



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Help for Parents of Prodigal Children - Part 2

Guest(s): Allison Bottke

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- Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.
- Allison Bottke: The fear is very real that if they don't help, their child will not make it. But you know what I challenge them with? How do you know? How do you know that God might have a plan? How do you know, when you step back, that your adult child may show you an amazing side you've never seen? I didn't know what would happen in my son's life, but I had to believe that God had a better plan than me.
- Roger Marsh: Welcome, to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and today you will hear the remainder of a conversation Dr. Dobson had with author, Allison Bottke, on this tough issue of prodigal children.
- Now, on yesterday's program, Allison shared the story of her son, Chris, and how his rebellious nature drove him to a prison, and why parents can't enable the bad behavior of their kids. On today's broadcast, Allison will give parents very practical steps to break the cycle of allowing their child's behavior to continue, and emphasizes the importance of making a plan of action for parenting a prodigal child. Here now is part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with author, Allison Bottke, here on Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: Last time, Allison, we talked about what you say to the parents that you're speaking to at these conferences that you're holding all over the country. First of all, confirm for me my expectation that people are just sponges for the information you're giving because they are struggling and hurting so much.
- Allison Bottke: Yes, they are.
- Dr. James Dobson: And you're addressing your comments specifically to those whose children are legal adults, and yet the parents are still playing a parenting role. And they're still trying to get them out of jail and they're still paying the fine, and they're doing whatever they need to do to enable that individual. Now, they don't see it as enabling, obviously. They think of it as just helping. But you have made a distinction between the two.

Allison Bottke: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: One more time, explain what that distinction is.

Allison Bottke: Helping is doing something for someone that they are not capable of doing themselves. And enabling is doing something for someone that they can and should be doing for themselves.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what's the first step?

Allison Bottke: It spells sanity. It's S, and it's stop the enabling, stop the guilt, stop the self-blame. And a real key, Doctor, stop the flow of money. When we cut off the money train, a lot of things change.

Dr. James Dobson: That's very difficult to do, but it's the first step, isn't it?

Allison Bottke: Yes, it is. We have to really realize that what we're doing isn't working. We're on that gerbil wheel and we've got to stop. So the stop has to happen first. Stop. If you know that there's a habit going on here, you've got to change it. If you know that it's not getting any better, the drugs get worse, the calls to the police get worse, the money that you're spending is worse. You're at a point where you're losing your retirement savings. And this is what's happening with parents around the country.

Dr. James Dobson: I wish everybody understood that. Our son, Ryan, will tell this story, so I'm sure it's okay for me to share it as well. He went off to college and he wasn't quite ready for college life, and for all the studying and everything that went with it. And was not doing well academically. And after the second year we had a little conversation. There was no anger or anything. I just said, "Ryan, we're helping to pay the bill here and there's no free ride in life, and you're not earning it. So if you do get another D, you call me." And he said, "Okay, that's fair." And he called me in several months and said, "Dad, I got another D." And I said, "Okay, Ryan, figure out what you're going to do with your life because it isn't going to be like this. I'm not going to pay the bills if that is the way..." Because he's bright as he can be.

He came back to Colorado Springs, got a job in a bakery. And of course hated it. And he came home one night and said, "Boy, Dad, those people are going nowhere." And I said, "I know, that's what I was telling you." And I volunteered. I said, "You want to take one more run at it?" And he said, "I would love it." And so, he chose Biola University in Southern California. And I said, "I'll give you one semester. You can have one semester at a time."

Went back, graduated, and he's out there doing work for the Lord. I'm so proud of him. But I had to have the courage as James Dobson and James Dobson's son to take a step that was very, very hard. I didn't know if he'd ever get back to college. I had no guarantee that this wouldn't get him off a career path where

he could use the talent that he had. But he told me a while back, he never respected me more than that decision, and it was a turning point in his life. But my goodness, that's hard to do.

Allison Bottke: It is hard. And tough love, as you said, it's not as tough on the kids as it is on the parents often. It's tough for us to do that. Respect is what exactly happens. My son is respecting me more. There was no respect. When you continually bail them out and you don't hold true with what you say. Now, when you told your son that he couldn't come home, that you weren't paying again, you had to stick with that and then allow him to go out and experience the bakery and experience that and come back. And then you gave him another chance a semester at a time. This isn't happening out there. What's happening is so many parents just keep doling out the money.

