



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Single Adults – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, so grateful you've joined us today. You know, those who have listened to Family Talk for many years know that we are strongly devoted to the family. While many of our programs are dedicated to parenting or marriage, there's another group of people who are equally important to our ministry. Those who are single and or those who have never been married. The conversation you're about to hear in just a moment deals with the frustrations and issues that many single adults have. Joining Dr. Dobson for this classic conversation are his close colleagues, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.

Now these renowned psychologists are co-authors of the best-selling *Boundaries* series. Together they've spent decades counseling singles through their work with Campus Crusade, church groups and their respective private practices. Their discussions will explore why some singles struggle with emotional attachment, how men and women approach relationships differently, and the deeper questions about self-worth that many single adults face. So here now is Dr. Dobson to further introduce today's guests and topic on this edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to talk about single adults today. We're addressing this subject to those who were never married, and there are some different needs there than just those who are perhaps divorced and raising children or single for other reasons, maybe widowhood or what have you. But the number of single listeners in our audience is very large and it's growing, judging from the amount of mail that we receive. And these individuals care passionately about family matters. They want to know how they can meet the right person, how they can make good decisions about relationships, how to get out from under loneliness in some cases. Not everybody feels that way, but many do and here to help us tackle these questions today are Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud.

Over the years, these gentlemen have become specialists in the area of counseling for single adults, lecturing for Campus Crusade, church groups, as well as maintaining busy private practices. Both gentlemen, both Henry and

John, were awarded doctorates in clinical psychology from Biola University in La Mirada, California. If you detect a slight southern accent in our guests, you're not imagining things. John hails from Wilson, North Carolina and Henry from Vicksburg, Mississippi. Gentlemen, welcome.

Dr. John Townsend: Pleasure to be here.

Dr. James Dobson: We have no more time for the broadcast. It's been good to have you with us. I depicted the never married individual as one who often deals with a self-searching kind of a discontent with life. Is that accurate or is that a caricature? What has been your experience?

Dr. John Townsend: What we have found is that if you look at a demographic survey of singles, you'll find them pretty high functioning people who have begun careers, are actively searching for that other person or are trying to relate to some kind of a group. But in a large majority, there is some sort of a discomfort level about the state of singleness. Now, those who have been single for a while who didn't ever see it as a deficit, come out happy about it, but we see more and more people who are looking at singleness as something that they shouldn't be and are reaching some vague discomforts about it.

Dr. James Dobson: We try to design every broadcast with somebody in mind. In other words, each one is different and we aim it at an individual. Don't always hit that target and sometimes it may be useful for those that we're not aiming at. But let me read for you who the intended audience for today is. It is a person, it is an individual, perhaps 27 to 35 years of age, never married, a listener who feels perhaps the same way they did on the playground in elementary school where teams were being chosen for kickball or for baseball or what have you, and one by one their friends were chosen or picked and yet they remain in the middle of the field and haven't been selected yet. They wonder, is something wrong with me? Why haven't I been picked? Why haven't I been selected? Am I capable of playing the game or in this case, dealing with relationships, am I capable of loving and being loved? How common is the emotional characteristic that I just described?

Dr. John Townsend: All too common. You have just described someone that no one may on the outside know feels like that and yet when you ask them if they're single by choice or by default, in their heart of hearts alone at night or when they're being very honest, they're going to say a lot of times it was by default. It wasn't my choice. And they're going to come out with a lot of real, what you might call victimized feelings about it. That someone somewhere in the plan has not measured up or not let them measure up for them.

Dr. James Dobson: Henry, I believe you guys did radio program for a while, four hours on Saturday just for such individuals, just for singles. What did you hear hour after hour?

