



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Sandwich Generation: Being There for Your Aging Parents

Guest(s): Grace Chavis

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone and welcome to Family Talk. I'm your host as always, Dr. James Dobson. When we were kids, our parents took care of us, obviously, that's the responsibility they had. Then when we grew up and became a little older, there was a time when everything flipped and the child became the parent and the parent became the child. I don't know if you've been through that yet, but there is a time when the generations change and responsibility is totally different.

To give you an example, when my mother grew older and was ailing, her welfare became my responsibility. I used to go by her condo every Friday and pick her up and take her to lunch. We'd talk about whatever she was interested in. I would take her by the bank or whatever her needs were because I now felt the responsibility for the welfare of my mom. That's the way it works. You live long enough or if your parents live long enough, then you take care of them in a different way.

Now, after my dad died, which was devastating to my mother, she could not cope. She loved my dad so much that she never got over his sudden departure, sudden heart attack, and she came down with Parkinson's Disease. That was about five years after his death, and then she really needed help because eventually even what I could provide was not enough and we had to keep her in a nursing home, and I would go by to see how she was doing and so on. That flipping of the generations is something many of the people who are listening to us may be anticipating. It may not yet have occurred, but if they live long enough, it will, and you need to prepare for that.

On today's program, we're going to hear from a speaker named Grace Chavis as she shares her experience caring for her elderly parents and in-laws. Grace went on to be with the Lord on May 6th, 2015. I became aware of Grace because she took care of both her mother and her father, and what she had learned there was of such use to other people that she began speaking about that subject. One of those speeches was recorded, and so I thought you would want to hear what Grace had to say on that occasion. She was a great lady. She's one of 81 contributors to the Women's Study Bible. She was a roving reporter for Guidepost Magazine. She was a teacher and speaker at biblical and relationship conferences worldwide. She was active in church leadership and she was also a

caregiver for her 93-year-old parents. She talked about that with passion and we're going to let you hear what she said today. I hope you're going to find this useful if not now, then down the road when your parents are going to need a little extra help.

Grace Chavis:

In Exodus 20:12 it says, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the earth."

Our four-year-old grandson had been living with us for a year. He moved out in June and in September, my 93-year-old parents moved in and lived with us for six years. Now, two years before we had told them, "You know we have an extra bedroom and you are welcome at any time," but then we did not press them, just assured them from time to time that they would be welcome. But we watched their deterioration with anxiety. At 93, my father still was driving like a teenager, couldn't stand another car in front of him. He'd go around whether there was room or not. Never saw a red light, he'd slam on the brakes at the last minute. He would zoom into the church parking lot and the deacons would shake their heads and say, "Grace, take that car away from him."

I want to give you nine suggestions on how to care for your aging parents, and if you have the handout, I have listed those. The first one is let them be independent as long as possible. Just because they're in their seventies or eighties, don't force them into your home or into a nursing home until they want it or it is absolutely necessary. More and more, our people are growing older. They're living to a ripe old age and only 15% of our elders live with their families. 80% of us are independent or semi-independent and good enough to grow a garden or swim or dance or whatever. Now, only 5% of people over 65 are in nursing homes. The lowness of that figure shocked me, but these are mostly people who are seriously ill, physically or mentally.

One pastor went to visit this elderly woman in a nursing home and she had some peanuts beside the bed, and you know how you'll do, you reach over and you eat one and then you eat another and you eat another. All of a sudden he realized he had eaten all of her peanuts. He said, "Oh, I am so sorry. Please forgive me."

She grinned and she said, "Oh, that's all right. I can't eat those peanuts. I just suck the chocolate off."

When the time does come that you feel that your parents, that you must do something about their living conditions, I would strongly advise a family conference. Get all of the brothers and sisters together and maybe a minister or a counselor or a doctor to referee, and then decide at the beginning who is going to be responsible for what and how the expenses are going to be met. It saves a lot of bitterness later on.

Now, since I was the only living child, we did not go that route. We did not press them to come to us, but I was praying mighty hard and one day when Daddy finally said, "Well, honey, maybe it's time for Mom and I to move in with you," boy, I had them moved within 24 hours, and I sold Daddy's car for which he never forgave me.

All right, number two, give them private space. We put them into our master bedroom, a big sunny room with space for a queen-size bed, two big lounge chairs. We moved in their furniture, their TV set, their pictures on the wall, anything to make them feel at home. Then my husband and I moved to the two bedrooms at the end of the hall where our children had been. We used one to sleep in and we converted the other into kind of an office-den sitting room, so you see, we each had privacy.

