



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Life Without Limbs – Part 1

Guest(s): Nick Vujicic

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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: When we go through storms in our Christian walk, or feel that life sometimes just isn't fair, we question the identity of God and how the ruler of the universe could allow bad things to happen to us. This program will attempt to reveal how God works through the worst of situations for his glory. Hello, and welcome to Family Talk with your host, psychologist and bestselling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. Our guest today is Nick Vujicic, and he has an amazing testimony. He was born with a condition called phocomelia, which left him without arms or legs. Nick will talk about how depression and worthlessness controlled his childhood, but how God showed him his value and purpose in life. Let's listen now to part one of this conversation we've titled "Life Without Limbs," here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Here is the primary question that most of us have to grapple with at one time or another. When things look dark and our lives seem to be falling apart around us, is God still who he says he is? Is the scripture still accurate? Does he think about me? Does he have a plan for my life when everything seems to be unraveling? That is our topic for today. And I've invited a young man to be with us today who has grappled personally with that all important question, perhaps on a level that most of us will never experience. His name is Nick Vujicic, and he's the founder and president of a nonprofit organization called *Life Without Limbs*. He's told his personal story on a number of television and radio programs, including *CBS 60 Minutes* and *ABC's 20/20*, *Life Today With James Robison*, and so many others. I'm telling you it is an honor, Nick, to have you here and to see the way the Lord is using you in a way that I'm sure not even you would have believed in the beginning. Thank you for taking the time to come and be with us.

Nick Vujicic: It is my honor and privilege to just see you face to face, and thank you for the privilege of just being able to share what God has asked me to share. But I just want to tell you, you have been a personal encouragement to me and my family in my childhood and teenager years especially.

Dr. James Dobson: You are from Australia.

Nick Vujcic: Yes, sir. And I moved from Australia to start the headquarters of our ministry in California.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we don't have the benefit of television or videotape here today, so we're going to have to explain to people what we can see and people can't see through radio. But explain your birth defect and tell us a little bit about your story.

Nick Vujcic: I was born without arms or legs, but I do have a six inch appendage to the bottom left of my torso, and it's my foot. I have two toes there, and so God's given me enough to do the peace sign still, and I have two toes. And with it, I now type 43 words a minute on a normal computer, and I'm mobile to walk and swim and golf and fish.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you golf?

Nick Vujcic: I hold the ... I don't drive or pitch, but I definitely putt. I love putting. And I hold the stick, the putter, in my shoulder and clench it with my cheek, and I aim it pretty well. I was playing pool last night as well, billiards and stuff. So I love to try new things. I always tell teenagers at public schools, "You don't know what you can achieve until you try it." But to the Christian schools, I say, "You don't know what God can do until you trust him." So I was born without arms and legs. There was no medical reason as to why this had happened.

Dr. James Dobson: They really have no idea.

Nick Vujcic: Correct. My mom actually was a nurse, and she delivered hundreds of babies before I was actually born. I was her firstborn son, and I have a brother and a sister born after me with arms and legs, and they still have no explanation. But we know that God certainly had a plan. And I love it how you were opening up about how God has thoughts, that he has for you. I love it in Psalm 139 where he says, "He has more precious thoughts of you than all the grains of sand in the world."

Dr. James Dobson: Can you understand that, Nick? How could the God of the universe, I mean the God who has no needs and no limitations, and he knows all of us, and thinks about us, and has a plan for us? He says it, I believe it, but I don't understand that.

Nick Vujcic: I don't think we'll understand a lot of things about God until we see him face to face, and that's okay by me. All I know is that he is with me, and no matter what he puts me through, he does have a greater plan for my life, even when God doesn't make sense. But that's where we do step out in faith. And I love an acronym of faith that I came across about a year ago, FAITH, full assurance in the heart. When you have faith in the promises of God, it gives you the courage to step out and overcome the lies.

Dr. James Dobson: But you did struggle with that as a little boy. Let's go back to your birth. Your mother suspected when she was carrying you that something was going wrong.

