



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Help for Parents of Prodigal Children - Part 1

Guest(s): Allison Bottke

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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.

Allison Bottke: The definition of insanity is repeating the same behaviors and expecting different results. I found myself standing in my son's kitchen after the SWAT team raided his home, pouring out liquor bottles, cleaning up, and I stood back and went, "What am I doing? It's just getting worse, and worse, and worse. I'm thinking, I'm helping. This is clearly not helping." That's what we have to reach as parents. And then, I had to turn the spotlight on me, because the problem isn't our adult dysfunctional kids. Yes, they have problems, they do. But the problem is the part I kept playing in bailing him out. The problem was my rescuing him all the time. What about my heart? What about me as a mom made me do this when clearly it wasn't helpful? So I had to look at that and see what I had to do differently. And as a mom, I had to do things differently. I had to stop writing the checks. I had to stop the money flow. I had to do hard things and be prepared for the consequences.

Roger Marsh: Well, that's a bold and eye-opening statement from Allison Bottke. And she knows firsthand what it's like to have a prodigal child. And then to have to ask yourself the question, "What role did I as a parent play in raising this child? Welcome to the special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and if you find yourself in this situation where you are resonating with what Allison had to say, you definitely want to be with us for the next couple of broadcasts. Allison is the parent of a son by the name of Chris who went through a season of rebellion that actually wound up landing him behind bars. And, even though we know raising godly children is not easy, it's even more difficult on parents, especially when those kids either didn't have faith or walk away from their faith. But then, when they make choices and we find ourselves doing everything we can to try to "help them out," and then it turns out that what we're doing to "help" actually winds up doing more harm than good, it's very, very difficult to face that music.

But Allison Bottke has done so, and she's done so with aplomb, as it were. She's written a number of books. She's been a best-selling author for years. Her Setting Boundaries series has sold more than a quarter million copies. She's the

author of the best-selling book, *Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children*, which will be the theme of our conversation today. And the follow-up to that, *How to Connect with Your Troubled Adult Children*. And both of those books are available in our resource center at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Okay, let's get into part one of this conversation. We encourage you if you are listening with young children to use discretion as to how to handle this program, either to be listened to live as you're hearing it, or to go back and listen to it online at drjamesdobson.org or also on our stream at oneplace.com. And now, let's get into part one of *How to Set Boundaries with Your Adult Children*, and our guest, Alison Bottke. Here now is Dr. James Dobson to start today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We sat in my office a few minutes ago and I got just a deep appreciation for what you're trying to do, because you're not writing in a vacuum, you're not pulling this out of nowhere and saying, "Maybe this will be helpful to people." You have lived it. And, in fact, it comes out of your childhood. And so, what was your childhood like?

Allison Bottke: I did. My parents were divorced when I was young and I was the middle child. I tease about that, I was the middle child. But, I mirrored what I learned about parenting. I didn't know what it was like to have two parents around. I had a real skewed view of parenting, and of love, and of just life in general. So when I became a parent at a very young age, without the Lord, without direction, I was really a mess.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And you had one son, his name is Christopher.

Allison Bottke: Christopher, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And you acknowledged making some pretty serious mistakes with him.

Allison Bottke: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And, he made a few of his own. And, Christopher is now in prison.

Allison Bottke: Yes, he is.

Dr. James Dobson: For what?

Allison Bottke: Oh, gosh. Breaking and entering, dealing drugs, any number of... There's a whole list.

Dr. James Dobson: So when you talk to parents about the pain of a dysfunctional child that you are personally responsible for, in some cases. You know what? And in other cases, the parents did what looks like an outstanding job. Nobody does it perfectly, because you can no more be a perfect parent than you can be a perfect human

being. But there are parents that do it better than others. And sometimes, those that do it very, very well still have dysfunctional children.

