



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Joys & Challenges of Adoption – Part 2

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

Air Date: November 19, 2021

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

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: Did you know that there are over 400,000 children in the US foster care system at this very moment, and every year over 23,000 young adults in that system age out of foster care without ever having found a forever home? Those are painful and sobering statistics to be sure. I'm Roger Marsh and you're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. On yesterday's program, we shared the first half of a powerful interview on the topic of the joys and challenges of adoption. Dr. Dobson has had as his guests, two couples who adopted children out of the foster care system in Colorado. They shared the highs, the lows, the emotional roller coaster of their journeys. Our guest names are Billy Jack and Ann Barrett who adopted five children and J.R. and Reyna Keller, who adopted one.

On today's broadcast, we're going to bring you part two of that conversation, which was originally recorded back in 2012. We're sharing this interview once again, in honor of November being National Adoption Awareness Month. Well, this was actually the second time that Dr. Dobson had welcomed the Barrett's into the studio. Back in 2005, the Barrett's had been featured on the reality program, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. Dr. Dobson saw that broadcast and was so intrigued by their story that he asked Jack and Anne to join him in the studio for a broadcast. However, today's and yesterday's conversation took place several years after that Extreme Makeover Home adventure. Here now are the Barrett's and the Keller's with Dr. Dobson on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: I know what I would say to families like yours, before you adopted the first child. I would like to know what you would say to others. Let's go back Reyna and, what do you wish had been said to you?

Reyna Keller: I think there's a few key issues and I was really thinking about them before we came. And one of the issues is running across in Luke 14, where it says, Jesus was talking and he goes, "Count the cost. A wise man, counts the cost before he goes." And I don't think there's any way of knowing really what this process is going to cost you, adoption of these children is a redemptive process and there

is a cost for redemption. And God is asking our family to pay that cost. He's asking our biological children to pay that cost, which gets tough.

But I think there's a few things I wish I would've known, is that I wish someone would've said, "You're still going to feel strangely about this child years down the road." I love this child. I've worked, this child is mine. And yet I love him way differently than I love my biological children. My biological children do not put me through what this little guy does and it's not his fault. We're trying to restore him. I think, J.R. and I were talking last spring and I said, "I'm shocked." I was truly shocked that it still felt like a graft after two and a half years, and I didn't expect that. I expected it to feel like a new normal, but it still feels like we're working at the putting together of this family.

Dr. James Dobson: And because you're not there yet-

Reyna Keller: We're not there yet.

Dr. James Dobson: The process isn't complete.

J.R. Keller: You mentioned here a second ago about the years of what these kids went through. Well, basically when they're adopted into a family, you're having to go in and tear out little sections of that foundation that was laid and you're having to try to rebuild it.

Dr. James Dobson: J.R., have you ever regretted it?

J.R. Keller: It's tough. And so yeah, there are times when you sit back and you look at it and go, "would I do it over?" And there's a lot of soul searching there, but it goes back to how we opened up-

Dr. James Dobson: I don't think you would be normal, if you didn't have those feelings.

J.R. Keller: But we go back to how we opened up the program. Did God call us to do this? So if God's calling us to do it, then we've got to honor that.

Dr. James Dobson: Reyna, have you ever looked back?

Reyna Keller: Oh, definitely. And I think what's been hard for me is to understand the cost to my children, and what God has asked my children to do. And especially our youngest, because he's been the one, the closest in age and has been living with the youngest the most.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me ask you another really tough question.

Reyna Keller: Go ahead.

Dr. James Dobson: Has the impact on your biological children been a net positive or a net negative?

Reyna Keller: I would say net positive. Growing character is never an easy process. We all know what we're in for. I went to our oldest son after we'd had our youngest for two years and I said... It was just a time, a downtime for us to refresh ourselves. And I said, "What do you think about this thing that we have done? Where are you at with this? What have you learned?" And he goes, "Mom," he goes, "I learned one thing. I learned that love was a choice." And I'm like, "This kid's 16.5, 17 years old. And you know that love is a choice." He goes, "Yeah. And love is an action." And I thought, if that's what God's trained you through this, then it's worth it. It's worth it to know that maybe it's been tough, but in the end, my kids will look back and go, "we helped God with one of his lost ones. Yeah, we sacrificed."

