



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: What's Wrong with Being a Nice Guy? – Part 2

Guest(s): Paul and Sandy Coughlin

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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, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Have you ever been told that you are too nice, especially if you're a guy? Or perhaps you've wondered why being the nice guy doesn't always seem to work in your relationships? Well today on Family Talk, we're going to continue exploring a topic that might surprise you. Why being nice instead of good can actually hurt the people we love the most. Today on Family Talk, Dr. Dobson's guests once again are Paul and Sandy Coughlin, and they are here to challenge what many of us have been taught about Christian behavior. In fact, Paul calls himself a "recovering nice guy," and his journey from passivity to authentic strength has transformed not only his life but his marriage and family as well.

In his book, *No More Christian Nice Guy: When Being Nice Instead of Good Hurts Men, Women, and Children*, Paul Coughlin reveals how misguided attempts at niceness can actually be harmful. Together with his wife, Sandy, Paul has also written a book that's a follow-up to *No More Christian Nice Guy*. It's called *Married But Not Engaged: Why Men Check Out and What You Can Do to Create the Intimacy You Desire*. Now on our last edition of Family Talk, Paul shared how his abusive childhood led to a life of fear and passivity that nearly destroyed his marriage. Sandy also revealed how frustrating it was to be married to someone who wouldn't stand up for himself or his family. On today's edition of Family Talk, we'll hear how Paul Coughlin found healing through counseling, how Sandy Coughlin learned to support rather than shame her husband, and the practical steps that transformed their relationship.

Guys, if you struggle with passivity, if your marriage feels stuck in neutral, or you simply want to understand what healthy relationships really require, today's program offers hope and practical wisdom for change for you and for your spouse. So let's join Dr. James Dobson right now as he welcomes back Paul and Sandy Coughlin for another edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Paul and Sandy, I'm delighted to have you back with us again today. I thought the program last time was very interesting and provocative and helpful and that you're really on target with the concepts that you have in these two

books. Paul I'm gonna address the first question to you again. Growing out of something Sandy said last time that you were a nice guy but not a good guy according to this definition. When you all first married and I suspect and in fact I think you've said in the book that it comes out of the way you were raised and you were more or less taught to be a passive male.

Paul Coughlin: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Explain where that came from.

Paul Coughlin: Yes, I had an upbringing that was a bit tough at pivotal times. My father, wonderful man, I have such great fond memories of him, wish he would have been more assertive in our home. He married a tiger of a woman. A lot of jalapeño in my mom and though that jalapeño has a beautiful side to it, it really does, it also has a downside. She was abused herself by her father. My parents are Irish immigrants, and my grandfather was a tough man by all accounts. So she was the oldest of three and she experienced great difficulty at pivotal times, not always, but pivotal times. And when we were growing up, I am the youngest of four, and she was physically abusive, emotionally abusive. You know, I'd come home from school and she'd say "They're coming for you in an hour and a half. They're coming for you in an hour. They're coming for you in a half-hour. They'll be here any minute to take you away because you're such an evil boy."

Dr. James Dobson: She actually said that to you?

Paul Coughlin: Said these things and there's more that's...

Dr. James Dobson: Considering the vulnerability of children, it's amazing for me to hear stories like that of people who would be so cruel.

Paul Coughlin: It was designed I guess to get me to behave and it does get you to behave a certain way but in ways that are just unforeseen. With the physical beatings that took place you know...

Dr. James Dobson: Just the intimidation in so much of what being at home was about.

Paul Coughlin: It wasn't a lot of fun, sure and it was humiliating. it was...

Dr. James Dobson: What was your father like? He must also have been somewhat passive.

Paul Coughlin: He was. I did see him stand up at times. He was also working about seven days a week. He was a house painter down in Southern California and he was gone a lot. And so he would work his regular job, then on the weekends, with jobs on the side and supporting a family of six by himself. So I'm not trying to make excuses for it, but abusive people are sneaky people. They want to make sure that they have assurance of victory when they do abuse. So it would be done

outside of his sight often and I just would not think of Running to him and saying that these things are occurring.

Dr. James Dobson: Was he the kind of guy that would not stand up for what is right?

Paul Coughlin: He was a more reserved man. And yeah, he would stand. I saw him stand up many times. I admired him.

Dr. James Dobson: Was he your role model?

Paul Coughlin: Of the two yes, of course. Yes. I really looked up to my father.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet something was missing there as you patterned yourself after him.

Paul Coughlin: Something was missing. I didn't know what it what it was. I was just... and I also raised myself by and large. I didn't have a lot of guidance. I was pretty much on my own for...I mean I was fed and that sort of stuff. But I had no curfew from as I remember it, from like the ages of 11 on, I just would come and go as I please.

