



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Marriage Carol

Guest(s): Chris Fabry

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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 division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and on today's program we're going to do something unique. We're going to take a look at a timeless classic, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, through the lens of Scripture and what if the characters involved weren't necessarily old, miserable Ebenezer Scrooge, but a couple whose marriage had gone off the rails, and now they were wondering was there an opportunity for them to have a second chance to rebuild their marriage? Second chance is hope, remembering why we celebrate. It's so easy to get caught up in the holiday rush that we sometimes forget to pause and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas, and that is the birth of Jesus Christ. Doctor, I know that today's program is going to help a lot of people focus on those second chances that Christmas reminds us of.

Dr. James Dobson: We do and we do every year. That's why I love Christmas. We can take great joy in this celebration at this time of year. But this is also a really good time to stop and assess how we're treating people in our family and outside our family and how we're investing in those relationships. And to help us do this, I am very pleased to welcome my dear friend Chris Fabry to these Family Talk microphones today. Welcome, Chris.

Chris Fabry: Oh, it's great to talk with you.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Chris Fabry is no stranger to radio. He's the host of the award-winning radio broadcast Chris Fabry Live. He's also the very talented author of more than 60 books and one of which we're going to be talking about today. It's called *A Marriage Carol*. It's a fictional piece which takes a twist on the famous classic, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Now Chris, on the dedication page of the book, you and Gary Chapman with whom you co-authored this book, say that this story is for and I quote, "The wounded, cold, and all who struggle. May this story bring warmth, life, and above all, hope." Explain what you meant by that.

Chris Fabry: Well, that is something that Dr. Chapman and I... Dr. Gary Chapman, as you know, *Five Love Languages*, we wanted to do with this story, and that is reach into the hearts of people who are just at the end. They've struggled for so long. They've gone on for years and years in a marriage that's been cold and dead and they just want to walk away from it. Also for people who are married and really committed, and yet they've lost some of that spark with their spouse. So anybody who's listening today who feels that way, our hope is that this little story, and we're going to hear a dramatization of it in just a moment, but this little story would kind of creep in around your heart just like the story that Nathan told David when David sinned with Bathsheba.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Chris Fabry: And the prophet came to the king. The prophet chose not to point his finger and say, "You did wrong." He told him a story about this little lamb and a little landowner and the person who had a lot of cattle and a lot of sheep, and David was incensed by this. And then Nathan said, "This story, this is you." I'm hoping that this story will be a mirror for many people who are listening today. That's the kind of feedback that we're getting, that people are saying, "How did you read my email?" Or "Have you been looking at my Facebook?" Because it's reality.

What I wanted to do is use marriage past, present, and show both the future ahead if you stay on this road that you're on, or a vision of the future that might be there that you have never even considered, that God may give you. There are some people who are listening to us who have gone on Facebook and they've found this person that they dated 20 years ago and they say, "Man, if I'd have made that right choice back there, I wouldn't be married to this dolt today. I would be happy." I say that inside there is something good in that desire to have happiness and a depth to your marriage. It's the wrong thing to go to the Facebook page.

What is right is to lean into that other person and to allow God to form this vision for you just like... I'll go back to the biblical example, Bartimaeus on the side of the road who's blind, who says, "Lord, help me to see." I think God wants to give us that same kind of vision for our marriages. He wants to drop the scales from our eyes. And right now there's just so much snow built up. We're in this blizzard and we can't see it and we just want to get warm and get away.

But if you are in that marriage where you say, "I'm just so tired and I cannot take another footstep toward this other person over here today." I want you to open your mind, open your heart to the possibility that God may want to take something that is dead right now, even in your own heart, and make it alive. Because Dr. Chapman and I both believe that the best chance you have of happiness long-term in your marriage is the person that you've said 'I do' to, not somebody else. It's that person right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Wouldn't it please you if the Lord would use this little book that you and Gary have written, to rekindle love within the hearts and minds of the couple out there that's already given up on love?

Chris Fabry: That's our prayer. It has been the prayer when I started the book and as Gary and I worked through it. And I tell you, I have never had the sense of mission that I've had for a tiny little 20,000-word story that might slip in the door of someone's heart and turn it around toward that spouse. And I know that's what you're all about. It's what you've always been about, to turn that heart toward your family.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is a beautiful little book. It's artistically appealing and I do hope that our listeners will get a copy of it. In the meantime and to kind of whet their appetites, however, set this up for us. We're going to play a few scenes from the drama. We can't include it all. But Moody Radio has produced this and has allowed us to share some of the scenes. Set it up for us, will you? What's this story about?

