



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Light from Lucas: Lessons in Faith From a Fragile Life – Part 3

Guest(s): Bob Vander Plaats

Air Date: December 6, 2023

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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, I'm Roger Marsh, today's program is the conclusion of a three-part conversation featuring Bob Vander Plaats, and our own Dr. James Dobson. Bob will be sharing with us how God's greatest miracle might be wrapped up in your biggest problem. And the program you're about to hear is also included in our 2023 Broadcast Collection. Bob Vander Plaats is the president and CEO of The Family Leader, a public policy center in Iowa. Bob married his high school sweetheart, Darla, and together they raised four grown sons. Sadly, their third son Lucas went home to be with the Lord in November of 2021. Lucas was battling a very rare brain disorder, and ultimately lost that battle due to pneumonia. And yet, Lucas made a lasting impact while he was here on Earth, and we can all learn from the life he lived. But before we get started, I do have some exciting news to share.

As I mentioned, the program you're about to hear is part of our 2023 Broadcast Collection, and I'm excited to announce that all this month we have a matching grant in place. So, for any amount that you donate to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, it will instantly be matched, dollar for dollar. Family Talk is a listener-supported program, and every donation you make helps protect life, save marriages, and encourages someone to draw closer to God. You can give a gift electronically using the JDFI Family Talk app, right on your smartphone, or visit drjamesdobson.org. We greatly appreciate your prayers and your ongoing financial support of this ministry. And now, let's join Bob Vander Plaats and Dr. Dobson right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me ask you a tough question, if through some divine intervention you could have not had this experience, would you have taken that option? Has this child done something very positive in your life as well?

Bob Vander Plaats: I would say, before Lucas was born, without question, I'd want a child that's healthy, normal, play basketball. On this side, when Darla and I are now 60 years old and ready to celebrate 40 years of marriage, I am so thankful for the gift of Lucas. It's something that we never would've prayed for, but it is a gift to

have a child like Lucas. He taught us so much, and he gave us a joy and a purpose that honestly I don't think any other child could have. And like I said, he gave such a powerful sermon, and again, our lives would not be what our lives are today without Lucas. Yeah. So, if God opened up on June 13, 1993, and said, okay, this is going to be your journey, until November 22, '21, we would've ran from that. We would've been like, count me out, I'm not doing that.

But His grace is sufficient, His mercies are fresh every morning, and it's day by day. And that's where we can really get to, that we're just so thankful that he would choose us to have a child like Lucas. This is the only book the Chuck Norris has ever approved. Okay, so it carries the Chuck Norris approved seal on it. But Chuck said to me, he said, "Bob," he goes, "I know that you wanted kids who could compete, especially in the game of basketball," He said, "I believe Lucas might be the toughest kid I know. But he's not competing for some victory that's here today, going tomorrow, on a basketball court, he's competing for his own life." And I agree with Chuck, Lucas is probably the toughest kid I know.

Dr. James Dobson: Did he ever say, I love you?

Bob Vander Plaats: He never verbalized I love you, but I believe through his eyes, and through a lot of other non-verbals, he did communicate I love You. This book, I believe, speaks to a lot of parents who are dealing with children with special needs, there's no doubt about that, and we have testimonies of that. But a gentleman who is very wealthy, doesn't know anybody with disabilities close to him, that would be a family member or cousin or anywhere close, when he read the manuscript, he said, "Bob, this is my story." I said, "This is your story? He goes, "Yeah, this is my story." And this is about expect the unexpected. This is about thank God for moms. This is about don't wear a mask, be authentic. This is, there are angels among us. He said, "When I read that," he goes, "this is my story." And he goes, "I can almost track my journey through Lucas's journey in your book." And again, I believe that's where God is using a child like Lucas to speak to all of us, not just some of us.

Dr. James Dobson: Where, Bob, did you get the strength in the midst of all that was going on at home, and being up half the night, or all the night, and nearly losing your child over and over again, where did you get the strength to go ahead and be useful to the kingdom, the way you have? That's why I admire you so greatly.

Bob Vander Plaats: Well, I think that's part of God's sovereignty. And Darla and I did not choose this path, this is not a path we would've chosen. Darla would've been a career CPA, probably owned her own accounting firm. I would've been a teacher, a coach, high school principal, maybe a superintendent, and I would've retired at age 55, with full government benefits. But that's not the path God wanted us on. And so, we just tried to be in prayer, and with Christian community, and wisdom and discernment from others to help guide us. And part of it is, and maybe this is a guilt piece of it, even as I lead The Family Leader, my dad served in World War II, and I had a peer of mine say to me, "You might have a survivor's guilt," meaning

I never wore the uniform. So, I want to fight for freedom in my way. Because my dad was part of a special generation fighting for freedom in his way.

