



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Modeling Integrity for Your Kids

Guest(s): Jim and Anne Ryun and Family

Air Date: October 12, 2026

- 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. You know, every parent hopes their children will grow to become adults who have strong character, lasting faith, and the wisdom to make good decisions. But between childhood and adulthood come countless choices, and parents don't always know which ones will matter most. On today's edition of Family Talk, we're going to look inside one family that made some unconventional decisions about education, dating, faith, and family life. Olympic medalist Jim Ryun and his wife Anne raised four children while intentionally making prayer and biblical principles central to their home. So what did they do differently, and what can we as parents learn from it? Well, here's Dr. James Dobson to explain as he begins today's edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: I'm just delighted to have you guys with us today.
- Jim Ryun: Well, it's really a pleasure to be here, Dr. Dobson. It's a thrill and it's such an honor.
- Anne Ryun: We consider it a delight to be here because we know that you are a spokesman for our nation and our world in this day.
- Dr. James Dobson: You remember the time that we were together in 1984 and you came through? We did a radio program then, didn't we?
- Jim Ryun: I remember that show well. And I think the thing that I recall is that while we were doing our show, the children were also doing one or a little bit later, they were having a show. And it gave us an opportunity as I listened back on that tape just to hear them spontaneously talking. And it was really exciting.
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, I tell you what, I've been fascinated with this family because nobody's a person. If you look behind the scenes, everybody's got flaws. That's just the human condition. But this family serves as kind of a model for what I believe in the way families really ought to run. As a matter of fact, you all have homeschooled most of the way. Anne, you took that responsibility, didn't you?

Anne Ryun: We have, and I didn't really take it very willingly because when God first approached us through one of my brothers starting to homeschool, I said, "Lord, we're evangelists. How can we be evangelists being homeschoolers?" And one friend, after praying this through, turned to me and said, "Anne, look at it this way. You're raising up four more evangelists." And that gave me such great peace that though I had to give up going out among the people for several years, I had the responsibility, not really the primary, Jim really the primary, but he designated a responsibility to me to raise academically, and some spiritually, the four children.

Dr. James Dobson: Jim, you really take seriously this task of spreading the good news, the gospel, don't you? You guys have been Christians only 22 years, as I understand.

Jim Ryun: It was May 18, 1972, that we met the Lord, and that's how it all began for us. And, you know, it was kind of the thing where we knew that the Lord was calling us to a walk that was different than we'd ever known before because all we had known was churchianity. We'd gone and done all the things you're supposed to do, but there was never relationships. And when we met the Lord, we realized that He wanted to become Lord of all of our lives. And so that meant that, for example, while I was competing competitively, I needed to dedicate that to Him. And then as we started homeschooling, we realized that what we needed to do was to find out exactly what He wanted to do in that area. And, you know, it was really a challenge because when we lived in Santa Barbara, We felt very welcomed in the classroom. And then when we relocated back to the Midwest, to Lawrence, Kansas, it was one of those things where we felt as if we weren't, it wasn't, parents weren't really welcomed in the classroom. We tried to find all the proper procedures to go through to withdraw the children from school and to do everything that would be glorifying to God, knowing even in that it would be a means of witnessing to people because if you do things with excellence as well as you do it properly, at some point it's going to point back to the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to pick up with this homeschool matter and especially that moment in Lawrence, Kansas. And when you decided to go it on your own, it occurs to me that in my enthusiasm to introduce this family, I didn't really tell people what they need to know about Jim because Jim Ryun, his name will be recognizable to us older jocks. Remember that there was a guy named Roger Bannister who was the first man to break the four-minute mile. And he ran against an Australian named Landy. I'll never forget that. I saw it on black and white television. I was a freshman in college or something. And Landy looked over the wrong shoulder and Bannister passed him. Anyway, he stumbled across the finish line at 3 minutes 59 seconds and, of course, set the world record. Jim comes along a few years later in high school and runs 3.55 and then eventually ran 3.51 and set the world record. The whole world was watching you at that time. What do you remember about those days?