Dr. Henry Cloud: Well, it's interesting. People bring up certain issues and they talk about struggles with sexuality or intimacy or relationships or career, and you hear these single

topics, but what we found was that those are all symptoms. When people struggle in those issues of singlehood generally speaking, what they're struggling in is some sort of developmental process that was not completed in their family of origin, and they're stuck in some ways. When you were talking about the kid on the playground, for example, and the single wonders is something wrong with me, well, a lot of times, yes, in that there is something that's not completed from developmental stages and that has prevented them from a lot of times moving on.

Dr. James Dobson: Such as what? Give me an example. What's a developmental stage that didn't get consummated?

Dr. Henry Cloud: For example, a lot of people because of coming from broken homes or homes where there were problems, do not learn how to emotionally attach to other people. That is a big one, and a lot of the cries of aloneness and desperation come from people who really have not been in settings where they learned to attach emotionally, they learned to bond. They didn't learn to invest themselves emotionally and as a result, they've had to stay distant.

Dr. James Dobson: Does low self-esteem play a big role in that inability to bond?

Dr. Henry Cloud: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of times?

Dr. John Townsend: Yeah, absolutely. Because there is a fear of some level that if I were to be really known by you, you would turn and walk away from me. And they'll experience this thousands of times in real life as well as just in their imaginations.

Dr. Henry Cloud: When we talk about the problem of emotional isolation, it's not a problem of being alone. It's a problem of oftentimes being alone in the midst of a lot of other people. And people just can't emotionally attach, and they feel very isolated in large Sunday school groups a lot of times.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's talk about the Sunday school because typically single adults, they're segregated in classes just for those who are single adults. Do you all think that's a mistake? Had you rather see them integrated throughout the church or had you rather see social groups or clusters, if you will, of those who are in that particular status of life?

Dr. Henry Cloud: I'd rather see them integrated, John?

Dr. John Townsend: Well, I think there's a place for the other because they are looking for a place to meet other people, but I think the problem comes when you've got people who can't bond with people who can't bond, you end up with a lot of lonely people and just square the number. So if there was some kind of a way that the family,

the nuclear families in that body can reach out as well as the people having a place for themselves to go, you've got the best of both worlds.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Now we're getting to a real key.

Dr. Henry Cloud: We see a lot of single people who are stuck in some developmental passage and the church very oftentimes is the healing agent. Some family within the church will take them in. Not as an incompetent who can't earn a living or can't fix their own meals or something like that, but somewhere where for instance, if they've never had anyone nurture them, if they've never had somewhere where they can be accepted and reveal themselves and cry when something goes wrong or whatever, they learn those skills. They learn to receive love when they've never had it.

Dr. James Dobson: There is a longing to be around children ...

Dr. Henry Cloud: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: ... to be around people who are married.

Dr. Henry Cloud: And that's where the families benefit. You can find a single adult, for example, who can take the kids to Disneyland, who can take them on a picnic because they're part of that family and the couple goes off to the mountains for the weekend or whatever and it's a mutual benefit.

Dr. James Dobson: I think what I hear you saying is there is a place for unmarried single adults to get together among themselves, but there is also a need for married couples to include them for dinner, to include them in family activities, maybe to invite them Christmas Eve to celebrate the birth of Christ and open presents together.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And to incorporate them into the rigors of family life.

Dr. John Townsend: A lot of my graduate training involved as a single person going through a program where everybody else was married. And so some people in the church did that for me, and would just make sure, because I didn't know how to ask for things from families. And that's the thing about singles. They don't know how to ask a lot of times.

Dr. James Dobson: John, how old were you before you got married?

Dr. John Townsend: I was 36.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you have resented the assumption we almost made a minute ago that everybody who's not married by 35 years of age has an inability to bond?

Dr. John Townsend: If I had been 30 years old, I would've resented it. At 35 or 36, I would've understood it a lot better because I think a lot of it for me was bonding to work because bonding to someone else in a very intimate way was still, I think at a very honest level, a frightening thing for me. And that sort of commitment.

Dr. James Dobson: Put that fear into words on behalf of those who may be experiencing it.

