



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Warfare Strategies to Win Back Your Prodigal Child

Guest(s): Laine Lawson Craft

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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 division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Thank you so much for joining us today. We are here on location at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Dallas, Texas this year. Now, I think many of us are familiar with the parable of the prodigal son. Luke chapter 15, some of us know it much better than others. The younger son goes out on his own, seeks his own way, squanders his inheritance, and ends up feeding pigs in a pig pen when he literally, I love how the Scripture says he came to his senses and then decided to return home. Then there's a grand reunion of the son with his father who'd been waiting in great expectation for the son to come home and they all lived happily ever after.

Well, there are many parents who have clung to and are clinging to this passage, and they have a prodigal son, prodigal daughter, and they're waiting in expectation for that son or daughter to return home. And sometimes it takes longer than you want it to, and sometimes it doesn't happen when you want it to, and sometimes it doesn't happen at all. Well, our guest on the program today experienced not one, not two, but three prodigal children who all went out on their own, but eventually returned to the Lord. And she's written about that experience. Her name is Laine Lawson Craft. She's an award-winning author, speaker, and podcast host. Emerging from a near collapsing marriage and a financial hardship because of this, Laine understands firsthand the transformative power of faith and her real life victories over spiritual warfare resonate with so many people. They turned her into a magnet for parents who are saying, "You survived this. I want to survive it too." She's been featured on the 700 Club, on CBN, Fox News, and much more, and she and her family live in the great sunshine state of Florida. Laine Lawson Craft, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Laine Lawson Craft: Thank you so much, Roger. What an honor.

Roger Marsh: Can you give us ... I'm sure you've had to tell this story many times before, but since you have not one, not two, but three, prodigal stories. Can you give us just an overview of what those experiences were like, just kind of in a nutshell, before we get into this new *Warfare Parenting* book that you have?

Laine Lawson Craft: Absolutely. I first and foremost want to say, Roger, I think the biggest thing I want any listener to take away is the shame because at the time that I had three prodigals, not one, not two, but three, I had a national magazine in every bookstore in America and Canada, all faith-based. It was Jesus from cover to cover. So I was brought from the secular world into being a messenger of hope for Jesus Christ. And I thought, okay, I'm doing everything God's called me and purposed me to do. And at that same time, I had one child that loved drugs and alcohol. I had another child that loved the concerts and all the wild drugs that go with it. And then my daughter was 17 or 18 and really battled depression into such a way that she thought life would be better without her in it. So when I say the enemy was out to seek kill and destroy my three, he was, and he used all kinds of different darts for that.

Roger Marsh: Especially that third one. I mean, we've all heard the story of the too much partying or gets the wrong boyfriend, girlfriend and starts doing something crazy. But your daughter battling depression to the point where she was considering taking her own life, that's a whole different type of prodigal in the sense that you know that if God is the Lord of life and the relationship is solid there, you're not sitting around saying, "I don't want to be here."

Laine Lawson Craft: That's exactly right. And you know, we are seeing a uptick of this in an awful way, anxiety and depression for our children today. There's no shame in that either. When I talk about a prodigal, I do mean a wayward or mentally ill or ... I really broaden that now because our children today, man, they are under attack.

Roger Marsh: Yes. Yes, they certainly are. So let's talk about now, you did write a book about your experience and now you have a follow-up here, a daily battle plan to fight for your child called *Warfare Parenting*, which I think is really intriguing. Obviously, we want the sugarcoated Hollywood version where they all come running home and there's music playing and flowers and all that stuff. Obviously, real life doesn't work like that, but what was the initial reaction with you and your husband when you're looking around one day going, "All three of our kids. What the heck? God's blessing our ministries and our marriage and our life, but our kids are just way off the rails."

Laine Lawson Craft: Well, I think the big aha moment for me as a mom was when I realized, Roger, I wasn't battling that teen or young adult. I was battling the enemy. That was a big aha because that shifted my perspective. I mean, I wasn't yelling and screaming going, "You've broken curfew again. The police have called me again at 2:00 AM." So when I realized I was in a battle with the enemy himself for my children, that's when I became a true warrior and warfare parenting.

Roger Marsh: Love it. Love it. Well, that is encouraging to hear because you've kind of set the stage for, I mean, just about anyone who's listening. There is a way to do battle with this, but don't chase after them. Don't major in the minors, I guess is what I heard you say.

