



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Building a Passionate Love Life – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Dr. Clifford and Joyce Penner

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**Dr. James Dobson:** You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

**Roger Marsh:** Well welcome back to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Now, before we get to today's broadcast, a reminder that some of the content discussed on this program is intended for mature audiences, parental discretion is advised, so if you have little ones nearby, please occupy them with something else to do, or be sure to listen at a later time. And of course, you can do so on demand when you go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Now on today's program, we will do a deeper dive into understanding the dynamics of relationships. It's crucial to recognize the natural course of passion as a marriage carries on in time. As we navigate through the stages of connection from the initial intensity of attraction to a deeper intimacy, that transition can oftentimes cause issues and lead to challenges in a marriage.

**Joyce Penner:** The attraction of a new relationship that creates the passion, that initial hype of newness dissipates in about six to 30 months. And if we don't make the transfer into an intimate deep connection with our spouse, then that passion dies and then the couple will think, "Well, I married the wrong person. I'm just not in love anymore." And it doesn't have to do with love, it has to do with not being able to connect intimately at a deep level.

**Roger Marsh:** Yes. That was Joyce Penner. Joyce and her husband, Dr. Clifford Penner are back again today here on Family Talk to continue their conversation with Dr. James Dobson about intimacy in marriage. Today they will emphasize the importance of nurturing and maintaining a connection with your husband or wife for a marriage that lasts a lifetime. The Penners will also break down what healthy sexual desires are that God created both in men and women, and they'll encourage husbands and wives to plan time together, which is especially important due to the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Dr. Clifford and Joyce Penner are well-respected sex therapists, relationship counselors and popular authors. They truly are pioneers in encouraging couples

to realize God's plan and purpose for sex. Dr. Clifford Penner is a clinical psychologist. He earned his master's and doctorate degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary. His wife, Joyce Penner, is a registered nurse who holds a master's degree in nursing from UCLA. Now without further ado, let's listen to part two of Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Dr. Clifford and Joyce Penner right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: When we have talked about this subject or things related to it in the past and implied, as we are now, that most of the lack of interest in sex is on the part of the women and that the men are most anxious to have a sexual relationship, I have gotten mail from women saying, "I want it more than my husband does." You hear that, don't you?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Yes.

Joyce Penner: Yes we do.

Dr. James Dobson: It's not always the typical way here.

Joyce Penner: No. And we get both coming to our practice where the man isn't pursuing and isn't available and isn't wanting it and is resisting. Most times when the man isn't wanting sex, he is having difficulty with intimacy and may be connected with pornography. So its a-

Dr. James Dobson: Satisfying himself a different way.

Joyce Penner: Yes. So there is a difference between men and women and their lack of interest. Men's tends to be, and men will tend to talk about it that way, they won't talk about it as lack of desire, they will talk about it as lack of initiation or lack of desire for their wife and they're not connecting with her.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Whereas when the woman is experiencing lack of interest or desire, for her, often, there is no interest. It's not happening in any other realm if it's not happening in a relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: You talk in the book at length about adult children of alcoholics and you run into that problem often. A woman in particular whose father was an alcoholic frequently is dysfunctional in this way.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Let's talk about that. Early in our practice, we had six women who came in and we realized after we had worked with those six women, they all came with the same pattern. The pattern was that they were very resistant to entering a sexual experience, felt no awareness of sexual desire, and were resistant even in the beginning of a sexual experience. Then at a certain point their body would click in, they would get aroused, be very intensely aroused, be orgasmic, the whole experience, and then shut off almost as quickly as they had gotten aroused and

then be disinterested again. And that positive experience made no difference on the next experience.

And so we went into those files and checked and all six of those women, the one thing they had in common was having had an alcoholic father. We said, "That's interesting." So we started gathering data on it and now have come to believe that there is a pattern that is there when a woman especially is raised in an out of control home, it could be alcoholic, could be violence, it could be insanity, whatever it is, where she is the one who has to provide control rather than that the parents are in control that she will have shut off her sexual interest and response and desire.

Joyce Penner: And being out of control is very frightening to her, and that's true whether her father was a raging alcoholic or a silent alcoholic. And now we've discovered after teaching about this for years, that men also fit this pattern when they've been raised in an alcoholic or emotionally out of control home and they too may resist sex because they don't like that feeling of being out of control. And when we get into a sexual experience, it is letting go and being out of control.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what do you do about it? Those are patterns that start in childhood obviously and have been carried over into the adult life. That's why they're called ACAs, Adult Children of Alcoholics. It has many components, not just sexual in nature.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Oh, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Where do you start?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, we start with having the person who is struggling with it accept and recognize their strong need for control and help them make a conscious decision to use that control for their sex life rather than against their sex life.