Chris Fabry: Jacob and Marlee have been married 20 years. It's their 20th anniversary. They're going to the lawyer's office to sign the papers to end their marriage. They've already made these decisions. He makes this decision, Jacob does, to go over the pass and they get into an accident, and that's where you see all of this hard-heartedness, this coldness come out in Marlee's life as then she has to try to find her husband.

Dr. James Dobson: Hey, Chris. I hope you sell a million copies, man.

Chris Fabry: Well, Merry Christmas. Thanks so much for having me today.

Jay: "Oh, you are freezing. Quick and put this afghan around you. Here."

Marlee: Standing before me was an older man who brought me into the warmth of the room.

Jay: "What were you doing out there?"

Marlee: "There was an accident. I can't find my husband. He didn't come here, did he?"

Jay: "No. We haven't had any visitors with the storm. No, no, no. I suspect he went to look for help or a cell signal. He's probably worried about you. Now, come on over to the fire here. That's it. We'll get you warm and cozy. I'll be right back with something to warm you up on the inside. Our Teacup Yorkshire Terrier will keep you company."

Marlee: The smell of the tea brought back memories I didn't want to dredge up. Fights with Jacob, arguments and outbursts from me, and the silence of a man resigned to something other than love. Bookshelves flanked the fireplace. There

were pictures as well of smiling couples standing together, posing for the camera. A coffee table held a single candle, a Bible, and a purple book underneath. On the hearth were fireplace utensils. Beside them was a long-handled pot with two other smaller pots inside with the same size handles. They were gold and looked barely used. I was intrigued and might've gotten up for a closer look, but the door opened and Jay walked in.

Jay: "That smells pretty good, doesn't it? I have some three-bean chili cooking. It'll be ready in a little bit."

Marlee: "What about Jacob?"

Jay: "I found your car, but no sign of Jacob."

Marlee: "Oh, no."

Jay: "I checked with the neighbors too. It's nasty on the roads. Almost got stuck even though I have four-wheel drive. Maybe he got a ride down the hill. I left a note on the front seat telling him where you are and put the emergency flashers on too, but whoo, battery is pretty weak."

Marlee: "Thank you. I suppose that's all we can do now."

Jay: "Yeah, yeah. Other than pray."

Marlee: The old man disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a steaming bowl of chili with cornbread that tasted so sweet it melted in my mouth. He headed upstairs with another bowl and Roo met him at the top, wagging his tail. I had finished my bowl when he returned.

Jay: "Ooh, yeah. Care for another bowl?"

Marlee: "No, I think I'm full, but that was delicious. Thank you so much."

Jay: "You're welcome."

Marlee: "Tell me, who else is here?"

Jay: "Oh, no one's here but my wife and me. She's resting upstairs."

Marlee: "Oh, is something wrong with her?"

Jay: "Nothing time and life haven't done. And what brought you out to these parts?"

Marlee: "We were on our way to an attorney's office to sign divorce papers."

Jay: "Ooh. You've been planning this long?"

Marlee: I told him more about us, more than I wanted. But it just seemed to spill out.

Jay: "Oh, that's a lot of years to be married."

Marlee: "Yeah."

Jay: "What's the main reason for the divorce? Has Jacob abused you in some way?"

Marlee: "Oh no, no. There's no abuse."

Jay: "Oh, is there another woman?"

Marlee: "I don't think so. His other woman is his work."

Jay: "Well, have you tried counseling?"

Marlee: "Yeah, a few times. A pastor once, a psychologist. We went to a marriage seminar a few years ago."

Jay: "Have you tried books about...?"

Marlee: "Oh look, look. Let me tell you about the books I've read. Okay? They're stacked on my nightstand. Do not give me another book. Look, I've tried everything, even called a radio program once asking for advice. Nothing works. We're just not right for each other."

Jay: "Yeah, but you were at some point."

Marlee: "Well, yeah, in the beginning. Sure. Anyone can stay in love at the beginning I think. But then through the years and with the kids, we just grew apart. He threw himself into his work and his hobbies and my heart turned toward the children."

Jay: "And here you are 20 years later, strangers."

Marlee: "Wow. Strangers. Yeah, exactly."

I told him everything and Jay just sat there listening attentively.

Jay: "You mentioned a pastor. What about your spiritual life?"

Marlee: "I know it's not true, but it almost feels like I don't have any right to talk to God."

Jay: "Why is that?"

Marlee: "Well, I know it's a sin to get a divorce. That's how I was raised. And once God is ticked off at you, He's not going to listen to your prayers."

