



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Empty Nest – Part 3

Guest(s): Judy Berry and Panel

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: The empty nest season mirrors another key season of life, retirement. Parents who are empty nesters have retired from day-to-day parenting, in a sense. This newfound freedom opens up a world of new opportunities, especially for women.

Welcome to Family Talk, with your host, psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. Today, we're featuring part three of a powerful four-part conversation on the subject of the empty nest. Joining Dr. Dobson in studio are a panel of four experts on this subject, moms who have weathered the empty nest season as well.

As we concluded our last program, Dr. Dobson and the panel were discussing the decision many moms make to either re-enter the workforce or to engage in voluntary work once they become empty nesters. Here now is Dr. James Dobson on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: You know that the feminists scorn voluntary work because it's unpaid. And worth and pay are linked together in their minds. How do you react to that?

Beth Brown: I have that given to me, because as a Christian educator, most of the work that women have done in the church has been voluntary. So I say that is a mindset that you develop. You have to say, do I think ministry's only justified if I'm paid for it?

Dr. James Dobson: And you don't.

Beth Brown: And I don't. I enjoy my paycheck when it comes. I receive one, but I look at all of the things that I have done without pay that I consider just as worthy. When you put them in eternal perspective, is this what God wants me to do? I'm doing it. If I'm paid for it, that helps. If I'm not paid for it, He's rewarding me. The check is part of a reward system, but our rewards go way past that.

But we need to teach women and men that ministry is ministry and it's all exciting. If it's what God asked you to do, go for it. And here's the stage of life where we can go for it with enthusiasm, we have the time to do it.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, all four of you here represent some women in the same category that you're in, broad categories. And Sunny, particularly you represent the women who have given themselves to this task of mothering and now it's over and it's not real clear where we go from here. How and do they go about finding a new identity? What have you done to search it out and what have you learned from that process?

Sonya Wark: Well, I've had a real struggle with this because people say to you, one of my biggest complaints is if you join a new group and they go around the table and say, "Everybody say their name and what do you do?" And everybody says, "I'm a teacher, I'm so and so, I'm a secretary," and they get to me and I just say, "I'm so and so."

There's this awful pause at the end of it. It's been very hard and I think I did panic about it and thought that I just absolutely had to do something. I have really worked hard the last few months in particular saying to myself, it is okay just to make muffins for ladies that you think need a batch of muffins. It is okay just to give.

Dr. James Dobson: I love that. That is neat, Sunny.

Sonya Wark: Well, this is sort of a joke because I have a nickname called, I'm called the "muffin fairy" because I made a batch of muffins for a friend whose husband owns a paint store, and I used to go to the Y very early in the morning and exercise and I came to put them, to give them to him, and he hadn't unlocked his door yet. So I tied them on the door and got a phone call later in the day saying, are you the muffin fairy?

Dr. James Dobson: There are too few muffin fairies in this world today. I'll tell you that.

Sonya Wark: I sort of got a kick out of that and I hang onto that, but this is my thing. I am best with people on a one-to-one basis. I don't work well in an office. I'm a rebel. I don't fit in well and I work best, I like people on a one-on-one basis.

Dr. James Dobson: Why you have to be what somebody else wants you to be, Sunny?

Sonya Wark: That's my whole point. I don't have to and thank you Lord, I don't even try anymore. It's taken a long time because the paycheck to me was tangible evidence of my value, but it isn't.

Dr. James Dobson: You really mean that?

Sonya Wark: I really mean it. Taken a long time.

Dr. James Dobson: And when you're in a social setting and somebody says, and what do you do, Sonya? And you say I bake muffins.

Sonya Wark: Yes. That's one of the things to say. The other thing is that I belong to a Wednesday night Bible study group that happens to be most of the people, the women in it are young working women, and I call myself their unofficial den mother. And they love it and it's fun. I'm the person they phone and say, it's so-and-so's birthday, will you bring the cake? They know I'm there to do it. They're the ones that can phone me during the day if they want to and just talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you have grandchildren yet?

Sonya Wark: Yes, I have three little boys that I hardly ever get to see because they live in Portland, Oregon and I have one little grandson. I don't get any granddaughters. My sewing is not getting used, but I have a little grandson who's just five months old here in Alhambra.

Dr. James Dobson: You will make an incredible grandmother. I'm sure you already are.

Sonya Wark: Well, I don't, see, this bothers me a little bit because I don't want to be the kind of grandmother who has to babysit all the time and who has to worship their grandchild. I want to be an independent person who gets on with the rest of my life being who I am. And what I have to give is fine, but I don't want to go back. I brought up four kids, I don't want to bring up anymore.

Dr. James Dobson: It's not a matter of going back. In fact, I think the grandparenting role is a God ordained and designed responsibility that's almost as important as parenting.

