



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage – Part 3

Guest(s): Lee and Leslie Strobel

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, you're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: In Ephesians chapter 5, the apostle Paul gives husbands a clear responsibility to be the spiritual leader of the home. But the truth is, many men today are either unable or unwilling to step into that role, and that can leave a marriage feeling spiritually out of balance. On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're bringing you the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's three-part conversation with Lee and Leslie Strobel. They'll be discussing surviving a spiritual mismatch in marriage. Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. And over the past couple of programs here on Family Talk, the Strobels have been candidly sharing how their own marriage weathered a spiritual mismatch after Leslie became a Christian and Lee did not. Today, they will talk about how couples can encourage and strengthen one another's walk with the Lord. A quick reminder about our guests. Lee Strobel is a celebrated Christian author, and speaker, and a former award-winning investigative journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. His books and curricula have sold more than 18 million copies worldwide. And together, Lee and Leslie have co-authored a book called *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. And that is the very subject of today's program. So now here is the conclusion of this conversation featuring our own Dr. James Dobson and the Strobel's right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: And we're so glad that the Strobels came to share their story with us so openly, as they've done in their book, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. Lee, as most of our listeners know, is one of the premier apologists for the Christian faith, and he's written a number of best-selling books, including *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ*. He's a graduate of Yale Law School and the former award-winning legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. He and his wife, Leslie, have been married for over 30 years. So, Lee and Leslie, thank you again for being with us once more, because this is such an important topic. And being unequally yoked in a marriage can be extremely challenging and frustrating, as we heard last time. We were talking off microphone about something that I want to let our listeners hear about a cultural phenomenon. The fact that women don't like to eat alone. They're kind of embarrassed if they're not in the company of a man. I know that frustrates the feminist, but I understand why. And then when

that's applied to a marriage that is unequally yoked. A woman may go to church alone but not feel totally comfortable there. Have you observed that?

Leslie Strobel: Absolutely. Church is a family-oriented place, and you tend to think of families going to church. I remember one time I went. Lee wasn't going with me, and I got the kids in the Sunday school, and I would go into the sanctuary and kind of look around for another woman sitting alone just so I might be with someone who would relate. And so this one time I sat down next to this lady and we started talking a little bit. And she asked where my husband was. Was he taking the kids to the Sunday school? And I said, oh, no, he doesn't come with me. And I could see her whole demeanor change. And she just sort of went, oh. And she didn't quite know how to respond. And then in a minute, her husband arrived. He had been an usher or something and serving and sat down next to her. And they just didn't ever pay much attention to me after that. And at the time, I couldn't decide if it was my own uncomfortable feelings that were projecting maybe something different. But I had talked to women in the past about that, that there is a little bit of a bias oftentimes in churches families to be apart, and when there's someone who's either single or married but her husband isn't with her, that that sometimes causes them not quite knowing how to handle you.

Dr. James Dobson: And Leslie, what a shame that is because you were desperately in need of support and counsel and Scripture and love and acceptance, especially in a church.

Leslie Strobel: And this was at a time before I was involved in a Bible study. I was looking for Christian women just to have someone in my life.

Lee Strobel: It's a great reminder for those who are listening that are Christians and they're saying, well, does this really relate to me because I am married to a believer? Well, one thing you can do is reach out to women and others, men who are unequally yoked, when you encounter them at church, to be sensitive to that and to realize that they're going through very difficult times. It's a tension-filled time in their marriage. They're feeling alone. They're feeling vulnerable. And what a great time for us as believers to enfold them and to encourage them and to pray for them and with them. So it'd be a ministry for everybody who's listening to say, well, I can at least do that.

Dr. James Dobson: I used to teach a very large Sunday school class of young adults, young married couples, and it used to really bother me that people would come to the church who were visitors, and I would watch them come in alone and sit down, and everybody would be, before the service started, talking with their friends. They hadn't seen them in a week or two. And leave these people standing out there alone. And we had 400 people that came through that class in one year. And I remember saying, those people, many of them came here and gave you one chance to say that we need you here. They didn't come because of me. They didn't come because of the pastor. They didn't come because of the theology of the church. They didn't come because of location. They came saying, is this a place where I would be accepted? Can we make some friends here? Would we

be comfortable here? And then you go out there and talk to your friends. and leave these people standing there. I used to rail at my class over that because we lost some of those people and they never came back.

Lee Strobel: What a ministry we can all have to just do that simple thing, just be in full people emotionally and just say, you know what, I'm sorry your husband doesn't come with you, but let me just pray for you and encourage you.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we have aired two programs with you folks. I feel so strongly about what you've been saying. It's really bedrock material for Christian families.

