



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Joys & Challenges of Adoption – Part 1

Guest(s): Billy Jack Barrett, Anne Barrett, J.R. Keller, Reyna Keller

Air Date: November 18, 2021

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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: Thanks for joining us for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And today, we're bringing you a classic program from our archives. Dr. Dobson conducted this interview back in 2012. He had as his guests two very special couples who had searched their hearts and made a significant life-changing decision. Both couples adopted troubled kids out of the foster care system, and welcomed them into their homes.

Billy Jack and Anne Barrett adopted five children, and J.R. and Reyna Keller adopted one. Now, I want to remind you that November is national adoption awareness month. Here at the Dobson Institute, we encourage you to listen closely, and to prayerfully consider how you might be able to help children looking for a forever home, or a foster home. There is a need in your community, no matter where you live, I can guarantee you that. Well, with that, allow me to introduce more about today's and tomorrow's programs.

This was actually the second time that Dr. Dobson welcomed the Barretts into the studio. You see, the Barrett family, back in 2005, was featured on the reality TV program, *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*. Dr. Dobson was so intrigued by their story, as portrayed on TV, that he asked Jack and Anne to join him for a broadcast. Today's discussion though took place several years after their extreme makeover adventure. There are lot of joys and a lot of challenges that come with adoption. And the Barretts and the Kellers are on the broadcast today to share some of those stories, as part of their own. Here now is Dr. Dobson with his guests, on today's edition of family talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that takes us back a number of years, when we invited the Barrett family to come, and to tell us about the children that they adopted, most of them were abused or neglected and wounded children. And they reached out to them because they felt the Lord impressed it upon them to do so, to give homes and to give love to these children who had never seen it, never experienced it, and to bring them into a loving family. A couple of these children were so damaged and dysfunctional that the state of Colorado, as I recall, actually labeled them as

unadoptable, because of the terrible things that they had experienced, and the personal, emotional, mental disabilities that grew out of that experience.

But the Barretts accepted the challenges, and brought the children into their home. Now, we're speaking of Anne and Billy Jack Barrett, Billy Jack is a horseman and a rancher, and the manager of the Air Force Academy Equestrian Center, and he has been since 1980. So he knows horses. Anne is a homeschool mother and homemaker. And they were also, and many of our listeners will recall this, they were also guest on a popular ABC TV show some years ago, called *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, and that television show and the producers actually built a brand-new home for this family because of what they were doing for foster children.

We want to give an update on how the family is doing now, and the children we heard about, now almost eight years ago. Also with us is J.R. and Reyna Keller who have adopted one child from the foster care system here in Colorado, and that is to accompany three biological children. So they have four children that they are raising. Thank you all for being with us today, and to the Barretts, how nice to see you again.

The program that we did together had me in tears through most of that program. Do you remember that? I couldn't stop crying because of the implications of the love that you all gave to these kids that were unlovable pretty much. And you took them in, you made them your own. You introduced them to Jesus Christ, and you began teaching them discipline, and how to work, and family looks, because they'd never seen a family that functioned right, had they?

Anne Barrett: No, they had not. It was very different, very strange to them, and very difficult for them.

Dr. James Dobson: I mentioned the two kids that the state of Colorado said were unadoptable. Tell us about that. What had they gone through, and what did you find when you brought them in?

Anne Barrett: Well, I think the case with most children in the foster care system is one of neglect, and that leads to abuse. They're exposed to alcohol and drugs. They're exposed to physical and sexual abuse. They are abandoned, horrible things done to them. So their level of trust is non-existent, and it's easier for them to reject their family. They are the ones doing the rejecting than to be rejected. So, they make their behavior really awful with every right. What they've been through is just heinous.

Dr. James Dobson: Why did you do it?

Anne Barrett: This is what parents have asked. And it's a very important question, because if you adopt these children because you have an empty spot in your home or

family, and need to fill it with a child, it won't work. This has to be a calling from God. And I say that because the hurt, the difficulties, the seemingly insurmountable behavioral issues that we all have encountered, we have to have divine help through these, and anybody that doesn't have that ground to stand on will give up and send the kids back.

Dr. James Dobson: It is a sacrifice, and it does have an impact on biological children. We have a lot that we need to talk about here. Let me get to the Kellers. Reyna, tell us the story of the adoption of your youngest.

