



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Kids Are Gone: Now What? – Part 2

Guest(s): David and Claudia Arp

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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: The following program is intended for mature audiences. Listener discretion is advised. Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and in just a moment, part two of Dr. Dobson's powerful conversation featuring David and Claudia Arp answering the question, the kids are gone, now what? The Arps, of course, are the founders of Marriage Alive International and they're the authors of the classic books like *10 Dates for Mates* and the book that we'll be discussing on today's program entitled *The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of Every Long-Term Marriage*. First, though, this reminder. We have a special free opportunity for you from our friends here at the JDFI. Of course, Dr. Dobson wrote a classic book many years ago called *Bringing Up Girls*, and with over a million copies of that book sold initially and even more sold over the years.

The biblical principles that you find in there for raising young girls, especially helping them navigate the preteen and teenage years has proven invaluable for literally millions of families. We have a free ten-day email series that we'd like to make available to you, and you can get your hands on it right away. Simply go to drjamesdobson.org and then click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page. Give us your name and email address and we'll be happy to send you this ten-day email series featuring powerful, timeless biblical principles that Dr. Dobson includes in the book, *Bringing Up Girls*, as well as information on how you can order a copy of that book as well. Again, for the ten-day free email series called "Bringing Up Girls," go to drjamesdobson.org or you can call our resource center at 877-732-6825. Now, it's interesting when you think about what happens once those daughters and sons of yours have been raised and moved out.

It's an opportunity for a couple to stay connected and actually grow stronger together during this new phase of life, but how does a marriage shift from child-focused to partner-focused? How does communication change when the children are grown and gone? How do you keep fun and friendship in your marriage relationship? Well, during the next half hour, David and Claudia Arp

are going to get into these issues and more, so let's get this conversation started. Here now to begin is our host, psychologist and bestselling author, Dr. James Dobson, on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We began this discussion last time talking about *The Second Half of Marriage*, your book. You made reference therein to eight problems faced by those at that time of life. Tell us what they are. List them for us, will you?

Claudia Arp: Okay. The eight challenges is that if couples can surmount these challenges, we believe they can build a successful, loving, growing second half marriage. The first challenge is to let go of past disappointments and forgive each other and make that commitment to making the rest...the commitment not only to permanence, but to growing in their relationship, that that's the starting place. If they can't get past forgiving each other and accepting each other as a package deal, they're not going to go much further. The second challenge is to create a marriage...

Dr. James Dobson: We'll see how well you know your own book here. You've reached for the book. What's the second?

Claudia Arp: Okay, the second is to create a marriage that is partner focused rather than child focused, to move past those years when you're just focusing on your children, let your adult children grow up, you need to let go and then reconnect with them on an adult level and then you need to refocus on each other.

David Arp: Well, let me pick it up there. Challenge number three is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, dreams, expectations to each other, but do it in a positive way.

Dr. James Dobson: You say in there that communication in the first half is different than communication in the second half. How so?

David Arp: Well, in the first half you're communicating in sound bites, in just short periods of time, the kids are always there. They're, as we call them, the ankle biters, they're always interrupting you so your communication is very short and you don't have time for long conversations. But in the second half, you do have time for those long conversations to talk about the meaning of life and what you personally want to see happen in your life personally over the next X number of years and where you want your marriage to be. And for some of us, for some of us, men particularly, it's a little uncomfortable. This is sort of new for us. It's a new language. You don't have...

Dr. James Dobson: What do I say now? What's number four, Dave?

David Arp: Number four is to use anger and conflict in a creative way to build your relationship. We've been talking about that. It's so important in this stage of life.

Dr. James Dobson: We've done a pretty good job of covering them so far.

David Arp: We have a lot of pastors who tell us that when couples come in who've been married 25, 30 years, this is the issue. There's so much bitterness and resentment that's built up. It's so hard to deal with it. Challenge number five is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. Fun in marriage is serious business so we need to put more fun. Dating is an important part of it.

