



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and Follow Jesus – Part 1

**Guest(s):** James Spencer, Ph.D.

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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:** Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, we've been through a lot over the past couple of years, including the shutdown, economic uncertainty, increased division in our communities, and we as Christians are seeing the world transform literally before our eyes and sadly not for the better. As you may know, many aspects of our current culture are not of God of course, but remember, we are also called to not be of this world. As Christians, each of us are called to hold strong to the Lord as we resist the pressures of today's broken culture. So how do we learn what this Christian resistance is really all about? Well, our guest today here on Family Talk is Dr. James Spencer and he's written a book that will challenge you and strengthen you as a Christian. His book is called *Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and Follow Jesus*.

Dr. James Spencer is an author and theologian specializing in biblical interpretation. He earned his Ph.D. in Theological Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. James Spencer has spent 11 years in higher education administration and now proudly serves as the president of the D. L. Moody Center, an independent nonprofit organization inspired by the life and ministry of Dwight L. Moody. Dr. Spencer is also a regular instructor for Right on Mission as well. James and his wife Kim have been married since 1999 and together they are the parents of three children. Now let's join our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton and today's special guest, Dr. James Spencer, right here on Family Talk.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** James, welcome into Family Talk. What a delight to have you. Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, send their regards.

**James Spencer, Ph.D.:** Hey, thank you very much. I've been listening to Dr. Dobson for a long time on the radio and so it's exciting to be here and great to be here with you.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** James, as we get started, you serve as president of the D. L. Moody Center. A lot of people who listen know of Moody Bible Institute, but there's a fascinating D.

L. Moody Center up there. Tell us about the center, how you got involved and what God's doing in and through that ministry.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Sure, yeah, I think a lot of people with Moody Bible Institute recognized D. L. Moody's role in ministry in Chicago, but a lot of the things that he did during his life in ministry were actually done in Northfield, Massachusetts, a small town in western Mass, and the campus that he built is still there. He started a school called Northfield Seminary for Girls in Northfield. He built a 2300 seat auditorium. He lived there, he was born there, and so we shepherd some of the buildings on that property and make sure that they're preserved. We're getting them ready for touring. We have a prayer walk where people can go around and see the different buildings and sites on the property. And really what we're trying to do is just echo the message of D. L. Moody, which was in essence the gospel, but also really encouraging Christians to take up their responsibility as Christians to be and make disciples.

And so the D. L. Moody Center is really very closely dedicated to that. I became involved in 2018. I came over from higher education. I was just done being a dean in higher ed, wanted to try my hand at something new, had gotten to know the CEO of the D. L. Moody Center and we really worked well together. And so I thought this seems like a great ministry and I will say it's done a lot for me personally, being able to slow down from the pace that I was running in higher education, to learn a little bit more about D. L. Moody and to understand who he was as a person, has really deeply impacted my life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, he certainly was a giant of the faith and continues to have impact in our culture and we appreciate what you're all doing and support those works. James, as we get started, you've got a new book out, *Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and Follow Christ*. Fascinating Work. Can't Wait to get into what God's put in your heart, but let's begin the conversation going in this direction. I think last few years have been pretty tough go for everybody. It's been unbelievable, really. You go back to when Covid hit and the lockdowns and the loss and the loneliness, the racial tension that we saw, the rioting that took place go into the election, the election mess and everything that happened around us and then Covid was like the gift that kept on giving variants everywhere. It was unbelievable. When you look back on it and you think about where we're at, what we're experiencing right now, it's unbelievable.

James, we're also in the midst of some real significant challenge when it comes to Christianity, modern day Christianity. People are being branded as Christian nationalists. We're hearing terms like domestic terrorism. We know that suppression and censorship really is happening and it's just like what in the world is going on. In the midst of it, you pen this book, a pretty bold title, *Christian Resistance*, but the message in it I found fascinating. And James, tell us a little bit about what your heart is behind writing the book and why God put this in your mind I think for such a time as this.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah, I think looking at all of the things that you referenced and just seeing the world in turmoil, it reminded me of something. It reminded me that number one, Christians, we should never really be that comfortable in the world. We're always not an isolated bunch, but we're supposed to be a separate bunch. And I think sometimes when we get too comfortable, we start living down to the standards that the world sets. And in times of turmoil, it can wake us up to this notion that wow, the world is not really on our side. The world is trying to make us disciples of the world. They want us to be disciples of the economy. They want us to be disciples of the government and they want us to learn to live along the rules that those systems really set up for us.

