



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Ken Davis Shares from His Heart

Guest(s): Ken Davis

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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. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, some of the people who make us laugh the hardest are actually carrying stories that we would never guess they were going through. And that's certainly true of our guest today here on Family Talk, comedian, speaker, and author Ken Davis. Ken is an award-winning author of 12 books. He's the founder of The Score Speaker Academy, where he trains others in the art of public speaking. But beneath all the humor is a man who has walked through some genuinely dark valleys. A while back, Ken sat down with Dr. Dobson to open up about the complicated relationship he shared with his emotionally distant father, a survivor of the Bataan Death March, and how that shaped the man Ken became. There's a lot of heart in this broadcast, so let's join Dr. Dobson and his guest, Ken Davis, right now on today's edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: One of my favorite people is the man that is here today, Ken Davis, who I think has an intuitive understanding of this experience called humanity. What it means to live as he has and to hear him talk about what he's learned and what he's seen. The sorrows and the joys and the experience of being with his family and speaking to people all around the world. There's just a lot that he has to teach us. But if you don't mind, there are two matters that I would like to get you to talk about. The first is your relationship with your father. It was different. It was the kind of relationship that many older men had with their fathers who were involved in World War II. Wasn't your dad in the war?
- Ken Davis: My dad was a survivor of the Bataan Death March.
- Dr. James Dobson: Alright. Okay. And that shaped and had an influence on the way he related to you.
- Ken Davis: Yes.
- Dr. James Dobson: Talk about that man. Who he was and how you felt about him.
- Ken Davis: It's an absolutely amazing thing that he even survived. And his survival depended on him being tough. And perhaps as a result of that it was hard for

my dad to say, "I love you." I think it was true of many people of that generation. "I love you" was said by putting a roof over the head and by putting food on the table and, "I don't have to say it." I remember somebody in a counseling session, a man said to the counselor, "I told my wife I loved her when I married her and if I change my mind, I'll let her know."

Dr. James Dobson: I'll let her know.

Ken Davis: Yeah. Not good.

Dr. James Dobson: We need to explain what the Bataan Death March was and maybe you'll do that.

Ken Davis: Yeah, just very briefly. A group of Americans were put on this peninsula in the Philippines and told to defend it and they were given no reinforcements.

Dr. James Dobson: They were abandoned by our government.

Ken Davis: Yeah, they were abandoned and they held and held and held and held that piece of land for longer than would be humanly possible but finally were overwhelmed by the Japanese forces. There was a, I believe it was sixty-some mile march, that they had to go on. They were already starved to death. Many of them died on the way. I don't have the statistics all in my mind, but then they were taken to these horrible prison camps where they were kept. My father was there for three and a half years, weighed eighty some pounds when he was liberated.

Dr. James Dobson: If anyone collapsed on the march they were bayoneted or shot.

Ken Davis: Yep. Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Just utter cruelty.

Ken Davis: Yep. It was cruelty. Unbelievable cruelty. And one of the reasons was that the Japanese held no respect for anyone who would surrender. But my dad came out of that experience. And I want to make sure your listeners understand: my dad loved me with a passion. But there was a block that kept him from saying those words. I would say to my dad "I love you," and he'd say, "Well, I love you too, with God's love." And that actually got to a point where it would make me angry. You'll understand. I would say, "I want your love. I want to hear that you love me." He loved the word agape. He said, "Well, I love you with agape love." And I just wanted to hear the words.

So, I have proclaimed since I can remember beginning speaking, the importance of those three words in the life of a person. I had just received an award for one of the books that I had written and I remember the award was above me in the airplane and I sat in that seat and I said, "I wish my dad could be here. I so want

him to be proud of me. I would love to have him look at this, read it and say, 'I'm proud of you and I love you. I love you so much.'" So, I wrote my dad a letter on that airplane. I have inherited some of that. I'm not a good writer. I take some things for relationships for granted. But anyway, I wrote this letter and at the end of the letter I say, "All my life one of my major goals in life was to make you proud." And I wrote, "I want you to know today, I love you."

Dr. James Dobson: Was that letter written while your dad was still alive?

Ken Davis: Oh yes. My dad lived for many years after this particular letter was written. But it was at the beginning of my success. It would have been around the first time that you and I met, Dr. Dobson. So I wrote that letter to my father and then I waited by the phone. You know what I mean. I waited for him to call and say, "I got your letter. I love you. I want you to know I love you." And the call didn't come and letters were exchanged back and forth between our families but the call didn't come.

