



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Breaking the Bonds of Welfare – Part 1

Guest(s): Star Parker

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's classic Family Talk program, we're tackling a difficult truth about poverty in America, one that many people would rather not discuss. Our guest today on the program is Star Parker, and she knows this subject intimately because she actually lived it for seven years. Star went from welfare dependency to becoming one of America's leading conservative voices on public policy and poverty. As founder and president of the Center for Urban Renewal and Education, CURE. She now helps craft solutions to transition people from government dependency to self-sufficiency. Star's journey from rebellion and crisis to purpose and leadership is nothing short of remarkable. Her story challenges everything we think we know about government assistance, and it also reveals why the current system often traps people instead of freeing them. Here now is Dr. James Dobson to introduce his guest, Star Parker, on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: You grew up in some very difficult circumstances, didn't you?

Star Parker: I made a lot of bad choices. Actually, my dad was in the military, and so we moved about a lot, but I listened to all the lies of the left that I had no real moral responsibility for the choices that I was making. And I knew the welfare state was designed to get rid of any natural consequences that might come from the decisions I was making. They had replaced those consequences with these safety nets. And so I was extremely rebellious.

Dr. James Dobson: Are you referring to your junior high and high school years?

Star Parker: Oh, even before that, I'd gotten involved in criminal activity and drug activity going into even junior high. And of course, my parents didn't know about these things and it began to escalate to breaking and entering. And then after committing armed robbery.

Dr. James Dobson: At what age now?

Star Parker: All through high school. And by the time I got involved in armed robbery, because I was coaxed by a friend to go in on this liquor store, I was probably about 17, but I knew at that point I needed to make some adjustments in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you get caught?

Star Parker: No, I didn't get caught, but that's probably when I started thinking about some of the decisions that I had been making and just how my life was out of control. And one of the reasons I started thinking about it, because as we were running away from this liquor store, I'd started thinking, "What if this guy had a gun? He could be shooting me in the back and no one would even know that I'm out here." Because of course, these were activities that I didn't tell too many people that I was involved in. And when looking after graduating from high school with no idea what I was going to do with my life, I actually stole my brother's car and moved to California thinking that maybe I could start myself afresh and not knowing the Lord, not knowing anything about Him, still believing that my life was my own control and I could maybe make some adjustments, it wasn't an easy thing to do.

Dr. James Dobson: Star, why were you so rebellious? Looking back on it, that's a question I really find helpful to ask because Franklin Graham was here on this broadcast and I asked him the same question. Why were you so rebellious?

Star Parker: Was he a middle child?

Dr. James Dobson: He said, "I don't know. " He said, "I love my parents and I don't know why I was so rebellious." Why were you?

Star Parker: I'm with Franklin. I'm wondering, I was a middle kid, maybe just attention. I think, and this is the challenge that we're facing today in our society when under the impact of moral relativism, you can really lose focus on what's right and what's wrong. I'd never thought about the fact that I was being rebellious. I just thought I was having fun. Anything and everything that anyone asked me to do, I just did it. I don't know why.

Dr. James Dobson: What was your age when you first got pregnant out of wedlock?

Star Parker: Oh, probably about 18.

Dr. James Dobson: And you had your first abortion?

Star Parker: I had my first abortion and I didn't even think about it. It was not a decision that I contemplated at all. I was so out of control with my sexual life already. And in California, the government paid for abortion, so it didn't cost me anything. So I never really had to think about it

Dr. James Dobson: So it was really kind of trivial to you. It wasn't any big deal.

Star Parker: Not any big deal to the point that I was pregnant within a very short period of time and just had another one. And then within a short period of time again, I was pregnant, but by then I had figured out the welfare system enough to know that if I stay pregnant long enough, they'll send me a check on the 1st and the 15th of the month and I could use that money for whatever I wanted to. And mostly it was drug activity at that point. And then I would have an abortion. And it wasn't until after the fourth time going into their so-called safe, legal, rare clinics, that I had a gut instinct way down deep inside that there just has to be something wrong with this. I didn't change my behaviors. I wish I knew enough to change the things that I was getting myself involved in because within a very short period of time, again, I was pregnant, but I knew I wasn't going to have another abortion. And that's when I went off.

Dr. James Dobson: So you had four abortions? Four abortions. Did you keep any of the babies about that time or in that period of time?

Star Parker: Mm-mm.