Jim Ryun: You know, it's interesting, Dr. Dobson, because when I reflect on those years, they were very rich and very rewarding in the sense that there was that, you know, you establish a goal and you achieve it. And yet there was a hollowness

that came with that because I was under the impression, growing up as a young boy, immature, searching for that sense of identity as to who I would become or what might make me a happy guy, that if I did something well, that indeed I'd be a happy and fulfilled person. But when I had achieved some of those accomplishments, it would be like this is what it's all about? And it would be empty. And I kept thinking, well, I've got to get better at what I'm doing. But it wouldn't be until someone would finally introduce me to Christ that I would realize, no matter how successful I was, no matter how fast I would run, that nothing would satisfy except a relationship with Jesus Christ. So in a sense, I became a Christian in May of 1972, my athletic career ended because it was all for the wrong reasons. And so then I began a walk with Christ, and it's just been the greatest.

Dr. James Dobson: Anne, I want to meet your family. Go back to that moment in Lawrence, Kansas, where you went to the school. You told me a few minutes before we came in the studio that you came out in tears.

Anne Ryun: I did. I had registered the children to go to government school. And I came out weeping, and I said, "Lord, what is wrong? There is something seriously wrong." And not too long afterwards, my youngest brother, Tom, had wrote us and said that they were going to start homeschooling their first child in Portland, Oregon, and mentioned a man by the name of Dr. Raymond Moore.

Dr. James Dobson: We had had him on our broadcast at that time.

Jim Ryun: Not a name unfamiliar to you. Yes. So that was on a Friday. We received that letter on a Friday. We started praying. We thought this could be an answer to our prayers. The next Friday, the Lord had Jim Ryun and Dr. Raymond Moore in Omaha, Nebraska, in the same radio station doing back-to-back interviews. Jim approached Dr. Moore and said, "How do we start homeschooling? We've never heard about this. We don't know exactly what it's like or what it's all about." And Dr. Raymond Moore responded with, "Has your wife ever taught school?" Which I had. And "do your children obey on command? Have they been brought up in a disciplined lifestyle?"

Dr. James Dobson: How about it, kids?

Family: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you guys obey on command?

Family: Yes, we have.

Dr. James Dobson: Heather, as you look back on those years of homeschooling through high school when your friends were going to the prom and doing all this other thing, did you feel deprived?

Heather Ryun: No, not really. And that's an honest answer because I felt like number one, I needed to apply myself at home just as much as they did in public school. It took a little bit more discipline, I think. And I wasn't really into the prom and the dating. I had a family that loved me, and we got along and we played together, and I didn't really look for a lot of external activities.

Dr. James Dobson: And when you graduated, you went to the University of Kansas?

Heather Ryun: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let me come on around the circle. Catherine, you are the youngest. You're the baby. You have been homeschooled for how long?

Catherine Ryun: I've been homeschooled from third grade through my senior year, and I just graduated last year.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you feel about that?

Catherine Ryun: I'm very grateful for the experience, and it was really enjoyable. Because not only did I get to learn more about the Lord and His principles, also I was able to do my academics in a lot. I didn't have to spend a lot of time on it. I don't know what high schools could do in a whole day's worth I could do in a couple hours.

Dr. James Dobson: There is a lot of wasted time in school.

Catherine Ryun: There is a lot of wasted time that can be cut out.

Dr. James Dobson: When we had an opportunity to have lunch together a while back, we talked about many aspects of family life and there were many philosophies that you, Jim, and Anne have held and have implemented in your own family. And one of them in particular that I know you feel very, very strongly about has to do with dating and the dating life of a teenager and the ground rules for that and what you implemented in your own home with regard to your four children. And I think parents of teenagers and even those with younger kids would really benefit from hearing what conclusions you drew because you have to look at successful parents and say, what did they do that made the outcome? such as it was. Now, I know you're going to say that you stayed on your knees in prayer and you're probably still there, right?

Anne Ryun: Yes, yes.

Jim Ryun: That's very much a part of it. And then being able to, you know, have prayers from other people, but also learn from them and some of their experiences. I know when our... when we were first looking at the dating situation of our children, I reflect back to a story when we were at one of, I think it was a tournament, tennis tournament someplace, and we were talking to Pat Boone, and he said, well, when my children became 16, then they could date. And so we thought, well, that's a good idea. We'll wait until our children are 16, and

then they can date. And as that time frame came closer, it became wait a minute, that's what we did, but we're Christians now. Is there another alternative? And so we had to go back and kind of take that book off the shelf that represented what we did when we were younger and look at what had taken place in society since then and say, is that what we really want to do? So we really didn't have a lot of answers when Heather turned 16 other than the fact that we knew that there had to be something different because we were seeing results that were not necessarily from Heather, but results from the dating system that were frustrating. The divorce rate was just as high inside of the church as it was outside, there had to be another way.

