



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. Dobson: The Untold Stories – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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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 by the way, this week we are celebrating Dr. Dobson's birthday and we've got a special opportunity for you to take advantage of some outstanding resources to honor this occasion. I'll tell you about that coming up at the end of the broadcast.

You know we are so glad that you've tuned in today because we do have something truly special in store for you on this broadcast of Family Talk. You know, for decades you've heard Dr. James Dobson interview fascinating guests here on the program. But on today's program and the next edition of Family Talk, we're going to be turning the tables and I'm going to be stepping in as co-host to interview Dr. Dobson himself. Well you may have been listening to Dr. Dobson for several years, or perhaps you've read many of his books. But there's still so much about his personal journey that you may not know. On today's edition of Family Talk, he'll share stories from his early life, including how he met and courted his lovely wife, Shirley. He'll also share some memorable rookie mistakes that he made in their marriage and he'll be reflecting on becoming a parent as well. Now I know you'll not want to miss a minute of these captivating stories as Dr. Dobson opens up about his personal life in ways he rarely has before. So let's jump right in to my conversation with Dr. James Dobson on today's edition of Family Talk. Dr., are you ready to get started?

Dr. James Dobson: Are you sure you want to do this?

Roger Marsh: Well, you've invited me here. I'm wandering into this territory very, very carefully, Dr. Dobson. I'm grateful to be here, but I know that there are listeners who are wondering all sorts of questions about your childhood, about your courtship with Shirley. All sorts of different things. So if I may, Dr. Dobson, are you game? Do you want to go for this?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I think it's a good idea. We'll see if people really want to know these things.

Well, I met you before and I enjoy interacting with you. We went to lunch together and the conversation never lagged, so it's going to be fun working back and forth. Thank you for being here.

Roger Marsh: Thank you for having me here. Okay, let's get the ball rolling here with the most important question that everybody wants to know. Let's put the books aside. Let's put the video series aside. Let's put the radio show aside. Let's talk about your beloved Shirley. Now, you two have a fascinating story about how you met, because in this day and age, we think, well, people can meet from different states or different regions because of social media, but when you two met, it was a different story. Talk about that.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we met in college, but the interesting thing is how unlikely it was that we would ever know each other, because I grew up in East Texas and my father was a pastor of a Church of the Nazarene church. I found the Lord there when I was four years of age and I grew up in the faith and knowing who the Lord was, and I think had a pretty good grasp of how He felt about me, that He loved me. I had wonderful parents. And Shirley grew up in Torrance, California, in a Nazarene church. Her father was an alcoholic and they had a lot of trouble in their family, a lot of difficulty, and it wound up being a divorce. And when Shirley was about six years of age, on a Sunday morning, she stepped out in the aisle and walked down and knelt at an altar and she found the Lord. Now, here I am 1500 miles away. How is the Lord going to bring this couple together?

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: They seem ideally suited for each other. Well, it happened because we both went to Pasadena College, which was a school, college, a wonderful school in Pasadena, California. And I was ahead of her, so I was a senior in college, a big man on campus, and Shirley was a sophomore, and we were sitting in the cafeteria. And you know those situations where you looked over to your left and you see a pretty girl, and then you look away and then you look back to see if she's looking at you, and then you look back at her and it goes back and forth. That happened for about 20 minutes. We were catching each other's eye. We did not speak on that day, but a little bit later, several days later, we had finished the evening meal in that cafeteria and we were out on the campus, a beautiful green campus, and Shirley was standing with a bunch of other students. And I walked up to her and I had wanted to get acquainted with her after having seen her. She was such a pretty little girl.

Roger Marsh: Well and especially after 20 minutes of playing eye contact with each other. I think there was some interest.

Dr. James Dobson: It was the right time. And so I walked up to her, and this is really clever. I mean, this is clever.

Roger Marsh: Okay, I'm taking notes now.

Dr. James Dobson: I took a nickel out of my pocket and I said, "I want to bet you a hamburger that I can flip this nickel and I can call it heads or tails." She said, "You got it." So I flipped the nickel into the air and it came down, and I called it heads and it was heads. So now, she owes me a hamburger. Now, you see how clever this was?

Roger Marsh: So romantic.

Dr. James Dobson: If I lose, then I get a date with her to buy her a hamburger. If I win, she buys me one. I win both ways.

Roger Marsh: I'm taking notes here.

Dr. James Dobson: And I won, and if you know Shirley, it's typical of her to say, "Oh, no. We're going to go double or nothing." So I said, "Okay, we'll flip it again." I flipped it and I won again. And she said, "Double or nothing." I flipped it again and now I have four hamburgers, and she says, "We're going to keep flipping." She was going to flip until she got what she expected.

