



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: City Serve: Mobilizing the Church to Transform Communities – Part 2

Guest(s): Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, greetings and welcome back to Family Talk. We hope this October autumn Friday finds you healthy and well and perhaps enjoying cooler temperatures and more pleasant weather. Wherever you are, please know it was a hot and a difficult summer for many, and as we saw last week in Florida, weather and natural disasters often bring a lot of pain and suffering with little notice.

When that happens, some people are left literally with nothing in its wake, but where there is a need, you'll find Christian compassion, charity and comfort. No doubt about that, and that is what we'll be talking about again today here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's edition of the broadcast, we'll continue our discussion with Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson. Dave is the CEO and Wendell is the president of CityServe International. Our own Dr. Tim Clinton, the co-host here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, continues his examination of why this grassroots activation ministry with a wide-scale vision and a big heart to serve communities here and abroad is so special.

Over the last few months, the nonprofit organization called CityServe has equipped 1,800 Ukrainian churches and another 1,000 churches in neighboring countries with food and supplies. CityServe are also working in eight states here on the domestic side with plans to expand rapidly. Now, the ultimate mission at every entry point is to lovingly provide much needed practical resources that anyone needs to survive. Listen carefully as Dr. Tim Clinton picks up from yesterday's program with these two godly men and introduces us to a Christian ministry with an eye on every church in America as a distribution point within a wider Christian relief net.

Now, the physical aid that CityServe provides to families often translated to be goods in kind, and the spiritual support and comfort they give read as unapologetic evangelism. It's geared for such a time as this when we see so much pain and suffering in the US and also abroad, and we are so glad that you will not be missing a minute of today's program. Let me reintroduce today's guests for you.

Dave Donaldson is an author, speaker, and humanitarian leader who previously served as the national director of Operation Blessing and is the co-founder of Convoy of Hope. His calling card is spearheading global partnerships with churches, businesses, and governments to mobilize volunteers, goods and resources worldwide. After Dave left Convoy of Hope to launch CityServe International, he had a mission to train and resource local churches and nonprofits to help people move from dependency to sustainability. CityServe has been radically effective in helping communities address systemic poverty, addiction, foster care, job readiness, and other areas of need.

Dave Donaldson is also an advisor to the Produce Alliance Foundation, a nonprofit organization that works to be a part of the solution to provide hunger relief, grow jobs, and strengthen local economies that are underserved communities. Dave also serves on the National Faith Advisory Board, as does Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton here at Family Talk. Dave is the host of the podcast called Influencers in which guests from corporate, government, nonprofit and church sectors share valuable insights. He earned his master's degree with an emphasis on “developing and implementing social programs in a cross-cultural environment” from Fuller Theological Seminary. Dave and his wife have four adult children and they make their home outside the Bay Area in Northern California.

Wendell Vinson is a pastor and the president and vice chairman of CityServe International. It was just over 30 years ago that Wendell and his wife became the senior pastors of Canyon Hills Church in Bakersfield, California. Today, it has grown to become one of the leading multi-site churches in Southern California, pioneering fresh approaches to church planting, renewal, and taking the gospel far and wide, wherever and whenever possible to unreached communities. Wendell and Lynda have two adult children and three grandkids. They make their home in the beautiful California Central Valley, Bakersfield to be precise. Now there's so much to examine about the ministry of CityServe, so let's dive right back into this conversation right here on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dave and Wendell, welcome back. What a delightful conversation yesterday. Can't wait to get into this story side of this vision, but welcome back.

Dave Donaldson: Thank you. It's good to be back.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As we get started, I found it fascinating that again, the heart of what you're doing is taking neighborhoods to the nations, but this vision started here in the United States, in this Farmers to Family program we talked a lot about yesterday. A powerful initiative. Taking food, a lot of food in this country's wasted. I think about 40% of our food actually goes wasted. Is that right?

Dave Donaldson: Yeah, the amount of food that is wasted every day would fill the Rose Bowl.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's unbelievable, and what you're doing is you've got a channel and you're using the local church to be a distribution arm and to take that to people who desperately need it, and there are a lot of people who are hungry in our own country.

Dave Donaldson: There are.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In the midst of it, you all got involved also in Operation Border Blessing. I have been down that way and we all hear the conversations about the open borders and the nightmare that's taking place on our borders, and there's a lot of brokenness down there.