Claudia Arp: When we did our national survey, we discovered, and also research has backed this up, along with how you handle conflict. The greatest indicator we found for a successful, long-term marriage was the level of the couple friendship, and the more years they were married, the more important that factor became. And we started thinking about it and we thought our culture is not marriage friendly today, and marriage is not held together from without, it's from within. It's that core relationship. The friendship is what builds that relationship and you build your friendship by having fun together.

Dr. James Dobson: That reminds me a little bit of the mice who agreed that there needed to be a bell on the neck of the cat and nobody had an idea how to get it there. We all know we need to be friends in marriage. What do you say to the person that's been married 25, 30 years and says, and says this person is not my best friend and sometimes not even my friend. Can it be rebuilt at that stage?

Claudia Arp: Absolutely.

David Arp: We believe that you can take any marriage. If the Lord is involved and you can allow the Lord to give you the forgiveness, yes, you can reinvent your marriage for the second half. We see it happen. We see the Lord really step in and perform miracles in couple's lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Sometimes with an outside consultant or counselors.

David Arp: Counseling can be a very important part of it.

Claudia Arp: We're working on a project for Christian counselors right now to turn our 10 great dates resource into something they can use in their counseling to help couples restore this friendship. And we believe that any couple who's willing to set aside time and date their mate, they can jumpstart their relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: 10 great dates means suggestions for what you can do together? Is that what that... I haven't seen that one.

David Arp: Oh, that's good. But 10 great dates is there are 10 fun dates, but each date has a marital theme there. Actually it's a marital skill, but we just call it a theme. And if you're the church on the corner that's offering fun dates and free or low-cost babysitting, couples will come. Basically you're allowing those couples to... It's a short video date launch where Claudia and I just set the tone for the date and a

little bit about the skill that you're going to be practicing and you send them out for an hour and a half on their date and we hope they come back and have to get their kids.

Dr. James Dobson: If I caught that, this is part of your seminar to couples in the second half.

Claudia Arp: We have a book, *10 Great Dates*, and it's also a video resource for churches and groups and this is the follow up to our Marriage Alive seminars. Our churches are just using this resource standalone, but it's a program. It's a marriage education program that will draw couples who would never go to a marriage seminar or a marriage bible study, but they'll come to the church for fun dates, especially if they offer child care. And we're finding that what happens, the women drag the men the first few dates, but by the third or fourth date, the men are dragging the women and they're getting involved.

David Arp: They're getting into it. Yeah.

Claudia Arp: And it's a great resource also for couples in the second half. We did it really broad-based. It's for couples all ages and stages of marriage, but it's a program... Around the country, it's going really well.

Dr. James Dobson: People really do get excited about what you have to say, don't they?

David Arp: Well, apparently.

Claudia Arp: We are pioneers. We've always been out there sort of pioneering new areas, and so when we started pioneering the empty nest, it wasn't on anybody's radar screen, but they're pragmatic and they want some help and so we're trying to be prepared and be there for them and have resources for small groups and for Sunday school classes to help them build their marriage in the second half.

Dr. James Dobson: Now we'd gotten through five, I believe.

David Arp: Five. You want to go up at six?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Let's take number six.

Claudia Arp: Challenge six is to renew romance and restore pleasurable sexual relationship. From our personal experience, we believe that our love life has been more creative and more fun since our kids left home than before. We remember those adolescent years, it was probably the low point in our love life. And everything else. Three sons, and they stayed up later than we did, and we were pretty exhausted by the time we got the last one out the door. And so...

Dr. James Dobson: Do you know how many people feel like it's over by that point?

David Arp: Oh, a lot. We had a lot in our seminars. Couples come up to us all the time and say, "I think we've forgotten how." That was in the early years of our marriage. But we do believe that this is another area you can reinvent in the second half.

