



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Back from the Brink of Divorce – Part 2

Guest(s): Larry and Sue Wright

Air Date: August 30, 2022

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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: You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, alongside your host, Dr. James Dobson. Doctor, today, again, we're going to hear from a couple whose marriage survived extremely difficult circumstances.
- Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. The interview that we're going to hear today serves as a follow-up to the testimony we heard yesterday from the late Mr. Larry Wright. Larry was a highly successful and well known disc jockey in the Phoenix area. I never heard him, but I would like to have, because he had a lot of spunk I'm told. In fact, he acquired the nickname, Lucky Larry, yet he quickly discovered that his life and his marriage were falling apart due to his addiction to alcohol.
- Roger Marsh: Very true indeed. If you missed the first part of the Wright's testimony, be sure to visit today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. When you're there, you'll find a link to day one of this story. Now, from what we heard last time, doctor, Larry had a big heart and an incredible sense of humor, didn't he?
- Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I came to love this man. He was such a warm and caring individual and he genuinely loved people. Larry and his wife, Sue, joined me in the studio some time ago to share about their marriage and specifically the redemptive power of God's love in each of their lives. Their relationship was clearly crumbling. In fact, Larry said that it wasn't if they were going to get a divorce but when, but then Sue found the Lord. Through her actions, she was able to lead Larry to Christ and he was never the same. They went from sickness to wholeness in a relatively short period of time.
- Roger Marsh: Wow.
- Dr. James Dobson: From that point on, Larry's passion was to tell everybody he saw about what the Lord had done. Larry then went on to be with the Lord in 2001, but I will never forget his passion for our Heavenly Father.

Roger Marsh: Doctor, Sue continued that same fervor that filled her husband's life until her passing in 2019. Larry and Sue left behind three daughters and numerous grandchildren and numerous more great-grandchildren as well. Sue and Larry founded Abundant Life Ministry. Larry also taught from the pulpit at Northwest Community Church there in Phoenix, before his passing.

Dr. Dobson, this interview was originally recorded many years ago, but it still contains timeless wisdom that really hasn't aged much at all. So many couples feel helpless and hopeless in relationships that are failing or just falling apart.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. They've run out of answers, they really have no other solution. Sometimes counseling doesn't help either, if you don't get the right person and have the right attitude going in. There is something else that's there and that's appealing to the Creator of the family.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, you are absolutely right. We pray that this broadcast will minister to those marriages in hardships, or maybe even on the brink of divorce. Well, let's get to today's broadcast now. As we begin, Larry Wright opens by describing his days as a popular disc jockey, here on Family Talk, a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute.

Larry Wright: Well, I married a Phoenix girl, I'm originally from Oklahoma. Sue and I met on a blind date, we were married three months later, and then about three or four years later wondered why. We discovered we had nothing in common, absolutely nothing. She came from a wonderful, warm, loving, hugging, kissing family background. My father had died when I was just a toddler and had no concept of what love was really all about, I'd never really seen it. My mother had to immediately go out to work, to keep body and soul together in the family. I just didn't know how to love and to know what it was. I began to pursue my own personal goals in the radio business. I was disc jockey at the top rock and roll station in Phoenix. I looked for fulfillment there and had it for a period of time. I was Lucky Lawrence, back in those days.

Dr. James Dobson: Your name was about as well-known as anybody in the city, wasn't it?

Larry Wright: Yes, I suppose in the state of Arizona during the '60s, I was probably one of two or three well known disc jockeys in that area and got so involved in that. The pressure became so great with ratings. It's very insecure in the broadcast business, particularly in that brand of it. You either get the ratings or you lose your job. That kind of pressure eventually led to my looking for some kind of relaxation, you just can't continually take that pressure. I found a place about a mile south of where I worked that served this marvelous, relaxing liquid that I began to partake of quite heavily. In fact, it got so bad after a period of time, I'd get off the air at 9:00 in the morning and my day was virtually over, about 9:02, why, there were three or four fingers of vodka sitting there on the bar waiting for me.

Sue tried to do everything she could to change me. I was failing in my own home. I was success out there, everybody loved to see me coming.

Dr. James Dobson: You're making good money.

Larry Wright: Yes, here comes the life of the party. We had the nice home, the clothes, the cars, everything that I thought was going to bring me happiness. Yet, I was not a father and I knew it, and I was not a good husband and I knew that. No man wants to hang around failure, so the more I failed at home, the more I spent out there where I was accepted and successful. The more I spent out there, the more I failed at home and got caught up in this catch-22 situation, until finally the marriage was gone. Divorce was not a matter of whether, it was just a matter of when.

Dr. James Dobson: You were really ready to call it quits, Sue, is that right?

