



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** What's Wrong with Being a Nice Guy? – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Paul and Sandy Coughlin

**Air Date:** June 11, 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. Have you ever felt like being the nice guy has actually held you back in life? Like your desire to avoid conflict has actually kept you from standing up for what's right, or even from being the leader your family needs? Well on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're exploring a provocative topic that challenges conventional thinking about what it means to be a godly man. Our guests in-studio are Paul and Sandy Coughlin. Paul is the best-selling author of eight books and a nationally recognized expert on bullying prevention. In fact, his anti-bullying curriculum is used all across North America and all around the world. You might have seen him on *Good Morning America*, ABC's *Nightline*, or as a contributor on *Fox News*. Well today here on Family Talk, we'll be focusing on Paul's groundbreaking book called *No More Christian Nice Guy*, which makes a crucial distinction between being "nice" and being good. Sandy Coughlin is a successful blogger who shares her perspective as the wife of a self-described "recovering nice guy." Together with Paul, she co-authored *Married But Not Engaged*, love that title. And it's a book designed to help couples navigate the challenges when husbands struggle with passivity. The Coughlins have three adult children and make their home in central Oregon. So let's listen in now to this fascinating conversation with Dr. James Dobson on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: You know God created two sexes not one and it works best when the two are distinct and those temperaments those characteristics of the personality that are identified with masculinity and femininity should be preserved and we're going to talk a little about that today. In my book *Love Must Be Tough*, I wrote a little bit about that and I did it again in *Bringing Up Boys* and now another author has come along and has expanded on those observations, and taking them to their logical conclusion. And I have his book here in front of me. It's called *No More Christian Nice Guy*, and the subtitle is *When Being Nice Instead of Good Hurts Men, Women, and Children*. And we're going to talk about that because the title is provocative and requires some explanation, and that's what we're going to do today.

Paul Coughlin is the author of this book, and his articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Today's Christian Woman*, *New Man*

*Magazine, Passage Magazine, and Crosswalk.com. He's been interviewed by C-SPAN and The New York Times, American Family Radio and the Moody Broadcasting Network. Paul, it is really good to have you here.*

- Paul Coughlin: It is a pleasure to be here. Thank you very much, Dr. Dobson.
- Dr. James Dobson: You've apparently kind of been tracking me kind of closely. You've quoted me rather generously through your books.
- Paul Coughlin: I think I've quoted you more than any other author and I'm a big fan of what you do.
- Dr. James Dobson: Paul also considers himself a recovering nice guy. There is a biographical connection here somewhere. This is the first time that Paul has been here along with Sandy, his wife, and I'm delighted that they have come, especially to talk about a book that I find very provocative and interesting. Speaking of Sandy, she's here with us too. There was such an overwhelming response to *No More Christian Nice Guy*, that these two folks decided to write a book for the wives of these men entitled *Married But Not Engaged: Why Men Check Out and What You Can Do to Create the Intimacy You Desire*. We're going to talk about both those books in some detail today, so Sandy and Paul, I've already welcomed Paul. Sandy, I'm glad that you came along as well.
- Sandy Coughlin: Thank you, Dr. Dobson.
- Dr. James Dobson: Did it surprise you what the response to this first book has been?
- Sandy Coughlin: Because I live the life not really. We kind of expected that we get the response that we did and sure enough. We're excited to be able to help people.
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, you're also a full -time mom.
- Sandy Coughlin: Full-time mom.
- Dr. James Dobson: Got three kids. Ages?
- Sandy Coughlin: Three kids. Work at home. Fourteen, 12 and 10.
- Dr. James Dobson: And the 10-year-old's the baby.
- Sandy Coughlin: 10-year-old's the baby. Girl.
- Dr. James Dobson: Spoiled rotten.
- Sandy Coughlin: Spoiled rotten.

Paul Coughlin: But Dr. Dobson, she could run the house. She could. She's like Sandy. They are spitting image of each other. Same temperament, very assertive, vivacious, active, sympathetic people.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you're going to have adolescence all over the place before very long. Are you ready for that?

