



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Reflecting God's Love Story in Your Marriage – Part 1

Guest(s): Al and Jo Ann Janssen & Kurt and Olivia Bruner

Air Date: June 13, 2022

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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.

Al Janssen: I think marriage was intended to be a picture of how much God loves us. And in fact, it says in Genesis when He created man and woman, the intention was that it would be a reflection of God's image, but Adam and Eve decided that they were going to go their way without God. And so, for centuries, marriage simply became a man and a woman doing their thing really apart from God. What the beauty is is that God loves us so much and wanted us to understand what marriage was that He entered into a marriage relationship Himself. And when it says in Scripture that the church is the bride of Christ, the reason marriage is so important to God is that He's been in a love relationship that He calls marriage in the Scriptures.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What an incredible illustration of God's deep desire for us to have loving and fulfilled marriages. You're listening to Family Talk, the listener supported division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of Family Talk and president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. I'm also a licensed professional counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist honored to serve as the resident authority on mental health in relationships here at JDFI. Today on Family Talk, we're looking at God's purpose for marriage as demonstrated in the Bible and our responsibility in that covenant relationship. In fact, I'd like to invite you right now to partner with Dr. James Dobson Family Institute in support of the institution of marriage. Thanks to some generous friends of the ministry, we have access to a \$300,000 matching grant throughout the entire month of June. This means that every financial gift given to Family Talk in June will be doubled. Your contribution to strengthening marriages, families, and fighting for biblical truths will have twice the impact all month long.

To give today, visit drjamesdobson.org, drjamesdobson.org, or call us toll free (877) 732-6825. Now back to today's conversation on Family Talk, joining Dr. Dobson are two experienced married couples. The first is Al and Jo Ann Janssen. Al and Jo Ann have been married for over 40 years and have provided helpful assistance and insights to numerous ministries. Al's the author and co-author of

32 books, including *Your Marriage Masterpiece*, which is the main topic of today's conversation. The Janssens reside in Gleneagle, Colorado, and they have three children. The other couple joining Dr. Dobson are Kurt and Olivia Bruner. Kurt is the founder and president of Drive Faith Home, a ministry with a mission to create a culture of intentional families.

Olivia serves on the Drive Faith Home leadership team, and is co-host of "It Starts Now" video curriculum for parents. Both of the Bruners are successful authors and speakers. In fact, Kurt co-authored three dystopian novels with Dr. Dobson called *Fatherless*, *Childless* and *Godless*. Today, the Janssens and Bruners will be explaining how God's original intent and purpose for marriage has been all but lost in today's culture. They also define a covenant marriage and challenge couples to fight for their relationships. Here now is Dr. James Dobson on the first installment of this classic conversation on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: So, when you all wrote this book, speaking primarily you Al, but Jo Ann, I know you played a role in it, you were very much involved in it, too, Kurt.

Kurt Bruner: Well, in fact, that goes to where it began and maybe that's a good place to start. It began a year and a half ago, Al-

Al Janssen: Yes, in your office.

Kurt Bruner: In my office, we had a white board in front of us and we were discussing, what is, I would say, the problem statement that led to this book. We, as a Christian community, particularly evangelical Christian community, probably have more material available to us than any people's in history on how to better communicate in your marriage, on dealing with sex issues in your marriage, your finances, your in-laws, you name the topic. I imagine we have more available at our fingertips than any group in history. We put that challenge in front of us and said, what is it that we're missing? If any group should be reflecting what marriage is intended to be, it should be the church of Jesus Christ.

You may remember a meeting we had with several religious leaders in your office where they asked you the question, "Dr. Dobson, what will the world look like? What will the family look like in 10 years?" And I remember as you gave your answer and you shared some things, some of which are disturbing in terms of the trends in the culture, but I remember thinking to myself and asking, "gentlemen, I wonder if the more important question for us is will the church look any different in 10 years than the rest of the world?" And that's what led and motivated this book. And it's a very inspirational book as we'll be able to discuss some of the themes in it. But the idea is simply this, we're missing what marriage is. And God has told us what marriage is, it's purpose, it's transcendent nature, and the joy that it can be. And we're missing that by focusing, as good as they are, exclusively on tips on how to make it better. We're missing the big picture.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we want to get to that big picture because, really, if I understand the theme of the book, you're providing what might be called the grand design for a marriage, what God had in mind in the first place as revealed in His Scriptures.

Al Janssen: That's correct. It goes back to Genesis in the garden of Eden when God brought Adam and Eve together before the fall. And my question was, were Adam and Eve happy in their marriage? Well, they had all the ingredients there. He gave them a tremendous adventure to go into the whole world and subdue it, to grow in knowledge. But I think even greater is He gave them Himself. Marriage originally, I believe was designed to be a three way relationship, not just between husband and wife, but with God in the middle of that. What an exciting adventure that would be to have a world to explore with God in the middle of your marriage relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet they managed to mess it up.