Dave Donaldson: There is.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Take us there. Tell us why you got involved.

Dave Donaldson: I got involved, Pastor Paula White and Todd Lamphere, two mutual friends of ours, and they said, "You've got to see what's happening there." I went down and I was deeply moved. First of all by these heroes, the border patrol and how they're being villainized, them and their families. One border patrolman, he said to me, "I don't even wear my uniform to work. I don't even want my neighbors to know what I do."

Here they are protecting our borders, they're serving people on both sides of the border, and so we made a decision that we were going to jump in and we're going to honor them. We are also going to provide them with food, toys, school supplies, but at the same time, we are helping the churches as part of our model to provide other product to these families that are in desperate need. It's a combination of honoring, serving the border patrol, but also helping these families in many cases that have lost everything.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dave, take us down there. I mean, what did you see? What are some of the stories, maybe experiences that you had down there? Because this has turned into a real passion of yours.

Dave Donaldson: Well, on the other side of the border, the Mexico side of the border, it's heart-wrenching. You have families, as I mentioned that have given up everything. I have three daughters and so you have young women that have tried to launch out on their own, walking in some cases 200 to 300 miles. They have so-called safe houses, which are more like haunted houses for young women. They're there, they're beat up. They've been deeply wounded and harmed, so we have steered them to these churches that wrap their arms around them.

Obviously, they're pleading to cross the border into America where they can be safe. They love America, they see America as that city on a hill. Then on the other side of the border, you have these heroes of border patrol doing their

best to not only protect the borders from people streaming over illegally, but also the drugs, the amount of drugs that are pouring into our country.

It's overwhelming. It's absolutely overwhelming. It is a tsunami of need and desperation, but that's why the church is on both sides of the border. It's a mission without borders. You have the church on the Mexico side that is serving, and then our churches right there on the other side of the border like in McAllen, Texas that are doing an awesome job as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Out on the front lines, trying to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Dave Donaldson: Absolutely. Mother Teresa said, "I follow Jesus and Jesus led me to the poor," and that's what we're doing on the border.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I wanted to ask you, Wendell, in terms of overall mission, when you start thinking about these projects that you're involved in. Keeping the main thing the main thing can be challenging at times, especially when you start with a lot of the busyness of the management and different things that are going on. Sometimes you can get lost in just the brokenness, that you can get jaded if you will, a little bit by everything that's going on. How do you keep those priorities right?

Wendell Vinson: It's really amazing how God's given us a very clear template in Scripture of the people that He's called us to. The widow, the orphan, the prisoner, the vulnerable, the exploited.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The least of these.

Wendell Vinson: The least of these. Jesus did in Matthew 25. Isaiah the prophet talks about it, Isaiah 58 and others. Jeremiah talks about it. Amos talks about it. Much of the Old Testament prophets were talking about justice and advocating for those who can't speak up for themselves, being a voice for those who can't be a voice for themselves.

There's a mandate there for the church. Jesus said, "When you do it to the least of these, you have done it unto me." I would just say that I have found that when people get close to hurting people, you never feel more close to Jesus than when you're putting yourself in a place where people are hurting or people are in need.

I think in those moments, just the sense of, Scripture says, "That the joy of the Lord is our strength," and the sense of God's joy over His church. Isaiah 58 says that the church will be known as the rebuilders of cities, people who repair brokenness. Many of sin itself, failed policy, lots of things contribute to the brokenness of our society.

But the church in Jesus through his church is the answer. It's the only answer. Everything else, Tim, is a band-aid. If the gospel and the good news of Jesus Christ isn't part of the solution, we're just putting a band-aid on the problem.

But when we get close to people, care for them, proclaim the gospel. The gospel elevates people. The gospel transforms people, it changes their hearts and their minds and you don't have to see very many victories to have renewed hope. What causes us to lose and what causes many times compassion fatigue, in my opinion.

Proverbs says that, "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." I think many times when we don't see the victories or people come out the other side having been changed and transformed, we can lose hope too. But when you get up close to people and you begin to see them change and transform, that's why the power of testimony is such an incredible thing. When you hear somebody's testimony, you can listen to testimonies all day long because when you hear the stories of transformed lives, it is fuel to us as believers.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know what I find fascinating is that when you give of yourself, maybe it's just sending a text message to someone. Maybe it's just putting an arm around somebody. Maybe it is just sliding that \$5 bill in somebody's hand or something and saying, "I'm here with you." That the message that comes back by the way is that you have value, that you have a place, that God has something for you.