Allison Bottke: Yes, they do. The children do make their own choices. Absolutely right. The ones that I really am speaking to are the parents that are trying to make the choices, not trying, we're making choices for our children. I'm talking about enabling. I'm talking about the difference between helping and enabling. I didn't know what that was. A lot of parents don't know what that is, and there is a very definite difference.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's talk about it. Tell us the difference between enabling and helping.

Allison Bottke: Helping is doing something for someone that they are not capable of doing themselves. Enabling is doing something for someone that they can, and most often, should be doing for themselves.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And enabling is often involved in bailing them out, and giving to them, and looking the other way, and taking the blame, and not holding them accountable, and that whole area. That's not helpful, is it?

Allison Bottke: It's helpful. No, it's not. But often, at least I know from my experience as a mom, I didn't want my son to hurt. I didn't want him to experience the consequences of his actions. It didn't dawn on me that I was stopping a train of growth that he had to go through. Sometimes our kids have to hurt to grow. Sometimes that's what God uses to make them become the people He wants them to be. And I kept getting in there and stopping that progression. I kept getting in there and I thought I was helping because I didn't want him to go through any of these things I went through. I was guilty because of how I raised him. I was a teenage mom. I made a lot of mistakes. So any number of reasons, I kept coming in just in time. So he didn't have to feel the pain, or the anguish, or any number of things that he really needed to feel to become a responsible adult.

Dr. James Dobson: Describe the teen years for Christopher. Do we have his permission to talk about him?

Allison Bottke: Yes, we do. We do. And God has used prison to bring some amazing people around in their u-turns. We know this. I mean, look how many people in the Bible have had to spend years in prison. And that's where my son is. He's closer today to the Lord than he ever has been. So, it's a different life. But yes, we have his permission. It's an interesting relationship that he and I have now. But you asked about his teen years. We don't, as parents, all of a sudden when our kids are 20, 30, 40, start this habit. Parents that are enablers have started when they're young. And I did start when he was young. I didn't want him to experience the pain of his actions. I was always coming to his rescue. Any number of things there, I would go-

Dr. James Dobson: You'd intercede for him at school.

Allison Bottke: ... Oh, of course, of course. Because I was helping. And I was a real helpful mom. I was right in there because, he didn't have a dad. And, I mean, I had more excuses. So, I mean it was over and over. But through that doctor, I wasn't a believer then, I was living a life that was really a mess. I was not mirroring... He had a mom that was so confused. I was working, partying. I was into drugs and alcohol. I was a mess. And I was being a mom and trying to be a mom. And he saw somebody that was so out of touch. He didn't have anything to really... There was no faith in his... I raised him not to believe in God. I told him there wasn't a God. I mean, I believed in New Age, and tarot cards, and astrological charts. I was so open-minded, my brain slipped out. There was no foundation. So, when he started running away from home, it made perfect sense. Why live in that environment when your mom is, "Do as I say, not as I do?" That was-

Dr. James Dobson: Allison, when you were sitting in my office, I looked at you and you had gigantic tears in your eyes.

Allison Bottke: ... You're going to start it again.

Dr. James Dobson: And, yeah, your mascara is a little bit smudged today here in the studio, because please don't apologize for it. I know how it got there. And, you were talking about your conversion to Christ. How old were you when you found the Lord?

Allison Bottke: I was 35-years-old. And my son was a teenager, he was 18. And, he was in juvenile detention center the day that I walked into a church and realized that everything I was trying to fill that empty space with wasn't working.

Dr. James Dobson: Mm-hmm. And how did you come to know that there was an answer?

Allison Bottke: Well, we hired a Christian secretary in my office who listened to Christian radio. I'd never listened to Christian radio before, and she would play it in the background and I would listen. So I started putting it on in my car, and there was this radio program by some doctor named Dobson. So I started listening to him.

Dr. James Dobson: That was the first Christian program you've ever-

Allison Bottke: The first Christian talk show I ever listened to. And I listened to you and I thought, "Well, there's some good points here. There's some good points there." And then I started listening more and more. I listened to more Christian music. And that's how the Lord began to soften my really hard heart. He used Christian music and your radio program and yes, that's why you got my big crocodile tears going.