Maybe with a child like Lucas, Darla and I really wanted to make sure that his life had a purpose, his life had a megaphone, his life could be displayed in everything. We were just in Arizona, and Darla was having lunch with some ladies, and I believe her aunt asked her, said, "Have you ever sat back and thought, what was the change in your and Bob's life that put you on the path that you're on?" And Darla just looked at her, and I don't think you answered right away, but then she responded, and she said, "It was Lucas." And I think we could point back to, Lucas, he brought a beautiful chaos to our life. It was a chaos that we didn't want, but there was a beauty to it. And then God directed our paths, but it was because of the birth of a boy. So, that disruption, that prayer that God didn't answer the way you wanted him to answer, he might have a special purpose there. I tell a lot of people, God's greatest miracle might be wrapped up in your biggest problem. And so-

Dr. James Dobson: What a beautiful way to put it.

Bob Vander Plaats: ... to pursue it that way.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And the wonderful thing, it's almost impossible to describe the moment that's going to occur when you meet Lucas as a whole person in the other side. You're going to see him someday, he's going to call you Dad for the first time, and you're going to go to the feet of Jesus, and say thank you.

Bob Vander Plaats: That was a common thread in all of the eulogies that were given at Lucas; funeral. And Lucas funeral was, Dr. Dobson, it was so much filled with praise and worship.

Dr. James Dobson: It was not anger.

Bob Vander Plaats: Not anger. Giving God all the glory, and all the praise for Lucas's life. We wanted to honor Lucas's life. And it was a beautiful funeral, from start to finish. And it was taking place in one of the most high-tech churches in the Des Moines metro area. And they had three cameras rolling to capture all of this. And when it got done, we had so many people saying, I want a recording of that, I want to watch that again, or I want to watch it for the first time because I heard of it. But someone forgot to push play, and so that recording wasn't there.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh my goodness.

Bob Vander Plaats: And so, part of the book is to communicate what happened at that service. But our oldest son, Hans, said to me afterwards... Because he knew that I was struggling with Lucas's service not being recorded. Because it was such a beautiful testimony that I thought could speak to so many people, especially dealing with their own child with special needs. And Hans said, "I think Lucas

gave us another lesson. Or God gave us another lesson through Lucas." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "If you wanted to have an impact on Lucas, or if you wanted Lucas to impact your life, you had to be there. You couldn't phone it in, you couldn't Zoom it in, you couldn't remote it in, you had to be there." And really, it comes down to, I think what Jesus talks about, with love your neighbors yourself. It's not a wave, it's not just cut them a check and see you later. Love your neighbors yourself is really getting to know who your neighbor is.

And so, I thought it was a powerful lesson, but the last seven chapters of this book, *Light From Lucas*, is really Ruth's eulogy, there's angels among us. It's every one of the boys' eulogies, talking about faith, talking about Christian community, talking about only can imagine what Lucas is doing right now in Heaven, running, jumping, dunking, doing all those things for the first time. Darla's eulogy was just about a grateful heart. Why Thanksgiving... Because he died right before Thanksgiving. Why Thanksgiving will be a celebrated holiday in our household because we're so grateful for the gift of Lucas.

Roger Marsh: You are listening to Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh, if you're just joining us, we are listening to today's guest, Bob Vander Plaats, and his conversation with our own Dr. James Dobson. Bob is sharing about his newly updated book, called, *Light from Lucas: Lessons in Faith from a Fragile Life*. Bob and his wife Darla, lost Lucas in November of 2021, he'd been battling a very rare brain disorder, and ultimately lost that battle due to pneumonia. Now, let's rejoin Dr. Dobson and Bob Vander Plaats for the conclusion of this three-part series, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us about Lucas's passing, what happened in that experience?

Bob Vander Plaats: Well, I guess if Darla and I look back on it, which we have, we're so close to the situation that we probably couldn't see it, but he was slowly fading, he wasn't as responsive as he used to be. The seizures really took a toll. But at the end, he developed a non-COVID pneumonia. And pneumonia with kids with disabilities, that's a word you never want to hear. But Lucas had defeated pneumonia several times, he always bounced back. The doctors would predict and Lucas would beat the odds. And so, we thought this case would be the same thing. And we thought we had about a 24-hour window when he was in the hospital to see if he would turn the corner or not turn the corner. And so, I went home to take care of things, and Darla stayed at the hospital, and then signs were that Lucas was not going to turn the corner in a positive way.