Sue Wright: Well, yes. We just didn't have any feelings for one another at all. When we did communicate, it was arguing and fighting and bickering. I just felt totally unloved, I just felt he didn't care about us. When he was home, he wasn't with us. He was either sacked out on the couch or watching television, he really was not with us at all.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, isn't this fascinating that you all at that time in your life had achieved the American dream. You, Larry, were famous, successful, loved, you had the material, possessions that come from that kind of success. You had three healthy kids, you had the nice home. You supposedly had what people struggle for and hunger for. There are many people listening to us right now who think that if they can only achieve some modicum of success like that life would take on a different aura, yet you had it and it didn't satisfy. In fact, you all were dying inside.

Larry Wright: At that particular point, I wasn't alert enough to recognize Sue's depression, that she was really hurting, she was withdrawing. See, what I didn't realize at the time is what she really wanted was the one thing I wasn't willing to give her, and that was myself.

Dr. James Dobson: And that's you, yeah.

Larry Wright: And to try to replace it with buying her gifts, this will make her happy, this'll take away the disappointment.

Dr. James Dobson: What was going on with your kids, Larry? We've heard Sue's answer to that question, but how do you see your relationship with your children when they were younger?

Larry Wright: Well, when they were very young, we spent time together, but then I got caught up in this success thing. The pressures became greater, became more time

consuming. I was just a guy who came in from time to time. They were very insecure, but I was not even aware of it. I didn't know what I was doing. My job was not the kids, she could take care of that. I was oblivious to what was going on in my relationship with the children. I could explain it away on the basis that I didn't have a father and didn't know. Everything that I did was in ignorance, I didn't set out to warp my children. I didn't mean to do that, I just wasn't aware.

- Sue Wright: What I did is I constantly nagged him, because see, I had a wonderful relationship with my father and so I knew what the children needed. Girls, particularly, I think need a dad, a super relationship with a father.
- Dr. James Dobson: Sue, are you admitting here that you also played a role in the problems that you all had?
- Sue Wright: Oh, did I ever.
- Dr. James Dobson: Even though he was drinking too much and gone and not involved in the family and you were trying to hold it together, you still bear some responsibility.
- Sue Wright: Oh, I did, because I had blinders on. We all have our blind spots, but it wasn't until Christ came in to my life and began to open my eyes to see what the Lord does, is He takes your eyes off of the other person and turns them around and you see yourself. I began to see that I was a constant nag. I was a very depressed person because I thought I was going to end up like my mother, only earlier. I was very negative, very critical. What Larry needed more than anything, because coming from the background, and the Lord showed me this, it wasn't something that just happened, God began to show me, I asked God for wisdom and He tells us, He'll give it to us liberally, and as I watched him and realized that he was just as empty inside as I'd been before Christ had come in and he needed to know the love of God. I condemned drinking so much and thought it was such an awful thing, but then God began to show me, hey, what I was saying to him was worse than what he was doing.
- Dr. James Dobson: I want to emphasize that point, because in my dealing with families this is a rather characteristic pattern now that we're talking about, that's why I wanted you here to convey this message. It's not just your story, it's too many people's story. You've got an over-committed husband, really believes that success in business and making money is all there is and that's the extent of his responsibility. His wife knows that's not right and she is responding in a way to him that is almost as destructive to the marriage as what he's doing, but she recognizes no responsibility for it. What she is doing is bludgeoning him instead of pulling him toward her, attracting him toward her, making him want to do what she needs him to do. She is hammering him into the ground. You put that combination together and the marriage is in serious jeopardy.
- Larry Wright: What happened as soon as Sue really began to realize the love of Christ in her life and through the study of God's word understand what God wanted her to

be as a wife and through his power began to have that produced in her, the little pamphlets began to disappear. She began to quit asking me how many did I have, she would smell my breath, that all stopped. She just began to love me.

Sue Wright: But the reason that all stopped was because I had totally released my husband to the Lord. I knew I had tried everything. That's one thing I would say to most women, is there is nothing you can do to change your husband, that's God's job, and to be willing to let God change you and to do what he has to teach you. God had to teach me how to love the unlovable person. My love was very conditional. I'll love you if you don't drink, I'll love you if you come home on time, I'll love you if you do this. God had to show me what kind of love I had. Not only did he show it, show me through Larry, then we had teenagers and we had to learn it all over again, how to love unconditionally.

Larry Wright: One of the neat things Sue said to me, and this wasn't but just a few months ago and we were counseling a couple in our living room and Sue made this statement. I never heard her say it before, she said, "I realized that as a child you had grown up without any love. When I realized that God had given you to me so that I might love you, that he brought you to me so that I might have the privilege of really giving you the love that you had missed all your life," that really blew me away. She had demonstrated that, but never verbalized it before.

