



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Delicate Mother-In-Law Relationship – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Annie Chapman

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- Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: The beautiful days of summer are a very popular time to get married. Couples who get engaged around the holidays rigorously plan for that special day anywhere from May until August. With all the excitement around the planning, it's important to remember the family relationships that will also be formed as well. The relationship with the new in-laws in particular is what we want to focus on today and tomorrow here on Family Talk, a production of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Joined now by our host, psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. Doctor?
- Dr. James Dobson: Thank you Roger. You know, all too often young couples get swept away by their own romantic excitement and enthusiasm, and they don't realize until the honeymoon is over that they now have to find that delicate balance between their spouses and their in-laws. They begin to realize that when you get married, you're not just marrying the other person, you're saying, "I do" to the entire family as well. That's why we're using the next two programs to air a past interview with a guest who has met so much to our family over the years. She's Mrs. Annie Chapman. Annie and her husband, Steve, are musicians and we've worked with them through the years. I love these folks and I love their kids. They're all very talented musicians who travel around the country and use that talent to share the love of Christ and really emphasize the importance of marriage and family.
- In fact, years ago when I would speak at different venues, Steve and Annie would often come to sing at those events. And they always had a way of touching my heart with their beautiful music.
- Roger Marsh: Oh yes, doctor, I love their music too. Because their lyrics are so encouraging, especially in the areas of marriage and parenting.
- Dr. James Dobson: These folks write lyrics right out of their lives and they go straight to the heart. Steve and Annie have been married since 1975. They have two grown children and a growing number of grandchildren, and they've also written a number of

very good books on marriage and parenting, and I urge you to get them. One of them is called, *I Love You and I Like You: How to Be Married and Still Be Friends*. At the time of this recording, Annie had just written a book specifically about the relationship between a mother and her daughter-in-law, because that can be one of the tougher relationships to navigate. It's called *The Mother-in-Law Dance: Can Two Women Love the Same Man and Still Get Along?* What a great question. And in fact, Annie is going to answer it for those that listen to the rest of this program, because she addresses it head on. This is sage advice for a new mother-in-law or a soon-to-be mother-in-law.

- Roger Marsh: Well, doctor, I'm sure it is. So let's tune in right now as we hear your conversation with Annie Chapman about this very issue on today's edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've written a book, Annie, called *The Mother-in-Law Dance: Can Two Women Love the Same Man and Still Get Along?* And man, there is great practical stuff in this book. It comes out of life, doesn't it?
- Annie Chapman: It does.
- Dr. James Dobson: It comes out of experience and it comes out of your research on this subject. Let's go right to your subtitle. And you ask a question there. Can two women love the same man and still get along
- Annie Chapman: They can, but not without a whole lot of work, because he is the prize. And you've got the mother who has just poured her life into this kid and loves him and wants that prominent place in his life that she's always owned. And now you've got another woman that's encroaching on that and says, "No, he's mine." For those two women to get along, someone has to give. And so the reason I call it *The Mother-in-Law Dance* is because that's exactly what it is. When you first learn to dance, you step on toes and it's supposed to look good. You're supposed to do this with a seamless kind of effort, but when you first learn to dance, it doesn't look that great and you spend a lot of time looking at your own feet and it's easy to hurt feelings and get hurt.
- Dr. James Dobson: And the mother-in-law is the one that has to yield there. She
- Annie Chapman: Does. I have a chapter, "Who's To Lead In That Dance?" It is the mother-in-law because she is the older one. And scripturally, wife trumps mom. I mean, he's supposed to leave and cleave. And what's the daughter-in-law's responsibility? She is to honor and respect his mother the same way she would her own. So it's not like one gets off totally, but as far as the leading in that, it's the mother-in-law backs off and lets them have their home.
- Dr. James Dobson: I don't do this often, but I'm going to read from the first chapter of this book. It's called "May I Have This Dance?"

"The candles are lit, the room glows with a soft yellow hue. The groom, the pastor, and the wedding party are in place at the altar. Suddenly the air has changed from the sweet stillness of anticipation to the first notes of the beautiful music chosen for the wedding processional. As the doors swing open, the bride's heart races at the sound of the melodic cue to make a long-awaited slow walk down the aisle of matrimony. But as the song plays, the lovely bride does not realize that she is not the only lady in the room who has been cued to the music. Her mother-in-law-to-be is also called to respond to the melody. When the young woman in white moves gracefully with the music toward her chosen one, the song calls for the mother of the groom to graciously step to the side. In reality, the wedding processional is not just for the bride, but it's also a cue for a lifelong dance to begin for two special women in one man's life." Annie, that's beautiful. That's poetic.