And so Christian resistance is the term that I use to help Christians understand that we have to retain our shape in a world that is exerting pressures on us to form us into something other than Christ. And so the picture that I've been using for that is a dam. A dam has this tremendous pressure from the water that is pressing against it. My wife and I were just out, we visited Hoover Dam last year and you see all this water pressing against this massive dam, and you just realize that while that water and the dam come together, they're touching, the dam has to hold its shape in order to do its job.

It can't bend in on itself, it can't crack, it can't fracture. It's got to hold up to the pressure of that water. And so there isn't a separation between the water and the dam, but there is a clear boundary that the dam can't give way on. And I think Christians are like that dam. We've got to have that and hold that shape because when we don't, we begin to lose the ability to really testify for Christ in this world. So that's why I wrote the book.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, James, you open up with a reference, strong reference to George Orwell's work, *1984*, and you parallel it beautifully, I think, to today's Christian life. It's fascinating. You think about what he wrote about and what we're experiencing. It's unbelievable. And in a lot of ways you talked about that dynamic and culture wanting to connect us to love what they desire us to love in a way they desire us to love it. That was fascinating to me because it leads to this whole idea of what I thought was unbelievable reciprocal narrowing. Can you take us down that road, James?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Sure. I think first of all, the reference to *1984* is just fun. I'm a sci-fi dystopian novel and book geek. And so I love using Orwell and stuff and really thinking through the way that that regime controls the thoughts and minds of the people underneath it is fascinating given our media culture these days. And so I think we are in a world that is increasingly proficient at telling stories that deny God. And to the extent that we succumb to those stories, we are beginning to, that process of the scene that I talk about from *1984* is where they are trying to convert the dissidents. And I love that language that Orwell uses because I really do believe that that's what's going on in the world today. All of these pressures that are coming to bear on Christianity and on Christians individually, it's a means of conversion.

And so I'll start there. As we then think about that, if we think about the tunnel vision that we could get into of how do I avoid persecution? How do I keep from suffering? What does it look like for me to get along with my neighbors, to not be viewed as a prejudiced bigot or a terrorist or something like that, a Christian nationalist, all those kind of things. What begins to happen is this process of reciprocal narrowing. As we focus in and get a tunnel vision on those things, we begin to just live in the world as one who avoids those things. And we can't think about being in the world in any other way. So the term's actually drawn from psychology and particularly psychologies of addiction where you'd have somebody who might be an alcoholic or a drug seeker or something like that.

And the loop that they go through is, "I drank some alcohol, I'm starting to feel down, I need more alcohol. I drank some alcohol, I need more alcohol, I need to find more alcohol." And so their whole life becomes ultimately about seeking this comfort that they find from drinking or from taking drugs. And I think we get into the same thing as we interact with these ideas in our society. If we're constantly trying to be someone who is safe from being labeled a certain way or viewed a particular way, we are going to ultimately be something other than Christ. Christ was never really afraid of being hated. He just was who He was.

One of my favorite narratives to illustrate this is John 6. He's got all these disciples who have been following Him up to a point, He's been feeding them, He's been throwing them signs and wonders, and He finally says, "I think you all are just here for the food. And He said, guess what? To follow me, you're going to have to eat my flesh and drink my blood." And the text says, "And many disciples left Him that day." And so Jesus has these points where He is going to be who He is and it doesn't really matter what the world thinks of Him. And so He is breaking out of that reciprocal narrowing cycle and we have to do that as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, that's fascinating. And really it leads into this whole idea then of Christian resistance. When you think of the word resistance, everybody's going to think about opposition, going against a force or what have you, a little touch and go word in modern day culture. But when you think about it from a Christian perspective, we're taught to resist the devil and that it'll flee from us. We're taught to resist temptation and sin in our own lives and more. Take us down how that idea then James, fits into what you're calling us to do in such an hour, in such a culture that we live in.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah, the text that I usually go to is Malachi 3:10. I love Malachi 3. I'm an Old Testament guy by training. And so Malachi 3, you have the Israelites who are robbing from God. Essentially the situation is there's some famine going on at this moment. They don't have enough food. The Israelites are really dealing with scarcity. And so what they decide to do is they decide to hoard the food that they have and they're going to depend on their stores to get them through this tough time of famine. And to do that, they decide that they're going to stop giving the tithe to the temple because listen, "God doesn't really need food, right? Why would we do that? We're hungry. We need the food more than He

does. We'll just keep it." And God says to them, "You're robbing me. You're taking from me. This logic that you're employing to solve the problem that you have is actually something that I've never given you.

