

Family Man Book Discussion Guide

Chapter 1: Campaign Mode

Whether you agree or disagree with Dr. Dobson's political agenda, how important do you think his influence was in the 2004 elections?

How do you think "moral values" figured into the elections? Do you believe we will see more emphasis or less emphasis on moral values in the years ahead?

Chapter 2: Paterfamilias

Dr. Dobson's family legacy includes outspoken Christian ministry and devout prayer. In what ways do you think that prepared him for his own ministry? In what ways might it have hindered him?

Discuss your family legacy and how it has affected you. If you have children, what kind of a legacy do you (or will you) want to leave for them?

Chapter 3: Striver

Dr. Dobson had four mentors at a crucial point in his life. Tell about someone who has filled that role in your life and how that person influenced you. Who in your life might you be a mentor to?

How do you feel about the "cat-and-mouse game" Jim and Shirley played when they were dating? Obviously it worked for them, but do you think it's a model others should follow? Why or why not?

Chapter 4: Daring to Discipline

Review the three factors that created a favorable climate for *Dare to Discipline* when it was published in 1970 (pp. 43-45).

Do you agree with Dr. Dobson's statement in the introduction to *Dare to Discipline* (p. 46)? Why or why not?

Discuss Dr. Dobson's approach to discipline in relation to your own upbringing and, if you have children, your own parenting style.

Chapter 5: Packing the House

Shirley Dobson set aside one day a week for fasting and prayer on behalf of her family. Is this something you have done or would like to do? Discuss.

Dr. Dobson worked tirelessly preparing for public speaking. Even when someone is called and gifted in a certain area, there is often still hard work involved. Tell about something in your own life that you've had to put a lot of effort into.

Chapter 6: The Velvet Microphone

Dr. Dobson believes that God brought good (his *Focus on the Family* radio program) out of disaster (his appearance on *Donahue*). Tell about a time in your life, or that of someone you know, when God brought good out of disaster.

In the 1970s, Christian radio was not of very high quality. If you listen to Christian radio today, discuss whether that has changed. If you don't listen to Christian radio, tell why.

In 1983 Dr. Dobson had the opportunity to host a radio show on a secular network that might have reached a larger audience. Speculate on how his ministry might have developed differently had he accepted the offer. In the end, do you think he made the right decision?

Chapter 7: Deal with a Devil

This chapter contains some disturbing information about pornography and serial killers. Do you think it's important for Christians to be informed about these issues, unpleasant as they are? Why or why not?

If you were in Dr. Dobson's place, would you have agreed to interview Ted Bundy? Why or why not? Do you think Dr. Dobson made the right decision?

Dr. Dobson says, "It's not more difficult for God to forgive Ted Bundy than it is for [him to forgive] me" (p. 96). How do you feel about that statement?

Chapter 8: A Born Entrepreneur

What were the two aspects of running a ministry that Dr. Dobson recognized he needed help with? In what areas of your family or ministry responsibilities do you need to enlist the help of others more knowledgeable?

Chapter 9: Colorado, Here We Come!

The move to Colorado was a huge change for Focus on the Family and for the employees who decided to go along. Put yourself in the place of a Focus employee and discuss the pros and cons of such a move. What would the implications be for your family? your friends? your church community? Would you decide to stay or go?

Chapter 10: Hot Pending

Describe Dr. Dobson's management style. What aspects of it do you feel are commendable? What aspects would irritate you if you worked for him?

Chapter 11: The Political Animal

Dr. Dobson is known for his ability to generate phone calls to Congress on issues he feels are important. Have you ever contacted a government official? What did (or would) motivate you to do so?

Chapter 12: Bringing the Hammer

In 1998 Dr. Dobson was frustrated with the performance of the Republicans he had helped to elect. Do you track the records of officials you have voted for? What are some ways ordinary citizens can do that? What should our response be when elected officials fail to uphold their stated position on key moral issues?

Do you think Dr. Dobson should run for president? Why or why not?

Chapter 13: Stress Fractures

After Dr. Dobson's heart attack, he instituted several healthy lifestyle changes. Why do we so often wait for a crisis before making changes to improve our health (or other circumstances)?

Several key figures at Focus on the Family—and their families—have paid a high personal price for their involvement with such a demanding and visible ministry. Are those in ministry more prone to failure than the rest of us, or does it just seem that way because their failures are often so public? What are some ways you can help your pastor or other spiritual leaders withstand the pressures that cause many to fall?

Chapter 14: The Dobson Difference

Discuss the various components of “the Dobson difference.” What is it about him that you personally find appealing?