Olivia Bruner: Yeah.

Al Janssen: Well maybe they thought God was holding out on them, but obviously what they had, they did not perceive was enough to satisfy them. And so they went in a direction God said not to go.

Dr. James Dobson: You began this book with a very inspirational story, having to do with the Sistine chapel at the Vatican and Michelangelo's work that he did there in the 16th century. Describe its relationship to marriage.

Al Janssen: Well, it's a metaphor for the way I see marriage, the Sistine chapel almost immediately after Michelangelo finished that incredible masterpiece, because of smoke, because of pollution, a lot of different reasons, it began to get dirty and to fade. And frankly, 100 years after it was finished, people no longer remembered what it originally looked like. Well, in the 1980s, an incredible restoration project was undertaken where they cleaned the ceiling and art experts thought they knew what was underneath, but when they discovered it, when they actually got all the grime and dirt off, the colors were so much brighter and more magnificent than anybody ever expected. And I think that's a bit of a picture of what's happened to marriage is God's given this beautiful picture that is called marriage, but we've so discolored it. And it's been discolored by so much grime that we've pretty much forgotten what it was supposed to be.

Dr. James Dobson: The reason that illustration touches me is that I experienced it. Shirley and I made our first trip to Europe in 1969 and I was just finishing my PhD and we were just getting started with a family and all of our responsibilities. And we traveled on \$10 a day, if you can believe that. There was a book at that time that was out, Europe on \$10 a day. And we did it, but we were there at the Vatican and we were in the Sistine chapel and we saw that beautiful artwork, but I had no idea that it wasn't the way Michelangelo had painted it because

nobody had seen it for so long. I don't think even the officials at the Vatican knew what had been done in the early 1500s. And so we went back November of last year. And I saw what had been intended in the first place. And it was breathtaking. It was absolutely brilliant. Those colors were just incredible.

Kurt Bruner: Now imagine, take that picture to marriage. God designed marriage before the fall of man. As soon as the fall occurred, for centuries grime and dirt and things that discolor and mar that original masterpiece have been accumulating. And so how we perceive and see marriage on a grand scale, as well as in our individual lives, we're not seeing it the way God intended it to be.

Dr. James Dobson: One more thing on that chapel, there is a little swatch that was left by those who cleaned it to show you what it was before they did their work.

Jo Ann Janssen: What a contrast.

Dr. James Dobson: And, yeah, It was dirty and dingy and everything. And we've marveled over Michelangelo's work all these years. And then you see what was really intended. What you're trying to do is clean off the grime and show marriage in the way it was originally intended.

Kurt Bruner: And what it can be even now.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, let's talk about the grand design. What is it? What does the Scripture say? What did God have in mind as best we can tell from His writings?

Al Janssen: Well, interesting enough, I think marriage was intended to be a picture of how much God loves us and the relationship that He wants to have with us. And in fact, it says in Genesis, when He created man and woman, the intention was that it would be a reflection of God's image. But what happened in the fall was that Adam and Eve decided that they were going to go their way without God. And so for centuries, marriage simply became a man and a woman doing their thing really, apart from God. What the beauty is, is that God loves us so much and wanted us to understand what marriage was that He entered into a marriage relationship Himself. And it says in Scripture that the church is the bride of Christ. So, the reason marriage is so important to God is that He's been in a love relationship that He calls marriage in the Scriptures.

Dr. James Dobson: Some people will be really shocked and surprised to hear that God's married. Truth of the matter is He is.

Kurt Bruner: He is married.

Al Janssen: I never heard that when I was growing up in church, I've had a lot of images of about God, but marriage was not one of them.

Kurt Bruner: Not only is He married, He has a pretty crummy mate. It's us.

Olivia Bruner: It's us. That's true.

Al Janssen: It's man.

Kurt Bruner: We've been unfaithful. We've been insensitive. All the things you can imagine in the worst mate possible, that's what we've been to God. And yet, what has He done in response? And that reveals the masterpiece.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me read the Scriptures on which that concept is based. For those who think that God isn't married, let me share a Scripture from Ezekiel 16:8, and here God is talking about Israel with whom He has entered into a covenant relationship. And symbolically it says, "Later I passed by. And when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the sovereign Lord, and you became mine." And that's Ezekiel 16:8. Deuteronomy 23:23, "Whatever your lips utter, you must be sure to do because you made your vow freely to the Lord, your God, with your own mouth." There's the other half, Israel and his people married God.