Anne Ryun: We all really believe in the authority of God and the authority of His Word and God has delegated to Christian parents the responsibility of being parents, of guarding and guiding and protecting the children that he has blessed them with. We came to the idea of the courtship rather than the dating because we looked at dating as a setup for marriage and divorce. "I like this guy. I'll go out with him a few times. Then we'll break up." The way you are trained is the way you're going to live your life. And we really believe that parental...

Dr. James Dobson: I see. In other words, you're saying the temporary nature of a dating relationship sets a person up for a temporary marriage. Is that the conclusion you're doing?

Anne Ryun: Yes, because the commitment is not there. And the emotions.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, how in the world did they get that across to rambunctious teenagers? Tell me. How did you guys accept that?

Ned Ryun: Well, I think courtship definitely adds a serious note to this, the notion of everybody wanting to play the field. Because when you go in with the preset idea that this could be your marriage partner, you definitely spend more time on your knees and seeking counsel because you don't go into it. But the idea that, well, maybe if it doesn't work, I'll just kind of walk right out of it. And the idea of courtship, you get to know the girl's family. And I think that really adds a certain amount of responsibility to the relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, that brings us to a very interesting point. It's what we discussed when we had lunch together. Jim, you laid down some rather strict guidelines for who could date Heather, who was your oldest, and then later your daughter, Catherine. Explain what you did.

Jim Ryun: Well, let me first of all perceive this by saying that it's a learning experience for the father because in many occasions, you know...

Dr. James Dobson: Their heads are nodding.

Jim Ryun: It's kind of like saying, well, we're going to try something new, and Heather, you get to be the first one to try this with me.

Heather Ryun: It's a stretching experience because the father's now put in a new role, and as the daughter, I'm sharing my heart with my father and my brothers, things that maybe I normally wouldn't. Yes, I really like him. Just kind of things that maybe you would just normally share with your mother and your sister. You're now involving your father and your brothers. It's not a joke anymore. You know, it's serious. I mean, I'm 23 years old, so I'm like, okay.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, I want to hear what he required of you.

Jim Ryun: So here's the procedure that we have followed, and that is if there's a young man that's interested in dating Heather, he will first come to me. And we will have a little conversation that will be something like, well, first of all, after Heather makes me aware of the fact that he's interested, Heather and I will have a little conversation to see what sort of interest she has. After she's been praying about it, is she feeling that this is somebody God potentially might want her to have as a husband? So that's part of the motive behind it. Where are you going with this relationship? There has to be the right motive involved. And so if she says yes, then I will sit down and talk with him about courtship, what that really means. And the intent is that you're looking at Heather as a potential wife. So you need to know this is somewhat of a serious relationship. And of course, I'm well aware of the fact that it's tough for young men to come because that's kind of intimidating.

Dr. James Dobson: Scare a kid to death.

Jim Ryun: What is this?

Dr. James Dobson: I want the first date and then dad's going to talk to me about marrying.

Jim Ryun: But you know, the benefit to that is it provides, especially for the young women, someone that can serve as a screen that can give them a little measure of protection. Now, we consult together, and if it turns out that it's just simply something she's not interested, I will talk with the young man and say, well, we'd like to keep this as a friendship situation. In other words, right now, she's not interested in dating. If it goes beyond that, then I'll sit down with him, and we'll talk a little bit. One of the things we use is a little book called *Dating and Courting*, so he can understand something more about where we're coming from.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, Heather, they're only two million people listening to us, okay? So I want you to be dead honest. How did you feel about that when it first occurred?