Sandy Coughlin: Well, we've been listening to your tapes.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, is that right?

Paul Coughlin: On the long trips. Preparing for Adolescence.

Dr. James Dobson: Have you really?

Paul Coughlin: Oh you betcha. You betcha. My oldest boy, well I guess I can go ahead and say this, isn't too bad. What we do is, I don't know if you advise us or not, we don't tell him that the tapes are coming up. We get into the car and we have a long trip and we say "hey, we really want to talk about some stuff and this guy's really got it down, so let's listen to him."

Dr. James Dobson: You're sneaky is what you are.

Paul Coughlin: We're shrewd as serpents. And so what did he do? He took all the pillows; he was in the passenger seat. He was wondering, "why am I in the passenger seat?"

Sandy Coughlin: Yes, and mom sat in the back.

Paul Coughlin: Yeah, and so he put all the pillows, he made this little fortress around himself 'cause he just didn't wanna talk about...It wasn't you, it was adolescence, and it was one of the best trips we ever took. The pillows came down; we had some great conversations. Of course we would stop it, and then just talk about our own experiences without putting anyone down or anything and it was, I think we'll remember that for the rest of his life, I'm sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you're talking about the tape series Preparing for Adolescence. Many people don't know that that was recorded not for your use but mine. My daughter was 13, My son was eight and Danae was going into adolescence and I felt a need to tell her some things that were coming that she didn't know. And so I wrote and then recorded that series just for her and then later for Ryan. And the people at our church heard about it and said, "Could we use it for our junior highers?" And so I allowed them to do that. And a word began to spread and people start saying, "I want a copy of that." And that's when it was then published and released. So it's still out there all these years later.

Paul Coughlin: Outstanding resource.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I find the story of your son interesting because when he put the pillows over his head, what he was actually saying is, "I've been had." He thought this was gonna be a fun trip, and all of a sudden, he got it. Well, let's talk about your book. You acknowledge that men should be good, but should not be nice. And I'm sure many of our listeners are saying, "What in the world is the difference between the two?"

Paul Coughlin: And that's a great question to ask, and they should ask it. It's the difference between enabling really and being a redemptive force for good in this world. For example, you have a relative and that relative is unable to make their rent payment. And you are asked to pay it for them. You soon discover that the reason why your relative isn't making the house payment is because your relative is addicted to drugs.

Well, a nice person who wants to alleviate discomfort will go ahead and pay the rent for that person. But the good person will come along and say, "Well, you know, the reason why you're not making the rent is that you're making really bad choices with your life, and so the rent really isn't the issue. It's your drug addiction. That's the problem. So I'm going to help you. You don't need money for the rent. What you need is rehabilitation. I'm going to pay for that." And usually if the person on drugs is unrepentant, hasn't hit rock bottom yet, they'll probably tell them to hit the highway.

Well, that's okay. A good person is willing to do that. A good person is willing to enter into conflict for redemptive purposes. A nice person doesn't have it in them. Ask yourself this fundamental question of the people who you think are the nicest people you know. Do they ever stand up to injustice? In most cases, most of the time, the answer is no. They don't have the moral courage or the backbone to do it. My book deals with the fact that what we often call niceness is really fake. It's fear and passivity in disguise. It is a vice disguised as a virtue.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're linking that to masculinity primarily?

Paul Coughlin: Yeah, because it's so painful for me, and we are very much expected to be the one who goes out there and slay the dragons, and that makes sense, and that's the way it should be. What if you don't have that temperament? What if it doesn't exist, as it did for me at one time? What do you do? Usually you beat yourself over the head and you just quietly submit to the rhythms of life and you just fade into the background and get under the radar of life. But what happens to your life? It falls apart. You think that by avoiding conflict, you're going to get to the abundant life Jesus has for you. You'll never get there.