Dr. James Dobson: Did at any point that begin to really feel wrong?

Star Parker: Not until that-

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, did you have any understanding of right and wrong, Star?

Star Parker: I don't think I thought about whether it was right or wrong. I really grew up believing that whatever decisions I make were my choices. And I did not know enough about an afterlife or God or that the decisions that I was making had some type of eternal value, so I never thought about it. It was not my worldview. It was not my surroundings and I just never had to spend any amount of time thinking about the things that I was doing.

Dr. James Dobson: Looking back on it, what's the origin of these bad choices, these bad ideas? Did they come from your peers? Did they come from the media? Where'd you pick it up?

Star Parker: I think it's a combination and that's some of the things that I address in my book, *Uncle Sam's Plantation*, that when we have a society that says that there are no absolutes, there are no rules to govern your existence here. It reduces the meaning of life to nothing, to acquisition, to sex, money, power. There is no meaning. There's no sense of meaning. And you couple that with the welfare state, which says if you do have any kind of consequences to what now I know is sin, you don't have to worry about it. We have safety nets. You do not have to think about these decisions. So I did not have to think about them. When I needed help, abortion, the government was there. Taxpayers funded it. When I decided to have that child, the first child I had, which was my fifth pregnancy,

the welfare state was there and I went in to live that way for the next three and a half years.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it's so tragic. It's tragic for you, but it's also tragic to think of how many other people.

Star Parker: Oh, that's why I do what I do today. And that's why I wrote this book, how many others? It is so in our society that this entitlement mentality that is at any wonder we have 3,000 housing projects. AIDS is the number one sweeper within these housing projects. When you look at the top three social crises confronting us as a nation, they are all rooted in sexual sin. And we as a nation don't even call it sin. So I was in the 80s doing this stuff. Imagine, this is before rap music. This is before the real breakdown in our school systems to where now lawlessness has taught us just an alternative lifestyle. So the implications of the homosexual behaviors and us as a society not judging this behavior, even to the point that we're having national discussions on marriage are serious because when you tell somebody that they do not have to discipline themselves sexually, then there's not one absolute way that God has ordained for us to do this.

Well, then if a little kid ... Now, imagine someone nine, 10 years old, everything in his life is already broken. And so he's told that he can do whatever he wants to sexually. Well, when he gets arrested, he's going to go in these little jails and do whatever he wants to do sexually. Then he comes back out and we've concentrated poverty in these housing projects. All we have are single women with children.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that what the kids in the inner city are hearing? Is that typical?

Star Parker: They hear it in every institution. Every institution except the church. That's why I want the government out of welfare. And that's what this book is about. And I really think the church needs to take seriously our role in charity. It's not just in government policy. It's in our schools. They're teaching in these public schools that there is no such thing as an absolute moral framework for you to govern your lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Star, before we get to your book, and I want to talk about this welfare issue that you just raised, tell us how you came to know the Lord and how'd you get out of the mess that you were in?

Star Parker: It's so beautiful. I love sharing this because He's just so good. And when God said that you are to preach the gospel to the poor, I know why. It's because He is just not mad at us. I was living in this broken state. I tell people, I was like in this little black hole and didn't even know I was down in there. I'd been three and a half years now consistently living off welfare and I looked to subsidize my income. Before we reformed welfare, the rules were don't save, don't work and don't get married.

Dr. James Dobson: Your caseworker actually told you that.

Star Parker: Oh yeah. It's the known rules. They send you a form every month to make sure that you did not save any money, that you did not get married, that no one in the household turned 18, that no one died, and no one returned to school. That's how you got your check.

Dr. James Dobson: That was involved with the Reagan administration in the 80s dealing with that very issue. So it's not new to me, but it still flabbergasts me.

Star Parker: He tried to change it during that time. In fact, that's when I was on welfare during the time that Ronald Reagan was in office. And because he, I guess, understood what Patrick Moynihan had said about, if we continue in this state, if we continue with these welfare policies of the great society, you're going to break the black family. Well, when Senator Moynihan first said that, he was in charge of the labor department and black out of wedlock birth rates were at 22%, which is a high number. But you look at the black family, 78% of husbands were in their homes raising their children up until 1965. Right after they engineered the welfare state, the black family plummeted to the bottom and now-

Dr. James Dobson: It destroyed it.

