



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Star of Christmas

Guest(s): Anthony DeStefano

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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: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. You know the month of December is blowing right on by. It's moving at record pace. The holidays are fast approaching. Can you believe it? Christmas Day is just one week away. And if you haven't had a chance to do so already, I really hope you find some time to prepare your heart and mind for this celebration. Make sure you have decked the halls and trimmed the tree. I know, in our family, we started a new tradition this year. We actually put up our Christmas decorations a week before Thanksgiving, and you'd be amazed at the differences had on our family as what we are in the process of preparing for the most important part of this season, which is anticipating the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, before we get into today's broadcast, if you haven't heard already, all this month at the JDFI, we have a special matching grant in place. That means it's very easy for you to give a donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and have it doubled. Every dollar you give will be instantly matched. Thanks for remembering that we are a listener-supported program and we greatly appreciate your financial contributions and your prayers as well. You can give a gift online at drjamesdobson.org. And now, today's classic program is sure to put you in the Christmas spirit. Our guest, Anthony DeStefano, will be talking with Dr. Dobson about his Christmas book called *Little Star*. He'll even read it to us during the program.

Anthony is the best-selling author of over 25 books for children and adults. So let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Anthony DeStefano, right here, right now on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: I think it's important to review what a tradition really is because it should play a major role in family life. A tradition is something, a food or an experience or a place where you go or something that happens within your family year after year after year. And by doing that, it becomes an identity for your family. It's a way of saying, "This is who we are, this is what we do, this is what we have

enjoyed together." And traditions, to that degree, are very, very important, not just at Christmas time, but Thanksgiving and on throughout the year. We have special foods in our family for different times of the year. And we have a guest here today who is going to share something with us that I think might become a tradition for many families that are listening to us today.

He is my great friend, Anthony DeStefano, who has done many things, but he has written a Christmas book called *Little Star*. Anthony attended St. John's University in New York where he received his degree in philosophy. He's a vice chairman of the board of Priests for Life. Anthony actually received the Mom's Choice Gold Medal Award. So Anthony, it's very good to have you here. Why don't you explain that award for us as a place to begin?

Anthony DeStefano: It's just a group of moms and mommy bloggers. And the mommy bloggers are almost like an army in this country right now. These working women, women who have families, and they go online and they have these blogs and they're part of a group that's called the Mom's Choice Awards. And they read all the different children's books that come out during the course of the year. They get together and they make a list of the best awards and they give out gold prizes. And I was fortunate and blessed enough for them to have *Little Star* be their Christmas children's book of the year.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is not really a new book, is it, because you wrote it when you were 15-years old?

Anthony DeStefano: Yeah, actually it sat in a draw for 35 years or so. I wrote this book in high school, believe it or not, when I was 14 or 15. At that time I had a very, he wasn't famous back then, but he became famous later, a teacher for creative writing named Frank McCourt. Frank McCourt went on to write a famous book called *Angela's Ashes*, and a lot of people know it. It's a memoir of his upbringing in Ireland. And anyway, at that time, he was just a high school English teacher and I guess what he did at that time was he tried to break teenagers out of the habit of writing over elaborately. That's a common mistake that young people have when they try to write. They use too many adjectives, too many adverbs. And he figured, if I assign them to write children's books, well then, I'll be forcing them to write simply. And so it was an exercise that he gave.

So he assigned us all to write children's books. And the children's book that I wrote back then when I was 14 or 15 was *Little Star* and it got a lot of accolades back then. He loved it. And there was a famous actress named Helen Hayes, Academy Award winner-

Dr. James Dobson: First Lady of the Theater.

Anthony DeStefano: Exactly. And she even read this book publicly to a gathering of the Easter Seals Convention or something that year. But as it turns out, nobody wanted to

publish it at that time, because, I guess, I was so young and it just sort of sat in a drawer for 30 years.

Dr. James Dobson: But you did send it to publishers in hopes that it would be published.

Anthony DeStefano: Yes, and I still have the rejection notes in my drawer. They liked the book, they didn't like the ending very much, which we could talk about because it ties into the meaning of the book and why I think the book is a good book. But they didn't like it, and so it sat in a drawer for many, many years. And then I went on and at some point, I did become a successful author of adult books. I wrote a book called *A Travel Guide to Heaven*. And even after I was a successful author, I still had trouble getting this book published. Nobody wanted to publish it.

Dr. James Dobson: You wouldn't give up on it.

