



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Fatherlessness: An Epidemic

Guest(s): Kurt Bruner and Chris Fabry

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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.

Kurt Bruner: Well, our enemy, Satan, as we learn in Genesis chapter three, hates the image of God. He hates anything that depicts the reality of the one that he so despises. And in Genesis three, we see the deception. But you go back to Genesis two, we see that God says there's something that's not good that he created. Now, it wasn't not good because it was bad. It couldn't have been bad. He made it. But what did He say was not good? What was not good was a solitary, isolated human being. We were not made to be alone. We were not made to be self-centered. We were made, as Christ said, to lay our lives down for someone else, and in the process, find our very meaning, our very existence, and our very purpose.

Roger Marsh: Well, that was just a brief sample of what you'll be hearing today featuring one of our guests, Kurt Bruner. Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and as we just heard, man was not made to be alone. It is the sacred union between a man and his wife that is the basis for the family. And yet, sadly, today, many families face the problem of fatherlessness. In fact, one in four children in America are growing up without a dad in the home right now. That's almost 18 million kids, and that is truly a staggering figure. Think about this. A boy or girl grows up without a dad in the home, or maybe dad is physically present, but emotionally he's pretty distant or he doesn't have a relationship with God. Those kids run the risk of growing up with damaged, emotional, and spiritual health.

And oftentimes a huge void is left in the heart of that boy or girl. And in attempting to fill it, they can be led into a life of poverty or crime, or drug use, and possibly even perpetuate that cycle of more fatherless children for generations to come. This is truly a critical problem for our culture, and also for the future of our country. We as Americans, and especially as believers, really need to look at how we can change the tide for families in crisis. Now, today's program was recorded several years ago. It features our own Dr. James Dobson and Kurt Bruner, his co-author in a fictional book called *Fatherless*. This volume was set in the year 2042, and it's divided into a three-part series that examines

what American life might look like given our dropping fertility rates and our lack of respect for life, and the very fact that our children are growing up in broken homes.

Kurt Bruner, by the way, is the founder of the Home Pointe Ministry, as well as the chief operating officer for a global non-governmental organization that serves persecuted Christians. Kurt lives in Texas with his wife, Olivia, and their six children. Now on the broadcast, you're also going to hear the voice of Dr. Dobson and Kurt Bruner's, good friend, Chris Fabry. Chris is the host of his own radio program called Chris Fabry Live. He's also the author of over 80 books. He and his wife Andrea have nine grown children. So let's join in on this discussion right now as Chris Fabry interviews our host, Dr. James Dobson, along with his co-author Kurt Bruner, on the subject of fatherlessness right now on Family Talk.

- Chris Fabry: Dr. Dobson. Kurt, welcome to the program. Thanks for joining us today.
- Dr. James Dobson: Thank you, Chris. I always enjoy working with you.
- Kurt Bruner: Thanks for the honor.
- Chris Fabry: Dr. Dobson. The first question I have is the dedication to *Fatherless*. It's to Chuck Colson. Why?
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, because both Kurt and I greatly admired Chuck Colson. He was one of my closest friends, and he just had a way of perceiving the culture from the perspective of Scripture. And as such, he had just great influence on me through the years. Reminded me a lot of my dad, although we weren't that farther apart in age, and I miss him greatly today. I just wish Chuck knew and could review the work that we're doing in this trilogy. I know he would have some great insight for us.
- Chris Fabry: Kurt, anything to add to that?
- Kurt Bruner: Well, I would only add that Chuck Colson was part of a generation of leaders who foresaw many of the things that we depict in these novels, coming and started giving early warning signs. We hope by dedicating it to Chuck Colson, we in some ways honor an effort he put decades into, and that is saying, hey, evil is evil, but the good can overcome.
- Chris Fabry: Kurt, let's talk about the power of a story, the power of identifying with this character that is on the page and kind of jumps off the page. What can that do for good or ill for the person who's reading?
- Kurt Bruner: Well, we live in story, don't we? Our whole existence is because God, the grand author of the grand drama, has put us in scenes, in a particular scene, in a particular time, in a great narrative that's unfolding of which He's the author.

And we know that ultimately the end of that story is one of redemption, but there are also very, very dark scenes. There are also very troubling moments and disturbing moments. And in every great story, there's conflict. There's good, there's evil, there's redemption, there's love. The guy, will he get the girl? And all of those things play out in all great stories. And the reason we're excited about portraying what's coming, what the trends are telling us is coming in story form. And throughout history, literature has been a powerful tool in depicting realities, depicting trends, depicting themes that are inherent in the gospel.

