



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** A Lifeline to Moms: Defining Real Expectations

**Guest(s):** Sarah Parshall Perry

**Air Date:** May 11, 2023

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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:** Being a mom is one of the toughest and most demanding jobs a woman can have. Now, that's no understatement. Not only do they have the stress of the constant and ever-changing situations that come with raising kids, moms also are faced with the pressure of being the "perfect" mom. I'm Roger Marsh, and you're listening to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And today on Family Talk, you're going to hear part one of a conversation that Dr. Dobson had with Sarah Parshall Perry back in 2017. When Sarah transitioned from her career as a lawyer to being a stay-at-home mom, she found that motherhood was much more unpredictable and taxing than she had anticipated. Today Dr. Dobson talks with Sarah about her book, *Mommy Needs a Raise (Because Quitting's Not an Option)*. Great title. They'll also discuss the unique challenges that come with raising children with autism. Let's listen now to today's edition of Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello everyone and welcome to Family Talk. I'm so glad that you joined us on the program today, and I hope that you feel support and friendship from us because that's a good part of what we're trying to do is I just want reach through this radio and give you a hug and let you know that you are loved. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson, and today we want to talk about a subject that will be of particular importance to moms because we do appreciate moms. As kids we, speaking of you and your family, you probably knew your mother as a woman who loved you the very first moment that you came into the world. She prayed over you continually through the child-rearing years, and she helped you when you needed it most.

And that is not always true, unfortunately, because some women are not good mothers, but most are. And as kids, the children don't often understand or realize the stresses and hardships that are on moms before and after your birth. But maybe today we can articulate some of those feelings that are now being experienced by those of you who have children. Today we're going to hear from Sarah Parshall Perry and her journey from her life as a lawyer and then on to

being a stay-at-home mom and the issues facing moms in the 21st century. Sarah, I'm so glad to have you here.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us about your two children with autism. How did you find that out? How soon did you know it, and how is that going?

Sarah Parshall Perry: So that's a fabulous question. So I have three children. Noah is my oldest. He is 13, and my middle is Grace. She is what we call neurotypical. So she's not on the autism spectrum. And Jesse, my youngest is eight, and he also has high functioning autism.

Dr. James Dobson: So one in three do.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right. Exactly, and there is an increased probability, the CDC tells us, that if you have one boy on the autism spectrum, it is more common to have a second boy on the autism spectrum. There is now approximately one in 42 boys who have autism spectrum disorders. So we are among a more increasing segment of the population. And I didn't know much about stages of development when I had my Noah. He was our first. We were the first among our friends to have children. But I did know that what I originally thought was mother's intuition in retrospect was the Holy Spirit prompting me and saying, "Mama, I want you to look into this a little more." He was late to walk. He was late to talk. He had trouble with eye contact. And when he became very excited, he rapidly flapped his hands. We actually went to friends we knew who were experienced in issues like this. And ironically, I was called over-reactionary and neurotic and did nervous.

Dr. James Dobson: Did your pediatrician recognized it?

Sarah Parshall Perry: My neurologist recognized it, but only after our general pediatrician said, "I think he's just eccentric, and that's the way he expresses himself." So I thought, oh man.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a sheer tip off though.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Flapping the hands is one of the characteristics.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes, it is.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Sarah Parshall Perry: So we actually said to ourselves, well, we want to put a rest to this once and for all. So we went to the Kennedy Krieger Center in Baltimore, which is one of the

world centers for Autism and Related Disorders. And as we walked into the building, my heart said "There is something coming." But my mind said, "No, no, I think we've just worried too much" because we didn't want to hear it. And I think when we actually got the diagnosis, it didn't just come as high functioning autism, it came as ADHD, oppositional defiance disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and the potential for an early onset mood disorder. So we got a basket of diagnoses, and it's kind of, I like to tell my friends like that scene in a movie where there's a fight and as one guy is rolling up his sleeves, the other one gets the first punch.

That's how we felt because we were so blindsided by it. And very frequently an autism diagnosis comes with another neurological or psychiatric diagnoses. So we with both boys have about six diagnoses, and we're currently dealing with some issues in our oldest that could be an early onset mood disorder. We are very carefully watching him with our psychiatrist, who is excellent. But I tell you what, it makes for some interesting days, and right now we are in the middle of a move, which is chaotic enough as you know, Dr. Dobson. It is fraught with its own stresses, but when you have boys on the spectrum who really thrive with order and predictability and routine, and their whole world is turned upside down, these boys have pretty much had it. So let me tell you, I am looking forward to going to love on them when we are done here and just letting them know that Jesus sees their stresses and loves them anyway.

