



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Christ-centered Higher Education that Impacts the World with Truth – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Dr. Donald Sweeting

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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, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and we are over halfway through back to school week here on the program. I hope that you've been encouraged by the specially selected programs on the topics of education and faith that we've been airing here over the past couple of days. Whether you're a grandparent who has pick up or drop off duty, a busy parent who barely got the back to school shopping done, or if you're a student yourself, we want to wish you great success as you transition into another school year.

Today here on Family Talk, our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, will be discussing the importance of Christian higher education with Dr. Donald Sweeting of Colorado Christian University. Dr. Sweeting is now chancellor of Colorado Christian University, also known as CCU, and co-chair of the Western Conservative Summit. Previously, he served as president of CCU from 2016 to 2022. Prior to his time at CCU, he was president of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, where he was also a professor of church history and regularly taught core and elective courses. Dr. Sweeting also served as the senior pastor of Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church in Greenwood Village, Colorado, for 12 years. He earned his bachelor's degree in history from Lawrence University and a master's degree from Oxford University. He then went on to receive his doctorate in historical theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Sweeting and his wife, Christina, have three adult sons and one daughter.

What you're about to hear was recorded just outside of Denver, Colorado, at the Western Conservative Summit earlier this year. Let's join Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Donald Sweeting right now here on Family Talk.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Dr. Sweeting, thank you so much for joining us on this edition of Family Talk. Dr. Dobson sends his regards. He so respects and loves the work at what's happening at CCU.

**Dr. Donald Sweeting:** Thank you, Tim. It's great to be with you. And we have a long-time respect for Dr. Dobson. When I was a pastor, of course, I read so many of his books because

I was guiding parents who had young families, and we had young kids, and we didn't know what we were doing. And the wisdom of our parents somehow didn't hit us on parenting. So he was a godsend, and he remains very helpful friend and ally just in that area. Let alone everything else.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes. We also have a mutual friend, he's gone now, but Dr. Larry Crabb, who was on faculty there at Colorado Christian University, one of the pioneering Christian psychologists of our day. Good man.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Good man. He founded our counseling program. The thing I appreciate about Larry so much is not only was he brilliantly skilled in his field, but he saw the need to bring it back to the Bible and to let theology and biblical theology really shape his understanding of psychology rather than vice versa.

Dr. Tim Clinton: He had a real affection for biblical community.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How we needed each other.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, love Larry.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Sweeting, as we get started, as president of CCU since 2016, obviously you have a strong passion for Christian education. I share that passion, being at Liberty for a long time, still serve as executive director of the Center for Mental Health Addiction Recovery at Liberty, but God's been doing some amazing things in colleges and universities, and Colorado Christian University, there's some exciting things going on there. Tell us a little bit about what's happening. I think you're highest enrollment ever in school history now.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: That's right. We just graduated our largest class ever. We are in our 12th and approaching our 13th consecutive year of record enrollments. And this is in a time when in the last two years, college undergraduate enrollment has declined by 9% nationwide. So this is a rather stunning thing. There's a lot happening under the surface that I think is compelling.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, it is. Over 200 academic programs and more. I love seeing that happen. I love seeing Christian schools flourish. We've got a lot to talk about on Christian education, but-

Dr. Donald Sweeting: We do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's press in. Mom and Dad's listening, maybe some high school seniors, people thinking about going on to college, Colorado Christian's on their radar. Why is Christian education important to you?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Well, generally, Christian education is important because it's important in the Bible. From Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6, of parents training their children to Proverbs, the importance of instruction and wisdom, to the great commission, teaching them to obey all that I've commanded. So biblically, everybody should be concerned about Christian education.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The decision about where to send your kids, pretty tough one for parents.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Big decision. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Probably a lot of push and pull too. Do I go to a state school, do I go to Christian school? But why should Christian parents care about where their kids go?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Oh my, because it is going to shape them in terms of what they get in the classroom, who their mentors and models are, and who their lifelong friends are, the community they have around them. That's critical.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know that was true in my life. Those undergraduate years and then grad school became really formative. A lot goes on. A lot of parents have concern that this is where the potential for losing their kids, especially in their faith. You hear all the time when kids go to school, they go off to college, that's where things start spinning for them. Have you seen that? Do you believe that to be true?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Oh yeah. And it's not just their faith that gets rocked, it's everything that gets rocked. So we're seeing so much in secular education where students go in, parents hope for the best, students hope for the best, and often the student comes out despising our past as a nation, deploring our present, that we're all victims, and despairing over our future, there's no hope because it's all going to fry from global warming. So there's a shift that takes place. And parents who have poured their lives into their children, they entrust them to a school to build them up, and instead they get totally deconstructed. And I think we're also seeing a lot of parents go, "My alma mater is losing its mind. I don't trust them." And so, they're losing their confidence in the value proposition of so much of secular higher education.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I agree with you. I know there's been, even recently, a couple of schools making the news. Grove City College in Pennsylvania, there's some pushback over critical race theory happening there. And I know the board was having to make a lot of hard decisions. Seattle Pacific University recently, the LGBTQ community debate going on up there, their board of trustees making hard decisions, important decisions. And I saw where Franklin Graham applauded them.