Jay: "Well, it's true that God hates divorce because of the pain and heartache it creates, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't talk with Him. He's a forgiving God."

Marlee: "You sound like a pastor."

Jay: "I guess in a way I am. Years ago this place was a funeral home. Didn't get much business way out here, so they sold it, and we turned it into a retreat center for struggling couples."

Marlee: "Oh."

Jay: "Yeah. People who've given up or those who just want to grow closer. From where I sit, I'd say you were allowed this divine appointment for a purpose."

Marlee: "No, no. Look, we've made up our minds. Okay? There's no hope left."

Jay: "Yeah, I've heard that a few times over the years."

Marlee: "Well, yeah."

Jay: "I'd like to suggest something about hope. Why don't you and your husband hold on to the hope I have for you?"

Marlee: "How can you say that? You don't even know us."

Jay: "I'm going on experience. Most people don't want to throw away their marriage. Working together for 20 years and giving a lot of money to lawyers? Well, that doesn't make sense."

Marlee: "Look, I know I'm not happy where I am and neither is Jacob. We're supposed to love each other. We're supposed to complete each other. Anyway, I think God abandoned our marriage a long time ago. I'm just following Him out the door."

Jay: "Well, maybe God has been closer than you know."

Marlee: "Oh, come on."

Jay: "Even bringing you here suggests to me that there's still hope."

Marlee: "Look, I don't know how many ways I can say this. It's over. He's picked out his apartment. I get the house and the van and we share custody of the kids. 20 years ago tonight we started this journey, and now it's about to end."

As we sat talking, water filled my eyes, and I felt something quiver inside. What if I do give it a chance? What if I open up enough to consider there could be hope. Would that be enough? I wondered, then bravely asked,

"All right, I'm curious. How does it work? The pots, I mean."

Jay: "Step outside. Gather up some snow in this. Here. You scoop it with your hands into the cup and you tap it down, get as much as you can, and then you bring it to me."

Marlee: I didn't have to go far to scoop the snow and as quickly as I did, the act felt like foolishness. Why had I trusted this old man? Why had I let my heart be moved by his kind words or think there could be any kind of hope? I hurried inside.

Jay: "Oh, good work. Now take the pan and put the snow inside and hold it over the fire."

Marlee: "That's it? I'm supposed to melt snow and it's going to change my life?"

Jay: "Stir the melting snow. Well, just try, okay?"

Marlee: "Okay. All right. You sure I don't have to click my heels and say there's no place like home?"

Jay: "Yeah, that's cool."

Marlee: I held the pot over the fire and as I stirred, a faint echo of music floated upward. Steam rose and swirled in the fireplace, hovering under the flue, and I felt myself slipping, swaying, and in one uncontrolled moment, the scene simply cloaked me and I was wholly taken in by the experience. Pictures from the past, images of children laughing, moments captured and frozen in time cascaded around me like snow, like a vast collage of my life. A dog I had known as a child, buttered popcorn spilled at a theater. My best friend and me eating muffins late at night, me crying through *On Golden Pond*.

Jay: "There all nuts you know."

Marlee: There he is, I said breathlessly. There was my husband, a young man again, hair much darker and fuller, no receding hairline, swarthy and full of life and a smile that made my heart ache. The years had chipped away at his smile. Many long years had passed since the sight of him had stirred anything deep within me.

Jacob: "Marlee, Marlee, I missed you."

Marlee: He looked so much younger and so did I, thinner too.

"But we just had breakfast together this morning, Jacob."

Jacob: "Exactly. It's been too long."

Marlee: When I turned back to the happy scene, a misty vapor swathed me and I walked through it searching for our former life. I found us walking near a familiar lake on a moonless summer night. He was about to propose to me. I wanted to scream, to yell caution, to stop the events about to unfold. The giving of the ring, down on one knee, tears of happiness and another long embrace that melted into a kiss so passionate I had to turn away.

When I looked again, we had moved from lake shadows to candlelight in the little church where we were married. The gown, the smooth skin, the trim figures underneath the dress and tux and the voice of our pastor charging us to love until death do us part. Jacob had written his own vows, his deep resonant voice cut through time and with emotion he said...

Jacob: "Your love has captured my heart. As long as it beats in my chest, I pledge to let nothing come between the love we will share in the years ahead, for it will take death's cold embrace to separate us."

Marlee: My eyes shut tight. We had loved until death. Unfortunately, it was love that died. The next scene was the arrival of our oldest, Becca. I had said some awful things to my husband during that delivery. He just smiled and forgave me without question. As I watched, the rush of memory aroused an unwelcome internal conflict. I didn't want to be drawn to him, but I was, particularly when I saw his wonderment at tiny fingers and toes and drank in the wonder of a newborn.