Anthony DeStefano: I wouldn't give up on this book because I am proudest of this book than I am of anything I've ever written. And eventually, eventually, I managed to bust down the door of one publishing house and they published it and it became a big best-seller called *Little Star*.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me go back to what you said about that teacher in high school. When I was a freshman in college, we all had to take exams to get placement in various classes and I scored high on the English test. And out of eight classes, I was in the second class and I had a professor by the name of Dr. Eddie Harwood who taught composition that year. And I got in his class, and he was notoriously tough, and I knew it. And when I heard that I was going to be in his class, I'm immature, I was 18-years old and I went to him one afternoon and I said, "Dr. Harwood, I think I'm misplaced and I think you ought to let me be in a different class." And he looked at me and he said, "There's no way I'm going to let you out of this. You scored high enough to be in my class and I want you in there and I'm not going to let you out."

And it turned out to be the most important class I had in college, wouldn't you know, because this man taught me to write. But he did the same thing that your teacher did for you, which is why I raised it today. On the first day of class he said, "Take out pencil and paper." And we did. And he said, "I want you to write a theme, two pages, right here in class on the subject, childhood is or is not, you can choose, is or is not the happiest time of life." Well, that mushy topic brought out all of the ridiculous overstatement and the kind of things your teacher was trying to keep you from doing. And then, he beat us half to death. There was red ink everywhere. He said, "I cannot tell you how to write. I can tell you how not to write." So your teacher was doing that and mine was essentially doing the same thing and it worked for both of us.

Anthony DeStefano: It worked and teachers obviously can change your life. And the funny thing, the ironic thing here too is the high school that I was at was a science high school. I had wanted to be a doctor. All my life, I wanted to be a doctor. And then, I

happened to take this English course and this is what happened, it was very encouraging. And I still wanted to be a doctor after that, but a couple of little things got in the way, like organic chemistry and intro to calculus.

Dr. James Dobson: Why didn't they correct your accent along the way?

Anthony DeStefano: They couldn't do it. Well, the problem was the school itself was located in New York, so we were all suffering from the same problem.

Dr. James Dobson: You're Italian, aren't you?

Anthony DeStefano: Yeah, that too.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I appreciate your telling me the genesis of this book because it's amazing that it has survived to allow us to read it and talk about it today. And the title of it again is *Little Star*. Did you come up with that topic or did the teacher assign it to you?

Anthony DeStefano: He just assigned us any book we wanted to write, as long as it was a children's book. It so happens that it must've been around Christmas time and so I thought it would be nice to write a Christmas book. And so happens that for many, many years I had had a question in my mind from when I was a little kid. I remember looking out of the window at night around Christmas time and thinking to myself, "Where's the Christmas star that I keep hearing about? Where's the star of Bethlehem?" Because one of our traditions on Christmas Eve all of the time was that my father would either read or tell us the gospel story of Jesus and Mary and the whole birth of Christ. And kids are intrigued by that star of Bethlehem that was shining on the stable.

And so I always had that question in my mind, what happened to the Christmas star? And I used the assignment as an opportunity to figure that out. I said before that I'm very proud of this book and I am, and I know sometimes it could sound like you're bragging when you say something like that, but I don't mean it in any kind of arrogant way. I genuinely think that this is the best thing that I ever wrote, even though I've got a number of bestselling books. And the bad thing about it is that I peaked that at 15-years old, but I'm happy with that, though.

Dr. James Dobson: How were you when you published your first book?

Anthony DeStefano: 37, when *A Travel Guide to Heaven* came out.

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking about early writing skills. When my parents would discipline me, and I felt it was unfair, I would write them. All my life, I have depended on the written word and that came very easy for me through school. And the Lord chooses those that He will give certain talents to.

Anthony DeStefano: I have to tell you, it's not easy for me, though. I write very slow and I'm not one of these writers who just writes paragraph after paragraph. It's a slow, hard process. Revisions, a lot of revisions, and it's difficult for me.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen to me, people who write like you described and can just write 15 pages a day, have a very good editor because you can't do anything with excellence without sweating over it. You agree with that?

Anthony DeStefano: I agree. And you know what I've found also is that my goal as a writer with my children's books and with my adult books is to write as simply as possible. And what I've discovered is that it's very difficult to write simple. It's easier, in many ways, to write things that are obscure and ambiguous, but to write something that really communicates the idea, especially when you're writing something that involves Christian theology and Christian principles, it's hard to write simply and at the same time keep the Orthodox traditional beliefs. Because it's easy, if you want to compromise and water down Christianity, you can make it simple, but to keep everything in there and at the same time make it simple, it's pretty difficult.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is a small book. It is beautifully illustrated. The artwork, the pictures in this book are, I think, better than I've seen in any other children's book. Who is the illustrator?