Dr. James Dobson: We live in a very permissive age where children are not held to accountability even at 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. They need to learn it then. And if they don't learn it then, it's going to be harder when you get into the adolescent years and beyond.

Allison Bottke: It's very hard, but you can stop right now. When I am speaking, S, insanity, stop. You know you're in pain, you're crying. You're sitting there saying, "My son is this, my daughter is this." Okay, stop. Step back, stop. And then look at what it is you're going to stop. What is it that you have to stop? We have to look at ourselves, Doctor. I had to see what it was in me. It's not my son's drug problem that's the problem. Yes, that's a problem for him. But for me, my problem is what I'm doing with this. It's so difficult for parents to see our part that we play in it. Because their lives are so messed up, they're the ones that are in trouble, they're the drug addicts. I'm not. They're the alcoholics. I'm not. They're not working. I am. Of course they have all the problems. No, it's-

Dr. James Dobson: But you take the responsibility for it.

Allison Bottke: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Because you can see mistakes that you made that led in this direction.

Allison Bottke: And why am I doing this?

Dr. James Dobson: Now, one of the other steps, I believe, from your book is forgiveness.

Allison Bottke: That's a very, very big step. That's not one of the six sanity steps, but that's a real part of it, forgiveness.

Dr. James Dobson: You're asking the child to forgive you?

Allison Bottke: There's five of them. It's asking the child to forgive me, yes, but it's also forgiving him whether he's asked for it or not. It's asking the Lord to forgive me for what I've done. Forgiveness is a very important part of this.

Dr. James Dobson: You're missing one. What about forgiving yourself?

Allison Bottke: And forgiving... Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: For the things that you failed at.

Allison Bottke: Exactly. That's where stop the blame.

Dr. James Dobson: There comes a point where you have to say, "Okay, so I did. Yes."

Allison Bottke: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: I did the best I could. I was trying so hard. And I love that child so much, but I made mistakes. And I've got to live with them and I'm going to give them to the Lord. And I'm not going to wallow in them.

Allison Bottke: Exactly. And that's where the A, insanity is important to be assembling a support group. Get around other parents. We are not alone. This is really one of the big things I'm seeing out there. Parents are coming out of the woodwork and they're saying, "Finally, somebody understands." They're afraid to talk about their kids that are in prison or that are on drugs, because they just don't know what to do anymore.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the next one?

Allison Bottke: And nip excuses in the bud. Nip our own excuses and theirs. And after a while, we really do know when it's an excuse. And our home, why we're doing this-

Dr. James Dobson: And we're spelling out the acrostic here is sanity.

Allison Bottke: Sanity, exactly. Nip excuses. And we really do need to stop that.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the I?

Allison Bottke: I, implement rules and boundaries. We can sit here and talk about this until the cows come home, my grandma would say. Unless you actually implement them, really put an action plan together. Decide what you're going to do. If you have an adult child living at home that sleeps until noon and doesn't work and you're paying everything, you know what, implement some rules. It's time to change.

Dr. James Dobson: Have an impact.

Allison Bottke: It's time. There you go. It's actually doing something, not just discussing it or crying about it. And then following the consequences, looking what the consequences are. I talk a lot about consequences because there's a lot of them. When you cut that money chain off, what happens? My son, the last time I saw my son, the last time I held him, he was in my car and he said, "Mom, tonight I'm going to go sleep under a bridge." He didn't have a place to sleep that night. I knew this. I could have brought him home with me. He's lived on my couch, on my floor time after time after time. This wasn't working. He was running from the law. He had warrants out for his arrest. I could have said, "Come on home, Chris." He didn't ask him to come home, he would've come home, but I couldn't do it.

Dr. James Dobson: And everything inside of you-

Allison Bottke: Everything inside of me wanted to bring him home. And I watched him walk down the street and I said, "God, please keep him safe. I can't do this." He was 34 years old then, homeless, had lost everything. Multiple times. This has happened multiple times. He's been in and out of rehabs, in and out. I said, "Well, I'll pray for you, son. I'll drive you to a shelter if you want to go to a shelter." He said, "No, nobody's got any room for me now." So he got out of my car. I didn't know what would happen. He turned himself in that night, and he's been in jail ever since. But he needed to accept the consequences for his actions. I didn't do what it was that he did that got the warrants out for his arrest. I wasn't responsible for him losing his apartment. I wasn't responsible for these things. And I had to really realize. And it's hard, and it's tough. Tough love is tough.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the T?