Dr. James Dobson: You have come from the successful working world of profession law, all the way to suddenly discovering you have an autistic child. Talk about that journey.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh boy, that is a journey that was, I believe, one of the hardest I've taken in my life. And my husband and I, my family have had our own share of hardships. But that particular journey, that transition was very, very hard for me. There was a routine and a control and an order to being a working girl, to taking the bar exam to knowing that if you did X, Y would be the result. And knowing that there was a predictable salary and an opportunity for an advancement in your career. And suddenly I was at home with three children and I had nothing to show for my day other than keeping them alive, which felt like a very small quest to keep going after, because I had no deliverables other than thinking, okay, they were fed and dressed today and the clothes were maybe clean, and that's all I got done.

And then the Lord compounds the situation for me and says, "I see how tightly you have a tendency to hold things, so I will give you aspects of motherhood that you can't control." And as you know, Dr. Dobson, parenthood is the ultimate free fall anyway. We are-

Dr. James Dobson: Oh yes, for everybody.

Sarah Parshall Perry: For everybody. And we put in the effort that is ours, but we trust the Lord with the results. So here I was working hard for an end goal I couldn't see, just trusting that the Lord would help things to work out and that we were raising

children who loved Him and could differentiate on their own. And then the Lord said, "Now I'm going to give you something else to deal with."

Dr. James Dobson: Did you move from full-time professional responsibility to full-time mom-

Sarah Parshall Perry: Full-time mom.

Dr. James Dobson: In one step?

Sarah Parshall Perry: One step.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you do it on purpose?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I did. And let me tell you, I didn't go into it fully committed to that idea until they handed me my son in the hospital. And it's funny the way the Lord hardwires us with passionate, all-encompassing head over heels, love for our children. And I went, "Oh, no, no. I may be on the fast track to partner or headed for vice president. I do not care. I cannot leave this child." And to this day, I still get emotional thinking about how it felt when they handed him to me. It was in theory a difficult decision, but in practice it was the easiest thing I've ever done.

Dr. James Dobson: I saw in the prep for today, you said that the smell of the child's head had meaning for you.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that right?

Sarah Parshall Perry: It did. And it's still does.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm talking about the newborn.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. Oh my goodness. Let me tell you, that is part of... God's so wonderful the way He just presses the right buttons in that connection between mother and child. And there was something immediately about holding him in my arms. And I look back now and I didn't realize that there were some warning signs and he didn't cry right away. He was very jaundiced, which some studies have said can be a predictor of whether a child develops autism. He was very still and very quiet. And so they rubbed him and rubbed him and rubbed him under the lamps. And when he finally cried and they wrapped him up and they handed him to me, he was wide awake and his eyes were open, and he looked at me and I just smelled his head. And I thought, if love had a smell, this would be it.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you know what the hormonal basis for that smell is?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I don't, but I bet you do.

Dr. James Dobson: It's called oxytocin.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, wow.

Dr. James Dobson: And a woman who may say all throughout the pregnancy, "I don't know this kid, I don't know if I will love him or her, and all of a sudden I'm going to have this responsibility." And there's an apprehension, and the Lord is taking care of that. And when that baby is born, there is the release of a hormone that says, "Love this kid."

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh wow.

Dr. James Dobson: And it works.

Sarah Parshall Perry: It sure does.

Dr. James Dobson: And I think that all of the smell and the holding the child, the first nursing experience, all of those things are a way of saying, "I made this child. And I made you for this child." It's a wonderful thing.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. It really is. And it's so funny because part of my purpose in writing this book, *Mommy Needs a Raise*, was really to examine for those women who've made that choice, who've gone from working or school to staying home. I didn't find a lot of women talking about it and talking about the challenges of what a world upset that was going from professional woman to suddenly going, "I'm standing here and I'm every cliché I've seen on television. I have a messy ponytail and dirty yoga pants on. What has happened to me? I don't understand it." I can't shower without someone looking like they're coming through with fingers under the door like an ax murderer scene. I mean, I really gave up everything that I thought was important, the free time and the extra income and the path to advancement because I loved these kids. But no one-

Dr. James Dobson: Did you never look back?