Dr. James Dobson: There's got to be a satisfaction in it.

Reyna Keller: There's huge, because God's in this thing.

Dr. James Dobson: Despite all of the hardship.

Reyna Keller: And there's joy. We get to watch our little guy grow. When he came to us, he was so messed up. We call him our Mach 3 Butterfly. And that brings its own set of circumstances. But he was a failure to thrive kid. He was scrawny, tiny when we got him and in three years, I mean he's grown nine inches and gained 30 pounds.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And I think you wrote, it may have been you Reyna, that these children are inveterate liars, because lying has been the way they survive.

Reyna Keller: Yes. Oh, they are unbelievably good at it, unbelievably good. And when you raise your own children and truthfulness is a core family value and you can tell. But there have been times when you can get stared straight in the eye and just lie through their teeth, and we've gotten to the point where we've even had wailing and gnashing of teeth, "I'm telling you the truth. Why will you never believe me?"

Billy Jack Barrett: When the children are leaving foster homes, the foster parents have given up, they've called the place, the authorities come to take them away, and as they're being taken away, the foster parents are standing there and said, "But remember, I love you." So it means absolutely nothing. So one of the things that we did is that as a practice, we didn't go around telling them we loved them because it means absolutely nothing to them, they don't believe it. You just do it, day in and day out in demonstrating it.

Dr. James Dobson: Anne and Reyna, in addition to everything else that being the mother in a situation like this, like both of you have experienced. Why did you put yourselves through homeschooling? That added to it. You talk about going a second mile. Why did you choose to do that?

Reyna Keller: We were already a homeschool family and for us, it was again, we really truly felt that God was calling us to homeschool. And when we got our youngest, when we adopted him, here was a kid that had so many people in and out of his life for so many years, caretakers, social services, therapists, teachers, counselors. He had so many people in his life and you have to find a way to get him to attach to one set of grownups. And so the idea, and of course, there's definitely some learning situations. And we've done a lot of testing with him and searched out help and we've received it. God's opened doors for that. But it does get very difficult, because it takes a lot of time dedication for him. And there's some different...and for me-

Dr. James Dobson: The price that you paid for that. That meant you were with this difficult child all the time.

Reyna Keller: Yeah. And we were not smart enough the first year to find more breaks for me in that process. It was just kind of like-

Dr. James Dobson: Did you nearly break?

Reyna Keller: You grabbed hold... Yeah, I did. Yeah, I did. You grab hold of that plow and you say, "God's in this and give me strength," and off you go.

Dr. James Dobson: How'd you get on your feet?

Reyna Keller: Well, I got some help. I was physically and emotionally just exhausted from trying to understand this child and keep the family functioning and keep the family at peace and meet everybody's needs. And it gets very difficult. But, I ended up going to some counselor and she was amazing for me. She helped me out a ton and got me back on my feet.

Dr. James Dobson: Anne, you had sort of a little red schoolhouse.

Anne Barrett: Actually we had a real red schoolhouse, they built us from Extreme, a one room schoolhouse. And at the time I had six children and I actually had been homeschooling for a couple years prior to then. I had decided, I was spending all my time at the school anyway, with behavioral issues, with one of the adopted children, actually each of them. I was becoming permanent part of the third grade class as they each went through third grade. And I thought, "I need to get these kids into an environment where there's not so much social activity that overwhelms them, that they can't address academics. If I can eliminate that part, then I can start to build on the academics and introduce the social aspect." And that's what prompted us, for me to homeschool.

Dr. James Dobson: The exciting thing will be when you see the fruit of your labor and it may be 20 years from now, you might not even live to see it, but it's there. Everything that you have put in to those kids is still there. And Shirley and I read a book many, many years ago, I don't even remember who the author of it was, but it was the

account of a Bible study where people were sitting around on the living room. And one of the women who was there began telling what her life had been like in foster care and how many times she had been sent back and how many times she had been rejected. And then she began talking about the last one that occurred. And she had finally found a family that really loved her and knew how to show love to her.

