



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Coach Wooden: Timeless Wisdom – Part 2

Guest(s): John Wooden

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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. As March Madness continues to captivate the nation, we're bringing you part two of a truly special conversation. On the last edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we heard Coach John Wooden share about his upbringing on an Indiana farm, his father's profound influence and his beautiful 53-year marriage to his beloved Nellie. Coach Wooden won 10 national championships at UCLA. It's a record that stands still today. But as you'll hear on today's broadcast, his greatest legacy wasn't about wins and losses. It was about character, faith, and wisdom that transcends the game. Coach John Wooden passed away in 2010 at the age of 99. Our own Dr. James Dobson had the privilege of sitting down with him shortly before he did go home to be with the Lord. And before we continue that conversation, Dr. Dobson has a few thoughts to share about his dear friend.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the man we're going to hear from again today is an individual who finished well to his last breath. We're going to hear the words of Coach John Wooden from UCLA who went on to be with the Lord at the age of 99. And he left a legacy that is as rich and meaningful as any that we could ever aspire to. I got acquainted with him near the end of his life. I had an opportunity to interview him and what a delightful man he was. Everybody loved John Wooden who knew him. It's interesting. We developed quite a friendship and he sent me a basketball that he had signed and he forgot it. And he sent me a second one. And then he forgot that and sent me a third. So I've got three basketballs signed by John Wooden and I'm proud of every single one of them.

At the beginning of the recorded conversation that we're going to hear today, which is part two of our discussion together, he was one of the winningest coaches in basketball history there at UCLA. And he's been honored in so many ways. In 2003, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is the nation's highest civilian honor. President George W. Bush remarked that quote, "Coach Wooden remains a part of our lives as a teacher of the game and as an example of what a good man should be." And I echo those words today. And even though he's now gone, those words are still with us and we're going to hear some of them today.

Roger Marsh: Now let's rejoin Dr. James Dobson for more of his conversation with Coach John Wooden on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: So you began life with almost nothing, no money, you were in debt when you married. Shortly after that, World War II came along and you felt that you ought to join the Navy. What's the story there?

John Wooden: Well, I made a mistake in a way in not talking with her. I enlisted without her knowing, and that's probably the worst disagreement we ever had. She didn't think I should because I had the two children and was a teacher and I might not have been drafted, but I just felt it was things to do and I listened and we got over that.

Dr. James Dobson: You were on what ship? Were you on any of the ships we would recognize?

John Wooden: No, I was blessed in many ways. I had orders to go to the USS Franklin and on my way, I had got terribly, terribly sick and I had my appendix burst. I had emergency. So they canceled my orders and the fellow that replaced me on the Franklin was hit by Kamikaze and killed. Then I was sent for a training carrier.

The USS Sable for training on Lake Michigan for training where pilots made their first landing. One of the basketball players who played for me at South Bend made his first landing on a carrier when I was serving as the captain of at that particular time. And then near the end of the war, I got orders to go to the Bella Wood, which was in the ... But Japan had surrendered. It was South Pacific and I wanted to get out. Didn't want to go to Japan. So the war was over and we go to Tokyo. And the captain of the Sable, USS Sable, he managed to get connections to Washington and I got out the next day. I went to the Glenview Naval Air base out of Chicago and got out.

Dr. James Dobson: I understand you had another near death experience or at least one that could have taken your life.

John Wooden: Well, I suppose you think of the time when I was headed to Campbell College at Buies Creek, North Carolina.

Dr. James Dobson: That's correct.

John Wooden: Where I went there for a basketball camp for several years in a row. That's where Pete Maravich was coming when he was a youngster. And something came up at UCLA that I couldn't go on Saturday. I normally went on Saturday, be there on Sunday because I usually spoke at the chop for all the youngsters were there and I couldn't go. And so I had my ticket changed the next day and the plane that I had the ticket for on Saturday crashed. Everybody was gone. So I don't know whether that's close or not, but ...

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the Lord was obviously looking out for you. He had something He wanted you to do, Coach.

John Wooden: Apparently so.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have felt that divine ordination on your life, haven't you?

John Wooden: I think so. I think so. I think there's more than just what we see. There's something deeper than that. And I don't know what it is, but I hope it's pleasing to Him.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned Pete Maravich. The day that he died, I don't know if you know that he died in my arms.

John Wooden: I knew that.

Dr. James Dobson: The day that he died, I set up that little pickup game, just a bunch of duffers. And then here comes this superstar of all times, Pete Maravich. And I knew that we had to get somebody to guard him because I sure wasn't going to do it. And Ralph Drollinger came to play with us that day. So he and I wound up giving CPR to Pete. Ralph played with you.

John Wooden: Yes, he did.

Dr. James Dobson: He was a center for you during one of those games.

