



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Planting Shade Trees – Part 3

Guest(s): Dennis Swanberg

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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: I'm Roger Marsh and you're listening to Family Talk, the radio home of Christian radio legend, Dr. James Dobson. On today's program, we're bringing you the final installment of a three-part series that we've called "Planting Shade Trees." It features author, comedian, and encouraging speaker Dennis Swanberg, or the Swan as his friends like to call him. Dennis speaks to around 150 organizations, faith-based groups, and corporations every year. He's the author of nine books and has created over two dozen DVD and CD productions. He's a graduate of Baylor University, where he majored in both Greek and religion. He earned both a master of divinity, as well as a doctor of ministry at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Dennis Swanberg served as a local church pastor for nearly a quarter of a century before moving into full-time speaking and comedy. He's married to Laurie and they have two grown sons, Chad and Dustin, and the Swans make their home in Granbury, Texas. Dennis Swanberg is also a dear friend of Jim and Shirley Dobson. I think you'll enjoy his presentation on today's edition of Family Talk. I know that the Dobsons did. Let's go there right now.

Dennis Swanberg: My great grandpa, Aaron Johnson, came from Sweden to America. When he got over here in the '80s, 1880s, he bought a piece of land in hopes of bringing a family to that land. He brought his wife-to-be over. They got married, they get there and they start having children. All of a sudden, next thing they know, they got my grandpa, Carl Johnson. They lived there in that little farm, 120 acres there in central Texas. In central Texas, there's just not many trees. My great grandpa, one of the first things he did was start planting some shade trees around the house. Y'all been there, done that. Yet, when my grandpa was five years old, my great grandpa Aaron Johnson died, but he planted shade trees that he never, ever sat under. I've sat under them. My boys have sat under them. More than just those literal trees, he planted for me a faith, a faith in God. He was a godly man. He loved the Lord. That witness carried on to my grandpa and that witness from my grandpa carried on to me.

A few years ago, I was sort of cocky thinking, "I'm the only preacher in the Swanberg family." All of a sudden my mama said, "I don't think so." I said, "Say what, mama?" "Well, let me show you something," and pulls out of this trunk where my great grandpa, Aaron Johnson, was licensed to preach the gospel in 1898. He planted a shade tree for me that he never, ever sat under. I have his picture in my office. Yet, he's never seen me except from the balcony of Heaven. I've enjoyed that shade from my great grandpa.

Likewise, my grandpa Elof Swanberg, my daddy's daddy, came over from Sweden when he was 14 years old. His mom and daddy died over there and so he and his older sister Ellen, who was about two years older than he, they got on the Lusitania and they came over here to America. They worked out a deal with a rancher in Texas, that if he would pay their way that my grandpa would work for him for 10 years. For 10 years, pretty good deal, 10 years, he was on that ranch working for that man. When he was 24, he was free to go. Became a sharecropper there in central Texas. Wasn't long after that that FDR worked out a deal where you could get about 100 acres for a low interest rate and we've got that farm, a beautiful farm. My grandpa, he planted some shade trees on the north side to break the wind from hitting on the house so hard.

My grandpa Elof Swanberg planted some shade trees for the old Swan. What does it take to plant a shade tree? Well, it takes a commitment of your life. Jeremiah committed his life. Likewise, for you to plant shade trees, for me to plant shade trees, we've got to commit our life to something. If we're going to leave a legacy of shade trees, we've got to plant our life in the kingdom work of God. Jeremiah said, "I'm going to do that." That takes a commitment of your heart, that takes a bending of your will. I'm going to tell you what. When you do that, there's a joy about that kind of commitment. Sort of like with your sugar babe, your honey love when you get married. My little woman, Lauree, my little honey love, my squeeze, my only squeeze, I remember when we were getting married, commitment time, scared to death, you know what I mean? "I will. I will. I promise. I promise. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am." I was saying all those things. The preacher said that we could basically seal it with a kiss. I knew that was coming.

There's a joy to that kind of commitment. Get to lay one on your honey. With real commitment, there's always a joy. With commitment, there comes a freedom of feeling good. With commitment, there's a love you see. There's a love of the legacy of leaving something for someone else. There's something about that that just makes you feel good. If you want to be a shade tree planter, you need to commit yourself unto the things of the Lord. Second of all, you not only do you commit yourself, but to leave a legacy of shade trees, what you and I have got to do is we've got to give of our resources. Jeremiah paid full price for that piece of land, Lord have mercy. Everybody was getting out while the getting was good, That thing was only 10 cents on a dollar worth anything. But you know what he did? He paid full price. Paid full price.