Star Parker: Destroyed it. Out of wedlock birth rates are seven out of 10. And so he was absolutely right. So I think Reagan saw these trends and did something to curb it, but it wasn't until '96 that the Republican Congress actually made some changes. But anyway, so I'm living like that. And who wants to live off of the little money that welfare is giving you? So I was looking to subsidize my welfare check and walked into a business in South Central Los Angeles and met three men that said that they didn't pay under the table. They were legitimate businessmen. And it was amazing to me because they were really good looking black guys. And I didn't know anyone that really mainstreamed because I'd bought the lies of the left that America was inherently racist, so we're not supposed to be a part of that society. And they were living good, clean lives.

And so I was fascinated to some degree, but then also they started challenging my life. And they told me that my lifestyle was totally unacceptable. And I of course questioned them about this word unacceptable. And I think it probably on some hate crime list, it's not politically correct to say today, but when they told me my life was unacceptable to God, I really started thinking about what that meant.

Dr. James Dobson: Were they Christians, Star?

Star Parker: They were. And they kept calling me, wanting me to go to church. And when I heard the message of the gospel that God had redeemed me and had set me free from my sin, I accepted that. I changed my worldview. I made a decision

right then that I was not going to look at the scripture as a book of don'ts, even though there were a lot of don'ts in there that I needed because I didn't know not to do them, but also I was going to look at a book of dos and start governing my life accordingly.

Dr. James Dobson: What'd the Lord do for you?

Star Parker: What did He do?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Star Parker: Well, immediately He started cleaning me up. Everything the preacher preached about, I did. I got off drugs. I was able to really get a sense of purpose and meaning to get my daughter into a Christian school at that point and started cleaning up. And a few years later, the preacher looked out at about 4,000 people, pointed his finger and said, "What are you doing living on welfare?" And I thought he was talking to me and when he started comparing God and government and talked about how God would supply all of my needs, I wrote my caseworker the next day, said, "Take my name off, I'm trusting the Lord."

Dr. James Dobson: Wow, that took a lot of courage.

Star Parker: Well, still takes courage to still trusting Him. But I know one day I'll never go back to welfare.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you fear that if you separated yourself from a welfare in the government that you would starve, that you would be homeless, that you wouldn't be able to survive, that your daughter wouldn't make it? I mean, what were the incentives not to do this?

Star Parker: The biggest incentive not to do it. The biggest fear was that I knew that it was going to separate me from my friends as well, that I was going to have to close one door and open another for a whole nother life. And that was harder than knowing whether I would be able to live because I had skills. I could go get a job, which I did. I ended up answering telephones in a food distribution basement. And it was a minimal job as they call it when we were debating welfare reform, a menial as the women used to say that we couldn't have these girls work. But I knew that if I started there, I'd already learned enough about Scripture to know that if I did everything heartedly in the Lord, He would take care of me. And I was really trusting that. And frankly, if He didn't, then I would have starved. And I guess I have that part in my personality that says, "Well, if I'm going to starve, then it'll be on you, God." And so He just kept supplying for me. I ended up back in college and got a degree.

Dr. James Dobson: You are death on welfare. We've heard that already today. What do you say? I mean, let me role play with you because there are a lot of people out there who are listening to us. We have inner city people who listen to us. I'm very proud of

that because we have a lot of friends out there. Talk to some of them that aren't yet convinced. Why would you oppose governmental assistance for the disenfranchised, for the poor, for those that don't have marketable skills, for those who've had no opportunity, for those who have come out of squalor, why would you oppose government putting an arm around those folks and giving them a helping hand?

Star Parker: Because government doesn't have an arm. Government is law. It's force. It's regulation. It's just a bunch of rules and people help people. And I think that when people are in need of welfare, it's because of some crisis in their life. And one of the challenges that we have before ourselves as people is that if someone has a crisis, it's really personal. It's very unique. It's individual. So there's not a one size fits all anything that can help them. Individuals have to help them. So charity doesn't belong to government.

Dr. James Dobson: And with the governmental assistance comes all kinds of entanglements that are destructive.

Star Parker: Well, absolutely. You have to live by the rules. When the great society was first engineered, it didn't have the means test that said that there cannot be a working body in the household. And there may have even been developed out of some good intention. As I was researching my book, I found that it was hard to find any good intentions in developing this concept. But let's just say that the American people said, "Well, we've got to do something so we don't mind pulling some of our resources to help folks that are in need." Well, we were wrong. And one of the reasons that we were wrong about pulling resources to help people in need is because you have to means test. That's one of the roles of government. It can't just arbitrarily say, "Well, anybody that wills will give you some money." So we put up criteria.