Heather Ryun: Well, at first, okay, I didn't go out on my first date until I was 17, and I didn't know at the time, but the young man had already gone to my parents, and we weren't practicing courtship then. And I'll never forget the first time that I'm 21 years old, and I'm like, oh, my goodness, I've got to tell some guy that he's got to go talk to my dad. I'm so scared. So I just said, well, I'd really like it if you

would ask my dad first, and then I left. I just made a beeline for the door, and I thought, I'm never going to hear from this guy. I was so embarrassed. But a week later, this guy called, and I was just floored. I just thought, oh, my goodness, they actually go for this stuff. And so for me, it was just encouragement to know that as I obey my parents and what they really want for my life, that God will honor that. And so since then, it's gotten a little easier as guys have come up and asked me. And I just send them to my dad because a lot of Young men nowadays do not know the idea of courtship.

Dr. James Dobson: Jim, role play with me, okay? I am 18 years old, and I want to date Heather, and I am absolutely scared to death.

Heather Ryun: Too young.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Catherine. I've seen Catherine at the locker at school, and we've had two conversations, and I ask her for her a date and she says, talk to my dad. So I come to you and I am absolutely scared to death because I don't know what in the world you're going to do. What do you say to him?

Jim Ryun: Well, you need to understand, I think, too, first of all, that the father in this position realizes he's carrying a tremendous responsibility. He knows that, for example, this could be potentially the young man for his daughter. And so there is a sense of knowing that, boy, you better make sure that you spend some time with your daughter, with the Lord and with your wife trying to figure out whether he's the one. So it is with fear and trembling that I make these decisions after consultation. But if he comes to me and asks that question after I've talked to Heather, then what I try and do, if he says, and so far, I've only had basically no's, it's the kind of thing where you want to ease that in as much as possible. And I will say to him, "We've talked together and we feel like we'd like to keep this relationship on a friendship basis and leave it as it is right now." And that's kind of how we've worked it so far. When we get to the yes, that'll be the next stage.

Dr. James Dobson: He shakes in and heads for the door, right?

Jim Ryun: Well, but, you know, the one thing that we're concerned about in any one of those responses is that if that's true and it's a no, that that doesn't... it's not detrimental in his walk with Christ because it can be the kind of thing where, you know, it feels like a big hammer has just been slammed on his head. And that's not the intent. But what we're trying to say is, you know, for this time in Heather's life and for where she is and where we are, you're not the young man. And try and do it as carefully as possible, recognizing it's taken a great deal of courage for him to come and ask.

Dr. James Dobson: If the young man was going to pass the test. would you get into the significance of a physical relationship and that sort of thing? Would you talk about that?

Jim Ryun: Well, we'd talk about a lot of things after that. Probably having come over and play basketball with my son.

Dr. James Dobson: Heather and Catherine are both nodding.

Heather Ryun: I think also, didn't you ask him questions about what he wanted to do with his life? And he was still going back to school and back to school and back to school. And I think that just different questions like that you would ask.

Dr. James Dobson: You're looking for character, aren't you?

Jim Ryun: You're looking for character. And see, one of the things that we've talked about as a family and prayed about is that, okay, let's get to the next step where we say yes. Well, then he's going to be coming over to dinner a lot. He's going to be, you know, coming and getting acquainted with our family because we feel it's important that each member of the family have an opportunity to, I don't want to say vote, but offer what they're observing about his character, just as you say, because it's so easy today for our lives to be misread, misunderstood. And if you have the counsel of others, it provides that help, which the Scriptures talk about. There's comfort in the multitude of counselors.

Dr. James Dobson: Anne, you feel good about this?

Anne Ryun: Oh, yes, because I was one that didn't have the privilege of courtship. I had the sorrow of dating. And I see the protection that this gives, especially the woman. And I think that your comment on looking at the character, you know, when a potential comes our way. for any one of the four, I particularly am going to be looking at not the facade of looking your best on a date, but I'm going to be looking at things like, how do you like to do the dishes? What do you think about a Christian woman working outside the home?

Dr. James Dobson: I've got to tell you a story. I don't think I've ever shared this. When Shirley and I were dating in college, I told her that I would do a lot of things around the house, but I would never wash dishes. That was the one thing I was not going to do. Don't count on ever seeing me wash a dish. I've done too many of them. I ain't going to do it. So her parents lived in Long Beach, which was close to where we were going to college. And after we had gone together for two or three months, she invited me home for the weekend. And her mother put on this big spread and everything. And when we're all through eating, her mom is set up to say, "Jim and Shirley, would you mind doing the dishes?" And I choked. I couldn't tell Shirley's mom I wouldn't do the dishes. And so there I am. I said this one thing I wouldn't do. I'm in the kitchen, and I'm drying dishes, and Shirley's dad comes in with a camera and photographs me. They have that picture today of me standing there drying dishes as a monument to what I said I would not do.