There was a bitterness that kind of built up inside me. How hard is it to say I love you? And eventually we took our family and went down to visit my father and mother and that thing was in my head. So, we walked into the house and my dad was very demonstrative. He would come and hug me and that was that kind of manly hug. You know, it hurt. When my dad hugged you, it hurt. Then he disappeared into the garage where he could fix anything and he was a tinkerer and he built things and he had a lathe out there. He disappeared into the garage. I could feel that bitterness inside. There was a great opportunity to say I love you and he didn't say it.

Ken Davis: My mother motioned to me. That kind of motion that was come here, come here. I said, "What is it?" She said, "I want to show you something." She took me into my dad's room and sitting against the wall was a table and on the table were some candles and a lamp and the entire wall, this was at the base of their bed in their bedroom, was covered with newspaper clippings of places I had been and articles that had been written. Diane would send these home to my family. That was wonderful. And then I saw a picture. There was a handmade frame. He had framed the letter that I had sent. And I collapsed. People who have heard other times I've been on the radio with, you know that I collapse on a regular basis. But I collapsed. I sat on the edge of the bed and I wept because the wall screamed to me what my father could not say, "I love you." It just screamed it. That was a wonderful moment for me because it released me. I realized my dad does love me. He may not know exactly how to say it and he may not say it the way I want to say it, but this man is intensely proud of what has happened with my life and he loves me very much.

Dr. James Dobson: I will bet that his father never said it to him.

Ken Davis: Oh, I guarantee it. I can guarantee it. Because his father was an evangelist, a traveling Nazarene minister, but it was tough. He was just, not cruel, those words don't even figure in. Not abusive. Just, "We're in tough times, we live

tough.” Not a lot of smiling. Not a lot of joking. We just walk through life one step at a time.

Dr. James Dobson: We did programs on D-Day. You know, June the sixth, 1944 and what happened there and thousands of men dying and this is when the allies invaded Fortress Europa on the coast of France. The men who survived that horrible experience had to fight all the way to Germany and the majority of them didn't make it. Those who were in that generation at that time, many of them died and they went through horrendous things. And they came home from the war and had children, became fathers, and those children were the ones in the late sixties that grew up to hate their parents. You remember that?

Ken Davis: Oh yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: They hated everything they stood for. They hated their country, their God, their work ethic. They hated it all, and hated their mothers too. And I think one of the reasons is because the men who had gone through that horrendous experience could not express love and acceptance or even explain what they had been through.

Ken Davis: And I believe with all my heart ... I mean you just watch these documentaries. They wanted to. Oh they wanted to. But something about what had happened to them kept them from being able to do that. Some of them broke through that and those are marvelous stories too.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you connect with your dad before he died?

Ken Davis: Not in that way. The connection happened because I recognized that he loved me.

Dr. James Dobson: You accepted him the way he was.

Ken Davis: Yes. That's what made the connection is just going, “My dad loves me.” And, I will not get this, but I want to say to the dads that are out there listening now, there are few things that you can do that are more powerful than to remind your children verbally, “I love you.” To say the words ‘I love you.’ There are few things a husband can do for a wife that is more powerful than the words ‘I love you’ on a regular basis. It's so important.

I was speaking at Promise Keepers one time and I encouraged the men to stand up because they had their sons there ... there's a, I don't remember, 55,000, some huge number at Soldier Field. I said “I want you to stand up, I want you to embrace your son and I want you to say, ‘I love you.’” I was looking at a monitor and the camera was focused on a man and his son, maybe 17 years old, standing uncomfortably, stiffly looking at one another but unable to embrace each other and say ‘I love you.’ I remember stepping to the microphone and saying, “Men, if we are incapable of expressing love to one another we have no

message for the world. We might as well walk out the exits right now. So, I want you to say, 'I love you.'"

Dr. James Dobson: A wonderful thing that needs to be communicated with the younger generation is that circumstances in life have made your dad different from you, but you accept him just as he is and you'll find that all the ingredients you want are probably there. He just can't get them out and it's okay. Allow it to be what it is.

