



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Hello, Are You There Dear? – Part 2

Guest(s): Howard Hendricks

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Dr. Dobson: Well, greetings, everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and this is Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I thank you for joining us today and giving us an opportunity to share a classic presentation from my late friend Professor Howard Hendricks. If you were with us yesterday, you heard him address the ever-important subject of communication between a husband and wife.

Dr. Dobson: Now, as a psychologist, I can tell you that many of the problems that arise in marriage are rooted in a failure to fully understand each other. Isn't that amazing? You live together, you sleep together, you eat together, you take vacations together, you buy homes together, and often don't really understand each other very well. Maybe that's because couples talk too much and they listen too little to what the other person is saying.

Dr. Dobson: Shirley and I are about to celebrate our 60th anniversary, and we still are pretty good talkers. I think one of the secrets of our relationship is that we love to talk to each other. I never get tired of talking to Shirley and being with her. She is fascinating to me and has been since we were in college together. That may sound like a hyperbole, but it is true. You know what? It's also love.

Dr. Dobson: With that said, we're going to let our listeners hear the balance of a timeless message from the late professor Howard Hendricks. Now, I said before, he was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was loved by thousands of students, many of whom you may have heard of because they're in prominent positions of authority in the church and throughout society today. We're going to pick up with Professor Hendricks as he continues to provide ways to create healthier communication between husbands and wives. Listen and enjoy.

Howard Hendricks: Here's a third one I'd suggest. Sharpen your sensitivity quotient. Now, I want to emphasize something very important. You need to become less sensitive toward yourself and more sensitive toward your partner. That's the art of building a relationship. Most of us are incredibly sensitive about ourselves, and that's why when they come for counsel, the first thing they want to know is "I'm not getting what I ought to get out of this marriage." I say, "Well, I've got news for you, friend. That's not the purpose of it." What I really want to know is, what

are you giving to the marriage? The truth of the matter is he or she isn't giving a blessed thing to it.

Howard Hendricks: You've got to reverse the whole field so that you develop a different kind of sensitivity, so that you become a student of your partner, you become a master of that person and you know exactly what their moods are like, and you know exactly what their likes are like and what their dislikes are like, and you become a master of knowing when to ask the question and discuss the problem. I think some of the most exciting experiences of my life in counseling are watching people develop in this area, watching a person who is so perfectly sensitive toward himself and so incredibly insensitive toward his partner, reverse the field by the grace of God.

Howard Hendricks: Well, here's the fourth one I want to share with you. Make yourself an interesting and attractive person. Now, I have often said to people, "My friend, you can be an evangelical without acting like one. You don't have to give people the impression you're dead in the head and everywhere else."

Howard Hendricks: This, my friends, again, has nothing to do with your age. Don't get this crazy idea that what we're talking about is somebody who is a young person. See, the difference is not age; it's attitude. What'd you learn this year that you didn't know last year? What are you doing differently?

Howard Hendricks: Some of you dear people eat at the same restaurant every week. They set the clock in the restaurant by your arrival. You go down the line, you don't even ask them, they just put it on the plate. Vacation comes along, as far as the kids, where are we going to go? Well, where else can you go? I say, "Man, why don't you shake it up a little bit? Why don't you go to a different place?" I finally struck on an idea with my kids years ago. I used to call it Pop's Surprise Trip, where you got in the car and it was a surprise, especially to Pop. I didn't have a clue as to where we're going, but the sheer excitement of finding out where we're going to end up, even lost.

Howard Hendricks: I saw the most interesting epitaph recently, "Died age 23, buried age 64." Beautiful. What a description of many an individual.

Howard Hendricks: My closest friend just passed away at 87. Man, did I hate to see her go. Because whenever I got feeling sorry for myself, I used to go pay her a pastoral call. Last time I remember being together in Dallas, we were sitting at home around the Christmas vacation, and she walked in. There were a number of us sitting around. The moment she spotted me, she said, "Oh, Hendricks, what are the five best books you've read in the last month?" as a way of sparking the audience. Finally, she said, "Well, let's not sit here and bore each other with each other. Let's get into a discussion. And if we can't find anything to discuss, let's get into an argument."

Howard Hendricks: At the time, she was 84 years of age. I thought to myself, "Boy, what a testimony for a Christian." Jesus Christ said, I am come that they might have life." I mean really live. Some of us aren't living; we're just existing. I think it's a great thing, as Christians, that we demonstrate to a pagan world running around like crazy, trying to find something that will fill the emptiness of the void in their heart, what it really means to live.

Howard Hendricks: If you're in Jesus Christ, my friend, then I think your home ought to be the center of life at its best, exciting, filled with laughter. See, many times they go into a Christian home, "Woo, man, it looks like it's going to rain in here," and the thing is suffering from what I call a suffocating fog of moralism. Everybody's sitting around on a crate of eggs like Dresden dolls.