Dr. James Dobson: The way this was manifested in you was fearfulness, passivity, maybe intimidation.

Paul Coughlin: Absolutely. Being uncomfortable just to go into adult life. I mean, as I say in the book, I had a Ph.D. in passivity by the time I graduated from sixth grade, right? In our home, there was only one mood that was allowed and that was our mothers. And if anything went outside of those parameters, it was intolerable. It would not be tolerated. It would be hunted down. And you weren't really allowed to have a will outside of what she wanted you to have. You couldn't... facial expressions. You couldn't have a facial expression she didn't like. So you'd have to change that. You couldn't think things she didn't want you to think. So you had to change that. So you couldn't be a full individual.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Sandy. Now, you all met where and when?

Sandy Coughlin: We met 16 years ago in Southern Oregon and we dated for a year and married.

Dr. James Dobson: And you told us last time that Paul was passive then. Did you recognize that before you got married?

Sandy Coughlin: No, I did not recognize that because here's the deal about a Christian nice guy. There's an upside to a Christian nice guy or at least there was to Paul.

Paul Coughlin: Just enough to fool the woman.

Sandy Coughlin: No, they're often thoughtful, charming, humorous...

Dr. James Dobson: Caring.

Sandy Coughlin: Very caring, very caring.

Dr. James Dobson: That is attractive to a woman.

Sandy Coughlin: It's very attractive. Very attractive. And I thought he was a nice guy and I thought that that was, you know, what I wanted. And it is what God wanted for us because He worked through us and now, we're able to help other people.

Dr. James Dobson: I have said many times that a woman can make or break a man and I am convinced of that. I am convinced that I'm a far better man because of Shirley and because of her influence especially in those early days where she was so committed to me and so respectful of me and she believed in me before I had done anything of significance. I was still a student and she taught me without hammering me or nagging me how to be more of a man, how to be strong enough to go face the world and to take a risk and all that. She really made an incredible contribution to me. I kind of have a notion you did the same thing?

Sandy Coughlin: I did. It took me some time to learn that though. I'd call... Shirley would be considered a wife of goodwill, and that's what we go through in this book, *Married But Not Engaged*. We talk about there is hope for the woman who is married to a nice guy if she is a woman of goodwill, if she's willing to have empathy and see behind her husband's eyes where he has been, what he has come through, and go alongside him.

Paul Coughlin: We're fortunate. I prescribe to the belief that a blow-up is much better than a slow leak. And there was no real blow-up at this point. One thing that did it for me, I would see other men with their children and be more emotionally available. They'd just be more connected with their kids, right? Because to a child if you hold them at arm's length at that age, they're not going to say "well, you know the reason why dad is emotionally unavailable."

No, they think "there's something wrong with me." They think "I am unlovable or I'm not worthy or I'm broken or I'm defective. That's why my dad won't connect with me." Now, they may figure that out later in life in their 20s or 30s, maybe even 40s, but they don't know that during that crucial adolescent time and it is cruel. So Christian nice guys, if you're not going to do it for your wife, if you're not going to do it for your own soul, if you're not going to do it to be a better disciple of Jesus, because you really can't follow Jesus if you're a fearful person very far, then do it for the kids. They need that. It's a sin if you don't do that soul work.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, one of the most difficult counseling problems to deal with is associated with what you're saying here, where a woman is, by a particular woman, is by her nature aggressive and assertive and confident and maybe easily irritated. And she's married to a guy who is passive and somewhat fearful and non-responsive.

And I think that may be the linkage to the title of your second book here *Married but not Engaged*. you're married but you don't engage emotionally so he won't give her or can't give her what it is she's looking for so, she begins taunting him and pushing him and attacking him and belittling him in front of the kids and he still won't stand up for himself and he goes in and he turns on Monday Night Football and he retreats into a book or television or more commonly work, and the frustration that that creates for a woman is intense because she'd rather he'd stand up and scream at her than to say nothing and be like a puppy dog that goes off with his tail between his legs. Sandy, do you recognize what I'm talking about?

Sandy Coughlin: Absolutely recognize that. And that's where in the book that we talk about if you're a woman of good will, there's some key aspects that you can put into place in your marriage.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, like what?

Sandy Coughlin: Well, first of all, to be a mirror of reality to your husband. You know, often a nice guy doesn't even realize that he's a nice guy. But in a non-attacking way, say, "Honey, this is what your passive lifestyle is doing to me and how it's hurting the kids and how it's hurting you." And to start trying to communicate with him about that in a non-attacking way and to give him room to make mistakes, it's really easy for aggressive woman to just, you know, bam, bam, bam. And then to not correct him when he does try to move forward.

Dr. James Dobson: And build his confidence. Stone upon Stone. And you may need a counselor to help with that. That's what you guys found.

