



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Chasing Love – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Sean McDowell

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of the broadcast. I'm honored to serve alongside Dr. Dobson as resident authority on mental health and relationships here at Dr. James Dobson's Family Institute. I also serve as president of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

Hey, thank you for joining us today for this special program on Valentine's Day. I want to start out with a well-known Bible verse. You know it, 1 Corinthians 13, actually a passage, verses four through seven. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it's not proud." Paul goes on to say, "It does not dishonor others. It's not self-seeking. It's not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, trust, hopes, and always perseveres." That is the biblical definition of love.

How do we define love? What are the rules for the physical expression of love? Well, there's a lot to unpack on this subject of love here on Valentine's Day. To help us answer that question is today's guest, Dr. Sean McDowell, discussing his new book, *Chasing Love*. Let me tell you a little bit about Sean. Dr. Sean McDowell has a passion for equipping the Church, and in particular young people, to make the case for the Christian faith. You may know him as the son of renowned apologist and evangelist and dear friend of Dr. Dobson and myself, Josh McDowell.

Sean is an international speaker, author, co-host of the *Think Biblically* podcast. He graduated summa cum laude from Talbot Theological Seminary with a double master's degree in theology and in philosophy. He later went on to earn his Ph.D. in apologetics and worldview studies from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Currently, Sean teaches a high school Bible class at Capistrano Valley Christian Schools, and he's also associate professor in the Christian apologetics program at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. He's married to his high school sweetheart, Stephanie. Together, they have three kids.

Sean, what a delight to have you. Welcome back to Family Talk. Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, send their regards.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Tim, it's great to be back, always an honor to be here.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, as we get started, it's been a tough go over the last couple of years. The truth is, it's been pretty tough on everybody. Sean, in the midst of it, I think when you think of relationships, you think of people, they're pretty tired, maybe tense, you know that, but at the end of the day, everybody wants to get this love piece right. Here we are on Valentine's Day talking about love. You wrote this book, *Chasing Love: Sex, Love and Relationships in a Confused Culture*. Sean, why did you write it? What brought it together?

Dr. Sean McDowell: Biggest reasons are Scotty, Shauna, and Shane, which are my three kids. My son is 18, my daughter's 15, and then I have a son who's 10. I see the constant messages that are unbiblical, confused about love, coming through social media, coming through Netflix. They're certainly being taught in many ways in our educational system. I looked at the landscape and didn't see a single book that I thought was up-to-date, relevant, interesting, dealt frankly with the issues that this generation is facing, whether it's issues on the nature of marriage and sexuality and identity in a biblically-based fashion. I figured, as a parent, if I couldn't find a resource to help my own kids, there's got to be some other parents looking out there for it, so I wrote it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, I was so encouraged. I've gone through every page of this book in preparation for our time together. I thought what a gift to the Church, what a gift to the family, what a gift to moms and dads as they really navigate these waters with their kids.

Now, Sean, you don't have to go very far in the Bible to realize that life's all about relationships, a relationship with God and a relationship with each other. As a matter of fact, Genesis 2, you see that passage where it says, "It's not good that man be alone." This, by the way, is before the fall. "It's not good that man be alone. I'll make a helpmate fit for him." He gives to Adam Eve. Then in verses 24 and 25, it says, "Therefore, shall a man leave both father and mother, cleave onto the wife. They too twain shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were unashamed." There's something so beautiful there.

Obviously, there's a dynamic that takes place between two people that ultimately reflects back to what God is looking for in a relationship with us. But Sean, I've always said this, there's nothing more beautiful in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you and they actually love you, and there's nothing more painful in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you and they don't love you. Sean, when we get love wrong, we start to begin searching frantically to fill that void, don't we? We go on a journey.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Oh, we do. I love that question, because sometimes our culture gets it right and sometimes our culture gets it wrong. I think our culture gets it right sometimes because everybody's made in God's image and there's something inside of us that wants to be loved rightly, as you indicated. I hope this example flies, but you think about the recent Marvel films with Infinity War and Endgame, two, three years ago. Endgame ends 10 years of this epic filmmaking with Iron Man willingly laying down his life as an act of courage and an act of love that everybody recognizes as the real hero intuitively, because you know what somebody loves by what they're willing to sacrifice for. When I saw that, I thought, wow, they get it right. Of course, Jesus said, "Greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down his life for a friend."