Lee Strobel: It's almost a different way of being unequally yoked. You're yoked to someone who is not as spiritually mature, who's lagging behind. I'd say three things about that. Number one, you have to ask yourself the question, could it be that my spouse is not really a believer? You have to ask that question. If they have no interest in growth spiritually, if you don't see a difference in their character and values, if they're not going through a process of becoming more Christ-like over time, you have to ask yourself, they may say the right things and believe the right things, but John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in his name." Believing in and of itself is not enough. There has to be a point in time where we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We receive this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life that He purchased when He died on the cross as our substitute. To pay for all of our wrongdoing, past, present, and future.

Dr. James Dobson: Which changes everything.

Lee Strobel: That changes everything. And we have to ask, could it be that my spouse is lagging because they're not really a born-again believer? And so sometimes I'll use that verse as a diagnostic, and you get in a conversation. That verse forms an equation of what it means to become a believer. Believe plus receive equals become. Honey, I'm concerned. I don't see a lot of change in you. I don't see a desire to grow in your relationship with Christ. I just want to raise the question.

Dr. James Dobson: To which he says you're judging me.

Lee Strobel: You know what? It could be. But, you know, you've planted a piece of sand in his shoe. And it's going to bug him now because you've raised the question. And he may grouse and he may react negatively. But you know what? I bet there's something in his spirit that eventually he's going to say, you know what? She's right. I need to get serious here. And I need to really give my life to Christ. So that's one thing I'd say.

The other thing I'd say is, you know, every church is not for every person. And you may be in a church that you are doing great spiritually, and you've got friends, and you really sync up with the pastor, and this is a wonderful community for you. It may not be ideal for your spouse. And you know what? I think sometimes you have to say, could it be because this church culture does

not work well with where my spouse is coming from? And, you know, it's okay to maybe say, you know, we need to find a church where we both can flourish. And, you know, I'd raise that question as well. And the other thing I'd say is resist the temptation first to fault find. Don't look down your nose at your spouse and shame them for not being spiritually more mature because that's only going to be a negative. But the other thing is don't project yourself onto your spouse. You may think that being a Christian is how I behave. I'm an extrovert, and I serve over here, and I teach this class, and I do these things. That's what Christians do because, hey, I'm a Christian. That's what I do. But my spouse is different. Maybe my spouse is introverted. Maybe they're more intellectual. Maybe they grow more in a quiet moment with God where they're reading Scripture, and God is feeding them through that experience, and they're learning about history and archaeology, and that feeds them. And you think, well, they're not like me, so they're not growing the same rate. Well, they may be growing in a different way. And we're all a little bit different the way we grow in Christ. And so we've got to cut each other some slack and say, you know, maybe it's just because my spouse ain't me. Maybe that's the problem.

Dr. James Dobson: But on the other hand, Leslie, I know that you have in recent years done a lot of one-on-one mentoring of women. Are you hearing the frustration we were talking about of women whose husbands will not accept spiritual leadership? They may not even question his commitment to Christ. But those men may not step up and say, "Let's have our devotions tonight. Let's pray before we go to bed. Or let's take this to the Lord. Or let's give of our resources." And they won't provide spiritual leadership for the children, which frustrates them do. Don't you hear that a lot?

Leslie Strobel: Absolutely. And I think that's a huge problem. And I don't know exactly. I think what Leah said is correct, that you have to gently talk to your husband about that and just see if they can understand the necessity and how God calls men to be head of the home. And if you can point out how enriching that would be for children and for the whole family to have them do that, I believe men would be willing to step up and try it.

Lee Strobel: It could be, too, that the church that you're in is not teaching this. You know, you go to some churches and they're staying away from that. This is all gender equality. You know, no difference between men and women. And they bought into a lot of this cultural stuff. And they don't emphasize the role of the man in the marriage relationship and the family relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: What is his role, Lee?

Lee Strobel: Well, he is the spiritual leader of the home.

Dr. James Dobson: What does that mean?

Lee Strobel: Well, it means that he takes the lead in seeing to it that the entire family is nurtured spiritually and that grows together in a Christlike direction. And that

doesn't mean you have to be a pastor, you know, or a seminary trained. you can be heavy-handed and boss people around, but it means you have a father's heart toward your spouse and toward the children to say, I want to be like a shepherd that helps lead them into a deeper relationship with Christ and spiritual growth.

Dr. James Dobson: I was baiting you a little bit there because I believe exactly what you believe.

