



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. Dobson Shares About His Dad – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

Air Date: June 10, 2025

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, I'm Roger Marsh. In honor of Father's Day coming up this Sunday, on today's edition of Family Talk, we're featuring a powerful presentation from Dr. James Dobson about the incredible impact fathers have on their children. On our last program, Dr. Dobson began by sharing deeply personal stories about his dad, a man who understood that being a father meant more than just providing for the family. On today's program, we'll hear even more touching stories from Dr. Dobson, including that pivotal moment when his father made an almost unthinkable sacrifice to benefit his teenage son and his family. So let's continue this touching tribute to fathers right here, right now on this special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: When I was six years of age, we came to a crisis in my family, because my dad felt called to be an evangelist and he felt like he absolutely had to have my mother. So, we both needed her and I couldn't go with them cause I had to go to school, there was no homeschooling in those days. And so my mom and dad in agony, let my great aunt raise me for that first year. And it was very, very hard for me and I became very bratty that year. I caused a lot of trouble in that first grade and in the neighborhood. I wanted to fight everybody and I was feeling abandoned. And a year later, my mom and dad came back and my dad looked at me and he said to my mother, "He's not our son anymore. He's being raised by the aunt." And he says, "I can't allow that." And he bought a home in Bethany, Oklahoma, and he went alone for the next 10 years without my mother. That was very, very hard for him. He made a tremendous sacrifice, and my mother was mother and father to me during the next about eight years. And I was not without him because he would come back and when he was back, he was mine and we would do things together. But he never rejected me and I always felt like I could go to him with anything. So that was second grade, where I began living with my mother in Bethany, Oklahoma. And my mother was also a very good mother and she had her hands full, but she knew how to handle me. It was amazing. *Dare to Discipline* is a book that was plagiarized. It was, I took it from my mom.

I saw how she raised me, and I talked to her a lot about that. And she just had a way with kids, and because I had the ability to be kind of bratty when I was in

the junior high, seventh grade, my teacher made a deal to the class. She said, "I want you to read these books. And I've put values on them, numbers on them. And the more important the book is, and the bigger it is and the more complex it is, you get a bigger number. And if you get a certain number in the course of the semester, I will give you an A plus." So, I came home and told my mother I was going to get an A plus, because all I had to do is read all these books, and I cheated. I didn't read them, I turned them in, but I didn't read them.

And I somehow thought that would be okay with my mom. So I came home with an A plus and I said, "Isn't this neat, I got an A plus." She said, "What'd you do to get it?" And I said, "Well, I was supposed to read these books but I didn't do it." And she went into orbit. She said, "Do you know what you have done? You have really lied about this and you're going to have to make it up. And I want you to read every book that you turned in." The works of Shakespeare were in there. A lot of very big books were in there. And I spent that summer reading while my friends were outside playing, but I learned something about cheating from my mother. I finally came to the last book, it was Ben Hur, and Ben Hur is about that thick.

And I started reading Ben Hur and I just went to my mother and said, "I can't read that book." And she said, "Well, then you've got to go tell your teacher." So I went into my seventh grade teacher and I said, "I didn't tell you the truth. I've now read these books, but I can't read Ben Hur." She forgave me and my mom forgave me, but I never did that again. But she didn't spank me or yell at me or anything. But anyway, she was a great mother. But when I turned 16, I got the notion that I knew more than she did, and that it was probably time for me to start making my own decisions. And the town was kind of changing and I was out in some kind of party. We didn't drink or do anything, but we were dancing.

And in my church tradition, you didn't do that. And I came home that night. My mother said, "Well, what did you do?" And I said, "Well, I was dancing. I'm learning to dance." And she said, "Well, you're not going to do that anymore, are you?" And I said, "No, I am going to do it." Big mistake, big mistake. My mom just said, "Well, I'm going to call your dad." And I said, "You do that." I had a stake in that conversation, I went around the corner and I listened to the conversation. She called my dad and she only said three words, "I need you." My dad was a prominent evangelist in our church. He was slated for four years ahead, and she said, "I need you." You know what he did? He got on the train, came home and canceled his entire four year slate, put a stake in the front yard and a sign that said, "For sale."