And that's what we try to do here. It can be something as simple as Charles Dickens who wrote *A Christmas Carol*, and you remember the Ghost of Christmas, Past, Present, and Future, all of which points to that process of repentance in his life, which is a Christian theme. So literature has always been a powerful mechanism for capturing the heart, as well as relaying profound spiritual truths.

Dr. James Dobson: The most influential person who ever lived, of course, was Jesus when he walked the dusty streets of ancient Jerusalem and Galilee. And how He did that conveyed His truths to as many as 5,000 people at a time. And what did He do? He told stories. He told parables. And who knows how He actually told them. He described, for example, a dirty, miserable popper named Lazarus who was hungry and needy, and the dogs were licking his sores. And he crawled past an open door where someone, I guess the servants had set a lavish table, and it was falling over the side and falling to the floor, and the dogs were lapping it up. And Lazarus said, "If only I could have a few morsels that are falling to the floor." And you can imagine how the people were moved by this gripping story. Now when it's reduced to writing, even in the Scripture, we don't really know how that story was told, but Jesus told one after another, and people were deeply affected by those stories.

I believe now, that a story, a good story, especially one that's true, has the opportunity to get through to the hearts of people. And in this case, novels have been chosen for the process, and I think it will be very useful.

Chris Fabry: Was there ever a novel in your childhood or growing up years that you felt that about, that you were just, as you were reading, you were just immersed in it?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I was greatly influenced by fiction when I was in college. I've focused my life on non-fiction since then because that's what I write. In fact, this effort to communicate through fiction is my first venture into that genre, if you will. But yes, I took great books classes in college, and I was greatly influenced by Steinbeck and so many other, the great authors, especially English literature, and those things really had an impact on me. This is why, Chris, that I speak in stories. If you just look at my first film series and what I do on the radio, it's largely reduced to stories because that carries meaning.

Chris Fabry: Kurt, follow up on that. Do you recall being immersed getting into a story like that in your childhood or formative years?

Kurt Bruner: Oh, absolutely. In fact, I'm a huge fan of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, by way of example, and Dostoyevsky's books on Russian culture and such. They've had a huge impact. And I'll tell you why. It's not simply because you're reading an idea. It's because you're experiencing those ideas embodied in human reality. And I think that's the power of those kind of books, and I hope that's the power of what people will experience in these novels.

Chris Fabry: So take us into what each day looks like. What is everyday life like? Is there urban unrest that people are going through?

Kurt Bruner: The primary overarching crisis of this series is an economic crisis, again, because of the depopulation, dramatic drop in fertility and then the rise in the aging population. Perhaps the best way to picture that is a tension that exists within the characters, particularly one of the families, the main families, which is Kevin Tolbert and his wife, Angie, and that they're considered something called breeders. And that's a derisive term in the future, almost like a racial slur today, where the population and the intellectually and cultural elite look down their noses at this group of people who devote themselves to lifelong marriage and raising children. If you're going to have children, for heaven's sakes, don't have more than one sensible child, maybe one two at the most, but oh my goodness, this family has three children? And one of those children, as the story unfolds, you'll see they've discovered, has a disability.

And they're in a world in which disabilities are very uncommon because people don't just simply have children the way they do today or have historically throughout all of human history, and that is conceived out of passion and love for your spouse. Children are conceived in the clinic. There's a very clear line and the distinction between having children and making love in the future. And so there's that separation that creates a world in which people pre-screen which child will or won't be born. And so these breeders who kind of believe in having children by faith, and by what they would call chance, are considered irresponsible in that future world.

Chris Fabry: So from a parental perspective, boy, I'm all over that. My wife and I have nine children, so we would stick out like a sore thumb in 30 years. What about growing up in that kind of environment for kids? What's that like for them?

Kurt Bruner: Well, we don't have to work too hard to imagine what it's like to grow up in a world where one, or at the most, two children is the expected norm. Take China, for example, which has now been living for several decades with something called the One Child Policy. Recent news reports are coming out. In fact, I heard a story not too long ago where the divorce rate has risen dramatically in China. And as they've tried to figure out why, because it's a culture that's traditionally highly valued the permanence of marriage, they're finding that it's probably related to this one child policy. Well, why would that be? Well, what they're finding is these children all have grown up in homes in which they're the center of their parents' universe, and therefore become the center of their own universes, and aren't used to compromising, aren't used to

apologizing, aren't used to doing any of those things that, as you know, siblings kind of create in one another's life in terms of forming you into that image of Christ that's humble and that's all of those things.

