



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Wake Up Your Faith– Part 1

Guest(s): Jen Lilley

Air Date: July 8, 2026

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

Roger Marsh: As Christians, we know that the goodness of God is all around us. He meets us on the mountaintop. He guides us through the valley. The Lord performs miracle after miracle and shows up in our lives at just the right moment. But as time goes on, our faith can sometimes become stagnant and we can grow a little bit complacent, just going through the motions. Well, on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, our guest to the program is Jen Lilley. And Jen is a very, very gifted author. She's an actress. She's an artist. I call her an advocate, too, because she's a parent and the mother of four. And she has written a brand-new resource to encourage readers to leave behind complacency and to pursue bold, courageous faith in Christ instead.

Before we dive in a little bit, let me introduce Jen Lilley to you as our Family Talk listening audience. Award-winning actress, as I mentioned, singer and producer, as well as philanthropist. You have seen her in various movies on the *Hallmark Channel*, *Great American Family Channel*. She will portray Gloria Stewart in the upcoming biopic called *Jimmy*, and we all know who that's about. That's set for release later this year. But most of all, Jen Lilley has a deep passion for the Lord and His Word and growing deeper with Him every day. She just released a devotional not too long ago called *Wake Up Your Faith: 365 Daily Encounters with Jesus*, and that will be the topic of a lot of our conversation for today. Jen Lilley, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're so grateful to have you on the program and especially I know Dr. Dobson would have loved to just give you a hug and say, "Jen, I'm so proud of you for the work that you're doing." So welcome to our broadcast today.

Jen Lilley: Thank you so much for having me on. It's just very humbling to be on the show. Of course, I grew up listening to Dr. Dobson. I'm just so honored to be here.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, that's really moving for you. I mean, he had that impact on people. And I know that when we were younger, I was in college when my mom and dad introduced me to Dr. Dobson. And my mom's a public school teacher. And she taught at a local elementary school where they brought in his film series. And she said, you really ought to come by and see it. And I remember driving by the school, it was a weeknight. They were showing it in the school library. And I

couldn't get in because it was packed. I mean, there were people streaming out into the hallways. And it was just, I thought, who is this James Dobson guy? But the more I grew in my faith, the more I began to realize my parents are listening to him and reading his books, and they are basically, Doctor's parenting me too. So from generation, as obviously I've got a few more laps around the sun than do you, the generation to generation to generation model is just, it's so huge, Jen. And to see where you have, where God's taken you, but to know that Dr. Dobson played a part in that, it's very gratifying for us.

Jen Lilley: It is. Yeah, good.

Roger Marsh: Well, how did it happen for you, though, to become, first we'll talk about your faith, but then also your career, because it's not the easiest thing in the world to say, I'm going to be, and for you to be a singer and an actress and a producer and everything that you've done. Talk about your life growing up. What was it like besides the fact that your parents made you listen to Dr. James Dobson on the radio? What was it like for you growing up in your home?

Jen Lilley: Not just on the radio. I actually also had to listen to all of his adolescence tapes about... we had to have the adult talk. My parents subjected me to like three days of that with my mom. No, I grew up in a great house. My parents are still married and that's never lost on me what a gift that is. They've celebrated over 40 years of marriage and I'm just so grateful. So I had a typically healthy childhood. And I say that as a child advocate because I know that there are so many children who do not have healthy households. So I don't want to say typical, but if it was a healthy household, I had a typical healthy household. Two parents, great neighborhood. I had a really an idyllic childhood for the most part. And I grew up Catholic till the age of nine. Not that Catholics are not Christian, but I remember specifically being a young child and being very analytical and just not believing in the Lord. I mean, I remember my parents prayed every night. I went to Catholic school. I knew all about Jesus and His 12 disciples and Moses, but I just wasn't sure about it. And when I was nine, my parents visited an Episcopalian church for various reasons. They had to church shop. It's so amazing to me because as a nine-year-old, and I hope this encourages anybody who teaches Sunday school because, you know, our Sunday school teachers, they miss out on the service, but I want them to know that the impact that they have on kids is so profound.