Joyce Penner: We talk about it almost like a conversion experience. It isn't that they change, they're still in the same spot, but rather than going that way and fighting it, they're going toward it and they have to make a conscious decision that says yes, when I am in a sexual experience, it is good for me. It is great, but I don't like that feeling. The reason I don't like that feeling is because of what happened in my childhood. But I know it's important for me, I know it's important for my marriage, and so I'm going to intentionally decide to go for and build our sexual relationship.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Now let me interrupt there. You see, we all have the idea that all of us should come to the sexual experience feeling a lot of interest and desire, we should be passionate and wanting it. And that's great, except that for the ACA, that doesn't happen. So they have to-

Dr. James Dobson: And for a lot of other people.

Dr. Clifford Penner: And for a lot of other people too.

Joyce Penner: And for a lot of other people.

Dr. Clifford Penner: But they will come to the experience and not have that feeling and so they have to move into it by decision rather than by desire.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you all recommend that people schedule times to be intimate with each other?

Joyce Penner: Yes. That they plan time into their lives, date night, whatever you want to call it, and particularly for the ACA, man or woman.

Dr. James Dobson: I personally believe that there are many, many consequences of a very busy lifestyle for parenting and for marriage, but difficulty in the sexual relationship is one of the most common. When you're too worn out, you're too tired to... I mean, sex requires a lot of energy.

Joyce Penner: It does. And our energy for getting things done in life is the same energy base that we need for sexual desire, arousal and release. And if that's all being burned up, we don't have it available. And yet then sometimes we're more susceptible to an affair kind of thing because that elicits adrenaline, which kind of zaps into that extra energy, gets it from us at a different level.

Dr. Clifford Penner: The experience of being exhausted from all the scheduled things, from work to all the kids', lessons to the committees, to the tasks that we have, we have to understand are all by schedule. And somehow we think that sex should be different than all those things. We shouldn't have to schedule it, we should just wait for it to be spontaneous. But if we did that, if we only got with God when we felt like it or only went to church when we felt like it or only exercised when we felt like it or all of those things, for many of us they wouldn't happen.

Dr. James Dobson: But you don't want it to be the last item on the to-do list of the day either.

Joyce Penner: No. No. And so that's why we have to carve out time, otherwise everything else will... It'll just squeeze it out of our lives and it will get the last of the day. See, we recommend scheduling time to connect and to be close and to touch and to pleasure not scheduling that you have to be turned on, that you have to be desirous, that you have to have a response, that you have to even move to a completely sexual experience. You don't have to complete it, you just have to have that time available to enjoy each other and to be together.

Dr. James Dobson: And good things will happen.

Joyce Penner: And good things will happen, yes.

Dr. Clifford Penner: If we don't put the demand on it that something's good going to happen and it's got to happen in the next eight minutes, because we often put that kind of pressure on it then.

Dr. James Dobson: I know the answer to this, but I want you to answer. I think I know the answer.

Joyce Penner: We'll see whether we can figure out what you want for the answer.

Dr. James Dobson: If both parties are happy and not having sex, who cares?

Joyce Penner: That's what often is asked. And what we find is that sex is, we think of it as the lubricant of the relationship. It's not the machine that keeps the marriage going, but we'll get a lot more friction if there isn't the sexual relationship going on.

Dr. James Dobson: And the potential is always there to find another outlet.

Joyce Penner: Yes.

Dr. Clifford Penner: That's right. Because whether it's pornography on the internet or somebody at the office that can all of a sudden connect with us and then all of the sudden it feels, "Wow, I'm feeling feelings that I haven't felt in years. This must be love. I thought I was in love, but this must be it now." And sex obviously is a very small part of marriage, but it's one of those absolutely essential ingredients for it to work.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's see what the apostle Paul wrote about it. Again, if you want to understand how human beings function and operate and how they should, you look to the owner's manual and to those who spoke for the Lord, the creator. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband." He's telling us to pay attention to this aspect of the relationship.

Dr. Clifford Penner: And it's mutual.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband in the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. That's an interesting... Is that the only occasion there?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Apparently.

Dr. James Dobson: Apparently so.

Joyce Penner: We haven't had many couples come to us...