Howard Hendricks: I was in a home not too long ago. Right in the middle of the meal, we're having a tremendous time, boy, this kid hits the milk and it goes all over and down me, right down my thigh, just before the meeting. Everybody came unglued. They lost their sanctification right on the floor. Everybody was so apologetic. I said, "Look, don't apologize. Thanks for making me feel at home." "Oh my, oh, what do we do?" I said, "Relax. Enjoy it. It's given me a tremendous story." "Let me give you some news, lady." I said, "If your guests have children, you'll never have need to explain. And if they don't have children, then no amount of explanation will help."

Howard Hendricks: Now here's the fifth one to put on your list. Cultivate your love life. Please note I deliberately did not say your sex life. I don't know when in the world we're going to get the picture that your love life and your sex life are not the same thing. I think one of the most common statements I get, particularly from women, is the statement, "Man, the only time this guy gets warm, the only time he gets interested, is when he wants me to go to bed with him." One lady said to me recently, "I think I'd scream if sometime he just put his arm around me and said, 'Sweetheart, I love you. It's such a privilege to be your husband,' then take off for work."

Howard Hendricks: This is why you're living in a generation in which people are flat neurotic, running around, trying to get a hold of every book that'll jack up the sagging sex life. Let's get another technique, another position, another something or other, when the truth of the matter is the whole relationship is dead. You'll never solve it by working on your sex life. You'll have to change the whole relationship. And when you do, believe me, that intimate, personal physical area will be dramatically changed.

Howard Hendricks: I get people in my office, I had a guy, a couple, really, who came to see me, and a student was in there, and they were having a knock-down-drag-out before they came in. Student said, "Boy, Prof, sounds like this will be interesting, or else it'll be exciting." So they came in. Every time I'd ask her a question, he'd run off at the mouth. So I'd ask him a question; she'd talk. I really thought I had ventriloquists. Finally, I said, "Now, look, we've got to get some ground rules, okay? When I ask you something, you won't say anything. All right? And if I ask

you something, you won't talk." Well, we tried that for a half an hour and got nowhere, so I sent her out.

Howard Hendricks: I said to this guy, "Do you love your wife?" You know, my friend, if I had picked up a two-by-four and hit him with all of my might, I wouldn't have jarred him as much. He sat right up in that chair as if to say, "You don't think I came up here to be asked a stupid question like that, do you?" He said, "Of course I love my wife." "Well," I said, "that's wonderful to know."

Howard Hendricks: I said, "Do you ever tell her?" "Tell her? Do I have to tell her?" I said, "No, you don't have to tell her, but it might help." I said, "I would suggest, however, that the next time you break the news to her, you better get her in an overstuffed chair. You're liable to produce a coronary." He said, "Look, 23 years ago, I told that woman I loved her, and that's still in force until I revoke it." I didn't know I had a lawyer on my hands.

Howard Hendricks: You and I laugh. The interesting thing is you don't even have to know the most elementary thing about love to know that love demands expression. I just ate lunch the other day with one of our students. Opens a little sack lunch and pulls out a napkin, and written across it is "Loving you is living." He handed it to me, said, "Prof, that's the kind of woman I'm married to."

Howard Hendricks: When is the last time you sat down... I'm not talking about one of these crazy faking type of approaches. Every now and then, I run into some woman who gets her husband up in the morning, "You know, dear, what day this is, don't you?" as we move to the calendar all circled. So the clod goes down and buys some roses. Oh, wonderful. I don't know, I'm not a woman, but I'll tell you, that would drive me up the wall to think that the only reason he brought it was that I had to take him to the calendar to tell him this was the day.

Howard Hendricks: See, the sheer excitement and spontaneity of a man or a woman who spends some time creatively thinking, "How in the world can I get across to this man, to this woman, in a fresh, personal way what I really think about them?" Whereas, a lawyer was saying to me just this afternoon at lunch, "I just reach over and dial that number, and my wife answers it and I say, 'Hi, woman. I love you. I'll see you,'" and hangs it up. You know what he says to her, my friend? He says more than this guy who's got to be told that this is the occasion and be sure to buy the roses, because that's what I want, because it's his personal way of just plugging in periodically, "I'm thinking about you. I love you."

Howard Hendricks: Well, let's add another one to this. That is, set aside some time for communication. Now, I know what you're telling me. "Well, I'm busy." Really? If you're too busy to communicate with your wife, with your husband, you're busier than God intended you to be. It isn't basically a question of busyness, because I find the busiest people in all of the world are often some of the greatest lovers and they're the greatest communicators, but they're smart enough to know that you are going to have to slice out some time. It may be in

the evening when you say, "We've only got 15 minutes, dear, but I don't know how I'd rather spend it than with you. Tell me what happened," and you'll listen.

Howard Hendricks: I can still remember my wife throwing herself across the bed when my girls, particularly, were teenagers and saying, "Hey, Bev, what happened today? Tell me," lie there and listened to this story about who jilted whom and all the real biggies. The resignation of a vice president, that's peanuts compared to the fact that Mac jilted Sal. That's a federal case.