Laine Lawson Craft: Right. Right. And pick your battles.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Laine Lawson Craft: Amen. You've got to figure out what is it that really needs my attention to war for.

Roger Marsh: I love that. The fact that these kids were also raised in a faith-based home, I think is worth digging into a little bit. I think the fact that you were able to say, okay, we know what is ours, which battles are ours to fight, and which ones aren't ours. We're not being punished. This is not some kind of retribution by God for some unconfessed sin. These are just kids who were raised with a biblical foundation and they've wandered from it.

Laine Lawson Craft: Absolutely. And mine even had a second advantage that many don't. They saw the hand of God resurrect my dead marriage. Steve and I were married 17 years and God came in and took that dead marriage and turned it around and they got to witness that. So it's not like they had not seen it in the home already. And we like to say that was the anchor for Steve and I when we had three prodigals, knowing that God resurrected our marriage, that was the hope that he would turn each one of them around in His timing.

Roger Marsh: There are a lot of traditional parenting methods that unfortunately don't work in situations like yours. Talk about why a lot of the traditional approaches overlook certain things where you're saying, "Wait, I tried to have a curfew and that, like you said, and at two o'clock in the morning, the police is calling me. I don't understand what's wrong." But you had to learn.

Laine Lawson Craft: I did. And you first, again, got to remember the darkness these children are under. I think we forget that they are one click away from making the wrong choice, hooking up with the wrong person, sending the wrong picture or receiving that picture. I think where the most important part is, I believe we can use outside sources, but I really do believe it takes an arsenal and a combination of it all. I don't think one and done. I also am not Pollyanna. In the *Parent's Battle Plan*, I even have a whole chapter about when you lose a child or you don't get your prodigal back. I call it when the miracle that you get is not what you expected. And I just talk about how it takes a miracle every day if you lose a child to this or one that never comes home.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. I was going to say, and you're talking about losing a child either because their life ends or because they wandered so far away. And I could still remember being at my father's closest friend in high school when he passed away. My dad was not able physically to be there. He was very ill. They were both in their 80s. And so I went to the funeral and I wound up being a pall bearer and honoring this guy, I'd worked for him for a while. He was a wonderful man. He had two adopted children and one of his adopted daughters was just so far off the rails. And she basically showed up at the funeral to see if there was any kind of

inheritance for her to collect. It was just a pain. She sat in the car in the parking lot while we had the service, that type of thing. And I thought to myself, that really had to be hard for them to see her not raised that way, but those are the decisions that she made. And that must be tough to know that it didn't get reconciled for them before that.

Laine Lawson Craft: Well, and Roger, you said something very powerful. We are not the summation of our children's choices.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Laine Lawson Craft: I grew up kind of thinking that my children would be a reflection of who I am. And that's not true because they're children and they're young adults. And listen, the prodigal adult children, the numbers are frightening of 50 year olds that have walked away from faith or continue to abuse alcohol or whatever it may be. So again, you are not the summation of your child's choices.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. And that old expression that I love so much. When you're born, you look like your parents and when you die, you look like your choices. You mentioned adult prodigals as well as younger children who go through the prodigal season. They all have a little bit of rebellion, but prodigal is a whole different dimension. Is there some kind of commonality that you've seen?

Laine Lawson Craft: Well, I think probably the complete redundancy for me in a personal way, making the same identical wrong choice over and over again. That's when I knew we're in war because these were good kids, really. And I believe every believer, the heart of God is in them and they don't wish that for their child or their adult child. So I do believe it's just having self-destructive choices over and over again would set apart maybe a prodigal from a rebellious, if that makes any sense.

Roger Marsh: Absolutely. No, it makes perfect sense. Prayer of course is where it all ... it often winds up being the last resort instead of the first line of defense, but it's important to have prayer. I mean, and we have spiritual armor on when we're fighting for our loved one, but how does your warfare parenting movement contribute to not just getting the kid back, but this is, like you said, this is a full transformation for the family.

