



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. Dobson: The Untold Stories – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the 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: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's program, we're going to revisit one of the best of the best of all-time here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We've been hearing our Best of Broadcast collection throughout the month of December, and this is a very special added attraction to the Best of Broadcast Collection. On today's program, and on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're going to revisit a conversation that Dr. Dobson and I had back in April of 2016. This goes all the way back to when I was first coming on board here at the Family Talk ministries and they thought just for fun, they'd have a little trial by fire and have me step in the studio with Dr. Dobson. So as we are remembering the life and legacy of Dr. James Dobson, I want to remind you you've got a couple days left to take advantage of our 2025 Best of Broadcast collection offer.

That's six-CDs featuring the best Dr. Dobson programs we have from the entire 15 year run of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, including program number one, which we're going to air later on this week on New Year's Eve. So if you have not had a chance to revisit some of these classic conversations with Joni Eareckson Tada, Chuck Colson, the program where Dr. Dobson went to Normandy and more, I encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org and put in your request for the 2025 Best of Broadcast six-CD collection. We'll be happy to send it to you as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the ministry, but you've got to act fast because the offer for the best of broadcast discs and the dollar for dollar match ends this Wednesday, New Year's Eve. Go to drjamesdobson.org. Drjamesdobson.org, or call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825.

For decades, you've heard Dr. James Dobson interview, fascinating guests here on this program, but on the next couple of broadcasts, we're going to turn the tables and it gave me a chance to step in as co-host to interview Dr. Dobson himself. Now, while many of you have been listening to Doctor for years and you've read his books and you feel like you know him, there's still so much about his personal journey that you may not know. On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, he's going to share stories from his early life,

including how he met and courted Shirley, some memorable rookie mistakes in their marriage and reflections on becoming a parent. I don't want you to miss a minute of these captivating stories as Dr. Dobson opens up about his personal life in ways he rarely did before. So let's jump right into this conversation with Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk.

Doctor, are you ready to get started?

Dr. James Dobson: Are you sure you want to do this?

Roger Marsh: Well, you've invited me here. I'm wandering into this territory very, very carefully, Dr. Dobson. I'm grateful to be here, but I know that there are listeners who are wondering all sorts of questions about your childhood, about your courtship with Shirley. I mean, all sorts of different things. So if I may, Dr. Dobson, are you game? You want to go for this?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I think it's a good idea. We'll see if people really want to know these things. Well, I met you before and I enjoy interacting with you. We went to lunch together and the conversation never lagged, so it's going to be fun working back and forth. Thank you for being here.

Roger Marsh: Thank you for having me here. Okay, let's get the ball rolling here with the most important question that everybody wants to know. Let's put the books aside. Let's put the video series aside. Let's put the radio show aside. Let's talk about your beloved Shirley.

Now you two have a fascinating story about how you met because I mean, this day and age, we think, well, people can meet from different states or different regions because of social media, but when you two met, it was a different story. Talk about that.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we met in college, but the interesting thing is how unlikely it was that we would ever know each other because I grew up in East Texas and my father was a pastor of a Church of the Nazarene church. I found the Lord there when I was four years of age, and I grew up in the faith and knowing who the Lord was, and I think had a pretty good grasp of how He felt about me, that He loved me. Had wonderful parents, and Shirley grew up in Torrance, California in a Nazarene church. Her father was an alcoholic and they had a lot of trouble in their family, a lot of difficulty and wound up being a divorce. And when Shirley was about six years of age on a Sunday morning, she stepped out in the aisle and walked down and knelt at an altar and she found the Lord.

So I was a senior in college, a big man on campus.

Roger Marsh: Big tennis star, sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Shirley was a sophomore, and we were sitting in the cafeteria and those situations where you looked over to your left and you see a pretty girl, and then you look away and then you look back to see if she's looking at you, and then you look back at her and it goes back and forth. That happened for about 20 minutes. We were catching each other's eye. We did not speak on that day, but a little bit later, several days later, we had finished the evening meal in that cafeteria and we were out on the campus, a beautiful green campus, and Shirley was standing with a bunch of other students. So I walked up to her, and this is really clever. I mean, this is clever.

Roger Marsh: Okay, I'm taking notes now.

Dr. James Dobson: I took a nickel out of my pocket and I said, I want to bet you a hamburger that I can flip this nickel and I can call it heads or tails. She said, you got it. So I flipped the nickel into the air and it came down and I called it heads and it was heads. So now she owes me a hamburger. You see how clever this was.

Roger Marsh: So romantic, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: If I lose, then I get a date with her to buy her a hamburger. If I win, she buys me one. I win both ways.

