



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Planting Shade Trees – Part 1

Guest(s): Dennis Swanberg

Air Date: March 14, 2022

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

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: Welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, home of the voice you trust for the family you love. I'm Roger Marsh. And today we are sharing a classic Family Talk broadcast featuring Dr. Dobson and his good friend, author, comedian, and speaker, Dennis Swanberg. The two will be talking about the Swan's 2014 book *Planting Shade Trees*. And to introduce his guest, here now is Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: I have a treat for you today. We're going to interact with a guest that I have known since 1987 and we have been close friends ever since. He lives on the East Coast and I now live in the Southwest, but his name is Dr. Dennis Swanberg. I said we met in 1987, we really didn't, I got a tape. I was driving the car and I almost hit a tree.

I was laughing so hard, and I was on the way to a football game shortly after that. I brought that tape with me and played it for all the guys in the car. We were rocking down the freeway and I put that on the air. And that was one of the top 100 broadcasts that we did for many years until I left Focus on the Family.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, how about that? Well, I remember it well, I tell you that was a big thing for me. I was a pastor in Hot Springs, Arkansas and I used to live there.

Dr. James Dobson: I remember.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: That's right. And I remember getting up to go fishing with a buddy and we had to, I said, "Turn the radio on. I'm supposed to be on this. They're supposed to play my tape." And so we listened to it and they went, "How'd you get on there?" I said, "Man, I don't know who," and I didn't know who gave you the tape. Been one of those mysteries over these years. Anyhow, they planted a shade tree for me-

Dr. James Dobson: Now that-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: ...by giving you that cassette tape.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I saw that God was blessing you and that he had given you a talent. You not only had a great sense of humor and were able to tell a story like nobody I knew, but you also put a message in there and I just have enjoyed working with you.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Well, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Now well, in fact, I'm holding your book, *Planting Shade Trees*. "The Swan teaches us that though not everyone can be a legend, we can have the opportunity and responsibility to leave a Godly legacy." That was written by Dr. Charles Stanley.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And that's really what you're getting at. Of course you know I have a new book-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I know.

Dr. James Dobson: ...called *Legacy* too so,

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I remember when you were telling me that you were working on it, I said, "Doc, you got to do it because people want to know who planted a shade tree for you. They want to know who are the people that helped you and now you're leaving a legacy because people, they've planted seeds in your life. As I would learn more and more about you being in South Texas and Hot Springs, we both had been in Hot Springs and born

Dr. James Dobson: In Louisiana, which is your state.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah. That's right. And then hearing your stories about your dad, your grandpa, people that prayed for you, they imparted to you a special blessing.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen, I've got shade trees-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Unbelievable-

Dr. James Dobson: All over the-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Unbelievable.

Dr. James Dobson: ...place that were planted by other people. And sometimes I feel like one of God spoiled kids because I-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I do too.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I feel like why didn't they get more attention than what I'm getting? Because they are the heroes, but I've often told folks. I said when we get to Heaven, I wouldn't be surprised if they don't have Paul Harvey in heaven at the big banquet. And Paul Harvey says, "And now the rest-"

Dr. James Dobson: Of the story.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: ...of the story. Page two," And that's where God will reveal all that was done in His name. And that's going to be awesome. And that will last for eternity and be known for eternity. I mean, that's just one aspect of Heaven that I think will be so neat. It's almost like the old show *This is Your Life*.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: We see the back of the tapestry, how all this tape, who was it that prayed for Jim Dobson when he was a boy? What teacher was that made an influencer? Who did that for Dennis Swanberg? Who was the change agent for him when he was in college, in high school? And that's going to be known and much glory is going to be given to the Father because of it.

Dr. James Dobson: Why don't you explain the concept of the shade tree? What does that mean?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Well, my great-grandfather came from Sweden in the 1880s. He bought a piece of land there in Texas at a little community called New Sweden, just East of Austin, Texas. And so what he did was he built the house and he planted some shades trees around the house, because East of Austin, there wasn't any trees. So he did that. Well when my grandpa was five, they said he took sick and died. Back then, that's all they knew. He took sick and died, but he planted a shade tree he never sat under. My grandpa sat under it. My mother did, I have, my two boys have.

Dr. James Dobson: Same tree?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: And those trees, they're there to this day. And I got to thinking he planted shade trees for me because he was also licensed to preach the gospel by the Methodist Episcopal Church of Austin in 1898. But he never got to preach. He got licensed but he died before he got to preach. Well, we found a letter that his pastor wrote after his death. We translated from Swedish into English.