But then sometimes our culture gets love deeply mistaken, in the sense that we now have this idea that I can live my truth, and my identity is rooted in my own feelings, and my job of love is to affirm however somebody feels about themselves. If I happen to object, I'm the one who's bigoted and hateful and intolerant, et cetera. That's where our culture gets it wrong. That's where Christians have to say, "Okay, wait a minute. Love actually involves ..." You read from 1 Corinthians 13, love is when you will and act towards the objective good of another person. What's difficult about that is sometimes when you love somebody, you have to act towards their objective good. They won't see it, they won't reciprocate it, in fact, they might even be angry at you. That's exactly what happened with Jesus.

You're right, our deepest desire is to be loved. We've got to wade through these confusions in our culture and make sure we're clear on what real love is and biblical love is, because when we're experiencing it and we're given it, that's the most fulfilling life. We all just know that's what our hearts yearn for.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, in the world of psychology, they often study love and look at how we're wired for love. I don't know about you, Sean, I know you married your high school sweetheart, Stephanie, I remember the first time I saw Julie, really noticed her. We were at a roller skating rink, we were attending Liberty University as freshman. Here's this girl out on the floor, she had on red pants, I'll never forget it, blonde hair. I'm telling you, my brain started going sideways. It was like, "That is amazing." You know the laws of attraction, and we're not talking about love and all this stuff.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Of course.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But Sean, there was something that starts going here. You know that? By the way, you want more of that. Whatever it is that starts happening, you just are drawn to it. You've heard people be defined as lovesick, love crazy, insane or what have you. Sean, when I started into your book, you caught me sideways because I thought, well, this is an interesting twist. Right up front, you're laying a foundation about how we have to wire ourselves if we're going to understand and look at and experience love.

Sean, take us there, about seeking first the kingdom of God and why that becomes so pivotal in our journey.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Tim, let me first take you to 1990, because that was the day, I was a freshman, not in college, a freshman in high school. I saw Stephanie, who's now my wife, and had that moment of, "Whoa, she is cute," grabbed me. Well, that's attraction, God has wired that in us, to be attracted to somebody, but what happens in a relationship when that feeling goes away? That's what our culture says, "Well, maybe you weren't in love, maybe that feeling was deceiving you. You deserve to have that feeling all the time. It can't be wrong if it feels so good." This is what our culture constantly says, but what that misses is that love at its core is a commitment, even if I don't always feel like it. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 6, he said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Both of us with our wives made a commitment, and when you stick to that commitment and you love somebody through the thick and the thin then there's a deeper contentment and richness and fulfillment that comes. At the start of the book, like you were asking, I'm asking the question really, what does it mean to love God and love other people? Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all these things shall be added unto you." That is such a countercultural way to think about love, that says, "I am committed for life. I want your best no matter what."

Well, when two people are asking that question in marriage, there's a whole nother level of beauty and of goodness and fulfillment that comes, because that gives us an inkling, I think, of the kind of heavenly experience we'll have when we are loved by God and love others amidst our failures, amidst our weaknesses, amidst our insecurities. That's the beauty that I think the Church must live out today to be countercultural.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, in a world that focuses on self and wanting that loving feeling and more, you can see how it becomes easy to get caught up in pornography, imaginary lovers, to get caught up in this mindset that sex, for example, is just simply about the physical pleasure and more, and how that can begin to really distort everything and take us down roads that are so destructive that the end of it is disastrous, and also I think sets us up to come back and say, "Wait a second, you guys are going to come back to God and God's principles? God's restrictive, God's a killjoy, if you will, when it comes to what I want in my life." Sean, that is where a lot of people are and that's what they battle with, don't they?

Dr. Sean McDowell: I don't blame young people for thinking that sex or a certain kind of a relationship is the key to a meaningful life. Why? Because every song, it's all over social media, it's in our movies, we just hear it nonstop. But the reality is what we're wired for is intimacy and closeness and real relationships, that's what's fulfilling. Partly what we have to do is just take young people and say, "Hey, do you see these lies? Let's compare it to Scripture. God's design is good, God's design is beautiful. It's actually God's truth that sets us free."