Roger Marsh: I'm taking notes here.

Dr. James Dobson: And I won. If you know Shirley, it's typical of her to say, oh no, we're going to go double or nothing. So I said, okay, we'll flip it again. I flipped it and I won again, and she said, double or nothing. I flipped it again, and now I have four hamburgers, and she says, we're going to keep flipping. She was going to flip until she got what she expected.

Roger Marsh: It wasn't a two-headed coin, was it?

Dr. James Dobson: It wasn't, but she thought it was. I'm sure. So we flipped that thing, and I promise you, I won 16 times.

Roger Marsh: Not that anyone's counting.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm not kidding. It was 32 hamburgers that she owed me, and she's been frying them ever since. So that was our first real conversation.

Roger Marsh: Oh my. Then how did the courtship develop from there? I mean, obviously you start off on the food note.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, well, you can't go very far on that. I played a lot of tennis in those days and I was often on the tennis court in tennis shorts, and in those days, shorts were short.

Roger Marsh: Actual shorts, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And so there was a couple of courts right in the center of the campus, and so I was down there getting ready to play tennis, and Shirley came walking by with another guy and she walked up to me and I promise she didn't say hello or anything. She just said, "Hi, legs." And she shocked me, little flirt, and she had seen me in these shorts.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: I figured later I thought about that Anybody who likes my legs can't be all bad. So that was the beginning of the relationship, and it wasn't very long before I called and asked her for a date and Roger, we had an absolutely storybook romance in college.

Roger Marsh: That's wonderful to hear.

Dr. James Dobson: We laughed. We had so much fun together. It was a natural connection.

Roger Marsh: Now, did you come up with something creative as to ask her for her hand in marriage?

Dr. James Dobson: You know what? They didn't do that much then. Now they plan all kinds of special things.

Roger Marsh: It's a television show.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. We just started talking about it and it seemed like the right thing to do.

Roger Marsh: That's wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: And so we were married in August, August 27th, 1960, and good things have happened.

Roger Marsh : If you're just tuning in, you're listening to a conversation with Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk. My name is Roger Marsh, and I am actually sitting in the host's chair today. Dr. Dobson, for all the times that you have been interviewing so many people, it's nice to be able to put you on the hot seat a little bit and give our listeners a chance to get to know you a little bit better, and you and Shirley. Now, people have looked to you for marriage advice for years, of course, and they've read your books and they've benefited from it. We've heard about the courtship. How were those first few years of marriage for Jim and Shirley?

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, they were wonderful. Again, I don't want to sound like Pollyanna or something, but we just had so much fun right from the beginning. I did make some bad mistakes, however.

Roger Marsh: Okay, rookie mistakes as a new husband.

Dr. James Dobson: Rookie, absolute, rookie mistakes. One of 'em is that I didn't fully understand that Shirley is a profoundly romantic human being. Many guys just don't get that. We're made differently. We were married in August and Valentine's Day came along very quickly and I didn't even think Valentine's Day was anything important.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my. I can hear all the men just breathing hard.

Dr. James Dobson: I wasn't thinking about it at all. And in fact, I was at USC graduate school at that time, and so on that day, I went over to the library on the campus of USC and I was in the stacks. Have you ever gone into the stacks? It's where you get lost in there, those musty, smelly books back there, and I was working on a thesis and I lost all track of time. About seven o'clock at night, I went over to the little cafeteria on campus and I ate, came back, worked some more, and by this time it was about 9:30.

Roger Marsh: On Valentine's Day.

Dr. James Dobson: On Valentine's Day.

Roger Marsh: Your first Valentine's Day.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I didn't think it was any big deal.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no.

Dr. James Dobson: And so I went out and gotten my little Volkswagen and I drove toward home, but on the way to our little condo, I passed my parents' house.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no. I know where this is going.

Dr. James Dobson: I went in to see my parents and my mother had baked an apple pie. Of course, I dearly love apple pie, and so we sat and talked a while. Now it's about 10:30 at night

Roger Marsh: On your Valentine's Day.

Dr. James Dobson: First Valentine's Day.

Dr. James Dobson: I get in the car and I drive over to Arcadia, California where we lived in this little two room apartment. I put the key in the lock and I open the door and it's all dark and through the darkness I see a big sign that Shirley had made that said, Happy Valentine's Day. And I said, oh, no. Then I looked over on the table and there was a coagulated meal, and there were candles there that had melted and

bent over, and what was left of a dinner that she had made for that occasion, was sitting there, not eaten, and she was nowhere to be found.