Pastor Olander, he was talking about what a good man he was and a Godly man he was and how he loved his family. And then at the bottom it says, "He was like the giant Oak tree that fell in the midst of the storm." And then the next line said, "who will take his place?" And when I read that, I said I will. I'll take his place. So I have his picture on my wall. I have a wall in my office, I call it my legend wall. And I look at him and I see his license and I see the church that he

built. And I see that letter and I go, "I'm going to keep planting shade trees." I'm going to plant shade trees for others. And in this book, *Planting Shade Trees* that... You want to plant shade trees that I may never sit under, but others will. Now some of the shade trees we plant, we get to enjoy.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: But they're many that we're going to plant that we never get to enjoy. Having my book, stories of all these trees, like the Muir woods out there in Golden Gate, those are awesome. They're a thousand years old. Well, how have they made it so long, doc? Well, their roots shake hands with each other.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Their roots hold each other up and we hold each other up. You and I we've prayed for each other over the years, we've held each other up. And all the folks that have listened to you and part of your ministry over the years, our roots hold us up together. And it gives us a lasting power.

Dr. James Dobson: Mentioning trees in the hill country of Texas. There are Mesquite trees everywhere. And there's very little water in that part of Texas. That's why they can't really grow anything there.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: You're right.

Dr. James Dobson: And as a result, the Mesquite trees don't have enough water to really sustain themselves. And they send a root system down deep 30 feet.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And they are so well rooted that nothing can blow them over because of the deprivation that they've gone through. Now in a rainforest where there's all kinds of water every day, they have shallow roots and a wind storm will blow them over because they have not had the trials...

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: The deprivation that the Mesquite tree has had. And that maybe applies-

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: ... that preach one.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: And the Redwoods... Another thing I learned, love reading those little signs as you walk through the woods about the Redwoods and everything.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: They have fires, used to. Do they think, "well, that fire's bad." No a fire can be good. It cleans the floor. And when they have a fire, the resin on the pine cones melt and the pine cones finally open and the seed falls out and then is able to produce. Sometimes we have to have a fire.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: God allows fires in our life,

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: So that it can sustain us.

Dr. James Dobson: You got a chapter that says, "Everybody Needs Somebody."

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Everybody.

Dr. James Dobson: Who do you need Swanny?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I need my sugar babe. My wife, my honey love, my little woman. She's a Martha and she's always bossing me around, but I got to have it. And she's tough and strong. We've been married 35 plus years. And I need her.

Dr. James Dobson: You talk about her a lot. What's her name?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, I do. Lauree, my little Lauree. And... But I also need friends. For instance, I live in Monroe, Louisiana. I lived with the Duck Dynasty boys before they were on television.

Dr. James Dobson: You've known them...

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: We've known them for 20 years and they're good people by the way. But anyhow, I was pastor at First Baptist church there and when I left in '95 to do this full time, people said, "Well, why don't you live in Nashville? Why don't you live in Atlanta or Dallas?" I live in Monroe, Louisiana. Why? My friends. I live there because of my friends,

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: My buddies. I've got my buddies there. I call them the boys on the Bayou. And Lauree has her Steel Magnolias. They even know which one's Ouiser. In the old movie Steel Magnolias, Shirley MacLaine was that gal that said, "I'm not mad, I've just been in a bad mood for 40 years." And she has her Steel Magnolias. And I've told people, if you could live anywhere you wanted to live, live with your friends. Live with those people that are going to haul me out one day in my casket.

Dr. James Dobson: That phrase you've known for about 40 years.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, right. And so I've been there 23 years, but my friends, they are those shade trees that our roots shake hands with each other and we hold each other up and you've got to have that in this life. You need friends. You need people.

Dr. James Dobson: Were you a pastor in that area?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, I was pastor at First Baptist West Monroe, Louisiana.

Dr. James Dobson: But not now.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Not now. No, I left the pastorate at '95 and I remember when I was leaving the pastorate, I called my mom Pauline Bernadine and I said, "Mom I'm leaving the pastor. I'm going to be a full time speaker." She's said "You stay in that church, that's where you belong. You're a preacher and don't you leave." I said, "Mom, I think I might speak to more people I've ever spoke to before." "It's not the same. Don't tell me it is. You're a preacher."

Well, I think now 23 years later, she understands that I'm in the niche that I need to be in and to be a minister of encouragement. And that's what I love doing.

Dr. James Dobson: How did you come to know the Lord?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I was raised in a Methodist church in Austin, Texas, and man we went to... If the doors are open, we're going. I mean my dad, there's no discussion, we're going. My dad had a good experience with the Lord when he was in his early twenties. And he decided at bootcamp down at Fort Polk, Louisiana, which is a hot spot.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: He decided down there, it wasn't a Bible study. It wasn't a revival. He said, "I'm going to be a godly man. And that's who I'm going to be." And so he was just one fine man. And so, I'd gone through confirmation and all that but finally at age 17, we had a Methodist revivalist guy come to our church and he preached and I realized that I'd always believed in God, but I'd never received Him. There's a difference.

