



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Setting a Higher Standard – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. William Bennett

Air Date: January 22, 2021

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- Dr. Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson. And thank you for joining us for this program.
- Dr. William Bennett: If you talk to teenagers today, you will get the sense, talking to many of them, that they do not think of themselves as if they were creatures made by God. Of course, this is not true of all of them, thank God, but it is true of all too many of them. We must not let them undervalue themselves. We must not let them state their ontological identity wrongly. We must correct them and tell them who they are, in whose image they are made and what destiny is theirs, what deserves to be loved and what they deserve to avoid.
- Roger Marsh: Well, that is a profound clip from Dr. Bill Bennett, a dear friend of Dr. James Dobson and our guest once again, today here on Family Talk. In a speech delivered in 1995, the former Secretary of Education and Drug Czar, Bill Bennett, explained that each generation faces a clear binary choice. Will they choose the path of virtue as they seek to follow their creator? Or will they choose the path of nihilism? The belief that life is meaningless, which leads to the rejection of all moral principles. Sadly, too many young people have chosen the latter option. If life is meaningless then, and there is no God, they'll attempt to fill that God-shaped vacuum with the world's siren songs of promiscuity, as well as drugs and alcohol. Let's listen now to part two of Dr. Bill Bennet's provocative presentation, entitled "Setting a Higher Standard" on today's edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. William Bennett: In 1960, 5% of the children born in this country were born out of wedlock. In 1990, 30% of the children born in this country were born out of wedlock. Senator Moynihan, senior Democrat from New York says that by early in the 21st century, if the current trends continue, we will have a 50% illegitimacy rate in this country. It is important to understand the nature of the challenge before us. We have a shift in people's beliefs about themselves, about life, about happiness, about what they are entitled to. And nowhere has this shift been more consequential than the brains of men, and their other organs, and their recognition or lack of recognition of their responsibilities toward families and children.

The choices aren't between family values and some other kind of values. If you live in a family and are part of a family, I don't think what you'd describe, if you were accurately describing what you live in, you'd describe as family values. More accurate might be to call it the family planet, as opposed to some other planet. It is a way of being, it is a way of being human. It is a way of being responsible, unlike any other way in life.

Josiah Royce, great American philosopher said once, "It's hard to wrestle with angels, but there are some blessings that can't be won in any other way." Well, it's hard sometimes to be in a family, but as I have found, old new father, there are some blessings that cannot be won in any other way. The choice is not between family values and some other set of values. The choice is between values, or virtues if you will, and nihilism, that is what the choice is about. It is about whether we regard ourselves as moral and spiritual beings, or whether we regard ourselves as something that television advertises to.

The question, as the philosophers would say, is one of philosophical anthropology: who do we think we are? If you talk to teenagers today, you will get the sense, talking to many of them, that they do not think of themselves in the way that we think God has made them. They do not talk about themselves as if they were creatures made by God. Of course, this is not true of all of them, thank God, but it is true of all too many of them. And we must be more confident and more assertive to them about what they are. We must not let them undervalue themselves. We must not let them state their ontological identity wrongly. We must correct them and tell them who they are, in whose image they are made, and what destiny is theirs, what deserves to be loved and what they deserve to avoid.

The Pope, John Paul, who was a tremendous character - I had the great privilege and opportunity to meet him, and I stammered when I met him. He nodded and said, "Oh yes. Mr. Bennett, the Secretary of Education in the United States. Very important job." And I said, not remembering my place or good etiquette, I said, "I have an important job. What about your job?" He gave me one of these papal things that he does, he said, "To save three billion souls. It is a lot of work." In his great Encyclical Centesimus Annus, the Pope said, "Yes, the pollution of the natural environment is a serious problem, but more serious," he said, "is the pollution of the human environment."

We need a new human ecology based on the Scripture, based on God's teaching. The pollution that has occurred of the human environment, perhaps most significantly, the pollution of time, the loss of innocence, the loss of childhood. The fact that we no longer think that children must be protected from anything. Perhaps this is one of the worst signs of our time. Somebody not paying attention for 30 years, Rip Van Winkle, and coming back and buying movies or renting movies by their parental notification system would be shocked to see what makes a rating. How many times have we in our house had to turn off a PG movie, to say nothing of even bringing a PG-13 movie into the house without trepidation.

