



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: No More Secrets – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Dennis Swanberg

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Announcer: Today on Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: Well, hello everyone. This is James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, which is a radio ministry supported by listeners like you. You are in for a real treat today because I'm joined by my very good friend. Now that's a phrase that's often used, but in this case it's for real. I'm talking about Dr. Dennis Swanberg. I'm sure many people in the listening audience have lit up just a little bit hearing his name because you've followed him and enjoyed his work for years. I've known him for 29 years and in fact, Dennis, I think that first time I ever heard your name, somebody who had given me a cassette recording of one of your very, very funny speeches.

Dr. Dobson: I tell you, I could hardly see where I was driving because I was laughing and the tears were in my eyes. That was in Pomona, California, where Focus on the Family was, where I was then. As I drove along I just said, "Our audience needs to hear this guy." I didn't know you, but I loved what you did and talked about your family and everything. I put that on the air and everything lit up.

Dennis Swanberg: Man it was something, wasn't it? Oh my goodness.

Dr. Dobson: It really was an unbelievable experience. And then let's see if you remember this. Shirley and I were in Sarasota, Florida.

Dennis Swanberg: Sarasota, Florida.

Dr. Dobson: It was a Sunday morning and we went to a Baptist church there and you were the primary speaker that day.

Dennis Swanberg: There I was. I was up on the platform and I looked out and I see Dr. Dobson and Ms. Shirley and I went, "Lord, help me be real good." Or, "Lord, take the shallow stuff and make them think it's something." Or, "Let me be like a Billy Graham or something."

Dr. Dobson: And we loved it.

Dennis Swanberg: I mean, I'm up there and oh. And afterwards I'm down at the pulpit ready to shake some hands, but nobody's shaking my hand, they're shaking Jim and Shirley Dobson's hands in the back. Finally when they finished they came up and gave me a hug and Doc, you said, "I want everything you've got." I hated to tell him, "That's the only cassette tape I've got."

Dr. Dobson: It turned out not to be.

Dennis Swanberg: It turned ... No, it-

Dr. Dobson: You did very many recordings and we had them.

Dennis Swanberg: And you guys encouraged me. You encouraged me.

Dr. Dobson: I believe in you, Dennis.

Dennis Swanberg: You did. I asked you one time, I said, "Doc, why have you been so good to me?" And he said, "Well, I like opening up the door for somebody in a big way." And I went, "Man, you opened up the door, the garage door." It was just an unbelievable blessing.

Dr. Dobson: Well, it was really selfish because I was sharing you and people loved me for it.

Dennis Swanberg: Man, you blessed me.

Dr. Dobson: You are a Baptist minister. You have a Doctorate in ministry from Dallas-

Dennis Swanberg: I sure do. Southwestern Seminary. Went to Baylor, majored in Greek and religion and here I've got all these degrees. I got the full 30 hours of Greek and 30 hours of religion, then I got my masters, my Doctorate, and I'm going, "Now here I am out here making people laugh a little bit."

Dr. Dobson: Yeah.

Dennis Swanberg: But you know what? I tell my boys and my loved ones, "You better be standing on the solid rock of Jesus Christ, no matter what you do." If you're a singer, engineer, teacher, humorist, that's important. I'm thankful for my education.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, when did you first discover that you could make people laugh?

Dennis Swanberg: I had fun at home, I had fun at school, but in high school we had won third state championship, John H. Reagan High School, Austin, Texas. We beat Odessa Permian, the Friday night lights.

Dr. Dobson: In what?

Dennis Swanberg: In football.

Dr. Dobson: Football.

Dennis Swanberg: It was our third state championship, and my coach asked me to come up and speak at the banquet. It was a little nervy because they were going to have a politician speak that was under indictment, but they didn't want to un-invite him because of politics. The mamas were upset, "I can't believe we're having this speaker." Coach didn't want to rescind and say, "You're not coming to speak." He was there and so ... I think my coach was pretty smart, he said, "You know I'm going to add a little humor." When he was introducing all of us he came to me and he said, "Dennis Swanberg here, he's a center and defensive end. Dennis does impersonations. Dennis, could you come up here when I finish introducing everybody and do a few for us?" I hopped up there.

Dr. Dobson: Spontaneous.