Dr. John Townsend: Well, if you happen to have an avocation or a passion let's say, a ministry or a schooling or a career or a hobby, that's a lot easier to connect with than another person who might look at you and say, "You know, what I see isn't really what I want," and you don't suffer as much rejection from those sort of things.

Dr. James Dobson: How about boundary needs? You've talked about that as well.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Oh, gosh. It's interesting. Today adolescence lasts until, because of the needs for higher education and career moves, it goes into 25, 30, 50-years-old sometimes.

Dr. James Dobson: It really does.

Dr. Henry Cloud: And a lot of people have not finished that in between period, especially if they're single. And the leaving has not been completed so the cleaving can take place. As a result, they don't have a good sense of limits in their lives. They can't set limits on abusive relationships. They can't say no to people hurting them, for example. They need to learn how to set limits and boundaries and grow up.

Dr. James Dobson: What does that have to do with still being an adolescent? You mean that they allowed their parents to relate to them that way and therefore they allow other people?

Dr. Henry Cloud: They never really separated from their parents. And I think the complaint of all the passive men in the church, for example, are a lot of men who have not separated from their parent figures. They're still yes men. They're not aggressive. They don't have opinions of their own. They're a lot of people-pleasers, and so the women gripe about these non-aggressive Christian men who are all nice guys and then in the world, they're attracted to the aggressive achievers.

Dr. John Townsend: We believe that for someone to be, I guess, grown up in the image of God, that there's a thinking that they've got to go through. There's a period like when Jesus said, don't call anybody on earth your father. He knew that sooner or later you're going to have to sit down and say, do I agree with the values of my parents? What do I believe that I have thought through that maybe they haven't thought through in a different way?

And there are people who have never questioned those things. What they think biblically, what they think relationally, culturally, what they think about the family. And what happens is as they're fused to their family, no one can ever

match up to what their family had in this ideal sense. Now where boundaries come in is when they can finally say, I still love my family of origin, but I differ with them in some ways and I can make distinctions between myself and the good old days, which a lot of times weren't the good old days, then I am free to find someone else that's not perfect either.

Dr. James Dobson: Gentlemen, it's been my observation that men and women as two classifications who are single, come at their singleness from a different direction. They're not thinking and feeling the same things. Women "are ready to settle down and are frustrated by the lack of seriousness in men. They perceive men as passive and detached, in love with their work, as you said, John, and afraid of commitment. Also, the non-Christian men they meet at work seem to be much more aggressive than the men that they meet at church. Men, on the other hand, perceive women as too hungry for commitment and communication. They feel that women are making too many demands on them and are giving mixed signals too, saying yes and acting no. As a result, men begin to withdraw. Elaborate on that. Do you agree with it?

Dr. Henry Cloud: I think there's a lot of truth in there. I think that when you look at for example, the bonding needs of a woman. She grew up and her first bond was with mother, and to grow up and become an adult, to get married is to establish a very, very adult bond for her. To have friends and be close to other women is a regressive move for her. And so a lot of times a woman can gladly look for security in the bonding of another relationship, a man. For a man however, there are aggressive things that seem to be more adult sorts of things, and oftentimes he's moving in that direction. So you get a squabble over this commitment phobia which is actually a squabble over developmental issues a lot of times.

Dr. James Dobson: You agree, John?

Dr. John Townsend: Let me give you an example, Dr. Dobson, to bring it into perspective. A lot of men have come from families where being aggressive was not a good thing, where they had to be nice for their family's sake. They couldn't have conflict, they couldn't disagree and so they learned to stay in the shadows in order to stay out of trouble. While a lot of women have been given a lot of good training in being aggressive, in being able to say what they need and to say to someone, I want to be with you. I want to spend time with you. I need you. These words can come easier to their lips. And so what happens is you get this constant frustration with this woman who wants what God built into her, the sense of belonging, coming after this guy who's learning to run away from this sense of belonging and ...

Dr. James Dobson: Scares him to death.

