



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Firm Foundations Romania: An Update with Sarah Vienna

Guest(s): Sarah Vienna

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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: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, Easter is fast approaching and with it come the images we often see of baby animals representing new life. Well, I want you to imagine for a moment, a beautiful human baby, no matter how he or she came to be, and knowing that they are pure and have the promise of a bright future. Well, babies need lots of love and care, and when they don't receive those necessities, even their physical development can be impacted. Today here on Family Talk, we're going to hear from a courageous woman who has answered God's call to help the preborn, as well as young people, in Romania. Here now is our own Gary Bauer to introduce today's guest, Sarah Vienna, right here on Family Talk.
- Gary Bauer: Hello and welcome to Family Talk. I'm Gary Bauer, the Senior Vice President of Public Policy here at the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm also the host of Defending Faith, family, and Freedom, our weekly podcast. I'm honored to be working alongside my good friend Dr. James Dobson.
- Today, we've got a great guest and a good friend of our ministry. She's an international speaker, singer and songwriter. Her name is Sarah Vienna. She's also the co-founder and president of Firm Foundations Romania. Sarah is a courageous woman who has spent her life working and singing to be a voice for the voiceless. Sarah, welcome back to Family Talk. Dr. Dobson and his wife Shirley send you their best regards.
- Sarah Vienna: Well, thank you. It's great to be back and it's great to see and hear your voice, Gary.
- Gary Bauer: Oh, well, thank you. It's been a little while since we've had you on the show, and Dr. Dobson's audience continues to grow. Your story of what God laid on your heart in a trip abroad is an amazing story. So why don't we assume that nobody listening has heard this story, and give us a little bit of a recap of how the course of your life was so dramatically changed, a number of years ago now, I guess.

Sarah Vienna: Yeah, I guess we could say about 20 years ago. 20 years ago is when I took a leap of faith. And it was the best risk of faith I ever took, and I'm still thanking the Lord every single day for the journey that He has prepared for me. Growing up, I grew up in a big family. I'm the youngest of seven sisters, and then 17 years ago, my parents adopted my little sister, Claire. So there's eight sisters, musical sisters. And my mom always just encouraged us to read books about men and women who took risks of faith for the Lord and went on amazing missionary journeys. And it inspired me as a young adult. And my mom said at 18 that I was going to be an Esther and lead people closer to the Lord, and I knew something was around the corner for me.

And then close friends suggested Youth With A Mission, YWAM. It's a discipleship training school where you learn about the Lord and missions for the first three months and that the last three months you go on a mission. At first I was like, "No, I don't think this type of school is for me. I don't want to push my religion, handout tracks." But the Lord melted my heart and the Holy Spirit guided me to say yes. And so I went on a YWAM journey in London, which eventually led me to the country of Romania, the City of Braşov, Romania for a two-month outreach. And I fell in love with the city and fell in love with the calling, and God said, two months is too short. So fast forwarding 20 years later, I'm still in the country.

Gary Bauer: Wow, that's amazing. So there was a particular, I believe visit that you made to, was it a hospital where you saw how some children were being treated that really led you to focus in on the ministry of trying to help those kids?

Sarah Vienna: Yeah. It was in 2005, some friends of mine invited me to visit children's hospital and they know that I could sing and they asked me to sing some Christmas carols for some, what we thought were just a few babies that were left alone in this hospital in the center of Braşov, Romania. And what we found on that day were rooms full of babies and children alone in these terrible prison-like cribs. The smell in the air was just so offensive and it was just a horrific sight. And the most eerie part of it all is that there was not one cry from the children, one cry from the babies because they learned that crying and did not answer their call, their needs.

And so God placed in our hearts to start buying disposable diapers. And diapers turned into cuddling babies for an hour and then our program started to expand. And fast forwarding up to now, we provide over 35,000 diapers on an annual basis for this hospital, and we run an international volunteer program.

Gary Bauer: Incredible.

Sarah Vienna: We've cuddled and loved over 14,000 babies since 2005. So I feel like I've had a lot of children in my life. Even though I never had my own children, I feel like I've had a lot of children.

Gary Bauer: Well, I've heard Dr. Dobson talk about this. There's actually a lot of scientific research about the need of children to be touched, to be cuddled, to be held. And it's a sad mark of the times we live in that there's so many children around the world and even here in the United States that are treated so poorly. Sarah, I remember you did an incredible song, I loved it. I think it was titled, "I'm Alive," which is a song from the perspective of the unborn child talking to their mother. So really, the work you're doing in Romania, it's all about the sanctity of life. It's just a different aspect of that.