Annie Chapman: Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: It really does describe what happens. And it goes on from there with the minister turning to the father and say, "Who giveth this woman to this man?" And when he says, "Her mother and I." He is in effect transferring the responsibility for this daughter that he and his wife have loved. What could be more intimate than birth, and yet they step aside and they pass on the responsibility.

Annie Chapman: And when my son said, "I do." I was done. And that is a sad moment for a mother, but I love my son enough to step back. And ultimately that's what a mother will do. She will step back, not because she's such a good person, but because she loves her son enough that she wants his life to be good.

Dr. James Dobson: And if she doesn't understand that and doesn't do that, she can create chaos in the little family that's just been brought together.

Annie Chapman: Oh, yeah. The same qualities that make you a terrific mother to small children are the same qualities that can make you a terrible mother to adult children. That mommy faucet that's just open where you want to instruct and correct and cajole and caress, all those things we do for them when they're small. If you don't learn how to turn that off as they become adults, you really do make their life difficult.

Dr. James Dobson: You wrote in this book something that I hadn't thought of before. Even though this is the son that you bore that you love with all your heart and that love hasn't changed, yet you can't even hug him anymore in the same way why?

Annie Chapman: That's right. Because there's another woman there. There's another woman between them.

Dr. James Dobson: And he belongs to her.

Annie Chapman: He does. He does. And that's not a bad thing. That's what you wanted. You want him to have a happy life and a good family and all of that. So yeah, you do that, you back off for his sake.

Dr. James Dobson: Or you should.

Annie Chapman: You should.

Dr. James Dobson: But it's hard to do, isn't it?

Annie Chapman: It is very hard.

Dr. James Dobson: But dance is not easy for either generation.

Annie Chapman: Right. What I do, I liken a mother to a mighty river. Now you think about when the pioneers created their communities and were building towns, very often they would choose an area that was in close proximity to a river. The river is where there was life, that was a place of commerce, transportation. Sunday afternoons, they go down to the river because it's cool and there was recreation there. That river was an incredible asset to that community until it overflowed its banks. And that same river that brought life to a community, brought destruction to property and eroded the banks and drowned innocent life and flooded crops, because it left its boundaries. And the same thing is true with a mother. Any home is blessed to have a good Christian mother. But when she leaves her boundaries, that's when you get into trouble.

It's just understanding that it has to be this way. You have to back off. I had one daughter-in-law tell me that her mother-in-law was just trouble. I mean, she was a stinker. She told them how to raise their kids, where to go on vacation. She told her how to vote and she said she was so intrusive in their lives. But one day on her husband's birthday, she sent her mother-in-law, a dozen red roses, and with those roses, she sent a card that said, "Thank you for all of the hard work you did in raising your son, my husband. Because of your diligence I'm married to an incredible man." And she just went on and on in this card about "I owe you a debt of gratitude. I acknowledge what you did and I appreciate it."

Dr. James Dobson: That's a very smart young woman.

Annie Chapman: Absolutely. She said, "Everything changed." Sometimes there's a conflict there, and the mother, all she wants is somebody to say, "I see you. I see that you worked hard. I appreciate that." That made a change in their relationship. She said, "I just wish I'd done it years earlier." Sometimes people aren't just mean and hateful, they just want to be acknowledged.

Dr. James Dobson: And one of the reasons I think you wrote this book is not every mother-in-law or daughter-in-law understand the concepts in this book. We are just trucking along and then we get married and we don't realize everything's about to

change. In fact, let me ask you, Annie, you thought, I'm sure, about the marriage of your firstborn, of Nathan, for a long time before it happened.

Annie Chapman: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: How was it different than what you anticipated? Was this an adjustment for you or did you slide right into it?

Annie Chapman: Well, I didn't think it was going to be an adjustment. I thought when Nathan married his wife, I just have two daughters. Just be another kid to love and run around with and shop and do that. So when Nathan and his wife got engaged, Nathan had an apartment, he lived in Nashville, Stephanie was going to move to Nashville so they could be closer together. Well, instead of Stephanie getting an apartment, I said, "I've got an empty bedroom." Heidi was married. "Just move in there." Now, the thing that saved me from making a whole lot of mistakes was my daughter, Heidi.

Before she ever moved in Heidi, said, "Mom, you've got to understand that Stephanie's not me. You're not getting another daughter. Stephanie has a mother, an incredible mother, and you need to get to know her as an individual. She doesn't need a mother. You need to get to know her as a friend." I'm standing there with my mouth wide open because not what I was thinking. I was just thinking another kid, but Heidi really gave me the heads-up. That changed how I looked at that. And it helped me to get to know Stephanie and to realize she's not another Heidi. She's a totally different person, an incredible person. And her relationship with my son has made him a nicer person.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's deal with some of the dos and don'ts. A lot of it is common sense, but common sense is often not common. So one of the things that you've got to do different has to do with the advice that you give. You have to be really, really careful about what you start telling this young couple to think or do or be.