Dr. James Dobson: You feel and I'm inclined to agree that this is taught in the Scripture, but people often miss it. In my office a few minutes ago, I was decriing the use of the phrase, "little Jesus meek and mild." I never found it that way in the Scripture. I don't find Him that way in my personal relationship with Him. Jesus was a strong, strong man. He was also a man of great compassion.

Paul Coughlin: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And so how do you fit the two together?

Paul Coughlin: His compassion gave Him part of that strength. This is not an either or situation. Jesus could be incredibly tender, for example, how He dealt with children and women in His time was simply revolutionary. People did not do that the way He did. At the same time, He could be incredibly tough, calling an entire group of people, brood of vipers, fit for Hell, children of the devil, hypocrites. Those aren't terms of endearment. Those are tough words. Those can get you in a lot of trouble in life and apparently got Him into a lot of trouble. But Jesus did...

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, driving the money changers out with.

Paul Coughlin: With a whip no less. And what we forget is He made the whip himself. That was not a spur of the moment thing. It was premeditated. We were told that in the Gospel of John. So Jesus' toughness was done for a reason. He wasn't showing off the way many of us do. He didn't get mad or outraged for small, petty reasons the way we often do. Like if our cable bill goes up \$3 a month, well, that outrages us. We're not talking about petty things here. We're talking about things of eternal consequences, of groups stopping people from coming to God's love and acceptance and salvation from people putting heavy burdens on others and not willing to lift those burdens themselves and we see this often in our own lives. So it is Christian men if they want to be like Jesus have full authority, they're fully authorized to be both tender and tough just depending on which what virtue calls for at the time.

Dr. James Dobson: Sandy, Paul talked about the fact that he is a recovering nice guy. Did you know him when he was a nice guy and maybe not a good guy?

Sandy Coughlin: I did, Dr. Dobson. I knew him as a nice guy, but I didn't know at the time because when I got married, I just thought, you know, all guys should be nice guys. But what I didn't know was that fear was really driving Paul, and I didn't understand that.

Dr. James Dobson: Fear of rejection?

Sandy Coughlin: Well, I didn't know what the fear was at the time. We teach our kids about fear false evidence that appears real. For Paul, it was how he grew up. Situations when he grew up that it just really caused him to be a passive person.

Dr. James Dobson: Did that bother you in the early days?

Sandy Coughlin: It did. It did bother me in the early days and it caused conflict between us because I would find myself walking on eggshells around Paul and I didn't know

why it was very frustrating because he wasn't clear on his wants and his needs with me and then another biggie would he would dismiss my feelings.

Paul Coughlin: Not the proudest moments of my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, yeah you know, I have seen this so many times and I don't know if I can put it into words, I think you've done it better than I can. But I think many divorces come right out of this factor, where a woman wants a man that she can look up to. One who won't look down on her. And that that is the combination, and if a guy is kind of wimpy and he doesn't defend the family, and he lets his wife run over him at times when he should stand up and say, "you know, this is not right, and I'm not going to support you in that," there is a place for being a strong man and a strong father.

And the moment you say something like that and I bet you've had it from people who think you're talking about running roughshod over your wife and abusing your kids and your mean and unloving and uncaring because you're strong. That's not what we're talking about.

Paul Coughlin: Well, I tell you, whether they have a video camera in my home, it's just not my nature necessarily to be that way. You're right. I mean, the biggest criticism I get, there's two groups that largely criticize me, but it's rare, is I call them the '60s holdout. They're still holding on to the love of the one you're with, Peter Paul and Mary, you know, focusing your thing where there's no conflict and you're not supposed to do this, you're not supposed to do that, no boundaries. It's crazy the things they say to me. And yeah, they see it as a license, I guess, for men to be abusive. There is no way you can read my book and argue by the end of it that it's an excuse to be a jerk. I mean, I defend Fred Rogers in this book and I go after pro-wrestling. So I don't know how someone can say that. I guess if they judge it by the cover, I suppose.

Sandy Coughlin: Well, I think I first saw it in the workplace with Paul, he wouldn't stand up to his boss.