And in instead of just being obedient, bringing the tithe to the storehouse and trusting that obedience is the wisest way you could possibly live in the world, you're opting to follow your own wit and wisdom, for whatever it is, in order to solve the problem. And God says, Test me in this. Bring the full tithe." In other words, "Test me through obedience and see what I do." And I think that's so crucial to understand when we think about Christian resistance. Christian resistance is functionally about really committing 100% to be Christian first, no matter what.

It doesn't matter what we're facing, where we are, what we're doing. It's about being obedient to God, following His word and doing what He says, even when what He says doesn't make any particular sense. And so *Christian Resistance* is really about that. It's about reclaiming a Christian logic and way to think about the world. It's about reclaiming a sense of Christian practice in the world that issues in obedience and makes us strange in the right ways. And it's about then holding those boundaries and recognizing where we end and the world begins, and those boundaries can't be blurry.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's interesting to me how we can get lost in the narrative of the day. We get consumed by it. And when you think about it's also a strategy, if you will, ultimately to take us away from what God wants us to be or requires of us and what it means to "be imitators of Christ." I know that early on in the book you dedicate a chapter to that issue of imitation. What does it mean to imitate Christ? What does it mean that Christ be formed in us? And like the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "be imitators of me as I also follow Christ." That challenge is what's getting lost, I think, is what you're saying here.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah, there's a big part of it because I think when we commit to Christ, when we're saved by grace through faith, we're also committing to a life of discipleship. And to follow a master is to allow that master to determine our desires, to allow that master to shape the way that we interact with the world. And so it should change. Following Christ should change the way we understand God, ourselves, others, and the world. And when it doesn't, it usually means that we are determining that for ourselves, which is not the brightest idea or we're allowing the world to determine it for ourselves. Again, a substandard move when we have Jesus there. Jesus's life is the only one that has so far resulted in resurrection, ascension and glorification. That's a pretty good authorization of the life that he lived. And it points to the fact that maybe we should pay more attention to imitating Christ and valuing what He valued, desiring what He desired, acting as He acted, than we maybe go off on our own and figure it out for ourselves.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A lot of challenges though, James, in that journey. There are a lot of things that are tearing at or pulling us away from what our center should be. James, you

referenced distractions. Everybody typically goes to the story of Mary and Martha, but I think it really fits here because learning to resist the interruptions, if you will, the emergencies, the whatever they are in our lives, is a tough thing to do. And it seems like we're running from crisis to crisis in culture right now. If you're up online, if you're in social media, and by the way, everybody's living in it and by talk about a distraction, it's consuming us.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: And I think I would go two places, definitely the narrative of Mary and Martha's important. It's the only place in Scripture that I know of that uses the word distracted. And so it's a great place to go. But Martha is falling prey to the conventions and expectations of the world and the conventions and expectations that she's putting on herself. And what she misses is the good portion, as Jesus calls it, of sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching. And so even the good things that we engage in can become distractions that lead us away from Christ. And so we have to just be careful of that. I would say the other place though that I often go to in thinking about this is Hebrews 12. At the end of Hebrews 12, I think it's verse 28, it talks about being thankful that we have an unshakable kingdom.

And I don't think we've grappled with that enough. So we've got all these things going on around us. There's all of this turmoil in the world. The world is broken and we know the world is broken. We also know that we are incapable of fixing a world that is broken. We can act within it. We can do good things within it. We shouldn't ignore the brokenness, but we know that there's only one fix for this. It's Christ. It's going to be the new creation and the new earth. And that is not us. We're just here to live faithfully in a world that is so broken, only God can fix it. And once we understand that we're part of an unshakable kingdom, all of these other things become, yeah, they're urgent maybe, or we should address them or as part of our Christian vocation, we need to engage here.

