



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Legacy of Life: 50 Heroes of the Pro-Life Movement

Guest(s): John Stemberger

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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: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you had a restful weekend. Hopefully you had a chance to attend church and maybe go on a hike or read a good book. Well, speaking of books, I do have a suggestion for you. It's called *Legacy of Life: Honoring Fifty of the Greatest Pro-Life Leaders of the Last Fifty Years*. This is a commemorative coffee table style book filled with beautiful pictures, inspiring tributes and captions. This is a tour de force of the founders, builders, strategists, and innovators of the past five decades of the pro-life movement. This was all thoughtfully conceived and edited by today's guest, John Stemberger.

Now, if you aren't familiar with John Stemberger, let me tell you a little bit about him. He's the president of the Florida Family Policy Council, a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect and defend life, marriage, and liberty through education, advocacy and empowerment.

John earned his law degree from the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University and is a practicing attorney in Orlando, Florida. John is also a conservative policy advocate and founder of the Institute for Conservative Studies at Florida State University. In 1992, John was the political director of the Republican Party of Florida for the last campaign run for president George H.W. Bush. John and his wife Olivia, are the parents of four children. Now, this program was recorded at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Orlando. Our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, sat down with John Stemberger to highlight and honor a few of the pro-life heroes of the past 50 years, including our own Dr. James Dobson. So let's join their conversation right here, right now on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome back, and we appreciate the work God's doing in and through you.

John Stemberger: Yeah, Tim, it's great to be with you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You and I have had a lot of conversations. I know you've got an affection and certainly a lot of stories around Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, but any reflections on your part about them?

John Stemberger: Yeah, he's like America's paternal figure. I mean, I have two large bookcases in back of my desk. One has famous people, presidents, and senators, and dignitaries, and the other one has my family on it. And Dr. Dobson's picture of him and I are actually on the family side because that's the way I feel about him. I grew up, my father passed when I was 15, and so there's just a neat thing about men that like that you can look at as a grandfather and a father figure, and he's been that way to America for many years.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, he still has a lot of vinegar in him. He's got some spice when it comes to these issues. He grieves about what he sees in culture. Last time we were together, we were at an event in Colorado Springs, public policy leaders from across the country had come in, and I don't know if you remember this one scene though, but there was something happening in the meeting. It wasn't going well, and Dr. Dobson was getting frustrated and he did what only Dr. Dobson can do, he shut the meeting down. He absolutely stopped the meeting, he was so frustrated.

And then I remember him saying, "We're going to pray." And so he in that moment called the entire room to prayer. And I'll never forget, he gets kind of down on that knee before God and starts praying and saying, "God, it's ominous, it's dark, it's evil." And then he said something that shifted the entire room. He said, "God, it's evil, it's dark, but..." And here were those words. "You are with us and God, we claim that." And there was a shift in that room at that time. The whole thing changed and we were back on track, rolling down the highway. Sensing and calling on God is everything. I think it's been the hallmark of who he is. He so looks to the Lord and continues to and just prays constantly that God would do something and raise up people like you to be that voice.

John Stemberger: The beautiful thing is, in that room, were leaders that because of Dr. Dobson's leadership, were birthed these 40 state policy councils that exist now, and it's really one of the best kept secrets in America. These men and women that run these policy councils, they're humble, they're theologically sound, they're strategic. They pass most of the marriage amendments in the country, and they just do remarkable work. And most of us go under the radar. For the most part, we're doing amazing work, and it's all because of Dr. Dobson's vision of legacy years ago of founding this movement.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, we're here together to talk about what God's done and what he's doing through the pro-life movement. In a lot of ways, and you put together a commemorative piece called *Legacy of Life: Honoring Fifty of the Greatest Pro-Life Leaders of the Last Fifty Years*. But let's step back for a moment and just talk about 50 years of history. You write that powerful leaders were at the helm of the pro-life movement. Advocates who tirelessly worked and saved millions of

precious lives of the unborn, especially during the last five turbulent decades when *Roe v. Wade* came into being, that was what that 1973 court decision?

John Stemberger: Yep, yep.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you reflect back, I mean it must bring tears to your eyes to think about the fight. Some what, 62 plus 3 million babies have now died in this tragedy, where does your mind go when you start just going page by page through this journey?