Sarah Vienna: It's protecting God's most precious creation, inside and outside of the womb. And I'm so glad you brought up that the song, I'm Alive, because I'm so excited to share that my friend, Jennifer Wilder Morgan, wrote a children's book off of that song, *I'm Alive, Dear Mama*. It'll be released in this fall in 2024. So how I would love to leave a legacy is just protecting the most innocent creation and serving the Lord in this way because this is what we're called to do, is to protect His creation.

Gary Bauer: We live in a country built on the idea that every baby is made in the image of God. It's in the Declaration of Independence that we owe these truths to be self-evident that all matter created equal and endowed by their creator. And so the message of that, and it's a biblical message, it doesn't matter whether you're a child in Romania or a child in America, or how much money your parents have in the bank or whether they don't have any or what the color of your skin is. None of that matters because all children and whether again it's a hospital in Romania or a child in a suburb of some American city, they all have dignity, value and worth because they're made in the image of God. And for you, through your music and your ministry, to promote that idea in such a dramatic way, you should feel very good about how God has used you.

Sarah Vienna: Thank you. Thank you. I'm honored, I'm honored. I always wanted to be a Joan of Arc. I wanted to be in the front lines. And I think we discussed that earlier, it's just waving that flag for Jesus Christ because we are in a spiritual battle. The spiritual battle is attacking the light, but we know where the victory comes from. We know the final end, and Jesus is in control.

Gary Bauer: No question. Jesus is in control. Don't you have a new album coming out? "Keep Going," I believe is the name of it.

Sarah Vienna: Yeah, it just has been released. "Keep Going," Sarah Vienna. It's available on Spotify, Apple Music, all the streamlines. Yeah, "Keep Going" is really about persevering, about encouraging people to keep going no matter what faces them, no matter what spiritual attack or trial or sickness, just keep persevering. And I'm just really proud of the album. It's music that I write and songs that I choose from other writers. I carefully choose them. It's like a birth. I want these songs to inspire people, to uplift them and to be memorable and to leave a legacy through music. That's my calling. I just love music. I love the opportunity to mix ministry with ministry of what I'm doing in Romania, a music ministry, and that's what I do, I combine it and then share the message through speaking

and stories and then sing it out and then lead people in worship. Because we know worship breaks down those walls, breaks down the enemy's schemes, and we need this more and more as we take one day at a time here in this life.

Gary Bauer: Absolutely, yes. So I know the history of Romania probably better than most of us do. But obviously, that country along with a good bit of Eastern Europe was under the thumb of Soviet communism for decades and decades. And so the people suffered for a long, long time. And then that began to change in 1989, with the fall of the Soviet Union and so forth. But do you see in your work there today still the evidence of what all those years of a godless philosophy being pressed down on those people and what that did to their families and their children and so forth? And are there still after effects there today that somebody like you deals with in trying to minister to these kids?

Sarah Vienna: Yeah, it was 40 years, 40 long years of communism that Romania was under. And communism, it's such a destructive sort of reign over people because it strips your individual rights, your identity, your religion. You weren't allowed to have Bibles and Christmas carols were not allowed. Anything religious was basically torn down physically and emotionally. And I really love the country of Romania. The people of Romania are so resilient and they're overcomers and they're warriors. They had to fight their way back after communism, after their government failed them. And the people, I still talk to people around my age that say, "I remember during communism times that we didn't have any butter. We had to limit our heat, and it was freezing cold and our parents sometimes didn't return." And yeah, there's still those shadows. And then you see the elderly people walking around and they're hunched over and you see the sadness, because they were tortured emotionally.

And so yeah, I still see it in the country. But the younger generations rising up, there's a lot of youth that walk around these beautiful cities of Romania. And so they're bringing back laughter and they're bringing back smiles because during communism, nobody could trust anybody. Still to this day, my goal is to try to smile at everyone I pass by on the streets because you look down, you don't look at each other and say, good day or bună ziua, you just look down and you're like two ships passing in the night. To be honest, sometimes I find myself doing that in America. It's like, no, don't fall into that. Be friendly. Especially in Texas, it's like howdy. There are still remnants, but it's slowly fading away, and that's a great thing.

Gary Bauer: Are there some stories that really stand out to you that have happened to you with children you've interacted with in Romania? I'm sure over the years there's been a lot of things. And maybe there isn't one that immediately comes to mind, but I just would like to hear more about your interactions with those children and how difficult it is to break through to them when for much of their life, there hasn't been anybody giving them the normal attention that a child would expect to receive.