But at the end of the day, we're secure. We have security because we are part of an unshakable kingdom. No matter what happens, the church stands, God's kingdom stands. And so we have that security, and that's the position from which we need to be operating in the world, recognizing that God is the most, the way I like to say it, God is the most relevant actor and factor in any situation that we are looking at. And if we lose sight of Him, we lose sight of something that is beyond a priority. It is the priority.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A friend of ours, Barry McGuire, hit the microphone at a recent event we were attending and said, "75% of Christians are filled with fear. They've gotten lost in our culture." And when you think about it and everything we've gone through and then what we're seeing, what comes at us every day, we lose our confidence, if you will, and the surety of things to come. We lose our maybe recognition of who God is. And I think we also live in a culture that puts a lot of emphasis on self-sufficiency. We're out there trying our best to "hit the mark, get everything done." We're busier than ever trying to prove that very thing. And I think we lose sight of all this. So it seems like there's a number of rails, if you will, that we're riding on here that are taking us away from that confidence

that we have. Or how about just, what was Dallas Willard, I think a few years ago before he passed said, "Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." In other words, engage Him. Is that what you're seeing, James? Is that what you're thinking here?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: I think those two things, fear is huge. We've actually written a piece called "Discipleship Against Fear," and it deals with fear of the Lord and making the Lord most prominent in your life. But I would also say adding to those two aspects, I would say that disgust is becoming more and more of a problem in Christian communities. What we do is we identify something that we see as a danger or threat and just like a virus, let's say would be, or a bacteria, that may come and harm us. And so what we try to do is eradicate that. And I think that sometimes we're aiming at the wrong things. In Ephesians, it tells us that we don't fight against flesh and blood. We fight against the rulers and the principalities in the spiritual places, and it gives us a whole list of things that we are to put on that armor of God.

None of those work against physical enemies, but they all work against spiritual enemies. And so to the extent that we become disgusted with sinners, to the extent that we become disgusted with God's creation, I think we're missing something because we should really be disgusted with the ideas, the sin, the things that are leading people astray, those principalities and powers that are opposing God is what we should be disgusted at. And if we can refocus, reorient ourselves to recognizing that we're not fighting battles in the physical realm, we're always fighting a spiritual battle, I think it would give us more compassion, which I think is an absolute necessity for being Christian in this world because the people who we're usually disagreeing with, are just lost, just like all of us were. They don't have any other options to believe in other than just what they believe is lost people.

They need Jesus. And so we've got to cultivate that compassion as well. And then I think as we think about fear, as we think about some of these other reactions that we could have, I also think that focusing in on the spiritual side is important because what we begin to realize is that while no one wants to be persecuted, no one wants to suffer, all those kind of things, we also find the resources in Scripture to find joy in those sufferings, and not to welcome them, but to recognize what they cultivate within us and how that helps us in the fight that we're really fighting.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, if people want to learn more about you, the Moody Center, where-

James Spencer, Ph.D.: They can go to [www.moodycenter.O-R-G](http://www.moodycenter.O-R-G), [moodycenter.org](http://moodycenter.org), and they can find out all about me, our ministry, and what we're doing. The books available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). And so yeah, I'd encourage people to go check us out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest today has been Dr. James Spencer. He's the President of the D. L. Moody Center, an independent non-profit organization inspired by the life and ministry of Dwight Moody. Brand new book out, *Christian Resistance*:

*Learning to Defy the World and to Follow Christ.* Practical guidance in here about what you can do as a Christian, a believer, in a world that is all over the map, in a world that's struggling with chaos and insanity. We have stability and strength in Christ, and He calls us to that. What a gift to the church. James, what I'd like to have you join us on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, our entire team, we pray that God continues to put courage and boldness in your heart as you represent Him. We love you and appreciate your ministry. Thank you so much for joining us.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Thanks for having me. I really appreciate being here.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a thought-provoking conversation with Dr. James Spencer and Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk. Hearing their discussion, I was reminded of what Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That's a powerful concept we need to remember. Be sure to tune in again tomorrow for part two of this special conversation, as Dr. James Spencer will share about a campaign that helps us reserve time for God.

Friend, we are not meant to journey alone as Christians and here at the JDPI, we have many resources available to help you in your faith journey. We need your support as well as the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is completely listener supported. So here is big news. During the month of June, we have been blessed by some special friends with a matching grant. That's right. Every dollar we receive this month will be doubled. Think about it. Your dollars will go twice as far to equip parents, educate kids, and strengthen marriages. But you need to hurry because the grant goes up to \$300,000. So don't wait. Why not consider making a gift today to double your impact.

Please know how much we appreciate your prayerful consideration. To give a gift online, just visit [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). You can give safely and securely right there on our homepage, [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). Or you can make a contribution over the phone. Call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And if you prefer, you can always send us a check through the mail. Make out your check to the JDPI if it's easier or you can just make it out to Family Talk. Our ministry mailing address is The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. I'm Roger Marsh. Be sure to join us again next time for part two of a powerful conversation featuring Dr. Tim Clinton and his guest, Dr. James Spencer, coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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