One of my favorite exercises, Tim, is I'll say to students, I'll say, "What would the world be like if everybody lived the sexual ethic of Jesus?" Now, of course, you have to define that, and that basically means singleness as a way of honoring God, but if you're single, you're not sexually active. Married is one man, one woman, one flesh, one lifetime, you're sexually active only with your spouse. What would the world be like if everybody lived that out? You'll see students' eyes going, "Wait a minute, there'd be no sexually transmitted diseases. There'd be no sex trafficking. There'd be no crude sexual humor. There'd be no divorce. There'd be no abortion," on and on and on. The world would objectively be a better place.

Like you said, God's commands are not to steal our fun, they're to set us free. It's because God is good. It says in Psalm 105, "God is good in his character." In Deuteronomy 10, Moses says, "These commandments I give you are for your own good." That's the heart of the question, do we believe God is good and his commandments set us free despite what we hear in our culture? That's the heart of the question we have to live and we have to communicate to this generation.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, behind closed doors in counseling sessions, what I often hear is this hard cry, "All I've ever wanted, really, it's just for someone to love me." Women express it, men express it, albeit a lot of different ways or what have you, but it's the same cry. I'm with you, because when you wrote that piece about following God's design for sex and marriage, you are right. If we did, there wouldn't be any STIs or STDs, there would be no abortion, the brokenness from divorce, no rape, no sexual abuse, no sex trafficking, and more. You quoted C.S. Lewis, "Right and wrong are inescapable here."

Sean, in that, you talk about freedom. I love this piece on the freedom of commitment. Help us understand that and why it becomes, again, foundational here.

Dr. Sean McDowell: This might be my favorite part of the book. When people ask me what do I think is the biggest confusion in this generation, I think it's over freedom, that we think freedom is doing whatever I want, whatever feels good, I'm the author of my life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm going to do my thing. You do what you want, I'll do what I want.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Yeah, exactly. That's what when I ask young people to define freedom, it's typically do whatever you want without restraint. Then I'll push back and I'll say, "Is it possible to do what you want but be not free?" A classic example is if someone says, "Hey, I want to look at pornography," and they go look at pornography. They're not actually free, they're enslaved. But second is freedom rejecting restraint. Look, if I have a piano and sit down and go, "Hey, I can bash this piano, do anything I want, no restraint," is that person more free than someone who goes, "Hey, I understand the purpose of a piano and I'm going to use it according to his design and play beautiful music, Bach, Mozart, worship

music," who's more free? It's not the person who lacks restraint, it's the person who understands the restraint of the piano, but has also restrained him or herself to learn how to play the piano.

Freedom is actually embracing the right restraint, it's living as we are supposed to. That's countercultural, and we have to understand God's design and cultivate the discipline to follow it to really be set free.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host. Our special guest, Dr. Sean McDowell, he's a professor at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, travels worldwide speaking at camps, churches, schools, conferences. He is co-host of the *Think Biblically* podcast, one of the most popular podcasts on faith and cultural engagement in the country.

Sean, when asked what makes for a great relationship, an overwhelming majority of Americans will answer in one direction, they'll say love. But the problem has always consistently been this, nobody really knows what love is. There's a lot of definitions out there. We've talked a little bit about it being a feeling for a moment, that's where a lot of people live, but commitment is at the heart of all this, get this peace right. Sean, help us understand that and why if we don't have that piece love fades quick.

Dr. Sean McDowell:

Yeah, really, we're talking about how God's design gives us freedom. Our culture says you're free without restraint, but there's actually a freedom that comes from commitment. For example, I'll often compare with students living with somebody versus being married. Well, in living situations, there tends to be actually more arguing, more physical violence, less satisfaction as a whole, not in every case, but as a whole. One reason might be if you're in a living circumstance and you're not committed for life, you know you can just walk out the door and move on with your life with minimal cost, but if my wife and I have a disagreement or an issue we're working through, there's a commitment we've made to each other, I'm in this for life, we are in this together. Ironically, there's a certain contentment and a certain freedom that comes from commitment.

And you know what? That's true in sexuality. There's a sense where there's a security that comes, there's a contentment that says, "You know what? This person is going to love me no matter what, if my body changes, if I'm struggling in life, and they're not going to compare me with somebody else." It's that commitment that sets somebody free. That's in part why the Bible is so serious about not just friendship and commitment to the Church, but the marriage commitment is serious and it's meant to be for life.