These are challenging times for Christian colleges and universities. I want to go into maybe something a lot of parents don't know or understand, and that is the mission statement of a college or university. They have a clear mission statement that represents why they exist. And in that process of accreditation, we hear that word a lot, that these regional accrediting bodies actually have a process that the school participates in called institutional effectiveness. And they're to demonstrate that they are accomplishing their mission. And what you're saying, it should be that if this is a Christian school and we have a mission of training up champions for Christ, if you will, is that showing up even in the classroom with the professor.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Right. Yeah. So unfortunately, sometimes there's false advertising. We're a Christian university and we will honor Christ, but then what you get in the classroom, they're not in sync, what the school promises and the faculty that they've hired. And I think one of the unique things about CCU right now, and it's always a challenge of course for every president, but there's so much alignment between our faculty and our strategic priorities and what we believed. Even the accreditors said, "We're just shocked that there's that much alignment." And that's not to say there's no freedom, there's no academic... There's lots of it. There's more than I think even at secular schools, but it's to say that they're bought in to what we're doing, and what we promise to deliver actually happens.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Therefore, the administration, the faculty, the campus culture, all these things become really, really important because they flow together.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: They do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And they impact the trajectory of that child's education.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Tim, every full-time faculty that we hire, we have a team that interviews them, but I interview them and grill them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Love that.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: And it's partly because I want them to be a great fit, I want them to be happy, but I also want to be faithful. And part of the job of a president is to keep the university faithful to its mission and its values that... And as we know, there's this huge story of not just academic drift, but mission drift in Christian higher education. It's a very sad story.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There is. In that, then, I guess it's logical that you conclude so goes the faculty, so goes the institution. It better be anchored by great administrative leaders who are passionate about staying faithful to God, to that calling and that original purpose and mission of that institution.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Amen to that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's go a step further. You gave an address to some incoming students. It was very impressive. I read through it, but you talked about the value of attending a Christian school, Christian university, and you shared some elements here that you felt were really unique or distinctive as to why they were at a Christian college. You began with the issue of truth. And I want to just work down through those for a moment.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Why is truth important? Because we know in this culture, it's unbelievable. Truth is relative. It's my truth, your truth, everybody's truth, whatever feels good. And that thinking... And people call it critical thinking. I'm like, it's insanity.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: It's insanity. Right. Yeah. And we live, you've heard the phrase post truth, and our universities are post truth. In fact, the whole post truth movement originated in many of the universities with academics who said, "There is no truth. It's just relative. It's up to you. There's your truth and my truth." Lots of people are offended by the idea that there's truth with a capital T, but you have no university if you don't have truth. So, it's critical.

But it's gotten worse than that because now, we're not just post-truth and post-Christian in the university, it's post wisdom and post virtue or character. We don't teach character. And it's post Western and post America. We don't really want to teach about America and our past. And then it moves to post reason. Reason is oppressive and white supremacist and colonialistic, and you just think, you can't have a university if you go that direction. And that's what's happening in the universities, they have bought into ideas that undermine quality education.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In the book of Proverbs, it says that we're to seek wisdom. A second piece you talked about was that word, wisdom and knowledge. This isn't just about knowing something, about having discernment and wisdom, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom is what we're taught in Proverbs. How does that play into a Christian college or university?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Well, when I talk about the purposes of university, I say number one, it's the pursuit and love of truth. And number two would be the transmission of knowledge and wisdom. And like you said, their knowledge is exploding, so you need wisdom to navigate all the knowledge that's out there. So many books. Where is wisdom found?