John Wooden: The last championship game in 1975, he played wonderful for us in that game.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you had that wonderful basketball career that ended in 1975. I would think that it would have been pretty difficult to walk away from something that intense and that rewarding and that successful. How hard was it to retire and move on?

John Wooden: It wasn't difficult at all.

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

John Wooden: For some reason, it was the time. I decided on the spur of the moment. I thought if anybody had asked me even 10 minutes before, I would have said, "Oh, I'll teach for two more years, maybe three, but certainly not over three." And then suddenly just like that, I decided it's time and I've never regretted it. I've missed practices. I love to teach. I love to plan my daily practices. I love to conduct them, but I don't miss the games. I don't miss the tournaments. I don't miss the falderalls and I don't miss trying to explain to the media what happened and so on. The only thing I miss at all was the practices. That's where you get to learn your players, learn about them, where you establish rapport and relationships that last forever.

Dr. James Dobson: You have for many years been speaking on an idea that you have wanted to convey to young people throughout a good part of your professional career. Describe it for us.

John Wooden: Well, in my early years of teaching, I became a little bit disappointed at what I thought parents of youngsters in my English classes expected from their youngsters. And if they didn't get an A or B, I found many parents thought that either the youngster had failed or the teacher had failed. And I didn't like that way of judging at all. I didn't think that was fair because the good Lord in his infant wisdom didn't create us all equal as intelligence concerned any more than we equals for size or appearance or not complex environments, et cetera. And I wanted to come up with something else. I wanted to coin my own definition, which would be a little different from Mr. Webster's. I thought this could help me become a better teacher and give the youngsters under my supervision, something to wish to aspire other than just high marks in the classroom or more points in some athletic endeavor.

And I thought about this and several things came to mind. One was my father saying, never try to be better than somebody else and never cease trying to be the best you can be. And in a class, a discussion of success that I recalled some years before. Then I ran across a simple verse that said "At God's foot stool to confess, he push soul and elder and bowed his head. 'I failed, he cried.' The master said, "Thou did thy best. That is success." I like that.

I think that is when you individually know you did your best. So from that, I coined my own definition of success, which is peace of mind attained only through self-satisfaction and knowing you made the effort, to do the best of what you're capable. Nobody else knows that with you because you can fool everybody else, but that wasn't serving the purpose for which I'd hoped. And so I tried to wonder what I could do. And I came to the conclusion after analyzing it a bit that if I could come up with something you could see. And here again, like so many things popped out from the hidden recesses of the mind, something that I'd seen years before called it a ladder of achievement. Somebody had taken the ladder five rungs in the ladder and they'd named each rung of the ladder as some particular trait or characteristic that this individual felt was necessary to get to the top of the ladder.

Where we'd all like to get. We might differ in what we consider at the top of the ladder to be, but we'd like to get there. And there's nothing wrong with ambition as long as it kept under control. And that gave me an idea of a pyramid. I worked on that for the next 14 years. I placed-

Dr. James Dobson: Pyramid of success.

John Wooden: I placed my definition of success at the apex and then started working from the bottom and the first two blocks I ever chose for the cornerstones, industriousness and enthusiasm. They are essential.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you have a training program for young people that's being used all across the country and has been for a number of years that incorporates that. And the name of the training program is ...

John Wooden: I'm doing it with Mr. Garrett, and it is the John Wooden Course. I guess that's what it's called.

Dr. James Dobson: And it consists of materials, videos?

John Wooden: Yes, and all from the pyramid.

Dr. James Dobson: All from the pyramid.

John Wooden: And different things from that.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

John Wooden: I spoke to the players one time at the beginning of the year on the pyramid. I took some time and explained to each block and talked to them one time. And then I would say, "And if you want to come in and talk to me about it, fine." And some did and some didn't. Let me give you an example. Lew Alcindor, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on an interview, the interviewer asked him, "What do you think about Coach Wooden's pyramid?" And he said, "When I came to school, I thought it was the corniest thing I'd ever seen." He said, "Before I got out of school, I saw it was kind of meaningful, but I never realized how much until the number of years after I was out of school." And that's come from a lot of the players. And that sort of pleases me. It's what happens to him afterwards. I like Amos Alonzo Stagg. Most of you probably never heard of him Amos Alonzo Stagg. He was a great football coach when the University of Chicago had outstanding football teams. And after one final year, a reporter said, "Well, Coach Stagg, is this your finest year?" And he said, "I won't know for 25 or 30 years." In other words, more concerned what's going to happen to all those under his supervision after they're gone than right at the moment. I've always liked that statement.

Dr. James Dobson: You have had a lifelong love for the Bible. That came from your father, I believe.

John Wooden: Yes, I think so.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you still read it and study it?

John Wooden: Yes, I do.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it still meaningful to you? Does it still speak to you?

John Wooden: Indeed.

Dr. James Dobson: You carry a cross with you.