Lee Strobel: I was taught this by a very wise teacher once. He said, have you ever noticed how guys who want to get married and want to settle down, want to get the job done. And they will, and I don't mean intentionally deceive people, but they will say to the girl they want to date who's a Christian, "Oh, of course I'm a Christian. Oh, yeah, of course I believe in God. Oh, yeah, me too." And they will kind of gloss, because they don't understand the importance here. They'll gloss over this stuff, and they're trying to win this woman who they want to marry. And they will play games. And there are women who think and sometimes the women will be in a position where they're not looking very deeply because they're in love with this guy. They like this guy. They don't want to find what they're afraid they're going to find. So they kind of gloss it over too. And then they get married and they find out this guy didn't want to go to church anymore. He doesn't have any interest in growing spiritually. And you know what? He wasn't a believer in the first place. But they sort of fooled each other in that process. So I think the one thing that Christian men and women, young men and women ought to do is decide now, do not become unequally yoked. That's what the Bible teaches. That's what God's Word says. Therefore, I'm going to decide now I'm not going to date someone who is not a committed follower of Jesus. One of the things we do in our book, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch*, is we try to help people, women especially, diagnose as best they can, is this guy that I want to date really a believer? Look past what he claims. And so we have 15 questions that you can ask, and I won't go through them all, but I'll go through a few of them.

First of all, can he describe a specific time or era during which he received Christ's gift of eternal life? If he were put on trial and in charge of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict him? When he talks about the future, does he mention God? Is there room for God? What does he choose to feed his mind? Where does the compass of his heart naturally point? Who does he spend time with? You know, birds of a feather flock together. Who are his friends? Are they believers? Does he possess humility? Is he honest about the little things in life? When you're at a restaurant and they give you the wrong check and it's \$50 less than your check, does he quick pay the check and get out and cheat the restaurant? Or does he do the right things about the little things in life? Does he take responsibility for his actions? Does he care about people who don't know Christ? Has he ever expressed an interest in that? Does he pray? Is he willing to postpone immediate gratification so that greater satisfaction can come in the future?

Dr. James Dobson: Let me add one.

Lee Strobel: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Is there any evidence of addictive behavior?

Lee Strobel: Oh, that's a good one.

Dr. James Dobson: You're dating somebody who is a heavy drinker or you get little indication of vulnerability to pornography or to gambling or other things. Run. Don't walk. Run away from him because he's trouble on the hoof.

Lee Strobel: Yeah, absolutely. How many times as a pastor have you sat with people who – come in and their lives are absolutely wrecked because of a spouse who has an addictive personality who has fallen into one of these traps. It's so sad, you're right, to discern, is there any evidence of that in the relationship? I think we've kind of hinted at this. Sometimes it's a two-way street. It's the guys who want to maybe implicitly deceive someone into thinking they're something they're not. But it's also the women who will say, I'm going to overlook stuff because I want this guy. I like this guy. This guy is going to be a doctor someday. He's going to be successful. And he treats me well. He's a nice guy. Well, you know what? There are nice guys who are headed for Hell. And there are nice guys who are not going to lead their family in a godly direction. Are they committed followers of Christ? Do you see growth in their life? What do they talk about? imagining how your life might be together and get married someday, does God ever come up? Do they ever express an interest in spiritual matters unless you press them? Those are tough questions, but boy, you'll regret it if you don't ask them.

Dr. James Dobson: Here's another one. Are you going with somebody? Maybe you're a woman and going with a man who's trying to talk you into going to bed before marriage? I mean, talk about a red flag because if he'll do that with you, he'll do it with somebody else later on.

Lee Strobel: Absolutely. Are his actions consistent with Scripture or is he cutting corners? Is he drinking heavily? Is he suggesting premarital sex? Is he pushing you on things that you know aren't right, those are all signals. And it could be little things. It could be just maybe, you know, some – of some lines of intimacy short of, you know, actually going to bed together. But, you know, he's going too far too fast. And you go, whoa, whoa, whoa. What's this guy really interested in here? We just have to open our eyes. And I think for those listening, it's like, you know, if you're a guy and you're single, you know what? The best thing you can do for your life and your future marriage is to grow in your relationship with Christ, to become spiritually mature. I mean, make that your number one value, and you know what? You will find the right woman, because you're going to be hanging out in the right places, and you're going to be meeting the right people, and God is going to arrange when you're ready for the right person to be there for you. And don't put yourself in a position. If you make the decision now, I am not going to do this, then when you're in the midst, your hormones are pumping, and you're liking this guy, and you're feeling drawn to him and

everything, then you're not making the decision. I already made this decision in the cold light of Scripture, and I'm going to live by it.

Dr. James Dobson: We have said several times in the course of the programs that we've done that the principles that you taught in your book and that you've discussed with us here come out of Scripture. But we haven't documented that. And there is Scripture in both 1 Corinthians 7 and in 2 Corinthians 6 that are relevant to what we're talking about. Would you share those scriptures with us?