And then one more, 1Corinthians 6:15-17, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said the two will become one flesh, but he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. Now there are other Scriptures that-

Kurt Bruner: There's a lot of Scriptures.

Dr. James Dobson: That use marriage as an analogy to explain what God has done in His covenant relationship with man.

Al Janssen: Dr. Dobson, it would be good to mention one more, and that's in Ephesians 5:31 and 32, where Paul references Genesis 1:28, where for this reason, "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And the two will become one flesh." And then Paul says, "This is a profound mystery, for I am talking about Christ and the church." And so there it is right there, the connection between what marriage was at the beginning and what it's supposed to be today.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, you're drawing the conclusion then that marriage itself was designed to explain to us the relationship between man and God.

Kurt Bruner: I believe marriage...The reason we use the term masterpiece is marriage is a portrait of both God Himself in His relationship to man and the redemptive work that the gospel proclaims. It's all a picture of what our relationship to God is all about. And when a marriage falls apart, it's more than just sad because an individual home has been damaged. There's a portrait and a story God's trying

to tell that's been ripped to shreds. And Al goes into all the different types of marriage and different emphasis of what God's marriage is like, and therefore what ours can be. And those portraits are gone forever. You remember when you went to the Sistine chapel, it's not one portrait up there, that master work is dozens of smaller frescoes, each telling its own little story, but all combining for an incredible master work.

Dr. James Dobson: How much it must grieve God's heart now that we have perverted this institution of marriage, that it is being abandoned and forgotten and being used in ways that were never intended. That people are cohabiting and they are behaving sexually without benefit of marriage. There's so many things there that obviously offend God and that symbolism of the relationship between God and man. Olivia would you consider your marriage to be a covenant marriage?

Olivia Bruner: Definitely. Yes, I would.

Dr. James Dobson: And what do you mean by that?

Olivia Bruner: I think it's a picture of what God has done for us. I think I was telling Al before we came in that as I've given advice to married couples over the years, and I have said to women, even if you don't feel like hugging him and kissing him when he walks in the door, you go do it. And I've been telling them that what, you do it because God has asked you to do that. You do that because you're supposed to honor and respect your husband. What Al has done in this book is giving you the why. This is why, not just the what, but the why, because it's a picture of God's love for you. And I think that's always been a little easier for me to do because I fully understand every day God's grace in my life and that I need Him and how He forgives me, all the things that I do wrong. And so in our marriage, it's not that hard for me to continually give, even when I don't feel like it, because I know that Kurt deserves that and I need to give that to him.

Kurt Bruner: Because I'm a great guy.

Olivia Bruner: Because he's such a great guy. That's part of it.

Dr. James Dobson: Jo Ann, would you agree that in almost every marriage, there are times where you do what's right whether you feel like it or not? And that there probably are times that you don't feel like it?

Jo Ann Janssen: Yes. There's a lot of times when you do not feel like it, when you're tired, when you have small children you've been dealing with, sometimes I don't even like my husband, but you get past that.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't like him a lot either.

Jo Ann Janssen: Most of the time, he's a great guy, but I'm 49, there's hormones involved here sometimes.

Olivia Bruner: Well, and Kurt walked in in the day, it was just a couple weeks ago and said, am I irritating you? And I thought, oh, and I was feeling tired and overwhelmed and I thought, I am portraying to him that he's irritating, and I need to stop that right away. And it was just in my response and it really had nothing to do with him. It had everything to do with how I felt that day about myself and what I was doing. So that's a big thing for women.

Jo Ann Janssen: That's right. And I have learned because Al told me early in our marriage, honey, I can tell what time of the month it is by the way you talk to me.

Dr. James Dobson: Or the way you perceive how she's talking to you.

Jo Ann Janssen: That's right. And that was very convicting to me that my hormones were directing how I was treating my husband, how I perceived him. He hadn't changed. My perception had changed. And so this is an idea from Gary Smalley. There's warning lights in my head. When I start thinking negative thoughts about my husband, that's a warning light in my head that my husband hasn't changed. It's my attitude that has changed. And in fact, Scripture tells you this, you have a will to direct your thoughts. You do not have to think negative thoughts about your husband. You can choose to not do that and think positive thoughts about your husband, and that of course affects how you treat your husband or wife, your mate. And that really helps me a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: Jo Ann, how would you account for the high divorce rate among Christians today? Do you have any take on that?

Jo Ann Janssen: That is really difficult for me because I married a man of integrity and I know our covenant is so secure. So I figure there's a lot of men out there and women that don't have the integrity, don't have the big view, don't have the view of the masterpiece, God's picture of marriage that I happen to have with my husband.

Kurt Bruner: The covenant itself, the traditional vows had the covenant woven into them. Al you tell the story about you and Jo, when it was time to get married, it was...