Claudia Arp: We lead them back to Genesis 2:24, which is the verse on marriage that Christ quoted in the new Testament that we're to leave our father and mother and cleave to each other and become one. And we said those three principles are the foundation of a Christian marriage, the leaving other things, making your marriage a priority, cleaving to each other, becoming soulmates, best friends and becoming one, building a creative love life. And God commanded us to do it and He didn't say it's just for the early years, so get busy. He's the one that put that passion within your heart to be played out in the framework of a loving, Christian marriage, so get busy loving each other.

Dr. James Dobson: Now here is another instance where you may need some help in understanding that. There may be physical reasons if there's a lack of what's called a libido or desire, there may be a lot of reasons, some them emotional and sometimes it requires a little assistance.

David Arp: Well, in our small group last night, this is one of the first questions that came up was about the sexual relationship and in the second half and they said, what's the difference between the second half and the first half? And we just said the second half is more of a stroll, the first half was a sprint. And now it is more of a stroll. We have more time, our bodies react slower so that it's a good time to be playful, to experiment, to just enjoy the process.

Claudia Arp: You have the whole house and you have time, but you have to be proactive, you have to be intentional because if your love life has been on the back burner during those adolescent years and the parenting years, it'll stay there unless you move the pod. And so you have to take the initiative. So we encourage couples to take getaways. You might say, well, why do I need to take a getaway? Just to change your environment, just to get out and do something different and to be adventuresome. Go select a good book on love life.

Dr. James Dobson: If I had to offer advice to a couple that's lost interest in one another and wants to rekindle it, the very first thing I would do would be to say, concentrate on the other 23 and a half hours a day. Pleasure one another in other ways. Show love to one another, build a relationship. That's what makes a woman respond. You just can't concentrate on the sexual experience itself if you haven't laid the foundation by drawing close to one another. That's what makes human sex different than animal sex, it's because it comes out of a deeply emotional commitment to one another. You have to start with that.

Claudia Arp: One little tip that we give in our Marriage Alive seminars is we encourage couples, in the morning when you say goodbye to each other, kiss for 10 seconds, just 10 seconds, and then when you come home in the evening, kiss for 10 seconds. That's 20 seconds you're investing in your marriage each day.

Dr. James Dobson: But Claudia, what do you do for the other nine seconds?

David Arp: That's exactly it.

Claudia Arp: That's it.

David Arp: Because usually couples look at us, as we look out across the audience, they look like, well, what's the big deal about 10 seconds? Well, time it. Hold up your watch or you count, 1001, 1002, 1003. We're beyond most people right now. And 10 seconds is longer than you think. And we get more emails about the ten second kiss and how it's revitalized the intimacy in their relationship. Just 10 seconds.

Dr. James Dobson: Shirley and I had an opportunity to go to the inauguration of George W. Bush and we were in the Texas ball that night and apparently he hates to dance, and yet it's traditional that they dance. And so he told the audience that, he said, "I've never danced for more than 30 seconds in my life. I'm going to try to beat the record." And so they start dancing, they dance for about 12 seconds and he looks at his watch.

David Arp: How long has this gone on?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, was tough for him to get through it. Some couples have been married for 20, 25, 30 years might find it difficult to kiss for 10 seconds, but what a great idea.

David Arp: You start with one second and work up.

Claudia Arp: Work up. But we just got an email from a couple saying, "We've been practicing the ten second kiss and my husband said that our marriage has made a turn because we're paying more attention to each other, we're being more intentional." Anything, the dating. Dating is an attitude. We turn almost anything that we do into dates. Every fall we have a flu shot date.

David Arp: Flu shot.

Claudia Arp: Yeah, flu shot date where we go and get our flu shot together and we just make it a date.

David Arp: But you know, Dr. Dobson, I probably wouldn't go get the flu shot if we didn't make it into a date. So we go together, I hold Claudia's hand while she gets her shot first, I want to see if it's okay, then I get my shot. And this last year we started a new tradition after we got our shots, we kissed and Dr. Bob, our doctor, he said, "After 28 years of medicine, I've never seen a couple do this before." So we just take any...

Dr. James Dobson: What a celebration.