Dr. James Dobson: Were you talking to him about that when you observed that and saw it?

Sandy Coughlin: Yes, I'm defending him, but our book goes into what a woman should and should not do if you're married to a nice guy. And so we would have conflict with each other because I would be, you know, I was more of the vivacious one in the marriage.

Paul Coughlin: Yeah, passive guys often marry vivacious women. Art people marry their people. And it's real funny on television, but it's not funny in real life, I can tell you that.

Sandy Coughlin: So for an assertive woman you know and you have a passive man talk about frustrating and so we call it the bazooka of shame, Paul and I call it that. I would pull out the bazooka of shame, and it'd be so easy for me when he wasn't doing what I thought that he should be doing to pull that out and let the words fly,

and for a nice guy, what that does it pushes them deeper down into their nice guy ice cave.

Dr. James Dobson: Even there he wouldn't defend himself.

Sandy Coughlin: Wouldn't defend himself.

Paul Coughlin: Well, because as a nice guy, you don't think you're allowed to defend yourself. That's one of the huge things. She talked earlier about fear. That fear comes from someplace. It's not what God wants for us. He wants to give us a spirit of power and self-control. This is what Paul wrote to Timothy. So this is not what God wants for men. He doesn't want this for His men. But when you have fear in the driver's seat of your life, you're never going to get to the abundant life Jesus has for you.

Dr. James Dobson: Paul and Sandy, tell us how the definition of masculinity has changed, because this has something to do with those '60s that you were talking about and the feminist movement and what impact it has had on men and on culture at large.

Paul Coughlin: Well, men have been marginalized. We have been told we're disposable. It wasn't really funny, but remember the statement in the 90s that men were simply sperm donors. We were basically reduced to our ability to, in the creation of life, and that we weren't needed as fathers. Now, information that used to be on the radical fringe when I was in college, there was this idea that actually two women could raise a child, particularly boys, better than a traditional family of a husband and wife. Now back then in the 80s, you know, we laughed at that idea.

Dr. James Dobson: You're not endorsing that, obviously.

Paul Coughlin: Oh, absolutely not. Back in the 80s, that was an idea that was on the radical fringe. Well, today it's a best-selling book. And so not only have we been told that all that's needed from us is sperm in the donation of the creation of life, and then from there go and take your hands off of kids, now we're being told that we are bad. We do it worse than if two women were to raise a child. Even when the statistics tell us otherwise, University of Virginia has some great work put out by a man named Brad Wilcox, who clearly shows that the influence of a father and a mother just can't be beat. And that men, or rather fathers, have a unique connection with children, a unique ability to grow them into successful adults that wouldn't be there otherwise.

Dr. James Dobson: One of my observations that I probably will do some more writing about one of these days, but through the late 60s and the 70s and 80s and into the 90s, the feminist movement was telling the world and the world seemed to believe that males and females are not different except for the ability to bear children. That everything else is culturally induced and everything is biased in a way boys are raised versus girls and so on. And so that's what we believe.

Then new medical technology came along that allowed us to look at the brain without opening the skull 'cause it was very difficult to get volunteers for that. And they found that the brain of a woman lights up in a different place than the brain of a man with the same stimulation and then from there it's gone on to be demonstrated that males and females are vastly different in brain structure and in behavior and thought patterns and many, many other inabilities. Now, the feminist movement should have at that point said, "Whoops, we made a big mistake. We've been telling you something that's wrong all this time. We apologize. We've misled a lot of people." No, what they did is they made a little shift and now they say men and women are far different and women are better and men are nothing. Men are jerks. Men are stupid guys, and you just watch television, and that comes through in every commercial and every sitcom, and it makes me sick.