We have, for many of our children, denied them their innocence. I think of Yates' poem: "And in the ceremony of corruption, all innocence was drowned." I give you the times. It is not all the times. It is not everything that besets us, but I give you the times in this report of our meeting with Time Warner, which Jim Dobson so generously mentioned. Delores Tucker and I, she, head of the National Political Congress of Black Women, a liberal Democrat, and I, went to the executive offices of Time Warner, where we met with the chairman of the board, president, head of Warner Music, several vice presidents. We brought with us lyrics from some of the songs this company markets and sells. This is Warner. Warner Brothers. Remember *Warner Brothers Goes to War*? Remember *Bugs Bunny*, remember a host of other Warner characters?

We brought with us lyrics, which talked about and exhort people, to the degradation of women, to beating them up, assaulting them sexually, raping, torturing them and mutilating them. This is done by way of exhortation. We distributed the lyrics and Mrs. Tucker, a deeply religious woman, said to the executives at Time Warner, "Will you read these lyrics aloud?" Not one would. Not one would. My colleague, Pete Wayner, we asked to read them aloud. And he read them. They're the most shocking, horrible things you can imagine. When we finished reading, we said, "What do you think?" And the head of Warner Music, now the head of HBO, said, "I don't know, it's a tough call."

I said, "If that's a tough call, this is the end of civilization. Or if your view that this is a tough call is shared, it is the end of civilization. If this isn't horrible and bad, nothing is horrible and bad." We then got the anthropological cop-out. We got this; we got this answer. "Well, it's not my cup of tea, but this is the authentic voice of the ghetto." To which Mrs. Tucker responded, "This kind of degradation of women is not the authentic voice of any black American worth his salt."

They said, "What do you want us to do?" And she said, "We want you to stop paying our children money to call their mothers (beep), (beep) and (beep)." There was a long pause. And I said, "You guys understand that?" They said, "You are particularly aggressive, Mr. Bennett." They thought I was the most aggressive thing I'd ever seen. I said, "You haven't seen anything yet." I said, "My question to you is, is there something so low and so vile that you will not publish it and sell it to kids?" The response to that was, "What do you mean by vile?" At which point I said, "You guys are the bottom of the barrel. You really are. And it's a shame."

Then came the hilarious moment. The chairman of the board said, "We'd like to continue this process of dialogue with which we have just begun." I said, "This is not a dialogue. We don't need to continue anything, just stop doing this." They said, "Well, how would we judge?" I said, "Just ask people." "Who?" I said, "Well, not each other, ask the secretaries who work for Time Warner." Then he said, "It's been a pleasure having you, Mr. Bennett." I said, "Well, thank you Mr. Levin, but you don't have to say that. I know it hasn't been." He said, "No, we

welcome the opportunity for a candid exchange of views. And we look forward to more meetings with you."

I said, "No, you don't." I said, "Look, we're here, because we made an ad, we made a fuss." He said, "Oh no, that has nothing to do with your being here." I said, "Of course it does." I said, "We can get a little attention in the media and the papers, and that's why we're here." He said, "No, no, you're here because of our interest in dialogue." And I said, "Baloney." And the chairman of the board of Time Warner said, "What did you say?" I said, "I said 'baloney.'" And he said, "I won't listen to language like that."

So, it ended. And so will I, in a minute. This has been a pretty gloomy assessment. And I do not mean to suggest this is an assessment of every community, of every family, of every child. Of course it is not. There are victories won every day. There are important, as I will mention in a minute, things going on in this country, which are cause for great encouragement, but we must take the current situation very seriously. This is not a world war. This is not an external enemy. This is not something we can defeat with a government program. And although I live in Washington and I'm of Washington and talk a lot with politicians and do a lot of the talk shows, I will tell you it is much more important, it seems to me, that we focus on Los Angeles than we focus on Washington.