Dr. John Townsend: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Is her concern about the biological clock a lot more serious a consideration ...

Dr. Henry Cloud: Oftentimes.

Dr. James Dobson: ... than his concern about it?

Dr. Henry Cloud: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: In other words, he can father a baby until he is 50 or 60 years of age perhaps and she can't be a mother for very long.

Dr. Henry Cloud: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: So part of the pressure on her relates to that sometimes.

Dr. John Townsend: That's kind of where I think a principle from your *Love Must Be Tough* book comes in because ...

Dr. James Dobson: How nice of you to mention that.

Dr. John Townsend: Well, how nice of you to write it, because it's helped a lot of people and we recommend it a lot. We have seen quite often that a man will use that as leverage to a woman. While I can wait, and I don't know yet and God hasn't told me yet. All these sort of excuses to get away from being intimate with a woman while her clock's ticking, and he will use that for leverage. And sometimes a woman has to say, I have to put a limit on you. I have a time limit. It's this far no further and on and on and on. Where they have to say, I'm willing to lose my half relationship with this man to either get a whole relationship or nothing. And that's when sometimes men kind of grow up faster.

Dr. James Dobson: Or get scared and run away.

Dr. John Townsend: Absolutely. But at least they know.

Dr. James Dobson: Something that I'm observing is that the world has changed a whole lot and girls do the phoning now. Boys don't call girls on the telephone very much. Girls call boys. That bothers me. That goes counter to my cultural understandings.

Dr. John Townsend: Do they open the door as well, is that it?

Dr. James Dobson: They probably do, but the one thing is certain. They're a whole lot more aggressive than they used to be. I think girls have always cared more about the romantic attachment and involvement than boys have. Boys have been interested in girls as a curiosity and certainly sexually, but they have never been quite as motivated about the possibility of a permanent relationship and marriage and children in the adolescent years as girls have. They start thinking, fantasizing about that possibility very, very early. But there's been a social

restraint in the past that's forced girls to hang back and wait for the guy to take the aggressive step. To make the call, to make the date, to make the plans and so on.

That's now disintegrated or at least it has changed radically, and so it is now acceptable for girls to take that step. And as a result, I think we've got some biological things backwards where girls are so aggressive that they scare guys. And even in the twenties and thirties, an aggressive woman can really make a man run. Just as I was trying to describe him, mentioned *Love Must Be Tough*. You tend to move toward that which moves away from you and you move back from that which is coming your direction too fast. I don't know why it is, but it's true. And I wonder if you have seen what I've seen, that some women who are aware of that biological clock and are so concerned about finding that bonded relationship, drive a man away before he is ever even really enticed.

- Dr. Henry Cloud: Well, Proverbs says that the earth quakes when an unloved woman finds a husband. Now that is a pretty graphic verse and I think we've all seen that in men and women. If somebody is trying to meet some very primary unmet relational needs in a spouse, that is a very, very heated kind of chase and it can be a very conflicted marriage. And so what we tell singles is that if you've got some relational deficits, try to work on those in some setting other than your romantic pursuits because that relationship was never designed to undo everything you've ever missed in your whole life and it puts much too much pressure on it.
- Dr. John Townsend: Dr. Dobson, we think that that marriage is kind of like a nice buggy, a Volkswagen buggy, and it can putt along just fine if there's not too much on it, but what people will do will, they'll take their family backgrounds of dysfunction or detachment or not being able to make choices or disagree and try to finish by putting a flatbed 18-wheeler on the back and then run it uphill and wondering why it's not working.
- Dr. James Dobson: Ah, that's well said.
- Dr. John Townsend: We try to demystify marriage a little bit and say, you're not going to be any happier as a married person. Your problems are going to be different, but the baggage you bring in, you're going to keep.
- Dr. James Dobson: You really believe that?
- Dr. John Townsend: Absolutely.
- Dr. James Dobson: There are an awful lot of single people who feel if they could find somebody to genuinely love, their basic problem in life would be solved. You don't see it that way.