Dr. Clifford Penner: Spending so much time in prayer...

Dr. James Dobson: Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Because there is an accumulating pressure, hormonal pressure if there's not a release and it can find expression in other ways.

Joyce Penner: Yes.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, and this is true both for the man and the woman. Sometimes we think of hormonal pressure only for the man, and it may not be experienced the same way, but for the woman when there is the lack of it over time, there is an emptying that is going on in her. Now, we regularly deal with a large number of marriages of three months, six months, three years, 10 years, 15 years that are unconsummated. No one ever talks about it. People don't share that with their small group or their pastor, often not with their mother or their father. And that is one of the places where we notice the biggest difference because when you move a couple from eight years of an unconsummated marriage to having a joyful, fulfilling sexual life-

Dr. James Dobson: You've done something.

Dr. Clifford Penner: ... and they know it and you know it, and we call it birth announcement therapy because usually about a year later we get an announcement that they're having a baby. And so that is one of the greatest rewards that we have.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, there's an amazing amount of fear and anxiety associated with our sexual nature, not only the fear of failure, of performance that will embarrass us with our partners. I wonder just how many people get off to the wrong start on the honeymoon and then never recover from that. Is that what you find?

Joyce Penner: It is. And because of that, in our book, *Getting Your Sex Life After Great Start*, we actually put our telephone number in the chapter on planning a successful honeymoon. And-

Dr. James Dobson: You do what? You put your telephone number?

Joyce Penner: Yes, and we-

Dr. Clifford Penner: Our office number.

Joyce Penner: And we get regular calls-

Dr. Clifford Penner: From Hawaii, the Caribbean, around the world. And we have heard more awful honeymoon stories than we care to hear.

Dr. James Dobson: I bet you have.

Dr. Clifford Penner: And we do believe that how couples get their life started does set them on a path and many do not ever recover from it.

Dr. James Dobson: That's really sad, getting off... People who love each other-

Dr. Clifford Penner: That's right.

Joyce Penner: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: ... even some of them have been abstinent and have waited to that moment and anticipated and talked about it and dreamed about it, all of a sudden, it's here and it doesn't fulfill them.

Joyce Penner: And it's such a test of faith for them too. It's saying, "Here, we followed God's standard and we did what we were supposed to do and now it isn't working. We thought we'd be blessed because we did that." And yet sometimes it's just a little piece of information, it's just a correcting something very minor. But if that stayed and that pattern continued, 20 years from now, there'd be so much pain and resentment and anger.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Or five years from now.

Joyce Penner: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it a foregone conclusion that sexual interest has to wane as you get older?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, that's kind of a universal assumption and there is no question that it does diminish, and that is primarily related to testosterone levels because that's what fuels our desire, both in the man and the woman. Testosterone reaches its peak around 20, levels offer about 20 years, and then at about age 40, different for each person, it begins to diminish. And it doesn't diminish to zero, but for many men it diminishes to such an extent that their interest isn't what it used to be and they're still wishing it was. And so partly they're thinking, "Boy, I must be losing it, not as interested or as responsive as I used to be and now I must be getting old." And so then they just back off.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the things I want to ask the Lord when I see him, and I don't mean this disrespectfully at all, this is the question I want to ask him, is why he designed us to mature sexually before we do emotionally. And you've got 15-year olds who are on fire and they're still little kids and don't know how to handle this issue at all.

Joyce Penner: And then why we don't keep that vibrancy when we don't have kids in the home anymore and we have time for each other?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Come on Lord, let me have it back.

Dr. Clifford Penner: If we could trace those 15 years and put them on the end, that'd be great.

Joyce Penner: But that doesn't mean when we get older we lose the ability to function with each other or the need, and it may change some and it may be less erotic and more about intimacy, but keeping that connection is important.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's kind of bring this in for a landing and I want to do it this way, I would like you to think specifically about a couple that has been listening to this. Maybe the woman heard it first, she wrote for a tape and now she's listening to it with her husband and they are finding themselves characterized by the things that have been said.

Dr. Clifford Penner: We were talking about them.

Dr. James Dobson: Right about them, and they have not had a meaningful sex life for years and have had no idea what to do about it. They don't know anybody like you and they're not even sure they could afford it if they went for therapy and they're too embarrassed to admit it anyway. Somebody, the church may find out and they're just paralyzed, but they love each other and they wish it weren't true. And they don't know what to do. Talk to them, encourage them. Tell them where they go from here.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, the starting point would be to say that we have found that any couple who diligently chooses to work on their sexual life can make a significant difference in it. It isn't like we're stuck where we are.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Penner is there hope for me?