Wendell Vinson: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When I was in college, Jack Wetson who used to head up Word of Life, Schroon Lake, New York, came to Liberty University to speak, and in the midst of his address, he looked at all of us. I wrote these words down. He said, "God has no greater plan than to use people like you and me as vessels through which He channels His message of hope to other people."

See, it really is true. It's not about us. It's about what God's doing in and through us to draw people to Himself. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "He's the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, who comforts us so that we in turn can comfort others." See, it doesn't start there with comforts us.

Wendell Vinson: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: "So that we in turn can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves are comforted by God." That's soul care ministry, and when we do that, we expose them to Him. Now we know the rest of the story. See, it's that piece that motivates me, that puts energy and skip in my walk. So the question is what can I do? How can I serve?

Let's go back to the mission of CityServe again. I'm going to read this again. "CityServe trains, equips and mobilizes the local church," we're talking a lot

about the local church, "to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in its community through compassion." I'm going to come back. Here's your opportunity because people are looking for an opportunity to make a difference. Tell us again what it is they could do maybe through what you do.

Wendell Vinson:

Well, there's opportunity for every person and every believer, every church to engage in the brokenness around them. Many times people think that the big social ills of our day are too big, but they're not too big. The church is the answer. We want to encourage every church and every individual to say, I'm going to today start. I'm going to take some steps toward being with someone, making that journey with someone toward wholeness. I'm going to engage in some way.

Certainly, CityServe stands ready to help churches and individuals in their community, that just start in their community serving the hurting, serving the broken, serving those in need. I like the social challenge of foster care and adoption that Dave just mentioned. People sometimes think well, it's just too big. How can we ever fix this? In reality, Tim, the stats are that if one church in a community, one out of every four churches would just highlight the need for foster care and adoption. If only one person out of that one out of four churches raised their hand and said, "I will step into that need." That need, every single adoptable child in America could be raised in a Christian home today if just one person, one church, and if only one person out of one out of four churches raised their hand and said that, "I'll step into that." It would be met. Every child in that adoption system would be in a Christian home.

When you think about all the social ill, so many of them flow out of the breakdown of family and all of our other systems in America, that flows out of just fatherlessness and the church has an opportunity to start and to make a difference that will have an eternal impact.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Will CityServe tell me how to do that? Will they come alongside of us?

Dave Donaldson:

In addition to the gifts in kind and all the home furnishings, school supplies that we're distributing through our warehouse hubs to pods, to local churches, we have 10 initiatives and one of those is foster care and adoption. As Wendell so well put, it's a key to you being blessable. You think about it, Tim, God said, "I'm going to be a Father to the fatherless." We have the honor to be the fulfillment of his promise to these kids. Wow, what an opportunity. That's why I like to say I'm a possibilitarian. We can do this. We can eradicate foster care if we'll simply make room.

Now, there are some families that would say, I can't take in a boy or girl into my home in foster care, or what we like to call forever family, but you can provide respite, a break on weekends. I got to tell you, our daughter, when we had to leave town, she would go into other foster homes and what I saw in those other homes would break everybody's heart. I mean, one home, this lady had three foster kids and she had locks on the refrigerator, the cabinets. These kids, she

wasn't cleaning them up, and she joked "they're our truck payment." When our daughter was dropped off at our house, she was dropped off like a FedEx package.

We're believing we've got 480,000 kids in the system. We're believing now with the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* that no telling how many more are going to enter the foster care system. There are those who would say, "Well, that's why we should keep *Roe v. Wade* because we don't want to fill the system with more kids in a system that many describe as a virtual graveyard for these kids." But when all that's said, we got the church. If the church will rise up, wrap our arms around these kids, take them in as foster parents, adoptive parents, provide respite. There are many things that you can do to help these foster families.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let me make sure I have this right. 480,000 kids in foster care.

Dave Donaldson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: About 25,000 of them age out every year.

Dave Donaldson: Each year.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I mean, they're looking for anything, anyone to help step into their life and the church needs to be there.