Dr. James Dobson: There's not another philosophy on the face of the earth that would grant her that kind of acceptance and love other than the love of Christ.

I want you to talk a little more about the consequences of that familiar pattern of an over-committed father, thinking that his total responsibility is to become a big wheel in business and earn a lot of money and not being involved at home. You disciplined in anger, didn't you, Larry?

Larry Wright: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: What did that produce? What was your relationship with your kids in the early years, and what did that do during the adolescent years?

Larry Wright: Well, in the early years, not having a role model as a father, either good or bad, I just assumed that what those children were to do was to obey me. When I said jump, I expected them unhesitatingly to jump. As long as they were small enough where I couldn't handle that, then they did, but they began to get into those areas where they said, "Oh, wait a minute. I know whether jumping is the right thing to do or not," and I began to immediately just lose my cool. They would dare disobey me, oh my goodness, they'd pay the price. I can remember in the adolescent years, to this day, my middle daughter sitting on a bed there, looking me with hatred in her eyes and her jaw clenched and saying, "I hate your guts," because I had just really let her have it. I was mad because she disobeyed me.

My oldest daughter got involved in some activities that just really tore old dad's heart out, and our relationship was severed. I didn't want to talk to her, I didn't want to see her. I was a Christian at the time, had been for several years, but I didn't want to have anything to do with this daughter. She had been the first born and we'd been so very close in those early years. We ran together before the teenage years and just had fun. I just loved her so much. Then she got into some difficulties, marital. She had married a marvelous young man, just a prince, and they had become separated. We hadn't heard from her for several weeks. She was living in a California city, by the way. Now, we were in Phoenix, hadn't heard a word and we wanted to reestablish this contact. I said, "It's very important that we get this communication going back again. That we've got to say, 'We care for you. We don't like what you're doing, we don't like this separation, that you're not really working at putting your marriage back together.'"

We got the ticket, made arrangements, met her there in the airport. We sat in the lounge and we started reminiscing about the early days in our relationship. She said, "Dad, the thing I remember, running in the track meet and my event came up and you were doing the announcing up there in the stands. I remember in the middle of the race, you had forgotten to turn off the public address mic and you were yelling and screaming over the loud speaker, and I heard you. I finished and I won the race." She said, "Dad, the first thing I did was to look up in the press box and see you jumping up and down." She said, "Dad, I just wanted you to be proud of me." She said, "More than anything else in my life, I've just always wanted you to be proud of me," but she said, "I figured that I'd just blown it."

At that moment, it was as if the Lord hit me between the eyes and I said, "Oh, Linda, you haven't blown it. I'm the one who's blown it. See, I remember when you won, I was excited and for you." But I said, "Let me tell you what I remember. I remember a track meet that we went to that you should have won, and everybody knew you should have won, and you didn't. You finished poorly. I can see myself standing on the step there of that stadium, taking your warmup shoes in my hand and throwing them at you." I said, "That's what I remember. When you won, I was there encouraging you and for you, but when you lost, what happened?"

I said, "Linda, God just showed me, that's the way I've been loving you." I said, "I now know why I'm here." I said, "The only reason I came, Linda, is to tell you I don't care whether you put your marriage back together, I don't care whether you go back to your husband, I don't care what you do. I just want you to know that I love you and I love you because you're mine and for no other reason. What you do is of no consequence, it will not affect that love. I love you. That's the way God wants you to love your husband, just because he's yours, God's given him to you to love."

We wept together, and in time for my plane to leave. She threw her arms around me and she said, "Oh dad, I wish you could stay. I wish you could stay,

but I know you've got to get back." The last words out of her mouth, through her tears, she said, "Dad, I just want you to know, I want to do what God wants me to do. I want God's plan for my life." God restored the relationship. That moment of time, not just between father and daughter, but because of that restoration, he also restored the relationship between wife and husband. God has given them a love for each other that they never experienced before. I said, "Oh Lord, forgive me for being so hardheaded, so stubborn, that you have to take me to that point to be able to reach out to her and say, 'I love you and it doesn't matter what you do. The only thing that really matters is who you are.'"

Dr. James Dobson: All right, get practical with that now, Larry. Talk to somebody who has a 13-year-old or 14 or 15-year-old, who is so hostile and so angry and is doing everything they can to tear up the family. It's not just they want their own way, but they're in the process of saying, as your daughter did to you when she sat on the bed, "I hate you, get out of my life." When you restored this relationship with your daughter, she was grown, she was out of the home, you didn't have responsibility for her. How can a parent continue to exercise authority and yet give that unconditional love in those moments of great anger and hostility?