Joyce Penner: Definitely. We believe that every couple has the potential to find a mutually satisfying sex life, and that that is a possibility. Whether there are physical difficulties, whether there are relational difficulties, a couple can do that with the right help, with the right guidance-

Dr. James Dobson: My wife has absolutely never cared a flipped about sex from the very beginning, never cared about it. Is there something desperately wrong with her? What's going on?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, you see, we believe that God created us all as sexual beings. We think the Scriptures teach that from Genesis 1 through to the end. And so we're not living out how he made us, if that is the case. And usually when somebody says, "I have no interest, I've never been interested," there is either something in their physiology or in their background that programmed them in that direction. They weren't born that way. And since they weren't born that way, and we say that with great assurance, then we believe that it's something that can be corrected. Now how do we do that?

Joyce Penner: And they may need to call or go to our website or get a book or get some help and we may be able to guide them to someone in their area to find that help. We may be able to guide them in using one of our resources to find that help.



So they may need a third party, whether that's a book or a counselor to help them through that process.

Dr. Clifford Penner: But what we would be looking for them to do would be first of all, talk to each other. And that's why we have them read the book out loud together. Because then-

Dr. James Dobson: By the book you're referring to, *The Married Guy's Guide to Great Sex*.

Dr. Clifford Penner: That's right. Because then they get to hear themselves say the words that they're not used to saying and they get to talk about where they each are. And they'll learn things, they'll discover things that surprise them completely. And that's usually the starting point. And then we usually would have them do some very simple things together that help build their relationship to the place... We don't start off at the intercourse level, but start off at the handholding level, if you will, and take them through a retraining process to get them to the place where they can come together, but it's very possible.

Dr. James Dobson: Did God call you into this area of responsibility?

Dr. Clifford Penner: Well, we can guarantee you we didn't write it in our high school yearbooks that we were going to grow up to be sex therapists. So it had to be a call from God.

Joyce Penner: Yes, it was very clearly. And each step along the way, each book we've written, we've never pursued it, it's always-

Dr. Clifford Penner: Come to us.

Joyce Penner: ... come to us.

Dr. Clifford Penner: I was a practicing psychologist and Joyce was developing the nursing program at Azusa Pacific when we were invited, I was invited to teach a course for 60 women on sexuality just because I was a psychologist. So I got her to join me, and we had such an intense response from the women of that class that launched us, and that was in 1975.

Dr. James Dobson: 1975.

Joyce Penner: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Clifford Penner: Yeah, so we have felt it was a calling of God, it certainly wasn't anything we would've chosen.

Dr. James Dobson: And you all are saving marriages all the time.

Joyce Penner: Yes.

Dr. Clifford Penner: We hear it, we get lots of reinforcement many, many times a day.

Dr. James Dobson: Cliff and Joyce, my great friends, good to have you here again, lest don't wait 21 years to have you back.

Joyce Penner: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And thank you all for what you're doing, for your love for people. This is a passion for you isn't it?

Joyce Penner: It is.

Dr. Clifford Penner: It's very much a passion.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an informative and encouraging end to this two-Day broadcast featuring Dr. Clifford Penner and his wife Joyce Penner, here on Family Talk. Our prayer for you is that couples would reprioritize intimacy in their marriages and not just sexual closeness, which is important of course, but also emotional and spiritual bonds as well. Now if you'd like to listen again to this broadcast or learn more about the Penners, simply visit our website at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Once you're there, you can also find information about the Penner's books and their organization called Passionate Commitment. Again, that's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

And remember, if you and your spouse would like to grow closer in your relationship with God and each other, there's still time to sign up for our 10-day marriage series. Prayer is a very powerful tool and it really can change all kinds of situations, especially your marriage. So take the challenge today. To do so, all you have to do is visit [drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries](http://drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries). Then simply input your email address and click on the signup button, it's that easy. From the day you sign up. And then for the next 10 days after that, you'll receive an encouraging email from Dr. James Dobson about how to strengthen your marriage. Now the email includes some words of wisdom from Dr. Dobson and some questions for you and your spouse to answer as well as a prayer to say together. You can sign up today for our 10-day marriage series when you go to [drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries](http://drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries). Well, I'm Roger Marsh and you've been listening to Family Talk. And on behalf of the entire team here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we thank you for making us a part of your day.

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

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