Allison Bottke: T is trust your instincts. I have so many parents I talk to that say, "I just knew he was dealing drugs. I knew something was going on." I have a mom that the SWAT team broke her door down. They found a safe in her son's floor of his bedroom where he was dealing methamphetamine. She then became an accessory and had to spend most of her life savings to clear her name. And she didn't know anything about this. But she said, "Allison, I just kind of felt something wasn't right." And often the Holy Spirit talks that we have shut down that still small voice. We've shut it down a lot. Listen to it. Listen to it and then act on it. Trust your instincts is T.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the Y?

Allison Bottke: Y is the hardest and the most important to get sanity, and it's yield everything to God. When I finally realized that rescuing my son was playing, God, was taking God's role, then I couldn't do it anymore. When I had that realization that I thought I knew more than God did?

Dr. James Dobson: Who helped you come to that point?

Allison Bottke: God helped me come to that point.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't read it in a book, you were so desperate.

Allison Bottke: That's it. And I read a lot of books, and a lot of us are reading them. These parents that are going through this, we're reading everything we can get our hands on. And we've got to really get to the point where we just say, "No more. No more." You just take them. You do what you can do. Help me get through this.

Dr. James Dobson: Allison, what are you hearing from the parents? You have now given this speech and it's break time or you're through, what happens?

Allison Bottke: They cry. They weep. We cry together. I cry a lot, with moms. Mostly are moms that just say, "I don't know what to do, he's in jail. Or she is or they're on drugs and I've lost my money. I've lost my job. I've lost my marriage." It's just...

Dr. James Dobson: Drugs and alcohol-

Allison Bottke: Drugs and alcohol.

Dr. James Dobson: ... are right there in the middle of it all.

Allison Bottke: Oh, it's huge. It's a huge issue. And then the parents fighting because they can't agree on the way to handle this situation. And that's-

Dr. James Dobson: And the father is often so angry he's ready to kill the kid.

Allison Bottke: Oh, the dynamics are... It's amazing. But I am hearing from people that they are getting sanity. This is what I talk about, it's just stepping back and stopping these behaviors. Putting an action plan together, really hanging together with other people. That support group is so important.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, you've made reference twice to an action plan. What is it and how do you develop it?

Allison Bottke: You sit down and you develop a plan to either launch your child out of the house if they're still living with you. Or if they aren't living with you, what the issues are that are the problems. It's really identifying what you want. Identifying-

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go to the beginning. You've now drawn these conclusions and you ask to sit down with your son or daughter and you have a conversation. I assume you don't do that.

Allison Bottke: See, so many of us have had these conversations with these kids already. We're past that.

Dr. James Dobson: They don't believe it.

Allison Bottke: Exactly. Or we sit down and we say, "Now, let's talk about how we can do this together. You're going to get up at eight o'clock, and you're going to go to work." This is an adult. "Okay, you're going to go to work because you have to go to work now. I'll get you up." Hello. No, that doesn't work.

Dr. James Dobson: And you say-

Allison Bottke: Once everything-

Dr. James Dobson: You know what, again, without incrimination and all of the anger that is frequently evident throughout this kind of conversation, you sit down and say, "You know what, it is really time to go. You're a man. You got to stand on your own two feet. I've done all I can do. So, let's get packed up and I'm going to have to say goodbye to you."

Allison Bottke: Exactly. If that is what you've decided in your action plan, yes, absolutely. But plan that out first. That's what I'm encouraging parents to do, really plan out step-by-step, by step. And look at the consequences first. Now, if you do put them out, if you do cut the checkbook off, what are the possible consequences? Now, there are parents, and I've talked to them and I know these parents that have stopped the money chain. The child has gone out and overdosed and is now dead. The consequences-

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's one of the fears, isn't it?

Allison Bottke: It's a horrible fear.

Dr. James Dobson: Fear of suicide.

