



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Everyday Heroes Who Are Making a Difference at College of the Ozarks and Beyond – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Brad and Laura Johnson

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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.

Gary Bauer: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Gary Bauer, senior vice president for public policy and culture here at JDFI. I'm also the host of the Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom podcast. Check us out if you haven't done so already. I'm glad you're here today. We've got a fantastic show. You know, there's a lot of problems facing America. We talk about them a lot on Family Talk, and I know our audience and Christians around America are very concerned about and very knowledgeable about those problems. But there may be one that's more important than all the rest, and that's what's going wrong in American education. And this has been an issue that Dr. Dobson and I have cared about for a long time. Some of you may remember that I was undersecretary of education during the Reagan years, so I've cared about this a lot.

And of course, you know, in elementary schools and high schools, there are issues. But I want to direct our conversation today because of our guests to what's going on in what's called higher education. Dr. Dobson and I, we've both experienced this quite a bit, and we talked about it a number of times. Well, our guests today are a remarkable couple. They certainly fit into our category of everyday heroes. And they're here to talk about, among other things, the College of the Ozark, which is an institution that is addressing the issues that I just mentioned. Brad and Laura Johnson have a heart for the next generation. And they believe that the future of America depends on raising young people and educating young people not only to be knowledgeable about issues, but also having a strong character and having courage and hopefully loving Jesus and loving America. and also having a heart for serving others.

Brad Johnson is the president of the College of the Ozarks, and you'll be excited, as I said, to hear about the school. His wife, Laura, is accomplished in her own right. She is a fellow for the Chuck Colson Center. She's the author of multiple Bible studies. She's got a master of arts in communication. I learned the other night that she's been a news broadcaster on radio and television. We're not going to hold that against you, Laura. You know, if Dr. Dobson was not with the Lord, but still with us, he would push me right out of this chair because he knew about the College of the Ozarks and he would want to do this interview. But we

don't have him with us today, but we do have both of you. And welcome to the show. We're really blessed to have you here.

Dr. Brad Johnson: Well, thank you, Gary. It's such an honor to be with you today. And I wish Dr. Dobson was here. Not that we would want to push you out of the opportunity here, but we have long admired his dedication to the Lord and his dedication to family values across the nation and his love for our country as well.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Laura Johnson: We both grew up listening to his broadcast. I know my parents had the *Strong-Willed Child* book, and I think that's because of me. They thought I was the strong-willed Child.

Gary Bauer: Oh, man, this would be music to his ears. And tell our audience a little bit more about both of you personally. How did you come to the Lord? Were you raised in Christian homes? And you've already answered what I was going to ask about how did you first hear about or learn about Dr. Dobson. So I'll let you figure out who's going to go first and second here.

Dr. Brad Johnson: Sure. Well, I grew up in the Texas panhandle on our family farm there and would listen to James Dobson's broadcast while I was driving the tractor. And so lots of hours there listening to his wisdom and learning from that as a young man. And just really, really enjoyed that. Grew up in a Christian home. Very, very fortunate and just thankful for the opportunity that my family provided me and a Christian foundation, Christian heritage.

Laura Johnson: My first job actually came about because I was trying to follow up on the James Dobson broadcast.

Gary Bauer: Seriously?

Laura Johnson: It did. I was praying in the kitchen, Lord, what are my next steps? I was in college at that point, and I actually got down on the kitchen floor, and I just said, "Lord, I want to know where You want me to be," and the radio was playing. And it was our local Christian radio station. And they were advertising an internship opportunity. And I thought, I've got to find more about that. So I tried to find a pen, couldn't find a pen. It was before the days of Google. So I thought, I'll just call the radio station. And lo and behold, the general manager answered the phone. He didn't know what ad I was talking about. But he said, hey, I like your voice. And I'd like for you to come down for an interview. We've got a job that I think you'd be perfect for.

Gary Bauer: What a great story. That is fantastic. So you probably owe a finder's fee to Dr. Dobson.

Laura Johnson: I do. He helped me get my first job in radio.