Chapter 15: Transformed Lives

This chapter lists numerous individuals and ministries that have been dramatically impacted by Dr. Dobson's attention. Which of these ministries have touched your life in some way? Which ones did you first learn of through Focus on the Family?

There was some concern at Focus on the Family about hiring an actor for *Adventures in Odyssey* who was not part of the evangelical subculture. What are your thoughts on their choice?

Chapter 16: Friends of Jim

Dr. Dobson has many friends from various walks of life. How important are friends for someone with Dr. Dobson's high profile? How might his ministry and personal life be different if he did not make time for friends? What would be some of the challenges in being a friend to someone so well known?

Tell about an important friendship in your own life. How has this person impacted you?

Chapter 17: A Silver Thread

Regular personal prayer has been an important part of Shirley Dobson's life since she was a child. How important is personal or family prayer to you? What are some practical ways you could make it a higher priority?

Do you have a prayer partner? If so, share how you entered into that relationship. Discuss how you or others in the group might find someone with whom to pray regularly.

Chapter 18: Inside the Fishbowl

Dr. Dobson has consistently nurtured his relationship with his wife and children. In what ways do you think that has contributed to his success in other endeavors?

What are some ways you can (or do) nurture your own family relationships?

Chapter 19: Black and White and Red and Blue

Dr. Dobson has an extensive and complex relationship with the secular media. Do you think he should make more of an effort to gain such exposure? Or should he try harder to stay out of the news? Explain your answer.

Dr. Dobson has been criticized for seeing political issues in black-and-white. Do you think he is right to do so? Why or why not?

Why do you feel Dr. Dobson has been involved in so much controversy and has lost supporters and friends as recounted in this chapter? Do you think he has responded appropriately? Why or why not?

Chapter 20: A Crucible and a Gauntlet

Dr. Dobson is devoted to his father's memory and ever mindful of the legacy he left—perhaps too much so, some critics feel. In what ways can it be helpful to remember and celebrate the lives of those who have gone before us? How might it be harmful?

Chapter 21: A Week in the Life

Do you think the week described here is a typical one for Dr. Dobson? What did you learn (or see confirmed) about his priorities in reading of his activities during this “sample” week?

Chapter 22: Maybe Bruce Was Right

Dr. Dobson has had a hard time giving up direct control over Focus on the Family. Do you think his desire to stay at the helm as long as he can is in the best interests of the ministry? Explain your answer.

Have you ever had to give up control over something that was important to you? How did you handle it? What advice would you give someone in that situation?

Chapter 23: The Third Way

Do you think one of Dr. Dobson's children should take on a leadership role at Focus on the Family? Why or why not?

Focus on the Family hopes to keep Dr. Dobson's message relevant in the years ahead, even when he is no longer an active public figure. Discuss the challenges involved in such a venture. How effective do you think it will be?

Chapter 24: No Small Feat

Dr. Dobson identifies one of the biggest problems facing the family today as fatigue and time pressure. How have these factors affected your life or your family? What are some steps you can take (or are taking) to address this challenge?

If you're old enough to remember *Roe v. Wade*, how did you feel about abortion then? How do you feel about it now? If your position has changed, briefly tell why.

Do you think Dr. Dobson is right to be stepping up the frequency and breadth of his appearances on national cable television? Why or why not?

Chapter 25: Slouching Towards Gomorrah

Do you feel the magnitude of Dr. Dobson's efforts to prevent the legalization of gay marriage is appropriate? necessary? effective? If not, what approach do you believe Christians should take?

Chapter 26: Montgomery and Beyond

Do you think Dr. Dobson's concerns about judicial overreach are warranted? Why or why not?

Do you think boycotts, such as the one against Abercrombie & Fitch, are effective? Tell why you do or do not participate in boycotts.

As this book went to press, the Terry Schiavo case was again in the news and she eventually died. Why do you think the news media was so attentive to this case? Why did they label it a "right to die" case if, as Dr. Dobson points out, Terry Schiavo was not trying to die?

Chapter 27: Righteous Revolution

George Stephanopoulos accused Dr. Dobson of saying something that wasn't "particularly Christian" (p. 385). Have you ever been accused of the same type of thing? If so, how did you respond?

Al Franken thinks Dr. Dobson believes he "has a corner on absolute truth" (p. 392). Do you agree with Franken's assessment? How do you feel about the way Dr. Dobson handled it?

Are you pessimistic or hopeful about the future of American culture? Tell why and give some examples to support your answer.