



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Single Adults – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

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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.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. Are you single and feeling like you're the only one struggling with loneliness? Perhaps you're watching your unmarried friends and you're wondering how best to support them. Well today here on Family Talk, we're going to tackle the unique challenges and opportunities of single life. Joining Dr. James Dobson in studio are his guests, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Both men are acclaimed clinical psychologists, popular speakers and best-selling authors. You may know them from their groundbreaking book series called Boundaries which has literally helped millions of people set healthier limits in their relationships. Well during our conversation today, they will be addressing common misconceptions about singleness. They'll also offer some guidance to those seeking marriage and they'll share practical wisdom for cultivating meaningful relationships.

They're also going to challenge married couples to better understand and include their single friends in family as well as social life. So now let's get into part two of a great conversation featuring Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud and our own Dr. James Dobson right here on Family Talk. Doctor?

Dr. James Dobson: John and Henry, we had a lively discussion yesterday about this topic. Appreciate your giving us another day and agreeing to share your knowledge and professional skills with us.

Dr. Henry Cloud: It's good to be back. We had a good time yesterday.

Dr. John Townsend: I'm looking forward to a little of the different areas you were talking about earlier in this second segment.

Dr. James Dobson: Gentlemen, I know from some of the things you all have written and said, relate to the differences between ideal and real for single adults. In other words, apparently many single adults, men particularly, have this notion of the ideal woman that they're looking for with so many characteristics that they feel like they have to have, and that runs headlong into reality that people are not perfect, women are not perfect, and they're not going to find the ideal person.

Describe your concerns and what you've seen as you've worked with single adults.

- Dr. Henry Cloud: Well, it's a double bind because the only way that we can give up our need for the ideal is to begin to love the real. And a lot of times when we're looking for the ideal, we never get to the real. And so the real love from real imperfect people cures our need for the ideal, but we stay stuck and don't move into that because we're looking for the ideal. So it's a never-ending cycle.
- Dr. John Townsend: Let me give an example of that if I can, Dr. Dobson. We have worked with a lot of on-the-way-to-marriage couples and people who are dating, this sort of thing the past few years. And a lot of times a man will come in with an idea of a woman's got to be Betty Crocker plus a movie star plus Elizabeth Elliot plus a lot of components-
- Dr. James Dobson: Some other things you didn't name, right? And he isn't going to find her, right?
- Dr. John Townsend: That's right, and what happens is as you start working down to what he's really asking for, you find out what he's saying is these are things that I don't have in myself that I want someone else to provide for me. For example, someone who's a very feeling person, you'll find out a lot of times he can't feel feelings. He goes into a room, and he can talk about sports, he can talk about weather, but he can't feel feelings. So he puts a demand on this woman to feel his feelings for him, and she's got to go to all the parties with him. She's got to go to all the meetings with him because-
- Dr. Henry Cloud: Then he resents her because she's feeling all the time.
- Dr. John Townsend: And so he's placed an ideal need on her to be something he couldn't be in the first place, which she as being a sinner is going to disappoint him sooner or later, and then she loses her pedestal position.
- Dr. James Dobson: Or he goes from a relationship to relationship trying to find the impossible, right?
- Dr. John Townsend: Absolutely.
- Dr. James Dobson: And it's never there, and years roll on.
- Dr. John Townsend: And what we have to start asking a person then, is it really the ideal you're looking for or is there a fear underneath that if you find something imperfect, you're going to be disappointed the rest of your life? And a lot of times we find out that they really never wanted the ideal in the first place. They just wanted a defense against ever making a deep commitment because it was so scary.
- Dr. James Dobson: That's an excuse not to attach. We asked our correspondence department to put together for us a wish list that had come from the single adults who've

written to us. The frustrations that they experience are reflected in this wish list. Here it is. "I want to be respected as a normal responsible adult, not viewed suspiciously as somehow abnormal because they haven't married yet." You guys jump in at any point where this makes sense to you. Is that a common concern?