Anthony DeStefano: The illustrator's a young man named Mark Elliott. This was an important story to me, obviously, after the 35 years it took me to get it published. And looking around at some of the children's books today, you see some of the very weird kind of illustrations and I didn't want that. I wanted something beautiful. This is a story about the birth of Jesus. It foreshadows even the Easter story of the death and resurrection of our Lord. This is meant to be a deep, beautiful story and I wanted to have beautiful illustrations that look just like beautiful paintings. And so I really searched hard for this particular illustrator and I think I found him because I think he just did a great job.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Anthony, I don't think that I have ever asked an author to read his own book on the air here on Family Talk, but I'd like you to do that. It's a small book and would you be willing to read it yourself?

Anthony DeStefano: I would be willing as long as your listeners don't mind my New York accent and somehow doesn't ruin their Christmas season.

Dr. James Dobson: I think it's charming. I tease you about it, but go ahead and read the book to us.

Anthony DeStefano: I'll be happy to. Thank you.

"Dad, which one is the Christmas star?", the boy asked, straining his eyes as he looked out at the clear dark sky. The father, smiling, looked down at his son, "Don't hurt your eyes looking for him. You won't find him. He's not up there

anymore." "Where is he? Where did he go?" the son asked. "You mean I never told you the story of the Christmas star before?" "No, Dad, never.", The boy shook his head. "Please tell me." "Well, a long time ago in the farthest corner of the universe there was a tiny star. In fact, he was the smallest star in the heavens. His name was Little Star. Little Star was sad and lonely. The other stars didn't make fun of him, they simply ignored him because he was so tiny. But what can be worse for a star than to be ignored?

After all, stars do little more than decorate the sky. They help pass the long evenings by twinkle talk, and there was a lot of twinkling going on. The other stars were all talking about a rumor they had heard for ages, a rumor that a king would soon be born on a faraway planet called Earth. It was known that the king had a special message that would change the whole world forever.

As the great day approached excitement among the stars began to build. A special reward was to be given to the star who could shine the brightest on the night the baby king was born. In preparation, the stars were being cleaned and dusted by long-tailed comets. This made them twinkle and sparkle and give off a much stronger light. All except Little Star, who was being ignored again despite his tears. Little Star was so sad that his points drooped. How could an undusted star have any chance of winning the reward?

Finally, on the coldest night of the year, one of the stars yelled, "It's happening. It's happening. The king is going to be born." Far below in the small village of Bethlehem, Little Star could see two people, a woman sitting on a donkey and a man walking beside her. He watched as they searched for somewhere to rest. It was bitter cold and Little Star felt sorry for them. Wherever they went, no one seemed to want them. People can be cruel, too, he thought. At last, the man and woman located a place to stay. It was a shabby stable, but at least it gave them protection against the icy winds. "This is a strange way for a king to be born," thought Little Star. Then, with only the silent stars as witnesses, the child was born. The mother wrapped the baby in a blanket and carefully placed him in a straw-filled manger. The baby's name was Jesus.

"He can't be a king", one of the stars yelled. "Kings aren't born poor. We've been fooled." Feeling disappointed, many of the other stars agreed, but Little Star kept looking down at the baby. Suddenly, a thought came to him. "I think I understand", Little Star cried out. "The baby Jesus is a king. He's just little." Little Star knew that Jesus could have chosen to be born in a palace surrounded by riches, but instead, He had humbled Himself to be born in a stable. He didn't want to be rich and important. He wanted to be like the poorest of the poor. Jesus wanted to be born little to show all the people of the world that He loved them no matter how small or poor they were. Of all the stars in the heavens, Little Star was the only one to understand the king's message. His message was love.

Little Star's heart was bursting with joy. He wanted so badly to touch the child. Trying as hard as he could, he used all his strength and might to reach out with

his light toward the earth. Burning brighter and brighter, he extended his rays down to the village of Bethlehem into the cold stable, warming and lighting it with his love. The other stars were amazed. They had never seen Little Star so big and bright, but they were scared that he was burning too brightly for such a small star. "Stop", they all yelled. "Stop or you'll burn yourself out." Little Star could not hear their warnings. He was only aware of the child in the cold stable. All through the long cold night, Little Star burned as brightly as he could so the baby Jesus could be warm. When dawn came, the star that no one had ever noticed was tiny and gray. "Little Star is gone", the other stars cried. "He burned himself out."

"Well, son", said the father, "that's the story of the Christmas star." "But he's gone", said the boy. He felt very sad. "No, he's not. He's not gone at all." The father patted his son's hand to reassure him. "You see, Little Star did a wonderful thing that night in Bethlehem. He gave his life so the baby Jesus could be warm and God gave him a great reward in return. Little Star will be remembered forever and ever." "You mean Little Star isn't gone?" the boy asked. "No, he's alive", the father said. "Every Christmas when we celebrate Jesus's birthday, people all over the world place a star on top of their Christmas tree to remember Him." The boy looked up at the star on top of the Christmas tree and smiled. The end.