Darla read Psalm 23 over him, she gave me a call about, you need to get down here. And so, I rushed to the hospital safely, but I was rushing. Then when Lucas passed, Darla said to Lucas, "We'll be with you soon."

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

Bob Vander Plaats: And then Darla called me and I was at the 73rd Street exit, I was about 10 minutes from the hospital, but I felt right away a peace, almost as Jesus saying, I've got this, you don't need to do this. The only one he needs now is me. And Lucas passed at 4:40 on Monday morning, November 22, 2021. And the reason I bring out those numbers, 4:40, Darla and I, I taught accounting, and she was an accountant, numbers mean a lot to us. But if you go to Luke 4:40, Lucas dies at 4:40. Luke 4:40, this is where Jesus is having them all bring people to them and he's healing them. And to us, Jesus healed Lucas at 4:40 in the morning, on-

Dr. James Dobson: Perfect peace.

Bob Vander Plaats: ... November 22. And so there was a perfect peace about that. And so, when we look down, yeah, we miss Lucas, there's no doubt we miss Lucas, but the Scriptures tell us, lift up your eyes, and I believe they tell us to lift up our eyes for a reason. Because when we lift up our eyes and we see Lucas today, who's met Jesus face-to-face, and every tear and every disability is wiped away, and he has a new body, and we cannot wait to see Lucas that day. As Darla said in one of her deals, "Save a dance for me." And I believe there'll be a dance, a glorious dance in Heaven that day.

Dr. James Dobson: There's victory in it.

Bob Vander Plaats: Victory, without question.

Dr. James Dobson: Bob, what drives you now? Where's the passion? You're a hardworking man, and you've devoted yourself to so many family-related causes. Where's the force, the driving force, that compels you today?

Bob Vander Plaats: I believe it has to be our faith. And I think in Lucas's life, Darla and I would say, it put our faith to the test. When Lucas passed away, right away, we talked about putting our faith to the test. But I think it's also Lucas of, the message of I don't get to do a lot of these things, I can't stand in the gap, I can't even advocate for myself, that I think is really what fuels us. We are going to advocate for the pursuit of righteousness and justice that honors God, that blesses people in our state of Iowa, but across the country. We want to see this country be a beacon in the night, a shining city on a hill, that embraces a culture of a life from conception to natural death. And so, that I think is what motivates and what fuels us. There's an urgency to what we do.

Dr. James Dobson: At the top of the list is the sanctity of human life.

Bob Vander Plaats: It is at the top of the list. Matter of fact, I believe if you get the sanctity of human life right, you're going to get a lot of other things right. If you get the sanctity of human life wrong, you're going to get a lot of other things wrong.

Dr. James Dobson: The name of the book is *Light from Lucas*, Lessons in Faith from a Fragile Life. It's a wonderful photograph of Darla and Lucas, and he's laughing, holding his

hand up. There is a story here that has not been said, of all the proceeds that come from this book, you don't keep any of them. What are you doing with it?

Bob Vander Plaats: Well, first of all, Darla and I want Lucas's light to shine on. So, it'd be a great honor for us, for all who are listening, to purchase a book, of *Light from Lucas*, and then go to thefamilyleader.com and they'll be able to find it really quick of how to purchase *Light from Lucas*. But what I want to tell your listeners, Dr. Dobson, is that every dime, every dime, Darla and I keep none of it, our ministry keeps none of it, it all goes to sanctity of human life efforts, because we want to give God continued praise and glory for the gift of Lucas's life, and stand in the gap for other people's lives.

Dr. James Dobson: That is breathtaking.

Bob Vander Plaats: So, thefamilyleader.com, all the proceeds go to sanctity of human life efforts.

Dr. James Dobson: And I want to say to our listeners, you need to read this book, it puts life into perspective. And you know someone who needs to read this book. I strongly recommend it to our listeners. Thank you for writing it, Bob, it took the [inaudible 00:18:09], didn't it?

Bob Vander Plaats: It was actually a very cleansing process. And when I was writing the book, it was a way for me to deal with a lot of emotions that might have been built up. So, there's a lot of tears in writing the book, but it's been a real blessing. And the best blessing is when we get stories back, or emails back, testimonials back, about that book and how it's impacted their lives. That tells us that Lucas's life has a purpose, and God is allowing his light to shine on.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you miss him?

Bob Vander Plaats: Of course we do. There's different times where it hits you, and sometimes it's just that you want to go see him, you want to go give him a walk, you want him to center you again. But anytime that we miss him, I think we realize quickly it's for selfish reasons. We know he's home, and that's where he should be.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank God for the promise of eternal life.