Al Janssen: It was traditional to... it was-

Jo Ann Janssen: This was the '70s.

Al Janssen: Yeah. The '70s, everybody wrote their own vows. And so we sat down one Sunday to write our own vows. And we finally wound up with the vows that had been used for centuries. Kurt, you have those.

Kurt Bruner: Well, this is taken from the book of common prayer, which the traditional wedding vows have been taken from for centuries until more recently. But when you asked Olivia, why do you have a covenant marriage? Here's why. When we got married, we said to one another, "I take you to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer

or poor, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance, and thereto I plight thee my troth." It's a holy ordinance we entered into, it's a covenant. It's more than just a temporary partnership, a contractual relationship before God. God was in the midst of our marriage and we made a promise and it reflects the promise He made to Israel. If you remember the story where God made a covenant with Israel, it was a one way covenant. Olivia made a one way promise to me and I made a one way promise to her.

- Al Janssen: And it says nothing about how the other person performs. In our culture today, the reason I think that so many Christians and so many people in society are giving up on their marriages is because they think it's all about happiness.
- Olivia Bruner: Indulge yourself. Isn't that what you say in the book? You were reading something, music magazine or something, and it said indulge yourself. And I loved that story because it made you think that's what our culture does. What's good for me, not what's good for both of us.
- Al Janssen: And so we have couples saying, you know what? I love my partner, but she's getting in the way of my career or we no longer have the happiness that we had at one time. And we think it's about happiness and fulfillment. Well, these vows don't say anything about happiness and fulfillment.
- Kurt Bruner: Not a word. Not a word.
- Dr. James Dobson: We stay married as long as it is convenient to do so. As long as it is to my advantage to do so. That's not a covenant marriage.
- Kurt Bruner: Not at all.
- Olivia Bruner: And don't you give that example too in the book about, there's two different clauses when you get married. One, you can have a no fault divorce or the other.
- Al Janssen: Oh yes. In Louisiana. The state of Louisiana has given two options. One is a no fault divorce. And a second is a covenant marriage. And at least at the time I finished writing this book, I don't believe there's been any divorces under the covenant marriage.
- Dr. James Dobson: That's a wonderful piece of legislation and we're hoping that it will spread. Explain what it really means. What is the covenant marriage from a legal perspective?
- Al Janssen: A covenant marriage, as I understand it, first of all, requires more counseling ahead of time. And the couple commits that if a divorce takes place, there's only a few conditions under which it could take place. And I believe there's a

yearlong waiting period prior to that divorce where the couple agrees to get counseling and help in order to work out their problems.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right. It's a voluntary agreement going in that this is for life and nothing short of a disaster is going ever separate us. And they do live by that covenant, as you've said, it's been very successful in Louisiana.

Al Janssen: And the beautiful thing about that, whether the state wants to admit it or not, is that is a picture of what God intended. When God entered into a covenant with Abraham, the incredible thing about that covenant is that God made the commitment to Abraham and walked that blood path in Genesis 15. He did not require Abraham to walk that blood path, but God said, I make this commitment. And even if you fail in your part, I will be faithful to the covenant.

Kurt Bruner: And I will pay the price.

Al Janssen: And I will pay the price if you fail. And He did that, I believe intentionally as a picture to us of what a marriage covenant should be.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Al this is a very important book. We have only gotten through a certain portion of it, probably the first third. And I do want to talk some more about the concepts that are in here because they are so foundational to the meaning of marriage. And so if you all will be back with us, we'll continue next time. And thanks for being our guest today.

Al Janssen: Thank you very much. We'll be glad to.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You've been listening to Family Talk, an important discussion on the sacred covenant of marriage. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, cohost of Family Talk and president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. Dr. Dobson's guests today have been Kurt and Olivia Bruner and Al and Jo Ann Janssen. If you're interested in learning more about the Bruners, the Janssens or the book, *You're Marriage Masterpiece* by Al Janssen, visit drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Tomorrow, the Janssens and Bruners will join Dr. Dobson once again to continue this much needed discussion on the effort and blessing of a godly marriage. On another note today and the entire month is also a perfect time to give to the James Dobson Family Institute. Because of the generosity of a number of friends, we've been given a matching grant of \$300,000 for the entire month of June.

That means your gift of any amount to the Dobson Family Institute or Family Talk this month will be doubled. Your financial support enables us to help couples grow closer and enjoy a deeper connection than they ever have before. We also encourage and equip parents so they can stay engaged with their kids and help them grow into godly adults. To give, visit drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, or call (877)732-6825. As always, thank you for your support of Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, hope

you'll join us again next time. And until then, may God bless you and your family.

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