John Stemberger: So when *Roe* fell, my best friend called me the next day and he said, "John, I remember in college you looked me in the eyes and with great commitment, you said, I'm going to spend the rest of my life working overturn *Roe*." And I don't even remember saying that, but it sounds like something I would've said. And I just began to weep because it was so meaningful to me that he remembered that. And there's something inside of me that bothers me when people do amazing things and they're not honored. I don't know how to explain that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I understand that.

John Stemberger: But it bothers me. And so the Bible says, "I'll give honor what honors due." Right? "Let another man praise you." And that means there's a duty on us to praise people so they don't have to promote themselves. And so there's three reasons why we did this book.

One is to honor those people whose shoulders we now stand on because this is an amazing landmark in time where this horrific decision is gone.

Secondly, we wanted to educate people about the history of the book. So these 50 tributes are actually chronologically ordered in the time and place that they impacted history. And so you learn about the history of the movement through these tributes, very personal tributes.

And then finally, we wanted to energize and motivate the next generation. That's the most exciting part. This book is beautiful. It's striking. It's the kind of book where even if you don't believe in a pro-life position, you would pick up and say, "What is this? This is amazing." That's the kind of intrigue and striking artwork that's in the book. And so we want to inspire young people to become the next Lila Rose, the next David Daleiden and the next Kristan Hawkins, the next Dr. Dobson, because this is a long-term battle. This is an intergenerational battle. We're talking about hundreds of years to be able to get to the place where slavery, we say, "No, we're going to protect unborn children. We can love them both. We want to protect the mother and the baby." And so this is a long term battle. This is a legacy project that was in my heart. I'm just so pleased the way it turned out. It's available right now. Today's the first day it's being available. It's online at legacyoflifebook.com

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here on a special anniversary.

John Stemberger: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Of the *Dobbs* decision last year where *Roe* was overturned. Do you remember where you were when you got the word that?

John Stemberger: I do? I do. It's a part of my introduction. I was in my bedroom and I was getting dressed and I had my handheld looking at the SCOTUS blog, trying to see the new cases come out. And I saw it and I was so nervous. The phone hit the ground and it hit my foot and I was just going nuts. And I just saw it and I was just like, that-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Makes sense because it puts chills through my body right now listening to you and watching you.

John Stemberger: ... I just didn't feel like there was enough to commemorate it. It was the kind of thing where we had some dinners. There's the March for Life, but I wanted a permanent commemorative thing, a piece of artwork, a beautiful piece of history, really. And that's what the book is. It's unique history about these various leaders.

Dr. Tim Clinton: This work, again, I want to make sure our listeners understand what we're talking about again here. This is a commemorative kind of a coffee table work, *Legacy of Life: Honoring Fifty of the Greatest Pro-Life Leaders of the Last Fifty Years* forward by Ben Shapiro and John, you're the editor. And when I thumb my way through the pages here, I'm just amazed at who you profiled.

We're going to talk about the founders, and the builders, and the strategists, and the innovators here in just a moment. But these leaders, what God has done, this is something to put before not just yourself, before others. Let them see what God has done and the faithfulness, the stewardship that has taken place here.

John Stemberger: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Committed to this journey, to battle, to fight for life. John, we also know that even though that *Dobbs* decision came down, the fight goes on, it went back to the states, and there's some real battlegrounds going on right now.

John Stemberger: Well, the good news is we have about 22 states that have almost prohibited all abortions and protect unborn children.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amen.

John Stemberger: But we have an equal number of states that basically allow abortion for any reason up to nine months of pregnancy. And nobody likes to mention that, but

that's actually the case in many of these states. No limitations whatsoever. And then there's a small handful of states. Florida was one of those, but we just changed our law now to six weeks that are kind of in the middle. And so that's where we're at. So this is still a battle, but it's amazing that at least half of America is really pro-life. So, but we're going to have to go to the drawing board in these blue states and just remind people, help them, educate them, show them what's in mommy's belly. It's not a blob of tissue. It's a baby, not a duck or a Buick. It's a baby. And so we have to remind them about the humanity of the unborn child. We just have to go back to the drawing board and educate them and motivate them the same way we got here to begin with.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It boils down to that personhood debate. And I love what's happening with these heartbeat bills and more. Of course, we all stand on the ground of life begins at the moment of conception. So we do have work to do. But I'll tell you what, this is a moment to celebrate. John, I wanted to step back for a moment and just reflect with you on some of those leaders profiled in here, Ronald Reagan, Francis Schaeffer, Phyllis Schlafly, James Dobson. You mentioned Abby Johnson, that next generation, if you will, and Kristan Hawkins, I think of Lila Rose and others. But let's talk Francis Schaeffer for a moment. I remember him coming to Liberty University when I was a student, and "how then shall we live?" And what did Schaeffer pour into your heart and soul, your mind as maybe you read him, heard him, and you think about this battle?