Reyna Keller: Well, it was interesting when Anne said that if you're looking to fill a hole with these children, don't do it, because they will not fill that hole, but our little guy came to us kind of literally through our back porch door. And he was being fostered by our neighbors and friends. And we have a little boy who's 13 months older, that's our biological child. And they became friends, and we ended up being caretakers for this foster boy, when his foster parents needed respite care, or when they were going away. They have a lot of children of their own.

Dr. James Dobson: So, you got acquainted with him.

Reyna Keller: So we got acquainted with him, and we found out that the foster home term where he was at was getting ready to end. And our youngest looked at us and said, "Oh, mom. Could we adopt him?"

Dr. James Dobson: Did you feel a divine calling to do this also?

Reyna Keller: We did. We did. We were scared to death. It's like, "We are not doing this unless this is God, because God's got to take care of this thing, because there's no way we can do this."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. How old is he now?

Reyna Keller: He just turned 12.

Dr. James Dobson: And how old was he when you got him?

J.R. Keller: He was eight when he moved into our house, and he turned nine right before the adoption was final.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. What was life like, bringing in a foster child to make friends with and interact with three biological children?

Reyna Keller: It's a rodeo. It's riding a bronco. Our youngest, our adopted son is also very similar to what they were talking about at nine years old. As near as we can tell, we were his 15th or 20th home. And that was bouncing in and out of birth

parents homes, and other foster care systems. Some where the state actually removed him from the home as a young child, where he was put in foster care.

Dr. James Dobson: Was he abused?

Reyna Keller: Not as bad as he could have been. Physically, certainly, but we didn't have to deal with sexual abuse issues at all.

J.R. Keller: And I don't know that social services, I don't know that they really explained it to us or we really saw it, but you don't understand the magnitude of what you're getting into here.

Reyna Keller: And I think you really don't understand the impact, the long-term huge impact on your own biological children.

Dr. James Dobson: What was it?

Reyna Keller: It was a disruption of who we were. Our oldest son at the time was 16. And he's like, we're praying this through as a family, and we're searching for God's, "What do you want with us here, Lord?" And our oldest son looked at us, and I said, "What are you feeling on this?" He goes, "I don't want it. I don't want to have anything to do with it." And I said, "Well, why not?" He goes, "I like us. I like the way we are. We're happy. We're good. We function. We enjoy each other. We just have a hoot." And he goes, "I don't want that to change." And I said, "I understand that." He's pretty strong with his own walk. And I looked at him. I said, "But where's God in this?" And he just kind of hung his head. And he goes, "I think God's telling us to do it."

Anne Barrett: That's the really hard part.

Reyna Keller: I said, "So what do we do now?" He goes, "We're going to have to do it."

Anne Barrett: Yes. I think Reyna is so right, and the calls that I have gotten from parents across the country, and one of the things, just to know, that came up in people calling me was how these kids, biological and or adopted, feel following Jesus, and rejecting the sibling that God has placed in their family. Like what you talked about with Richard, with your oldest. Their feelings of conflict, of, "I'm a Christian. I follow Jesus, but I don't like this person. I do not like him. And I don't like thinking of him as my sibling." And that guilt that they carry also.

Reyna Keller: Well, and I know for our older three kids, they just got so fed up with the way the adopted child was treating us, and treating me in particular, because we homeschool, and we're all like on top of each other all the time. And they're just like, "My parents are giving you everything, and you are treating my mom like this?" And it gets tough.

Dr. James Dobson: And elaborate on what Reyna just said. What was the attitude of your biological children to the adopted children, during the tough times?

Anne Barrett: It was pretty negative. They shut them out of their hearts. They didn't want to communicate with them. You'd almost think of it as a shunning, but they didn't turn their backs.

Dr. James Dobson: But they felt guilty for feeling that way.

Anne Barrett: Yes, the guilt, because as followers of Jesus, they know God has placed these children in this family, and they are conflicted with these feelings of real dislike. And yet, knowing that that must mean they're not a very good follower of Jesus, if they have those feelings.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you all get phone calls from people asking for advice from those who have adopted older children?

Billy Jack Barrett: Not only phone calls, but we'll be stopped in the grocery store, or the gas station, pumping gas.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you blame me for that?

Anne Barrett: Yes. Some of them come to you first to get to us.

Dr. James Dobson: And do you take the time for them?

Anne Barrett: Absolutely.

Billy Jack Barrett: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And encourage them.

Anne Barrett: Absolutely. I want these adoptive parents and their children to know, "You are doing what God has called you to do." What a gift and a blessing you are. Guilt comes from Satan. Get rid of it, because there's no room for it. You are following God, and pray, and watch your walk with Him. Grow unbelievably.