And she was making such progress and she was happy as a lark. She went bouncing through the entryway one morning and found her little suitcase, her little tattered suitcase sitting by the door. And the foster parents said, "We're not going to be able to keep you." And she hadn't known it. She didn't sense it. She thought they felt about her the way she did them. And she looked around the room and everybody was crying and she was shocked to see them cry. And she said, "Oh, wait a minute. Don't cry for me. It was because of this experience that I gave my heart to Christ. I would never have known Him if I hadn't experienced some of the things that I went through." So, she was giving the Lord praise, much later, even for the rejection, because it brought her to Christ in her own way.

Anne Barrett: It always strikes me when I meet people who've been through situations where they've been in foster care and weren't adopted, or their younger siblings were, and they weren't, they were rejected. How beautiful some of these people have turned out, followers of Christ and open hearts to love. And then you realize that God doesn't need any of us to do any of this, but what a privilege to be asked to be part of it.

Reyna, one of the things that you said, "It still feels like your youngest, he's grafted in." Living with him every day, I don't think you become aware of the really big steps that these kids do make, because you're there all the time. It's when somebody sees them once a month or once every six months. But all of a sudden, one day you'll realize, "I'm parenting him just like I parent the others. When did that happen?" And that is the most wonderful moment. And our last one, it's been seven years, six years, and she is just now being parented normally. It's like she is no different from the others as far as how we deal with her.

Dr. James Dobson: I ask the Keller's a question, now I want to ask you the Barrett's. What would you say to parents that are about to adopt a child, especially an older child, that may have problems? What advice would you offer?

Billy Jack Barrett: Well, if God is behind this, then it is good to be for it. And as I was saying and kind of what Anne said it earlier, the reward comes from and the joy from serving God and doing what he's called you to do.

Dr. James Dobson: So, you would do it over?

Billy Jack Barrett: Yes.

Anne Barrett: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Even with the pain? Anne, would you?

Anne Barrett: Absolutely. I cannot imagine my life without all of my children. They're a part of me and-

Dr. James Dobson: All nine of them.

Anne Barrett: All nine of them and the ones that were adopted, I tell them they might not have been conceived in my womb, but they were conceived in my heart and they're mine. And I would say to parents, there are tremendous resources out there for help, use them. These kids need help. And with God behind you and giving you direction, use these professionals to help these kids heal. In the beginning, for a lot of them, it is chemical help with antidepressants. The hope being that once they're stabilized in a family, they can be weaned off of those, but the issues they have to deal with. The biggest issue, isn't the physical abuse or the sexual abuse, the verbal abuse. The key, the biggest issue is abandonment. When Jesus went to the cross, he was really abused and the Romans knew how to kill with a whip and how he ever made it to the cross was unbelievable. But the only time it's recorded in scripture that he cries out is when his father leaves him. Abandonment, it goes to our very depths of our soul, and that's what the real issue with these kids is.

Dr. James Dobson: That tears into the worth of the individual. "I am worthless. They didn't love me. That means I'm not lovable." And that's as painful as it can get.

Anne Barrett: And the truth is some of their behavior, they're not lovable as we're going through it. But like Reyna said, what one of her oldest sons realize is love is a choice. It's not a feeling. Sometimes a feeling is part of it, but it's not a feeling, you choose to be there and you choose to never leave them. And I hope my kids hear my voice in their ear, especially when they're about to do something wrong. Now they may go ahead and do it wrong, but they still hear my voice. And mom is with them all the time. I want them to hear God's voice.

Reyna Keller: Dr. Dobson, one other thing that I would like to tell prospective parents of these older, foster, adopt children is that, prepare for exhaustion. You will spend so much time just trying to figure it out. And that in itself is exhausting, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, and you've got to have safety nets in your life. You have to have a friend or two that will take the child, that will let you refresh as a family.

And I think one of the things that surprised me also, as we went on with this, was nobody told me that I would go through a grief process of mourning the loss of my original family. And nobody talked about that to me, I never heard of such a thing. But I miss my old family. My new family is good and we love this kid and we are totally committed to him, but there are times I miss the way we

used to be. And it would just have been nice if somebody would've told me, "You got to go through that. You got to cry on my shoulder." And it's like, "Yeah, I understand that this is a tough road." God's in it. And there are great rewards. Our little guy is being healed and he loves the Lord and he's memorizing Scripture and he's doing the best he can. This is hard for him too. And that's what we have to remember. This is hard for these kids to do this too.

