



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Stepfamilies of the Bible – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Laura Petherbridge

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- Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, nearly two out of every three Americans today have a stepfamily relative. That's a lot of people navigating a road that isn't always easy and often doesn't come with a map either. On the last edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, author and speaker Laura Petherbridge shared her own journey from a child of divorce to being a stepmom herself, to eventually becoming one of the most trusted voices out there on the subject of blended family life. On today's edition of Family Talk, she and I will dig deeper into the pages of Scripture itself, where stepfamilies show up more often than you might expect. Laura Petherbridge, welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk for part two of our conversation on your most recent book called *Stepfamilies of the Bible, Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*. Laura, it's good to have you back with us again.
- Laura Petherbridge: It's wonderful to be here. Thanks for asking.
- Roger Marsh: You have one of the best-known stories in the Old Testament of a blended family is one we don't think about as a blended family, and that's Joseph. And we realize he gets two whole chapters in this book because there's bitterness, there's resentment, you know, with sibling rivalry and half-siblings and this, that, and the other thing. Talk about what we can learn from him because Joseph, we have to understand, the caveat is God had an amazing plan for him. More amazing than for his brothers. You know, they were kind of counted as, you know, well, the rest of you all together make up 12 and there's 12 tribes of Israel. Talk about what we can learn from the way he handled it, the way his father handled it, the way it plays out now. The same type of scenario plays out in real life situations.
- Laura Petherbridge: I really could have written the entire book around Joseph because almost every emotion that is in the book is experienced by the dad, the mother, Joseph and his brother, Benjamin, the half-brothers. Every mistake that step families make is probably exemplified there.

Roger Marsh: Yes. Let me show favoritism to my son with the second wife and make the other brothers angry. Oh, oops. Did I do that?

Laura Petherbridge: Yeah. And so he, you know, the baby, babies he has with Rachel, he loves Rachel. These are the two kids he has with Rachel. And dad is showing them favoritism, in particular Joseph. And it's very common. It's what we would call today an ours baby. Yours, mine, and ours. So this is the child that the couple comes together. They're happy now. The second marriage we would call today. And they have a baby. And that's Joseph. And the other brothers and sisters, they hate him. They're like, get this kid out of here. Parents don't want to hear this, but it's very common for a half-brother or sister to not really like the baby that my dad and my stepmom have together because they have formed their own family and I'm outside of that. I'm with the ex-wife. The ex-wife is my mother. And that pushes me outside that circle. And I don't like it. I resent it. It feels like I lost my father. And I hate this little kid that they just had together.

And we don't like talking about that. We don't like hearing that. We think adding an ours baby is going to make everybody connected. And sometimes it does. But if dad is showing tremendous favoritism or one stepmom has a baby of her own, she acts differently. It can cause some real tension in the home. And just like we see in Joseph, theirs goes to the extreme where they want to kill him.

Roger Marsh: Exactly. Literally. And take those steps to put his life in peril so that maybe he isn't dead, but well. Sorry, we can't find him. You know, it does seem like an extreme exaggeration, but Laura, I wonder how many couples when they do find themselves in a second or third, you know, a remarriage situation, let's call it. And they're having that conversation about, we want to continue our family, you know, and I'm sure that's a question that you counsel a lot. Do couples think that way? When they're remarrying, when they're recoupling, if you will.

Laura Petherbridge: Yes, they do. Definitely.

Roger Marsh: That's good to hear.

Laura Petherbridge: And it's something that should be discussed way before you say I do. Because if one wants to add them and the other does not, that can be a disaster. The other thing that I've seen happen many times is it's usually dad that doesn't want to add more children. Either they agree both of them don't want to add more children or it's the dad that doesn't want. He feels like, okay, my kids have been through enough. I barely get to see them anyway. Adding another baby, I could lose my kids. And so that's usually the dynamic that's the most common. What I often see happen is while they're dating, dad will say, okay, we can add another baby. Then they get married and he sees that his kids are not doing well. They are not adjusting to this well. And then he goes, I've changed my mind. No, this is already too complicated. Sorry, I don't mean to hurt you, but I got to pull the plug on that idea because this is going to make my kids really unhappy.