Dr. James Dobson: You can no more be a perfect parent than you can be a perfect individual. It's not possible. We're all flawed. And so, we can't blame ourselves too much when we've tried so hard, right?

Anne Barrett: Right. And yet we take it.

Dr. James Dobson: That's one of the messages from these programs.

Billy Jack Barrett: Well, we're on the winning team. And with some of these kids, it might be the Hail Mary at the end of the game but we're on the winning team.

Dr. James Dobson: Anne, I want to take you back eight years to a story that you told. I haven't listened to that tape in quite a while, but you told about a particularly rebellious child that you had adopted, and I believe you were at SeaWorld, or you were at an amusement park, and this child decided to throw a temper tantrum. You remember that? Yes. Tell that story again because what you did that day really did impress me.

Anne Barrett: Yes. That was quite a day. We had been on a polar ride that everybody sits in these chairs, and it feels like you're on a helicopter, and you're swooping down through the polar icebergs. And when we exited there, it's right where the beluga whales are, and it was dark, and these whales are white. And she, I don't even remember what she did, but I told her to come stand by me. And she said no. And she's all of four foot, eight inches, or something. Very tiny.

Dr. James Dobson: You were surrounded by people too, weren't you?

Anne Barrett: People. There must have been 40 or 50 people. There was a young man with a microphone waiting to talk about the beluga whales. So I just scooped her up because she was being defiant. This was part of the problem. And she's 12. I just scooped her up in my arms, and just held her like a giant hug. And she started screaming. And his talk was about 15-20 minutes. And finally, she stopped screaming and she started crying, and she sobbed from way down deep. And she put her arms around me, and hung on so hard and sobbed. And I knew from that moment, she was mine, that she understood she couldn't intimidate me. She couldn't make me embarrassed. She couldn't run me off. And I wasn't going to let go.

Dr. James Dobson: That took a lot of courage.

Anne Barrett: I think it was desperation. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Because everybody was watching, and everybody was undoubtedly irritated by this. And they want you to shape this kid up, and you couldn't do it. I mean, she's 12 years old.

Anne Barrett: And to this day we laugh.

Dr. James Dobson: Intuitively, you knew that you had to hold her.

Anne Barrett: There wasn't anything else I could do. I couldn't let her leave. I couldn't let her run off. I couldn't let her do what she wanted. She had to stay within the confines of my protection, because we were at SeaWorld, and there were people everywhere, but we still tease her that she turned the belugas white from her screaming.

Dr. James Dobson: You have probably hundreds and hundreds of stories like that, of moments when you were challenged, moments when the answers were hard to come back. And yet you hung in there. Anne, thank you for that.

Anne Barrett: Oh, you're welcome.

Dr. James Dobson: This is a great lady. You know that?

Billy Jack Barrett: I know that.

Dr. James Dobson: J.R., you're pretty blessed you.

J.R. Keller: Yes I am.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Now, we come to the heart of what this program is all about, because for the best of motives, and in-sync with what you thought the Lord was saying, there has been a difficult component to this, but it makes it especially tough because we want people to adopt these children. They are children of God. They have an eternal soul. They will live someplace in eternity. And most of them don't know the Lord. They haven't been introduced to faith. And what a worthy assignment to take these broken, wounded children, who are so needy, and what they need more than anything else is love. And yet it is often very, very difficult for the family. So I don't want to discourage people from rescuing these kids, but the truth of the matter is, even with you guys, Billy Jack and Anne, it's been really hard.

Anne Barrett: It has. But this is one of the most amazing callings that God can make. And like you, I don't want to discourage parents. I agree with the Kellers, that when you start into this, we all have this very superficial kind of idea of what these kids ...

Dr. James Dobson: Kind of the romantic notion.

Anne Barrett: And we don't know the depth of the damage to their souls. It's horrendous. And as we get into it, we see this horrible evil that has pervaded their lives from birth until the time that we get them, and the overwhelming job of trying to show them that the huge chasm in their hearts can be filled by God. And for a lot of these kids, the father figure has not been a good figure. So now, you're talking about God, the father, and it's not a happy picture for them. And I may not live to see what all of my children accomplish, but I know that they will come back to Him, those that have tried to push Him away and run Him off, and hide from Him.

Dr. James Dobson: And some have. You have five adopted children, and two of them are doing well, or at least they're still in the family.

Anne Barrett: Yes, they're doing good.