Lee Strobel: Yeah, in 1 Corinthians it says specifically that if your spouse is not a believer but they're willing to remain married, then you should remain married. So having a non-believing spouse is not an excuse to say, okay, I'm heading for divorce court.

Dr. James Dobson: Unless there's infidelity.

Lee Strobel: Yeah, then it raises other questions. There's infidelity. Or the Scripture says if they leave, then you should let them go. And 2 Corinthians 6 verses 14 through 16 talk about being unequally yoked. And what that means is that we should not be in a relationship with a nonbeliever like a marriage because of all of the things we kind of talk about in our book, all of the negative fallout that will happen in your marriage if you are unequally yoked, if you're married to a nonbeliever. So Scripture specifically says do not be married to an unbeliever. And there's one other relevant passage in 1 Peter 3, verses 1 and 2, which talks about that wives, when you have a nonbelieving spouse, they're going to be won over by your behavior, by your purity and reverence in your life. That was Leslie. I mean, and that was a great example, I think, in her life of someone who lived a pure. Being like a magnet for the nonbeliever. Now, it wasn't a magnet without problems. In other words, I came kicking and screaming in many ways. But it was a magnet nonetheless. And I think, again, Scripture is so wise here in saying it's not always the words that are going to do it. It's the attitude. It's the behavior. It's the purity of your life. It's your devotion to Christ that are going to eventually be attractive to the nonbeliever.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the title of the book is *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. It is an outstanding book, and you've heard that the last three days. We've been talking about this content, and there's a lot more here that we didn't get to. And I appreciate so much you all being with us for these three days. This has been very uplifting to me. There's content here that I've wanted to get across to our listeners, and you've done it today. Leslie, thank you for being the godly woman you are. Thank you for hanging in there with this jerk until he found the Lord and became a spiritual leader to the whole Christian community. I mean, it's amazing. You must be, again, shocked how God is using him.

Leslie Strobel: It's quite a ride we've had. It's been a lot of fun.

Lee Strobel: She used to pray, I just wanted him to go to church with me.

Leslie Strobel: That's right.

Roger Marsh:

Sometimes the most powerful sermon isn't preached from a pulpit at all. It's actually lived out quietly in a kitchen, on a car ride, or in a pew shared in patient love. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and we just concluded part three of Dr. Dobson's heartfelt discussion with Lee and Leslie Strobel as they discuss their book, the very personal book called *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. Now, if you missed any part of this three-part conversation, or if you know someone who is walking this road, I encourage you to listen again or share it with a friend. When you visit jdfi.org, you can do just that. Conflict in marriage is nothing new, but resolving conflict in marriage is not necessarily easy, though it can be rather simple. Over the years, Dr. James Dobson has counseled thousands of people on how to resolve conflict in marriage using principles from God's Word. It's natural to have a conflict in marriage, but how you handle those disagreements can make all the difference in the health of your relationship, and that's why we have prepared a special four-part email series that's absolutely free called Conflict in Marriage. It features priceless wisdom from Dr. James Dobson that will resonate in your marriage even today. To receive your free copy, you can sign up to start getting this four-day email series absolutely free when you go to jdfi.org and search for that title, "Conflict in Marriage." Again, jdfi.org.

You know, when Dr. James Dobson founded the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, he built something meant to outlast him. Something that would go on preserving and promoting the family, defending the biblical principles it's built upon, and pointing people to the gospel of Jesus Christ for generations to come. That's the heartbeat of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And it carries on today through this broadcast, through the Dobson Policy and Culture Center, and the Dobson Digital Library. And that work continues because of friends like you. Every day, we are working to strengthen marriages, to encourage parents, to defend the sanctity of human life and religious freedom, and to carry biblical truth to families here in America and all around the world. But we can't do it alone. It's the faithful support of friends like you that keeps these conversations on the air and this mission moving forward. So whatever amount God leads you to give, we invite you to partner with us today. Your generosity truly makes a difference in the lives of families who need encouragement and hope. make a secure donation, visit us online. at jdfi.org. You can also speak with a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if you'd prefer, you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

Dr. James Dobson:

Sometimes reenacting the first stages of a dating relationship can help rekindle the fires in a marriage.

Roger Marsh: With today's Dr. Dobson Minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: According to Dr. Desmond Morris and Dr. Donald Joy, there are 12 stages to marital bonding that cement us together as a husband and wife. They progress from the least intimate to the most intimate, from simple eye contact to sexual fulfillment itself. Unfortunately, many of us neglect the early stages that drew us together in the beginning. What can we do when our relationship lacks romance? Dr. Joy suggests going back to the basics. The early bonding stages of dating. Eye contact, touch, holding hands, giving unexpected hugs. These are the experiences that convey a sentiment that words can't express.

Roger Marsh: For more information, visit drdobsonminute.org.