David Arp: Yeah, but it's an attitude. You can take anything and turn it into a date and just interject a little bit of fun along the way.

Dr. James Dobson: I got to tell you, you got to be hard up for a date.

Claudia Arp: Well, another date that we do is our airport date because we do seminars almost every weekend. We spend a lot of time in airports and all the things you hear about delays, as you well know, really happen. Flights are canceled, and when we are discouraged and tired, what we'll do is we'll just go to a flight that's been called. It's not our flight because our flight's delayed and we'll pretend like we're saying goodbye to each other, that one person's going to get on the flight.

David Arp: I don't know if you realize it, but airports are one of the few places where you can kiss passionately in public and get away with.

Dr. James Dobson: Nobody even looks at you.

David Arp: Oh yes they do. They do us. And that's part of the fun because they look at us and say, gee, that couple's a little old for this kind of stuff. So that plane loads, we don't get on because it's not our flight and we'll just go to another gate where they're loading and we will do the same. No, to do the same thing.

Dr. James Dobson: That's called fun. I agree.

Claudia Arp: It's all fun, but it's an attitude. You can go to the grocery store together to run errands together and turn it into a date.

Dr. James Dobson: Shirley and I used to love to go to the farmer's market and just walk along looking at the produce and the fruit. I don't know why we enjoyed that, but we did. What's number seven?

David Arp: Number seven is suggest to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. And this is probably the greatest felt need that most couples dealing with their adult children, having aging parents who need medical help or maybe need to move in with them, all those issues. So to go into that particular challenge.

Dr. James Dobson: It's called the sandwich generation.

Claudia Arp: And there are so many needs and stresses and hurts in this stage of life. And what we tried to do in this challenge was not to solve all the problems of adult children and aging parents, but was to challenge the couples, whatever your situations, however desperate it seems, how can you make your marriage the anchor relationship? How can you be united together and support one another? We can all handle stress so much better if we know there's one other person

that understands how we're feeling right now, and so to be that person for your spouse.

Dr. James Dobson: We could do an entire program on that subject. We're almost out of time here and I have one other very important subject I need to ask you all about, but give us number eight.

David Arp: Okay, number very quickly is the eighth challenge is evaluate where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer together to God and together serve others. And we end on this thing because we can grow closer together spiritually at this stage of life. We have the time, the spiritual and the financial resources to get involved in ministry, to short-term ministry. You got a lot of your volunteers who want to come, they want their lives to count at this stage and you can do that.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, let's deal with the most difficult, perhaps, of all the subjects we could talk about in the second half, and that is the specter of widowhood or a widower, the possibility of the loss of that person that you have dreamed with and grown with and raised children together. And now you come to this stage of life and let's suppose it is as it is for Shirley and me, that this has been the most wonderful thing that's happened to you, and yet hanging over us is this prospect of one going on to heaven and the other one not for a while. That's really scary, and Shirley and I never completely get away from that because I've had a heart attack and a stroke, and I'm feeling great and doing well, but still, that's there.

Claudia Arp: It is and it's very scary. And that's close to our heart too because we're at basically the same stages of our marriage and this last year I had some surgery and found out later I could have died. We've had people say, "Well, aren't you too close? What if you're too close? And isn't going to be too hard when one of you loses the other?" And we thought about it and we thought, well, no, we're not too close. God desires for us to be one. We don't want to be enmeshed in each other, we want our other interests, but we have never heard anyone say, "I'm so sorry I worked so hard on my marriage, we worked too hard on our marriage." And we thought, well, if one of us loses the other, it will be with no regrets because we took the time to build our marriage now, we took the time to build our friendship while we had that time to take. And as hard as it will be, I cannot imagine life without Dave, but I know that God is there and Christ would see me through.