Ken Davis: I have looked back at my parents and realized they did everything they could with what they had. And now I'm a parent and my children are in therapy talking about me and they have come to realize I did everything I could. So as I tried to raise my children and this will be, if I ever write another book which I'm not going to write another book on parenting, but I'm going to give you some things to put in your next one. As I was with my children it was always about I would take them with me thinking, "This is great. What a great dad I am." But I would take them with me. So I would take them hunting going "shh, shh, shh." And they're going, "look at the flower, look at the butterfly. Oh, there's a squirrel." Shh, shh, shh. Never realizing at the time until they helped me see it later that they desired for me to be present with them in their world. Now that I know, now I'm with my grandchild and we're picking up snails and sniffing them and-

Dr. James Dobson: Every dad will make one of those mistakes. You can correct the ones of the previous generation and then you make a-

Ken Davis: Yeah, a new one.

Dr. James Dobson: Another whole battery of mistakes of your own.

Ken Davis: So dads, here's my word to you. Stop to sniff the snails. It's unbelievable.

Dr. James Dobson: Snails?

Ken Davis: If you got grandsons you're sniffing snails.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to go to the second thing I wanted to talk to you about. You have lost 50 pounds.

Ken Davis: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: How did you do it?

Ken Davis: I saw a picture of myself taken from behind at the beach. I weighed 237 or 240 pounds, something like that. I was holding the hand of a little girl who had she been struggling in the surf I couldn't have saved her. I was out of shape. I just coasted. I had become an undisciplined, unmotivated person. My faith was comfortable. I had a career that was comfortable. I'm going to tell you

something, I want to say this. A comfortable faith is no faith at all. I had stopped risking. I had stopped trusting. I just wanted to hang on to what I had. And I saw that picture and the comedian in me knew that there were people on the beach going, "Uh move, we want to see the ocean." I didn't dare lay down because the environmentalists would have poured water on me and pushed me back in. I was horrified. Another one of those awakening moments where God drives a stake in the ground and says take a look at this.

I didn't know how to get started. I didn't know how to discipline myself. So I signed up for a triathlon. No, not the ... I saw the look on your face. Not the Iron Man. This is more like a Styrofoam person triathlon where you run to the bathroom, fill up the tub, pull the plug, fight the current, that kind of thing. It's a smaller, shorter triathlon, okay? But what it did was put a stake out there and it gave me something to work toward.

Dr. James Dobson: A heart attack for one thing.

Ken Davis: Oh, no no no. Well my doctor said it was okay and so I began to do it. I started biking. I called my wife so many times, come and pick me up. We live in Tennessee. It's worse than Colorado for hills. And this one was ... I don't do details real well. It's 200 meters, 12 mile bike and then a two mile run. But I couldn't go a mile. And then I started biking and biking and I took second in that triathlon in my age group. There were only two old guys in my age group so second... No, the truth is this. I beat more than half of the people who entered the triathlon. But for people listening out there, this is part of what God is teaching me and oh, I wish I would have learned it earlier. This race God has called us to does not have a winner's circle. It only has a finish line.

Paul said I press toward the mark of the high calling of Christ. He talks about the fact that he wants to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of him. This idea of knowing the power of the resurrection in your life. He wasn't talking about just being raised from the dead. He said to the people he was writing to I haven't yet achieved it. They knew he was still alive. He's talking about knowing Christ's power in your life. And for me that started with physical.

I have to tell you a story. Finally, I made it up a two and a half mile hill by our home. Two and a half miles. I had called my wife several times, but then I determined I wasn't even taking a cell phone anymore because if I couldn't pedal up it I was going to walk the rest of the way. Finally, I could make it up this hill. And on this day I was at the end of maybe 17 or 18 mile run and still making it up the hill and I'm almost to the top. But I'm spent. That wonderful spent where you're sweating and you know you're alive. There is pain but that's what part of life is. And I hear "haaa, haaa." It kind of sounded like one of those life support machines. I look behind me. There was a fossil of a man on a bike behind me and he was gaining on me.

Well, God gave me an intensely competitive spirit and nothing to back it up, so, I cannot let this old man beat me. So I stood up on the pedals and I started to

pedal until I thought I was going to be physically sick. He pulled up alongside of me and he looked over and he smiled and I have to confess, I just wanted to clothesline him. I just wanted to stick my arm out and knock him off of his bike. He kept right on going. I thought, "I'm getting off this bike. An old man has just passed me." Then I saw his head and his shoulders and I thought maybe I can catch him, but he was slowing down. Came up beside me and what I'm going to tell you is the truth to the best of my remembrance, every word. He said, "I'm sorry for interrupting you but I want to encourage you. Don't stop doing this." He said, "I do this to live."