Dennis Swanberg: Spontaneous. Got behind that microphone and I did Howard Cosell, "No doubt about it. Monday Night Football. Lenny Dawson backed a pass. I did Muhammad Ali, "I'm the greatest." I did Barney Fife, "Anybody see Thelma Lou?" I hadn't done Billy Graham at that time, but I was doing all these and it was like people just needed an excuse to laugh. It broke the ice and people just lost it. All of a sudden at that time the way they responded I thought, "I can make people laugh." I didn't understand it.

Dr. Dobson: What an epiphany. Your life changed.

Dennis Swanberg: I didn't grasp about being a speaker. The next day in the Austin American Statesman newspaper in big, bold letters it said, "Swanberg steals the show."

Dr. Dobson: No kidding.

Dennis Swanberg: And that I upped the politician, who was a big politician in Texas, and I knew I had something. Shortly after that, March 15, 1971, I gave my life to Christ on a Monday night, I was 17. All of a sudden I had these evangelical preachers coming up to me going, "Hey, why don't you come speak to our youth, you can do these voices." I went, "Is that appropriate in a church? Is it okay to be funny at church, or humorous?" They went, "Oh yeah. And then you could end up talking about being an imitator of Christ." I went, "Is that in there somewhere?"

Dennis Swanberg: That's how it got started and one thing led to another. Ended up pastoring in the local church 22 years and then in 1995 I resigned from First Baptist Church West Monroe, Louisiana, I love those people, to do this full-time. Well Doc, that was 25 years ago. Here's an interesting story. When I resigned, the next day y'all had replayed one of my cassette tapes. It was like a Billy Graham movie and I just couldn't believe it. I've had a great life, the Lord has blessed me.

Dr. Dobson: I've got to ask you about that because the standard understanding, or maybe a cliché about comedians, is that they came out of pain.

Dennis Swanberg: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: In fact, let me tell you, Jonathan Winters, one of the funniest man that ever lived was talking candidly on television one time and I heard him. He talked about the fact that he lost his father. His dad ran off when he was just a little kid and the kids teased him because he didn't have a dad. In those days everybody had a dad.

Dennis Swanberg: Exactly.

Dr. Dobson: They would make fun of him and he would beat them up, he would fight. When they weren't watching he would go behind a tree someplace and cry. He said, "All my humor is an expression of pain." I've heard many people say that. Apparently that is not true of you.

Dennis Swanberg: It's true in the sense that my pain wasn't because of my parents. I had great parents, great grandparents, family. I was a little bit of the ADD and we didn't know about ADD back then and so I wondered about myself. I wondered if I was smart or not smart, I didn't do well on tests. How I would cover for that would be with my humor. But here's the deal, Doc.

Dr. Dobson: It's the same thing, really.

Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, it's the same thing. But now, after ... My boys graduated from college, but after they graduated from college, no one's exempt from pain and Laurie and I, we experienced some pain and some hurt. Sometimes it comes early in the day, sometimes pain comes late in the evening, but we experience some pain.

Dr. Dobson: I don't know anybody that doesn't experience pain.

Dennis Swanberg: Everybody does, but not everybody always wants to talk about it. When I'd go out and speak and entertain, I'd preach and I'd entertain, and I believe I was effective, I care for people. But after I experienced and went through, Laurie and I did, with some bumps in the road with our boys, all of a sudden I had a new sensitivity to people that hurt. Because I remember I'd be out there at Dana Point speaking at one of those big hotels for a big faith-based group to raise money. They didn't know it, but I knew it, that my youngest son Dusty was just down the road in San Clemente in a rehab, and yet I couldn't go see him.

Dr. Dobson: He was drinking.

Dennis Swanberg: Yeah. I'd have to be up on that stage and laughing, but deep down in my heart I love my Dusty and boy, that was tough. I can flash back to you guys. It's in our new book called No More Secrets.

Dr. Dobson: We're going to talk about that.

Dennis Swanberg: We're very open about it. But I remember is after Christmas in 2008 and Laurie and I and Chad, we came back to Louisiana to Monroe, but Dusty was going to go from Fort Worth down to Austin to see his cousins. Later that night we're trying to text him but he doesn't respond, we can't find him. It's a tough thing when you have your nieces and nephews and everybody and you're just calling police stations and sheriff's departments trying to find your son. My niece, she found him in Georgetown, Texas, he was in jail.