Roger Marsh: It wasn't a two-headed coin, was it?

Dr. James Dobson: It wasn't, but she thought it was.

Roger Marsh: I'm sure.

Dr. James Dobson: So we flipped that thing, and I promise you, I won 16 times.

Roger Marsh: Not that anyone's counting.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm not kidding. It was 32 hamburgers that she owed me and she's been frying them ever since, so that was our first real conversation.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my. Then how did the courtship develop from there? I mean, obviously, you started off on the food note.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, you can't go very far on that. I played a lot of tennis in those days and I was often on the tennis court in tennis shorts, and in those days, shorts were short.

Roger Marsh: Actual shorts.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. And so there was a couple of courts right in the center of the campus, and so I was down there getting ready to play tennis and Shirley came walking by with another guy. And she walked up to me, and I promise, she didn't say hello or anything. She just said, "Hi, legs." And she shocked me, the little flirt, and she had seen me in these shorts. And I figured later, I thought about that, anybody who likes my legs can't be all bad.

Roger Marsh: Very true.

Dr. James Dobson: So that was the beginning of the relationship and it wasn't very long before I called and asked her for a date, and Roger, we had an absolutely storybook romance in college.

Roger Marsh: That's wonderful to hear.

Dr. James Dobson: We laughed, we had so much fun together. It was a natural connection. I just fell in love with her.

Roger Marsh: What a wonderful testimony.

Dr. James Dobson: So I teasingly say, I think it's going to work.

Roger Marsh: Now, did you come up with something creative to ask her for her hand in marriage?

Dr. James Dobson: You know what? They didn't do that much then. Now, they plan all kinds of special things.

Roger Marsh: It's a television show, yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. We just started talking about it and it seemed like the right thing to do. And so we were married in August, 27th, 1960, and good things have happened.

Roger Marsh: If you're just tuning in, you're listening to a conversation with Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk. My name is Roger Marsh, and I am actually sitting in the host's chair today. Dr. Dobson, for all the times that you have been interviewing so many people, it's nice to be able to put you on the hot seat a little bit and give our listeners a chance to get to know you a little bit better, and you and Shirley. Now, people have looked to you for marriage advice for years of course, and they've read your books and they've benefited from it. We've heard about the courtship. How were those first few years of marriage for Jim and Shirley?

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, they were wonderful. Again, I don't want to sound like Pollyanna or something, but we just had so much fun right from the beginning. I did make some bad mistakes however.

Roger Marsh: Rookie mistakes as a new husband?

Dr. James Dobson: Rookie, absolute rookie mistakes. One of them is that I didn't fully understand that Shirley is a profoundly romantic human being. Many guys just don't get that we're made differently, and we were married in August and Valentine's Day came along very quickly, and I didn't even think Valentine's Day was anything important.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my. I can hear all the men just breathing hard.

Dr. James Dobson: I wasn't thinking about it at all, and in fact, I was at USC graduate school at that time. And so on that day, I went over to the library on the campus of USC and I was in the stacks. Have you ever gone into the stacks? It's where you get lost in there, those musty, smelly books back there, and I was working on a thesis and I lost all track of time. About seven o'clock at night, I went over to the little cafeteria on campus and I ate, came back, worked some more, and by this time, it was about 9:30.

Roger Marsh: On Valentine's Day?

Dr. James Dobson: On Valentine's Day.

Roger Marsh: Your first Valentine's Day?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I didn't call. I didn't think it was any big deal.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no.

Dr. James Dobson: And so I went out and got in my little Volkswagen and I drove toward home, but on the way to our little condo, I passed my parents' house.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no. I already know where this is going.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, no is right. I went in to see my parents and my mother had baked an apple pie. I dearly love apple pie and so we sat and talked a while. Now, it's about 10:30 at night.

Roger Marsh: On your Valentine's Day.

Dr. James Dobson: Valentine's. First Valentine's Day. I get in the car and I drive over to Arcadia, California, where we lived in this little two room apartment. I put the key in the lock and I open the door and it's all dark, and through the darkness, I see a big sign that Shirley had made that said, "Happy Valentine's Day."

Roger Marsh: Oh, my.

Dr. James Dobson: And I said, "Oh, no." Then I looked over on the table and there was a coagulated meal and there were candles there that had melted and bent over, and what was left of a dinner that she had made for that occasion was sitting there, not eaten, and she was nowhere to be found.

Roger Marsh: I was going to say, what did you do?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I panicked. I mean, it never occurred to me that that was a special day, and I opened the bedroom door and I looked in there and Shirley was in bed and the covers were right about at her ear level. You ever had that happen?

Roger Marsh: I have. I have, and all the men are nodding saying, "I know that look, I know that look."