Dr. James Dobson: And one of them is doing super.

Anne Barrett: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: But three of them have left the family, and at least at this stage of their lives have walked away from their faith, and gotten involved in drugs and crystal meth, and other things.

Anne Barrett: Alcohol.

Dr. James Dobson: Has that torn your heart clear out?

Anne Barrett: Oh, absolutely. I think, this sounds a little strange, but I want my heart to break over what God's heart breaks over. So I know when my heart is breaking, his is too. So our hearts break together, but I told one of my friends I would rather have the scars on my heart healed by Christ than no scars at all. Because those scars show that we have been through the fire. We are passing through the waters. And we're coming out on the other side.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're still praying for them.

Anne Barrett: And that's the big thing.

Billy Jack Barrett: Absolutely.

Anne Barrett: Prayer is the greatest thing that, as a parent, we can do. Everything in our being wants to go grab them and haul them back out of the darkness. But they have to bring themselves out. When we adopt them at eight and nine years old, we go in with a lot of people, and we take them out of the darkness. We bring them into light. We bring them into security and safety, and we give them the tools to function. But when they become adults, they get to choose how they're going to use those tools. And we are blessed.

Dr. James Dobson: Do they know, these grown kids now, they're in their 20s, some of them, do they know the front door is still open? Because they have rejected you. And they've said harsh, mean things to you, and they've rejected their faith. Do you still have a place for them in your heart?

Billy Jack Barrett: Yes. And I believe they know that. They also know that we are firm in our conviction that we will not enable bad behavior.

Anne Barrett: Two of them, Dr. Dobson, are coming full circle, recognizing how important their family is. And it's wonderful to see, as they start to come in, little ways. The third one's going to be a little bit harder. I don't know how long it will take her, but I believe with all of my being that she belongs with us.

Dr. James Dobson: You can no more take credit for every good thing that your child does in life than you can take the blame for everything he does wrong, because you can look and say, "Man, I wish I'd had done that better. I could have done it better. And I am responsible for some things that go wrong." But we're dealing with complex human beings here. And you just don't program them. I think the misunderstanding of the Scripture that says, "Train up a child in the way he will go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." That puts all the blame on parents, if you interpret it the way it seems.

Anne Barrett: I think the first time it happens, we have five that we get to practice these feelings through, the feeling of betrayal with one of them was overwhelming. And then it was, "How could I have not seen? How could I have not known?" So you start second guessing yourself. And those were the nights that I really cried myself to sleep. I had a big pity party, wondering what I didn't do, what I should have done. And I know Bill did too. This hurt deeply. And it not only hurt us. It hurt some of their siblings. That's something you struggle with, but when you see them coming around, and when you realize how precious they are to God, that's the joy of walking in faith with him. My prayer at night is, "Lord, don't let them be happy if they're not close to you, make them miserable and keep them breathing long enough that they can come to the foot of the cross."

Roger Marsh: This is Roger Marsh again. And we have run out of time for today's program, but we'll pick it right back up at the same place tomorrow, and actually go a little bit deeper into this round table conversation about adoption. This important topic of adoption and foster parenting is filled with opportunities for compassion, commitment, fulfillment, and restoration. I hope that you've been encouraged by today's program, which we are calling "The Joys and Challenges of Adoption." Make sure you listen to Family Talk tomorrow on your favorite platform or outlet, or go to our on-demand broadcast page to catch part two when it is up tomorrow.

Now, I'd like to share a quick note about one of our guests. Since this program first aired, Billy Jack Barrett retired from his position as the manager of the US Air Force Academy Equestrian Center. He has since founded the Remount Foundation in Colorado. The foundation provides active-duty military veterans, first responders, and their families with free equine-assisted therapeutic activities. You can learn more about the Remount Foundation when you visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

A big reminder for you and yours. November is "National Adoption Awareness Month." And here at the Dobson Institute, we encourage you to prayerfully consider how you might be able to help children looking for a forever home or a foster home. There is a need in your community, no matter where you live. So if you have time, space, capacity, energy, or other resources, why don't you start with your local church? The folks there should be able to direct you to organizations in your community or state to explain the process and the need.

As always, thank you for making family talk a part of your day today. Would you please take some time today to lift our ministry up in prayer? We are always striving to bring encouraging, helpful, and God-honoring broadcast to our listeners. So please pray that God would continue to provide, and that he will guide us in Kingdom work. I'm Roger Marsh, hoping you'll join us again next time, right here, for another addition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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