Number three, give them responsibilities. When they moved in with us, Mother asked, "Mow what can we do?"

I said, "Nothing, mother, really," which was the same mistake nursing homes make. They do everything for their residents because it's easier and quicker and cheaper, but my mother would not settle for that.

She said, "We can at least do the dishes." They refused to use the dishwasher, and I'll tell you, it would break my heart to see Daddy washing and Mother half blind and in a wheelchair trying to dry those dishes. But I realized that I had to give them the dignity, a feeling that they were contributing. Of course, I had to buy unbreakable Corelle dishes because mother dropped so many of them.

All right, number four, give them patient, loving care as they become senile. Caring for my husband's widowed mother was a different story. She lived on a farm in South Carolina and as senility came on, she refused to move. We hired one woman after another to live with her. She drove them all off and finally by force we brought her home with us. For the next 10 months she lived with us, her mind gone but very active physically. As I said last night, she referred to me the whole 10 months as, "That woman that eats here."

Now, all my married life I had prayed. I had vowed, Miss Min will never live in my home. Dear Lord, please. Only five foot tall, she was meaner than a rattlesnake, and I can say that because her only child, my husband, used to say that his father never knew a minute's peace in the 50 years his mother and dad lived together. But by the time Miss Min came to us, she was like a happy two-year-old. Christmas that year was a joy, and I am so thankful that God put that 10 months into my busy schedule because it took away from me the guilt that I had always had about the way I felt toward her. Aren't you glad that God does not always answer yes?

All right, number five, accept conflict as natural to life. During those six years that my parents lived with us, my husband was absolutely wonderful to them.

However, about three or four times a year, he would finally have it right up to here with my dad telling him how, when, where, what, and to do with his fruit trees in the backyard and the explosion always came at the lunch table. I don't know why, but it did. Coley would yell at my dad, at which time my father would say nothing, and my mother would look at my dad and say, "Sam, we don't have to put up with this. We'll just go and rent us an apartment of our own."

Daddy would say, "Yes, and we'll buy us a car."

Now let me make a suggestion on what to do when the anger begins to build. Take a deep breath. That's much better than counting to 10. Now, I'll tell you why. Whenever you experience any deep emotion, fear or anger, or if you experience something like pain, an extra supply of adrenaline is dumped into your cardiovascular system and the oxygen you breathe in helps use it up and you can talk much more rationally. Everybody right now, take a deep breath.

All right, number six, realize ahead of time it will not be easy. One of the hardest things about caring for your aged parent is the emotional strain of seeing that once vibrant, healthy person become weak and dependent upon you. I will never forget the first time that I gave my father a bath in the bathtub. I felt like I was committing incest and his embarrassment was pitiful.

Another thing, older people will often demand that you do something for them right now, right now, no waiting. You need to reach the point where you are the parent and they are the child and sweetly, but firmly, you can say, she wants stamps right now, and you can say, "Mama, I can't get them today, but I will go to the post office tomorrow and get you your stamps." Then try not to feel crushed when she stamps her foot and calls you a mean, selfish daughter.

Carefully word things when you make suggestions. For instance, if your father's living alone, you don't say, "Dad, do you want to go see the doctor?" Instead, you say, "Dad, I'll be by tomorrow at 10:30 and pick you up. We need to get that rash checked at the doctor's and then we'll go out and have lunch." Do you see the difference? Saves all kinds of arguing.

Try not to let yourself be manipulated by negative actions like tantrums. Try not to give in to things like that. Reward positive behavior. Every time they do anything for themselves, brag on them and reward them. Remember, they are becoming like children. It is not easy to have a beloved parent begin to view you with suspicion, begin to accuse you of laughing at them. But now just think about it for a moment. Suppose your eyesight were getting dim and your hearing was going and someone across the room was laughing. It would be the easiest thing in the world to think that they were making fun of you.

It is not easy to watch a loved one suffer. Mother had a massive stroke two months before she died. Now the doctor said all the hospital would do would be to give her custodial care. She was totally blind by then and so frightened that

we bought an electric hospital bed and kept her at home with us. I'll never forget that first night. They had slept together for 70 years and when Daddy saw Mother in that bed with the rail up, he looked at that, he looked at the queen-sized bed, and he looked at me and he said, "Where am I supposed to sleep?"

All right, number seven, plan time away. Oh, beloved, if you have someone, small children or aging parents living with you, get away, totally away for a few days, every once in a while.