Dennis Swanberg: First of all, Laurie and I, we looked at each other at one in the morning and you know that with your kids you look at each other and that ache in your stomach, that hollowness and like, "What did we do wrong?" I'm supposed to be America's minister of encouragement and I'm thinking, "Well I guess I didn't encourage my own son." So Chad and I, we got in the car and we drove all through the night. We got down there about 7:30 in the morning. I went in and paid his bail. Walked outside and God said to my heart, "If you love him, leave him." I went back inside. I've never heard God speak in an audible voice except through my wife Laurie, my honey love, my sugar babe. But I went back in and I said, "Will y'all just keep him? I don't want him. I want y'all just to keep him."

Dennis Swanberg: Well, long story short, the rest of it's in the book, but they kept him. I come outside. Chad said, "When's Dusty getting out?" I said, "He's not. God told me if I love him, I needed to leave him this time." We got in the car and we're driving all the way back to Monroe, Louisiana. Laurie calls me on the phone and says, "Do you have Dusty? You got Dusty?" I said, "Baby, I left him." "You left him?" I said, "Yes. God told me if I loved him I needed to leave him so I left him." She said, "Okay."

Dennis Swanberg: I got home and he called, collect call from jail. "When are you going to come get me?" I said, "When God tells me to come get you I'll come get you, but Dustin I left you there because He told me if I loved you I needed to leave you, so I'm leaving you." The one verse that I knew in my heart was out of Joshua 1:9 and out of Hebrews, "I will will never leave you nor forsake you."

Dennis Swanberg: When I was at Baylor majoring in Greek, I'm not a scholar but sometimes we'd translate that in the voice of old Billy Graham like, "I'll never leave you, nor forsake you." But actually, if you translate those five negatives in that verse, it really is translated, "I'll never, never, no never, leave you nor forsake you." That's a forever never. I knew that my Lord was with him. All he had was a Gideon's new testament.

Dr. Dobson: Let me give you another scripture that's maybe. The story of the prodigal son-

Dennis Swanberg: Exactly.

Dr. Dobson: Jumps out at us here because he was a wealthy farmer representing God Himself who owns everything, and he could have gone and rescued his son who was eating with the pigs and was destitute and with prostitutes and every evil thing. He could have sent his servants to find him and bring him back, but he did not. In fact the scripture, I think it's the Living Bible, says, "And no one gave him anything." When he came to his senses, those two things are back-to-back.

Dennis Swanberg: Huge.

Dr. Dobson: No one bailed him out, and then he came to his senses. You apparently had a similar situation.

Dennis Swanberg: Yeah, that's right. He probably should have been in a hospital, but I didn't know anything about detox. But after nine days I went and got him, put him on a plane, took him to the rehab. About two or three days later up there he said he came to the place in his life he said, "I am helpless. I need you, Lord." Ever since then, Dustin has been making changes. We all fall and fail and falter. 80% of people relapse, addicts. Well, we all relapse from something. But now Dustin is married. We have a little grand baby, Andrew James Floyd Swanberg, he put Floyd in there for my daddy, Floyd Leon. I thought, "Good night, will all that fit on a birth certificate?" But he's the best little fellow.

Dennis Swanberg: They're going to have another child in April. Giver, thoughtful, spiritual. Worked at Celebrate Recovery at First Baptist Dallas for a year and now he serves our government in lot of ways I can't say. But I'll say this, he's a light. He shares the light of Christ with his life. He does interventions. He goes to meetings and helps people. When people that I know call and they're hurting, they want to call and talk to Dustin. Or likewise, my oldest son, Chad. Both of them have been in recovery and it's ... My oldest son, he's gone through some tough times. And I'm so proud of Chad, he wrote the epilogue of this book. Can I just read a little bit?

Dennis Swanberg: Chad's a good writer. He said, "One of my greatest secrets was my own deception. Although I was very good at deceiving those around me, I was even better at fooling myself. I kept secrets from myself. I avoided responsibility by playing the victim, blaming, justifying, rationalizing so that I didn't have to take credit or accountability for my part in my problems. The actions, behaviors, and choices that I made, however, gave me the life that I had, yet I was still unwilling to pull the curtain back on that secret. Never would I be willing to confess that I was the reason for my difficulties or responsible for my struggles. I could not admit the secret truth that the answer to my problem stared at me in the mirror every morning. Every secret that I kept had to be protected."