Sonya Wark: Yeah. But do you know what I mean?

Dr. James Dobson: It's lost. I mean, it doesn't happen today because as you said, grandparents live in Texas and the kids live in Maine and you just don't get together. But it's a shame.

Sonya Wark: But do you see what I mean when there are grandmothers who just, they seem to have perpetuated the mother role through their grandchildren, and that's something I really, I want to be there, but I don't want to be so hooked into them that I don't move ahead with my own life.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. But you did say you are a nurturing person.

Sonya Wark: I am a nurturing person, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And it wouldn't hurt to nurture some grandkids along the way at all.

Sonya Wark: No, not at all.

Dr. James Dobson: Sally, how do you feel about grandparenting?

Sally Marston: Well, it's interesting. My mom and dad are such wonderful grandparents. They are really involved in all of their grandchildren's life. They live in the northern part of California and they call and talk to our kids and our kids write letters to them and they just stopped by to visit them in Santa Barbara for Valentine's Day to take them out.

And so they really do play an integral part in our children's lives. And I see the special relationships that our children have with my mom and dad, and I thank the Lord for that because they're getting some good values and teaching from them that they're reiterating what we have tried to instill in our children and they're seeing it in my mom and dad.

Dr. James Dobson: How about yourself? Are you going to enjoy the grandparenting role?

Sally Marston: Oh, yes. I'm really looking forward to it. Very much so.

Beth Brown: Well, if you want to talk to an expert...

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. You have 10 of them already.

Beth Brown: Actually number 10 is due in about two weeks. But when you inherit a group of kids, they're now all grown. So I have nine grandchildren, 10th on the way.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't look like the grandmother of nine.

Beth Brown: It's a lot of fun to be 40 and have 10 grandchildren, but I'm the only Grandma Brown they have. So though chronologically I'm too young, I'm very happy to take that role because they need grandmas. In fact, I remember when my grandson Jesse was about four, he took my face into his hands, just kind of cupped it in his hands and said, "Grandma?" And I said, "Yes, Jesse?" "You don't look like a grandma." And I said, "But Jesse, is that okay?" And he said, "Oh, it's just fine. I really love you."

So it's the role and the feeling. My frustration with it so many is that our grandchildren live all far from us and far away, and I have come to really appreciate the whole concept of the family of God because my own children have been grandparented by people in the church. We are across the continent from my folks. So people in the church have grandparented my children, call them grandma so and so or whatever, and it's been wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: Judy, I told you I had a few surprises for you. I have another one. We've already played a couple of cuts from previous comments you made in 1979 and 1981. I want now to play a recording of a statement that you made in that 1981 discussion of mothers and daughters, and in fact, we got around to the subject

that day of mothers and sons and you talked about Brad and the possibility of him getting married someday and we're going to hear what you had to say.

I really would like to know what kind of mother-in-laws you all will be.

Judy Berry: I already am praying about that because it's going to be very difficult for me, because I don't worry so much about my daughter because I know how women feel and she and I can share. But oh, to let go of Brad to another woman.

Dr. James Dobson: We ought to talk about that a little bit.

Judy Berry: I'm going to be knocking on your door. Because I know, we as women know how a woman can make or break a man. I know where I've made mistakes with Paul and I have tried to rectify them and he has forgiven me, but I know my ability to make him or to destroy him and to let my Brad into the hands...I've cried a lot today. I'm a mess.

Speaker 7: To let go, that someone else can be more influential in your son's life than you are. Because there's a special thing between mother and son.

Judy Berry: That's right.

Speaker 7: That you can't replace, it's nice between mother and daughter, but it's different. It just is.

Dr. James Dobson: And you will be in second place. I mean, whenever any difference of opinion occurs, he is obligated spiritually and in every other way to identify with her.

There it is. Judy.

Judy Berry: I haven't changed a bit.

Dr. James Dobson: Still feel the same way about it?

Judy Berry: I have, yes, and I have come to that place. I now stand in that place that I was referring to.

Dr. James Dobson: Brad seems to be serious about a young lady.

Judy Berry: Yes. And I love her. There's nothing official yet, but it's as official as it could be unofficially. And I love her, but I have had to deal, and painfully so, with the realization that my place is secondary. And it has made me look at my own mother-in-law with great eyes of tenderness in a way that I have not viewed her before because she didn't have the privilege of having a daughter. She just had two sons.

And the realization now that what is happening is God ordained and the way God intended it to be, but my role in Brad's life now is to back away and to always love him and pray for him and be his greatest supporter. I'll always be his greatest fan. No one will ever love him more than his mother loves him, but God did not intend for him to stay with me all of his life and I wouldn't want him to.