Dr. James Dobson: ... You were 35?

Allison Bottke: 35-years-old.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Allison Bottke: And I walked into a church that night. There was a service. It was Wednesday night, 20 after 7:00. The pastor's message was for me, he talked about being empty, being lost, being alone, stuffing our hearts with work, money, drugs, food, partying, whatever. I said, "Well, okay God, if you're really up there, do something with my life, because I sure have messed it up. And I've messed up my son's life too. He's 18-years-old in juvenile detention center." Actually, he was 17. He was going to be 18 in about two days. So then, he becomes an adult and the problems become escalated, because he's no longer in juvenile detention centers, he's now going to be in jails if he keeps up what he's doing. And I couldn't control him. And I thought that was my job. I had to control him. I had to fix him.

Dr. James Dobson: But in that service, you yielded to him.

Allison Bottke: I did. I said, "God, I'm here. Fix me. Fix him."

Dr. James Dobson: What did he do in response?

Allison Bottke: My life absolutely changed. It wasn't easier. I say that often to people. My life didn't suddenly become joyful and happy and easy. However, I had a new direction. There was a navigator. I had no navigation. I didn't know. I started reading the Bible. I became convicted of how much sin was in my life. I didn't know that word sin. I began to be convicted. The lifestyle I'd lived for so many years, everything was great. There was no right and wrong. If it felt good, do it. You just tolerate everything. So God really changed my life in convicting me. That was the first thing. Whoa.

Dr. James Dobson: The Scripture says that's what happens when you draw near to him. Isaiah said, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up and His train filled the temple. And I said, 'Whoa, it's me. I'm a man of unclean lips.'" There is something about coming into His presence that you recognize your need for a savior. You recognize the need for cleanness and you recognize your sin, and that's what you did.

Allison Bottke: Oh, in a big way. And I really adopted 2 Corinthians 5:17 that says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." And I hung onto that, that the old was gone. I didn't have to live that way anymore. And through that came a different relationship with my son. And it wasn't easy. It wasn't overnight. I mean, he was 18. My growth took a lot of years. I'm still growing trying to figure out how to be a mom to this very strong-willed child.

Roger Marsh: It's never easy to face the fact that we can possibly raise a child who could turn out to have a situation where their prodigal season gets so bad that everything we do to try to help makes it worse. But, today here on Family Talk, our guest, Allison Bottke is sharing with Dr. James Dobson about how to set boundaries with your adult children to keep that from happening. And she's speaking from

personal experience. And now, let's continue with the conclusion of today's edition of Family Talk. Dr. James Dobson's conversation with author Allison Bottke.

Dr. James Dobson: You write in your book about fear and guilt being the root cause of much of the enabling that goes on out there. Elaborate on that.

Allison Bottke: Yes. I was so fearful that if I didn't come to my son's rescue, if I didn't bail him out, if I didn't let him crash in my house, that he would overdose, he would rob somebody and go to jail for the rest of his life, someone would kill him. The fear is very real when you are involved in a world of drugs, and alcohol, and crime, it's a very real fear.

Dr. James Dobson: You never know when there's going to be a knock on the door at night and you're asked to come down to the morgue. That haunted you, you said in the book.

Allison Bottke: Every time the phone rang, I would think somebody's calling to tell me my son is dead. And that's a horrible way to live and it's a horrible way. And so many parents feel that. We know if we aren't there, if we don't rescue them, they could die. And it's a real consequence. It is a real consequence.

Dr. James Dobson: And that went on for many years and still really continues today, doesn't it?

Allison Bottke: Dozens of years. Well, today he's in prison. I still am fear-

Dr. James Dobson: You still worry about him?