The main reason is because the way we understand God's love for us is through the illustration of marriage, but also so we could experience God's love in one fashion, not the only way, but one fashion. When somebody says, "I love you and I'm committed to you and I'm going to stay with you for life no matter what," that's beautiful. That's a God-sanctioned kind of marriage that people

are meant to experience. When you said earlier in counseling sessions people say, "I just want to be loved," my heart goes out to people who are experiencing that. That is a good desire. We're all meant to have that desire, but it's sin that just messes it up. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sean, I know we're fighting time here on our first broadcast on this. I can't wait for the discussion tomorrow, we're going to talk more about honoring God with your body, your soul, distorting God's plan for sex. We're going to talk about singleness and the purpose ultimately in marriage, et cetera. But Sean, for some who are listening right now, today's a tough day, they're not in a relationship, they're single, it's not a good day, they may be in their hearts just yearning and asking God for direction, hope, they want to be loved, or they're just trying to figure out this singleness piece, Sean, what do you say to them? What if they've blown it too and they're just thinking, "I don't know, maybe I'll never have that in my life."

Dr. Sean McDowell: Well, first off, I would apologize on behalf of the Church. I think sometimes we've made an idol out of marriage itself, as if that is what it means to be a mature Christian, to grow up and that's where we find happiness. We've done this in the Church, and marriage is beautiful and it matters, but like you said, singleness, we're going to talk about it tomorrow, I have a chapter on that. When I was printing out an early copy, a single lady where I work read it, and my wife walked in and she was in tears. She said, "Finally, somebody is talking about the beauty of singleness, the challenge of singleness, and understands my unique life." That's a lot of what it is.

Know that singleness is good. I can understand why on a day like Valentine's Day and this season, just on our whole culture is saying, "You've got to get married to be in a certain relationship," I understand that's difficult, but God says both singleness and marriage are two God-honoring beautiful ways to be in relationship. Amidst those challenges, let me tell you, I'm thankful for you, I love you and I'm pulling for you, and your contribution to the Church is vital. Maybe, as an encouragement, find some other singles who are living out this kind of relationship that God has for us, as a model and as an inspiration.

If you've blown it, here's the bottom line, we've all blown it in different ways. All of us have, nobody can stand before God and say, "Hey, I'm completely pure," nobody can. That's the heart of the gospel. Satan is an accuser, but in the Old Testament there's a psalm that says, "God will separate our sins as far as the east is from the west." Not north from south, because if you go north, eventually you're going south. If you go east, you're eternally going east. That's why 1 John says, "If we ask for forgiveness, he is faithful and just in forgiveness." There is grace for you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In the end, there's only one who can meet the deepest longings of any of our hearts, and that's a relationship with God in Christ. That's where we find our completedness. Sean, without it, it's a journey, it really is.

Well, hey, what a delightful conversation. The book, again, *Chasing Love: Sex, Love and Relationships in a Confused Culture*. If you don't have a copy of this book, you need to get it. You certainly need to get it in the hands of all of your children, I mean that. This book takes it all on. He addresses everything from hard questions about sexuality to pornography, homosexuality, transgender ideology, and so much more. It's all in this book, anchored in a strong, biblical, principled ethic and more.

Sean, what a delight. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, our entire team here at Family Talk, we salute you. We pray that God would continue to lead you and really put in your heart seeds of boldness and courage to stand strong for such a time as this. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Sean McDowell: Thanks, Tim.

Roger Marsh: Well, we have covered a lot in today's Valentine's Day program here on Family Talk from the thought of if everyone followed God's plan for love and sex what would the world look like to what commitment really means in a relationship. You are listening to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we want to wish you a very happy Valentine's Day. I hope that you found today's interview helpful for your own relationship or for the building of one in the future.

Now you can head to our website at drjamesdobson.org and listen again to today's broadcast, or you can also listen to hear anything you might have missed during that program. Be sure to tune in tomorrow for part two of this important conversation with Dr. Sean McDowell and our own Dr. Tim Clinton. While you're on our website, you might consider purchasing the "Building a Family Legacy" eight-DVD video series. It was created by Dr. Dobson himself, he compiled all of his 40 years of research and experience into a resource to help strengthen your marriage and your family. For a suggested donation of just \$50, you can have this series sent to your home. Visit our website at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, or give us a call at 877-732-6825, that's 877-732-6825.

While many of us are thinking about our significant other today, let's also remember the one who loves us the most. He gave His only son for us, He laid down His life for our sins so that we can have eternal life, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thanks for joining us today here on Family Talk. Roger Marsh here, praying for God's richest blessings to continue for you and your family.

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