Bob Vander Plaats: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: You're a good man and a good father. But I know Bob, that Darla was a fantastic mother to Lucas, and to all of her boys. She is gifted in what she does. And what would she say in answer to some of the questions that I've asked?

Bob Vander Plaats: Well, I think she would back me up, that she's so thankful for the gift of Lucas. We're not the same people that we once were. This has strengthened our faith. It has emboldened us in fresh and new ways-

Dr. James Dobson: There's no bitterness.

Bob Vander Plaats: There's no bitterness. If I wrestle with anything right now, is I know that children like Lucas are in the crosshairs of the abortion debate. And I think every time we abort a child with down syndrome, or spina bifida, or a child like Lucas with partial pachygyria lissencephaly, we're robbing God of the display of his mighty works. That's what the word, His Scripture says. So, we are profoundly different today, and we would choose to have Lucas each and every day that ends in Y, and twice on Sunday, because of how his life has impacted my life and so many other lives. Matter of fact, after Lucas's funeral, I had a college basketball teammate who attended the funeral, and he called me up afterwards, he said, "Bob, after attending that funeral, I wish I would've known Lucas more." And Lucas was a hard kid to get to know, you had to spend a lot of time with him. And that's the kind of thing you want, because Lucas had such a mighty impact that people left saying, I'd like to know him more.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me ask one last question about you and Darla. You had another baby after Lucas came and went.

Bob Vander Plaats: Mm-hmm.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you have a discussion about having another child, or did God figure that out?

Bob Vander Plaats: Well, God definitely figured it out. I had just left my position of being high school principal to start Opportunities Unlimited, and it was in a turnaround situation, we had to do a lot of things to turn that ministry around. We just bought land, we were going to build a new home. Darla gave me a call from Sheldon, I was in Sioux City, and she said, "Hey, are you sitting down?" I said, "No." She goes, "You probably should." She goes, "You know that flu that I thought I had? I went into the doctor, I'm pregnant." And it was a sit down moment. But I do remember that the doctor talked to us about it could be another Lucas. And we said, we will love this child every bit as much, if it's another Lucas.

Dr. James Dobson: If you'd had a choice, would it have been yes?

Bob Vander Plaats: I think having the next child, I think we knew our plate was full with Hans, Josh and Lucas, just the three of them, we probably would not have chosen to have a fourth child. But boy, did God know what he was doing when he gave us Logan. Logan brought so much healing to our family. He was the little brother that Hans and Josh didn't have with Lucas. They couldn't hold Lucas the way you could hold other normal babies, or showcase their friend, or teach them how to play ball, or do those things. And Logan, just a vital, vital element to our family. I don't know what Logan's name actually means, but it should mean healer, because he brought a lot of healing to our family.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've said it very, very well today. And I trust that many hundreds of thousands of people will eventually hear this conversation. Thank you for caring enough to tell the story.

Bob Vander Plaats: Thank you, Dr. Dobson, you're a good friend. Thank you for having us on.

Roger Marsh: Well, I hope Bob's stories about Lucas touched your heart, I know they touched mine. Friend, you're listening to Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh, and if you missed any part of today's program, or the previous two days for that matter, remember you can hear the entire three-part conversation on our website, at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And throughout this month, we are presenting to you programs that are included in the 2023 Broadcast Collection. Now, if you enjoyed today's program, you know that it's part of that collection, and we would love to send you the entire five cd set, or make available to you at digital download of this year's collection. To get yours, simply go to drjamesdobson.org/2023, we'll be happy to send you a copy of the 2023 Broadcast Collection as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the ministry, here at the JDFI.

Again, go to drjamesdobson.org/2023. In the 2023 Broadcast collection, you'll hear seven of the best programs from the past year, featuring our own Dr. James Dobson, plus eight bonus programs from a special local event here as well. So, keep it, share it, give it as a gift to someone you love, but please know how easy it is to get your copy. We'll be happy to send you a copy of the 2023 Broadcast Collection as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of JDFI. You can call us, by the way, at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And just for the month of December, we have a special matching grant in place, here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Thanks to some very special friends of the ministry, every dollar will instantly be matched.

Most importantly though, those dollars are used to impact lives, to encourage moms and dads, and to build stronger God-led families. You can make your donation online when you go to drjamesdobson.org, that's drjamesdobson.org. Or make a donation over the phone, the number is 877-732-6825. From all of us here at the JDFI, thank you so much for your prayers, and your generosity, and for joining us today. I'm Roger Marsh, make sure you join us again tomorrow for another edition of Family Talk. Until then, may God continue to richly bless you and your family.

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