Dr. James Dobson: When this subject comes up. I think of the movie Shadowlands. I don't know if you all saw that, but it was about C.S Lewis's writings and he had lost his wife. And the entire story deals with him asking the question, would I have hurt as badly if I hadn't loved this much? And at the end of the movie, the final conclusion is that you can take two routes in life. One is that you can protect yourself from pain, make yourself invulnerable and not allow yourself to connect with others and therefore not suffer loss, or at least as devastating a loss, because you have built a fortress around yourself. The other approach is to make yourself vulnerable, to love and to value and then to hurt when loss

occurs. And his final conclusion is the latter is better than the former. It's better to love.

David Arp: Absolutely.

Claudia Arp: That's so what couples face in the second half of marriage, and many couples aren't willing to reinvent their marriage, they just want to stay in this comfortable relationship, but they miss that intimacy and they miss that opportunity to live out before their children, their grandchildren, their communities, what it really means to have a loving, Christian, growing long-term marriage.

Dr. James Dobson: What a wonderful thing to have sweet memories and not bitter ones when it's all over. And then we're going to spend eternity together on the other side.

David Arp: Claudia, what she just said, reminded me too that we're not doing what we do as far as our Marriage Alive ministry just to help couples have happy marriages. There's a bigger purpose, and that is we believe that a loving, Christian marriage where the love of God really is flowing between husband and wife and that forgiveness is evident is the best lighthouse we have for Christianity. It's the best evangelistic tool we have. We have more people who come to Christ because they see Christ in our relationships.

Claudia Arp: Last weekend we were doing a seminar in Houston and a couple came up to us and they were New Yorkers and they said, "We've just got to tell you what happened to us last year." And they had visited this church and saw that there was an empty nest second half Sunday school class, and they said, "We got involved in this class and we became Christians through this study of the second half," And they had just been baptized and they were getting ready to have a 40th wedding anniversary celebration where they were going to renew their vows and they were like little newlyweds running around.

David Arp: They were just full energy and holding hands.

Claudia Arp: What a great advertisement for marriage and what a great advertisement for Christianity.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the way I feel about you all. I believe you've got a message and you have something to say to today's families, you're meeting a need and I just trust that as a result of your being here on these two days, that the Lord is really going to take this ministry to new heights. You're available. You don't want to run your legs off, we've already said that, but you're available to speak, is that right?

Claudia Arp: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. And we also...

Claudia Arp: Have staff that we are training.

David Arp: And we also have a wonderful website. It's marriagealive.com. It's the opposite of marriage dead.

Claudia Arp: A lot of resources there.

David Arp: Yeah, a lot of resources on Marriagealive.com. There are a lot of interactive resources. There's a whole section dealing with the second half of marriage. There's a section dealing with dating. It's just almost anything you want to deal with. As far as it deals with marriage and parenting, we have resources there to do that. So marriagealive.com.

Dr. James Dobson: It comes out of your own experience and the things the Lord has taught you, and I just trust the will continue to bless your work and your future writings. Thank you for being our guest and we will meet again.

Claudia Arp: Well, we are so delighted to be working together in the harvest, the Lord's Harvest here.

David Arp: It's been exciting for us and we thank you for the opportunity.

Roger Marsh: Well, this has certainly been an inspiring and a most useful conclusion to a loving conversation among three people sharing from their hearts based upon their experiences in their own marriages here on Family Talk. Of course, that was Dr. James Dobson with a classic interview he conducted with David and Claudia Arp as they examined the question of, the kids are gone, now what? Maybe you or someone you know is going through a similar transition, and if that's the case, please let us know here at Family Talk. If you'd like to learn more about David and Claudia Arp, their ministry, Marriage Alive International, or more information about their resources, visit us online at drjamesdobson.org forward slash Family Talk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. While you're there, be sure you also click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page for more information on how you can start receiving our free 10 day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book, *Bringing Up Girls*.

Again, it's a 10 part email series that's absolutely free. All you have to do is sign up to get it and you can start receiving yours today when you go to drjamesdobson.org, or you can call our resource center at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Well, that's all the time we have for today. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. And now if you'll excuse me, I plan to spend some time with my lovely wife, Lisa. Maybe we'll go on a date or something. See you next time.

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