My entire life changed because of one Sunday school lesson. I visited an Episcopalian church, went back to the Sunday school class, and they taught on Elijah and the widow with the oil and the flour. Now, that's a really amazing story found in 1 Kings, but it's not the coolest story of Elijah. I mean, if people are familiar with Elijah, he also called down fire from Heaven. He prayed so vigilantly that the Lord sent a drought to where he lived. So anyway, I hear the story of Elijah and the widow where they have just enough flour and just enough oil every day to survive this famine that Elijah has taken part in calling down. I remember being nine years old, sitting in that Sunday school class, and being completely bewildered and befuddled because I was like, hang on a

second. I know Jesus and his 12 disciples can do miracles. And I know there's a guy named Moses who had a staff and did some crazy miracles through the power of God. Who is this guy in 1 Kings? And so what happened was I ended up going home, pulling out my First Communion Bible, which is a New King James Version Bible, which is not an easy read, honestly, especially for a nine-year-old. And I remember reading the story of Elijah. And of course, as I get to Elijah and the 300 prophets of Baal, and he does call down fire, and I'm like, what? What else does this book say? So I ended up taking a yellow Crayola crayon, because I'm nine, and sneaking down into my parents' basement. And that summer from turning nine to 10, I read the entire Bible cover to cover. I mean, I'm talking like, I would read it like eight hours a day. I have distinct memories of one of my neighbors, Erin Tainer. She was like, do you want to ride bikes? And I said, I can't. I'm in Leviticus. So I really fell in love with the Lord the summer that I turned 10, so turning nine to 10. And I was really on fire for the Lord ever since then. I garnered the nickname that people thought that they were hating me, but Jesus says, if you're persecuted for my name's sake, consider it an honor. And I really took that seriously. I was called Jen for Jesus, but I evangelized my entire fourth grade class, fifth grade class. I mean, I just was an evangelist from that get-go. And then I... I mean, when I was in high school, I experienced a lot of church drama.

To be clear, the church is actually the body of Christ. The body of Christ did not hurt me. A couple of individuals did, but the hurt was really deep.

Roger Marsh: Who attended that church, but not necessarily were part of the body of Christ.

Jen Lilley: Yeah, who attended a different church than the one I got saved in. But I just, after years of a lot of deep-seated torment. My family left the church. I mean, it was the whole church split. It was that nasty church drama that a lot of people have experienced. And at the same time, I want the listeners to know, and I want you to know that Jesus was not the one who hurt me. I knew that throughout the entire church hurt experience. That's what I think makes church hurt so hard, and I write about it in my devotional is that church hurts the deepest because there's a knowing of you should know better. If you really love Jesus, how could you do this? Versus when the world hurts you, it's much easier to view them through a lens of Heaven because you're like, you know what? They're lost. They don't know Jesus. They don't have the Holy Spirit. So I walked away from the church for a while and tried church again in college. I was like, all right, I'm distanced enough. And then my Bible study leader in college sexually assaulted me, and so I left the church again. But I could never outrun Jesus because my parents prayed. I did, again, I loved the Bible. I loved Jesus so much. I led so many people to the Lord. But I just was like, I don't know where to go from here, Lord. And started dating my now husband and really dove back into the Word. My relationship with the Lord deepened, and then I found acting.

Roger Marsh: Jen Lilley is our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and we're getting into a conversation about why she's written this new devotional called *Wake Up Your Faith: 365 Daily Encounters with Jesus*. A journey of spiritual

renewal and divine purpose, which we've got linked up at drjamesdobson.org. The reason I find that so interesting is that you had this passion for faith first, and what fourth grader wants to read Leviticus, or the whole Bible through, or Elijah, come on, that was you. But then to go through church hurt the way you described it, which was people at the church who were hurting other people, not the church itself hurting you. And then to go through the assault that you went through. But in the middle of all that, God leads you into something that is really unpredictable, highly artistic. Having grown up as a theater kid myself, because my dad's work and everything, I know that this is not so... Usually by the time of life where you're having the experience that you did, you're thinking, I want to be a school teacher. I want to be an accountant. I want to have something that's got some tangibility. And you're going into the great wide open, what was it about acting, drama, that type of thing that you felt God leading you to?