John Wooden: I do.

Dr. James Dobson.: You have it with you today?

John Wooden: I do.

Dr. James Dobson: Could I see it?

John Wooden: Yes. It was given to me by my minister in South Bend, Indiana when I joined List in the Service and we've got some other little things here too. Then another cross.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that money or is it something else?

John Wooden: Just a little came from Rome. This is the one that priest gave me. It has Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and it has the heart and the monad.

Dr. James Dobson: Why do you carry it? I think I know, but tell us.

John Wooden: Give me a peace. I had that in my hand, all the basketball games, and I think they didn't know it, but I think officials should have been happy that I had that in my ...

Dr. James Dobson: And you have carried it virtually every day?

John Wooden: Yes, I've had it. All these years.

Dr. James Dobson: It's worn down. How long have you been carrying it?

John Wooden: Well, I had it since 1942 is when I was given to me. And the heart and the monad and the alpha and omega are almost faded out. You can still see them, but they're still there. I've never seen another one like it and I like that. Never got another one in the pocket I carry, but it's not like that. It's not that meaningful.

Dr. James Dobson: You have indicated that you're still trying to grow, still trying to learn.

John Wooden: Yes. I think we should be every day when you're through learning or through. I think that's true. I think when I was teaching, I think I hope in 1975 I was a little better and I wasn't 74. I know it was a lot better than I was in 1934, but I hope each year I was a little better than I was the year before. There's always different ways of learning, maybe not in certain techniques, but there are other things. Most important probably is learning to work and listen to other people.

Dr. James Dobson: When you would greet a new team with a lot of freshmen and you had to start from scratch, where'd you begin? What'd you say to him on the first day?

John Wooden: Well, the first day of practice and the first day I met with them?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, either one.

John Wooden: Well, I want to get across to 'em the first thing that is that defense usually wins championships and it's been absolutely disgrace. If any of you are a good offensive player and you're not a good defensive player, that's disgraceful. Now, a good defensive player might not be a good offensive player, and I understand that, but offensively, you better be a good defense player. I want you to remember that. Now offensively, I want you to know that I want most of our baskets to come at the end of a pass, not the end of a dribble. And here we prevent no behind the back passing, no behind back dribbling, no fancy stuff. If you want that, we'll try to get you a job with the Globetrotters, sir. Or you can go someplace else.

Dr. James Dobson: No showboating.

John Wooden: No showboating. I wanted them to understand that. But I wanted to understand that two thirds of our practice throughout the entire year will be individual fundamental drills, and a third will be on trying to bring the individuals together in the team concept, and we must always think of the team first.

Dr. James Dobson: If you had a player whom you suspected was trying to put numbers up for himself, even though he was helping the team, what would you do?

John Wooden: Oh, I had the greatest ally in the world, the bench.

Roger Marsh: Well, I'm Roger Marsh once again, just ducking in for a moment to remind you that you're listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're revisiting Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with legendary UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden. Now, as we reach this midpoint, please know how much we appreciate your prayers and faithful financial support of the James Dobson Family Institute. We can't do this ministry without you, and we are so grateful for the ways that you stand with us to continue to bring the good news of the gospel to families all across the country. You can learn more about how you can stand with us on a more regular basis when you go to jdfi.net. That's jdfi.net. And now, let's continue with the conclusion of today's conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and Coach John Wooden here on Family Talk.

John Wooden: Well, I've often said that the two most important words of the language are love and balance. And two of my bookcases at home, one is love and the other one's balance. And the third one is drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible. There are three of the bookcases that I have. And I do believe that love, love ... I

mean, true love, lasting, not passion. Love, love. Passion is temporary. Love is enduring. And that is the most important way, and it can be shown in many ways. What is it in my book, *Inch and Miles for Children*? Charlie, the chimp is on friendship. And it ends something like, "To be a friend is paying to see that you yourself, a friend, must be." Love is indicated in that. Let's see, there's another one. "A bell isn't a bell until you ring it. A song isn't a song until you sing it.

And the love that is in us wasn't put there to stay. Love isn't love till you give it away." True love. And then the next one is balance. You have to keep things in proper perspective. Don't let things get out of perspective and that is done too much. Keep things in proper perspective regarding that in your profession. I use, at times, I say family, faith, and friends. And I say that's wrong, but I think you'll understand. It should be faith, family, and friends. They're the three important things. The three important things. If you have those, I'd like to know what else you need.

Dr. James Dobson: Freedom.

John Wooden: Pretty good. But with faith, family and friends, with faith, I kind of think you have freedom.

Dr. James Dobson: When your life is over, how do you want to be remembered? What we talked about today are the things that we remember about you and admire you for. What do you want to be remembered for? As the coach that won 10 national championships?

John Wooden: I'd like to be remembered as just someone that was considering of other people. That'd be enough.