John Stemberger: Jack Wilke is kind of the founding father of the movement, but other than Jack Wilke, I think Francis Schaeffer really stands out when you read these tributes, there are so many people, at least a dozen of these men and women that said, "Schaeffer directly affected me."

Dr. Tim Clinton: You can see these strands.

John Stemberger: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

John Stemberger: How one person's life affects many others. You can see it all throughout the book because each person talks about who affected them and who led them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you think about overturning *Roe*, how did we get that done, do you think?

John Stemberger: Well, it was through many, many years of work. And so really it was through elections. Through elections, we elected the right presidents. President Trump gets a lot of credit for this. I mean, I know he's a very controversial figure, but look, he appointed the right people. Best thing about President Trump is the people he put around him. And that's what was smart. And we brought him to the dance when the mainstream Republicans said, "Hey, ooh, icky poo." We

said, "This is about life, and marriage, and the constitution, and about the republic." And so look, it's about policy, ultimately.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Policy matters, that's the bottom line.

John Stemberger: And so he's the one that made the appointments of the justices that changed the court, and here we are. And so he gets a lot of credit for that along with the movement that brought him there because the evangelicals are the one that stayed with him and were loyal with him to get him elected.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You had mentioned the word honor before, give honor to whom honor is due. And the other goal of the book really was to help educate those who would pick this up, not just of the history, but again of what binds these hearts together, and what the real issues and battles have been, and where people spoke into those issues and how it becomes an apologetic, if you will, for life. Is that really at the heart of what you're trying to get done in and through this?

John Stemberger: I think that when people see someone standing, even standing alone, it inspires them. There's courage there, there's commitment. And I think my goal is to have young people pick up this book and say, "Wow." If this book inspires even one person to rise up and become a huge leader in the movement, then it's mission accomplished. And it's really designed to appeal to young people. In many ways, it's gorgeous, the appeal to Ben Shapiro. We have a tribute in the back to the unknown activists, all the thousands of people who will never be known, will never be honored. We have a tribute to them and attribute finally to the mothers who chose life in the back of the book.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What's so encouraging to me is I've been at the March for Life with our Family Talk team last number of years, and it's this younger generation that's showing up. They call themselves the pro-life generation to say, "Hey, we're going to bring a blow, if you will, to what's happened here, and we're going to stand emboldened to that end." And are you encouraged with the energy you're seeing? No doubt.

John Stemberger: Oh yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I mean the *Dobbs* decisions are a big, big lift, but I mean, there's starting to be an energy, a collective energy that's moving in a direction, that's moving against the tide, if you will, that says, "No more, we're not doing this anymore."

John Stemberger: Yeah, we kind of have a crisis of epistemology. That's a fancy philosophical word, meaning what is real, right? We can't discern what's real anymore. And I think a lot of people are just pushing back and saying, "Enough, we're not going to put up with this just because corporations, and the schools, and the government, says we have to do this." And so we're seeing that in a lot of ways. I think young people are more pro-life than there ever have been. And that's

very encouraging because when that happens, the next generation comes and it's game over. If you can capture the imagination of young people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You've broken the book up into four key areas, founders, builders, strategists, innovators. And I just want to talk about maybe a couple out of each one and why you profiled them. But we talked about Francis Schaeffer upfront. You mentioned Jack Wilke. I'm just thinking any other founder that just really jumps off the page to you that meant a lot.

John Stemberger: It's hard to choose, there's so many of them really.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know.

John Stemberger: But Mildred Jefferson was a Black American woman. She was a physician, Harvard educated person who Ronald Reagan listened to on TV, give a pro-life presentation on public TV. And he was so moved by it. He called her and said, "You have moved me to the core on this issue." And he said, "I want to meet you." And so he literally brought her into the White House and she became the President of Right to Life and was very influential with stuff. And so she's a remarkable human being that most people don't even know about. Most pro-life leaders don't even know about Mildred Jefferson. So she's remarkable.

Dr. Tim Clinton: See those are the kind of stories that... Our lives are built around stories. And that's fascinating to me.