I believe the reason, the more causative reason that we have problems coming out of Washington is because of what's in people's hearts and what's in their minds. What the young have been taught to believe, what the young had been taught to sing, what the young have been taught to think, what the young have been taught to feel. And this power that comes from the media, from television, movies, from radio, and even unfortunately from some of our schools, has to be countenanced. There are enough of us. We ought to be able to make the fight on both coasts and indeed, as it's needed, in the middle as well. So is there any encouragement?

Absolutely. There's Jim Dobson, who by himself is a great encouragement. One of the stories in *The Book of Virtues* is a story called "Horatio at the Bridge." And it's about one man at a bridge. It's remarkable how many stories in *The Book of Virtues* are about one man or one woman. We don't think in those terms today, we think collectively, or the schools would have us think collectivistically, but in the old stories, the good stories, the moral stories, one person, and we're proud to have him at our bridge. You are other heroes, the efforts and actions that you perform every day. There are some signs developing, rising in America that are most encouraging. One's been mentioned twice tonight already to ripples of applause. Promise Keepers. What an interesting thing is going on with Promise Keepers.

The name of the group by the way, proves my point. We are in such times, that a group of people gathers together and to tell the world what it's about. It says, "We shall keep our promises. For keeping our promises, people are known for

their virtue." As we are confounded, I know Jim and I have talked about this, by people thinking us, our colleagues, heroic for simply doing what is ordinary and naturally right and decent and responsible. There are families who are daily making their efforts. And today on a little trip to Wilmington, North Carolina, I talked to a woman who told me of her daughter at Stanford and her daughter at Stanford is in a sorority. And all the girls are virgins and all the girls go to a Bible study and they're working hard and they're doing well. And they're having a great time.

And she said, "Do you know how backward my girl is, my daughter?" I said, "No tell me." Said, "She went to the doctor because she was having some trouble. And the doctor said, 'You're allergic. You got a lot of allergies.' And she said, 'What am I allergic to?' He said, 'Well, most of all, you're allergic to hemp.' And she said, 'What is hemp?'" She said, "God bless my daughter. She doesn't know what hemp is. The Stanford doctor laughed." But she said, "You know, a lot of her friends in the sorority has to know what hemp is either." Well, maybe we are making a comeback with these girls who don't know what hemp is.

And my last point, and excuse the self-reference. It's very important, it was very instructive to me. I did get out of government, and support myself in the private sector and did this book called *The Book of Virtues*. And I shopped it around. I shopped it around to a lot of people. And one publisher said, "800 pages, no pictures? No sex?" One other publisher said, "It's just a lot of moralizing stories." I said, "Yeah, that's sort of the point." And said, "We don't think this will work." Well, I got a publisher who did. Simon and Schuster. They're not exactly a conservative press. That's right. But they printed 40,000 copies and hoped for the best. We've now sold 2.2 million copies of *The Book of Virtues*.

I outsold Roseanne 10 to one. I outsold ... My wife doesn't like when I do this. She'll say "You're boasting, you're boasting." But it makes a larger point. I outsold Howard Stern, about 20 to one. I've outsold Howard Stern and Rosanne combined or together, I said that once and Rush Limbaugh said, "Don't ever say Howard Stern and Roseanne combined, the thought is just too horrible to even [inaudible 00:17:12]" Oh, you're a family group. You know that. But anyway, I found out today we have outsold both OJ Simpson books. *The Book of Virtues* has outsold both OJ Simpson books. What does this tell you about American society? It tells me something very encouraging. Believe me, it is encouraging for me and for my heirs and their heirs and their heirs. And for Catholic Charities all over America. You know our little thing about purgatory. I have four get out of purgatory free passes, right now.

You'll forgive us. Morally, if not theologically, you will forgive us. Anyway. Here's the point. That's why I'm doing all this boasting. At the end of the meeting with the Time Warner execs, these guys, in their \$2,000 suits and all of their St. Martin's tans sitting there, they said, "Well, you guys from the government," I said, "Government? I'm not in the government. I'm not Bill Clinton. What do you mean the government? I'm in Washington." "Well, you're in the government." I said, "No, no, no. I'm in the private sector. I'm in the education and

entertainment business, Mr. Fuchs, I write books. I'm doing a cartoon series of *The Book of Virtues*. We're doing a children's..." I said, "We do publication and distribution of materials for the public. Just like you. However, with our work, we will read it in public. Now, aim higher, Mr. Fuchs." That's what we said, "Aim higher."