Jen Lilley:

I don't fully know. It's kind of multifaceted. I remember I was stage fright growing up, so I didn't do theater. I tried it, but it was stage fright and kind of just was like, this isn't for me. But I always loved storytelling and I love people so much. And I think that's what made Church hurt hard was I couldn't understand. I couldn't understand the behavior. I couldn't understand how we could follow the Bible and go to your brother if they've offended you, then bring a friend, then following all that and still just stonewalling. Why is this not getting better? Why can we not get to the bottom of these problems? So I basically went to an open call audition for an independent film. And I got on set and I realized that I wasn't afraid of the camera. And I absolutely loved everybody that was involved. I felt that, you know, even the hair and makeup person and, you know, whoever was doing costumes, the director, the lighters, you know, the gaffers who do the lighting, the editors, everybody that was kind of on set was very intelligent, loved storytelling, was very hardworking.

Films and television, it's really not easy. People think it's really glamorous, but it's a profession where you get rejected for a living. You have no consistency. And you have to really be the top of your game in order to make it no matter what field you're in, whether it's hair and makeup. I mean, you have to kind of be the best of the best. So it's very, it's just very intricate. And so these people are very smart and hardworking and they love storytelling. And I really realized that none of them were watching me, so I didn't have performance anxiety about it. The camera just felt kind of like a friend. And so I started praying about it, and I really felt the Holy Spirit. And when I say I hear the Holy Spirit, if anybody's listening and they don't know the Holy Spirit yet, God can speak in various ways. We see that through the Bible. And the Bible should always be the lens in which you view everything and verify everything. It should be our plumb line. God speaks many ways. He can speak through dreams. He can speak with an audible voice like He did to Samuel. However, when you say or when I say that I'm hearing from the Holy Spirit, it's probably what people most commonly refer to, which is almost like this voice in your head, like when we have thoughts. So it's not like a booming voice, but it's outside of your normal thoughts.

Now, you can have this, I want to clarify really quick. You can have three different kinds of thoughts. You can have thoughts that are your own, that come from your own flesh, and that are just your own thoughts. You need to take those captive and make them obedient to Christ is what the Bible says. You can have thoughts from the Holy Spirit, which can seem very counterintuitive. And 1 John says that you need to test the spirits because Satan himself comes as an angel of light. So sometimes things that can sound good are not actually God, which is why you need to know Scripture, because you need to run it through a discerning test and figure out, is this actually the Holy Spirit? And then there's also the enemy, the adversary, Satan, the demonic. They can also plant thoughts. And again, you have to take those thoughts captive. So I believe when you have suicidal thoughts, that's not a thought from the Lord. It's usually going to be a thought that's demonic and you need to take it captive. You need to make it obedient to the Lord and understand that you were created on purpose and for a purpose for this exact moment in time.

So when I say I hear the Holy Spirit, I mean, it's a thought that I had that was so outside of myself that then I can pray into and that voice will continue talking to me and it is not me talking.

Roger Marsh:

I love that.

Jen Lilley:

So the Holy Spirit told me that He was calling me into acting. So I started studying everything there was to know about film acting because I knew I didn't want to do theater because I, well, I love it. I love to watch it. It's terrifying to me. And so I studied film acting and called up my husband who was then my boyfriend and said, hey, you know, we've only been dating so long. We were friends for so many years. I really feel the Holy Spirit wants me to go into acting. So I think I'm going to move to L.A. after college because we were from Virginia and West Virginia respectively. And I said, so, you know, if you don't want to move to L.A., I totally understand that. Maybe we should break up now before we get in too deep. Because when you date, two Christians dating, you are dating with the intention of possibly getting married.

Roger Marsh:

Absolutely, absolutely.

Jen Lilley:

And so I was like, I would rather just break up now and try to see if we can regain our friendship and not make it so awkward. And my husband was like, well. If it was really the Lord and we're supposed to be together, then we'll do that. So we moved to L.A. and I worked really, really hard. I don't want to make it sound like it was easy. It was a career of rejection.

Roger Marsh:

Is he in the industry too?

Jen Lilley:

No, he's sane.

Roger Marsh:

He's the grounding in the family there, right?

Jen Lilley: He is. Oh, absolutely. I always describe my husband's like, you know, to drive a car, you have the gas pedal and you have the brake. And that's what makes a good couple is to be balanced. He's the emergency brake and I'm like pedal to the metal at all times. So, you know, I'm not easily bridled. The man is a saint.