Number eight, remember, there is a time to die. There's a time to be born and there is a time to die. Five days before Mother died, she turned her head, refused to eat, and said, "It's no use," and I cried all day long. The next day she did eat something, whether she forgot or it was too hard, I do not know. But five days later, she died very quietly in her sleep, four months before her 99th birthday. Eight months later, my father died one month before his 99th birthday.

I remember one day two months before he died, he walked up to me in the living room and he said, "Could I stay here a couple more days?"

I said, "Daddy, you live here. I am your daughter."

He smiled so big and he said, "You are? Then I can stay," and he trotted happily away.

Now, the day before he died, I realized he was going. I realized congestive heart failure was setting in. He did not seem to know what was happening. He did not seem to be in any pain. The morning that he died, he ate a full cup of yogurt, bless his heart, and then God gave me a beautiful present. I realized his mouth was dry, and I made the mistake of trying to put a teaspoon of water in while he was laying down and he almost choked, and I hit the button and it brought his bed up like this, and we were eye-to-eye. For the first time in a year, I saw total recognition and such love and such peace. I know he had one foot in Heaven, and we just looked into each other's eyes and then the eyes glazed over and I laid him back down and about an hour later he was gone.

Then finally and the most important, number nine, is pray. Pray with your Bible open before you so that God can talk back to you. When you pray, do you do all the talking? I remember about a month after Mother had died, I had made the mistake of saying that I would do a series of lectures and I was trying to put them together. Daddy was stumbling and falling all over the house, my husband was facing possible surgery, and that night before my live-in help had quit. I'll tell you, I was just standing there before the Lord crying out, "Lord, I cannot take another thing. I can't. Everybody is pulling on me. Please help me."

Then very wisely, fortunately, I began to read the Bible and let Him talk to me. All of a sudden I came to Psalm 16:8 which says, "I have set the Lord continually

before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved. Heart, body and soul are filled with joy," and they were. I just sat there rejoicing for a while, I knew I could make it. But now suppose I had spent my entire hour with God crying out, "Oh God, I can't, I can't." God could have been leaning over the parapets of Heaven trying to get His message through to me, and I never would've heard it because I would've been so self-centered. Let Him speak back to you through the Bible.

Dr. James Dobson: We've been listening to a recorded message given by the late Grace Chavis as she talked about taking care of her elderly parents and her in-Laws.

Again, I'm James Dobson thanking you for listening to our program today. We're excited to bring you some classic shows like the one you just heard, but also some fresh new shows. We know you'll be encouraged and inspired by these upcoming programs. To do this, obviously, we rely on you. Our ministry is completely supported by the listeners to this program and their tax-deductible financial contributions. If you're able to help us to continue this work, we would certainly appreciate it. Again, the number is 877-732-6825. Why don't you give us a call when you have time? We covet your prayers, we thank you for your assistance in our ministry to preserve and promote the institution of the family.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a remarkable woman of faith Grace Chavis was. She sure had some great advice for those of us currently taking care of a family member or anyone who might someday care for someone in their golden years. Now, if you'd like to listen to any part of this program you might've missed, or if you'd like to share today's broadcast with a friend or family member who needs to hear this good news, visit us online at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

As we think about family members who have entered into their golden years, their senior years, as it were, you realize that public policy and decisions made on behalf of the elderly are more and more important each and every day. If you haven't listened to the weekly podcast from the Dr. James Dobson Policy Center yet, you really need to check it out. It's called the "Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom Podcast," and it's hosted by Gary Bauer. Gary is the senior vice president of public policy here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. He shares his unique perspective on current public policy issues affecting the family through the lens of the U.S. Constitution and an unapologetic Biblical worldview. Now, if you want to listen in, all you have to do is go to our main homepage, drjamesdobson.org, and then select the Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom Podcast. You'll be directed to the podcast page, and once you're there, you'll also be able to select your favorite listening platform like Google or Apple, Spotify or Stitcher. Then just sit back, listen, and enjoy to the "Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom Podcast" with our own Gary Bauer. You can find that information at drjamesdobson.org.

One of the beauties of listening to the wisdom of Grace Chavis is it can help you understand a little bit more the role that children have in caring for their

parents and honoring their fathers and mothers during their golden years. We're living in a culture right now that doesn't seem to understand that. As a matter of fact, we live in a culture right now that doesn't really seem to understand the difference between men and women, let alone how to define those roles.

Well, when you go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, be sure to click on the link for a brand new PDF created by the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and Dr. Owen Strachan to encourage moms, wives, sisters, and daughters and affirm what God's designed for women really is. The PDF is titled, "What Is A Woman, According to God?" and to download it's absolutely free. Go to drjamesdobson.org/family Talk, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of everyone here at the JDFI, thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day. 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.