Dr. John Townsend: The whole idea that, and we hear that a lot too. The whole idea there is people asking for something that they've got to grab for themselves. In other words, respect is earned. And a lot of people when they start saying, "Well, I'm not going to be in this group because they don't respect me," or this sort of thing, a lot of times it's because they're waiting for people to come up and say, "Well, I respect you. Well, I don't know what you do. I don't know whether you're a good singer or a leader or a teacher or whatever." And so that wish comes up a lot. We help people to see that the more aggressive they are in taking initiative, being proactive instead of reactive, people come up and say, you know, did things for six months and I never told you this but I respect you.

Dr. Henry Cloud: They tend to respect single people who enjoy their lives, who have close relationships, who enjoy their careers, and serve the Lord. And they respect those single people.

Dr. James Dobson: And they're not living today in anticipation of some great event occurring, that person on a white horse that comes riding in a year or two or three years from now. Living is right now.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Living is right now.

Dr. John Townsend: We call that the rescue myth and-

Dr. James Dobson: The what myth?

Dr. John Townsend: The rescue myth, that someone's going to rescue me out of singleness.

Dr. Henry Cloud: The grass is greener on the other side, but people forget that you got to mow it.

Dr. James Dobson: Here's the second need, the need to be included in the social and family life of their married friends, to have contact with the older generation and to be with children, to put them to bed, to take them to Disneyland or what have you. You were talking about that last time that this is something we married folks can do for the single.

Dr. Henry Cloud: That is a very, very real and a good need. I have a family who took me in when I came to California. I knew no one out here. I'd spend Christmas with them. I'd spend Thanksgiving with them. We'd do things. They're in my church, and it's been a very good sense of grounding for me. I think we all need that. And married people who are out there who see some single that you like that you enjoy being with and you'd like to share your home with, go for it. Because God says in Psalm 68:5 think it is, that He'll put the lonely in families, and He will

rescue them. And the only way He's going to do that is if the body of Christ goes out there and finds those single people and says, "Come on board."

Dr. James Dobson: What a ministry.

Dr. John Townsend: The thing about it though is a lot of people are probably listening to the broadcast saying, "Gosh, I got to find some stray pup on my door and take care of him, and I've already got three kids." And that's not the case with singles. They have so much to offer. They bring so much richness to someone else's life. They bring a dimension of being able to be a little more flexible than other people that families can really get a lot out of too. So it's really a two-way street.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, here's the next one. They want to resolve this area of their life as soon as possible. They're tired of dating, tired of wondering if they will ever have a family. That's part of the wish list. Agree?

Dr. Henry Cloud: That is a wish. Again, we keep coming back to responsibility here. Because there are wishes, but a lot of times, people have got to begin to examine why are they where they are if it's somewhere they don't like to be. And a lot of times it's circumstantial, but a lot of times there are issues in their lives that they haven't faced. So we keep saying, if you have problems in relationships, go get it worked out somewhere.

Dr. James Dobson: What would you do, John, if you were single and wanted to be married? Pure and simple end of conversation. That's what you want, and you don't have anybody in your life. Would you go out looking for them or would you wait for God to put them on the front door?

Dr. John Townsend: You know, Dr. Dobson, that question is probably the number one question that anybody ever asks us anywhere about singleness. And as I look through the Scriptures, the Scriptures never reinforce passivity. It never says sit back and let somebody else do it, God or another person. It always says go out. So what I tell people to do and what happened to me was I went out and did things that I liked doing that also had eligible people out there, and there a connection happened. In other words, I didn't go to a certain club or a meeting because I wanted to go look at what the flock was like. I ended up being in a fellowship where I liked what was going on and somebody just, so the circle was just hitting the right place.

Dr. James Dobson: You know why I asked the question? Because I got absolutely torn to shreds for saying what you just said one time. I said, I don't know that this is the wisest advice that anybody ever gave to singles, but if I were in that situation and I most wanted more than anything in the world to find somebody to love, I would go out looking for them. I would change jobs if necessary. If that was more important to me than a job, I'd change jobs. I would change churches. I would put myself in a place where I would go to the marketplace. If you were looking for apples and oranges and bananas, you would go to a grocery store, and if

you're looking for somebody to love, you go where people are, where eligible people might be, and you get cloistered over in the corner someplace.