Laine Lawson Craft: It is. It's the heart of the battle. So for prayer for me was God gave me a vision in my mind and I started pleading the blood of Jesus, which we don't talk a lot about anymore. But where do we get power, authority, is through the blood of Jesus. So I would literally paint a cross, a blood filled cross on the back of my children in my mind. And I'd say, "Father, in the name of Jesus and the blood of Christ, I just ask that you protect Steven" because I learned that a male is 25 years old before that frontal lobe develops and gets that good decision making. So first and foremost, I would say, "God, just protect him and then Lord, give him your wisdom." And so through that, I would do for each child, Lawson and

Kaylee. And guess what? I am here today to tell you, I believe that powerful prayer that I did all the time. And remember, my eldest was 15 years before God came in and delivered him.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Wow. 15 years. I love the sequence there too. And I think it's important to underscore. You prayed for protection and for wisdom. And I think a lot of times as parents, we go right to wisdom. They're making dumb decisions, so God please give them wisdom to make the right decision. Instead of saying, "Hey, wait a minute." I mean, the protection part has to be there first. If they're in a destructive cycle and they're sliding down that hill, protection is of the utmost, it's the most basic.

Laine Lawson Craft: It was huge for us because I had two boys and they liked to flip cars.

Roger Marsh: Of course they did.

Laine Lawson Craft: ... and get racing, speaking tickets. How many can you get in a year? So I literally, I used to have a prayer, Roger. I would say, Father God, keep them alive till they're 25.

Roger Marsh: And as a former 25-year-old male, I completely vouch for that message there. Now there's the issue though of what are you doing in terms of you're praying for your kids. Obviously you're praying for protection, you're praying for wisdom, but you're also still trying to have relationship with these prodigals and that is much easier said than done. What are some tips for having not only just keep the relationship going, but to make sure it's spiritually purposeful. You don't just want to say, "Hey, show up on Thanksgiving and whatever. And whatever you're doing that's destructive, we don't care as long as you keep calling us." You want way more than that.

Laine Lawson Craft: Right. And there are a couple of things that I know are pivotal. One is I would just look at my child or children at some seasons and go, "This is a new day. What we've been doing is not working. There are new mercies every day. So will you help me, Steve and Lawson or Kaylee, come up with a new way to do us?" Wow. You wouldn't believe a breakthrough that would bring.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Laine Lawson Craft: Yeah.

Roger Marsh: Many parents would say, "Well, I could never do that. They're making dumb decisions." I mean, quite frankly, that would be my first reaction is to say, "Why should I ask them that?" But you had to trust that that was what God wanted you to do.

Laine Lawson Craft: Absolutely. And I think it takes that level of compassion because you know that you know that's your child. And then the second thing that I really think is

pivotal is say, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Steven. I keep yelling at you." I can remember him saying, "Mom, you always act so disappointed in me." And I go, "I'm not disappointed in you, Steven. I'm disappointed in the choices you continue to make." So I would say, "Hey, look, I'm sorry. Did I yell too much this time?" But Roger, when a kid keeps doing wrong, it's not easy to keep your cool. So I think I'm sorry is pivotal because I believe that also enables a new beginning. When you just say, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I think Gary Chapman had a book out years ago. He had *The 5 Love Languages*, but then he also did *The 5 Love Languages of Apology*. And when you say, "I'm sorry," I'm thinking, well, there's maybe a couple different ways. Maybe saying I'm sorry isn't the way that they hear it, maybe it's please forgive me, or trying to do something that shows that you want to do differently. But whatever it is, be intentional. You're saying mom, dad, if you've got that prodigal child, you take the initiative. Don't just pray and wait for them to have an epiphany one day and come home for Christmas and say, "You know what? You're right. 15 years on your knees and by golly, God finally broke through." It takes a lot of hard work.

Laine Lawson Craft: It does. And I think it also allows the children to see that you're not perfect because we're not perfect. Is there any perfect person? And there's no perfect parent. We're all going to make mistakes. And so when we say to our child, number one, let's do a new something because what we're doing is not working and let's talk about it. Don't just do it. Try to get them on your team. And then you say, "I'm sorry. If I've ever hurt you in the past, maybe I blew my cool." Right then, you'll see it in their eyes or go, "Wow, okay. Maybe I can at least listen to them."

Roger Marsh: Yeah. This is a great conversation because of how important it is. I mean, how many parents are wrestling with this? How many young people are struggling as Laine Lawson Craft mentioned earlier. One of the principles that you recommend is to declare victory. And I appreciate the fact that you encourage parents to do that because I'm sure that most parents are thinking this is either black or white. It's either up or down, yes or no. Either they are completely restored to wholeness and they're home and we've got a great relationship. And if I don't have that, then it's not working. Talk about why you say that declaring victory in the middle of the struggles can actually be a source of strength for parents.