Howard Hendricks: Puppy love, but it's mighty real to the puppy. You better take the same approach to it, or there may be some day when you'd give your right arm if that same gal would even say two sentences to you, because she really wanted to communicate. You don't have eternity in which to pull off this job, and you can't determine when that child is going to talk, and particularly when they're in the teen age. When they're ready to talk, that's when you talk. That's when you listen.

Howard Hendricks: I had a family life seminar in Chicago sometime ago, A businessman, an executive with the corporation, came. When I met him, he said, "Hey, you remember that session we had in Chicago?" I said, "Certainly. I've never forgotten it." He said, "Boy, you really wiped me out with that one." I said, "Really? How's that?"

Howard Hendricks: "Well," he said, "you ought to take some time to evaluate your marriage and your family." He said, "Would you believe it, I just came off two weeks of intensive planning with our company for the year 2000, and we got the whole thing lined up, and suddenly I asked myself, what are you planning to do in your family in the next year?" He said, "Man, I didn't have a clue."

Howard Hendricks: He said, "My wife and I went home, and I call up the Holiday Inn in our area and I said, 'I want a room for this weekend.'" He took his wife Friday night, all day Saturday, and all day Sunday. They went out, and they got the word out, and they got a piece of paper out, and they began to set down their goals. They began to do some real, honest, open thinking and discussion on the basis of their relationship as a couple, as well as their evaluation of their family and how well we're doing. He said, "We set up eight goals, and would you believe seven of them have already been fulfilled, and we're seeing the eighth one accomplished? And we're not even through the year."

Howard Hendricks: Of course. Because, you see, he's aiming for something very specific. He's praying for something very specific. He's trusting God for something very specific, and God does not ignore this. My experience is that, with most of us, we do not plan to fail. We fail to plan. We do not sit down and say, "What is it that we are committed to? What is it that we need?"

Howard Hendricks: The last thing I'd like to suggest to you that could really revolutionize your marriage and your family life, talk frequently with your Heavenly Father. Talk

frequently with your Heavenly Father. You see, my friends, if you are out of fellowship with your partner, it will just be a matter of time before you are out of fellowship with the Lord. Or if you're out of fellowship with the Lord, it will just be a matter of time before you're out of fellowship with your partner.

Howard Hendricks: In fact, I am so convinced of this that if I ever find myself out of fellowship with my wife, I conclude automatically I'm out of fellowship with Jesus Christ. My primary responsibility is not to get back in fellowship with her; it's to get back in fellowship with the Lord, and then to go to my wife and say, "Sweetheart, I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm really out of it, and I don't want it to continue that way."

Howard Hendricks: You see, one of the great needs of Christian experience is the need of having someone, and particularly someone as close as your husband or your wife, that you can actually get down on your knees together and pray. My friend, that changes the communication system of a marriage. If some of you are having difficulty in this area, and people have said, "Well, we find it very hard to pray in front of each other," I say, "Well, why don't you ask your mate to give you three things that he or she is really concerned about and that they want the Lord to move in their life, and then you pray for them. Then the next night, reverse the process and have them pray for the three things that you share with them."

Howard Hendricks: We had an interesting family conference down at Pine Cove in East Texas. Some of you, I know, have been there. I think the most exciting thing of that week, and there were many things that God did, were the number of couples who came to me and said, "This is the first time that we've ever prayed together." I said, "How long have you been married?" "Oh, 10 years, 15 years. We've never prayed together, never prayed together once." To see a couple get down on their knees together and talk to their Heavenly Father is the beginning of developing a whole new relationship. The interesting thing is that sometimes I've seen couples who had a real hard time talking to each other who find it easier to talk to the Lord, and as a result of this, to begin to talk to each other.

Howard Hendricks: The price tag of this is extremely high. I just jotted down a little quote that I came across this afternoon. "Love can survive large problems in the open better than small ones buried and smoldering within." I think thinking together is much more important than thinking alike. That's why Paul said to the church at Philippi, being of the same mind, not necessarily the same opinion, but the same mind, committed to the same person, the same objective.

Howard Hendricks: Our Father in Heaven, we pray that during these days you will be breaking through to us. We sense that all too frequently we develop a shell, we develop our own defense system, and often it is with difficulty that you penetrate us at the level of reality. Lord, we pray that you will strip us of our superficiality, of our selfishness, of our stubbornness that often refuses to say, "I'm sorry. Forgive me. Tell me again; I really want to understand. I love you." Thank you, Lord, for bringing us together, and we pray that you will develop us as a couple and as a family to please you. Lord, these are petitions that we really cry from our heart, and we pray that you will place them on our lips, that we may communicate

with each other and, most of all, with you, because we ask it with great expectation through Christ our Lord.

Roger Marsh: A powerful prayer to end this insightful two-day presentation from the late Howard Hendricks today here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope you've enjoyed this timeless wisdom on the subject of communication in marriage. Even though this message is a bit dated, the concepts are still very relevant to us even today. Visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org for more information about the ministry of Professor Howard Hendricks. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Roger Marsh: Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure to tune in again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Have a blessed day, everyone.

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