Sarah Parshall Perry: No, never. And I have to tell you-

Dr. James Dobson: Honestly now, Sarah, honestly.

Sarah Parshall Perry: I really did not. I really did not. And God is again, He's so good because when I had gotten through the phase of little littles, so my youngest is now eight, three years ago, the Lord provided me an opportunity that truly, Dr., landed in my lap to work with a family research council in Washington. And I know your connection to it. And a dear friend of mine who also has a son on the spectrum, was working there at the time, and they hired me to handle education reform and the Common Core standards initiative, which we were fighting very hard against because my heart, as is the heart of that organization, is to promote

educational liberty and to give parents the opportunity to choose what is best, whether it's curriculum or it's a public school or a private school.

And so I was hired to do exactly that, but the Lord went, "I'm going to take your love for these kids and your love of writing and words, and I'm going to drop this in your lap so that you don't actually have to guess if it's from Me because you're not even looking for it when it shows up." So He really-

Dr. James Dobson: So this came along with motherhood.

Sarah Parshall Perry: It did. It did. Once my youngest was five and they were now in school for larger blocks of the day when my youngest was in kindergarten, and I had this period of seven hours a day, the Lord went, "Perfect. Here's your next task."

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that wonderful-

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh yes.

Dr. James Dobson: That the Lord in his great compassion look down like he did with Adam and said, "It's not good that he be alone and created Eve for him." I can foresee Him looking at you and saying, She's got all this talent and also all this ability, she's pouring herself into these children and I'm going to give her something else to give her some meaning." And that's what happened to you.

Sarah Parshall Perry: That is exactly what happened. And the only drawback is that now my children think they're famous because most of my books have been about them.

Dr. James Dobson: Do they mind that?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Not in the least. In fact, if there is anything in our family, my three children are prone to grandiosity. And so they fight over who the book was actually about. So Noah, because he was the first diagnosed, believes it was him. Grace, who is the middle and neurotypical believes it's her struggle in the midst of her two brothers and Jesse, because he's the youngest and the cutest thinks it's about him. So it's worked out.

Dr. James Dobson: You heard my introduction. You were sitting there when I was welcoming people to the program today. And you remember I said, "I'm so glad that you joined us today. I hope you feel our love and support. Everyone has a need for acceptance and love, and we're trying to provide it to you today by putting an arm around." Do you identify with that? There's a woman, and I think many of them who were listening to the broadcast today who heard that and said, "That's exactly what I need."

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you talk to that woman?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, absolutely. Well, let me tell you, first of all, a chapter in the book is called "Mommy Wars." And I think we in Christendom are no less tempted by the opportunity to belittle the choices of others. And let me tell you, motherhood is fraught with a hundred choices. It is stay at home mom, it is working mom, it is private school, it is homeschool, it is bottle-fed or nursing. It is raising your children one way, co-parenting, co-sleeping, helicopter parenting, pick your descriptor. So we have a tendency, I think, to be no less divisive unless we make sure that the Holy Spirit is at the center of our parenting choices. And for me, that means supporting other moms in their parenting choices.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, you have written in your book about women shaming one another.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. And I believe because 80%, the statistics tell us of American moms use social media, whether it's Instagram, whether it's Facebook, it's predominantly where many of us get our news sources. And so we follow the perfect photos and the perfect meals and the idea boards. And let me tell you, I am too tired for a private persona and a public persona. So I have said to my friends, "Listen, if my life is proof of anything, it is that God can use the smallest and the most cracked of vessels to do any good work of His." So I am one of those people who if there are moms listening, and I hope there are, you are doing a fabulous job, mama.

Dr. James Dobson: What is the nature of that shaming that goes on? What do women say about each other that hurts?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I think it's twofold. I think first there is a judgment. If the invisible, unspoken standard isn't kept, because I don't have a calling right now outside the house, I'm going to take what I can do here and make it perfect. So the clothing's perfect. The pictures are perfect, the meals are perfect. And you know what? The only thing perfect is God. And He shows us that. Our brokenness is our opportunity to show our kids, "Listen, mommy messed up", or "Listen, we didn't keep the schedule today." Or "Mommy is running late, and I'm sorry." And kids are quick to forgive. In fact, my asking for forgiveness of them has taught them how to ask for forgiveness when they themselves are wrong.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, that's neat.