John Stemberger: And in terms of the builders, Dr. Dobson has to be, to me, the strongest show.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, you go into the builders piece. We were waiting to bring up Dr. Dobson.

John Stemberger: I mean, his tribute is called "The Line of Life," and Bob Vander Plaats wrote it, who's the policy council director in Iowa. And if you think about Dr. Dobson's influence. I mean, he saw in advance what was happening, and he built infrastructure. He founded the Family Research Council in Washington, DC and then he suddenly saw that the attacks of the family were state level. And so he got together with funding and some strategy, and with other people, and he started forming this network of state policy councils. And I owe what I do to Dr. Dobson. I mean, he's a hero in our eyes.

And so you think about, without Dr. Dobson, we wouldn't have Alliance Defending Freedom, which is the largest legal force we have. We wouldn't have the state policy council movement. We wouldn't have Family Research Council. So his impact is really remarkable. And then there's all the people that were influenced by him, not just moms and dads that said, "I raised my kid on Dr. Dobson." But there's just the leaders that have been influenced by him, and it's just remarkable.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So yeah, it's that righteousness and culture. Often when I talk to Dr. Dobson, he says, "Tim, we're built on marriage, and family, and we're built on righteousness, and culture, and we can't waiver. We've got to commit ourselves to truth, be anchored in the word of God. Stand boldly on it." Any other builders or maybe strategists?

John Stemberger: So there's a fellow named Mark Crutcher who not a lot of people know about, but he did some amazing stuff and he influences basically Lila Rose, he influences David Daleiden. They were like little kids. They were literally teenagers together in a little Catholic homeschool co-op. And there's Lila Rose and David Daleiden who ended up spending two years of his life going underground, investigating Planned Parenthood. So it's just amazing the stories.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... You said that, 'cause when I've interviewed Lila, just to think about a teenager taking on Planned Parenthood, deciding-

John Stemberger: That's amazing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... Yeah. And what God's done through that effort and the voice that God's given to her for such a time as this, it's encouraging.

John Stemberger: Yep. We call her the thorn in Planned Parenthood side.

Dr. Tim Clinton: She does has a little of that in her.

John Stemberger: Lila Rose, so that's perfect. She's one of the innovators in the book.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As you reflect again on these who have committed their lives to this end, it's got to be some type of common thread. Is there something that kind of weaves its way through the tapestry of all that?

John Stemberger: Great question, Tim. That's a great question. Resilience. I think about William Wilberforce who stood alone as the only member of Parliament, and for 18 years, for two decades, he argued for the end of the slave trade and they said, "You're insane, you're nuts." He was an outcast amongst the parliament members, amongst the society. All these leaders had this resilience where it doesn't matter who criticizes them, they're going to continue to do what God's called them to do. And I think that's the key part that I see is their ability to absorb criticism and pain, and throw it back and not be hindered by it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you think about 50 years, 50 years, five decades, it's a long time. It can get pretty discouraging at times. John, what have you done in those moments of discouragement? How have you kept yourself going?

John Stemberger: That's a great question. When I think about discouragement, I have just developed a sanctified resistance to this kind of pain. When I walk through the Arlington Cemetery and I see row after row of those markers of people that

gave their lives, whatever I'm experiencing is nothing to these men and women who gave their full commitment. And so really what I do is very small. People say bad things about me on the internet, Twitter, it's like, who cares? Right? The bottom line is that this is an issue which we have to be willing to go to the mat on, and we have to fight with every fiber in our body to say, "These are human beings made in the image and likeness of God, and we will fight. As long as God gives us breath, we will fight for the unborn."

Dr. Tim Clinton: That resilience, that perseverance is showing up. And I love to say this, life is winning.

John Stemberger: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Life is winning. John, again, you've put together an amazing work, *Legacy of Life: Honoring Fifty of the Greatest Pro-Life Leaders of the Last Fifty Years*. It's a beautiful piece of work highlighting and profiling those who have been bold and courageous, who often, by the way, stood alone at times, who battled through the discouragement, but God gave them grace and added strength, a book of honor, a book to educate future generations. What a gift to us all.

John, I know you're president of the Florida Family Policy Council, and I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about year two, what needs to happen at the state level, at the federal level? Where's the battle and how do we engage this so we can continue this fight and keep that pro-life movement winning in this post-Roe America?