- Dr. Henry Cloud: That is a basic problem, one problem and that there is a basic need to love and to be loved, but we have to learn that and be able to do that before marriage. Jesus was single, Paul, at least later in life, was single and the need to be loved and to love and to bond and attach to other people is very, very important. But if they cannot do that and are thinking that a spouse is going to somehow for the first time in their life do that, they're setting themselves up for trouble.
- Dr. John Townsend And that's why we stress the church as a family. The only way a person's going to have what they need out of life is family. It may be a biological family that they've married into. It may be a church family that they've stayed with for 10, 15 years, but it's where those corporate relationships can give them what they didn't have, without them having to all of a sudden forge it out with a person that they've met six months ago that God's going to give them the repairing they need.
- Dr. James Dobson: Okay, let's talk for a few minutes here and then we'll carry on next time. Specifically to the woman who feels like I described a few minutes ago. Feels lonely, feels lost, hears the clock ticking, wants more than anything in the world to find somebody to love, to have children, to build a home, to buy a house, to decorate it, to have grandchildren someday. That whole thing that now seems to be slipping away. That not only do they not have it now, but they may never have it. What's your advice to that individual, the one who sees that as the only real goal in life, the only thing that really matters.
- Dr. Henry Cloud: My advice would be to become someone instead of look for someone. That oftentimes if there is just horrible, horrible sense of deficit felt, to try to work on oneself to become the most loving person you can be, the most appropriately independent person you can be, the most responsible person you can be and that will maximize your chances of being found.
- Dr. James Dobson: You do that with an end in mind or you do it as an end in itself?
- Dr. Henry Cloud: Well, I would say an end in itself and like any other fruit bearingness of the Scriptures that there ends as results as well. When we become the people that God wants us to be, there are good fruits and benefits that happen naturally from that. And one of those fruits is that you are more winsome or attractive. People who are doing something they love and feel fulfilled, draw people to themselves as opposed to a person who is hungry relationally and is looking for someone to fill that hole up.
- Dr. James Dobson: We have about a minute left. John, take the other side of that coin. If we've dealt with one stereotype on the female side, let's talk about the male side. What do you say to the man out there who is not looking for a relationship, is made uncomfortable by it and yet doesn't quite feel complete in his life. He'd like a family, but he's a little bit afraid of all the implications of that. You have any advice for him?

Dr. John Townsend: Well, the Scriptures are real clear that two are better than one and that it's not good that we be alone and that there is an organization called the Body of Christ or an organism. And a lot of times what we'll have to do with a man who's feeling these things, is to find out what is fearful about intimacy. Have you been hurt in intimacy? Has closeness been a hard thing for you so that you've had to pull back and bond to things other than relationships? Maybe your job, maybe some sort of avocation or vocation, and then help them to understand that there's a lot more for them in intimacy and that they don't have to get hurt this time when they got hurt the last time.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we'll work through some more of these issues on behalf of the never married single adult tomorrow. Will you be with us?

Dr. Henry Cloud: We'll look forward to it.

Dr. John Townsend: Look forward to it.

Roger Marsh: Well, whether married or single, we all need meaningful relationships and a strong sense of self to truly thrive, amen? You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and we've just heard an eye opening conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and his special guests, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Now if you missed any part of this discussion or if you'd like to share it with a friend, simply head to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk if you're not there already.

Well here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are committed to helping people build strong, healthy relationships rooted in biblical truth. These daily broadcasts are made possible through friends like you who share our passion for strengthening individuals and families. If you've appreciated what you've heard on today's program, would you consider partnering with us? Your tax-deductible donation of any amount helps us continue sharing godly wisdom with those who need it the most. You can make a secure donation over the phone at 877-732-6825. You can also give a gift online at drjamesdobson.org. Well I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again next time for part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend. That's coming up next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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