Those are very encouraging, inspirational words. I didn't feel inspiration at the time because I'm almost throwing up and he's carrying on a conversation. He said then, "Don't misunderstand me. I don't do this to stay alive. I do this to live." He said, "Today is the anniversary of my stroke. I have regained all my speech. I'm celebrating." He said "I still do not have full control of my left arm or my left leg, but I'm alive." And then he took off. I had just been defeated by a disabled dinosaur and I'm feeling a little down. And he goes over the top of the hill and he turned back to me and yelled, "Live!" That's all he said. And part of me thinks that he might be an angel except that he was slobbering and I know that can't be true.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you ever see him again?

Ken Davis: Never saw him again. But all through life, Doctor, I'm telling you, God gives these little gems. This teacher that supported me as a child. The moment when the picture was taken on the beach. A difficult time in marriage where God shows up and saves your marriage, and an ancient man on a bicycle encouraging you to live. And when I ran across that quote, "The glory of God is man fully alive," I'm telling you God has laid His hand on me as clearly as I've ever felt and said, "This is going to be the message of the rest of your life." To help people from all stages of distance from the cross of Christ to learn what it means to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Dr. James Dobson: You look wonderful, Ken.

Ken Davis: I feel great.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean 50 pounds will do a whole lot.

Ken Davis: Oh yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: And you are, as you said earlier, enjoying every single day.

Ken Davis: 50 pounds and hair dye.

Dr. James Dobson: I'll take it any color I can get. I don't care. Well, I can't believe how fast these programs go. But it's always so good to have you here. Thanks for coming back and being with us.

Ken Davis: Any time.

Roger Marsh: You know, behind every person who can make us laugh, there's often a much deeper story, one of struggle, faith, and hard-won hope. And Ken Davis has reminded us of that today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we heard a heartfelt conversation Dr. Dobson had with author Ken Davis. If you missed any part of this program, or maybe you know a dad who needs to hear this message, you can listen again and share it from our website at jdfi.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, just in shorthand. You know, Ken Davis's story about his father reminds us of how much power lives in three simple words a dad speaks to his children. If you're a father looking to lead with that kind of intention, we would love to walk alongside you. Our free "Strong Dads" email series offers biblical encouragement and practical wisdom to help you make a lasting impact on your sons and daughters. To sign up, just simply go to drjamesdobson.org and search for that title, "Strong Dads." Again, you'll find the Strong Dads email series waiting for you at drjamesdobson.org. If it's easier, just type in those initials, jdfi.org. It'll take you to the exact same website.

Now conversations like the one you heard today here on Family Talk reach the air because friends like you make them possible. Family Talk is just one of many outreaches of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and every gift fuels a much bigger purpose, strengthening families on biblical principles, introducing men and women to the gospel of Jesus Christ, defending the sanctity of human life and religious freedom in the public square, and standing for righteousness in a culture that desperately needs it. We need to see it modeled for us each and every day. When you donate to the JDPI, you help carry that mission into homes all across America. So we invite you to partner with us today. Your gift of any amount makes a real and lasting difference. For more information on how you can give over the phone, call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877 732-6825. If you prefer, you can send your tax-deductible donation through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or you can just use those initials JDPI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. And of course, you can always give a gift securely online at drjamesdobson.org.

Well, that's all the time we have for today. On behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. 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.

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

Dr. James Dobson: We've all heard that old suggestion that we should count to 10 when we get angry. Is there any validity to this advice? You bet there is.

Roger Marsh: With today's Dr. Dobson Minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: The reason for waiting is that anger is not only emotional, but it's biochemical as well. Now, this biochemical response is involuntary. It occurs quite apart from conscious choice. What isn't involuntary is our reaction to these sudden changes. We can learn to take a step back in a moment of excitement. We can choose to hold our tongue to remove ourselves from a provocative situation. We can control the impulse to lash out verbally or physically, doing what we will certainly regret when the passion has cooled. We not only can exercise this self-control, when it comes to children, we absolutely must.

Roger Marsh: For more information on this topic, visit drdobsonminute.org.