So imagine a world in which you have fewer and fewer children, all as P.D. James put it, when you treat children as gods, they eventually behave like demons.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk, and I'm Roger Marsh just jumping in for a brief moment here. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we thank you for listening today and for making us a part of your day each and every day. Of course, we are a listener supported Christian radio program, and it's because of you and your prayers and your faithful financial support that we're able to bring quality content to you and your family each and every day. Now, to find out more about how you can support the JDFI visit drjamesdobson.org, drjamesdobson.org. And we all have a prayer in our heart, so if you have yours you'd like to share, we would love to connect with you and pray with and for you if that's what you need. If you'd like to reach out, simply give us a call at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And now, let's return to the program right here on Family Talk.

Chris Fabry: I have to ask you about one of the major influences that I see in culture for the last couple of thousand years, and that is the church. What about Christians? Where is the church? What is the spiritual climate in the world that you're writing about?

Dr. James Dobson: The church is made up of very flawed individuals like you and us, and they sometimes fail to recognize what's happening around them. The culture I've described in my book *Bringing up Girls* is like a river, a raging river. And it only flows in one direction, and it has enormous influence on all the people in the river. And they're all carried downstream. It becomes extremely difficult to oppose the flow of culture and walk upstream. You got to give it everything. You've got to do things differently than those around you do. And the church, the people of the church are in the river too, and they're carried downstream toward unknown waters. And so the church has the same forces and influence on it. If we follow Scripture and if we understand it, we will be able to resist it. But without that, we make the same mistakes. We have divorce in the church, we have infidelity in the church. We have selfishness and we have dishonesty. Many people are frustrated with the church because they say they're all hypocrites.

Well, aren't we all to a degree? And the Lord can help us. He can cleanse sin and keep us from living that kind of life, but the church is not perfect. And if it were, it wouldn't be after I got there.

Kurt Bruner: Well, let me add this about the church, and this is part of the great hope, both in this trilogy, but also in terms of when we look to the future trends. The reality is those who do tend to get married and have children and raise up the next

generation are, by and large, more religious people. And in fact, a recent study I saw showed that the more conservative they are in their religious faith, the more likely they are to have and raise and more children for the next generation. And demographics are destiny. So part of what's portrayed in this series is we have one young man, Kevin, who's a rising star politically in Washington, and he, of course, is a breeder because he, if you can imagine the horror, actually has three kids, for heaven's sakes, which is unheard of in his generation, but he's one of those breeders.

But here he is in the midst of the political tension going on, and he's trying to point out, look, look at the bright spots. Look at where the economic vitality and energy and innovation is happening. It's in these places where they're actually having children, where they're actually respecting and honoring the aged and the disabled rather than discarding them. So the hope is that the people of God, as is currently the case, tend to value life more and tend to embrace these things more. And so demographically, that will play out as the conflicts emerge in the future.

Chris Fabry: You both see this novel and the series depicting spiritual warfare. Can you explain that?

Kurt Bruner: We really do, Chris. And that goes all the way back to Genesis one, two, and three, where God after creating all that He created that expressed who He was, the mountains and the stars and the animals and the ocean, and then dogs, and then for whatever reason, cats. But He created all these things that reflect who He is, reflect Him as an artist. But then on the last day, on the sixth day of creation, He creates the family as this communion of love, of different personalities all coming together and becoming one in a mysterious way. Well, our enemy, Satan, as we learn in Genesis chapter three, hates the image of God. He hates anything that depicts the reality of the one that he so despises. And in Genesis three, we see the deception. But you go back to Genesis two, we see that God says there's something that's not good that He created.

Now, it wasn't not good because it was bad. It couldn't have been bad. He made it. But what did he say was not good? What was not good was a solitary, isolated human being. We were not made to be alone. We were not made to be self-centered. We were made, as Christ said, to lay our lives down for someone else, and in the process, find our very meaning, our very existence and our very purpose. And that occurs most commonly throughout all of human history and all cultures in all generation. It happens, God revealing Himself through this simple little thing called marriage and parenthood.