Sarah Parshall Perry: It's so huge. And I think the other thing is that we have a tendency to be critical of decisions that make us feel insecure. So the stay-at-home mom might be critical of the mom who has to work because she's not in a position financially to be able to stay home with her kids, or she doesn't have family in the area to help with childcare. And I think that speaks to who we are in the inside and we struggle, so we complain or we struggle so that we judge. And I think if we are secure in who we are in Christ and what He's called us to do in our lives for a season and for eternity, I don't think we can make a wrong decision as long as we set our course toward Him.

Dr. James Dobson: After Shirley and I had been married about 10 years, we finally got enough money together to buy a nice house. It was a fixer upper, and we set about expanding it and changing it and wallpapering it and putting carbon in all those things. And because we didn't have enough money to just call a contractor and say, "Do it", we did it ourselves, and it took three years to do it, and I was teaching the Sunday school class of young adults at that time, young married couples, and there were probably 60, 70 of them, and they waited to give us a housewarming for three years. They kept waiting for us to get to the point, and at the low point of that whole process, we were an absolute wreck. I mean, you don't put underwear away when you get to that point.

You know, we had parts of sandwiches on the ironing board. We did the dishes in the bathtub and the backyard didn't having grass in it, and there was mud, and they finally got frustrated with us and decided to come anyway. And so on Sunday night, we had gone out to eat, we came home, I saw something move in the backyard, and there were a hundred of these Sunday school class members in that mud out there, and they came in and we were so embarrassed. I've never been so embarrassed in my life.

Well, our church was building a new church and everybody was urged to give, and my son Ryan has my name, James Ryan Dobson. So he had signed a pledge for \$5 and left it on my desk. So everybody that came by thought that's how much I gave to the church. I mean, the next morning we looked at each other on the elbows and said, "Did it really happen?"

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh my goodness.

Dr. James Dobson: There are moments like that when you are embarrassed and mortified. We all go through that. We've got to have a little compassion for one another, don't we?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. Oh, the world does not need another chit of meanness to hold against one another. And I tell you what, if anybody should have grace, it should be the people who not only profess Christ, but who get the great privilege of being moms because boy, there is no other place where love is expressed and experienced that in the nature of a family.

Dr. James Dobson: We're out of time. Will you stay with us?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I sure will.

Dr. James Dobson: You have a plane to catch, don't you?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I do.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll have to talk fast.



Sarah Parshall Perry: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Well, the title of Sarah's book is *Mommy Needs a Raise (Because Quitting's Not an Option)*, and we're going to talk about that some more tomorrow. Thanks for being with us.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: You're good at what you do.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: You are listening to Family Talk, and I'm Roger Marsh encouraging you to join us again tomorrow for part two of Dr. Dobson's dynamic and honest conversation with Sarah Parshall Perry. They'll be discussing some motherhood survival skills you must hear about and learn from. You will not want to miss this program, so be sure to join us again tomorrow.

I think we can all agree that moms are the true backbone of any family's home life, and boy did we learn that a lot during the pandemic and the quarantine. Moms face so many different challenges, and every mom deserves respect, affirmation, support, and encouragement. That's why here at the JDFI we have our new Empowering Moms series. It's a series of once a day emails from us to you, and they provide you with practical parenting advice, packed with timeless scriptural truths and a prayer to encourage, renew, and inspire you delivered right to your email box each and every day.

To sign up now, just visit [drjamesdobson.org/empowermoms](http://drjamesdobson.org/empowermoms). That's [drjamesdobson.org/empowermoms](http://drjamesdobson.org/empowermoms). Okay. Before we go, I do want to remind you that we are a listener supported radio broadcast, and it's because of you, your prayers and your faithful financial support that we're able to bring you quality content each and every day. We rely on God through your tax-deductible financial contributions to help us continue in the work to which our Father has called us. We believe that the voice of Dr. Dobson, his guests, and esteemed colleagues should never go away.

We must press in during challenging times of cultural confusion and division to provide clarity and biblical truth for everyone, but that requires your help to bolster families. Family is of course, the bedrock of our culture, and without the family, all hope would be lost. To find out more about how to financially support Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute financially, just visit [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). We'd also love to connect with you and pray with you if you need, over the phone. Just give us a call at 877-732-6825. And thank you for all of your prayers for the Ministry and also for Dr. and Mrs. Dobson as well. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

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