



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and Follow Jesus – Part 2

Guest(s): James Spencer, Ph.D.

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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 back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Have you ever wondered how we can get back to basics to strengthen our relationship with God, especially in the culture that we're living in right now? Well, today's guest here on the program is Dr. James Spencer, and he's here to point out the valuable resources and tools we already have as Christians to draw closer to the Lord in order to resist the earthly temptations of the world. Recently, Dr. Spencer published a new book entitled *Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and Follow Jesus*.

By the way, if you are not familiar yet with James Spencer, he's a theologian who specializes in biblical interpretation. He earned his Ph.D. in theological studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and currently serves as president of the D.L. Moody Center in Western Massachusetts near the birthplace and homestead of Dwight L. Moody. James Spencer leads the yearly Shine Bright Project, which seeks to mobilize God's people to be and make disciples. James and his lovely wife, Kim, have been married since 1999, and together they're raising three children. Let's join our co-host Dr. Tim Clinton right now with today's guest, Dr. James Spencer, here on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, tell us a little bit about your Go Dark, Shine Bright Project, and are you participating yourself in that project?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah, this is the third year we've done the Go Dark, Shine Bright campaign. Initially, it started out as a 10-day social media fast followed by 10 days of sharing Christ on social media. This year we're doing a five-day media fast, and we're asking people to consider what media is really hindering them from growing in their relationship with Christ, and to set that aside for five days. The campaign officially runs in a bounded timeframe, but godarkshinebright.org is always up, and the guide is always there. And so, we recognize that people have used that throughout the year just to take a break from social media, and we're really happy about that.

Over the three years, we've had about a little over 50,000 participants go through the Go Dark, Shine Bright campaign. I do participate myself. I have been off of social media now for five days, and I've also been stepping away from some of my favorite television shows. A lot of times when I work, I like to have something on the background, and I've skipped that this week. And so, it's just been a real blessing not to have the extra noise, and I've found that I have a little bit more energy to read, research, and just to get to some of the activities with my family that I'm often too distracted to get to otherwise.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

So, in the midst of it, like the Apostle Paul said, redeeming our time, we need to reserve time for God. We need to use time in a way to worship God that makes it just, like in sports, they talk about developing muscle memory. It's automatic. That this becomes such a way of life that we're not caught up in whether or not the donkey or the elephant is going to save us. That, ultimately, our confidence, our hope is in God. Hope thou in God. And that call back to that center place, by the way, I agree with you, is getting not only lost because we're so busy and preoccupied and distracted, we're also getting lost in the narrative of everything that's being shoved down our throat, and we're losing our confidence in a God who was there for us.

And when we press back into Him, James, I hear you saying that's the resistance that we need in this day and hour. This is what we need to do. In other words, when we resist the world, we open ourself up to, what you said, are opportunities that only God can provide, that we'll only see when we're near and dear to Him in the midst of the storm.

James Spencer, Ph.D.:

Yeah. And, I mean, I think we really have to grapple with this because, oftentimes, I've been engaged in conversations around, let's say, prayer. And prayer becomes this, "Oh, I'll pray for you." And it can become a trite, "Hey, I'm really sorry for what you're going through," saying. But I think true prayer is an activity that engages the world because it's engaging God. It's not about being passive. Prayer is an active move against the forces of darkness that we're looking at. It's a way of resisting. But oftentimes, when we're faced with some of these urgent challenges and the problems of the day, prayer is not our go-to move.

Prayer seems too passive. It seems like we're going to sneak away and just sit in the corner and hope that all of this goes away. But the reality is that prayer is us activating God. It's pleading with God to act in our midst, to strengthen us, to change the way the world is operating, to protect us, to enlighten hearts. Whatever it is that we pray for, that's us pleading with God and participating with God to say, "We know we need you. Any human effort that we exert without you is going to be wrongheaded." And so, there's this sense in which I think we need to get back to basics in order to exercise Christian resistance. None of the things that we do as Christians, worship on Sundays, prayer, Bible study, fasting, all of those normal spiritual disciplines you think of, those are all building resistance. They're giving us the resources we need to recognize that