He shocked the daylights out of me. And the next thing I knew, he took a church in South Texas and I was on a train heading for San Benito, Texas. And my dad took a pastorate there and he was with me those last two years. It was his second big sacrifice on my behalf. And he hunted with me and fished with me and reconnected with me and he pulled me back. My dad was even willing to sacrifice his own ministry, or put it on hold, in order to do what was right for me.

When I was in graduate school, the abortion issue was really being talked about and the professors there were saying things that were flat out racist. You know what they were saying? "You know, in the inner city, there all these kids, and many of them raised by cocaine moms and their fathers are non-existent. And they're raised in the inner city where the gangs are prevalent and you know what it would really..." Listen to this. "It would really be better if they were not born."

And I came back to talk to my parents about it. I remember one night, we're having dinner and I told them what my professors had said and I hadn't yet settled my understanding of abortion, it wasn't even legal. And my dad looked at me, big tears pushed out of his eyes and ran down his cheeks and he said, "No, no, no, no, no. That is evil. That's wrong. Those babies have a right to live." And he said, "don't you believe it." He was that moral beacon for me. And I began to get an understanding of what abortion is really like. But that was the way it was. Well, I went on it and I graduated from USC's doctoral program, got a Ph.D. And without bragging to you, I tell you that the whole world opened to me. It came at me from everywhere.

My books were all number one best-sellers, and I was getting hundreds and hundreds of speaking requests. And I was on national television. I don't know if you remember the old Dinah Shore show. I was the psychologist on that show. And then a little later, Marty Rubenstein, who was the president of the Mutual Broadcasting Agency, which owned the Larry King Show, came to me and he said, "I would like to make you a guest on Larry King for two hours and let's see how it goes." And I said, "All right." And so, on a Sunday night I did the Larry King Show and another Sunday night I was on a show of my own, which was sponsored by Purex. And Marty came to me and he said, "I really like what you did and I made Larry King and gave him a show. I want to give you one like it."

And he said, "If you will do this, I will make you a very wealthy man." And words of my father rung in my ears, because my dad in those days wrote me a letter. This is so characteristic of him. He wrote me a letter and he said, "Jim, I'm proud of what's happening in your life. It's wonderful to see what's taking place. But I'm worried about something, I'm very concerned. Because your daughter Danae," Ryan was not born, "your daughter Danae is growing up in a world much farther gone in moral decline than the world into which you were born. And I have observed that in this kind of culture that you can't guarantee the spiritual welfare of your children if you're never at home."

I'd gone 17 days without being home because everything was just... And that is really heady folks, for a young man. It really is, when you have suddenly gotten pretty taken with yourself. And I had not gone very far down that road so I didn't abandon my family, but I could have right there. And if I had taken that offer that Rubinstein had laid before me, I would have done huge damage to my wife and my two children by that point.

And my father ended that by saying, "Saving your children and preserving them for the next life requires time. And it cannot be given if it's all sacrificed and laid on an altar of career ambition. Don't make this mistake." And again, he was there and pulled me back from the edge. What a good man he was. And it was such a shock, I was up speaking in California on a Sunday morning and at break time they came and told me that my dad had died and he was gone. And it rocked me to the core, because I had depended on him for so much. All of my values, my love for the Lord, everything came out of the relationship, primarily with my dad. And I wept in a way that I had never wept before.

He had been sitting at a table at his sister's house on a Sunday afternoon. He had characteristically just prayed. They asked him to pray the prayer for the meal. And he had held a baby and then they had begun to eat and he just leaned into my mother's arms and was gone. My mother was devastated. She was absolutely committed to him with every fiber in her body and she could not deal with it, and never did. There was something else grieving in that house. My dad had a little dog named Benji, named for Benjamin Spock, and he held that little toy terrier. And Benji was always where my dad was. And my dad read a lot. He was reading at the time he died, on God's four letter words, he called them, which are the essential amino acids. And he would sit in his big chair and hold Benji, who was always in his lap, always near him.

Well Benji, that Sunday morning saw my parents leave. There was a staircase that went down to the garage and a door. He saw him leave, only one came back and he was curious about that. And he stood at the top of the steps for months waiting for my dad to come back. And I went there to pack up all my dad's clothes and get them ready, to get my mother ready to come to California to live near us. And I put the suitcases on the bed and I was packing his clothes and Benji came and jumped up on the bed and he looked at that suitcase and he walked stiff legged over to the suitcase. And then he put one foot in it and then another and he walked over to my dad's clothes and he sniffed them, and then he laid down on the clothes and put his head down where the coat was, because that little dog loved my dad.