Heather Ryun: I think one of the things having the family involved, I've learned just through experience, and my brothers will pick up on things. that I won't pick up on. And I have learned to listen to them.

Ned Ryun: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. I've got to ask you the toughest question, okay? You guys are too good to be true. You know, it's not real. You never have a big fight in this family and you stay hurt for three days?

Heather Ryun: No. We have disagreements.

Dr. James Dobson: Catherine?

Catherine Ryun: Well, Heather and I share a room and Ned and Drew share a room. And so if we were to have some disagreement and we're right next to each other, if we have a disagreement, we immediately always ask forgiveness because if we don't have peace in our house, it just wouldn't work.

Dr. James Dobson: In the closing moment here, Jim and Anne, talk about the role of prayer more specifically because I don't believe any of us have the intelligence, as much as I respect you guys, to do the kind of job you've done without being on your faces before the Lord. And you have been, haven't you?

Anne Ryun: Yes, I was going to comment. There are two things that this family does together a lot. And that is we pray and read the Word together, memorize and meditate on it. And the other thing is we have a lot of family meetings. I'm just sitting in the living room, sitting around the dining room table. We eat breakfast together. We eat dinner together. Those are our two main meals together. And I would want to encourage parents of young children today, pray with your spouse. Jim and I, have made it a daily event and sometimes several times a day, but we do not go to sleep at night without having first prayed together sometime during that day. Usually it is at night. The other thing that I want to encourage young parents to do is to be faithful to God's Word. When you want an answer to a question that you are struggling with, and Jim and I, when our children were little, there were night upon night that we would go to bed literally crying before the Lord saying, "Lord, we are so inconsistent in and of ourselves." We were 25 years old when we met the Lord. So we had 25 years of worldly training that we had to be working out and are still working out. But the consistency of applying God's Word, best way that you can on a day-to-day basis. Paul says it in Hebrews, when you discipline your son as the Lord disciplines us, then in the end, there is peaceable fruit. There is peace.

Dr. James Dobson: Of righteousness, he calls it.

Anne Ryun: There is peaceable fruit.

Jim Ryun: I'd only add a footnote to that. Again, the aspect of prayer. There have been many times when Anne and I have gone to bed just, you know, the day's been long. We've been really tired. It's exhausted, that sort of syndrome, which every parent goes through. And yet it's those closing moments when you really give it to the Lord, not only as a couple praying together, maybe for each other, but for

your children individually. You know, taking that time and really seeking God's will for them and asking for help, recognizing that you don't have all the answers. You know, God will give you little insights for each one of your children. He'll give you those so you'll pray specifically for them. I think that's the key, one of the keys to successful parenting. The amount of time you spend on your knees before the Lord, recognizing your inadequacies. the shortness of which you fall and need to have his help in what's going on.

Roger Marsh:

You know, there are no perfect parents and there are no perfect families. But as we heard today on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, raising children with strong character and lasting faith begins with being intentional, staying involved and recognizing how much we need God's wisdom all along the way. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we've enjoyed Dr. Dobson's conversation with Olympic medalist Jim Ryun, his wife Anne, and members of their family. Now, if you missed any part of today's conversation, or if you'd like to share it with another parent who would benefit from this wisdom, of course, you can always listen in at drjamesdobson.org, or you'll find us online at jdfi.org as well. And perhaps one of the most encouraging things we heard today is that Jim and Anne never claimed to have all the answers. Instead, they talked about praying together, about seeking God's direction, and spending time in His Word as they raised their children. Helping families build that kind of biblical foundation is at the heart of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Through the Family Talk broadcasts and the many other resources we have available online, we are committed to strengthening marriages, equipping parents, and encouraging families to remain faithful to God's Word. And your financial support makes this ministry possible. To make a tax-deductible donation today, you can visit us online at drjamesdobson.org. If it's easier, just type in those initials, jdfi.org for short. You can also call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in 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.