Now, my daddy Floyd Leon has never paid full price for anything. My daddy said, "I have never bought toothpaste full price, never, ever. I have never, ever bought shaving cream full price, never ever. You hear me? Good now." Yet, sometimes he'll just walk into a dealership now that he's retired and us kids are gone, I don't know what's come over him, but walk in there and go, "I want that Cadillac right there." That's a chunk of the inheritance, brother. Do you hear me? That's a chunk. Help me. You senior adults, when you all do that, you don't warn us, you don't sort of ease it to us, just mama on the phone, "Daddy, tell him. Tell him what we did." "Uh, we went ahead and got us another cad, got another cad. We always drove used cars our whole life. Now that we're retired, what we got left, we're buying Cadillac's."

Whoever finds out first, I call my sisters, Sherry Darlene or Terry Lynn, and I go, "Hey, did you hear?" "Yeah, we heard." Get on a conference call and go, "It's going, it's going fast." They're even getting these bumper stickers now and putting it on the back of the car, "We're spending our kids inheritance." That hurts. Don't do that. Leave us a little something. Man, one time I was down there with mom and daddy down in Austin, Texas. I had been down there speaking and everything and I wanted some Blue Bell ice cream. Oh, Blue Bell, Blue Bell Blue Bell is good. I love Blue Bell. I love it. I love carbohydrates. The sugar buster business is of Satan, let me tell you.

This bunch is with me. This brother right down here, we're bonding right now. I can tell you. Look at me, we're bonding. Many good memories aren't there, brother? Many good memories. I said, "Daddy," I said, "do y'all have some Blue Bell at home?" We're driving home, I'd been speaking in their church, we're driving home. He goes, "I think we're out of Blue Bell, baby." "Daddy, I think we're out of Blue Bell." I said, "Well just pull right in. There's a grocery store right here. Just pull in here, dad. I'll get it." "Oh, we're not paying full price. We're not paying full price. Lord have mercy. Mama, where's it on sale?" "I think Walgreens has it on sale, dad. I think."

We turn around, go five miles back to get it for a quarter cheaper. When daddy goes in, I told my mama, I said, "Mama, what is the deal with daddy? He's getting to that stage where he's just so tight with his money." She said, "Well, that's why we have something and y'all don't." But you know what I love about my parents, what I love about my in-laws, what I love about those that have gone before? They have always been tithers, they've always been givers to the kingdom work of God. To plant shade trees, it does take your possessions. Jeremiah said, I'll do that. I'll gladly do that for those that come behind me, and I will too. Most of all, to be a shade tree planter, you've got to be able to have a vision. If you're going to leave a legacy of a shade tree, you got to have a vision. You got to be able to see, you got to see in the lives of your loved ones and those that come after you. Jeremiah could see houses and fields and vineyards someday.

My great grandpa, Aaron Johnson, before he died, before he went to the hospital in Austin, when he left the country, before he left the country to go to

the hospital in Austin, Texas, he got with his family of faith at church. He said, "This is a good place. I was thinking about sending my family back to Sweden, but this is a good place. This is a good place for my family." And the pastor that did his funeral service, brother Oli Ander, wrote a letter that we just found in our home a few years ago, had to translate it from Swedish into English. He said that my great grandpapa had a foreboding that he was going to die. He said, "I'm going to leave this place for my family. It's a good place for them." He could see something good about the place.

Then the cemetery that he built was the place where he is buried. It's going to be probably the place where the old Swan's going to be buried right next to him because I want to be a shade tree planter like him. Matter of fact, brother Oli Ander in his letter said, "Like a tree that's fallen before the storm, I often wonder who will take his place." And when I found that letter just a couple of years ago, I said, "Lord, I'll be that man. I'll be that shade tree planter myself." But quickly, I've got to tell you this story about my grandpa Elof. Great man, he always loved for me to entertain. It's where I started to getting a little of my entertaining from. He'd look at me and he'd say, "Do a funny, do a funny." And I'd get up and I'd do people that he liked, Jimmy Stewart, I'd say, "Well, listen, grandpa, how are you doing?" "Oh, that's a good one. Do another one." I'd get up and I'd entertain. Then sometimes I'd go too much then mama would say, "Sit down. That's enough. You're acting up."