- Roger Marsh: Well, that's a common thought for dads. And yet I wonder what mom does, because now you've talked to a lot of moms who are remarrying and saying, no, I love this man. I'm going to get it right this time or whatever. Or I missed my first husband. He passed away and I really want to solidify her family. I would imagine the emotional pull to bring an hour's baby into a step relationship is much stronger for a woman.
- Laura Petherbridge: It has tremendous implications because the woman views it. Now you have solidified. See, women are much more cantankerous against the ex or the former, even if she's died, than men are. Men are not nearly as competitive with the other dad, with the biological dad, as women are. Women struggle with this more. They still feel in competition with her. They still can feel jealous of her. You know, when's the last time you heard a guy say, did you see how short his shorts were when he came in with the kids?
- Roger Marsh: I'm laughing because that just sounds ridiculous to me. But I understand that, you know, guys don't do that.
- Laura Petherbridge: You can hear a stepmom saying that about the ex when she comes to bring up the kids. And you see, and I'm throwing my sisters under the bus here. I get that. I get that. And I understand some of the why. Some of the, you know, because sometimes hubby is giving in to whatever she wants, his ex-wife, just to keep the peace. The guy just wants to keep the peace and so and she views that as him favoring his ex. The dynamic between the two wives is very different than usually the dynamic between the two husbands. And so that is where some of that tension comes from. And it causes big time explosions.
- And often the woman feels if I add a baby to this dynamic. That will make him mine. It will keep him from feeling like he only has children with his first wife. And the other thing for a woman, totally different for a woman than for a man, she missed out on being the first to give him a baby. You see, women have that in them. They have that, "he got to experience all of that with his first wife. And I never got that with this man who's the love of my life. I didn't get to experience the pregnancy, the delivery room, the first steps, all of these precious moments that a woman cherishes in her heart." She wants to have them with her husband. And so this is often what drives the adding of an ours baby, which is wonderful. I'm not saying they shouldn't do it. I'm saying you need to be careful that you think through. And Joseph is a classic example of the numerous things that can happen when you add an ours baby. Just be prepared for them. That's all I'm saying.
- Roger Marsh: You'll never read the book of Genesis the same way after reading Laura Petherbridge's book called *Step Families of the Bible: Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*, which we have up at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org), because of that very simple reasoning that you're talking about here. I mean, these are emotions. We're people. We're creating God's image. And even though the culture has changed a lot, our societal interactions, especially between men and women, husbands and wives, moms and dads, hasn't changed all that much.

You know, Laura, Dr. Dobson wrote a landmark book years ago, well, all of his books are landmark books when you think about it, but especially *Love Must Be Tough*. I think about the marriage relationship, and I'm sure there are a lot of blended families who have benefited from that as well. When you look at some of these families, these step-family situations in Scripture that you write about in your new book. Talk about how tough love can kind of bring that about. I mean, in terms of saying, God has a plan for us. Our family is together. And whether you're David, who is a friend of mine, you say, couldn't keep his eyes on his own paper, you know, when it came to women and that type of thing. Or, you know, there are so many different examples in Scripture of situations that get botched for whatever reason. And yet we have this assurance in Scripture that God can work all things together for good. Talk about maybe some of those first steps that if someone is listening to this conversation right now and saying, all right, our blended family isn't blending so well. What are some steps we can take to make it blend better?

Laura Petherbridge: The number one thing I hear primarily from the stepmom, but even some stepdads will say this to me, is my spouse refuses to tell their child no. My spouse refuses to set a boundary. They refuse to allow their child to receive a consequence. Even if they threaten, you know, if you do blank, you're going to lose your phone. They never follow through. They make the threat or they get that it's not a good idea for the kid to do this or even that it's dangerous for the child to do this.

But they don't have the backbone, in the step-parent's mind, that's what it is. They don't have the backbone to follow through and allow their child to suffer a consequence when they make a poor choice. It is the number one reason why stepfamilies fail, is this because the parent and the stepparent are looking at this child through different lenses. And the parent is looking at the child through the lens of love. I don't want to hurt them. I don't want them to be mad at me. I don't want them to not come over and visit me. It's going to make my ex mad. You know, I mean, they just want to keep peace. The step parent is going, how is this child ever going to be responsible and a good person and a good Christian, if it's a Christian family, if you don't allow them to suffer any pain? When they do something wrong, you're being a wimp. You are just letting them get away with murder and this is not love. And so they're each looking at this child through a completely different lens.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Laura Petherbridge: And the parent and the step parent then turn on each other because they don't feel you're not listening to me. You're not respecting me. And so this turns into the biggest battle in a stepfamily. It's not there in a biological family because you each brought the child into this together.