Gary Bauer: That is really amazing. So the College of the Ozarks, I think it's fair to say, is not a household word, right? Everybody's heard about Harvard and Yale and the University of Chicago and Georgetown and so forth. And, of course, the universities and colleges that people know about a great deal, ironically, are the very ones where the problems are the greatest. And we could spend hours talking about that. But the College of the Ozarks is special in many ways. And I want our listeners to know what makes it unique. What is it that you all do there that really puts you in pretty rarefied company? Because there aren't many other schools that follow the model.

Dr. Brad Johnson: That's right, Gary. It is very unique. I like to describe it as one of one. And so back in 1906, we were founded by a minister who came to the Ozarks and saw the need for education that was just so desperate. The poverty there was intense and he saw all these children that needed an education, but didn't have money to be able to secure that. And so he had heard about a model that where children could or youth could work for their education. And he came up with the idea of founding the School of the Ozarks at that point. And on the premise that students could work for their education. And so they did chores. They helped with the farms. They cooked. They cleaned. And for that, they were given their education. And so today, College of the Ozarks is the exact same model. So our students work 15 hours a week and two 40-hour work weeks throughout the academic year. In exchange for their work, they receive a tuition assurance scholarship that allows them to come tuition-free.

Gary Bauer: What was that again?

Dr. Brad Johnson: Tuition-free.

Gary Bauer: Parents are fainting all over America. Tuition-free.

Dr. Brad Johnson: That's right.

Gary Bauer: That really is remarkable.

Dr. Brad Johnson: So the college doesn't participate in the student loan programs, and all of our students graduate debt-free.

Laura Johnson: And it's so exciting to see them all over campus. They scramble eggs. They mow the grass. They serve in our award-winning Keeter Center, which is our restaurant and boutique hotel at the front of campus. They give campus tours. And it is just remarkable to see these students working hard for their education and shining for it.

Gary Bauer: Well, it's an incredible concept. And, you know, there's actually research on this, that if a student, a young person will take a job, a first job, and it might be cutting grass, taking out trash or whatever, if you take that first job and begin to learn the skills of what's required, being prompt, you know, listening to your boss, et cetera, that that's a path that inevitably almost always leads to eventual

success down the road. And I think that's what you both know, right? That work is important. It gives you dignity.

Dr. Brad Johnson: We see that every day and how our students come to the campus, you know, 90% of them demonstrate financial need. And that's by design. And because our mission is to reach out to those students that might not have another opportunity. But when they come to campus and they begin to work. And you pair that with the academic offerings that we have. There's something that really, really amazing that happens. And the dignity that they feel, the sense of pride that they take in our campus. We've had graduates come back and say, you know, I learned at College of the Ozarks how to appreciate some of my peers that were doing the less than attractive jobs.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Dr. Brad Johnson: Whether it's janitorial types of things. or mowing the grass, they learn to appreciate their peers that were doing those jobs. And there's so much dignity that comes from the work that happens there on the campus. It's valuable and it pays off in their education as they go out and they graduate and they go into the world of work. Our employers in the region look for College of the Ozarks graduates because they know just how to show up on time. They're not afraid of hard work. They're there and they're ready to work on a team. And it's really exciting to hear those stories.

Laura Johnson: It's really fun to hear from employers who tell us that they had a job candidate in front of them. And when they learned that this candidate was a graduate of College of the Ozarks, that they closed their folder and said, you're hired. That's all I needed to know was that you're from College of the Ozarks.

Gary Bauer: Now, that's an endorsement because employers recognize what kind of person will be successful for them and if that's all they need to know. That's a great endorsement of what you're doing there. Now, there's this guy on Fox, Mike Rowe. People probably are familiar with him. He's really been emphasizing that not everybody goes to school and are going to end up being a rocket scientist, right, or discovering a cure for a new disease, although certainly we need both of those things. But we have a desperate need in America of young people that know a trade. We're running out of people that know how to fix things, build things. You can't be a great power in the world if you don't have a population that knows how to make anything. Haven't you all done some work with him?

Dr. Brad Johnson: We have.

Gary Bauer: Describe that a little.

Dr. Brad Johnson: Yeah. So Mike was on campus to do one of our major convocations about three years ago and did a phenomenal job. I think he just fell in love with the college. In fact, one of his Facebook posts afterwards highlighted the things that he had seen and done there. One of the things that he got to do was bottle feed a calf.