Dr. James Dobson: Judy, you choked up all those years ago, even thinking about Brad getting married.

Judy Berry: I still do.

Dr. James Dobson: He was far too young for that then. You still feel like that today?

Judy Berry: Yes, I do. Oh, absolutely. And I'm resisting calling him even right now because I feel, I've dropped him a little note with the Valentine and I feel that I want to be the kind of mother that he needs and the kind of mother he needs is one that just backs off and doesn't try to be overbearing.

The Lord is working in his life and I am trying to be sensitive to the Lord's leading. It's not easy for me to keep my mouth shut. I want to offer my opinion all the time. And my worries about being a good mother-in-law are still there because I have the potential with all the love I have of still being a real big nag. I could be a real pain in the neck to the poor girl, and I don't want to be.

And I feel the freedom to express this to my children, and we can laugh about it, but I think it's important that our children know what we feel. We don't have to say, I'm the mom and he's the dad, and so we have to be careful. We're in this place and they're in this place. My children have seen my suffering and my daughter is, she and I are just, are the best of friends. And I would like to say to the women out there that are listening and to the fathers as well, be your children's friend.

Dr. James Dobson: Judy, there are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who feel things very deeply and they're those who don't. And you do. And I like that kind better. Something sensitive about your heart.

Judy Berry: There is no amount of money that can buy the friendship of your child, and there's no lack of money that can take that friendship away.

Dr. James Dobson: You have in your hand an envelope with a note that was written to you by Kim at Christmas time.

Judy Berry: After Christmas.

Dr. James Dobson: And there was a time where your friendship with Kim was on the line as it is in adolescence, nearly always between mothers and daughters as we talked on

that previous program. How about reading that little note? That's kind of the culmination of what you were working on then?

Judy Berry: I would be happy to. I didn't bring it with the idea of reading it on tape. I wanted you to see it because you remembered what I had said about my feelings with Kim in those days when she was in junior high. And I realized that we stood in a place where I could either be her best friend or I could become her mortal enemy.

And it really was dependent on how I handled the situation. And I consciously made a decision standing in the doorway of her bedroom, looking at what I thought was an absolute disgraceful mess and trying to decide whether I was going to jump down her throat or I was going to back away.

Dr. James Dobson: You're nodding, Beth, you've been there. You stood in that doorway, didn't you?

Beth Brown: Yes. This morning.

Judy Berry: And it's not that I'm an advocate of children's messy rooms, but I decided that day, there's so many things that she was doing so right, and I was going to concentrate on those. And I believe that this note is a direct result of that decision that I made.

This letter came after I'd written her a thank you note for something that she had done for me.

Dr. James Dobson: What'd she say?

Judy Berry: Mom, the letter I got from you today really touched me. I'm so thankful for all that God has done and is doing in our lives. This year has been very important to me in helping me see how special you are to me. I feel a very strong bond with you. It is so good for me to watch how you've lived your life and try to model that in my own life. I can see already how rewarding living for Jesus is. I never would have seen that without your example. I'm so glad you're my best friend. I couldn't have a better mom or friend. I love you, Kim. P.S. Tell Daddy I love him.

Dr. James Dobson: We offer that as a greeting card to all the mothers out there today who are in conflict with their daughters. There is something between mothers and daughters, there is a tension that's typically there, not always, but so often. And it can get better again. And it did in your case, because you made the right choice. I think that was a very conscious and a very wise decision that you made, Judy, because you can turn your children into enemies over insignificant things that don't really matter a whole lot.

Judy Berry: Absolutely. Even now in the kitchen, when she was home this weekend, I just had my kitchen cleaned and she announced she was going to make Valentine cookies. And my response, my first response was, oh my goodness, the flour's

going to be all over everything. And I thought, who cares? She's making Valentine cookies.

And two of them said mom and two of them said dad, and she made them for her friends. Who cares about flour in the kitchen when you have the friendship and the love of your child?

Sonya Wark: I can remember when David graduated from college and he came home to stay for a while so he could buy a car and have enough money for an apartment and everything. And it was a really tough time for him because it seemed that he felt that he was going to come back under my control, and I didn't want it to be like that. And he used to be pretty surly. It was a time when I had to be very, very sure of who I was and where I was and let him be surly because he needed to establish an independence from me and to see that I wasn't still being mom.

Dr. James Dobson: How old was he at this time, Sonya?

Sonya Wark: Well, he probably would've been around 22. Our children seem to be a little late in adolescence. I don't know.

Dr. James Dobson: In other words, you allowed him to come home not under your authority and yet under your roof.

Sonya Wark: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a tough assignment.

Sonya Wark: It was tough. And I can remember one day in particular when he came in and I said, "Hi, Dave, how are you?" And he said, "Oh, are we going through the inquisition?" And I just said, "Sorry, Dave. Friendly question."