- Paul Coughlin: And it makes a number of people sick who don't come at life from a more conservative perspective. We have a lovely older couple that we are friends with, and they're not conservatives necessarily. But they look at how men are, particularly the woman, the wife, looks at how men are portrayed in the media and she can't stand it. And why can't she stand it? Because her grandchildren are seeing this and they're getting this, it's not even a subtle message anymore, that they are buffoons. So why don't you just give up? Why don't you just give up?
- Dr. James Dobson: What you are really saying in this book, I think, is that masculinity is God's design and it's different from femininity and it's being assaulted and it has a very important place in culture and in the family and even for Christians who have this image of Jesus as being kind of a wimp are teaching that to their boys, and as a result boys don't know how to lead.
- Paul Coughlin: Absolutely and you know a lot of us have masculinity wrong. You know we have this machismo culture right that says well being a man is that you have to kill something or you know in Christian circles, being a man means is that you somehow turn into a pacifist. I've never understood that we are neither pacifist or jihadists, we are active warriors of light in the world that's a war with truth. That's the fact. That's what the gospels tell us, so both camps need to change their definition of what it means to be a guy. Being a guy means you're emotional, being a guy means you love people and you hurt for them and you weep with those who weep. It also means that you protect people when they need to be protected.
- Dr. James Dobson: And stand up for righteousness.
- Paul Coughlin: Absolutely.
- Dr. James Dobson: The title of the book is *No More Christian Nice Guy* by Paul Coughlin and the subtitle is *When Being Nice instead of Good Hurts Men, Women, and Children*. It hurts everybody. And then Paul, you and Sandy wrote the second book, which is sort of a sequel. I haven't quite figured that out, but it's *Married But Not*

*Engaged*, telling a woman primarily how to deal with a passive man and how to encourage strength within him. And Sandy, I want to hear a whole lot more from you next time on this subject. Paul and Sandy, thanks for being with us and thanks for the work you do. It's interesting stuff because I happen to agree with it.

Sandy Coughlin: Thank you.

Paul Coughlin: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Good to have you on the program today.

Roger Marsh: The difference between being nice and being truly good cuts right to the heart of biblical masculinity. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring a challenging conversation Dr. Dobson had with his guests, Paul and Sandy Coughlin. They've been discussing what it means to be a godly man in today's culture and not just a Christian nice guy. Now, if you'd like to revisit any part of today's program with Paul and Sandy, remember you can find it when you go online at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). And while you're there, be sure to check out Paul's book, *No More Christian Nice Guy*, along with the book that Paul co-authored with his wife, Sandy, the follow-up called, *Married But Not Engaged*. You'll find both of those resources and more when you go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Now speaking of strengthening men and fathers, if you're a father looking to lead your families with greater purpose and confidence, we invite you to sign up for our "Strong Dads" email series. In today's culture, your children need guidance, strength, and godly leadership now more than ever before. The "Strong Dads" email series provides practical tips and timeless biblical wisdom to help you step into your God-given role as a husband and father. To sign up for the free "Strong Dads" email series, visit [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).

Well, the conversation we heard today reminds us why biblical truth matters so deeply for our families. In a world that seeks to redefine marriage, to confuse our children about their God-given identity, and to diminish the value of human life, your partnership here at Family Talk helps us stand firm. Your tax-deductible donation, whether \$25, \$50, or \$100, maybe even \$500 or \$1000, will have twice the power to strengthen marriages, support parents, and raise godly children thanks to a special dollar for dollar match each day during the month of June. So take advantage of this limited-time opportunity to double your impact by making a secure donation online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). When you give a gift of any amount today, we'll be happy to thank you for that contribution by sending you a copy of Dr. Dobson's powerful book called *Your Legacy*, along with the companion DVD. In these challenging times when culture seeks to destroy our children's faith, this resource shows you how to build an unshakable spiritual heritage for your children. You can request your copy of Dr. Dobson's book, *Your Legacy* along with the companion DVD, when you make a donation of any amount online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). You can also send your

donation through the mail when you write to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk  
P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well I'm Roger Marsh, thanking you for spending some time with us today. Be  
sure to join us again next time for part two of this compelling conversation  
about Christian nice guys in modern culture. That's coming up on the next  
edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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