Dr. James Dobson: That's it.

John Wooden: I don't know if they've heard about this. A fellow was going to the cemetery reading all the inscriptions. That's where you find the perfect people. Just read the inscriptions, you'll find the wrong people. One fellow came to one and said, "As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you are sure to be. So may I say as here I lie, prepare yourself to follow me." And somebody had scratched under that. "To follow you, I'm not content until I know which way you went."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You know where I read that? It was a little earlier than what you just read and talked about. Shirley and I last summer were in Rome and there is the capuchin monks house of bones. And this is a monastery which is filled with the skeletons of the monks. And when you come out, I mean, it's all over the ceiling and walls and everywhere. The clock is made out of fingers bones. The skulls are on the roofs. Really kind of a spooky place. And as you're coming out of it, there's that little note that says, "Where you are, we once were and where we are, you will be." And it was that same, and that was from the 1500s. So we scooped you a little bit there.

John Wooden: Well, did they have the one in there that said, "When you get to Heaven, you will likely view many persons whose presence there will be a shock to you, but no one looks surprised. Don't you even stare. Doubtless there'll be many folks surprised to see you there." Did they have that one?

Dr. James Dobson: You look forward to seeing the Lord someday?

John Wooden: Of course I do.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to be together through eternity. That's kind of exciting. Would you take a little time when we get there to teach me to shoot?

I have the perfect poem here on which to end our conversation. This was written by you, Coach Wooden. And the title of it is "Do Not Look Back." I'm going to read it. "The years have left their imprint on my hands and on my face. Erect no longer is my walk and slower is my pace, but there is no fear within my heart because I'm growing old. I only wish I had more time to further serve my Lord. When I've gone to him in prayer, he has brought me inner peace and soon my cares and worries and all other troubles cease. He has blessed me in so many ways. He has never let me down. Why should I fear the future when I soon may touch His crown? Though I know down here, my time is short. There is endless time up there and He will forgive and keep me forever in His loving care. May I not waste an hour that's left to glorify His name of the one who died that we may live and for our sins took all the blame." Isn't that beautiful?

Roger Marsh: Well, what a meaningful poem penned by the late John Wooden. His words are much more meaningful now that he's gone to be with the Lord, of course. He truly was a phenomenal leader, coaching some of the greatest players in basketball history. But as we've heard of these past couple of programs here on Family Talk, Coach John Wooden was also a man of tremendous character and noble character is at the center of every good leader. Now, before we wrap up this program, I want you to hear a small clip that demonstrates his profound integrity. Here is Coach John Wooden addressing how he handled various racial issues on a team he coached.

John Wooden: You may have heard something. When I was teaching at Indiana State University, I was there two years and my first year we were invited into the National NAI Tournament. I had one black player on my team. He didn't get to play very much. He was perhaps... had a 12 man squad, he probably played the least of any of the 12 players. But he was a member of the squad and I refused to go because they weren't letting him go. Well, the next year we had a better year. I think we finished 29-4 or something like that. And we're invited again. I refused. And then his parents, and I think it was the NAACP, they talked to the people over the university, the president and so on. And they thought it'd be nice if he could go. They agreed to let him play. But he couldn't stay in the hotel.

We could have meals in the hotel as long as we got a private dining room. I said, no. But eventually I was persuaded and he stayed with the minister and his wife while we were there and no problems. And anyway, he didn't get to play very much. But that was a breakthrough.

Dr. James Dobson: What year would that have been?

John Wooden: That would've been 1948.

Dr. James Dobson: How disgraceful when you think about it.

John Wooden: A few years later, an all-black team happened to win that NAI tournament. But I never had any problem with racial relationships. I'm very proud of after one championship game, one of my black players and a reporter in my presence said, "Tell me about your racial problems." And he straightened up. "You don't know our coach, too. He doesn't see racial problems, he sees ball players" and he turned, walked away from the reporter and it pleased me. It pleased me. It pleased me about as much as anything could please me.

Dr. James Dobson: You were known then for being colorblind and you were.

John Wooden: Well, I'd like to think I was without prejudice, but I can't say that. I'm not sure anyone is completely without prejudice, but I like that they feel I was.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you said you had some of the greatest black players in the history of the game.

John Wooden: I did.

Dr. James Dobson: I remember Sidney Wicks and that team won one year. See, I was following you. You didn't know that, but I was on the other side of town watching you.

Roger Marsh: Coach Wooden lived to be 99 years old. His legacy proves that the principles he taught weren't just theories. They actually did work. You've been listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we heard the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Coach John Wooden. If you missed any portion of this two-part broadcast, remember you can listen again at jdfi.net. When you partner with us financially, you're helping to preserve and promote biblical principles that support marriage, family, and child development. To make a secure donation, visit jdfi.net.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and Family Talk, thank you 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 trust for the family you love.

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