Roger Marsh: I was going to say, what did you do?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I panicked. I mean, it didn't ever occurred to me that that was a special day, and I opened the bedroom door and I looked in there and Shirley was in bed, and the covers were right about at her ear level. You ever had that happen?

Roger Marsh: I have. I have, and all the men are nodding saying, yes, I know that look, I know that look.

Dr. James Dobson: And she didn't say a word, and I said, Shirley, I'm sorry, I forgot. And Shirley is a forgiving lady, and she did forgive me, but I learned a lesson that day that romantic things matter to her, and she sees that very differently than I did, and I needed to get with the program out there. But I want to tell you something, I didn't learn the lesson well enough, and about three or four years later, we were able to buy a little house. It was very small. It had obviously no furniture.

Roger Marsh: Little starter home.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, yeah. A little starter house. We put \$4,000 down. We sweated blood to get \$4,000.

Roger Marsh: Big amount back then.

Dr. James Dobson: And we paid \$31,900 for the house, believe it or not that was possible in those days, and Shirley's birthday came along and we didn't have any furniture. We had a table that we had bought, which we ate on, and a couple of chairs, and that was about it. Furthermore in the backyard, there was nothing. There was not any lawn furniture or anything. So I thought, here we are. We bought this house. What a romantic thing. Young couple buys their first house, and I thought it would really be fun to buy something for the backyard. So I went down to a store where you buy that kind of stuff, and I bought a redwood table.

Roger Marsh: Like a picnic table?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, a picnic table with crisscross legs and with a little help, was able to put it upside down on my Volkswagen and I tied it on there.

Roger Marsh: That would've been fun to see.

Dr. James Dobson: I looked like I was in a flying saucer going down the freeway with this thing, and I couldn't wait to share it with Shirley. And I drove down our little street and into the driveway and opened the back door, and I said, "Shirley, come out and

see something." I had bought her a birthday gift. She came out and she took one look at that Volkswagen and that redwood table, and she broke into tears.

Roger Marsh: Oh, no. And they were not tears of joy.

Dr. James Dobson: They were not, oh, it was not great excitement. She goes back in the house, didn't say a word, and I stood there in the driveway saying, now, what did I do wrong here?

Roger Marsh: I remembered your birthday.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen. Doesn't that make sense to a guy that we could have breakfast out there in the backyard on that redwood table and we could have friends over and it would start the collection of lawn furniture? That made all kinds of sense to me.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: But it wounded surely because there was no romantic element to it, and I began to get the picture, and before long I realized Shirley needs things that are frilly. She wants things that smell good, and she wants things that express love to her from my heart, and a redwood table didn't get it done.

Roger Marsh: Well, even if you put doilies on it or something, maybe some folders.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Believe me, it wasn't even in the neighborhood. I was telling that story when I was speaking one time, and this woman came up to me afterwards and she said, you think your wife had it bad? My husband gave me a wheelbarrow for my birthday. So there is a lesson there for guys. Women care about romantic things. It's what you write on the card and it's how you approach your wife that she has some needs you don't know about, and you need to figure 'em out.

Roger Marsh: See I knew there was that kind of story behind a lot of your parenting advice, a lot of your marriage advice. These are tried and true learning from the school of hard knocks in addition to your advanced education too, Dr. Dobson, because it is so encouraging for me as a guy to know James Dobson had a Valentine's blowup and a birthday disaster and that type of thing too.

Dr. James Dobson: Hey, Roger, who would've told me that? Where should I have learned that? I should have observed it? We went together for three years before we were married. I should have gotten that figured out, but many guys, I'm not alone in this.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. Well, you were 25 years before Gary Chapman writing *The 5 Love Languages*. I mean, big help he was.

Dr. James Dobson: I hadn't read his book.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, right because he probably was watching guys like us too, saying “picnic table on top of the car. I'm putting that in the book.”

Dr. James Dobson: But Shirley and I began to understand each other. There were things that she needed to understand about me as well.

Roger Marsh: Does she have a story that, I mean, not to put you on the spot on her behalf, but does she have a similar experience?

Dr. James Dobson: I'll let her tell it to you.

Roger Marsh: Okay, fair enough. Fair enough. Then see that you have learned, you've learned very, very well the special edition of Family Talk with Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh and we're talking with Dr. Dobson just about his legacy and giving you an opportunity to hear from him some of the stories that have shaped who he is, his family stories, and I know too your relationship with your children is really, really precious to you and special to you. What was it like for you and Shirley when you found out you were going to be parents? How did that change your family?