But later on, grandpa would say, "Do another one, do another one." He loved me doing that. He'd tell me a funny, he'd tell me a joke. He really liked it. In the midst of his rough life, he enjoyed humor. When he was in his forties, he was working at the cotton gin across the road. When he was working in the cotton gin, you know how, if y'all know about cotton gins, these blades that come and cut together and separate the cotton from the seed, he put his hand down in there and you shouldn't do that. You ought to use a stick, but he put his hand down there pushing the cotton through and it caught his finger and then it caught his hand and began to pull his arm into the cotton gin. He called out to his friend to Lee, "Lee, Lee, [inaudible 00:12:55] Lee, Lee." And Lee came running around and he saw what happened, he turned the motor off, but his arm was stuck in those blades.

Then Lee was able to do something he was never able to do again. He was able to grab that belt and pull the belt backwards where the blades would reverse and he got his arm out. Then he put a tourniquet around his arm. Lee took him to the hospital in Elgin, Texas, outside of Austin, little old country hospital. He got there and they called my daddy, my daddy, a young man, 16, 17 years old, my daddy, Floyd Leon drives out there and watches them take his daddy's arm off through a window. They put a sheet up in front of grandpa's face where he couldn't see what they were doing.

Afterwards, of course it was a tough time. My grandpa having to live without that arm didn't farm for several years. One day, the guy that was farming his land said, "Mr. Swanberg, would you mind helping me? Would you back that

tractor out for me?" My grandpa got up there, backed it out and said, "Man, I can still do this." And so he started plowing again and farming again. My grandpa farmed until he was 75 years old. Then when he was 85, he went to be with Jesus. I love my grandpa. He planted a shade tree of witness for me, of inspiration for me, so long, so many years I often wondered, "Oh Lord, I wish somehow, I could say thank you to his buddy that was there at the gin that saved his life. Because as a result of that, I had a lifetime with my grandpa." He couldn't say his Js, those Swedes, he couldn't say jet, he'd say yet, here goes a yet. Couldn't say jelly, pass the yelly, pass the yelly. I had a cousin named Judy, Yudy, Yudy. Come here Yudy.

I just loved him so. I did his funeral. Then in 1995, the old Swan decides to leave the pasture. I've been at the local church 23 years. Yet the Lord was saying, "Swan I want you to be a minister of encouragement. I want you to step out by faith." I said, "All right, Lord, I'm going to do it." So I did in March of '95, but by October of '95, I was a little down, scared. I was wondering, "Lord, am I making a difference out there? Am I planting any shade trees out there? Am I Lord? Could you help me, Lord?" We'd just been to a Promise Keeper's conference in Dallas. I had some old buddies with me down there in the Fort Worth area where we were staying. I'd gotten my mail and I hadn't opened my mail up. When we went back to the house and just sitting around, kicking back, I decided I'll open up my mail. When I opened up this one letter, It basically changed my life. I want to share it with you if you don't mind.

It says, "Dear Dennis, thank you. I can't think of a more appropriate way to start out this letter. In addition, I have a little story to tell you. One day last week, a coworker asked me to have lunch with her because she had some tapes that I really needed to listen to. She'd been trying to get me to do this for some time. I finally agreed. We began listening and this extremely funny man was telling stories about growing up. They were identical to my childhood memories. I didn't know your name at the time. He talked about growing up in the country, being Swedish, and I thought, I must know this person. Then I read your name off the tape. I couldn't believe it. I knew our families were acquaintances in some way.

I finished listening to that tape and then I listened to another of your tapes. I can not put into words how these tapes made me feel. I don't think I've laughed that much in I know at least 10 years. You see, I am one who takes myself and life too serious. I was having a rotten week and you made me laugh and feel good for a change. I took the tapes to my parents to listen to. Just as I had guessed, your parents were the Swanbergs. I'd heard many wonderful things about all my life. My parents are Mary Anne and Obert Sonbech," good Swedish name, "My grandparents were Lee and Hazel Anderson, who lived down the road from your grandparents.

As I understand it, grandpa pulled your grandpa out of the cotton gin. In fact, my mom and dad remember you when you were knee high to a grasshopper, as daddy would say. Anyway, I just had to let you know what a difference those

tapes have made in my life. Not many of the problems have gone away, but when I find myself thinking too hard and getting too serious, I pop in one of those tapes and laugh as I have never heard them before. It makes the problems of life not seem quite as overwhelming. You have a great gift from God. I know I am thankful. It is truly a small world, Cynthia Sonbech." Folks, you never know when you might be planting a shade tree for somebody. Lee Anderson planted a shade tree for me where I got to have my grandpa for many, many years. Little did I know that I got to plant a shade tree for his daughter. It's that way, isn't it, in the kingdom? I want to be a shade tree planter. I hope you do too.