- Dr. John Townsend: Yeah, instead of becoming a forest ranger and praying.
- Dr. James Dobson: That's right. But I got an overwhelming response from people who didn't like that and felt that it was taking things out of God's hands and trying to force something where it didn't exist, and I really wasn't saying all that.
- Dr. John Townsend: But these people also say in their job they have to be aggressive. In their spiritual relationships, they have to go out after things. In every other area of life, God reinforces making choices and making decisions and being autonomous.
- Dr. Henry Cloud: We always see it coming down to the person becoming a certain kind of person, becoming a relational person who can need other people and be needed by other people, who can open up and share, becoming somebody who's got a mind of their own and has a will of their own, who is not going to be controlled by other people, and becoming somebody who has well-developed talents.
- Dr. James Dobson: And that in itself is attractive to the opposite sex.
- Dr. Henry Cloud: That is attractive, and even if they're not found, they enjoy their lives. And so the answer is always a personal responsibility of hacking it out with God and with other believers of becoming all that he created you to be.
- Dr. James Dobson: If you put that on a continuum, you have that personal fulfillment and development at one end of the continuum, at the other, which is repulsive to the opposite sex frequently, is that needy state where the first smile that comes from somebody who might be eligible, and he gets jumped on. And the message that's communicated is, "I have been desperate to find somebody to love me. Could you be that person?" That's what you don't want to do, right?
- Dr. Henry Cloud: That's right. You asked for a sip of water, and a fire hydrant shows up.
- Dr. James Dobson: That's right.
- Dr. John Townsend: That was what I was thinking was we hope people here are understanding. We're not saying try all this stuff with the next date you have. You practice these relational things with safe people, with same sex friends, with platonic friends. You learn what connectedness is about or what the Bible talks about when it says parakaleo, the Greek. Putting your arm around someone, try that with people that you don't have all this romantic tension with, and once you feel connected with people in that level, the other just is a lot easier.
- Dr. James Dobson: Let me spring off that saying no, and let's talk about the sexual arena, which presents special problems to the single adult obviously. I have heard from so

many single women in the Christian faith who are disillusioned by the willingness of the single men to take advantage of them sexually, even within the church community. Think we need to say that. That's a problem, isn't it?

Dr. Henry Cloud: It's a big problem.

Dr. James Dobson: And a woman does, or a man for that matter either, does need to be able to say no to sexual advances as well, that morality has not gone out of style.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Not only is it not out of style, the sexual acting out in this single community keeps people from maturing because oftentimes, especially men, are looking for deeper emotional needs to be met and they're not facing that need just trying to hop in bed with someone, and as long as someone is acting out sexually, they're not facing the true needs that they're trying to meet.

Dr. John Townsend: So it's a shortcut to intimacy.

Dr. James Dobson: But not real intimacy.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Right, and like every other shortcut, it turns out to be the longest route.

Dr. James Dobson: And who loses the most?

Dr. John Townsend: I think the person starting it is the person who is going to have the most problems. A lot of times, especially if the woman is the responder, at least she can get some distance on it and say, "Well, I went along, but I know not any more this time." A lot of times, the men are in denial about the whole thing. I'd like to speak to the other end of that too though, Dr. Dobson. We've got the sexual problem over here, and then you've got people who are trying to solve the problem by being asexual or non-sexual beings. And by cutting off that part of their imageness of God of being a masculine person or feminine person. And what happens then is that that increases over a period of time, that increases the acting out.

Dr. James Dobson: Should a Christian woman feel comfortable and flirty?

Dr. Henry Cloud: Sure.

Dr. John Townsend: I was reading Song of Solomon the other day and it said, "Your glance confuses me."

Dr. James Dobson: She not giving him the right message.

Dr. John Townsend: He was all jumbled up inside because she was flirting.

Dr. Henry Cloud: He was flustered because she was, yeah.