Wendell Vinson: So much opportunity. It's just absolutely unlimited opportunity, Tim, to make a difference, not only in society, but in that child's life. Even as they age out, can you imagine not having a sense of family, not having people to go to?

My children are both adults. They call me all the time looking for help, looking for encouragement, talking through life. But can you imagine not having anyone in your life that you could pick up the phone and be like a mom and dad to you? That's a need the church could meet today, Tim. We could meet that need today.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The church has to do that very thing.

Wendell Vinson: Tim, our daughter, came to us out of foster care when she was 16 and I described her, I mean she was broken, abused, neglected. She had her hands crossed over her face. She was so scared. I cannot imagine two years from that point, her aging out of the system and just being out there.

I got to tell you, and I got to tell your listeners that there were predators that were trying to entrap her and lure her away from us and we stepped in. We had to call police. We had to enforce stalking laws. If we have any notion that these kids are just somehow out there in limbo, we're missing it. The enemy seeks to rob, steal and destroy these kids. We must rise up, bring them into our homes,

rescue them, disciple them, and they will be agents of truth and they'll be the foster parents and the forever families like our daughter dreams to be.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I can't help but believe that there are people listening right now who'd be willing to do that very thing. We pray, God, that that would be true. God help us.

Dave Donaldson: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Help them. It's obvious that God's got His hand on CityServe. Where do you see CityServe going? I mean the next year or two or five years from now?

Dave Donaldson: Thank you, Tim. We believe that just in a matter of a few years, we'll see CityServe at work in every state here in America. When we launch in a state, that state really has ownership of CityServe in their state. It's a movement really, and we are more a catalyst than anything else, but seeing churches begin to partner together, work together, developing that capacity nationwide to help churches begin to step into the need in their community.

Wendell Vinson: As we saw with the pandemic, God used that as a catalyst to stretch out CityServe's borders. We are now in Canada, we're about to launch in Costa Rica and through the war in Ukraine, we now have CityServe Europe and so we're serving Poland, Romania, but also churches as we've shared all over Ukraine. Where we see this going, it's going to remain about Jesus. It's not going to be about any personality except Him and about His church.

Dr. Tim Clinton: \$540 million gifting kind work going on just this last year, on a budget that by the way, is only about a 10th of that. It's staggering. I think that's rooted in that passion that God's put in both of your hearts and I know this, may God continue to expand those borders.

Dave Donaldson: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: May the people rejoice at who He is, who God is because of the good work of CityServe. We salute you and pray that God would continue to bless and direct your efforts, especially for such a time as this. This is a dark hour, but you guys bring a lot of light.

On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his entire team here at Family Talk, his wife Shirley, and so many more, again, we salute the good work that God's doing in and through you and may He continue to do just that. Thank you both for joining us.

Dave Donaldson: Thank you, Tim.

Wendell Vinson: Our joy.

Roger Marsh:

Well, what a powerful message and call to action from our own Dr. Tim Clinton and our guests today here on Family Talk, Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson of CityServe. These two humble servant leaders who sat in our guest chairs and visited with us yesterday and today, work every day to build up the big "C" Church and the Kingdom and to make it a better place for those in need. They lead a team that does it at a grassroots community level.

This is Family Talk, and as you've heard, our two guests reiterated the Scriptural calling and promise to serve the most needy, and in return, the true reward is being able to open the door to share the love of Jesus Christ on a personal individual basis. Remember, nothing God says or does shall return void.

To find out more or to listen to the entire two part conversation at your convenience, remember you can go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

We'd appreciate your prayers and your financial support. Family Talk is on the air because of you. To find out how you can make a contribution, go online to our website at drjamesdobson.org or give us a call at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. A member of our staff is standing by ready to speak with you, and we have all the details about CityServe there as well, a tremendous partner providing assistance for such a time as this.

Now, for more details about all that they do, you can reach them directly if you prefer when you go to CityServe.us. That's the word city, the word serve, dot us. You can also call them directly at (661) 558-4441. That's area code (661) 558-4441.

Well, have a great weekend and continue to pray for our friends in Florida as they recover from Hurricane Ian. Until next time, this is Roger Marsh reminding you that we are Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. Take care and may God continue to richly bless you and your family.

Announcer:

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