Roger Marsh: Right. Right.

Laura Petherbridge: You're both biologically connected. Even in an adoption, the mother and the father went together and got this child. They're on the same page. And so that is without a doubt the biggest battle stepfamilies face, and that is whether the kids are young or even adults.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I was going to say that I would imagine this would play out in a different way, but at the same style. If you got maybe there's a widow situation and they're remarrying in their 60s or something like that. Kids are in their 30s. You talked about that kind of family system that had been established. And maybe stepmom now is looking at her adult children and saying, wait, why are we doing this? You know, and asking the question, you're saying, because we always do it like this, you know. We always have. And dad hears this word from mom and says, I don't want to mess this up because these are my kids and this is what we've always done. And the kids get resentful. They've got better vocabularies and deeper pocketbooks now, so they can act a little differently. Whereas the young child is sitting there going, I don't want to lose my iPad. So, you know, that's, I'm sure that's a huge issue.

Laura Petherbridge: It's so hard. And the parent thinks the step-parent is being too rigid. And the step-parent thinks the parent is being too lenient. And so now it's affecting our marriage. Now it's gone from a parenting problem to a you and I problem. And I always try to encourage people, if you have not watched your fiancé, if you're dating someone, and you have not watched your fiancé parent as a single parent and you don't agree with how they're parenting as a single parent, it is a very bad idea to enter this marriage until that changes.

Roger Marsh: Wow. That's a very eye-opening statement from Laura Petherbridge. And today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're discussing her brand new book called *Step Families of the Bible: Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*. We've got a link for the book up at [drjamestobson.org](http://drjamestobson.org). You know, Laura, I would be remiss if we didn't, and I'm glad you brought this up, in your new book, *Step Families of the Bible*, the fact that the Lord Himself, you know, grew up in a, what we would call a step or blended family situation. Obviously, the conception a little bit different, you know, than what's happening here, but Mary and Joseph, and then they had a family and Jesus had siblings and step siblings and that type of thing too. But talk about why it's important for us as Christians to look at that dynamic and without passing any kind of judgment, just saying, OK, what can I learn from this? What did you learn in your research from studying the interpersonal relationships of Jesus and his siblings or half siblings, as the case may be?

Laura Petherbridge: Well, I've been a Christian for 43 years. I was an adult when I gave my life to Christ. And so, you know, I've been listening to the Christmas story and the life of Jesus for a while.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Laura Petherbridge: And I was shocked at how much I learned about Jesus and his family while asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to me what it was like for Jesus and his half siblings. You know, of course, we all tease about, can you imagine having Jesus as your half-brother or being a half-sister? You know, like, how would you compete with that? And did Mary have trouble not favoring Him because He was perfect? You know, I mean, of course, so we can go there all there with the jokes. But I think the thing that hit me the most was none of His half-siblings are at the foot of the cross.

Roger Marsh: Right, right.

Laura Petherbridge: Not one.

Roger Marsh: One of the seven words from the cross is Jesus looking at John and saying, behold, your mother, not to His half siblings. Here's mom, take care of her.

Laura Petherbridge: Yes, because in that day, a woman had no, she was property.

Roger Marsh: Right.

Laura Petherbridge: She had no way of earning a living or any of that. So he's got to give her to someone because He's the oldest son. So He's got to hand His mother off to someone or there won't be any way for her to survive. And so He gives her to John, the youngest, you know, of them all. At least that's how we're led to believe. And not one of His half brothers or sisters, you know, could be that the women weren't mentioned. That's possible because sometimes women don't get mentioned. But definitely one of his half-brothers would have been mentioned. And so in the worst moment of His life, I got to tell you, I wept. There were two times I wept the hardest while writing this book. It was that scene where Jesus is on the cross, being nailed to the cross, rejected, mocked, ridiculed in excruciating pain. And not one of His half siblings is there.

