



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Making Marriage Easier – Part 2

Guest(s): Arlene Pellicane

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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 back to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and today we're continuing our conversation with author Arlene Pellicane. She's a speaker, author as I mentioned and also host of the Happy Home podcast. By the way, if you missed part one of the conversation, remember you can always listen on the Family Talk app or by going to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

On today's Family Talk broadcast, Arlene will be opening about one of the most difficult seasons any couple could face and if you're ever heard Dr. Dobson talk about marriage and the seasons of marriage, you'll appreciate what we're about to get into on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Arlene Pellicane has written a book called *Making Marriage Easier*, but one of the most difficult chapters she had to write in this book centers on the loss of a child. Arlene will share how God sustained her and her husband, James, through the heartbreak of losing their daughter at only 26 weeks and how that tragedy ultimately brought them closer together rather than tearing them apart. It's a powerful testimony of God's faithfulness in the midst of profound grief. Now on our last edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, Arlene Pellicane shared powerful insights from her book, *Making Marriage Easier*, where she challenges us to flip the script if you will on the common belief that marriage has to be hard work. She introduced us to four key decisions that can transform any marriage.

They are, number one: play by the rules; number two: give thanks everyday; number three: serve your spouse; and number four, take fun seriously. She shared her own journey from being the girl who dreamed of marriage to discovering how to create lasting joy in her relationship with her husband, James. So whether you're a newlywed just starting out or maybe you've been married for decades, today's conversation will give you practical tools and biblical wisdom for helping to make your marriage do more than just survive but to truly thrive. Now let's rejoin our conversation with Arlene Pellicane on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Arlene Pellicane is the author of the brand-new book called *Making Marriage Easier: How to Love (and Like) Your Spouse for Life* and we're about to get into part two of this conversation. Arlene, welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk today.

Arlene Pellicane: So wonderful to be back with you.

Roger Marsh: And you have a chapter in your new book, *Making Marriage Easier*, that's titled Roses and Thorns. And I'd love for you to unpack, if you would, about what that season was like for you, with James, because every couple has a season like that. But for yours, it was really tough. You had kind of alluded to this earlier in our conversation.

Arlene Pellicane: Yes. You know, we had a hard time having kids. We had one child, Ethan, so it was so exciting. I was pregnant with baby number two. We were so excited. It was the day before Thanksgiving. You know, we were going to the ultrasound. The in-laws were in town. It was fantastic. But the ultrasound technician was so quiet. And even we made fun of her afterwards, because she was so gruff. She's like, "Sit here. Be here. Okay, wait here." And we're just like, wow, she's really grumpy. And then she was like, "It's a girl." And we're like, "Okay." So we're kind of making fun of her in our minds like, wow, she should get a new job. But later that day, my doctor called and said, you know, they're not allowed to say in that room, but there's something really wrong with your baby. So we kind of understood then and we went back to the doctor who said, we want you to come back the same day so you can know. So the day before Thanksgiving, we found out she had all these chromosomal defects. They thought her heart would stop beating within days and gave us that bad news. And I can tell you that the Lord had already, that morning, the devotion was trust in the Lord with all your heart. And I honestly felt like the Lord saying very clearly like this is exactly what you need to do today.

So when we heard that news, it was like undergirded with this just I felt like held like trust me trust me trust me. So we went through that pregnancy and we prayed like God either heal this baby, take this baby home, or help us to have a baby with special needs and know what to do. That was our prayer and so we kept going to the altar we kept praying. And so the days went by the weeks went by so that was Thanksgiving and they said she would die and Christmas came and I was still pregnant and was like, "Wow, what's happening?" But between Christmas and New Years, we lost that little girl. We went into an appointment and they told her, told us that the heart was no longer beating. And so at 26 weeks, we lost that little girl. And it was a very difficult time. And I will tell you, Roger, God's grace is so good. And it is the difficult times where God draws nearer to you. He draws near to the brokenhearted, the Scripture tells us. So when I went to deliver that baby, 'cause it's like, oh man, delivery is hard enough when you get a baby that's alive and then now you're going to deliver a baby and the baby's not alive.

So going, I was supposed to be induced and God did it because instead of being induced, I started going into labor on my own. So it kind of like was like, it just went faster than it was supposed to go, which I felt like was God's grace, and then in this huge San Diego hospital, the nurse walked in and it was the exact same nurse who had delivered my son, Ethan, and we had exchanged emails and had exchanged pictures of Ethan, you know, afterwards. So we had that kind of relationship. And when she walked in, I thought, my goodness, out of this huge all women's hospital, that this woman, Megan, was assigned to my floor, my shift, my room, told me God sees me and knows me and the thing that taught us in marriage was when you go through something together that's difficult, right? It can divide because it can make you angry at God, it can make you angry at each other. But you look at situations and you think wait a minute this this happened we have a shared experience so instead of it dividing you, you come together You say, "Lord, we both need your help." You grieve differently; you're on a different timeline. One of you might be more over it than the other one of you, and so be patient with each other to be like understanding toward one another. But James was very hopeful and said, "I know God's gonna give us another girl." And I just thought, "I just want a baby. "I don't care if it's a boy or a girl." And the day, literally, Roger, that she would have been born, her due date, I took a pregnancy test and we were pregnant again. And then that baby came the following Christmas and her name is Noelle.

And she is at in college right now at Oral Roberts University. So we often say like if the Lord had not taken that little girl, Angel Rose, to Heaven at that time, we would not have our Noelle. And a lot of it is the sovereignty of God, trusting God, and I also love to think and hope that even if we hadn't have had Noelle afterwards, that we could still say with Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. To trust in God's sovereignty." But He will carry you through the difficult times. He will... if you press into Him, you know, you can shake that fist in anger to God, and He's fine with that. Read the Psalms. He doesn't, He's okay with that lamentation, but eventually that fist will turn into this open hand like Lord, I release it. I surrender, fill me and I promise in a marriage, as you do that together and maybe the other one, isn't where you are, but you're the one pressing into God, keep pressing into God, keep praying that your spouse will someday also press into God and those problems will bring you closer together.

Roger Marsh: That is such a powerful story. You know, what a great encouragement to someone who's gone through this right now. We know there are people who are listening to this dialogue, whether they're the parents who are experiencing this or for we grandparents who have adult children who've had to walk down that road and how difficult it is. And yet, it does have that kind of galvanizing effect, doesn't it, Arlene?

Arlene Pellicane: Yes, it does.

Roger Marsh: But it's a decision, though. And it's hard because in your emotions, I'm sure there may have been a time where you were highly emotional, he was highly

emotional and you looked at him the wrong way and said, "Doggonit," and you had that temptation. What did you do purposely or what did he do purposely to say, "Hey, let's regroup on this. Let's make sure that we don't wind up getting into circular firing swat with each other because we're raw right now."

Arlene Pellicane: Yeah. I think it's sharing the same space together, like not isolating one another. So for us, it was we will go to, we'll keep going to church. We'll keep the same schedule. We're not going to be like, "Hey, we're hurting. We're going to kind of hunker down in our own house kind of thing in our own corners." But hey, it's Wednesday, we're going to go to church. It's Sunday, we're going to go to church. And what it does is that means twice a week, you're moving outside of your house. You're in a car together. You're with other believers. So that kind of just making yourself continue to do those kinds of things, I think that really helped us. So us being in the same space, not isolating from each other, continuing to talk, and then, you know, being gracious with one another, right? And asking one another, are you okay? Not just thinking of your own pain, but thinking like, hey, how are you doing today? All those kinds of things helped. And when you are irritated and you snap at each other, just as quickly as you can, get to the point where you can say, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you. It's not you that I'm mad at."

Roger Marsh: Right, right. And that's, that's so key. Arlene Pellicane's book is called *Making Marriage Easier*. Simpler and easier, but easier is the title. *How to Love (and Like) Your Spouse for Life*. Whether you're going through a difficult season right now, whether it's all, you know, sunshine and roses, whether or not you've been married a short period of time or a longer period of time, and especially as we're getting into kind of what we used to traditionally call the marriage season, this is a great resource for young couples who are just starting out or maybe couples who've been 25, 30, 40 years into it who could use a tune-up. Arlene, one of the things you talk about in this book, of course, we touched on this earlier, is I love how you said, you know, be serious about having fun, I believe. I think it was Jim Burns used to say, have serious fun.

Arlene Pellicane: Totally. That's right. I love Jim Burns.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, fun's a serious, it's a serious aspect of it. Talk about why it's important to do this, because especially for the couple like you've got two in college, you'll be empty nesters soon. And all of a sudden you begin to realize, like, I love the illustration you have of the fact that a lot of times the marriage gets put in the trunk of a car and the family's cruising around on kid mode for so many years. Then by the time you open it up and it's dusty and there's cobwebs and you're like, what's even in here? You know, I mean, fun's a good way to kind of make sure that you don't lose track of that, isn't it?

Arlene Pellicane: Yeah, something my husband, and I give 100 % credit to him, is he had this idea like, I don't want to just watch my kids do stuff. I want to do stuff with them. So I don't want to just spectate at their things. I want to do things with them. And what it did was it brought us into the fun. So for instance, when we did martial

arts, I'm sure there are a lot of listeners who have brought their kids to karate. But my husband did something very strange as he came home and he's like; I found this blue dragon martial arts and if we enroll our three kids in the class, we as the adults can be free. So it's enroll three, get two free.

Roger Marsh: And that spoke to your heart of being frugal and saying, Hey, why not. Sure. That's good for him, James. Good for you.

Arlene Pellicane: We're so frugal. So I was like, let's do it. So there'd be all these kids in these little shirts and us two adults. And the first time we did this, and like we're doing jujitsu, and James has his legs around my head, like a triangle, I am like, I am out of here. Like this is ridiculous. Or they like showcase, "Miss Arlene, come showcase your roundhouse kick." You know, I'm like tap, like I can't even touch my toes. I can't do anything. So it was so funny, but what it did we honestly did this for like four years of our kid's life in elementary school Like three times a week, we would all pile into the van with these t-shirts and do this blue dragon and it made our house so funny and it made the marriage funny because my husband and I would be in the sparring gear and you got this big dot on your chest and I told him the first time like don't even touch me and he's like that's what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to hit you. So we have so many funny memories of doing that. So whatever it is you're doing in your ordinary life, is there a way to make it more fun? Is there something funny?

It's usually out of your comfort zone. Like we play ultimate frisbee can look up what it is. It's kind of like, it's not frisbee golf. It's you're running around. It's kind of like soccer with a frisbee. We started doing this on Sunday afternoons during COVID and we still do it Sunday afternoons as, you know, as families, as community and it's funny. Like it really is funny. And it's come believe me; this is completely out of my comfort zone. I'm not a sporty kind of person. So if I can do it, anyone can do it. But it is this idea of what are we going to do that breaks us out of, "Hey, we just work and we watch Netflix and we sit down." Like what is there in our life that can be fun, fun that we can learn. It can be active; it doesn't have to be. It might be chess, it might be shopping for a certain antique you guys are hunting for, whatever, it might be a cooking class. But what are the things you can do to have fun and schedule them in as a family that everyone's having fun together and also as a couple things that you can do together that you both enjoy?

Roger Marsh: I think that's wonderful. I was thinking about that the other day. My wife and I, the second marriage for both of us and we have moved into the season now where we bought our first home together, which was kind of nice. It was the first new home for either one of us, because we didn't necessarily have a lot in our first marriages. And as we moved forward, I used to spend a lot of time growing up in Whittier, California at my grandmother's house, and she had this beautiful backyard, and I used to tend to her garden and all this stuff. And she'd pay me 25 cents or whatever the going rate was back in the '60s But I kind of had a green thumb and my wife doesn't, but she loves plants and stuff. And we've discovered that the garden, I mean, every night after work, we both work

at home, we go in the backyard, we look around, we look at the different blooms and everything. And at first, I'm like, okay, great, we have to do this. I'm gonna go ahead and take one for the team because this is really not my love language.

But I began to realize, well, first of all, it is because I kind of do really like it. But secondly, it fills Lisa up like crazy, just to sit there and we literally look at potential blooms on flowers, you know, it's the thing, if they're gonna come up. But it's amazing how when you start doing that, that's fun for us and it's a release for us and you get out of that whole, yeah, we worked all day and now we're gonna pop something on television and reheat last night's dinner and that's the end of the day and before long 10 years goes by. And you don't know what happened.

Arlene Pellicane: And you didn't watch the blooms. You know, and there's a big long list in *Making Marriage Easier*, a very long list of all different activities that you and your spouse can look through, and I'm sure you can find maybe three out of this huge list of things that you could potentially do together, right, and try together. So it's such a good thing because you do need those core pursuits and hobbies that continue so you can do things together even when the kids are grown. What can you say now as a woman who's experienced in 25 years of marriage, raising a growing number of children, and in that almost empty nest season, for the young couple that's coming up now, maybe listeners here who have a child, an adult child is going to get married this year, and they're thinking about some good advice, and they don't want to hear it from mom and dad, but they'll hear it from Arlene and James Pellicane. What are some of the key takeaways that a book like this can help a younger couple who's just starting out with.

Arlene Pellicane: Yeah, remember to have fun again. I know that's where we just were, but like really get back to that because when you are having fun together, everything is easier. The money is easier. Physical intimacy is easier. Changes, hard transitions are easier. So have the kind of connection where you're having fun. How do we do that? Well, we have meaningful conversations again. So we get better at listening. We get better at not just listening so we can talk, but listening so that we can actually try to understand you, to be curious again. But all that that having fun treating one another, not all the time, if we treated each other how we were dating all the time. We'd probably not get anything done right because we're just staring at each other like "oh, what are you doing now? I want to be with you." Yeah, so we get it. But just once, in a while you grab a hand, you put your arm around your spouse, you go out for a nice dinner that you don't normally do. Like those things that you used to do, keep doing them, keep considering one another, plan that trip. So save that money, plan that trip, make those memories. When you plan a trip, you enjoy it three times. You enjoy the anticipation of planning the trip. You enjoy the trip itself, and then you enjoy the memory dividend afterwards. So really maybe instead of getting that new couch, getting that new stereo, whatever, that new shiny, shiny thing you want to get, be like, "You know what? What we have is enough. Let's have an experience together." Because those experiences, you'll relish that more than

that new thing that you had and you enjoyed it maybe for two weeks, but then you kind of got used to that you had it. So invest in your spouse that way and really look, how can we have fun together again?

Roger Marsh:

I like the way you amortize that vacation. I thought it was just wonderful because all of a sudden now, if you had to spend a few thousand dollars to put that thing together, but you could really get to experience it three times. So it just got the cost by a third. I mean, thank you, Arlene, that makes it easier for people like me to say, yeah, we should go on that vacation. Let's give it a shot.

We're getting close to the end of our time together here. And I know you have a story about when you first got signed to write your first book and you wanted to have an ice cream party. That's why I mentioned this early. And I would love to hear you share this because this is the kind of thing that if you're not, I'm not a party person at all. And I was totally team James on this one. So I mean, not taking nothing away from you. But I'm listening going, "What? What's the problem here? But will you please share that?" Because I think it's a great example of all these things kind of, it's a confluence of all these four principles.

Arlene Pellicane:

Yes. You know, husbands and wives, we celebrate different, we respond different, you get your expectations crushed, all these things, so, I had my first book contract, Roger, I was so excited, the year was probably like 2008, somewhere around there, and I'm like, wow, I'm gonna be published as an author, let's celebrate, but instead of saying like, let's go out to a nice dinner, I said, why don't you go to the grocery store and get two gallons of ice cream.

Roger Marsh:

Not one, but two.

Arlene Pellicane:

Not one, but two, exactly. So it was like, this is big, right? So I just told him, just make sure one of them is chocolate, has chocolate. So he leaves with Ethan's five, Noel's three, they leave. They come back with a bag; they open up the bag. The first one is like butter pecan. I'm like, okay, that's nice, whatever. And then the second one was cookies and cream. And I'm like, is that chocolate? I don't think that's chocolate. Like it has a chocolate cookie in it, but it's not chocolate ice cream. So I am so mad because I'm thinking it is my book we are celebrating. All I did was ask you to get ice cream. Like that wasn't that difficult. And I am like four months pregnant. So I'm just like, I cannot believe you did not bring me the chocolate.

Roger Marsh:

You had one job, one job.

Arlene Pellicane:

So this is what we wives, we husbands were thinking you had one job, right? and you screwed it up. So whether it's ice cream, whatever it is in your life, right, you're thinking, "I cannot believe you couldn't just do this." So I am starting to steam, I'm eating the ice cream, I am, everyone's happy but me, because everyone's excited, they're eating two kinds of ice cream, and I'm just like, oh my goodness, and my son Ethan, he's five, he goes, "Mom, you say we should always be grateful for what we are served, but you don't look very

grateful.” That's parenthood right there, is that your kids call you on what you've been trying to instill in them, and I'm like, you're right, Ethan, from the mouth of babes. “You're right, Ethan, I am ungrateful, and I'm mad about this, but I should be thankful, and I'm thankful for this ice cream.” I started eating that cookies and cream with a smile on my face, but it was the principle, the decision of I will give thanks.

Like the sooner I can turn around, it's one of the decisions in *Making Marriage Easier*, the sooner I can turn around whatever I am in and say thank you God and maybe I can't say thank you for the ice cream, but I could say thank you God for my son who notices and understood that we should be grateful. Like you're searching for things to give thanks for and if you can make your heart search for things to be thankful for say “God of the universe, I know there are many things that I ought to be thankful for and I can be thankful for. Show them to me today in my marriage” and just pray that prayer and keep a journal and start writing down what you're thankful for your spouse and you will see that ice cream thing, it'll go away and you'll be thankful once again.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, you'll remember. Yeah, I guess that was a chocolate cookie. So maybe I can slide a little bit but no, that's such a perfect illustration, and what a great resource that we've been discussing today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Arlene Pellicane, the book is called *Making Marriage Easier: How to Love (and Like) Your Spouse for Life*, and we've got a link for it up at drjamesdobson.org. Arlene, it's always a pleasure, but especially this time, so good to see you again and spend time with you talking about this book. Thank you for the great ministry that you have and for sharing with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Arlene Pellicane: Thank you, Roger, and thank you, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: Well marriage isn't always easy, but as Arlene Pellicane has shown for us today on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, it doesn't have to be as hard as we sometimes make it either. With God's help and the right perspective, we really can find joy in the journey. You've been listening to a special edition of Dr. Dobson's Family Talk featuring my conversation with author Arlene Pellicane. Her honest stories and practical wisdom really resonated with so many of our listeners on day one, and we encourage you to catch two part conversation at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You'll also find them on the Family Talk app. And be sure to check on Arlene's book called *Making Marriage Easier* as well and you'll find a link for her Happy Home podcast on our website as well for more encouragement on building a joy-filled family life.

You know, conversations like the one we heard today is exactly why the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute exists. Every day we hear from couples who are struggling. Right now, you have an extraordinary opportunity to multiply your impact on other families all across the nation. Through our June matching grant, several generous ministry partners have committed to match every donation

that we receive this month dollar for dollar. That means when you make a \$50 donation, it becomes \$100. When you give a \$200 dollar donation, that becomes \$400. \$1000 becomes \$2,000, \$10,000 becomes \$20,000, you get the idea. Your generosity will be doubled to help twice as many marriages find healing, twice as many parents discover biblical wisdom, and twice as many families experience the transforming power of God's love. Now to have your gift matched and then doubled, you can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. You can also call our constituent care team toll-free at 877-732-6825. And remember when you support Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk with a gift of any amount, we'll be happy to send you Dr. Dobson's powerful book called *Your Legacy* along with the companion DVD.

In this deeply personal resource, Dr. Dobson shares his own family's spiritual heritage and provides practical strategies for passing on your faith to the next generation. You'll discover how to lead your children to Christ, how to build loving relationships that last, and how to create family traditions that reinforce biblical values. Now the companion DVD features a thought-provoking documentary that will challenge you to consider what kind of spiritual legacy you're leaving behind for your children and your grandchildren. Together these resources will equip you to be intentional about the most important investment you'll ever make and that is investing into the faith of your children and grandchildren. Now to request these special resources, the book, *Your Legacy*, and the companion DVD, go to drjamesdobson.org today or give us a call at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

You know we still hear from a lot of people who love to send a card or a letter to Dr. Dobson using the U.S. Mail. And utilizing our ministry mailing address also gives you an opportunity to make a secure donation in support of the ministry of Family Talk as well. You can send your tax-deductible donation to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

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Well I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again right here 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.