Laine Lawson Craft: It really can. It can keep you encouraged. That's a pivotal thing in the *Warfare Parenting*. I'm just going to tell you, Roger, I got very desperate at times. I mean, 15 years is a long time. And you can imagine the offenses I had to endure. So I say, take small victories, just take the small victory. If you hear from them, say, "Thank you for calling me."

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Laine Lawson Craft: "I've been wondering about you. " And I think too, when we wait expectantly, I learned that the hard way. That's faith in action. When you are waiting expectantly for God to move, then that allows God to move. Amen? So it's wonderful, but it's also very hard. I love to call it Roger, the meantime. You offer a prayer to God, you bring this prodigal home and then you're waiting for the answer. And I call that the meantime because it's mean. The enemy distracts you. He disappoints you. He really almost turns up the warfare on your child. So I really have a heart. In the first book, I gave you applications, tools, everything you would need for the battle. But in the *Warfare Parenting*, it literally is a daily nugget for that parent that's still warring for that child.

Roger Marsh: I love that thought that this you encourage us to look at this as an ongoing battle. Talk about the fact that there are, I'm sure there were times with your oldest, especially that long period of time, where you were trying to have an open and honest conversation with him and he said things purposely to hurt you or your husband, just to say, "I had a miserable childhood," things that they weren't true or maybe there was a situation that was a little dicey growing up and that led him to a certain way. How does a parent ... I mean, the ones that pierce the armor of God, and at least where you could feel that heat coming up against your skin, what are some good ways for parents to react short of just slamming the phone down or banishing them from their family's home for a while?

Laine Lawson Craft: Well, I can tell you from a mama, when I heard, "I hate you." Well, that would break my heart. "I hate you. You don't even know what I'm up against." And all I can say, when I started seeing, I don't know if it's a phrase, but when people are the most unlovable or when they need us to love them the most, and when I changed that lens and perspective, when he would say ... All three of them had their moments. "You don't understand. You're the meanest mother." I could go on and on because I mean, again, 15 years, you can imagine what I would hear. But when I started saying, "Oh wow, this is a cry for help." When he tells me his mom, that I know he loves, that he hates me, again too, I tell parents we can do this in another section, but about boundaries. When I started putting serious boundaries in place, that's when I really started getting that, I hate you, but do any of us change without a little pain?

Roger Marsh: Exactly. Exactly.

Laine Lawson Craft: So you don't want to enable them either.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. Well, boundaries are healthy. Talk about the reaction then when you hit that breakthrough moment. Maybe give an example with one of your kids. When the prodigal does return and it's not just false hope, it's not just a, or as we say here in the South, I guess, false fall. I'm sure parents go through a real emotional rollercoaster when they're dealing with that.

Laine Lawson Craft: They do. They do. And a Scripture always comes to mind. "A righteous man falls seven times, but he gets back up." If you don't mind me sharing for Steven, my

15-year-old prodigal was high on cocaine and he called an Uber and the Uber driver came to pick him up to take him to his next party. And the Uber driver was from another country earning money. And he said, "I feel like I'm supposed to pray for you, son." He was in ministry. So Steven, of course, was familiar with prayer and the man started praying and Steven said the presence of God. He knew he was high, but the presence of God was so strong that he was pressed to the floorboard of this Uber car and started wailing and crying. Now listen, he was high on cocaine going to the next party, but God came down and touched him so powerfully, Roger. He was forever changed. That was the beginning of his deliverance.

Roger Marsh: What was that like for you and your husband?

Laine Lawson Craft: I mean, I'm getting chills every time I share that story because for me, I don't know anybody else out there. I mean, that's not how I prayed God to touch him. Literally, he was in the pit of darkness when God came down and it just showed me none of us have to clean up for God to just come down and save us and rescue us.

Roger Marsh: Amen. Amen. What a blessing and what an encouragement. There are those who might be listening to this conversation right now and they're saying, "Okay, I'm resonating with everything you're saying and it sounds like it's really wonderful, but my prodigal story didn't have a happy ending."

Laine Lawson Craft: Right. And again, yes, because I just know that we have free will down here and choices and my heart breaks. I actually just ministered to someone at y'all's front desk that has lost a son to fentanyl poisoning. And I was able to minister and say, "I just want you to know the miracle today is that you're standing. And the miracle today is you're still calling upon the Lord." So that's what I say. Never give up hope, but if your child has passed and gone to Heaven, just know that God will sustain you and He loves you. And Roger, you know God was the first prodigal parent. What did He do? He had Adam and Eve.