And that's where I think a truly Christian liberal arts education offers the best education to humanity because it has a basis for all these things. It's rooted in the God of truth, fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom, Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom are found. There's an integrating coherence to it all. And so, there's a reason then to pass on the best knowledge and the

best wisdom of the past. There's a transmission that's supposed to take place in education. Now that's lost in modern higher education. Nobody articulates it. It may happen here and there, but there's an embarrassment to well, we don't want to pass on the humanities because they're not sure what they believe about the humanities. And we're not sure about liberal arts because, well, we're embarrassed by this and that of our heritage. So there's just such a loss of confidence that wisdom is not a part of the package in higher education.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I so hope that parents don't miss this conversation because it is critical where your kids go to school. And it's pretty threatening. It's frightening when you really think about the outcomes that we're seeing. Keep going here for a moment, character and learning development, how significant we need to deepen our faith, and then to prepare for future challenges. I think most kids, when you ask them about going to college or whatever, they, "I'm going to have this major, and I'm going to go make bank. I'm going to make a lot of money. That's why I go to school." But at the end of the day, Dr. Sweeting, what I sensed and what I've read and what I've seen in you and the work you're doing, and hopefully it's representative of Christian colleges and universities across the board, is regardless of major, this is about God's calling in your life.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Absolutely. Yeah. So originally, you didn't go to college to pursue a job. The liberal arts idea was you go in to get the tools of learning and be exposed to things that'll help you with all of life. And that's being slowly changed in colleges all across, where everything's becoming professional. But there are colleges that still hold onto this undergraduate ideal, where you want to prepare people for a life, not just a calling. Yes, you don't want to ignore the calling and the training in counseling or psychology or history or education. Those are important, but you need basic skills.

And so we have a core curriculum at CCU that has won us a lot of awards and put us in some really high categories of being a unique school. And it's premised on the fact that students are going to probably have about 14 jobs by the time they are 50 years old.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: And so, if you specialize too early, you're out of luck with the next job, generally. Whereas if you get tools of learning, you understand the basics of writing and thinking and English and math and science and history and American history and theology and Bible, that's transferable. You're ready for a lot of different jobs. And yes, you can specialize in something in your junior and senior year, but go someplace where they're going to give you that basic foundation. And a lot of schools don't do that anymore. They have a cafeteria curriculum where you can just do what you want to do.

The great subtraction or retraction is one of the stories in higher education, where the model was competence, character, Christ-centered faith. Even

Harvard, Oxford. They took away the Christ-centered faith part, and they whittled it down to, oh, we still believe in character and competence.

But guess what? They've taken the character part out. Harvard will explicitly say, "We don't teach that. We don't even hire for that because we can't agree on what it is." So then they're down to competence. Now you can get good technical training at some of these schools, but remember, Germany was the most educated nation in the world when Hitler came to power. Competence on its own could lead you into really challenging places. You need character, and you need a basis for that. And so that's where a truly convictionally Christian college offers you much more. And I would add to that, we also add constitution. We want our students to have an appreciation for our constitutional republic and come away as good citizens who understand why it's so special.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host. Our special in studio guest today is Dr. Don Sweeting. He's the president of Colorado Christian University, delightful conversation about the direction of our Christian colleges and universities. Dr. Sweeting, along with that, it's one thing to stay on mission and to keep everything at a college or university flowing in a direction that ultimately honors God and brings delight to those who attend and who graduate from there and go on into their careers, their callings in life.

But there's another challenge that's happening in modern day culture, and that's this Christian colleges and universities coming in the cross-hairs. A lot of challenge that's out there. And I know that you're familiar with the lawsuit that was filed with the DOJ, the Department of Justice, back in 2021, where I think about 40 LGBTQ students filed this lawsuit. Liberty, a bunch of other schools were named in it. CCU was named in it. And in it, the pushback was that they were being oppressed by basically the teachings of these colleges and universities.

Dr. Sweeting, your thought on that? I know that the Department of Justice backed off, said that they would support and defend that carve out that's in Title IX related... That religious exemption piece. But it seems like this thing's only moving or cascading, if you will, off the cliff. And where do you see it going?

Dr. Donald Sweeting:

Yeah. I have to be careful here because we're involved in this, so I can speak generally to that. And I think one of the strengths of American higher education has been the diversity of institutions. Lots of different schools to serve lots of different people. And one of the strange things about the left is they'll tout diversity, but then when it comes to a school that believes something different from their agenda, they're no longer interested in diversity. It's out the window. And so there's a move to say, anybody who doesn't agree with our progressive agenda, we are going to deny you government funding, and we're going to take your accreditation away.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And let me say something. That's serious, because a lot of these smaller Christian college universities can't withstand that infliction of punishment, if you will.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Well, it is infliction of punishment, first of all, through regulations where they regulate you to death, and it's very expensive to get involved in these suits. But then the end game is we take away the government funding, and we take away your accreditation, and we destroy you. And that's the end game.