Paul Coughlin: Well, yeah, I had individual counseling and that soul work was mine to do, right? Another thing that nice guys do, it's, it's manipulative and you've probably seen it in counseling where they'll try to get other people to do his soul work for him, right? The reason I'm this way is because you behave this way. No, just take ownership of it. This is your life. This is what you need to do And if you're married to a woman of goodwill, she will come alongside you. She won't do it perfectly. No one in life does it perfectly, but a person of goodwill when the day is over when the night is over, she will...you know that she's in your corner and if you have someone like that in your life, you are blessed indeed.

Kindness is always a virtue. Kindness is a beautiful thing. What we often forget, though, in regard to our understanding of love and kindness is sometimes it's the kind thing to be tough. We need to really change the way we define love. Love often means making the difficult decisions in life. Love is not the product or the byproduct of a conflict-free existence. It's true, Christian men are supposed to love their wives the way Christ loved the church.

How did Christ love the church? How did Jesus treat Peter? He could be amazingly tender. "Peter, do you love me?" He asked that question three times he says agape, deep and abiding love. Peter responds with phileo, "Well, I really

like you. Okay, I really like you." No, Jesus wanted him to come close. He wanted that closeness with Peter. He also reprimanded Peter. He was tough with Peter. So he was incredibly tender with Peter. He was also confrontational with love as its motive with Peter as well. We don't hear that much about how Christian men are supposed to behave in marriage but it's true and if you if you want to stay on the passive side that's your choice technically statistically, you're headed for divorce court.

Dr. James Dobson: Or an unhappy marriage or one without intimacy.

Paul Coughlin: And then you show that to your children. Your children see that.

Dr. James Dobson: And their little boys are watching very carefully what it means to be a man.

Paul Coughlin: They think if that's marriage I will find some other lifestyle.

Dr. James Dobson: The book again, *No More Christian Nice Guy*, really keys on the word Christian there, and we've been talking about this concept in general terms, but let's talk about it in Christian terms. Now, is it your impression that the church subtly and sometimes without even intending to teaches nice guy as an identification of the Christian faith.

Paul Coughlin: You have to be that way. You have to be kind of passive. And yes, and the reason why is because we read from the NGB, the nice guy Bible. And the NGB is only when you key in on the sweet stuff and you move away the tough stuff. I think one of the best examples is when Jesus was sending the disciples out and He says, "I send you out like sheep among wolves, be wise as serpents, innocent as doves."

I've been in the church for 20-something years. I've heard countless sermons on what it means to be innocent as a dove, personal piety, absolutely important, absolutely important to our walk. I don't believe I've ever heard a sermon on what it means to be wise as a serpent. The same word for wise can also be translated as shrewd and some translations may well say cunning as a serpent. Luke 16, the parable of the shrewd manager, we don't read these portions of Scriptures. We certainly don't meditate upon them and they're not emphasized in most pulpits most of the time. So Christian men have been told to emulate a Jesus who really doesn't exist. A gentle Jesus meek and mild is as fictitious as anything found in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. But we cannot blame Hollywood. We cannot blame the liberal press. We can largely blame ourselves. We have brought this upon ourselves. What we need to do is bring in the entire counsel of God. For example, we've been told to be generous. Jesus, and we should be, Jesus also told us there's an end to smart generosity. Do not cast pearls before swine.

Not only will they trample it, but they will turn on you, He warned us. But we don't emphasize that when we talk about a lot of how we're supposed to behave in life, and as a result, our lives suffer immensely.

Dr. James Dobson: Man, that's good stuff here. Paul, did you ever get to the place where one of your kids could have been, or even now could be bullied at school and it was not Sandy's place to go find out about that and fix it, but it was yours. You ever get to the place where you could do that?

Paul Coughlin: Oh, I've done it. There was one kid that was giving two of my kids a hard time coming home from school. And this is where you talk about being a good guy where you don't beat people over the head over things, but you still are firm and you're loving but firm and yes, went and talked to him and put my arm around the boy and said this is no longer tolerated and it never happened again. These are things that must be taught to our children as well. Certainly our boys because they're expected to go out there and slay the dragons but our daughters as well. We're all disciples of Jesus which means we should take on His characteristics. He Himself said that He was meek and lowly of spirit but we need to ask ourselves what was He meek toward. The word meek is synonymous with being yielding and submissive. You can not read the gospels, especially the gospel of Mark and conclude that Jesus was yielding to the will of man. What you can conclude was that He was yielding to the will of His Father. And that's how we are supposed to be.

Dr. James Dobson: Sandy, you say that there was a change in Paul, we can see it, when did it start to occur and how was it manifested and did you recognize that something was happening here that you had longed for? I'm taking you back over older ground, I don't know if you remember those steps along the way.