Dr. James Dobson: And she didn't say a word. I said, "Shirley, I'm sorry. I forgot." And Shirley is a forgiving lady and she did forgive me, but I learned a lesson that day, that romantic things matter to her and she sees that very differently than I did, and I needed to get with the program. But I want to tell you something. I didn't learn the lesson well enough, and about three or four years later, we were able to buy a little house. It was very small. It had obviously no furniture in it.

Roger Marsh: A little starter home.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, a little starter house. We put \$4,000 down. We sweated blood to get \$4,000.

Roger Marsh: That was a big amount back then.

Dr. James Dobson: Right. And we paid \$31,900 for the house. Believe it or not, that was possible in those days, and Shirley's birthday came along. And we didn't have any furniture. We had a table that we had bought which we ate on and a couple of chairs, and that was about it.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Furthermore, in the backyard, there was nothing. There was not any lawn furniture or anything, so I thought, here we are. We bought this house. What a romantic thing. A young couple buys their first house. And I thought it would really be fun to buy something for the backyard, so I went down to a store where you buy that kind of stuff and I bought a redwood table.

Roger Marsh: Like a picnic table?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, a picnic table with crisscross legs, and with little help, was able to put it upside down on my Volkswagen.

Roger Marsh: On your Bug.

Dr. James Dobson: And I tied it on there.

Roger Marsh: That would've been fun to see.

Dr. James Dobson: I looked like I was in a flying saucer going down the freeway with this thing, and I couldn't wait to share it with Shirley. And I drove down our little street and

then into the driveway, and I opened the back door, and I said, "Shirley." She says, "Yes?" I said, "Come out and see something." I had bought her a birthday gift. She came out and she took one look at that Volkswagen and that redwood table, and she broke into tears.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no. And they were not tears of joy.

Dr. James Dobson: They were not. Oh, it was not great excitement. She goes back in the house, didn't say a word, and I stood there in the driveway saying, "Now, what did I do wrong here?"

Roger Marsh: I remembered your birthday.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen. Doesn't that make sense to a guy, that we could have breakfast out there in the backyard on that redwood table and we could have friends over, and it would start the collection of lawn furniture? It made all kinds of sense to me, but it wounded Shirley because there was no romantic element to it, and I began to get the picture. And before long, I realized, Shirley needs things that are frilly, she wants things that smell good, and she wants things that express love to her from my heart, and a redwood table didn't get it done.

Roger Marsh: Well, even if you put doilies on it or something? Maybe some flowers.

Dr. James Dobson: Believe me, it wasn't even in the neighborhood. I was telling that story when I was speaking one time, and this woman came up to me afterwards and she said, "You think your wife had it bad? My husband gave me a wheelbarrow for my birthday." So there is a lesson there for guys. Women care about romantic things. It's what you write on the card and it's how you approach your wife, that she has some needs you don't know about and you need to figure them out.

Roger Marsh: See, I knew there was that kind of story behind a lot of your parenting advice, a lot of your marriage advice. That these are tried and true. Learning from the school of hard knocks in addition to your advanced education too, Dr. Dobson, because it is so encouraging for me as a guy to know, James Dobson had a Valentine's blowup and a birthday disaster and that type of thing too. It just, it really-

Dr. James Dobson: Hey, Roger, who would've told me that? Where should I have learned that? I should have observed it? We went together for three years before we were married. I should have gotten that figured out, but many guys don't. I'm not alone in this.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. Well, you were 25 years before Gary Chapman writing *The Five Love Languages*. I mean, big help he was.

Dr. James Dobson: I hadn't read his book.

Roger Marsh: Right. Because he probably was watching guys like us too, saying, "Picnic table on top of the car. I'm putting that in the book."

Dr. James Dobson: But Shirley and I began to understand each other. There were things that she needed to understand about me as well.

Roger Marsh: Does she have a story? Not to put you on the spot on her behalf, but does she have a similar experience?

Dr. James Dobson: I'll let her tell it to you.

Roger Marsh: Okay, fair enough. Fair enough. Then see that you have learned. You've learned very, very well. On this special edition of Family Talk with Dr. James Dobson, I'm Roger Marsh, and we're talking with Dr. Dobson just about his legacy and giving you an opportunity to hear from him some of the stories that have shaped who he is, his family stories, and I know too your relationship with your children is really, really precious to you and special to you. What was it like for you and Shirley when you found out you were going to be parents? How did that change your family?