We have been pushing them down and lowering them down for 20 or 30 years. Let's start to lift them up again. Let's start to raise them up, because you know something? If you put something out there that's decent, that's encouraging, it turns out there are a lot of Americans, even kids, who will respond. I got a very nice review in the Wall Street Journal of *The Book of Virtues*. But the reviewer, who's a friend of mine, said, "Parents will want to read it to the kids, but the kids don't want to read it." You know something? A lot of kids want to read it. They really do want to read it. Even my kids have occasionally gone over and picked it up by themselves. That's hard, you know, Dad's book. I mean, they've heard all of that they want to hear. But it's true. If we talk to them as if they were moral and spiritual beings, they may just act like it from time to time.

So, the moral of my story to you and to all of us is this: say what you stand for and say what you won't stand for. I think current times, present conditions, modern era requires you more to be a witness than a facilitator. What the young need to see, it seems to me, are people who are unafraid to stand for things that matter. To stand with good humor and good cheer and with a recognition of fault and humility, but nevertheless, to try to stand firm, to try to keep some shape on some things. Third, don't talk down, talk up, lift up, appeal to the better angels of their nature. There are better angels in there.

Fourth, when I was Drug Czar I had a bunch of meetings. At the end of a meeting, a very smart man, very religious man, very well-educated doctor from Harvard left the room. And he said, "Anybody ever said to you, 'Don't just stand there, do something'?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, in this job, a lot of the work, drugs, got to be done by Americans all over this country with their own hands. You can't do that. Don't take that on yourself. You can't do all that." I said, "So what's your advice?" He said, "Don't just do something, stand there. Stand there and stand for something. And someone will hold onto you and stand firm so they can hold onto you. And then someone will hold onto that person. And then we'll all be standing there. Not like in that silly, bromide Coca-Cola commercial, holding hands and singing about the world, but more like a family sitting around a table, holding hands in prayer. Mothers and fathers, boys and girls, as the children of God."

So my advice to you, counseling counselors. Every day counsel wisely, every night, ask for God's forgiveness for your errors and your sins of omission and commission. For the efforts that you are making on behalf of American families and families all over the world and for their children, I thank you. Have a wonderful meeting. It was my privilege to be with you tonight. Thank you very much.

Roger Marsh:

You are listening to Family Talk and what we've just heard is the second part of a powerful presentation that Dr. Bill Bennett delivered in 1995, entitled "Setting a Higher Standard." Interestingly enough, and maybe sadly enough, that presentation has even more relevance today here in 2021. When that well-educated Harvard doctor told Dr. Bill Bennett, during his work as Drug Czar, to just stand there and stand for something, I was reminded of the apostle Paul's well-known passage from Ephesians 6:10-13. Paul says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. And after you have done everything, to stand."

The devil and his minions here on earth do have their evil schemes. They want to intimidate us. They want to censor us in the workplace, in the classroom, and also in the public square. But here's the good news. We are indeed called to stand our ground and to stand for God as his advocates in a culture which is becoming increasingly hostile. We are his ambassadors, carrying his message of truth, forgiveness, and hope, but we don't stand on our own power. We stand in God's mighty power. Dr. Bill Bennett gave us an instructive screenshot of how we are to stand our ground in his verbal confrontation with the Time Warner executives about the profane lyrics from which they were profiting. And I loved it when he asked, "Is there something so low and so vile that you will not publish it and sell it to kids?"

When Gerald Levin, the CEO replied by asking, "Well, what do you mean by vile?" we got a revealing sense of the battle in the culture today. Now to learn more about Dr. Bill Bennett and *The Book of Virtues*, a treasury of great moral stories, please visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. That's D-R James Dobson dot O-R-G. We'd love to hear from you through the mail too, you can write to us at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, PO box 39,000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code 80949. Again, that mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute PO box 39,000 Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening and join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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

Dr. Dobson:

Well, thank you everyone for tuning into our program today. You may know that Family Talk is a listener supported program, and we remain on the air by your generosity, literally. If you can help us financially, we would certainly appreciate it. God's blessings to you all.