Laine Lawson Craft: And what did He tell them? Don't eat of that tree. What did they do?

Roger Marsh: They ate.

Laine Lawson Craft: They ate the tree. And He came back. If you remember, He goes, "What have you done?" He was devastated.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. I was going to say, He's devastated, even though He knew what they did. I mean, God, He's omniscient. He knew that they were capable of it, but it was like, oh man. Day one and here you're messing up.

Laine Lawson Craft: And so I really do want to touch on that though. Suicide is up 25%.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Laine Lawson Craft: Fentanyl poisonings are in the ... I think someone told me recently, and you can check my facts, but more people have died with fentanyl poisoning than we lost in a 10-year Vietnam War.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Laine Lawson Craft: Come on now.

Roger Marsh: That's incredible.

Laine Lawson Craft: Incredible. So I know there's someone listening today that has lost a loved one or a child. And I want you to know God loves you and loves that child and He will never leave you or forsake you. And He has promised us that we will reunite in Heaven.

Roger Marsh: That's wonderful. Well, Laine Lawson Craft has been my guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We've been talking about her brand-new book called *Warfare Parenting*, which is a daily battle plan to fight for your child. Take us out with a word of encouragement for the parent right now or the parent who's struggling with the ... And we're talking prodigal kid. We're not talking about rebellious three, four, five year old. I mean, that's a whole different dimension of spiritual warfare, but we're talking about that kid maybe 13, 14, 15, who was walking the straight and narrow and all of a sudden they're gone sideways. Or maybe the college student who seemed like they had it all together and the job got to be too much and next thing you know, they're not coming to family gatherings. Give that parent a good first step of encouragement.

Laine Lawson Craft: Well, I just want to offer hope because no prodigal is too far gone. And my life has shown that. Our testimonies have shown that. Again, if you're not praying for your prodigal, who is? So I encourage you today, get serious. And I don't mean that it's going to bring instant. I'm just saying that it keeps you connected to God in such a way that it keeps you encouraged and hopeful and expectant that God is going to bring that prodigal home.

Roger Marsh: Amen. Laine Lawson Craft, thank you for the work that you've done in this area. Thanks for being so vulnerable and sharing your personal story. I know it's going to encourage thousands of people, and we appreciate you being with us today on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Laine Lawson Craft: Thank you so much for allowing me to share this message of a hope.

Roger Marsh: Well, Laine Lawson Craft has reminded us that no prodigal is too far gone, and that echoes the heart of the father who never stops pursuing His children. That's the truth that every parent needs to hold onto, especially during those long, difficult seasons. I'm Roger Marsh and you've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring an encouraging conversation I had with author

Laine Lawson Craft about walking through the prodigal journey with faith and intentionality. If you missed any portion of today's broadcast or perhaps you know a parent who has a prodigal child in their home, we encourage you to go to jdfi.net and you can hear this entire program again. Once you're there, you'll also find a link for Laine's newest book. It's called *Warfare Parenting: A Daily Battle Plan to Fight for Your Child*. You'll find information about the book and the audio from this program at drjamesdobson.org or jdfi.net. That's just an easier way of getting to the same place.

Now, while we've been talking today about the challenges of raising children who have wandered from the faith, I want to share a resource that can help strengthen your marriage through every season of parenting. When you have a prodigal adult child, that can really put a strain on your marriage and strong marriages create the foundation that can help a family weather even the toughest storms like a prodigal child. That's why we've created a helpful PDF guide. It's called "10 Tips for a Long Lasting Marriage." These principles are drawn from Dr. Dobson's decades of research and counsel. And whether you are parents of young children or your empty nesters who are still praying for your adult prodigal children, these principles can help you and your spouse stay united. You can download your free copy of the helpful PDF guide called "10 Tips for a Long Lasting Marriage" when you go to drjamesdobson.org, or you can also get there faster by going to jdfi.net.

Every day, families all across America turn to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute for biblical wisdom when they're facing their toughest challenges and your partnership makes it possible for us to broadcast messages of hope and practical guidance that reminds struggling families they're not alone in their battles. If today's conversation has given you fresh courage for your own journey, would you consider helping us reach other families who desperately need this same hope? Your gift of any amount continues this work of equipping families with biblical, practical truth. And you can make a secure donation online at jdfi.net. That's jdfi.net or call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute, 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 can still trust for the family you love.

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