Allison Bottke: It's a horrible fear. Or a drug overdose, or any number. I encourage, in the action plan, to look at everything that you... What do you want? What are your goals as a parent? Do you want them out of the house or do you want them to work? Whatever it is, set that out, look at your consequences. And come to discuss this with them with love. And that's really hard, you've got to be calm. You're not negotiating with them. This is not a, let's discuss this. I want you out on the fourth, but you're going to negotiate and you'll be out on the 10th. This is not, no. You really, as the parent...

Dr. James Dobson: In your book, Allison, you list the things that people are afraid of, why they're so terrified in this conflict that they're involved in. And you said, "Here are the ones you most commonly hear. Fear of what will happen to the child if you don't provide him or her what they want." Money primarily. Secondly, fear of being rejected by the child, and accusations of not being loved by them. Those are very real fears. Fear of what others may think. Fear of living with guilt in the event that the child harms himself or others also is a very real possibility. And then

you name two sources of guilt. Guilt to ease the regret of earlier years of poor parenting, and guilt that comes from thinking that it's the right thing to do as a Christian. Elaborate on some of those. I think they're self-explanatory, but they're very good.

Allison Bottke: Well, they are. Those are the things I hear from parents. The fear is very real that if they don't help, their child will not make it. There really is that fear that if we don't do what they need to be doing, they're not going to do it. But you know what I challenge them with? How do you know? How do you know that God might have a plan? How do you know when you step back that your adult child may show you an amazing side you've never seen because you keep coming in? Now, I'd like to be positive and think that way. We don't know it. I didn't know what would happen in my son's life, but I had to believe that God had a better plan than me.

Dr. James Dobson: Now I'm going throw a monkey wrench-

Allison Bottke: Oh, boy.

Dr. James Dobson: ... into the whole discussion. And it's not one that you're not familiar with. But when you start saying there are consequences out there and the child might harm himself or others, and so on. I can almost hear voices coming back from the parents who say, "Yes, but there are grandchildren. I can't not try to rescue my son or daughter because I'm trying to reach those grandchildren and save them." That makes it even harder, doesn't it?

Allison Bottke: It makes it tremendously harder. And I always ask parents that bring that up, if you feel your grandchildren are in harm's way, if you feel they are not eating, if they really are living in a car, you need to do what you need to do legally to protect your grandchildren. I tell them that right away. It's another dynamic. And we have grandparents raising their grandchildren. But you've got to do it legally if you're going to be raising them, because often these addicts use these children as pawns. They're pulling the grandkids in and out of these homes. It's frightening. When the grandchildren issue is involved, it's a slippery slope you're walking on. Boy.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's say straight out, if you've got a grandchild who is being abused or is not having their needs met for proper nutrition and care, you go to Child Protective Services and report your own child.

Allison Bottke: That's exactly what I'm saying. I have friends that are raising their grandchildren, that have adopted them. I actually have one that's just gone through a three-and-half-year adoption for her own grandchildren. But if that's what you need to do, and that's what's on your heart to do, and you need to protect those children, that's what you need to do.

Dr. James Dobson: My heart really goes out to those people. We're talking to them right now. They had gotten their job done raising their children, and they thought they were through. And they're too old now to be doing the kind of things they have to do to chase a toddler, and the other. Some of them are 65, 70, 75 years of age and they've got babies and children on their hands. Boy, I tell you, I could weep thinking about them. And there are a lot of them out there, more than ever. As a family disintegrates, it makes me so angry that Hollywood glamorizes infidelity and glamorizes finding someone new, and all those things. And it's the children that are decimated in this kind of situation. And then you dump them on some older parents who really shouldn't be having to handle that at this time.

Allison Bottke: And it is challenging. And yet I do say to them, if they are raising them and they are there, they need to take the legal precautions to protect those children.

Dr. James Dobson: And then you do what you have to do with the Lord's help.

Allison Bottke: Exactly. Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: At least, I think it helps for us to say we understand what you're going through out there. Allison, you use the word hope here. We've talked about some pretty scary things. Is there hope? Are you seeing people healed? Are you seeing people who understand and catch this concept of tough love?