So you have to fight it. And you have to say, "Look, we've been strong because we've had this diversity of missions." Faith-based schools have been the backbone of American higher education and Western higher education. And it's only recently that there are some who are so intolerant that they want to wipe you away and get rid of what you do. And by the way, we train so many kids who can't afford higher education. They're first generation college students. They're going to sweep all that away as well. And it'll be disastrous.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It will be. And I want to make sure our audience, our listeners understand why we're saying that. When they say they're going to take away title... For funding, federal funding, grants, and more, what they're saying is if you are attending a school that does not adhere to these regulations that we're imposing, then we're going to withhold that federal funding. In other words, GI Bill money could possibly be on the table. Pell grant money could be on the table. And more. And what that means is how many students at CCU actually received that kind of funding?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Oh, many. Many. There are some schools that have gotten off a lot of government funding. They're not completely off the hook, by the way, on all this, because they want to take away their accreditation as well. And then, you have to deal with all the local agencies that are not going to license your students. So this goes far beyond just Pell grants.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then what happens is it creates a domino effect and moves into program accreditation then, issues like in counseling and psychology and other programs, law, business, what have you.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Right?

Dr. Tim Clinton: It all comes up onto the table.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: And it's not just you won't have policies that allow, let's say, same sex relationships and all the rest. It's we don't want you to teach, for instance, that marriage is for a man and a woman for life. That's God's design. And we don't want you to teach that sex is for marriage, and we don't want... And then it'll go to we don't want you to teach that God created people, male and female. It just goes everywhere. And by the way, we'll sue you if you teach those things. So, they're really out to fundamentally transform Christian schools so they cannot



be Christian. They cannot teach what Christian schools have taught from the beginning, which goes back way beyond Christian schools to Mosaic law in the Old Testament.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The Department of Justice is responsible for defending federal statutes in court. And the filing now reads that it will adequately defend the case of these religious schools and this religious exemption. However, the Equality Act we saw wind up in the Senate and other things were just more efforts to continue push the ball in this direction, and the administration seems like they're locked in to accomplish this particular task.

Dr. Sweeting, that's a sobering moment in higher Christian education. It is something that everyone who's listening certainly could come around and pray earnestly that God would lead and guide our efforts here to help protect our schools and those people who hold sincerely held religious beliefs.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Right. And I think a lot of Christians are... They don't like conflict. And so, they don't want to get involved, or they don't think it's really going to touch us in some of these areas. And the truth is it is, it will. So you have to speak out. Pastors, you have to speak up for just basic biblical teaching of what is a marriage, the sanctity of life, and things like that. These are gospel issues. And those in the pew, you have to speak out for religious liberty because this touches your local Christian schools, your classical schools, your faith-based schools, and as well as your Christian universities.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Sweeting, there's so much more to talk about and so look forward to tomorrow's broadcast where we're going to jump in and go a little deeper here.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Okay.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But I'll tell you what, we tip the hat. And I know Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, and the entire team, they have such respect and appreciation for what's happening here at Colorado Christian University. And we thank you for taking time to join us.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Thank you, Tim. Great to be with you.

Roger Marsh: In Proverbs 3:13-14, we read, "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she, wisdom, is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."

God's Word puts a lot of stock in the importance of gaining knowledge and wisdom. Because of this, Christian colleges and universities should strive to provide the highest level of education in every field of study that they offer. You've been listening to Family Talk, and that was the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Dr. Donald Sweeting, chancellor and former president of Colorado Christian University. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to

hear the conclusion of their conversation and for the final installment of “back to school week” here on Family Talk.

Now to learn more about Colorado Christian University or Dr. Donald Sweeting, visit [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk today. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, also known as the JDFI, we are dedicated to strengthening families and defending righteousness in the culture, and we couldn't do it without your prayers and support. So thank you for praying for us and thank you for considering a financial contribution this month to help support our ministry. And please join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi, everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton here for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The news comes in all kinds of shapes, sizes, and formats these days, but how do you cut through the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? Come to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for your everyday life, and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy, connected families. Go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). Sign up today. That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).