And after all of these years of doing stepfamily ministry and watching people come to me weeping, "My stepchild doesn't love me even after I've raised them. My stepbrother doesn't want anything to do with me. My half-brother has totally kicked me out of his life." And watching people weep over that, I never made the connection that Jesus lived that. Jesus experienced that. He knows what it was to be completely rejected by His own stepfamily. I have a lot of moms that get mad that the step siblings won't embrace the ours baby. You know, she has babies. She thinks everybody's.... And then when these kids are like, I want nothing to do with that kid. You know, you guys went ahead and had a baby. Don't expect me to be part of that. She gets so hurt. Why won't they embrace my baby? And to watch Jesus experience that kind of rejection and pain, whoa, it just brought me to my knees. And the other experience was Joseph when he has to go to the other room and wail. When he says that the servants are hearing him wailing, it's a guttural. It's that, you know, if you've lived very long, you've had one of those cries at least where it's so much pain. You're crying so deeply that it's almost animalistic sounds coming out of you.

And that's the way Joseph was crying. So those two really brought me to my knees.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. And the Joseph part, I mean, to start with the latter. You think about what he went through and what he experienced. And, you know, we talk about he persevered and God moved him in these different areas. And of course, the only way for him to get to where he was going to be was to go through what he went through. But then to come face to face with his brothers and have so much love for them.

And at the same time, you realize that he's only human. He's staring face to face with the guys who literally wanted to kill him because of who he was, even though they're brothers. And the heartache that that, I mean, it really is a beautiful moment. I'm tearing up just thinking about it. And then I think about Jesus, another one of the last words, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you forgotten me? That was, I always think of that between the father and son because of Jesus being, you know, taking on our sin. I never think of it as the fact that His mother's down there at the foot of the cross, but no one else from His family is. Oh, Laura, that's just, that's breathtaking.

Laura Petherbridge: It was profound. And I'd never thought of it before.

Roger Marsh: What's your hope, Laura Petherbridge? This book is outstanding. *Step Families of the Bible: Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*, for a family who, either someone who's going through this, or maybe for someone who has an adult child who's going through a divorce and a remarriage. What's your hope for this book?

Laura Petherbridge: If I'm being honest, the real hope The prayer would be that pastors and church leaders would finally open up to helping blended families, stepfamilies, and recognize that the dynamics in a stepfamily are totally different than a biological family. And they're putting these couples in a marriage class that is designed for first-time marriages is not only not helping them, it's often causing more pain or shame. You can't take them to all these marriage classes, whether it be phenomenal things like love languages or any of Dr. Dobson's stuff, until you take them into surgery and explain how the dynamics, the fractures from the former marriage have been carried in like a corpse into the second marriage. And that has to be healed before you can start walking or skipping or jumping or dancing. And so the skipping and jumping and dancing are the marriage materials.

But if I could get pastors and church leaders and denominations, and my prayer is I think the reason God wouldn't let me go is because this book is about biblical. So maybe it feels a little safer to use these Old Testament families as the illustration, as the foundation to teach, okay, God loved these stepfamilies. He loves your stepfamily. You don't have to go hide in the corner. Maybe you've got some forgiveness and repentance to do about your former marriage. I don't know. That's between you and God. That's none of my business.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Laura Petherbridge: My business is to help you survive and thrive and be a godly example for your kids in your current marriage. And so if I'm being honest, yes, I want individuals to buy it. Yes, I want people who are in stepfamilies or connected to a stepfamily to learn and grow. But my peak prayer would be, dear pastor, dear church leader, hear me. You have an untapped mission field in your backyard that if you would teach stepfamilies how to thrive and deal with the big issues that they're facing, help the children in these families and stop pretending they're like a biological family. If you would address their pain, these families could thrive. New statistic just came out from Pew Research 63% of Americans have a stepfamily relative.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Two out of three. Incredible.

Laura Petherbridge: And the church has nothing for them.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Well, they do now.

Laura Petherbridge: Amen.

Roger Marsh: Laura Petherbridge's outstanding new book called *Step Families of the Bible, Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*. This is the resource that your family needs. It's the resource your church needs. And we couldn't recommend it more highly. Laura, thank you for the work that you've done and in accepting the challenge and the ministry that God has placed you in. It really is awesome, the work that you've done and continue to do. And thank you for being obedient and diligent in your faithfulness to that calling. And thank you for being with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Laura Petherbridge: Thank you for asking. I appreciate it.

Roger Marsh: Well, you've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and we just featured the conclusion of my conversation with Laura Petherbridge about her most recent book called *Step Families of the Bible: Timeless Wisdom for Blended Families*. If you missed part one or you want to hear today's program again to share it with a friend or family member, you'll find both online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). You'll also find information about the book there when you click on it as well.

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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 joining us 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.

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