John Stemberger: So I wrote a national strategy book called *Thinking Clearly After Roe*. It's a five-part strategy, and it involves policy, it involves care for women and their babies. It involves law and involves basically culture of getting direct action. So those are the elements of it. And so half the country, we have states that are almost prohibiting all abortions and protecting newborn children. The other half of the country are just the opposite. They almost allow-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Seem like they're running rogue.

John Stemberger: ... Almost allow abortion for any reason, so we have to go back to the drawing board and these blue states and just say, "Hey, let's start educating people back again. We need to emphasize mothers, abortion hurts mothers." That's a big key factor because it's not just about the baby, it's about that mother who's could be involved with hemorrhaging, perforation of the uterus, sterility. There's just all kinds of issues that come during the abortion, after the abortion. And we need to help women understand that this is hurtful to women, not just to the baby.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What was the name of that book again that you said you just wrote?

John Stemberger: Oh, it's called *Thinking Clearly After Rowe: A Five-Part Strategy*.

Dr. Tim Clinton: *Thinking Clearly After Roe: A Five-Part Strategy.*

John Stemberger: It's available at flfamily.org.

Dr. Tim Clinton: flfamily.O-R-G. I want to encourage everyone out there listening if you too maybe have served out on the front lines, battled for life, we salute you.

John Stemberger: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we'd love to get a copy of this commemorative work into your hands. We're going to have some of the photographs up on our website. You can go to drjamesdobson.org, drjamesdobson.O-R-G, and check out some of these amazing pages and learn more about how you can get a copy of *Legacy of Life*.

John, if they want to know how they can find out more about this beautiful piece of work, this book, where do they go and maybe how can they purchase it?

John Stemberger: Sure. Legacyoflifebook.com, legacyoflifebook.com, and they can purchase it there. There's also a beautiful book trailer, like a movie trailer only it's for a book that's very inspirational as well. So-

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I want to thank you for your courage and strength being on the front lines, standing strong for life, a family policy leader and more. I know it takes a toll, but God gives us strength. He does. And by the way, anytime we're involved in his work, yeah, that's a good thing. And I know on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, they wanted me to make sure and say that to you.

John Stemberger: Thank you, appreciate that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I appreciate you and pray that you'll continue to stand strong, stay faithful, and continue to be bold and courageous, especially for such a time as this.

John Stemberger: Really appreciate what you said because there's a tribute to the unknown activists, and there are many thousands and thousands of people who worked their entire lives, ordinary people doing extraordinary things for a perfect cause. They'll never be known, never be honored. And we have a tribute that honors them in the back of the book, and that's the most special tribute to me in the whole book.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John Stemberger, editor of this new book, *Legacy of Life: Honoring Fifty of the Greatest Pro-Life Leaders of the Last Fifty Years*. John, what a delight to have you, thank you so much for joining us.

John Stemberger: Thank you, Tim.

Roger Marsh:

We do need bold and courageous leaders. I love the way John laid out the structure of the victorious fight of the pre-born and the way he honored the 50 heroes for life by placing each of them in one of four distinct categories, founders, builders, strategists, and innovators. And you know what? We could use a few more of each of those skill sets right now. Perhaps you will be called to stand up for the pre-born, be a voice for the voiceless. Think about it. What is your unique talent and where is your circle of influence?

Well, friend, you're listening to Family Talk, and we just heard the conclusion of John Stemberger talking with our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, and what a dynamic conversation it was. If you felt moved by today's program and you find value in what you hear on Family Talk, why not consider making a monetary donation, during this month of June in support of our ministry? During this month of June, we have been blessed by some special friends of the ministry with a matching grant, but time is running out because the end of June is this Friday.

Just think, every dollar you donate will go twice as far to equip parents, educate kids, and strengthen marriages. Now, the grant only goes up to \$300,000, so please consider a gift today to double your impact. We greatly appreciate your prayerful consideration. Now, to make a donation online, just go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. Or if you prefer, you can make a donation over the phone. Call 877-732-6825. Final reminder. Once again, go to our website at drjamesdobson.org for more information on how you can order your own copy of that beautiful commemorative pro-life book we were talking about earlier in the broadcast. It honors 50 of the greatest leaders of this movement. And here at the one-year anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, it would make a perfect gift. So go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk for more information on how you can order your copy.

I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for your prayers and for making us a part of your day. May God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger in relationship with him, and I look forward to you being with 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.