We have a dairy on campus, and that's one of the workstations for students. And that morning, he got to go out and bottle feed one of the calves with the students.

Gary Bauer: I want pictures. He's a pretty big, manly guy. I'm having a hard time seeing him bottle feeding anybody. But at any rate...

Dr. Brad Johnson: It was really fun, and we've maintained that relationship. And he's a big fan of what happens at College of the Ozarks. While we don't have the trades specifically, we're a traditional liberal arts college with some pre-professional programs as well. But the things that our students get to do in our work education program are supplemental, and many of them work in the electrical shop or the carpentry shop, and they are learning those trade skills and take those skills with them into life with a traditional bachelor's degree as well.

Gary Bauer: That's great.

Laura Johnson: I think about one of our students, Gracie. She was, I believe, an education major, and while she was working on campus there at College of the Ozarks. She was in our landscaping department and she would put together these beautiful floral arrangements for the Keter Center. And they were so beautiful. And people realized that she had a gift and they just spoke life into her. She ended up graduating and opening her own floral shop. And she does big business with weddings. And it started there at the college in her workstation.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic story. You know, that's one of the great things about America. We have a lot of people that are willing to start businesses. I talked a little bit earlier about the fact that the universities are so leftist. I saw a study the other day. There are more self-described Marxists on major university faculties than there are faculty members that will admit that they're a Republican. That seems a little strange and disturbing to me, but how do you, Brad, safeguard against that kind of thing happening at the College of the Ozarks?

Dr. Brad Johnson: Sure. That's a great question. And it's something that we're very active in safeguarding our mission in that way, because we have to. It's so easy for colleges and universities to drift away from their original mission. And one of the things that we do, we have a robust interview process. And I interview every faculty member that we hire before they are hired. And so that's the final safeguard. But the process doesn't stop there. For our faculty, they go through something called the Faithful Education Program. And that Faithful Education Program consists of doing a paper and presentation in their first year of service to the college. They will do the research present the paper on how they integrate their faith in in their discipline and then that cycle continues and every six years that faculty member has to repeat that process and update what they are doing to continue to integrate their faith within their discipline.

Gary Bauer: So you have a real check in that process of seeing whether you've got somebody that wasn't completely honest with you about who they were or who may be drifting to the secular left during their time there at the school.

Dr. Brad Johnson: That's right. And in addition to signing off, that they agree and support our values and principles on campus, our faith statements, they do that every year. But that's something that is built into the academic enterprise there on campus. And that makes it really a rich experience. And sometimes those papers are published. If they're really good, we put those together. So, I mean, it's really a neat thing that they can take pride in as well.

Gary Bauer: And you overtly present yourself as a Christian institution?

Dr. Brad Johnson: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, we were founded that way, and we continue to be that today.

Laura Johnson: One of the things that excites us most about our Christian faith there at the college is seeing how students are dispatched by the Holy Spirit in all kinds of vocations and fields to be salt and light, to share the love and light of Jesus. And it's exciting to see our faculty members helping students see their Christian worldview and how that makes a difference in their everyday life and how that's going to make a difference in their workplace.

Dr. Brad Johnson: And it's not just on the academic side. Our whole strategic plan, which affects everyone on campus, is based on the Matthew 5:14 through 16 passage. And our strategic plan is light the way, equipping students to shine the light of Christ. And in whatever discipline they choose, we want them to go out from our campus and be that light in a dark world and be a light for Christ.

Gary Bauer: Wonderful. So you're obviously a small school. What is the attendance there?

Dr. Brad Johnson: We are just under 1,500 students. We also have a classical Christian school on campus, about 300 students in that K-12 program there.

Gary Bauer: Ah. Okay, that's great. These classical schools are springing up around the country. And the ones that we've become familiar with, man, that is that's desperately needed. I mean, we you know, there's a lot of evidence the American people were better educated 150 years ago than they are now. And it's basically, at least in part, because we abandon anything resembling a classical education.

Dr. Brad Johnson: We believe that that education has to start early, embedding those Christian values in our young people and helping support them all along the way so that they can go out and be the light of Christ in the world.