Roger Marsh: I love that. That's great. So you guys, you took this huge leap of faith, not only for your career, but also for your family and your relationship as well. And that seems to be a kind of a recurring theme for you, Jen Lilley. I mean, I think what I realized while I was reading through your book. *Wake Up Your Faith* is not something that you set out to say, okay, now it's time for me to do a devotional. I mean, can you help us understand what the process was for doing this? Because you're doing these *Hallmark* and *Great American Family* movies, and you're really engaged in so many different causes, if you will. I mean, purposeful activities. And then all of a sudden, here comes a devotional. What was the impetus for that?

Jen Lilley: Before I tell you the impetus for that, I will say that while all of this was going on, kind of with the church hurt, I also suffered from a 15-year eating disorder.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my.

Jen Lilley: Yeah, I was bulimic for 15 years. I was trying on anorexia for maybe two years. That was not a good fit for me. And I just thought I would never get out of that prison. And the Lord set me free from that. And that's something we can for sure talk about. I'm really open to talking about it. But when He set me free from that, and I wanted to be free from the get-go, I just couldn't. I mean, addiction is a really interesting thing. Sin is a really interesting thing because it's fun for a season. And the Bible talks all about that. It's fun for a season, but it very quickly gets a grip on you. And when you're in a pattern of addiction, no matter what it is, there's just as much addiction to pornography in the church as there is outside of the church, for example.

Roger Marsh: Sadly.

Jen Lilley: People feel like they can never get out of it. And I started listening to a lot of John Bevere. I love John Bevere. And he started talking about...I was listening to him talk about how he has struggled with a pornography addiction early on in his marriage to Lisa, and he's very transparent about it. And he said, "You know, 'people would tell me, 'just throw away your dirty magazines, throw away your tapes, John.'" And he was like, "You don't understand. It's here. It's in my mind. I can play these things at any time." And when he said that, I thought the same way about bulimia. People would be like, "Well, just stop throwing up." And it's like, it's not that easy, actually, because I have to eat to live. My body does not know how to digest food anymore. Also, I have had many things in my life where I have felt completely out of control, and then I chose a profession where Holy Spirit led me into a profession where I have zero control.

People give actors so much more control than they think we have. We are at everybody else's mercy. This is a career where you're going to get rejected 99.9% of times, and you still have to keep trying, try your best, do things with excellence as unto the Lord, and keep going. But you've got to know you're being rejected, and you're being rejected sometimes for personal reasons, but it does feel personal. I mean, a lot of times it's political reasons or, you know, whatever it is. So I was set free because I listened to John Bevere and I started thinking, man, if John feels like he couldn't get out of it, and he did, and the Lord renewed his mind, then maybe, just maybe I could get out of it. And then I was sitting in this church service and my pastor, he said, "The best definition I could come up with for sin is trusting in anything more than you trust in God."

Roger Marsh:

Ooh.

Jen Lilley:

Oh, right? And that's actually Romans 14:23. The Bible actually says that. It's the last sentence of Romans 14:23. It says, anything that is not based on trust or anything that is not preceded by trust is sin. So in more simple layman's terms, again, the best definition of sin is trusting in anything more than you trust in God. And when I heard that, because I love the Lord so much, but every time I would go to somebody and say, "I have an eating disorder," my husband did not know. They would either reject me and walk away, have a terrible reaction, abandon me completely. Say, how can you be a Christian? You know, the worst response. Or they would give me the excuse of grace. "Jesus' blood covers that." Yes, Jesus' blood does cover that if I repent. But it actually says in the Bible, in Hebrews specifically, that if I keep on sinning, I actually nullify the sacrifice of Jesus. I continually crucify Him. I put Him on the cross daily.