Dennis Swanberg: That's just a little bit of what he says, but you feel his heart. But I've learned, Doc, I don't have to shame anybody, they feel plenty of shame already. I need to encourage them. I don't need to enable them, but I've got to encourage them all the same.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. And they need encouragement. I've found that a good, godly, Christian parents suffer more when their kids run into trouble than those who have no faith. Isn't that amazing?

Dennis Swanberg: It is.

Dr. Dobson: It's even more painful to be a believer in a moment like this because the scriptures in some interpretation blame you, the parents, for it. But the truth of the matter is, we all have a free will and your kids can choose. After all, God had a little trouble with Adam and Eve and He was the perfect father and they went wrong.

Dennis Swanberg: Exactly. I tell people that.

Dr. Dobson: You can't afford to blame yourself for what your kids do. Everybody makes mistakes as parents. We all look back on what we did and wish we could do it over because none of us is perfect and we don't have perfect kids.

Dennis Swanberg: I told Laurie, I said, "I may have gotten this from Doc and Ms. Shirley, but Adam and Eve, they had a perfect father, they had a perfect world, but they had a mind of their own and our kids have a mind of their own and we have a mind of our own. We're all in this together." Sometimes I have had to admit that too often my thought has been, "As long as your sin is bigger than mine, I'm fine." But isn't that funny how we are? "I didn't do this or I didn't do this. Well I didn't do that so I feel pretty good about myself."

Dennis Swanberg: I remember one time Dusty came home in 2012, so he had been sober a good while. I always wanted to go to one of those meetings, the AA meetings. My wife Laurie, my honey love, she said, "You don't go unless he invites you, okay? You just wait. You're just always so bold. You just wait and let him ask you." Well, finally one Saturday he said, "Dad, you want to go with me?" So I went with him. We went over there near ULM campus there in Monroe and man, there was a hundred people in there. Well, I've been out of the pastor ... I left First Baptist, West Monroe in 1995, I'd been out 17 years. We still lived there in West Monroe, so I know everybody. I walk in there Doc, I see some old church members. I had my coffee in my hand, I'm going, "Hey!" I'm waving, "Hey! Hey!" There's another, "Oh, hey! How are you doing?" And then I saw the guy that sold me my truck and I'm thinking, "Lord, good night. I don't know how this thing operates but I hope they'll come by where I can introduce myself and say, 'I'm Dennis Swanberg. I'm fine, I'm with my son. He's the one with the problem.'"

Dennis Swanberg: But when I did that, the Lord Jesus said to me, "You self-righteous preacher! Who do you think you are? Now sit down and drink your coffee and learn something." Well that didn't phase me. I thought, "I'm America's minister of encouragement. I've got to keep clean. I can't be associated ... What's this going

to do to me? People are going to walk out and say, 'We saw Dr. Swanberg at an AA meeting.'"

Dennis Swanberg: Then the Lord said, "It's AA Swan, it's anonymous." I said, "Well, I know it's anonymous but there are some Baptists in here and you know they're going to tell somebody." And He said, "Drink your coffee, eat your doughnut and listen and maybe you'll learn something." What I learned that day in 2012 more clearly was, we're all recovering from something. We all need a savior. I need to encourage my boys. I need to encourage others. I hurt with them. I hurt. We all hurt and have pain. How much more so our Heavenly Father? How did he feel? Adam and Eve had two boys and one of them killed the other one. You would be tempted to say, "God, you ain't got a good track record right now."

Dennis Swanberg: But I'll tell you this, what I think. He sure knows how we feel as parents, doesn't he? He knew he loved them so much, he made them some clothes, which took a sacrifice. He clothed them. He covered them with His love. I said in my book, "Sometimes we're pretty good at pointing sin out, but sometimes I'm not as good about helping them confess it." If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. It's not that I have to ... Everybody has to be as bold as Dennis Swanberg today on the radio, tell the whole world. You tell the Lord and a significant somebody, because if not it's like a beach ball underneath the water, if you're not careful it's going to come up and pop you in the face. Why not let the air out of it?