Even the demons believed, but I believed and I had a respect about God and knew of him and all my life. But it wasn't until March 15th, 1971 on a Monday night that I said, I'm, I'm giving Him my life. I'm receiving Him into my life. And man, what a difference that made, I mean, that was the biggie for me. When that happened, my high school football chaplain, Marshall Edwards, he was a Baptist preacher in town. He was a young preacher, he is 32. And I just looked up to him and he was pivotal in planting seeds and me coming to Christ. And so,

my senior year after I'd got saved... When I came back to school, we started an FCA and then I was going to go play football.

Dr. James Dobson: Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: And I was going to go play football at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. It was hot down there that sulfur plant. I said, Lord help me. So I went back home I quit. I was homesick and when I drove home that '64 Chevy and pulled in my driveway, my dad came out there and he opened the door and he said... We called Marshall Edwards rabbi. He said, "Rabbi is going to take you and me up to Baylor on Friday." Well, this was Wednesday night.

Well, he said, "Well, rabbi's taking us up there. He says you need to go to college." And I wasn't going to go to college. I was just going to do moving and hauling. We were working people and Marshall picks us up in his car. We drive up there to Waco. And when the day is finished, I'm enrolled at Baylor University. I'm there to play baseball.

It was a private school, we didn't have the money. We didn't know how we were going to do it, but we were going to do it and came home and a long story, a little shorter, Marshall Edwards ended up going up there to Columbus Avenue Baptist in Waco, a few months later. I didn't know how Baptists steal another preacher from another church but, so he got up there. I joined his Baptist church. I thought he's done so much for me I'm going to join up with these Baptists. You know how Baptists are, they put you underneath the water, won't let you up until you say tithe.

So, I joined and then I became his youth minister that next semester. So I quit baseball and I became his youth pastor. He became my father in the ministry and I had people there, the Marsh-Taylor family let me live with them. I had a guy in the book called Rev. Winchell he... When I left to go to seminary, he bought me a car. I can't even believe it. I called my dad and said, "Dad, this man's going to buy me a car," because my car had died a week before I was going to seminary in Fort Worth. And my dad said, "Don't you dare take it from him because... Tell him to help somebody that really needs help." I said, "Daddy, we are those people." And then my dad said, "What a man, what a man."

And so, they planted shade trees for me at Baylor. When I go back to Marshall Edwards and look what he did, he was a 32 year old guy. I wasn't even a member of his church. He was my high school football chaplain, but he took a day off, took me up there. One day changed my world. Changed my world. And so since then when I became a pastor, I was taking boys to Baylor. I was taking young ladies to Baylor.

I was taking them to this school, that school, Mississippi college, because I asked Marshall one time. I said, "How can I ever repay these people for what they've done?" I had people that helped pay my education. I mean one thing after

another. And he said, "Well you can't repay them. But one day when you have an opportunity-

Dr. James Dobson: You pass it on.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: ...you plant a shade tree for somebody.

Dr. James Dobson: You also talk about five elements of a shade tree planter.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: What does it take to plant a shade tree? Well, here's the preacher coming out in me. The story I love is Jeremiah chapter 32. It was a bad tough time. The Babylonians were coming in, they were taking over. They were taking God's people into Babylon, into bondage. I mean it was the worst of times but sometimes in the worst of times, God does some of His best things. And He spoke to Jeremiah and said, "Jeremiah, I want you to buy the field at Anathoth. I want you to pay 17 shackles of silver for it."

I mean that's like a year and a half salary of a good working man. I want you to sign the documents, put them in earth and jars, they need to last a long time because one day houses and fields and vineyards will again be planted in this land.

One day my people will return and we know from our history, 70 years later, the Persians defeated the Babylonians. And when Cyrus saw the witness of Daniel and those three boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, He said, if you all want to go home, go home. And they came back. And when they came back, they lived at Anathoth. And they did all that, why? Because Jeremiah planted a shade tree he never ever sat under. So what does it take to plant a shade tree real quick? It takes your sensitivity. Jeremiah, he heard from God.

Our God is self-revelatory. He speaks, we need to listen. We need to be better listeners. He has something to say to all of us. Second thing, it takes your surrender. I've got a surrender to plant a shade tree. I just can't do it on my own. And I have to surrender under his power to do it for him to do it in and through me. The next thing it takes your silver, it takes your money. And everybody knows I'm going to bring that up, but it takes your money. You're a ministry here, it's worldwide here on Family Talk, but it just doesn't happen.