- Dr. James Dobson: Do you think some Christian women feel they don't have the right to flirt, that they have to deny their sexuality so they'll appear spiritual?
- Dr. Henry Cloud: I think that's a big problem, and I think a lot of times you'll hear Christian men saying that Christian women are non-attractive or non-flirtatious or non-sexualized, and they go into the world, and are attracted to other women. And women need to be women. They don't need to act out. They don't need to start sleeping around, but they need to be aware of their own sexual feelings and be appropriately attractive and flirtatious.
- Dr. John Townsend: And if that doesn't happen, the guy is going to see the woman as a mother. Or the woman's going to see the guy as father knows best, and she's not going to be attracted to him because it's not going to be the same age type of mutuality attraction that they have to each other.
- Dr. James Dobson: Boy, I wish that there were simple words to put into an expression of what we're trying to say here in these two days. I think it's very hard to get it across. I tried to say it in *Love Must Be Tough*. I think some people comprehend it. I think maybe 20%, 30% haven't a clue as to what I was trying to say. But if I could take a run at expressing it, and then you all comment on it, it would be that the person who wants to find somebody to love and is desirous of a bonded intimate relationship could understand that the most direct way to pulling a person toward them is to express self-confidence, excitement with life, optimism, interest in many things, a certain independence, a certain ability to go on unconnected with anybody for the rest of their life if that's what God apparently requires.
- And the worst way, the way you can drive the other person away from you is to convey right up front from the beginning all of those needs, and all those feelings, and all that insecurity, and all of that desire, and attach it to the first possibility that comes along. I don't think I said that very well, but I said I wasn't going to say it well. Maybe you guys can say it better. Do you see what I mean?
- Dr. John Townsend: Well, Jesus said they're going to know that you're Mine by your love. People are going to be drawn to people who have something to offer them, and those things you listed, self-confidence, a sense of purpose, a fun attitude, they give somebody something. But if the only thing you've got on your sale marquee is I need you. You're not offering anybody anything.
- Dr. James Dobson: Not only I need you, but I'm depressed. Come get me out of this hole I'm in. That's turnoff, especially for a man.
- Dr. Henry Cloud: There is a key word there, and I think it's responsibility. When you say, "You're going to have to deal with all of these things in me," what single people have got to do, and married people, is realize that their hurts, their needs, their insecurities, all of the ways they've been injured, even though it's not their fault, it's their responsibility to deal with. That may mean seeking help at times. It may

mean a lot of things, but when we demand for somebody else to make us complete, we will chase that other person off.

Dr. James Dobson: I really do believe that. I want to make sure though that we're not implying here that the unmarried woman is the only one that has a problem. I think we need to talk a little bit more about the unmarried man and what he's feeling. Communicate with him. What advice do you have for him?

Dr. John Townsend: In many ways, the unmarried woman is ahead of the game than the man because at least she knows there are needs for relationship. And a lot of times the guys out there have not been allowed or cut off their feelings about neediness, about wanting to be connected. They're totally into the work atmosphere, or totally into something else, and that puts him a step behind because you've got to feel the needs before you can move to the next step.

Dr. James Dobson: Well then what advice would you have for that man that's not-

Dr. John Townsend: How can you tap into that?

Dr. Henry Cloud: I think that there are two types of men that need to be encouraged. One is the disconnected man, the man who has not established a sense of being able to be connected to other people, to be bonded emotionally. The other is the real passive man. The man has not learned to stand up for himself, to pursue his own interests. He's a yes man. He's a real agreeable guy, but he's not an attractive guy to women. And so to be encouraged in aggressive sorts of functioning, good goal-oriented aggression, as well as bondedness. I think both of those needs to grow in.

Dr. James Dobson: How can he learn that if he's never experienced it?

Dr. Henry Cloud: Well, he is got to take some risks in both areas. There is no growth without risk. There's no payoff without risk. He's got to get into some sort of intimate support group, some sort of counseling relationship, some group therapy, some family from the church where he can begin to learn to open up and to experience that deep sense of emotional investment in other people. On the other hand, he's got to begin to say no to people. He is got to disagree. He's got to chart his own course in some ways, and he will have to take risks in both areas.

Dr. John Townsend: The mistake that's made there, Dr. Dobson, is many times people will go into, especially men, will go into a singles group thinking to learn about relationships and no one else there knows either. So they need to go specifically somewhere where the job is, let's learn how to connect. Let's learn how to be emotionally honest with each other, and that takes sometimes a specialized group. But if that's the focus, then they'll get what they need.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you do in one of those specialized groups? Suppose you have 15 men that meet with you one night a week to try to learn how to relate to people, how to get in touch with their feelings, how to bond, how to attach. What do you talk about?