Dr. James Dobson: It was a wonderful experience. I don't think there's been anything in my life that has given me a greater reward or a sense of fulfillment than bringing those little children into the world and bringing them up to serve the Lord and their fellow men and trying to teach values and character to them. You and I were talking before about my field being child development, and so what I was learning in graduate school about children, about boys and girls and about the developmental process, I was seeing with my own children, and I remember when Ryan was about three years of age just watching him grow the same for his sister, seeing them develop and how quickly it occurred. There is a mantle of humanness that descends. Of course, they are human even long before birth because they are created in the image of God, but you're seeing the character, you're seeing the personality develop, and you're seeing them grow and learn and love, and that is a wonderful process to observe. I mentioned that I would go away to speak and I'd be gone for even three days, and when I would come back for a period, not more than one or two seconds, I could see that my kids had changed since I was gone.

Roger Marsh: Just in that first moment you walked through this door.

Dr. James Dobson: But I couldn't keep it. Three or four minutes later, I couldn't quite remember what it was, but something was happening. Those kids were growing and learning, and the whole thing was a laboratory for me.

Roger Marsh: I could tell in your countenance how you change when you talked about Ryan being three and seeing those incremental changes or Danae being in her younger years too, and what struck me just in this moment is the fact that I'm thinking, okay, this is Dr. James Dobson. Reagan White House, Dinah Shore

television show, Pete Maravich. I had this really just quick blast of all the famous luminaries that you are in friendship with and have been with over the years, and yet what lights you up is watching your children grow and become the man and woman that they become.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, there's no question about it, especially the responsibility that you have to introduce them to Christ and watching the spiritual aspect of that relationship. There's nothing more important than that, and it's a tough job too because you make a lot of mistakes along the way. I don't care who you are and I don't care how many books you've written, you still are learning as you go along and you make some mistakes there too.

Roger Marsh: Well, you've got more than 30 books to your credit, and for you to make that kind of admission I think gives us all a bit of pause, gives us a little bit of comfort knowing that it's something that we get on the job training for because like you said, where were these people when we were younger to teach us and say, hey, when your daughter hits seven, she's going to need this from her dad.

Dr. James Dobson: Roger, I fear that sometimes those of us who advise parents and who write books for parents make the other mistake giving the implication that all of you folks out there don't get it, but we do. The truth of the matter is none of us is perfect, not one of us, and we do need to pay attention to the process of being a good husband or father and letting other people know that we're in this thing together.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, it has been a pleasure. Thank you for the invitation to come here and turn the tables on you, so to speak. You've been a great guest. You're an excellent host, but you're an excellent guest too. Thank you for what you've shared with our Family Talk listeners today here on the program.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you, Roger. I really enjoyed working with you.

Roger Marsh: Well, it's such a pleasure to listen to this program again and have the fond memory of spending time in studio with Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh and the program you're listening to here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk is one of the best broadcast I think we've ever done here on the program, and I say that selfishly because I got to be a part of it. This is part one of a program, the series that we've titled "Dr. Dobson: The Untold Stories." We have shared this program many times on the Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk broadcast before, but it's especially poignant now knowing that Dr. Dobson went home to be with the Lord on Thursday, August the 21st of this year, and of course, everything we were airing during the month of December here on Family Talk is to remember Dr. Dobson's legacy.

Now, speaking of legacy, at the start of the program, I mentioned that we've put together this year's 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection. It's a six-CD set, which means we have 18 programs total, and this year's collection is special because

usually we'll do Best of Broadcast Collection for the previous 12 months. This year, we went back over the entire 15 year history of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and quite frankly, we had to make some really tough decisions as to which programs made the cut and which programs did not. Now, I encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org and express your interest in getting a copy of the six-CD collection, the 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection, and bear in mind that when you do so, every dollar you donate to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk will be doubled. Thanks to the Dr. James Dobson Memorial Matching Grant, it's up to \$6 million. We have available for matching dollar for dollar for every donation that comes in between now and this Wednesday evening, New Year's Eve. So go to drjamesdobson.org and learn how you can not only request the 2025 Best of Broadcast CD collection, but also give a gift that will be doubled.

A \$10 donation becomes \$20; a \$1,000 donation becomes \$2,000. You get the idea, and especially as you're getting ready to make those final year-end contributions before the tax deadline of December 31st, we encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org, make a donation to get the 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection, and every dollar you donate will be double thanks to the James Dobson Memorial Matching Grant. Again, you can do that transaction online at drjamesdobson.org. You can call a member of our Constituent Care team at 877-732-6825. Or if you prefer, you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at the JDPI, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time as we'll get into part two of the untold stories with Dr. James Dobson." It's coming up right here on the next 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.