God is active and present in the world around us, and that our response is not to the situations but to Him. That, to me, is at the heart of Christian resistance.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And when you press in that way, you begin to, I believe, hunger and thirst after righteousness. And then, truth is what you search for, it's what you press for. And so, can you address the whole issue of truth here, James, and how important it is? Because we're in a culture where we hear a lot about love, and we need to love everybody, but it's also loving, by the way, to what? To share truth with them. When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and more people want nothing short of "not just acceptance." They want affirmation of lifestyles that are not "biblical." And so, we're postured in a place where we need to understand what is it that God wants us to know and, by the way, to be emboldened to.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah. I mean, when I think about truth, the way I usually dive into it is through Isaiah. There are people who are willing to call good evil and evil good. Christians can't get that wrong. We need to call good good and evil evil, and that's it. We get that discerning influence by becoming mature. If we look at Hebrews 5:14, what we see is that, in our mature state, we are now capable of discerning good and evil. And so, there's an aspect of truth that comes from maturity. And then, we just have to be strong enough to stand and say, look, yeah, there's different knowledge that comes out of, let's say, science or philosophy or sociology and all these other disciplines. They can make truthful observations about the world around us. Even people's emotions and experiences, the way that they see the world, there's a truth in that.

It's true that they're experiencing the world in this way. But often what's lacking in that is a true biblical and theological viewpoint. And that's where I think Christians really need to make sure that we are conveying that message. We're the only people on the planet who can share the gospel. We are the only people on the planet who can really sit back and say, "Look, if we structure our lives appropriately, we truly commit to imitating Christ, we truly commit to Christian resistance, we are going to demonstrate for the world a way of living in the world that no one else can have. And it's because we have not only the truth of God's Word, but we have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit." And so, our truth comes through word and deed, and I think that's a real crucial point.

Often times, we like to say what's right as opposed to saying what's right rightly, and we have to get both of those correct, I think, to an increasing extent. We have to do both. And I'm not under any sentimental notion that if we just speak the truth in love, that everybody is going to be enlightened and love us, and we're going to be the most well-liked people on the planet. I don't think that's true. But I do think that we don't really have any other choice but to speak the truth in love because it's what Jesus did.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, I hear every day from people saying, "What can I do in the midst of all this? How, then, shall we live?" as Francis Schaeffer would say. James, I put in my notes here, and it really, I think, reflects somewhat of a summary of your

new book, *Christian Resistance*. We're to be in this world but not of this world. And ultimately, Paul cried out, "Until Christ be formed in you," that as we commit ourselves to growing up in Christ, to discipleship, when we're followers of Christ, who, by the way, get to live, say, in this country and more, when we reflect that, that's the influence we believe, ultimately, that brings people to a place where we know righteousness exalts a nation. And to that end, we commit ourselves.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: That's right. And I think we get there through small steps of obedience. People ask me, "How do you actually do this? How do you get to the point where you can resist as a Christian?" And I always say the same thing, "It's no different than what I would do in the gym." People may think it's funny. You load up 250 pounds on the bench press, and then you throw the two and a half pound plates on the side of there, so you've got 255. Why bother with the two and a half pound plates? It's because those little increases in resistance, pushing yourself just that much harder, those little things add up over time. And so, we've got to be willing to engage in these little things. And D.L. Moody has a great quote on this. He says, "I believe that many people miss out on the blessings of serving God because they're too consumed with doing great things as opposed to doing little things. Let us do little things in service of the master." That's what we do to build Christian resistance.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, while a lot of people think we're living in a horrible time, it's the old worst of times. On the contrary, people are starting to really be encouraged. They're seeing a stirring going on. Are you experiencing that? Are you seeing that as you engage people, culture, the younger generation, and more?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah. I mean, I think there's pockets of both, and I think we need to be careful to avoid the gloom and doom. The biblical analog I go to is Elijah after he gets chased out into the wilderness by Jezebel and her husband, right? And he's sitting there with God-

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's nobody left.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: ... and he's like, "I'm the last one. I'm the last one. I'm the only one who's faithful to the Lord." And the Lord's like, "Nah, there's 7,000 others. Don't worry about it." And I think that when we get too gloom and doom, we may really just be missing the other faithful members of the body of Christ who are fighting the good fight alongside us. We're just not aware. And so, I think we have to avoid that doom and gloom even as we engage in appropriate critique of some of the things that are going on.