Nick Vujicic: That's correct. She had a premonition, a feeling that something is going to go wrong in her first pregnancy. They had ultrasounds done both at week 20 and week 32, and I expand on this in my book. And I interviewed my parents and really got to the depth of all this, even at the birth room and now it all was handled. But they actually had-

Dr. James Dobson: Wait a minute. I'm going to give you an opportunity to say the name of that book because I want people to know it.

Nick Vujicic: The book's called *Life Without Limits*. And I actually had a wonderful time interviewing my parents and how it actually really was. So anyway, they had no warning. And at my birth on the fourth of December, 1982, I mean, my parents' world was turned upside down. And the doctors couldn't believe it, and the nurses were crying. What happened? They don't know.

Dr. James Dobson: So, in essence, for those that can't see, your body consists of a head, a neck, and a torso, and a small foot.

Nick Vujicic: That's correct. And all organs are there, all my body's there except the arms and legs. So I don't have ... Some people wonder if I have phantom pain or any of that. I don't have that. That's more for people who've had amputations.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, how did your parents deal with this? I mean, that's quite a shock to them, no doubt.

Nick Vujicic: Right. My dad took a lead in our household to hold me first. And I have to explain just one thing to set this up. My father's head was next to my mother's head as she was giving birth to me. And though his angle was little higher, from up higher, so he could see me coming out, and he saw my shoulder and he just lost all of his blood pressure and his balance, and his stomach turned upside down when he saw my shoulder without an arm. And he just didn't want to say anything to my mom until he could just fathom what he just saw. He knew what he saw was real, and so he actually because of physical sickness, he actually walked out of the room and into the hall without a word. And the nurses started crying when they held me, and the doctor held me low enough, so my mother couldn't see. And the doctor was just staring. And my mother's like, "What's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong?" And he said, "Phocomelia," which is a medical term given to a baby being born without limbs for no medical reason. And she knew exactly what that was because of her experience.

Dr. James Dobson: She was a nurse.

Nick Vujicic: She was a nurse. The doctor came to see my dad, and my dad said, "My son, he has no left arm. I saw his shoulder. He has no left arm. What's going on?" And

the doctor said, "No. Your son has no arms or legs." And he said his knees nearly buckled, nearly fell to the floor. He couldn't believe it, couldn't even imagine it. And he came out there, and he was a little upset that the doctors told my mom without him there. He wanted to be there for his wife. And during that time, the nurse put me beside my mother, wrapped up, and she just was in so much shock, just didn't know what to do. She didn't want to touch me. She said, "I don't want to see him, take him away," so they put me in the nursery.

My dad came back, I was already in the nursery. And my dad's like, "Where is he?" And they said, "He's in the nursery." And my dad asked my mom, "Can I go see him?" She said, "Yeah." So he came to see me, and he came back and he said, "He's beautiful." And so he took a lead in holding me. My mother couldn't breastfeed me, just because of the emotional trauma. Both of my parents' parents offered to take me in case they didn't feel adequate to raise me up, but both my mom and dad were unanimous in saying, "We'll raise this son that's God's given us."

Dr. James Dobson: Now your father is a minister and a man deeply committed to Jesus Christ. How did he deal with this spiritually?

Nick Vujicic: Now both my mom and dad were Christians, and they both planted a church 11 months before I was born. And it took my mom, first of all, about four months before she came to terms with it. My dad was the one who helped me a lot as a small toddler. But they both had full-time jobs as well, so he was a lay pastor, he had three jobs. My mom was working shift work, and so my hat comes off to them. They are my heroes. They say, "We only did what any other parent would've done in our situation." But they always say they took one day at a time with Jesus Christ by their side. That's how they did it. But the whole church was mourning as if the pastor's son had died. Why did God let this happen? They're not just good people, they're Christians who planted churches. Some people didn't know what to think of it. But in the end, it was a beautiful thing.