Allison Bottke: ... Yes, I am. But today, I have a different feeling in my heart, because I realize that the choices he's making are his choices. I'm no longer coming in and bailing him out, and I haven't for many years, but it took a progression of time to get to that point.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Allison, how do you get to that point? We're talking to people right now who know they make terrible mistakes. They will admit them. Some of them wallow in the guilt of that recognition. How in the world do they get beyond that and lay that down and say, "Lord, I did the best I could. It wasn't good enough. I failed. Will you help me? Will you take this? I can't carry it anymore. I'm going to give it to you"? Were you able to do that?

Allison Bottke: Amen. Yes. Yes, I was. I had to get to that point, and then develop steps that helped me get through that. Because I had the realization one day that nothing I was doing was helping. The definition of insanity is repeating the same behaviors and expecting different results.

I found myself standing in my son's kitchen after the SWAT team raided his home, pouring out liquor bottles, cleaning up, and I stood back and went, "What

am I doing? It's just getting worse, and worse, and worse. I'm thinking, I'm helping. This is clearly not helping." And that's what we have to reach as parents. And then, I had to turn the spotlight on me, because the problem isn't our adult dysfunctional kids. Yes, they have problems. They do. But the problem is the part I kept playing in bailing him out. The problem was my rescuing him all the time. What about my heart? What about me as a mom made me do this when clearly it wasn't helpful? So I had to look at that and see what I had to do differently. And as a mom, I had to do things differently. I had to stop writing the checks. I had to stop the money flow. I had to do hard things and be prepared for the consequences. So I got-

Dr. James Dobson: Especially when it sometimes brings anger, great anger.

Allison Bottke: ... Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And even more dysfunctional behavior, when you do that, you let go. And they're so angry they go out and do even more.

Allison Bottke: And for my son's case, he would go... For a year, I wouldn't even know where he was. I didn't know if he was alive. I didn't know where he was. So it was a never-ending drama. And it took a lot of years before he was gone for a long time, and I wouldn't be feeling guilty when he came back or I wouldn't be trying to keep him there with money or whatever it was. And I finally realized, "Chris, you're living your life. I love you. I am praying for you, but I can't continue this way." I had to look at my marriage. A lot of people lose their marriages over this. I mean-

Dr. James Dobson: They do.

Allison Bottke: ... It's a horrible situation when you allow your adult children and their choices to affect you.

Dr. James Dobson: To destroy your life.

Allison Bottke: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: And if you, the mom particularly, are a somewhat compliant woman who has never confronted people in this way, and then you're dealing with the one that you love more than anybody on earth, you gave birth to that child, you watched him or her through the teen years, you've been through that whole... How in the world do you get to that point where you say, "You are on your own. I love you as much as I ever did, but it's no longer my responsibility"? Now, I started to say, you've been speaking all over the country. Let's suppose you're standing in front of 500 people, 1000 people right now, and all over the room, they're crying, because they recognize your pattern in their lives. What do you say? What are you saying?

Allison Bottke: First of all, never underestimate the power of God to restore your children. And, that God has a plan for their life. And when we come in and rescue them, we are playing God. That is what really helped me tremendously. When I realized, something has got to happen in his life and I am stopping that from happening. So, I need to sit back and trust God, trust that God is in control, trust that God is in control.

Dr. James Dobson: The moment you do that, you feel better, don't you?

Allison Bottke: Yeah, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the interesting thing about love must be tough. There is a need to take this step with somebody you love and it's the hardest thing in the world to do. But your own relationship with that individual confirms in your heart that it's right. And you begin to recognize that it's right and do better.

Allison Bottke: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: And feel better. Yeah.

Allison Bottke: And, I started looking at it this way. I don't know that this situation, this issue my son is going through, isn't the sharpening that he needs for some amazing thing God's going to do in his life. I mean, what if Paul's mother would've not let him walk the road to Damascus and said, "No Saul, you're not going there. I'm walking it for you." I mean, I don't know. My son may have this amazing life that God's got planned for him. Who am I to keep stopping it? And that's what I was doing.

Dr. James Dobson: And Allison, you're absolutely right. I'm absolutely convinced that it's true.