I could have been really hurt. I could have been really angry. I mean, in a way he was rude to me, but big deal. He needed to see that I wasn't going to say, you can't talk to your mother like that, because I wasn't his mother anymore.

Dr. James Dobson: Is he married yet?

Sonya Wark: No.

Dr. James Dobson: How will you feel relevant to Judy's reaction when another woman comes into his life and you are replaced?

Sonya Wark: Well, our older son is married and we have a wonderful relationship. As a matter of fact, the four of us went on vacation last summer. And last Sunday we were down at Dave's place having brunch together, Rob and Sue and Danny, and we were all making plans to go to Mexico in about a year together on vacation. I think that's pretty special.

Dr. James Dobson: So let's become peers and friends.

Sonya Wark: Yes. Now, I can't say that I, like Judy said, when they came in on Sunday morning, it was sort of windy. And Danny, my son, had his little boy, five months old in his arms with no hat on, and he walked in the door and I said, "My gosh, you haven't got any hat?" And I thought, oh boy.

Dr. James Dobson: Here we go. Don't do it.

Sonya Wark: But then I said, "Oh, I'm sorry." And that's one of the nice things is that, to be able to say, hey, I put my foot in it and I'm sorry. I know as soon as I say it that was a dumb thing to say. And Sue is very gracious and says, "Oh, don't feel badly about it. I'm always telling Rob to do this and do that, and he's perfectly capable of figuring it out."

Dr. James Dobson: The crazy thing about the assignment of parenting is that it is so all encompassing and it takes every ounce of energy and creativity you have when the children are young. And as the years go by, instead of doing it better, you got to do it less until it comes to the point that you can't do it at all. So the skill that you've learned in those years, you have to muffle because it's no longer appropriate.

Beth Brown: You phase it out. You have, you bring in the friendship relationship that Judy was talking about, and that's the beauty of it. I'd just as soon go out to lunch with my daughters as any of my other friends. I just thrive on their conversation and I find them interesting and loving to be with and fun.

And so as the parenting is easing off, it's being replaced with something more equal that is delightful that takes less energy and is more reciprocal. And I'm thoroughly enjoying the friendship. I think that's one of the perks of this stage.

Sally Marston: Don't you think too, say when you talk about having lunch with your daughter, she becomes another confidant?

Beth Brown: Absolutely.

Sally Marston: That she becomes your booster and she's returning all of the warm fuzzies to you that you've thrown out to her over the years, and there's a relationship there that is just irreplaceable.

Beth Brown: Which Judy, explains a lot of our tears when we take them away to leave them at college because we're not only losing a child or that role, that's not all. That friendships gap is going to be there. We'll continue it by phone or letter and with, but the close, intimate friendship of we see each other every day is no longer a possibility.

So part of our support system is leaving, is part of our giving role. Part of our support system is walking out the door. So we are grieving that too.

Dr. James Dobson: Sally.

Sally Marston: Well, I was just thinking about when my daughter had decided that she was moving back up to Santa Barbara, I had this panic feeling within me thinking, no, you can't go yet. I need you. There was that need.

And as I came to terms with that and realized that I needed to let her go, I could release her to the Lord. But I can see our relationship coming together now as friends when we meet. And we have a tradition now once a year we go to San Francisco for the weekend, just the two of us. And it is such a special time for us, and we're getting to know each other in a different way now as friends.

Roger Marsh: The concept of letting go is key for empty nester parents, but it is a rich and rewarding experience for both the parent as well as the adult child.

You've been listening to part three of a classic four-part conversation on the subject of the Empty Nest on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Of course, with all of our audio programming, you'll find today's broadcast archived on our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. You'll find all four episodes of the program there available for you to download.

You're especially encouraged to click there today because we also have a web extra waiting for you there as well. If you're the parent of a prodigal or the launch into the empty nest season was rough because of some conflict between you and your adult children, you'll want to listen to the web-only release on Black Sheep available exclusively at drjamesdobson.org.

Be sure to take a look at our Facebook page and join the conversation about today's broadcast there. You'll find some valuable insights and meaningful dialogue on this subject of empty nesting when you go to facebook.com/drjamesdobson.

Finally, thanks for your prayers and ongoing financial support of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. This program is completely listener supported. We rely on God through your tax-deductible financial contributions to help us continue in the work to which he has called us. You can make your donation securely online when you go to drjamesdobson.org. You can make your contribution over the phone when you call toll free, 877-732-6825.

Thanks so much for your contribution of any amount during this special season when finances can be a challenge for ministries like ours. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time as our panel returns to conclude our discussion on how parents can transition into the empty nest season. That's on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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