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, you and I today are talking to some very specific people. I can feel their pain coming back through these microphones.

Dennis Swanberg: I do too.

Dr. Dobson: Because they gave everything they had to their kids and they turned out wrong, some of them are in prison and worse. They look at that scripture, the Proverb that says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he's old he will not depart from it." That sounds a whole lot like parental guilt.

Dennis Swanberg: Yeah. Oh, yes.

Dr. Dobson: That if you would have done it right, he would have turned out right. But that is not a promise of God, that is a probability.

Dennis Swanberg: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: Proverbs are not promises. There are all kinds of Proverbs that you say, "Well, I didn't get wealthy when I did everything right."

Dennis Swanberg: Right.

Dr. Dobson: The Proverbs are not promises, they're probabilities. I think that scripture has been misinterpreted to turn around and bite good, godly people who did the best they could and it wasn't good enough.

Dennis Swanberg: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: We need to put an arm around them today and say, "You give that to the Lord."

Dennis Swanberg: Exactly. And you know what, you can't fix it. You can pray for them, you can encourage them, but you can't fix it. But they have to find the answer. You know what both my boys tell me all the time? They say, "Dad, you and mom are great parents." Well Laurie and I know we failed here, we failed there, we failed here, we failed there. But isn't that something? They think we're the greatest. But I'm going to tell you what, there's a time when you need to have a catharsis. You've got to have an emptying of yourself and a cleansing of yourself so that you can be free. When my boys look at me in the face and say, "Dad, you know what our real problem is?" The addict. "You know what the real problem is for us? Selfishness. We are some of the most selfish people in the whole wide world." It hit a note with me because I'm selfish too. We're all selfish. But there is an answer to that selfishness.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, we're really just getting started on the theme of this book, No More Secrets. You have flown out here from Dallas, Texas to be with us today and I want you to sit right where you are and I want to continue this conversation, we'll let our listeners hear it tomorrow, the next time. But I love you, brother. I appreciate you. You want other people to benefit from what you have learned in letting go of secrets and sharing them with others.

Dennis Swanberg: Amen.

Dr. Dobson: We're going to pick that up next time. We're going to start by talking about your grandparents, who have learned some things about this issue.

Dennis Swanberg: Okay.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, thanks for being with us.

Dennis Swanberg: Thank you.

Dr. Dobson: It's always a pleasure to work with you. We'll pick it up right here next time.

Dennis Swanberg: Good deal.

Roger Marsh: You have been listening to Part One of Dr. Dobson's conversation with comedian and pastor Dr. Dennis Swanberg here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and I pray that you have been touched by Dennis's testimony. All of us are sometimes haunted by those mistakes from our past or even those acts of evil

conducted against us. However, isn't it good to know that Jesus can and will forgive us and redeem us from any situation in our past for His ultimate glory.

Roger Marsh: You can learn more about Dennis Swanberg's story when you read his book called *No More Secrets*. We have a link on our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org that has more information on how you can order a copy of that book. There you'll also find information about Dennis Swanberg's ministry and his other popular works as well. You'll find all that information and more at drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the broadcast page.

Roger Marsh: Now while you're on our site, be sure you also click onto our insightful blog tab. We have numerous entries there from Dr. Dobson, Dr. Tim Clinton, and several of our past radio guests as well. Our bloggers focus on current and relatable issues like parenting, marriage, faith and culture. Our goal here at Family Talk is to support you in any area that you might be struggling with, so take some time and read through some of our uplifting blogs when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

Roger Marsh: Finally, did you know that Dr. Dobson's insightful content can be found online? That's right. When you go to the Dobson digital library at dobsonlibrary.com, you'll find that we have cataloged all of Dr. Dobson's articles, blogs, newsletters, and past radio programs as resources for you. Stop looking elsewhere for practical tools and insights to help your family, just go to dobsonlibrary.com and take advantage of Dr. Dobson's years of knowledge. That's dobsonlibrary.com.

Roger Marsh: Tune in again tomorrow for the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's recent interview with author and comedian Dr. Dennis Swanberg. They'll continue discussing the impacts of secrets by sharing stories from their own lives. Dennis will also emphasize the importance of confession and how Christ is our hope in times of need. Don't miss this entire conversation coming up next time right here on Family Talk.

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

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