Sarah Vienna:

Right. I've dealt with children that have been orphaned. I've dealt with children that have been neglected, abused, or we call them social orphans where they have been abandoned by their parents, but they still have their parents. It's just the circumstances didn't allow the parents to raise their children because of their impoverished conditions. So I've seen a lot of suffering.

The one story I'll never forget, or the time that I had to work with the parents and their child was a very sad time was at the children's hospital. And these poor parents, they were Roma Gypsy, they couldn't afford... their little child passed away, died in the hospital, and they couldn't afford a funeral, they couldn't afford a coffin, they couldn't afford transport to drive their child back to their village to bury their child. And I was part of the team in the hospital working with the social worker, and they asked if I would be willing to drive the parents with their child in a wooden box to their village.

I'll never forget just the feeling of sitting in front of the car, first of all the responsibility, but seeing the desolation of the parents' faces literally holding their little coffin on their laps. And I realized like, wow, what certain people have to go through and it's just the sadness and the grief. And how do you handle that sort of grief and sadness without knowing the Lord? I don't know. And so they'll never forget that moment.

As far as other children I've interacted in the orphanage that had no parents of them just clinging onto you. And I wrote a song, "Unwanted," for a little boy named Mihai who wanted, we were leaving his orphanage room and he wanted one more hug before we left his room. And my colleague wrote a poem called "Unwanted," and I turned into a song. And it was about the pain of rejection. I'm very sensitive to rejection and sensitive to these children that do not deserve this sort of being alone without parents never saying I love you or hearing the words, I love you.

I have a lot of stories, it's just I think that's what has driven me to educate and love children that deserve a chance. And that's what we're doing in the Roma Gypsy villages of Budila. And we're working with 250 kids right now, educating them and sharing the gospel, and they're raising their hands saying, "I accept Christ," and they're feeling loved and wanted. So this poem that started out as unwanted is turning into wanted and loved. And without love we're nothing, and God will not leave us alone as orphans. There are orphans in this world, but spiritually, we will never be abandoned by our Lord and our Heavenly Father.

Gary Bauer:

Well said. So your ministry continues there, and I assume you need assistance and support in order to do all the things you want. So I want to be sure that we don't get out of our conversation without you having a chance to tell people where they could go in order to support you or make a donation or to pray for you or whatever.

Sarah Vienna:

Yes, yes. Well, our organization, once again is called Firm Foundations Romania. We have a website there and you can read all about our background

information. So it's firmfoundationsromania.com. And yeah, we ask for prayer support, we ask for financial support. We have eight full-time Romanian salaries to cover. We have 250 children that we provide healthy snacks and educational assistance and hygiene lessons. So yeah, we definitely need people's support. We're a worldwide team. Some can come and volunteer, some can financially donate, some can pray. I invite the listeners to get involved. Braşov, Romania is a beautiful city. Our heart, our mission is a family. We're a worldwide family. There's joy in giving, there's joy in serving. And the Holy Spirit's working in this country of Romania, and it's working in the center of our team. And the movement. It's moving and we're growing and we're on a journey. So we invite people to hop on our journey train and feel the joy of the Lord.

Gary Bauer: Well said. Dr. Dobson and I have been banging our heads against the wall trying to get American Christians to do something. Now, you ended up being touched by Christ to have a heart for these children in Romania. But I think we all know that whatever the problems are around the world, whether it's in Romania or it's here in the United States, whether it's racial reconciliation or strengthening families or fighting corruption, none of these things are going to be solved without the love of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Bible. And the only way people can know those things is if the followers of Jesus Christ, men and women, go into the public square and act and do things. So first of all, God bless you for when Christ led you in that direction, laid you on that heart, I can see a lot of people going, "Wait a minute, this must be a bad connection. You want me to do what?" So what can you say to your fellow believers around America about how badly we're needed right now, wherever God sends us?

Sarah Vienna: That's right. Well, the church needs to stand up and act and step out in faith, and we need to unite, link arm in arm and stand up for those that have no voice. I ask our fellow Christians, now is the time to consider serving and others and reaching out and doing something beyond yourself. Step out of your own homes and look around you. Share the gospel. Because when we share about the love of Christ, that shows that we care for people. Because it's not easy these days to share about Jesus and the light in this dark world because of what may come in response. But when we share, we care.

Gary Bauer: It's getting harder, even here in the United States, that was built on religious liberty. There's stories every day about people that get punished because they're open and honest about their faith.