And what I was not realizing until Jake Sweetman at Cathedral Church LA said, the best definition of sin is trusting in anything more than you trust in God. All of a sudden, it was literally like I saw, like I daydreamed this prison cell that I had been sitting in for 15 years. I wanted to get out of it. Roger, I went up for every altar call, but I wanted the Lord to give me a quick fix because God does still heal. There are many, many testimonies of addicts being sobered immediately, and the desire for their drug or alcohol, whatever their addiction is, goes away forever when the Holy Spirit moves. I believe God can do that. God did not do that with me, and I think that's because in His kindness and as His parenting, He knew that this was something that I had to walk out. So here I am, I'm sitting in a church. The best definition of sin is trusting in anything more than you trust in God. I am zealous for the Lord. I have been zealous for the Lord since I was nine, which is what's so confusing about the 15-year eating disorder. I knew my worth. But I also felt like I needed control. I felt like I couldn't get out of it. There was no hope for me. And I realized in that moment, here's all the lies I'm believing. I'm believing that God can heal other people, but He won't heal me. So He won't heal my metabolism and I've wrecked my metabolism. So there is no like going back body image wise. That's a lie. The Lord made our bodies so good. We have to put in the work to discipline our bodies to eat well. Cause I was definitely not eating well as a bulimic. That was like, I was a glutton. I was a glutton and a bulimic. That's what I was. I was trusting that by being skinny, I

could provide for myself, you know, stay skinny, be an actor, whatever. It's a control issue. I was not handing over control to the Lord, and my stomach and food was actually an idol because it was what I sought for comfort and control instead of casting my anxieties on the Lord, trusting that He could heal me.

Roger Marsh: This is a key point because there are parents who are listening to us right now who are concerned their kids might wander down this road, or maybe mom and dad are dealing with this. How long had you had...were you and Jason married before you had that come to Jesus moment where you had to say, you know what, sweetheart, I have an eating disorder? Because he didn't know and you were hiding it apparently so very, very well.

Jen Lilley: I will say. My parents, again, my parents were great parents. They did their best. I have four kids. Parenting seems impossible. So I do not put any fault on my parents. They did the very best that they could. And how can you ever know? Hindsight is 20/20. But for parents that are listening, if you're concerned that your daughter and even boys suffer with eating disorders, Part of what drove me into bulimia was my parents knew I was struggling with anorexia. So when I was trying to get better, I asked them for healthy food. I was like, I really want vegetables and grilled chicken because mentally I needed to know that the calories I were putting in was like healthy, high quality calories. It was like helped my mental struggle. The eating disorder was also brought on because I had all these issues. I had to be put on hormone therapy as a kid. I was packing on weight because of a medication. So I'm freaking out and just trying to control it. When I wanted to just have grilled chicken and vegetables, my parents took that as a red flag to she's suffering with an eating disorder again. And so they would not feed me healthy food. They were like, just get over it. Eat what we're eating. You eat with the family. So that's kind of how I got driven into bulimia because they weren't making healthy foods at home to kind of help me deal with the anxiety I was dealing with.

Roger Marsh: Well, Jen Lilley has been our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're just scratching the surface on her fascinating testimony and conversation about her new devotional book, *Wake Up Your Faith: 365 Daily Encounters with Jesus*. A journey of spiritual renewal and divine purpose, which is up at drjamesdobson.org. Jen, can you come back again next time when we continue this conversation?

Jen Lilley: Oh, absolutely. Anytime.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an honest and encouraging conversation today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. My guest has been actress, author, and mother, Jen Lilley. Her testimony reminds us that the Lord doesn't waste a single season of our lives, even the painful ones, and he never looks away from us when we are struggling. Amen to that. If you'd like to learn more about Jen Lilly's new devotional, it's called *Wake Up Your Faith: 365 Daily Encounters with Jesus*. You'll find it linked at jdfi.org. Be sure to join us again next time because Jen has

so much more to share of her story. We've also got the audio for part one of this conversation linked there as well.

You know, conversations like the one you heard today are made possible because listeners like you the mission of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And right now your support can go twice as far. Thanks to some generous friends of the ministry, we have a special July matching grant in effect. In honor of America's 250th anniversary, it's a \$250,000 match. Now that means that every gift you give to JDFI will be matched dollar for dollar up until we reach the deadline or July 31st, whichever comes first. As a listener supported ministry, we rely on friends just like you to keep these conversations on the air. So we invite you to take advantage of this opportunity to double your impact for families all across the country. You can make a secure donation at drjamesdobson.org. If it's easier, just go to jdfi.org. They are one in the same. You can also speak with a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or just use those initials, JDFI for short, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here as I'll continue my conversation with Jen Lilley about 365 ways to wake up your faith. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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