Dr. James Dobson: One of my favorite quotes from long ago, I put it in my second book was, "Don't look too early for the person your child will become," because you don't know yet. They're going through adolescent turmoil, hormones are going crazy and they are acting out and everything, that may turn out to be the pillar of the community. So in a sense, there's a great deal of pain during that growing up process, but you might have done a great work and don't yet know it. Would you agree with that?

Billy Jack Barrett: I sure would agree with that. And one of the things that meant a lot to me, when we started adopting children, I was pretty involved in a quarter horse and thoroughbred racing. And through the adoption of these children, I put all of that on the back burner and I've sat and watched acquaintances win the Kentucky Derby. And I watched them win the big races down at Ruidoso. But the man that was the father of all the quarter horse racing, up in his nineties, sat and watched the Belmont Stakes with him at his home in Oklahoma. And he looked over at me and he and I tried to race some good race horses, and hadn't quite gotten to the Winner's Circle. But he looked over and he said, "Billy Jack," he said, "What you're doing with these children is far more important than standing in the Winner's Circle at the Kentucky Derby. And so that was very meaningful to me.

Dr. James Dobson: The four of you are so articulate, but I can see what we are recording right now, being heard by foster parents and potential foster parents for years to come, because this is foundational stuff. And especially Anne and Reyna, what you all are describing about your feelings and about the commitment is just powerful stuff. And I wish that we could devote five more programs to this subject, we're out of time, but it has been so useful and especially, because you all have opened yourselves and revealed the heart that has suffered. And yet, the Lord is using you, and I'm looking forward to seeing what will happen in the future.

Now for the Barrett's, this is your second time that we have talked about these things together. We call this an update. There's going to have to be another one. Thank you all for being our guests and for talking about such a sensitive and yet such an important thing. And I do hope Ryan, that we have not discouraged anyone from adopting because these kids are desperate and they need a place. They need love. They need a home and they need Jesus Christ.

Billy Jack Barrett: The rewards are great.

Anne Barrett: They really are.

Reyna Keller: Thank you for having us Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that true of everything that is worth having, you have to work for.

Billy Jack Barrett: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay.

Reyna Keller: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, blessings to you all and our prayers will go with you in the days ahead.

Reyna Keller: Thank you.

Anne Barrett: Thank you.

Billy Jack Barrett: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a critical conversation on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. You just heard the second part of a two-part interview that Dr. Dobson conducted with two couples, the Barrett's and the Keller's. Both of these families have adopted kids out of the foster care system here in Colorado. And we decided to share their stories this week as November is "National Adoption Awareness Month." These families did not hesitate to share that their adoption journeys have been difficult at times. Their adopted kids presented a unique set of challenges due to the trauma and difficulties that they experienced in their pasts. But both the Barrett's and the Keller's were quick to also add that they did not regret their decision to adopt one bit. James chapter 1, verse 27 says, "Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless, is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

As Christians, we are tasked with caring for orphans and others, who are destitute or struggling. I can't think of a better picture of God's love than taking a child who has been abandoned and abused and giving them safety, security, and love. Now November is "National Adoption Awareness Month," and here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we encourage you to prayerfully consider how you might be able to help children looking for a forever home or for a foster home. There is a need in your community, no matter where you live. So if you have time, space, energy, or other resources, may I suggest 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.

Now, if you missed any part of today's broadcast, remember you can always listen again online at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You can also request a CD copy of this two part interview. Maybe get two, one to keep, and one to share. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. If you're in need of prayer today,

please give us a call. Our number is (877) 732-6825. Our team is here around the clock to answer your questions about the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and the ministry of Family Talk. We can also take your prayer requests and even pray with you as well.

Again, that number is (877) 732-6825. And finally, please remember, we love to hear from you when you contact us through the US Postal Service. It's a great way to let us know what you think of the broadcast or to request a resource. Our ministry mailing address is The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, PO Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code 80949. Remember you can contact us through the mail and this is also a great way to send a tax deductible donation of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute as well. Well, we thank you for listening again to Family Talk Today, for Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, Dr. Tim Clinton, and all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. God's richest blessings to you and your family.

Announcer:

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