I have a very large family. My mom and dad have many siblings. And so between my uncles and aunts, we have 27 first cousins. And so I was beautifully surrounded by love and acceptance and support, even as I grew up. But it was difficult for them to fathom it at the very beginning.

Dr. James Dobson: Now as a toddler, did you begin to realize you were different? Or did you not know?

Nick Vujicic: As a toddler, I don't believe I knew that I was different at all. That did not really sink in until age five or six when I actually went out to kindergarten and school, where kids would look at me and tease me. I already knew that I was a little bit different, but I didn't think it was such a big deal. I knew I couldn't do what the other kids could do. I knew I couldn't go on the soccer field, or ride a bike, or all that sort of thing. But by age five, I was riding my skateboard and I was driving my wheelchair at age two and a half, and all these things. I didn't think it was

such a big deal until I heard, "Wow, look at you. You look funny," or, "You're an alien," or these things. It was very difficult at first.

I mean, obviously having a lot of unwanted attention was the first thing. A lot of kids couldn't know how to interact with me. Does he have a mental handicap? A lot of them, half of them actually, it was more just pointing their finger and laughing. That's just how it is. You go to school today, you go to any single school, whether it's Christian or public, everybody picks on someone, and that's just how it is. And it wasn't just about kids picking on me. It was about demons and angels fighting for my soul to discourage me, to disillusion me, and try and make me believe that I'm alone, that God's forgotten me. I hear my dad preaching about the love God, and even out of Jeremiah 29:11, I say, "Well, wait a second. Either that doesn't apply to me. Either he has forgotten me." I prayed for arms and legs as a child because I learnt about this God of love who can do the miracles, and I've seen Jesus do miracle throughout the word. Well, where was my miracle?

And that was a big challenge where on Sundays, I would sing, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Or even the other one, where it says, "Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world." Then I went to school, and I saw the other children of the world. And I said, "God, if you love me like you love them, then why did you give me less?" And he didn't answer me for many years.

Dr. James Dobson: You are obviously a very strong personality, Nick. That would have crushed many kids, and it almost crushed you. Didn't it?

Nick Vujicic: Well, it did crush me. And by the grace of God though, he held me through and carried the storm that he had gracefully had plans to refine me through.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you begin to feel worthless and weird and different and strange and incompetent and all those things?

Nick Vujicic: All those things multiplied to the 10th degree. I told my mom that I wanted to commit suicide at age eight. I told her every day, coming home crying, "I don't want to go back to school. I don't want to go back to school." And mom and dad said, "No, you have to go back to school." But they have me some pointers. Number one, my dad really wisely encouraged me to press into mathematics. In the things that I couldn't compete in, he pushed me in the things that I could compete in and be the best at, just to bring my confidence up. And so I was very good at mathematics. And then my mom also suggested that when people see me for the first time, because they don't know how to handle me, even today, people, they don't know how to ... Do they shake my hand? I just give everybody hugs.

But for me, it was very difficult at school to see God's plan for me. And if God wasn't there, the only one that I knew who really understood, if he was real, he

was the only one who could understand the language of my tears. My parents at best could hold me when I cried, but they still couldn't help me. No one with arms and legs could encourage me, get to my soul, because I knew they didn't understand. So if God's not there to understand, then I am alone. At age eight I thought, "Well, maybe it's just better for me not to continue to be the biggest burden to my parents," and I would just commit suicide.

Dr. James Dobson: So, you actually contemplated suicide.

Nick Vujicic: So I tried. Not just contemplated, between ages eight and 12, but I actually tried at age 10. I went into a bathtub and I just had a bad, rough day. And I thought, "This is it. I just can't go on." And that evening when I came home, and I'm pretending everything's fine. I would always enjoy watching my mom cook dinner. And I was imagining myself asking them to put me on the countertop and jump off head first and try to kill myself. But I already knew at age eight and 10 that there's a possibility that I'm not going to die. I need to make sure I die.