And so we believe what we're projecting out is one of the last salvos in that battle where the enemy is putting a full frontal attack on the very image of God as it walks and breathes and reproduces and innovates and creates on earth because he hates and despises it so much. And we're trying to, in writing these novels, fire back missiles that say, "No, God's design for the family is beautiful

and is enriching, and is life giving, and is all that it was intended to be. And Satan, we're not going to let you win this battle.

Chris Fabry: Dr. Dobson, to conclude today, I want to know from you and Kurt as well, in the best of all worlds, not a dystopian world, but a utopian world, if you could have anything happen from the reading of *Fatherless*, and then the books that come afterward, what would you like to see happen in people's lives?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I would like people to recognize the demographic trends that are taking place around us and see why they are so important and where they lead. And that much of what they're being told in the popular culture is in error. It's wrong. It has implications for us and for our children, for our grandchildren, great-grandchildren coming along behind that we really need to do what we can to change it. I would also like them to see that the biblical principles are still valid and we can find in the word, the solution, and the hope. The hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Kurt Bruner: Well, I think you make an important point for listeners to understand and that this book would be equally appropriate to give to a believer and a non-believer alike because we're portraying the world as it will exist. Some of the characters are believers, some of the characters are not, but I think it's appropriate for either audience. In terms of what I would love to see happen, I mentioned earlier the Ghost of Christmas Future, I would like people to read 30 years into the future, this is where we're heading and come back to today. The opening scene of this book is what you might call a Tiny Tim, to use the Dickens analogy, someone who's disabled, who society considers not really worthwhile, part of what Malthus and others would call the surplus population. And I would like them to come back to today after experiencing these stories and give Tiny Tim a great big hug and hear him say, "God bless us everyone." And how does He bless us? He blesses us with the honoring and the beauty of old age and the respect and the dignity for human life from conception to natural death.

He blesses us when we receive the gift of children and raise them and nurture them in the faith, and He blesses us when we uphold all of these things, marriage and family, that are in themselves, an embodiment of the imago dei, the very image of God. That's what I hope happens, and that people will begin to see that process of self-sacrifice and investment in the next generation as something that's celebrated rather than disparaged.

Chris Fabry: Well, Dr. Dobson, Kurt, you know how much my heart beats with you on this subject matter. Thanks for pouring all of your literary talents, as well as your talent to look at where we are and where we may be, and may we not get there because of the power of God and his gospel. Thanks for being with us today.

Kurt Bruner: Thank you, Chris.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a great discussion featuring Dr. James Dobson, his co-author Kurt Bruner, and radio host Chris Fabry discussing the novel *Fatherless*. If you'd like to share today's broadcast with a friend or family member, remember you can do so easily from our Family Talk app or you can do so on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And while you're there, remember, you can also reserve your own copy of *Fatherless*. It's our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. So give us a call at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And now before we leave the air for today, a special announcement with our very special in studio guest. Dr. Owen Strachan is with me in studio today. He is the senior director of the brand new Dobson Culture Center, the newest edition to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute family. And Dr. Strachan, welcome to the broadcast. Welcome to the ministry, and welcome to the war, though you have been already fighting for the culture war for quite some time, haven't you?

Dr. Owen Strachan: I've been fighting for a few years, but I really appreciate the kind welcome, and it's a joy to be here with you and the team.

Roger Marsh: Okay, you're working from the perspective of as a theologian, as a pastor, as an author. We've had you on as a guest many times here on the Dr. James Dobson Family Talk program, but I think probably the thing that impresses me the most is that you are the father of three teenagers and you're still engaging in this battle. You want to help other families succeed as you're succeeding too. Talk about why that's so important to you.

Dr. Owen Strachan: Yeah, they're but for the grace of God go I in terms of the wreckage of teenage parenting. I'm so thankful for God's grace at this stage in the journey and for all of them. But in all seriousness, we've got to know that though our teens are facing fearsome odds in terms of the culture and what it's trying to indoctrinate them in, we have the antidote. We have exactly what they need. And if we will raise our kids in homes that are saturated with grace and truth in a John 1:17 way, we can know that our good God will work out His purposes for their good and His glory.

Roger Marsh: Amen, and amen. We're looking forward to hearing more from Dr. Owen Strachan in the days and weeks to come fighting for culture from the Dobson Culture Center. I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of the entire team here at the JDFI, thanks so much for joining us today and for making Family Talk a part of your broadcast day as well. Hope you have a blessed weekend, and be sure to join us again Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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