Our liquid money is the way we water a tree. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase and it costs money to plant a shade tree. I mean my wife landscaped our house again and wanted different trees and wanted them full grown Lord have mercy. We bought a full grown tree lately. And so it takes your silver and then it takes your sight, you got to see it. Do you have a vision, do you have a dream? You had a vision. You had a dream. It was a long time ago, doc. But I remember those days when you dreamed but you probably never imagined, but I mean what God did was-

Dr. James Dobson: No, it's a shock to be that way.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I mean the whole, has it been a great ride? It's almost like lonesome dove. You want us to look at each other and say, "It's been quite a party, hadn't?".

Dr. James Dobson: And that's the way I feel about it.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I mean, it's been a party.

Dr. James Dobson: I have had board members and others who have urged me to do long-range planning and to think about where this is going. I never would do it because frankly, I didn't feel like I owned it.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Or I was responsible for it. My job was to be faithful and to not mess it up. But the plan that was unfolding was a surprise to me the whole way.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: I mean it's... As I would used to say in the voice of Billy Graham, "It's like a Billy Graham movie as it unfolded, unbelievable." Well, the last point of what it takes to plant a shade tree that I have in the book is it takes your signature. Jeremiah signed those documents. He did it in front of witnesses.

He signed on that parchment. They rolled it up, put it in these earth and jars because God told him it needs to last a long time. And 70 years later when God's people came back and they opened up those jars and they saw his signature, that land was theirs. The power of a signature, your signature, my signature is our character. It's our integrity to do what God has told us to do.

Dr. James Dobson: For my grandparents and my grandfather particularly, who was not a Christian till right before he died, it didn't take a signature. It took a handshake.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: That's all that it required. And you could take that to the bank.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Isn't that awesome? I want to ask people to pray about the shade trees that you're going to plant for your family, for your church, for your faith. And I want you to pray about the shade trees you want to plant for Dr. Dobson's Family Talk. This work is still going on. He look... I'll tell you folks, he looks good. He feels good. He's in good shape. He works out every day. He's going strong. And we need someone that has wisdom to pass that wisdom on.

Dr. James Dobson: You're very kind. That's fine.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Well, that's the truth. That's just the bottom line.

Dr. James Dobson: I love swapping stories with you. Let me tell you about my father. My dad had a hard time getting settled spiritually, because the Lord called him to preach and he didn't want to go. And they had a revival meeting at their church and that's where he settled the question and he accepted the call to preach. And that revival cost \$600. And my dad was their only convert. And for \$600 and people complained about it. He went on to reach tens of thousands of people for the Lord. And one of them was me.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: I pray that I'm leaving some shade trees. Only God knows, but don't you want to hear him say, "Well done thou, good and faithful servant". Anything matter more than that?

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: And to plant a shade tree, the answer is be a shade tree. Psalm one, "Be like a tree planted by the river and absorb all his nutrients in His water, His strength." You be the tree that God wants you to be and you will naturally plant more shade trees.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me go back to that story of Elijah, where he had faced down the prophets of Baal in 400 of them did their dance and they couldn't bring down fire to set the sacrifice on fire and Elijah then called down fire from Heaven. Then Jezebel tried to kill him and he had to run and who knows how far he ran but he was exhausted.

Dr. James Dobson: He was absolutely exhausted. And our Heavenly Father looked down at him and said, "You need rest." And He put him to sleep and when he woke up, there was a little meal there for him, meat brought by the ravens. Can't you see the, our Heavenly Father... if we're talking to people right now who just worn out.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: And things have not gone well. And you feel like you just can't keep going, you can't put another foot in front of the other and you've sat down and isn't the imagery of that great to think that the God of the universe is looking down saying, "Oh, I understand my heart goes out to you. I'm going to take care of you."

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: And you don't remember what happened there with Elijah. He heard the still small voice-

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: ...of God speak to him. If we will hear Him, that will sustain us in the toughest of times.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a good place to end Dr. Dennis Swanberg. I call him "The Big Swan" at his request. I call you Swanny. Thank you for coming. Thank you for being my friend.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Thank you for being my family.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you for the things that you said.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Well, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And I trust there's some people out there that'll get this book, *Planting Shade Trees*, but will also look for a way to plant their own shade trees.

Dr. Dennis Swanberg: Amen. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: A powerful reminder that God takes care of his children. You just heard part one of a classic three part program featuring Dennis Swanberg right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Have you been the beneficiary of a shade tree planted in your life, maybe by your parents or your grandparents, a coach or a mentor.

We'll take a few moments today to thank God for their impact on your life. If they're still around, maybe write them a note or give them a call to express your gratitude. Now to learn more about Dennis Swanberg, his ministry or his book called *Planting Shade Trees*, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast or give us a call at (877) 732-6825.

Thanks again for joining us here on Family Talk, listen again tomorrow to catch part two of our classic broadcast featuring Dennis Swanberg on the topic of leaving a legacy and planting shade trees. That's coming up right here next time on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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