Gary Bauer: So if the students are attending, tuition-free, if they had to pay. I mean, there's no cheap schools out there. What would a student have to end up paying?

Dr. Brad Johnson: Sure. The tuition figure is roughly \$25,000 a year. And then you've got room and board on top of that. And the students can work. Many of them have the opportunity to work to receive that room and board free of charge as well. That work offsets the room and boards charges. There are a number of ways that we fund the model, and endowment is one of those. Also, annual fundraising is very important. And then many of our campus industries, we call them, like the Keter Center there on campus, and our Fruitcake and Jelly Kitchen, and our dairy, and all of those are revenue-producing programs, and that revenue serves to help offset the cost of education as well.

Gary Bauer: Okay. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I've heard a lot of people in important positions that know about your school. In fact, a number of, I think, fairly high-profile people have gone to the school to speak. I mean, the kind of people that you would expect to speak at much larger universities. How do you explain that? How's word spread?

Dr. Brad Johnson: We have convocations annually that we invite speakers to campus. We've had Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Bibi Netanyahu was there years ago, and Mike Pence. Lots of dignitaries from around the U.S. that have been there last fall. Laura got to interview Shannon Bream from Fox News right there on stage, and she did a marvelous job. And, of course, Governor and now Ambassador Huckabee has been there on campus a number of times. And so we try to put individuals like that in front of our students so that they can see and learn from their expertise.

Gary Bauer: Well, the very fact that people, you know, that prominent would come to the school, I think in itself says that those individuals know that something special is happening there. And again, it's a great compliment to what you're building.

Dr. Brad Johnson: Well, it's an honor to be a part of it. The Lord has blessed us so richly. And we want to spend our days equipping students to be out in the world and being that light for Christ.

Gary Bauer: Yes. Laura, you have some projects that you do on the campus. One of them is OWL. Do I have that right? Like hoo?

Laura Johnson: Yeah, that's exactly right. And it stands for Ozarks Women in Leadership. And we have several initiatives, but one is an annual luncheon where we are raising scholarship dollars for students to have internships all across the country. We find that many of our students have to choose between, will I work maybe at my local restaurant, or will I reach to get that internship that I desperately need to build my career? And sometimes we see that struggle. So many of our students come from financially impoverished backgrounds. And so they want to reach, but yet the finances are very much a challenge. So one of the things that we do in OWL is raise scholarship dollars to cover room and board so that when students come back from that internship, they have their room and board covered and have that experience.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic.

Laura Johson: We have a number of students all across the country who are working in various industries. We're here in D.C. right now, and we're going to visit some of our interns tonight. Some are working for Concerned Women for America, or maybe their congressmen, some in the local media. It's just really exciting to see the experience that they're getting. And I think that's one thing that our supporters talk about is how our students give them hope that this generation of students that we're raising at the College of the Ozarks gives them hope because they see us reigniting the American spirit.

Gary Bauer: My goodness, the time is flying. I have so many other things I want to ask you about. Your school is just so incredible, and I want people to know there are places like this in America. Can you come back and be with us for a second day?

Dr. Brad Johnson: We would be delighted to.

Laura Johnson: Absolutely.

Gary Bauer: That's great. Thank you. Well, folks, thank you for being here on Family Talk. And we'll be back with you tomorrow.

Roger Marsh: You know, I love that. I love that concept that a school is not chasing prestige, but rather sending young people out into the world to truly make a difference. Dr. Brad Johnson and his wife, Laura, call that stewardship of influence. And it's the kind of thing that gives you hope for the next generation. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring Gary Bauer's conversation with Brad and Laura Johnson of the College of the Ozarks. If you'd like to hear this program again or pass it along to a parent or a student who would benefit from hearing this great wisdom, you'll find the conversation at jdfi.org. We invite you to partner with us today, and it's easy to do when you 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 a gift through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Or you can give a gift securely online at jdfi.org.

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 for part two of Gary Bauer's fascinating conversation with Dr. Brad Johnson, president of College of the Ozarks, and his wife, Laura Johnson. They'll be discussing what it means to be an everyday hero on a Christian college campus. That's coming up right here on the next 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.