Dr. James Dobson: Anthony, that is wonderful. That gives parents an angle and means of talking about the Christmas story itself and using imagery that children will enjoy.

Anthony DeStefano: Yes. A couple of people have asked me, "Why don't you just let children read the gospel story itself? Why invent a star?" And my reaction is, "Yes, they should. They should hear the gospel story itself, of course. From the time they can understand words, they should be hearing the Bible." But we also have to understand that it's important to present images to the children that are child-friendly, and children love talking animals and talking stars. These kinds of characters are very approachable and less intimidating for children than human beings are. And so to use these kinds of child-friendly characters and images to impart to them this gospel message, I think, is a valuable thing.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've got a Scripture on the back cover that says, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." And of course, that's John 1:9. I think your publishers were wrong and you were right. I like the way you ended it, linking it over to the star at the top of the Christmas tree.

Anthony DeStefano: They had a problem with the idea of maybe the star dying. And of course, we softened that at the end where the star didn't die, he's remembered forever. But that really is the whole crux of this story. It's a Christmas story, but at the same time, it's very much an Easter story. Little Star gives his life for the baby Jesus, the way Jesus will eventually give His life for all of us. And so that's the message here, the message of what the true meaning of love is. Love is such an abused, confused, and misused word today. The true meaning of love is what Jesus teaches about it. That it's giving yourself completely for others. This is my

body given to you. And so that's exactly what Jesus does for us and that's what this little star does for Jesus. And what does he experience? He experiences a kind of a resurrection at the end, as well. That's his great reward. So it was very important for me here to have the continuity of the Christmas and Easter in one story and yet to tell it very simply.

Dr. James Dobson: Anthony, you have told a story about a boy, a very young boy who had a physical disability that this book related to. Share that story with us.

Anthony DeStefano: He was a nine-year-old boy who had some sort of genetic disorder where he couldn't grow. And apparently, everyone made fun of him and he had a lot of problems, psychological problems as well. And his parents gave him this book at Christmas time to read. And he read all about this little star that was ignored, but who somehow shined the brightest and triumphed. It sort of changed his life and he associated and identified with the star. And now, he's a much different person. He's much more confident. And I have to say, that's the other thing that I'm very proud of with this book because, yes, it does impart this gospel message. And yes, it teaches the meaning of love and all of these things that I'm proud of. But I think just purely on a psychological level, we're all small and so many children feel insecure because they're little. If they could read a book like this and see that by shining your brightest for God, for God, you shine your brightest, you could triumph over absolutely anything.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Anthony, you have also written another book. Tell us about it.

Anthony DeStefano: Yes. It's not a children's book. I've written several children's books and several adult books. And this one is for adults. It's called *Angels All Around Us*. And it's all about the spiritual realities of life, the angels, demons, spiritual warfare, grace, God. And also, the end things, *Heaven and Hell*. And it's written for all Christians and it's written from a Christian perspective, but so many people believe so many crazy things, new age things about these kinds of invisible spiritual, cultish realities. I wanted to write a book that had the truth of these things, but the Christian truth, and that's what *Angels All Around Us* is all about.

Dr. James Dobson: And you've written two other books. You've made reference to one of them, *A Travel Guide to Heaven* and *10 Prayers God Always Says Yes To*.

Anthony DeStefano: That's right. And they've been endorsed by the National Day of Prayer, so we're good.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Anthony, you and I have been friends for many years. It's the first time you've been on the air and first time you've come here to Family Talk. I'm glad you did today and Merry Christmas to you.

Anthony DeStefano: Merry Christmas to you. Thank you for having me. It's such a great honor. I've wanted to come here for so long.

Dr. James Dobson: And your buddy, Jerry Horn, an associate is sitting behind us here.

Anthony DeStefano: Yes, he is.

Dr. James Dobson: And we'll get him involved next time.

Anthony DeStefano: Well, he's responsible for a lot of the promotion of these books and he's the miracle worker. He helps us out a lot, as you know.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being with us.

Anthony DeStefano: Thanks for having me.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a great book about the birth of Jesus Christ. That was our guest, Anthony DeStefano, with our own Dr. James Dobson here on today's edition of Family Talk.

By the way, to learn more about Anthony and his book called *Little Star*, just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And during this season of giving, I want to share with you that during the entire month of December, we have a special matching grant in place. Thanks to a number of generous friends of our ministry, every dollar you donate will be instantly doubled. So your gift to Family Talk will help twice as many families, twice as many marriages, and twice as many listeners will be encouraged to strengthen their faith. So prayerfully consider making a year-end donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. You can make a donation online at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. Or give us a call at 877-732-6825. We thank you again for your financial support and your ongoing prayer cover as well.

I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at the JDFI, we thank you for making us a part of your day. May God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow in relationship with Him.

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