I can still go back to those shade trees out there at grandma and grandpa's on Sunday afternoon. We went out there every Sunday afternoon. Even when I was a teenager, I went, "I don't want to go out there in the summer." My dad, "Hey, you going out there, You going to be there a little while and you hug on your grandma and then you can go on." I look back now and wish I hadn't rushed off so. I remember seeing my daddy, my grandpa, and my uncles, they'd say, "Let's go out and sit underneath the shade tree. Grandma bring us a pot of coffee." Man, she'd make that coffee, it was in that glass coffee pot that percolated on the stove.

Sometimes she'd get talking because she's a talker and she'd forget about it. It'd get hot. It'd be hot, hot coffee. She'd bring that out, bring some cups and saucers to my daddy and my grandpas and my uncles. She'd give them that coffee and then she'd go back in and when she'd go back in, my daddy would look at my grandpa, my grandpa would look at my uncle, they look at each other, make sure she was gone and they'd saucer their coffee. Pour it into that, remember that? Some of y'all done it. If you did that in Cracker Barrel, your wife would kill you.

Came across this poem and I'm going to ask my friend Jimmy Stewart to help me with it. I think you'll enjoy it. It goes like this. "I'll never make a fortune and it's probably too late now, But it doesn't matter all that much because you see I'm happy anyhow. As I go along life's journey, I'm receiving better than I sold. I'm drinking from the saucer, because my cup has overflowed. I haven't any riches and sometimes the going gets a little tough, but I got two kids, Chad and Dusty, and a wife Laurie and they love me and that makes me rich enough. I thank God for all his mercies and all His blessings He's bestowed. You see, I'm drinking from the saucer because cup has overflowed. Oh, I remember when times were rough and my faith got a little bit thin, but all of a sudden the clouds broke and that old sun peaked through again.

Lord help me not to gripe about the rows, the rough ones that I had to hoe, I'm drinking from the saucer cosmic cup is overflowed. As God gives me the strength and courage, when the way is steep and rough, I'll not ask for other blessings. I've already been blessed enough. May I never be too busy to help another carry his load, you see I'm drinking from the saucer because my cup has overflowed. As I plant some shade trees with a legacy of love, I'll plant each one with a blessing that comes from above and I'll not worry so much about the

shade I've bestowed, I'll just keep on planting and drinking from the saucer because my cup has overflowed.”

I want to be a shade tree planter. I want to be like God who planted an old shade tree bush for Moses. I want to be like him who planted a shade tree for Nathaniel so he could sit there in the shade and think about the things of God. I want to be like the shade tree planter God Himself who planted a mustard tree bush, tree if you will, just to be used as an example for a preacher, an illustration. I want to be like him, the one who planted an old rugged shade tree on Calvary so that we might have that shade of salvation and hope and love. I'm going to tell you something, old Swan's going to be a shade tree planter. How about you? Be a shade tree planter. Would you be that shade tree planter? Let me hear you. Would you be that shade tree planter? Say amen.

Audience: Amen.

Dennis Swanberg: Amen. Thank you so much for letting the Swan be with you. It's been a blessing. Keep planting those shade trees. Shade trees of joy and laughter for a long, long time. God bless you.

Roger Marsh: Proverb 17, verse 22 reads "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Sometimes it's good to just sit back and laugh. I hope that today's program allowed you to do just that. You've just heard the third and final installment of a series featuring author and humorist Dennis Swanberg and we've titled that series, "Planting Shade Trees." Dennis published a book by that same title in 2014. There's an accompanying DVD by the same title as well. Go to denniswanberg.com if you are interested in finding out how to purchase a copy of the book, the DVD, or any of the rest of his feel good content, you'll be glad you did. Now, if you missed any part of the three day broadcast series here on Family Talk, just go to drjamesdobson.org/broadcast, or you can always give us a call at (877) 732-6825. We have team members standing by 24/7 to answer your questions about the JDFI, to take your prayer requests, and to pray with you.

Again, that is (877) 732-6825. Thanks again for making Family Talk a part of your day however you listen to us and wherever you are, we are so glad you found us and we hope you'll listen again tomorrow. May the Lord bless you and yours, as you continue to grow in relationship with Him.

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