Annie Chapman: Well, it's called interfering when you say too much. In the book of James, it says that, "If you can control your tongue, you can control every part of your life." And when you go to the doctor, when I was a kid, we'd go to the doctor, the first thing he'd say is, "Stick out your tongue." He could look at your tongue and realize if you were sick or not.

Well, our words really will get us in trouble as adult parents if we're not careful. And so the advice I give in the book is really keep your words short and keep them sweet. Even if your kids ask your opinion, I'd really think it through before I gave it. If you want to stay out of trouble, just keep all your conversations with your adult children to these three words. Whatever they say, you just say, really? Sure. Wow. I mean, that takes care of everything.

Dr. James Dobson: It makes for a very boring conversation.

Annie Chapman: But it keeps you out of trouble. But keeping our words, and that's not easy to do. Because what is parents? Our job is to tell them how to live, but to realize that when they're adults... I did an interview one day, and actually it was from New Zealand, and I'd never had anyone call himself a bloke before, and that was pretty interesting. And he says, "As a bloke." And he said, "It's hard for a mother to let her baby boy go and get married." And I said, "Well, your first problem is you've called him a baby boy. Baby boys are not supposed to get married." I said, "The guy's 6'6" and he has to shave twice a day. This is not a baby boy."

Dr. James Dobson: If you're thinking of him that way, you're on the wrong track.

Annie Chapman: For two and a half years, I surveyed women, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. And I got the best responses. But one woman said she got sick and tired of hearing her mother-in-law calling her husband a baby boy. And she said 14 years into their marriage, she was still calling, "This is my baby." And that's not a good way to think about it. This is a family that is established, that is separate, that you need to let be.

Dr. James Dobson: Annie, with regard to those three words, you also said there are three subjects that you really shouldn't be talking about, like weight or clothing or how the house is being maintained.

Annie Chapman: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you start telling your daughter-in-law how to dress that you really think that her skirt is too short or whatever it happens to be. Like you've put on a few pounds or whatever it is. You may not intend it, but you've got to fight on your hands.

Annie Chapman: Oh, yeah. One thing you should never give your daughter-in-law for Christmas, is a video on how to keep a clean house. You should not be sharing with them the latest diet ideas. There's just a lot of things. You just keep out of it and let them have their life. I really don't think that a mother-in-law can teach a daughter-in-law. Now, I know in the interviews I had women say, "my mother-in-law taught me how to cook. I didn't know how to keep house. She taught me how to take care of my kids." That's just really good. But that had better really be solicited.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you'd do it by modeling. Shirley learned to cook from my mother, but not because my mother pointed her finger at her and said, "This is the way you do it." But because Shirley got in the kitchen with her and watched her and became a great cook herself.

Annie Chapman: Yeah, well, the best gift you can give your kids is to let them have a home and to be separate from you. I really think every day I have to make a choice as a mother-in-law, and even as a daughter-in-law, every day you make the choice, am I going to be flexible or am I going to be pitiful? And when the holidays come

and there's that coveted Thanksgiving Day that everybody wants Thursday, somebody has to have a different day. And so I have just decided that I'm going to be flexible. I'm going to be the one that's flexible and I'm going to take whatever day they'll give me. And it is just a decision I've made because-

Dr. James Dobson: Why not? Why does it have to be on Thursday?

Annie Chapman: I know.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, it could be a week earlier or a week later. It doesn't have to be that way.

Annie Chapman: That's right. We've decided to celebrate occasions rather than dates. And it just makes life a lot easier on our kids when they're not being clamored for specific dates. You're actually giving your children a gift when you give them a guilt-free holiday like that. Now, my mom and my mother-in-law used to get together. They'd call each other and say, "Okay, I want Christmas Eve or I want Christmas Day." And it really took a lot of the pressure off of us to see our parents get along. And not everybody's willing to get along, but it sure helps when they're willing to.

Dr. James Dobson: Annie, there's so much to talk about here. We've been concentrating maybe intentionally and maybe not on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. But then there is also the other relationship between a mother and a son-in-law. We haven't talked about that. You're almost implying that this is two women in the kitchen sort of in a way of thinking, but there is also that cross-sexual relationship as well.