And so, I decided to ask them to put me in a bathtub, and so I think my dad put me in the bathtub in about six inches of water. I decided to try and drown myself. And so the first two times I turned over, I thought I was doing a good thing because I was just sick of being a burden to everybody. And I wasn't having a good life anyway. It was like my hell, and I wanted out. No one else could help me. And so on the third time though that I rolled over, I realized that I would be leaving my parents with a greater burden. There is one thing worse than having a son without arms and legs, and that's a son without arms and legs who decided to commit suicide. So just the thought of them staring at my grave, I just couldn't handle it. So I loved my parents more than I loved myself at that time, and I decided to stay around, by the grace of God.

You know when you don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, and you just have no more, I know how it feels to have just an exhaustion. You just can't go on. You want to sleep the day away. You don't want to be seen. You don't want to talk to anybody. And it's difficult as a child to sort of fathom all this.

Dr. James Dobson: I can't imagine. I can't imagine.

Nick Vujicic: But what I want to first of all square away, first of all, upfront, is this. Before we move further, if you allow me, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Certainly.

Nick Vujicic: Many people subconsciously, when they see me up on stage, a man without arms and legs, there is a subconscious voice in everybody's head saying, "Oh, my goodness. I will never, ever complain again in my life." When you see someone in a worse off position, you sort of find this quote, unquote, fake and empty shell of hope and motivation to say, "Well, at least I'm not there." But that's no hope, what for me to then say, "Well, at least I wasn't a wounded veteran who

lost his limbs." Or at least I'm not the African girl that I've met at four years old, who's dying of HIV/AIDs, or the 10 year old sex slave that I've met face to face, who was bought for \$700 to have sex 350 times before age 13, and pregnant at 12, and putting her baby under the bed. I mean, everybody has brokenness and pain, and I am not here for anybody to compare their suffering to my suffering because there is no hope in that.

But there is hope in knowing how big your God is compared to your pain. Now that is where hope is. Hope is in the name of the Lord, that he's faithful and just, not just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but to take even the most broken pieces of our life and make things beautiful in his time, to cause all things to come together for the good for those who love him.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about that spiritual journey. How did you come to a face to face encounter with Jesus Christ?

Nick Vujicic: I think I went through something that most people went through, and that is the thought that God owes you something. Here I am as a child, knowing that, quote, unquote, "Nick, you're a sinner. You need to ask Jesus Christ to come into your life. You need to live for him." And that's like God's asking me to do something when I've asked him to just show yourself to me, and he hasn't done anything. Show me that you're real. Show me that you love me. Where are you? I've asked for arms and legs, cried myself to sleep. And so it was this whole thing of believing. Well, where is God? I owe him some, but he owes me.

Dr. James Dobson: Prove to me that you're there.

Nick Vujicic: And I told him between ages eight and 12, I had a heart to say basically, even without me saying, he knew my spirit. I said, "God, I ain't giving my life to you. You owe me an explanation. I ain't taking one step in faith in believing that you're the savior of the world until you save me in knowing. Where are you? And what's your plan, and why?" That's the biggest question. Why? Why does God let us go through pain? And where is he when you ask for something and he says, "No"?

And that was not answered to me until age 15 when I was at a Bible study of our church, where my dad was not ministering, but he was in a church. And we were talking about John nine, and Jesus came through a village and he came across a man who was born blind. And Jesus was asked by all the people around him, "Why was this man born this way?" The disciples asked him that. And they thought that maybe it was because of the sins of him, the man, in a previous life. Or was it because God's punishing him, punishing the parents. Jesus said, "Neither."

Dr. James Dobson: Jesus said, "Neither."

Nick Vujicic: Neither of this happened.

Dr. James Dobson: You're from Australia. I said, "Neither."

Nick Vujicic: Neither. Right?

Dr. James Dobson: You said, "Neither."

Nick Vujicic: I said, "Neither."

Dr. James Dobson: So, either way.