Larry Wright: Well, I learned that the first thing I had to do is to wait for my initial reaction to that hostility and that anger and striking out me to subside. I would say just as strongly and firmly, whether it was done to me or whether that response and reaction was done to their mother, to say, "Sweetheart, I love you. Because I love you, I cannot let you get away with that kind of attitude, with that kind of action. Now, I'm angry and I'm upset, but that's going to cost you. I cannot tolerate that and let you get away with that and let you grow up like the fink that you're on the road to becoming. You go to your room, you close the door, do whatever, and I'm going to count to 10, or 180, or 647,000, however long it takes for me to get rid of this anger that you have stirred up in me, and then it's going to cost you. Your mother and I are going to sit down together and we're going to decide what the price is."

That was before we learned to start telling them what the price was in front, because my immediate reaction to that was, "All right, that's it. You are grounded for six months." Sue's response to that was, "Well, it really wasn't that big a deal after the anger had subsided." God put us together, I wanted to-

Sue Wright: Besides that, I was grounded with the kids also. Anytime he'd ground them, I was too.

Larry Wright: We learned to sit down and start consulting on what's right and what's fair, in terms of the response to that. Then I would go back and would say, "This is the privilege you lose. You lose a privilege because of that," but then I would be able to hold her and love her and hug her and say, "If you think that's going to cause you to love me less, you're wrong."

Dr. James Dobson: The Lord's taught you guys some valuable lessons through the years and you, today, have taught some of those lessons to me and to the others who are

listening. The beautiful thing though is that there was nothing but chaos in your lives, your marriage was on the verge of divorce, Sue, you were thinking of suicide and your children were in rebellion, and the Lord has put your relationship together. The two of you love one another, you said the most loving, complimentary things before we went on the air today, and all three of your kids are Christians and are married to Christians and are living the Christian life. Is that right?

Larry Wright: If it weren't for Jesus, He has to get all the credit, the Lord Jesus Christ does. He's given us-

Dr. James Dobson: No wonder you're out talking about Him, you've got a lot to be thankful for.

Larry Wright: Yes, we sure do.

Dr. James Dobson: I grew up in a Christian home and never went into that outbroken sin, even though the Lord had to deal with sin in my life, but I have not experienced that radical change that you're talking about, but it must really be something to see then and now, when you've been where you've been.

Larry Wright: Well, it's a miracle. I can just say publicly that Sue and I will never, never get a divorce. There's no possibility of that because we are so committed to each other now. God has given us such a love for each other. I publicly tell her, I think maybe you said it once, if we're really going to tell our wives we love them, to say it to somebody else, say it publicly in front of them.

Dr. James Dobson: That ought to do the job, right, Sue?

Sue Wright: Yes.

Larry Wright: I thank God for her daily and the fact that she was available to let the Lord Jesus Christ transform her life. If there is the epitome of a woman of Proverbs 31, a godly woman, it's the girl that God gave me almost 28 years ago. I thank Him for her daily.

Roger Marsh: This is Roger Marsh. What a heartwarming end to this insightful Family Talk broadcast. I pray that you were moved by how Larry and Sue Wright were utterly transformed by the gospel. Well, that was the entire purpose of this broadcast, wasn't it, Dr. Dobson?

Dr. James Dobson: We see it so often in the Bible, when someone accepts the Lord, they literally do 180 degree turn. They're headed down one path, a road that leads to death and destruction for themselves and their family, yet when we repent and humble ourselves before the Lord he completely transforms us. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things become new." We saw that with Larry and Sue. I'm telling you, it can happen for someone listening right now as well.

Roger Marsh:

Well, absolutely, Dr. Dobson. If you are serious right now about wanting to invite Jesus Christ into your heart, all you have to do is give us a call. A member of our team will be happy to pray with you when you call (877)732-6825. Again, that number, (877)732-6825. Call today and a member of our team will be happy to pray with you as you consider inviting Jesus Christ into your heart.

We also encourage you to visit our resources page at drjamesdobson.org. There you'll find a huge collection of Dr. Dobson's books, teaching DVDs, broadcast collections, and much more. Now, they cover materials like, of course, becoming Christian, but also topics like parenting and restoring marriages and passing on a godly legacy to your children and grandchildren.

Every family goes through tough times, Larry and Sue Wright are no exception, but we want you to know that if you're going through a situation like that right now, here at Family Talk we really do care about you. I encourage you to rush over to drjamesdobson.org if you're not there already, and take advantage of the Resources tab.

As we close, I want to thank you for your continuing support of this ministry. The Dobson Family Institute is funded completely by listeners just like you, your generous financial contributions allow us to remain committed to fighting for the institution of the family. You can learn how to partner with us by going to drjamesdobson.org or by calling (877)732-6825, that's (877)732-6825.

Well, that's all the time we have for today. Dr. Dobson thanks you for joining us, and we also thank you for listening to us too. I'm Roger Marsh, have a blessed day.

Announcer:

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