Allison Bottke: But there's a but coming there.

Dr. James Dobson: The but is you've got a 16-year-old who's on cocaine. And you love that child so much. Letting him go and get into all this trouble is very, very difficult.

Allison Bottke: It is very difficult. And there's something different though with the 16-year-old. They're still a minor. I am dealing with the adult children. It's a different thing legally in our country. The 16-year-old-

Dr. James Dobson: But even there, you bail him out over, and over, and over again, he's not going to learn the lessons.

Allison Bottke: ... Exactly. Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we're out of time for today, Allison. I want to start right here next time by asking you to walk people through these steps. You say there's six steps to hope

and healing, and let's hear what they are. Very practical approaches to getting out of this trap of giving and enabling somebody that you love.

Allison Bottke: Amen.

Roger Marsh: How grateful we are to have parents like Allison Bottke who have done the heavy lifting for us with regard to finding help in your relationship with your troubled adult child. And today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, she's been in studio with us to share with Dr. Dobson about *Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children*. That was a book that she wrote in 2018 after her son Chris had made some poor choices and wound up behind bars. Now, after that book was released, she followed up with another resource for parents called *How to Connect With Your Troubled Adult Children: Effective Strategies for Families in Pain*.

We have both of those resources available for you in our resource center. Go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and find out information on how you can get those resources online. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. In addition, you can also contact our resource center by calling 877-732-6825, and a member of our constituent care team will be happy to pray with and for you, hear your story if you're dealing with a situation with a troubled adult child. Also help you get connected to resources like either of Allison Bottke's books on this subject. Or, you can also get a copy of the audio CD featuring both part one and part two of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Allison Bottke on the issue of how to connect with your troubled adult children.

Again, you can call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And be sure to check out the Dobson Digital Library while you're online with us at drjamesdobson.org. You can search through thousands, literally thousands of files, resources, books, articles, blogs, videos, radio broadcasts, and more, all based on certain subjects that are easy to search. And then, you can go ahead and pull up whatever your specific issue is. We have thousands of resources literally to help you there. The Dobson Digital Library is accessible when you go to drjamesdobson.org. Now, one of the primary reasons why we're able to present the ministry resources to you that we do and make so many of them available without cost is because of your prayers and faithful financial support here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Now, as we approach a very special day in our ministry history, it's coming up right after Thanksgiving, I want you to be praying for how you might participate with us in an annual event called Giving Tuesday. Every year around the Thanksgiving holiday, of course, Thanksgiving is the final Thursday in November, and then of course, there's what they call Black Friday in the sales world, where people hit the retail stores or online retailers and take advantage of tremendous deals and bargains. Local business or small business Saturday happens. And then, of course, on the Monday afterwards, it's Cyber Monday.

On Giving Tuesday this year, Tuesday, December 3rd, we will have a special matching grant in place and every dollar that you give on Tuesday, December 3rd will be doubled up to \$100,000. So a \$100 donation becomes a \$200 donation on Giving Tuesday. A \$200 donation becomes a \$400 donation and I suppose if you gave \$100,000 that would wipe out the match all in one click or one phone call, but you get the idea. Giving Tuesday is a golden opportunity for you to stand with us, to partner with us financially in a special way in a special one day only match, dollar for dollar up to \$100,000. Remember you can give your gift online when you go to drjamesdobson.org. It's completely secure when you go to drjamesdobson.org. You can also call a member of our constituent care team. The number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Or write to us. You can send your tax-deductible donation for Giving Tuesday through the mail to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. And remember in the memo part in the bottom of your check write "For Giving Tuesday" and that way you'll participate in the day dollar for dollar match. Well thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow right here for the conclusion of our powerful conversation with Allison Bottke discussing finding help for troubled children and parenting your adult children well during those troubling seasons. Now for Dr. James Dobson, his wife, Shirley, and all of us here at the JDFI, I'm Roger Marsh, thanks for listening. 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.