Well, if you're single, raising children, we'll give you money if you're not in school. And the next thing you know, you have this monster of a program that you have people in order to qualify needing to move able, bodied husbands out of their homes. The next thing you know, why marry in the first place? And so the whole concept backfired on us as a nation.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a shame that that wasn't recognized before the damage was done because now it's so hard to reconstruct the family, the black family especially.

Star Parker: Oh, well, we have a lot of work to do, but I'm very hopeful. And I think that it was recognized. The challenge with it is that the whole welfare state was a liberal idea and Democrats promoted themselves as the savior for people in need. And so anytime someone pointed to some of the problems that perhaps could be in the future, as we mentioned earlier, Ronald Reagan and others, they were demonized as radical right wing. And they were also told that, where were you when during the civil rights movement? And oftentimes you did not see conservatives there. So they put a stigma upon people that were saying that maybe this is not such a good idea. But now the hope side of it is that after

reform and welfare in 1996, we put time clocks on these women. So they understand the first step out of poverty now, which is self-government, understanding that we each have a moral obligation to be self-sufficient and to be responsible with the choices we make.

So that's the first step. How do we do that? By putting time limits on them. The second thing that the bill had in it when we block granted to the states was the opportunity for the faith community to come to the table, the people that distribute charity best, individuals who out of love and volunteerism say, "I need to help you." That group was invited to the table. And so we're starting to see in the country a new birth of people that really want to help. And so I think this is a healthy thing. The numbers aren't as big and unmanageable as we think they are.

Dr. James Dobson: I got my Ph.D. April 3rd, 1967, right in the middle of all that great society stuff.

Star Parker: Oh, goodness.

Dr. James Dobson: And my field is child development. And so I got involved in a whole lot of that. And one of the very first speeches that I made after that, I'm sure it would have been 1968, was on this subject. And I talked about the principle of reward and reinforcement, and that which succeeds will recur. And if you tell 14 and 15 and 16 year old girls that they can get money, they can be liberated from their parents, they can have their own apartment, they can have their meal ticket handed to them. If they can get all of that by getting pregnant out of wedlock, and if they don't want that, they can have an abortion, then it's going to happen.

Star Parker: You're going to perpetuate.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, it is going to happen. It perpetuated itself. And I saw that coming and I, boy, I tell you what, nobody else did. I got my ears pinned back for that speech.

Star Parker: I'm sure you did. And the tragedy is that now it's a reality that needs to be fixed. And not just a message to women, but as George Gilder pointed out in his book, *Men and Marriage*, the really bad message was what it sent to poor men. That they could just sexually prowl that the best thing they could do for a poor woman was to leave her with a baby. And that's the reason-

Dr. James Dobson: And who needs him? He's not needed to provide for or protect his family.

Star Parker: And without...

Dr. James Dobson: And so he winds up standing on the street corner, and

Star Parker: That's right. He doesn't know how to be a husband or a father. And that's what's missing in Black America. When you go through these prisons, you find out that

numbers in 70 to 75% of these boys have no relationship with their dad. And I know the left always cries that we're racism and there's a race factor to the disproportionate numbers of minorities that are behind bars, but the common denominator is that they have no relationship to their dad. So they do not know how to be men. And without that element, then the major institution to transfer your moral integrity has been broken. Then you take those little kids that are brought up in these single head of households and throw them off in these government schools to where they teach them, they're just evolved from this animal. Well, is it any wonder we're looking at the picture that we see in the inner city?

Dr. James Dobson: Star, let's talk about your book, *Uncle Sam's Plantation*. I think we get the idea, but elaborate on it. What are you trying to say here?

Star Parker: Well, I do talk about the problem. I even researched a lot into the welfare state and its beginnings and why we would, as a society, come up with this idea about where we went wrong. And actually the book was a call to the church community, to the pastors and to the people of the body of Christ post welfare reform to say, okay, now what do we do? We've told five million women and nine million children that your time is expiring. We saw great victories because of the numbers that were in 100% welfare-

Dr. James Dobson: Now explain that. A lot of people don't know what you're talking about with welfare reform and what it required of welfare recipients.