Sarah Vienna: Right. And Gary, you shared in your amazing end of the day reports that I love receiving, I think everyone should receive-

Gary Bauer: Well, thank you.

Sarah Vienna: ... your thoughts in their inbox.

Gary Bauer: How nice of you.

Sarah Vienna: And you shared about how the church also needs to stand up and that if we all stand up together as Christians and stand up against just the injustices. And if we get imprisoned, there won't be enough space in the jails to house us, so they can't come against us. Right? We're too big of an army.

Gary Bauer: That's exactly right. The body of Christ, I think has more strength than we know. If only we are willing with love to speak to a hurting nation about all of these issues. And it's exactly for a time like this, I think that God gave us the blessing of being born in a place like America.

Sarah Vienna: Amen.

Gary Bauer: Where we do have still the liberty to speak about these things.

Sarah Vienna: That's right. That's right. And the Scripture, I feel for me for 2024 and for our organization and for really all of us as Christians, is beseech the Lord of the harvest, send forth the workers for the harvest is great and the workers are few. The harvest is great. Jesus called us to pray to our heavenly Father, to His Father, to say, send forth the workers because people... he had compassion on these hurting people who do not know the Lord or who are suffering with, struggling with their relationship with the Lord. So I would suggest strongly that Christians who are listening to pull up their bootstraps here and get strong and get courageous, become courageous, and share the love to the world of Jesus Christ. Because without love, we are nothing.

Gary Bauer: That's kind of the theme of that song and of the album of "Keep Going." Fear not, just keep going. Fight the good Fight.

Sarah Vienna: "Got to keep going, on and on and on and on." Yep. We got to keep going, pressing on.

Gary Bauer: Well, when you were praising my end of day report, thank you, let me assure you, God did not put me in the line when he was handing out singing talent. That was definitely the line you were in. And I will not scare our audience away by trying to sing. But since you just let out a few notes, it would be wonderful if you would want to sing a little bit more of either that new song or of the song about the unborn child singing to their mother. I'll leave it to you.

Sarah Vienna: Sure.

I am here, deep inside you. You can't see my but I'm alive. I am small, but I'm growing to be like you, I'm alive. So give me a chance, give me a chance, cause I'm alive. And I want to breathe, and I want to see and I want to feel you closely. And I want to roam and I want to see and I want to hold you tenderly. So give me a chance, give me a chance, cause I'm alive.

Gary Bauer: Wow. Yeah, I give a lot of speeches on the sanctity of life. I don't think any of them have been as powerful as just the simple verses of that song, Sarah. That was beautiful. Sarah Vienna Ministries, that's separate from the work in Romania and allows you, through your music, to bring the good news. How do people get in touch with you there?

Sarah Vienna: Yeah, they can visit my website, sarahvienna.com. I would invite everyone to visit the website, learn more about the story. I would love to come visit. I speak at a lot of ladies function groups, missions groups. I'm a worship leader, so I have a passion to see people grow in the Lord and utilize their God-given gifts. I guess you could say I'm a motivational singer.

Gary Bauer: Yeah, I would say so.

Sarah Vienna: So sarahvienna.com. Contact me, I would love to get in touch with you and meet you across the table.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic. Sarah, it's been wonderful to spend a little bit of time with you. I know you're in high demand around the country. You are a real example for all Christians, certainly for Christian women, about how showing our faith can make a difference in this world. Again, Dr. Dobson and Shirley send you their best. And I promise you that all of us at JDFI will be praying for you and your ministry in these months and years ahead.

Sarah Vienna: Thank you.

Gary Bauer: Keep standing strong and fighting for family, faith and freedom.

Sarah Vienna: Thank you, Gary. And thank you Gary for being a speaker of truth.

Roger Marsh: Well, Sarah Vienna certainly is using her gift of song to help others. Today here on Family Talk our own Gary Bauer conducted a conversation with Sarah Vienna of Firm Foundations Romania. To learn more about Sarah or her ministry, or to share today's broadcast with a friend, simply visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

In Proverbs chapter 31, verses 26 and 27, we read about women. "She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness." There's been a lot of confusion in the culture these days about what exactly a woman is and how to define her role. Well, here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we've partnered with Dr. Owen Strachan to help bring women an encouraging word and to affirm what God's design for women really is. We put together a PDF of a special download called "What Is a Woman According to God." And when you go to our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, be sure you download a free copy of this PDF. Again, the title is "What Is A Woman

According to God.” And you can find your copy absolutely free at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day, and be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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