Sandy Coughlin: Dr. Dobson, I remember the time that he started going to counseling, I really started doing soul work myself and I started diving into some books and into the Word and I really believe that it was the Holy Spirit that started working in my life at the same time. And so as he would come home and share from his counseling sessions, we started building intimacy, more intimacy in our marriage and talking, more communicating, more date nights. And I was just so pleased to see that he was making progress and at the same time, I had to do the same thing with my life.

Dr. James Dobson: It's always a two-way street.

Sandy Coughlin: Yes, it is.

Dr. James Dobson: You talk in this book and we're really running out of time here and what a time to raise up the subject of sex, but you talk about passivity in the physical relationship as well.

Paul Coughlin: Well, yes. It's one of the most dissatisfying parts of a Christian nice guy life is the sexual side of things. Largely because the nice guy does not behave in such a way that makes him very attractive. It's not attractive for the woman to have to constantly bear the burdens of the families, the bigger burdens of having to confront the bullies coming home from school with the children and things of

that nature. So it robs a relationship of an innate respect that really should be there. It is difficult to respect a passive person. We tend to not really like aggressive people.

Dr. James Dobson: Especially a passive man.

Paul Coughlin: Passive man is looked down on even more and so yes, it leads to not a great sex life, but I can speak from experience, without being graphic, that it gets a whole lot better much quickly.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I think that's the way it was designed and that's not to be taken to the nth degree where a woman can't be an initiator or can't be the one who raises that question or that activity, but it is a man's role to be more aggressive in a relationship. That's what testosterone is for. That's why it surges through our veins. It is such a pleasure to have the chance to talk to you guys. There's so much more in this book. I think I've got another 20 questions here we're not going to get to, but the title of the book is and the one that Paul wrote is *No More Christian Nice Guy: When Being Nice Instead of Good Hurts Men, Women and Children*. Paul did you gain a lot of self-respect when you began to realize what the difference was between being nice and good?

Paul Coughlin: Absolutely and let's please not mistake, because I know how Christian nice guys think, they think self-respect equals arrogance. That's part of the equation that they think. Please do not mistake the two. They're not the same. Self-respect is very healthy and it doesn't mean you're better than everyone else, it just means you feel better about yourself. You're more comfortable in your own skin and when you're more comfortable in your own skin, you're more protective you're more loving, you're more like the guy you want to be.

Dr. James Dobson: And Sandy, *Married But Not Engaged*, the two of you wrote this book together. *Why Men Check Out and What You Can Do to Create the Intimacy You Desire*. This is really kind of a how-to book, isn't it?

Sandy Coughlin: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: Got a lot of practical suggestions and ideas. –

Sandy Coughlin: Very practical book, Dr. Dobson, and it gives women hope. There's a lot of hope in that book for wives on how they can recreate intimacy with their husbands.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you all are very articulate, interesting people. I'm glad to have had a chance to meet you. Appreciate you coming and allowing us to talk about this book. Blessings to you both.

Sandy Coughlin: Thank you.

Paul Coughlin: To you as well.

Roger Marsh:

You know, Paul Coughlin's journey from passivity to purpose reminds us that true strength isn't about being aggressive, it's about having the courage to engage fully in the lives God has given us. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and a conversation featuring authors, Paul and Sandy Coughlin, discussing their books, *No More Christian Nice Guy* and *Married But Not Engaged*. If today's discussion stirred something in your heart, remember you can always listen again or share this program with a friend when you go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You'll also find that audio on the Family Talk app by the way. Once you're online with us, you'll also find the books featured in today's program, *No More Christian Nice Guy* and *Married But Not Engaged*, along with information about Paul's work with The Protectors, his faith-based solution to adolescent bullying.

Speaking of equipping fathers to lead with confidence, if you're a dad looking for practical biblical guidance in today's challenging culture, I invite you to sign up for our "Strong Dads" email series. You'll receive timeless wisdom from Dr. Dobson to provide you the godly leadership your children desperately need. To sign up for the "Strong Dads" email series, go drjamesdobson.org.

As we enter the summer months, families spend more time together, you know, there's never been a more important time to invest in strengthening the biblical foundation of homes across our nation. Through our special June matching grant, every dollar you donate to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute in June will be doubled dollar for dollar. Your partnership helps us equip parents with biblical wisdom, strengthen marriages under pressure, and introduce families to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Your support enables us to be a beacon of hope and truth. Now to have your donation matched dollar for dollar, you can go online to drjamesdobson.org. You can also give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. When you make a donation today, we'll be happy to thank you for that contribution by sending you a copy of Dr. Dobson's classic book, *Your Legacy*, along with the companion DVD. Again make your donation online at drjamesdobson.org, call 877-732-6825, or you can give a gift through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address being Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well I'm Roger Marsh, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer:

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