Annie Chapman: Well, I thought about including that, but all the jokes that you hear about mothers-in-law, they're always directed to the son-in-law. Those are the jokes. You don't ever hear a joke about a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law because it's not a funny thing. It's not a laughing matter.

Dr. James Dobson: It is a laughing matter the way you put it.

Annie Chapman: You can laugh about the other, but you can't laugh about mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Annie, we're almost out of time, and kind of put a rap on it. What's the last thing or the most important thing that you want to say? Maybe it summarizes what we've been saying or maybe it's something new.

Annie Chapman: Well, as I just would say to a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law that maybe is in a difficult situation, that they would look to Jesus to be their help. There's only one place in the Scripture where Jesus describes Himself, and that's in Matthew 11. And He says, "Come in to me all you labor and our heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Now, this is when

Jesus tells us what He's like. "I am gentle and humble in spirit, and I will give rest to your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In this world, we will all wear a yoke and we will all carry a burden. But the choice is, is it Jesus' burden and is it His yoke, which is easy and pleasant, or ours, which is pretty hard to handle? And so I would just say as a Christian, I say, I want to be like Jesus. Well, there's the formula right there to be gentle and humble in spirit, and I think you can get along with your in-laws better if you take that approach.

Dr. James Dobson: And if you deal that kind of gentleness and compassion to another person, you're likely get it back. We are out of time, but we're going to pick up right here next time. Our guest is Annie Chapman and she's the wife of Steve Chapman and they are a musical family. And the book that Annie has written is *The Mother-in-Law Dance: Can Two Women Love the Same Man and Still Get Along?* And though it doesn't say so on the cover, the answer is yes, but just barely. Yes. If you work hard at it, right?

Annie Chapman: There you go. That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll pick it up next time, Annie.

Well, this is James Dobson again, and that's where we have to stop for now. But we look forward to hearing more from Annie Chapman tomorrow on Family Talk. I hope you'll be with us. In fact, we'll dig in a little deeper to this topic and hear from several women who share some pretty raw emotions about their own experiences as both mothers and others who are daughters-in-law.

Roger Marsh: Well, that is certainly a program Our listeners are not going to want to miss doctor. And if you are about to get married soon, whether maybe it's you or someone you know, why not consider getting a copy of Annie Chapman's book called *The Mother-in-Law Dance*. It's a great resource for any new bride or bride-to-be. Also makes a great gift too. Click on the link on today's broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk) for more information on the book called *The Mother-in-Law Dance*.

Father's Day was just a few days ago, and that role a father plays in his children's lives is so incredibly important. A dad can help ensure strong, spiritual, physical and emotional growth. Sadly, though, many children have grown up without a father or a father figure in their lives. As believers and as men, we really need to come around each other to help support and encourage each other in this role of fatherhood.

And our goal here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is to walk alongside men so that we can become the great fathers who set a godly example for our own sons and daughters. Now, if you'd like some biblical guidance and tips about how to invest in your child's life, I encourage you to sign up for our brand



new free five-day email series called, "Dads, It's Time To Step Up." You can sign up by clicking the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page when you go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [Ddjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://Ddjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Trust me, you'll be glad you did Well.

I'm Roger Marsh and you've been listening to Family Talk. The voice you trust, for the family you love. Be sure to join us again next time when Dr. Dobson continues this conversation with Annie Chapman about the delicate mother-in-law relationship right here on Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: Are we ignoring the most common threat to family life?

Roger Marsh: With another Dr. Dobson minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: For many families, the most dangerous threat to marriage is the simple matter of overcommitment. I'm talking about the husband and wife who are too exhausted to take walks together, to understand one another, to meet each other's needs. So often these days, the husband moonlights the wife works and tries to oversee the home, and everyone is on the brink of exhaustion. Their children get shortchanged and life goes speeding by in a deadly routine. But when we reach the end of our lives and we look back on the things that mattered most, those precious relationships with people we love will rank at the top of the list. If friends and family will be a treasure then, why not live like it today?

Roger Marsh: For more information, visit [drdobsonminute.org](http://drdobsonminute.org).

Hey everyone, Roger Marsh here for Family Talk. Where can you go to receive support and advice for you and your family? Family Talk interacts with millions of people every day with inspiring advice and tips from Dr. James Dobson on what matters to you the most. Whether it's marriage or parenting, you can be sure our Facebook page will keep you updated with how your family can succeed. Join us each day for the latest broadcast, resources and inspiration. Nowhere else can you hear a thought of the day from Dr. Dobson, as well as a special message before you say Good night. Now you can be sure that every post on our page is created with you and your family in mind. So please take the time to visit us and become part of our online community at [facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk](http://facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk). That's [facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk](http://facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk).