



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Chaplains in the Workplace

Guest(s): Gil Stricklin

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's program we're bringing you a classic conversation that captures a truly innovative approach to ministry. And of course that was the hallmark of Dr. James Dobson's life and legacy that continues on to this day here through the James Dobson Family Institute. Our guest today here on Family Talk is Gil Stricklin, founder of Marketplace Ministries. After serving 22 years as an army chaplain, Gil pioneered a remarkable concept, the idea of bringing a chaplain to care directly to those in the workplace. What began in 1984 with just one company in Dallas, Texas, has now grown into the largest workplace chaplaincy program in America. To date, there are over 2200 chaplains serving 1.4 million employees and their families all across the nation. And today, as we close out the broadcast year for 2025, we want to reflect upon this great conversation that Dr. Dobson had with his good friend Gil Stricklin about the importance of chaplains in the workplace. Now of course, Dr. Dobson went home to be with the Lord earlier this summer. Gil Stricklin passed away in 2023, but both of their legacies continue through the ministries that reach people who might never walk through a church door, ours through broadcast and media and gills, through a workplace chaplaincy. And by the way, today is the final day you can take advantage of a special opportunity to have your gift to support the James Dobson Family Institute doubled. I'll have more on that at the close of today's program, but right now let's listen in as Dr. James Dobson explores the concept of workplace chaplaincy and this great mission field with his friend Gil Stricklin on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson.: We have as our guest, my good friend Gil Stricklin, who is the founder and the president and CEO of Marketplace Ministries, and it's just a pleasure to have him come by and be with us today. We had dinner with him not too long ago and he also was very kind to invite Shirley and me to Dallas where their ministry is located and to give me an award called the Integrity Award for Integrity in Family. That meant a lot to me, Gil. I'm really glad to have you here.

Gil Stricklin: Thank you, Dr. Dobson. It's certainly nice to be with you. You're one of my favorite people and we admire you greatly and we feel that we have a common mission to try to help families.

Dr. James Dobson: You had been in the military for how long?

Gil Stricklin: Dr. Dobson, I was a commissioned officer for 37 years, but I was served in the army as an army chaplain for 22 of those years. And so really this was the idea of where the ministry came from was through the Army Chaplain's Corps.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright, so you retired from the military and the Lord had a plan there and He laid it on your heart to start Marketplace Ministries and I think many of our listeners may not know about it even though it has touched millions of people to this point.

Gil Stricklin: Well, we're a well-kept secret. That's exactly right. And I did complete a career in the Army and then just moved the concept of military chaplaincy over to corporate America. And so today of course what we do is provide a chaplain service to secular businesses as their employee care program. And so we do what your minister would do for you or someone's priest or their pastor, but we do it for the great percentage of the American workers today that do not go to church, that do not have a pastor.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright, now let me see if I get it straight now. You will contract with a person who has ministerial training or counseling training or some expertise and then you make an arrangement with a business to place that chaplain in the business and then that person does what?

Gil Stricklin: Well, really the individual is our employee. So today we have 1,719 chaplains spread across 36 states in the United States. Those chaplains were represented in 452 cities. Those chaplains are employees, but we've got 900 of them who are pastors. They're actually serving a congregation and then on a part-time basis as our employee, they're going into companies and what they do for their parishioners at church, they do it for employees outside the church and people that don't believe anything or maybe don't know what they believe and yet they're still people that God loves and they're valuable to God and God wants to have fellowship with Him.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, what would motivate a CEO to make an arrangement with you to put such a person in his or her organization? How would you pitch him?

Gil Stricklin: Well, the spirit's got to pitch him to do this, but any man who is a Christian, any man who's a CEO and understands theology realizes that Ezekiel 34 tells him that he is to be a shepherd to his sheep. And so consequently what we do is simply help a CEO fulfill his responsibilities. If he's a believer, he has a theological responsibility simply to reach out to his employees, to care for them, to love them, to value them, to help them. And when life knocks 'em down, there's somebody there to pick them up and encourage them and love them and help them along the way.

Dr. James Dobson: Gil, where'd you get this idea? This is unique as far as I know. I don't know anything else quite like it. Where'd it come from?

Gil Stricklin: Well, of course it came from the army. The Army's had chaplains for 236 years. The first chaplain in the continental army was a Baptist from New York City, a man by the name of John Gato. He was Washington's chaplain. And so from that course of the beginning of our nation all the way through history, there's been sporadic times where there've been chaplains in the workplace, even as far back as the 1800s in Charleston, South Carolina and then early in the forties with some of the companies over in that part of the country. But there's been a new revival or a new emphasis, a new interest in chaplaincy today in America, and we're adding about one new company every week somewhere across the United States, and these are not all large companies, they're privately owned companies, mothers and dads operations. Our smallest company has 10 employees. Our largest company has 42,000 employees and right now we've got 300 chaplains assigned to that company and we'll soon have another 100 down in Mexico and Puerto Rico, so we'll have 400 chaplains caring for their 42,000 employees as well as their family members.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you find the chaplains?

Gil Stricklin: Dr. Dobson, we get about 50 applications a week off our websites, but we also have personal relationships and built network relationships with every major evangelical denomination in the United States, just all the major denominations. So we have 79 denominations on our staff. The best way we get people is really from our own staff referencing us to somebody else that they can be recommended to become a board with us as a chaplain, when first start out say would never hire anybody and have a master's degree, well that's kind of dumb, but we look for people who have had business experience. It's very important that they know what sweat is, they know what blisters are, they know how people suffer out there in the workplace and they know what people go through at work. Both the leader of the company as the CEO and the integrity issues he faces and then the workers out there at the bottom level that what they all struggle with. We want people that know what work is and then we want people who have had a ministry experience.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Gil Stricklin: We would not hire anybody that did not have at least two years of full-time ministry experience to come on our staff. And then on the average, our staff, they've known Christ for an average of 30 years and they've had experience, ministry experience for 22 years, so we've got a lot of good wonderful people out there doing ministry and doing it and without the concerns of legal issues or anything else.

Dr. James Dobson: What a wonderful concept. That's why I wanted to have you here today because it just is a much needed function or role in today's culture. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about that while you're talking. One of the first things that

happened in 1977 when we began on 34 stations once a week was this avalanche of mail with every kind of pain in it that you can imagine. We were a two person office at that time and it just begun having been a professor and this was all new to me and how do you meet all those needs? I started hiring people and training people for how you respond to these questions. I tried to provide prototype letters that could be sent because so many of the questions were similar. By the mid-80s, we were getting a hundred thousand letters and phone calls per month and the letters and the questions asked and the things said have changed over time.

At that time it was mostly how to advice with regard to families. Then more recently we see possible schizophrenia, manic depression. We see teenagers on drugs, we see their parents not knowing how to deal with 'em. We see a much higher incidents of divorce. We see just about everything you can think of that can go wrong, and so we think we can see evidence of the unraveling of the social order. You can see that the pressure on families is greater, that the problems that they deal with are greater and it's a lot more difficult to be able to provide what's needed because you just can't solve those kinds of problems in a phone call and a quick answer. So you have to make a greater investment in people. Tell me what you have seen in that 20 years. You also see the problems getting greater?

Gil Stricklin:

Oh, absolutely. Dr. Dobson and the number one problem is family and marriage and child rearing. That's number one. Recently, a man by the name of Tim Emery. Tim Emery owns the largest franchise of American Lube Fast oil changing centers in the southeast. He has nearly 700 employees. Tim and Kay are just wonderful, godly good people. He's a Catholic layman. Went on a mission trip, came back and realized that he was in full-time Christian ministry as a Christian businessman and so he reached out and the Lord brought us together down in one of his facilities outside of Atlanta. A chaplain went by to see his guys there. They usually have five to 10 employees in each of those centers and when they're changing oil and they're busy, well the chaplain steps into the front office there where the people are waiting for their cars and just introduces himself, gives everybody a card and says, if we can ever help you, let us know. We're the chaplains for American Lube Fast with Tim Emery. And so he did that one day and a chaplain by the name Watson Swope and Watson met this lady, handed her his card, said that and the lady said, well, I've never heard anything like that in my life. And our chaplain said, "Well, that's what we do with Mr. Emery's Company. We have 65 chaplains assigned to this company." And she said, "Well, does that mean you pray for people that have problems?" And the chaplain said, "Absolutely, we sure do." And the lady looked at him and started weeping, said, "Well, I have a problem. She said, my son's at home today. He's dropped out of college. He's on pot and on drugs. We don't know what to do to help him. My husband is not interested in helping with the problem and I need some help."

And the chaplain said, "Well, what is your name and where do you live and what's your son's name?" He wrote this down. He said, "I'm going out to your

house right now. I want to meet your son.” He goes out and gets in his car while this lady's waiting in her car and she says, “I'll be there in a few minutes.” He goes out there, rings the doorbell, this kid comes to the door who he had never seen before. He introduced himself as a chaplain of American Lube Fast where his mother's getting her oil changed and he just wanted to come out here to meet this young guy and ask him I could help him. Long story short, our chaplain got him in a rehab facility that was paid for by the county because they did not have any money to pay \$150 to three to \$500 a day to go to a center like that. So they got him into a center. This young boy has gotten off the drugs, the chaplains introduced him to Christ, he's gotten into a church, his family's gotten into a church and he has gotten back into college and that's just one story of millions of stories like that.

Dr. James Dobson: Gil, this being radio people can't see you and me and they can't focus in on your eyes and what happened while you were telling that story. You've got big tears in your eyes. That obviously matters a great deal to you. This is the passion that drives your work after 20 years to reach out to people like that.

Gil Stricklin: Well, Dr. Dobson, you and I both know there's a lot of hurt out there. There's a lot of people out there that are just left to die. I want to tell you something. If we don't have people to go where they are, to minister to them, to care for them, to love them, they will never come to Christ and they'll never have their needs met.

Dr. James Dobson: That woman that you told us about who met the chaplain probably would not the next Sunday morning, gone to a church or sought out the help of a pastor or a counselor. Probably wouldn't have. Why?

Gil Stricklin: Today only 45% of the Americans ever go to church on Sunday and that's the least it's been except for maybe one or two years in the past. I think that organized religion today, it does not appeal to everybody. I'm involved in my church, I tithe to my church, I work in my church. We lead a nearly wed seminar in our church, but a lot of people don't go to church, but they're not atheists, they're not even agnostics. They're not mad at God, they just don't think they have a need or time to go to church. But there's still an emptiness in their heart. They still have problems. They don't leave those problems at home when they go to work, they take 'em to work with 'em and that negatively impacts work. And so it's a great business decision to have chaplains at work just for business decision, which I could list a half a dozen of those.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, explain that. It is to the CEO's advantage to have help for families, isn't it?

Gil Stricklin: Absolutely, absolutely. And of course we're talking about having chaplains, but any kind of help because we take care of not only their the employee, but we take their employees, family members and for instance, this gentleman I just mentioned, Tim Emery, he was speaking, we spoke at Yale Divinity School and this man was up telling about it and he said, let me tell you the good reasons what's happened in my company since I put our chaplains program in place. He

said, we are a very profitable company. It's lowered our turnover rate in the time that we've had our chaplains there, it's gone from 1805 to 125%. He says, that saves me thousands, thousands of dollars and in the months we've had our chaplains program, the stealing has gone from 2.5% to 1%. He said, that saves us nearly \$300,000 a year of merchandise going out the back door at somebody's stealing because we have chaplains coming into our organization. He said, "What It's really done for us." He said, "I think a lot that's happened goes back to the whole change and the heart and the soul of my company."

Dr. James Dobson: What is the arrangement between A CEO and your organization? Does he pay you?

Gil Stricklin: That's correct. We contract the service to his employees and we volunteer the service free at no charge to the family members. So consequently, we have a one year contract with a 90 day out clause. We don't have any long-term lifetime, no cut contracts. They can let us go if they want to, but we have kept 76% of our contracts since 1984.

Dr. James Dobson: But they do pay you for it?

Gil Stricklin: They do. They do pay us a fee for each. If their employees, we pay the fee. We volunteer the free service for each of their family members. That's correct. Our budget this year is about \$9 million.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's a 501c3.

Gil Stricklin: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a nonprofit organization.

Gil Stricklin: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Are you able to meet the demand?

Gil Stricklin: Right now, we've got eight companies waiting for us to start and we will not start those companies until we get the right people. We can find the right people anywhere God leads us to be. We found them in 452 cities. We believe that there'll be more. Every place God opens the door; He's going to provide people there.

Dr. James Dobson: I bet you there's going to be some more today.

I'm sure there'll be some people out there. I think of retired military chaplains, people who are out there who are saying, what's next, Lord?

Gil Stricklin: We don't hire anybody that wants to retire. We do hire people that want to look for a second career. I know what you mean.

Dr. James Dobson: But retired means after 20 years sometimes. I know what some of 'em are only 38 years old by that time.

Gil Stricklin: And I'm just joking with the fact that we don't hire retired people. We don't hire anybody that wants to retire because that means you want to stay up and go fishing. We do hire people that look for a second career.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you don't do anything but fish, do you? You got this so well organized, you just don't have to sweat it anymore. Hey man, speaking of that, you are still a CEO and the chairman and the president and all sorts says a lot of pressure on you, isn't it?

Gil Stricklin: I laugh and say I keep somebody else from doing that, but this morning I was up, awake at 5:30, excited about being with you today and kind of like a kid at Christmastime, but it's that way. Most mornings I love to get out of bed. I love to before I get up to pray and let the bed be an altar and dedicate my life to God that day and ask Him, let self die, just whatever He wants to do that day and then putting my feet in my house shoes, go shower, shave and go see what God's going to do. It's really exciting.

Dr. James Dobson: More than anything else, Gil, what pleases you about what's happened the last 20 years?

Gil Stricklin: Well, Dr. Dobson, that's very, very simple. First of all, that God has been glorified and second of all that there's been more than 40,000 people that have come into the kingdom because of the witness of a chaplain. There was a young man named Michael Fitz down in Montgomery, Alabama that worked for Mr. Emory. He was 28 years old and he didn't come to work one day and they called, no answer at the house. They let that day go. The next day they called again. He didn't show up, and so they called the chaplain and asked him if he'd go out this man's mobile home and see if they could find out if he was there where he was. So they went, the chaplain went out there and knocked on the door, nobody came to the door. He called the police. The police came. They broke the door down and found this 28-year-old young man had died with an aneurysm there in his mobile home. 28 years old and died.

The eight guys at the American Lube Fast place were devastated. Here, their fellow worker, 28 years old, you don't think people 28-year-old is going to die. And yet the one day he was there, the next day he was gone. That made a profound impact on those lives of those people. The chaplain went down there, they had a memorial service there. He met with those guys individually, one-on-one, visited with 'em, talked to 'em, and I want you to know that five of those men, young men. Their average age in there is about 20 years of age. Five of those men came to know Christ because of the witness and the love and the kindness and seeking just to reach out and put your arm around somebody that's got an empty heart and a guy that's 18 and his buddy's 28, dies. You think, what's going on? Maybe I'm going to die, and so where am I going? Is there

something after this life? Is there more than just a few years here? And so chaplains answer those questions and they get a chance to help a lot of people.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, who am I? Why am I here? Who put me here? Is there life after death? Am I going to be held accountable for the way I live? People don't have answers to those questions today. They certainly don't get it in the public schools where they're told that we're sort of a chemical accident that we resulted from mindless evolution. There's no meaning in that. There's no purpose. You don't know why you're here and you guys are in a position to provide that and the bottom line is Jesus Christ. It's the same for our ministry. We're attempting to hold families together. We're doing everything we can to strengthen marriage and parenting by the traditional understandings. We are reaching out to people. We're caring for people much like you are, but ultimately, we want them to know the Creator of families. We want 'em to know Jesus Christ. Gil, we're almost out of time. I've got to ask you this. Suppose that you come and you talk to me about the possibility of cooperating together and I'm not a Christian and I'm not even a person of faith, but I see the need for something for my employees. They're going through divorces and it's really not good for my business to see what's going on, and I just want to know a few things about you and your chaplain. I want to know how are you going to handle it?

Gil Stricklin: Well, Dr. Dobson that was asked a lot is still asked some today, but since we've been doing this for 22 years and has never had a legal problem about our program. No company's been sued because of us and we've never been sued because of anything any of our chaplains did. So we have logged 1.6 million paid service hours to secular businesses without a problem and without a legal issue. We've been looked at by the EEOC, the ACLU, legal law firms across the country have looked at... It's an all-volunteer program. They don't have to use us. We don't go in there and turn the church into a business. My faith is not to be used to religiously harass you. I'm not going to hurt you in any way. I'm going to help you. Bringing our favorite four letter words to the workplace is what we do best. And those words are not words that you normally hear in the workplace, but they're the words of care and help and hope and love, and that's what it's all about.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you bring your chaplains together for training?

Gil Stricklin: We do by regions, Doctor. We have continuous education every month. We have staff meetings all the way down to groups of five to 10 chaplains and then the United States broken into seven regions. We have 40 divisions and they're regional managers, divisional managers, team leaders, and area coordinators over every chaplain. So there's always continuing education.

Dr. James Dobson: You're still having a lot of fun with it, aren't you?

Gil Stricklin: Well, we certainly are, and God's still doing a great work.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for what you're doing and give my love in regards to Ann, your wife, and to your entire staff, and I appreciate your sharing your ministry with our listeners. I know that there will be people who will want to participate or there will be CEOs who would like to have a chaplain in their organization and how can they do that? Just very quickly, give us the website.

Gil Stricklin: www.marketplaceministries.com. So we'd love to hear from 'em. Just love to send them some materials and even if they just want to pray for us, we'd be deeply appreciative of that as well. And you've been gracious to let us be here today and you have helped and encourage a lot of other ministries, and I believe God's going to make your reward greater even for that.

Dr. James Dobson: Come see us again, Gil.

Gil Stricklin: I'd love to. Thanks a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay.

Gil Stricklin: God bless.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright.

Roger Marsh: There are millions of Americans who will never set foot in a church over the next 12 months, but as Gil Stricklin has reminded us on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we can meet people where they are in the workplace, in the marketplace, right in the middle of their everyday lives. On today's edition of Family Talk, we revisited a classic conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his friend Gil Stricklin. If you'd like to hear this program again, of course, you can find the audio at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And keep in mind today is December 31st. We are just hours away from the deadline of the Dr. James Dobson Memorial Matching Grant. This historic matching opportunity up to \$6 million honors Dr. Dobson's legacy and supports the only organization he entrusted to carry out his work and to expand it to new generations and geographies. Every donation you give today will be matched dollar for dollar, but only up until midnight tonight.

Your support fuels the mission. Dr. Dobson championed strengthening marriages, protecting parental rights, defending religious freedom, advocating for the sanctity of life, and most importantly, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know how many times Dr. Dobson shared with me that all of our media, all of our ministry, had to first and foremost lead people to the Lord. So whatever amount God leads you to donate, remember, it will be double an impact. But today is the deadline. So to make your year-end gift count twice, you can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org, or take advantage of our brand new website, jdfi.net. That's James Dobson Family Institute, jdfi.net. You can also call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if you'd prefer to write to us, address

your envelope and make sure it's postmarked by midnight tonight. Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. Well, I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today and happy New Year. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust, for the family you love.

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and Happy New Year.