Jacob: "Look at her now. She's so perfect."

Marlee: "She's amazing."

Jacob: "Like her mother."

Marlee: Two people, united around a shared infant. He even changed diapers much to my surprise, and never complained about my nesting and the shuffling of furniture and the crib I returned three times in exchange because it just wasn't right for the room. But the scene changed again. Had he really been that thoughtful? The warmth and noise of Christmas past quickly faded and in a blink, Becca was nearly grown. We were in the car heading to soccer practice.

Becca: "Mom, why do you and dad fight so much?"

Marlee: "Oh, Becca. Honey, we don't really fight. We just disagree about a lot of things."

Becca: "No, you fight and you don't make up. It's like a tea kettle that's always ready to boil anytime the heat's turned up."

Marlee: The scene changed again. We were sitting in a large church with a few hundred couples listening to a man talk about going deeper in our marriage. I sat beside Jacob and I thought he was uninterested in our marriage, at making it work, but when I looked more closely, there was something written in his conference notebook. I strained to see it at the bottom of the page, but he closed it quickly.

The scene transitioned one more time to the very afternoon of the present day. We were saying goodbye to the children. David held on tightly to me and I choked back the tears as I heard myself tell how soon we would be home. The door closed and the three children went to the window to watch us.

David: "Where are they going?"

Child: "Probably more Christmas shopping."

David: "Yeah, probably more shopping. It's okay."

Marlee: Becca's face was the last thing I saw as the mist engulfed the scene. Drifting, floating, swirling like vapor rising. The mist parted, and I saw the empty pot over the fire. I was too stunned to speak.

Roger Marsh: Certainly an interesting way of looking at marriage through the lens of scripture and a reworking of Charles Dickens' classic, *A Christmas Carol*. Today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we've been listening to a portion of this dramatization based on a book written by Dr. Gary Chapman and our guest today, Chris Fabry. We've titled today's program "A Marriage Carol," and we encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk where you can find the complete drama there. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Now as we think about the Christmas season and what it means to so many different people, of course Dr. Dobson has written a special newsletter for Christmas, and if you'd like to read it, you can go to drjamesdobson.org. It's right there on our landing page.

And we encourage you also as you are reading through this newsletter and wondering, wow, I'd really like to receive that each and every month when Doctor writes his newsletter, well, you can sign up for a free subscription to the Dr. James Dobson Newsletter. Comes your way the first of every month, and go to drjamesdobson.org/newsletter and you can sign up to start receiving your free monthly newsletter from Dr. James Dobson and Family Talk.

Well, today is the day before Christmas Eve. Of course Christmas is on the hearts and minds of just about everybody all across the country. And as we conclude today's special edition of Family Talk, Dr. Dobson has a closing thought to share with us. Doctor?

Dr. James Dobson: Dear friends. Merry Christmas to our beloved friends in Christ. How quickly we have careened through the past 12 months, bringing us again to this blessed

time of the year. In that spirit, I wish we could drop by for a neighborly visit with each of our friends and supporters. We would bring a basket of home-baked goodies and sip a cup of apple cider in front of your warm fire. Perhaps that world does not exist anymore, but I refuse to believe that it's gone. Even in the rush and hubbub of everyday living, I'm convinced that people still care about each other and want to link arms in Christian fellowship. May we never get too busy to reach out to one another, especially during what has been called the lonely season.

Is there someone in your neck of the woods who needs a loving call or a friendly visit today? Is there a single mother near you who has struggled mightily to keep house and home together? Would an assortment of groceries and a warm note help her get through the expensive holidays? Is there a member of your family with whom you have had severe conflict this year? Wouldn't this be a great time to call and say, "I just wanted to tell you that I love you and I'm sorry if I disappointed or hurt you." After all, isn't that what the Prince of Peace came to teach us?

From Shirley and me and all of us at Family Talk, we wish you a wonderful Christmas season and join you in celebrating the birth of the Savior. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. Jim and Shirley.

Roger Marsh:

Well, Amen and Amen to that Doctor. Thank you for sharing those thoughts with us to put our focus where it needs to be. Reaching out to the lonely, mending fences, building bridges, strengthening families here at Christmastime. Again, if you'd like to start receiving Dr. Dobson's free monthly newsletter, just go to drjamesdobson.org/newsletters or you can click on the newsletter button right on the homepage at drjamesdobson.org.

And now for Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, and all of us here at the JDFI, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of 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.