Many, many people loved my dad. The most important thing he gave me was a deep commitment to Jesus Christ. It was the passion of his heart. And toward the end of his life he knew that he didn't have long to live and he began praying that the Lord would give him and his brother-in-law, who had cancer, he was praying that the Lord would give them some more time to win souls to Christ. And he prayed for three days and three nights and he was at the hospital the day after he had had an encounter with the Lord. He never said that flippantly, but about dawn that morning the Lord had spoken to him and He said, "I have heard your prayer and I'm going to answer it. You're going to reach millions of people all around the world, but it's not going to be through you. It's going to be through your son, because you're going to die."

My dad the next day went to the hospital to see his brother-in-law who died that day and my dad had a massive heart attack the next. He was never able to

tell me that story and it was seven years later when I was doing the gambling, I mean the pornography commission and was frankly carrying too much a load, and I got tired. And Vince Lombardi said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." I got kind of cowardly, and everybody thinks that if you head up a ministry, you're so ego involved that nothing would take it away from you. You wouldn't give it up. I was contemplating how long I could do that. And a letter came from my aunt and she told me this story and all of a sudden, I realized that all the doors that had opened, I started in 1977 with a half-time secretary.

And by that time, seven years later, I had over 500 employees and was trying to figure out how to keep a roof over their heads. And I started off on 34 stations once a week and by that time I had between two and 300 stations and I began to see that ministry very, very differently, and I do today. Do you know that what has happened to me, at Focus on the Family and in this ministry has almost nothing to do with me? It resulted from my dad's prayer and the promise that the Lord made to him about me and what the Lord planned to do. And everything that has taken place since then is a result of His blessing because I couldn't have opened a single door. And it's still that way today.

I hope he's here. I don't know the theology of that, but I wish he were here. Wish he could've been here tonight, for me to tell him how much I appreciate him for the sacrifices he made for me, for the love for Christ that he taught me. I never saw him compromise one time in my entire life. He was not a perfect man, he would be very embarrassed if he could hear me talking today as though he were some kind of saint, because he wasn't. He was very selfish at times. He was wrapped up in himself sometimes, but I'm telling you on the things that mattered, he stood like a rock. And Shirley and I have tried to do that with our kids. After I got that letter from my dad about the culture and the dangers that it posed, we began praying in earnest for those kids, because we knew that the devil could not get between us.

There was no threat of that. I don't care, some people's theology say you shouldn't talk like that. We knew that what we had was permanent and complete. But we didn't know whether or not that could be passed on to the next generation. And so we began fasting and praying for our kids and we prayed that prayer, I know the Lord got tired of it. We prayed that prayer all through those years saying, "Lord, when it comes to the end of the day, what we want you to remember that we asked for was not success or money or fame. We're not asking for any of that, not even asking for health. But we're saying that when our kids come to a fork in the road, when they are beyond our reach, put somebody there that has influence in their lives."

"When they no longer hear us for a period of time, giving them somebody they will listen to. And Lord above all else, may the circle be unbroken." I want to tell you all that that is job one, and you serve Him with a willing mind and that you as it says in Deuteronomy 6, when you get up in the morning, when you go for a walk, when you lie down, put it on the forehead, write it on the doorpost of

your house, write it on your wrist, and tell them the great things God has done. And that is the sum total of what I came here to say to you all tonight.

Roger Marsh:

Dr. James Dobson has been reminding us that the greatest legacy we can leave isn't measured in achievements or accolades, it's found in the faith we pass on to the next generation. You've been listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and a special program featuring Dr. Dobson's memories of his father. Now if you missed any part of this presentation, or if you'd like to share it with someone you love, simply visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now, broadcasts like the one you heard today only reach families because of listeners like you who believe in the mission of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And during the month of June, we have a special opportunity for you to multiply your impact on families. Right now through June 30th, several generous ministry partners have pooled their resources to create an extraordinary matching grant. That means every gift you give will be matched dollar for dollar, doubling your support for families who desperately need biblical truth and encouragement. You can give your special matching grant gift online at drjamesdobson.org. You can also give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson family Institute.