Star Parker: Okay. What it required of welfare recipients was that if they were already on the system, they only had two years to collect in a continuous state and five years over their lifetime. So it could no longer be a hammock, if you will. It could no longer be their chief subsidy. They would have to work, they would have to reengage their families, they would have to perhaps marry, but look for other alternatives than live off Uncle Sam. And the welfare bill itself was a block granting to the states because frankly, our problems in California are different from problems in Mississippi or different from problems in Michigan, et cetera, or even in Colorado. And well, the girls got the message clearly. They knew that they were going to have to expire off of welfare and immediately about three million left the roles because those three million basically had some skill.

Dr. James Dobson: They went out and got a job, didn't they?

Star Parker: Some went and got jobs, some went home and apologized to their family. They knew what to do and they only had one child, so it's easier to transition. But what we're down to now is the crises caseload. Those that are illiterate, those that have multiple children, those that perhaps don't have a framework for how to manage their lives. There might be two and three generations, there's drugs involved in others. So they need tender loving care and they need a caring community to assist them. And that's why I wrote the book is-

Dr. James Dobson: Do they need welfare?

Star Parker: Oh no, they don't need welfare. Oh no. Welfare is their crutch. Welfare is not helping them.

Dr. James Dobso...: I got to push you now. I got to push you star because the imagery of this woman without skills with four kids being absolutely destitute and she doesn't know where to go from here. Maybe she doesn't have a family to return to. She doesn't-

Star Parker: That's why the pastors have to get this book because this is what the minister should be thinking about and saying, maybe we need to have a refuge center. Maybe we need to be able to embrace this girl and help her develop some type of skill level. So there are many things that we have to do politically, but in the grassroots, there's some things that we ourselves as the church community need to awaken ourselves to and say, perhaps a maternity home isn't such a bad idea. Maybe we should adopt these crises pregnancy centers and really help them help these women that are in crises. The numbers are not as overwhelming when you talk about actual recipients who are clueless, but their children we have to be concerned about. And that's why the big battle there is to make sure every church in the inner city has a school and make sure we have vouchers so that these kids can be taught in this worldview.

And I've thought about it for a long time because I look at it like this. When Jesus was confronted with 5,000 people who were hungry, he did not send them to the Department of Social Services and tell them to get some food stamps. He told his disciples, "You feed them." And He then had them sit down and He made substance for them. And so I really believe, I've cried to the Lord. I'm like, Lord, there are five million women and nine million children that are really caught up. They're not five million Christians in all of this society with 290 million people. Surely we can come up with some answers. We can get creative. We know what to do. We just haven't had to think about it. When I debated welfare reform in front of the Congress, one of the people on the opposite side to me was a minister and he actually said, "If we reform this the way you're discussing, those girls are going to show up on my doorstep." And I let it be silent for a minute so he could think about what he just said. And then I turned to him and said, "Don't you think that's a good idea?"

Roger Marsh: Star Parker's journey from welfare dependency to purposeful ministry shows us how God can redeem even our most broken chapters and use them for his glory. You've been listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a classic conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Star Parker. Now, if you'd like to hear this program again or share it with someone who needs encouragement, you can always do so at jdfi.net. And while you're there, I want to share with you about a resource that can help strengthen your family today. Our "Raising Kids with Love and Limits" series offers 10 days of guidance drawn from Dr. Dobson's decades of experience, helping families navigate the toughest parenting challenges. You'll receive daily insights on

everything from discipline to building strong relationships with your kids, all rooted in biblical wisdom that actually works. To sign up today, visit jdfi.net and search for that title, "Raising Kids with Love and Limits" for this outstanding resource.

Your family's strength matters. When marriages thrive and children grow up, secure in their parents' love, our communities benefit, and that is the vision driving everything we do here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Through our daily broadcasts, resources and advocacy, we're working to preserve the timeless truths about marriage and parenting that have sustained families for generations and that a new generation called Generation Z is just waking up to discover. If you believe these principles are worth protecting and promoting, please partner with us today. Your gift of any amount makes it possible for us to continue to reach families who desperately need biblical guidance. You can call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. You can also make a secure donation when you visit jdfi.net. That's jdfi.net. Or if you prefer, you can send your tax deductible donation through the US Postal Service.

Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at Family Talk and the JDFI, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time when Star Parker continues to share her bold perspective on three types of poverty and why the church, not the government, holds the real answer. That's coming up on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust for the family you love.

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.