Allison Bottke: Absolutely. Our God is about restoration and salvation and love. And it is possible, and you can find hope. Yes, you can. I'm seeing it everywhere. I'm not saying they're finding this suddenly easy. It's not easy, but there is hope. There's hope from my son. My son is one year into a four-year prison sentence. He's writing me letters. I've never heard from him like this.

Dr. James Dobson: I saw one of them that he wrote to you.

Allison Bottke: The poem, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He is really, for the first time, understanding what he's put you through.

Allison Bottke: And he's in Bible study. He's reading books daily. God needed to put him there. He needed to be where he is, because it is a difficult place. And it's difficult to hear how many parents are going through this. It's so prevalent. I just ache because I want them to have joy and know that the Lord will provide, it's not just a platitude, you can say, because it does bring me peace. God has a plan. I don't know what it's going to look like. I don't know what's going to happen. The truth will set you free. And I'm walking in biblical and walking in grace. I'm learning what that means. Me, as a mom, I'm going through a different life. And these parents need to look at their own hearts and see what God wants to do in their life. When I stopped living my son's life and started living...

Dr. James Dobson: There are very few that have a greater compassion or passion for what they're trying to communicate than you have, because you have lived it. This is not an intellectual thing with you. This is not just a matter of saying, "I think there's something here that might be useful to people." You have walked this path and you know the individuals out there, you're talking to them on a daily basis. And I believe you really do have a message for this generation, and I trust the Lord will continue to bless it. Bless this book. The title of it is, *Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children: Six Steps to Hope and Healing For Struggling Parents*. For those who are out there who thought there are no answers, there's nothing but confusion and pain and guilt and sorrow and fear, give it a try. See if the Lord won't make use of some ideas that I think come straight out of scripture. And thank you for caring enough to do this. It really wrenches you emotionally, doesn't it?

Allison Bottke: It does. It does.

Dr. James Dobson: You have had tears in your eyes through both of these programs that we've done.

Allison Bottke: And I do. I travel around the country and I weep with these women. But at the end of all that weeping is a hope that things can be different. That we're not doing the same behaviors, that we're changing. That God will provide a way. And I never, ever give up hope that God's going to restore my son. And I tell that to these women, to these other moms, God will make a way where there seems to be no way.

Dr. James Dobson: Blessings to you.

Allison Bottke: And you as well. Thank you

Dr. James Dobson: Allison Bottke, the author of the book, *Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children*. And we'll talk again one of these days.

Allison Bottke: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: Well, that concludes a deeply meaningful and powerful conversation today here on Family Talk, featuring our own Dr. James Dobson and his in-studio guest, Allison Bottke. Now, Allison is the author of a number of series of books, including the *Setting Boundaries* series, and *God Allows U-Turns* series. Today, the topic of conversation with setting boundaries with your adult children, and it's the true story that Allison went through and lived with her son Christopher as he was going through a season of rebellion that actually wound up leading him to prison. Allison followed that book up with another one the following year called, *How to Connect With Your Troubled Adult Children: Effective Strategies for Families in Pain*. And we have a link for both of those resources and our online resource center at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now, during the last half hour, Allison was sharing with Dr. Dobson her acrostic for keeping your sanity. And the acrostic has some powerful principles that are worth repeating. First, stop hoarding your hurts. Second, assemble supportive people. Third, nip excuses in the bud. Fourth, implement a plan of action. Fifth, trust the voice of the Holy Spirit. And sixth, yield everything to God. That's the best way for a person of faith who has a child who's wandering in rebellion, an adult child, to keep your sanity. And by the way, in case you might be wondering, since this interview was recorded a couple of years ago, since that time Christopher has been released from prison and now he's growing in his relationship with the Lord and rekindling and re-establishing a healthy relationship with his mom.

By the way, speaking of healthy relationships, one of the ways that you keep Family Talk going and growing strong is with your prayers and faithful financial support. This is just a reminder that coming up after Thanksgiving, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving is referred to as Giving Tuesday. This is a day when you have an opportunity to make a special contribution in support of your favorite nonprofit organization online. Of course, we recommend Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And your gift will be doubled this coming Tuesday, December 3rd, only for that day. So make plans to be praying about how much the Lord would have you partner with us financially. And then make that note, Tuesday, December 3rd, Giving Tuesday. Give your best gift online at drjamesdobson.org, or call us at 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, thanks so much for listening. 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.

Announcer:

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