Nick Vujicic: That's right. Jesus said, "It was done so that the works of God may be revealed through him." And I stopped. I didn't even read on. I didn't even read on at 15 about how he spits into, makes a clay, puts it on the man's eyes. I just wanted to know that I know, that I know, that I know, that I know that God knows. Just because the blind man didn't know why and his parents didn't know why, and the disciples didn't know why, it doesn't mean that God didn't know why. And this faith came over me, and I had this peace that came on my heart. And I felt like the Lord asking me a question. Nick, do you trust me? And I said, "Yes, God. If you give me arms and legs, I trust you. But if you don't give me arms and legs, I still trust you." Do not worship God for what you hope he's going to give you. Worship God for who he is and what he's already given you, eternal life and your name written in the Book of Life, peace, love, joy, that arms and legs cannot bring.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you get an understanding of that at 15 years of age?

Nick Vujicic: Yes, sir, I did. I actually had an understanding at age seven that it doesn't matter about how you look at all because people were picking on me without arms and legs, and I could pick on someone with a big nose and freckles. And I realize that you know what, people weren't friends with me because of how I looked, and that's where I realized your value's not determined on how you look, or what you can do, or how much money you have. It's all about the inside.

Dr. James Dobson: Nick, we're really out of time. We're right to the wire, but I want to go on talking to you. There's so much more that our listeners need to hear from you, and in fact, I need to hear from you. And so if you will just stay with us, we will continue to talk. We'll record that and let our listeners hear tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. Who knows?

Nick Vujicic: Beautiful.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you, Nick. I appreciate you being here.

Nick Vujicic: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: You have been listening to the first segment of Dr. James Dobson's interview with author and evangelist, Nick Vujicic, here on Family Talk. If you appreciated

hearing what Nick had to say and would like more information about his book, *Life Without Limits*, go now to our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. And there you'll find more about his ministry and the resources he provides as well. Again, all that can be found at drjamesdobson.org. If today's program encouraged you, we would love to hear about it on our listener feedback line. Call toll free, 844-823-2669. We appreciate hearing from you. All those thoughts and comments are so very helpful to us. Again, our listener feedback line is 844-823-2669.

We hope you've enjoyed listening to the program today. We want to bring you more programs like this all throughout the rest of this year. But we can't do so without your financial support, so go to drjamesdobson.org to make your contribution securely online. Or call toll free, 877-732-6825 and talk with someone in our customer service department about making a donation over the phone. Again, that number is 877-732-6825. Be sure to catch the remainder of the interview with Nick Vujicic on tomorrow's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

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

Dr. James Dobson: I want to tell you about a courageous lady today, who recently passed away at 75 years of age. Her name was Marian Manwell, and I admired her greatly. When she was an infant, she was sitting in a halter swing that broke. The spring came straight down and struck the baby in the soft spot at the top of her head. Immediate medical care was not available, and by the time a physician examined her, there was just nothing to do but cleanse and bandage the wound. "Even if the child lives," he said, "she will be mentally incompetent." But the country doc underestimated the constitution of this little girl. She survived and was blessed with a quick mind, although she was homely and unable to run, or jump, or catch a ball. The abuse she took from other children was incredible.

One day as she trudged to school, a teenage boy came up behind her and said, "What's wrong with you? What are you limping for? Nobody wants to go with a girl who acts like that." Marian had every reason to give up on life because the deck seemed stacked against her, but she was made out of great stuff. She later married, bore eight healthy children, and became an inspiration to everyone who knew her. Now Marian Manwell is gone, and I thought her story might be encouraging to someone today, who has also considered giving up on life. If you're that person, I urge you to hang tough. If Marian could make it, you can make it too.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi, everyone. Dr. Tim Clinton here. When you think about your family and where they'll be when you're no longer living, are you worried? Are you confident? You hopeful? What kind of a legacy are you leaving for your children and their children right now? Here at Family Talk, we're committed to helping you understand the legacy that you're leaving your family. Join us today at drjamesdobson.org. You're going to find helpful insights, tips, and advice from Dr. Dobson himself. And remember, your legacy matters.