Dr. Henry Cloud: First of all, I think you've got to have somebody there who knows how to, and a lot of times people will try to just do that in friendships. And there are two unbonded people trying to learn how to be emotionally invested. I think you've got to have a leader, a counselor, somebody who is skilled in uncovering those aspects of the person and bringing them back to life. It's a difficult task.

Dr. John Townsend: Well, it's just important to realize that everyone is a bonder. We came out of the womb wanting to get close to somebody and something happened along the way for those people who were detached that they couldn't. So it's finding out what happened, what kind of habits or what kind of denial states they went into, and as uncover the needs, those bonding parts just naturally come out.

Dr. James Dobson: John, what do you think a man wants from a woman?

Dr. John Townsend: Basically, in this day and age, Dr. Dobson, I think a man wants someone who can connect emotionally but also knows when enough is enough. When he can detach and move somewhere else emotionally because we all have to have our alone times, and who won't feel guilty or bad for that. And actually, the women I've talked to feel the same way.

Dr. James Dobson: You agree with that?

Dr. Henry Cloud: I agree with that. I would add as well, someone who has got a will of their own. They don't want a-

Dr. James Dobson: Doormat.

Dr. Henry Cloud: ... shadow or a doormat. If they are or no disagreements, somebody's unnecessary in the relationship, and they want a whole person there.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, gentlemen, we're down to the end of the second day on this topic and admittedly, our purpose from the beginning has been to help, to offer some advice that would be useful to those who find themselves needy in this area as a single adult. Bring that in to a landing for us. You're talking to people who are right there today who've been thinking about this subject. What advice to them? What can they do today to begin to address needs in this area?

Dr. John Townsend: I think step one would be to do what David did in Psalm 139 where he said to God, "Search me, and know me, and try my heart, and see if there's anything hurtful in me." To begin to realize that, and Henry mentioned earlier, the big word here is responsibility, and to say "It's my responsibility to change what's inside that's blocking my relationships," and to begin to look for ways to explore

what's going on in me, not blaming it on someone else or trying to find the answer in someone else.

Dr. James Dobson: And it may require professional help to do that.

Dr. John Townsend: It could.

Dr. Henry Cloud: I would add to that we are injured in relationships, and we are only healed in relationships. And I think the church oftentimes has neglected that we have an incarnation gospel, and that the way that God grows us up in large part is within His body. And people have got to get back into very vulnerable, risk-taking, growth-producing relationships in order to be healed, in order to grow. And when they do that, they'll get these areas cleared up.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's risky to do that.

Dr. Henry Cloud: It is risky.

Dr. John Townsend: It may involve changing friends or churches or towns sometimes.

Dr. Henry Cloud: When Peter stepped out of that boat, he didn't have a life preserver on.

Dr. James Dobson: And he knew that too.

Dr. Henry Cloud: He knew that.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, halfway across he began thinking about that. Well, thank you gentlemen. I appreciate your being with us these two days. I know we will get a lot of mail on this subject. We always do. And we care about those who are out there who want a family but don't know exactly how to go about getting it. And there's a lot of apprehension there too because the divorce rate is so high and people are aware that a mistake can be costly. For some of those individuals, the answer is just not run the risk, and we have to leave it to them and to the Lord as to whether that is right in an individual case. You're not saying everybody ought to try to get married, are you? Paul made it clear that there is a responsibility for some where it's not God's will. And if that's the case, we have to learn to accept that too.

Dr. Henry Cloud: That's a tough one for a lot of people.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Thanks for being with us. We appreciate your participation.

Dr. Henry Cloud: Thank you for having us.

Roger Marsh: We are all wired for connection and authentic relationships and that begins with doing the interwork of personal growth. Today here on Family Talk, we've heard a conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his special guests, Dr. John

Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud. If you missed any part of today's broadcast, remember you can hear it again at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and while you're online, you can learn more about the respective ministries of Drs. Cloud and Townsend. These daily broadcasts are made possible through the generous support of friends like you who value Dr. Dobson's trusted guidance for life's most important relationships and your gift today helps us continue sharing biblical truth with families who need encouragement and direction. Remember you can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org, or call us at 877-732-6825. That's 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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