Dr. James Dobson: It was a wonderful experience. I don't think there's been anything in my life that has given me a greater reward or a sense of fulfillment than bringing those little children into the world, and bringing them up to serve the Lord and their fellow men and trying to teach values and character to them. You and I were talking before about my field being child development, and so what I was learning in graduate school about children, about boys and girls and about the developmental process, I was seeing with my own children. And I remember when Ryan was about three years of age just watching him grow. The same for his sister, seeing them develop and how quickly it occurred. There is a mantle of humanness that descends. Of course, they are human even long before birth because they're created in the image of God, but you're seeing the character, you're seeing the personality develop, and you're seeing them grow and learn and love, and that is a wonderful process to observe.

I mentioned that I would go away to speak and I'd be gone for even three days, and when I would come back, for a period not more than one or two seconds, I could see that my kids had changed since I was gone.

Roger Marsh: Just in that first moment you walked through the door.

Dr. James Dobson: But I couldn't keep it. Three or four minutes later, I couldn't quite remember what it was, but something was happening. Those kids were growing and learning, and the whole thing was a laboratory for me.

Roger Marsh: I could tell in your countenance how you change when you talked about Ryan being three and seeing those incremental changes, or Danae being in her younger years too. And what struck me just in this moment is the fact that I'm

thinking, "Okay, this is Dr. James Dobson, Reagan White House, Dinah Shore television shows, Pete Maravich." I had this really just quick blast of all the famous luminaries that you are in friendship with and have been with over the years, and yet what lights you up is watching your children grow and become the man and woman that they've become.

Dr. James Dobson: There's no question about it, especially the responsibility that you have to introduce them to Christ, and watching the spiritual aspect of that relationship. There's nothing more important than that, and it's a tough job too because you make a lot of mistakes along the way. I don't care who you are and I don't care how many books you've written. You still are learning as you go along and you make some mistakes there too.

Roger Marsh: Well, you've got more than 30 books to your credit, and for you to make that kind of admission I think gives us all a bit of pause, gives us a little bit of comfort in knowing that it's something that we get on the job training for, because like you said, where were these people when we were younger to teach us and say, "Hey, when your daughter hits seven, she's going to need this from her dad?"

Dr. James Dobson: You know, Roger, I fear that sometimes, those of us who advise parents and who write books for parents make the other mistake, giving the implication that all of you folks out there don't get it but we do. The truth of the matter is none of us is perfect, not one of us, and we do need to pay attention to the process of being a good husband or father and letting other people know that we're in this thing together.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, it has been a pleasure. Thank you for the invitation to come here and turn the tables on you, so to speak. You've been a great guest. You're an excellent host but you're an excellent guest too. Thank you for what you've shared with our Family Talk listeners today here on the program.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you, Roger. I really enjoyed working with you.

Roger Marsh: Well that feeling is certainly mutual, Dr. Dobson. The past decade has literally flown by and I certainly hope that friend, you've enjoyed the stories you heard today from our own Dr. James Dobson here on this special edition of Family Talk and believe me, we've barely even scratched the surface on the material that we have to discuss with you so be sure to join us again next time to hear more about the many twists and turns in Dr. Dobson's life that have led him to become the man he is today. Now if you'd like to hear today's program once again or to share it with a friend, you can access that audio on the Family Talk app or go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Well I mentioned at the start of the program that we are celebrating Dr. Dobson's birthday all week long basically here at the ministry and to honor this occasion, we're offering a comprehensive "Building a Family Legacy" bundle

available exclusively to you as a listener of Family Talk. Now this powerful collection features six of Dr. Dobson's most influential books and we're talking major league titles; *Bringing Up Boys*, *Bringing Up Girls*, *Your Legacy* and more. Several of these books even include bonus DVDs. These are trusted resources that provide biblical wisdom and practical strategies for strengthening your marriage, for raising godly children and establishing a Christ-centered home. Now we'll be happy to send you a copy of the "Building a Family Legacy" bundle as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. So call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or you can send your gift through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. Again that's Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk or JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well thanks so much for standing with us and protecting and nurturing families through your prayers and faithful financial support. And remember you can also give a gift online anytime, day or night, when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

Well I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening. Be sure to join me again next time for part two of the untold stories with Dr. James Dobson. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Roger Marsh: Here's today's Dr. Dobson Minute with Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: I read recently of a love-stuck man who began spending himself into bankruptcy in order to gain the attention of a young woman. He proposed to her on Christmas Day and she said no. So he set out to make her love him. He began by placing a lear jet on standby at a local airport. He sent 5,000 flowers along to her house. The problem was Karine didn't give a hoot about Keith, and she wasn't impressed by all those gifts either. You see what Keith was trying to buy wasn't for sale. He wanted her love and respect but the more he spent, the less she respected this strange man. Now there's a lesson here for all of us about the dynamics of romantic relationships. Love grows out of mutual respect and admiration. Those who lose their dignity in the quest for love usually wind up with neither.

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