And so I see it both ways. I see glimpses of people who are really in it with me, and who want to be faithful and are moving things forward despite all the complications and complexities. And then, I see people falling away and really struggling. And I think that's probably the normal mode of operation for the church. We just have to recognize that God is always going to raise up a

remnant for us. There's always things that God is doing that we aren't aware of, and so we might as well be hopeful as opposed to despairing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, I think we all would agree that we're getting lost in technology. We're not just spending time up there. It's influencing every fabric of our everyday life. And so, as a result, we're seeing our kids get consumed by it. And another pressing issue that's really emerging is this whole artificial intelligence piece, A.I. What's your take on where that is and where it's going? And what potentially the benefits and maybe the threats are around it?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah. So, we're just getting ready to release, what we call, "A 20 questions guide on artificial intelligence." And so, we ask and answer 20 questions. I actually constructed the guide, big parts of it, in conversation with ChatGPT, just to try to understand how that would work. I would say the biggest challenge for me, at this point, and the way I would describe it as like this. Let's say we were all going to take a trip together, and we decide that we're going to get on a plane that hasn't been regulated or even evaluated. And we're just all going to hop on this plane, we're going to travel somewhere together, we're not sure whether the pilots have really gone through a real training program, but we're just going to hop this flight anyway. Forget the risks.

We're excited to go where we're going wherever it is that we're going. None of us would really do that. We recognize that there are dangers in plain flight that we don't really want to take the risk of getting on with a pilot who may not know what they're doing in a plane that may not be suitable for travel. And I think that artificial intelligence, the way they're opening these things up and publicly testing them, is analogous to us getting on a plane that has not been appropriately regulated. There are going to be risks and side effects, implications for testing these things in public that no one is aware of. And yet, companies continue to do it. Yes, I think A.I. will actually have some benefits for us, and I'm not afraid of it.

What I'm concerned with is that we're unleashing this on ourselves without any real thought to the downside and assuming that the upside will really outweigh whatever negative consequences we suffer as we're doing it. And so, I think there needs to be a move toward, and I would say this in a broad strokes, I think there needs to be a stronger regulation on technology companies overall. We're just coming out of social media where we've seen some of the dangers and the slippage that we're getting in social media, and we're seeing that slippage across digital media really. Misinformation, disinformation, attention span problems, all these issues, and I think it's because we haven't taken an appropriately regulated step into some of these digital areas. A.I. is no different.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The Kids Online Safety Act that we're hearing about right now, I think, is going to require social media platforms to have safety by design and make them open their black book on algorithms and more so that parents and researchers can see all this information and data. I think that's a good step in the right direction. And you're right about A.I. It's fascinating. We did a debriefing at our

organization on A.I., and I'll tell you what, it's amazing. I mean from writing marketing copy to doing papers and everything, just think about it, to all the wisdom that comes with it. But somebody's going to control it. And by the way, that is at the heart of what the challenge is here. Seriously.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah. I mean, I think we go both ways. Somebody's going to control it, and somebody's going to use it. And just like any tool, when we put it in the hands of sinful people, there are going to be ways that that tool is going to be used that we can't anticipate, wouldn't have intended, and certainly don't want. And so, we've got to be more careful, I think, as we launch these technologies in the world. One of the things I talk about in the piece that we'll be putting out, this "20 Questions on Artificial Intelligence," I talk about the vulnerable world hypothesis that Nick Bostrom has written on.

And basically, what he talks about is that we continue to launch technologies on ourselves, and we've just gotten, the way he phrases it is, lucky that we haven't destroyed ourselves yet. Now, I don't know that we would say lucky, right? Lucky is not exactly a Christian word. It's by God's providence and sustaining hand that we haven't destroyed ourselves yet. But I think we continue to do this to ourselves trying to figure something out about the world. I would actually locate it in a brokenness. We're recognizing a brokenness in the world, and I think A.I. is, in some degree, a solution that is designed to help us transcend our limitations to fix that brokenness.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It goes back to your opening in your book *Christian Resistance* around Orwell and 1984. Their number one job is to convert people. They're going to use every means possible to get there. Sounds like we're conspiracy theorists, but at the end of the day, you begin to realize Big Brother is what? Big Brother's watching. This is crazy.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Right. We've already seen some of this monitoring happening. We already know that our privacy is fractured online, and most of us, including myself, don't really worry about it too much. But the reality is that our data's out there, that we've given access to someone, the ethereal they, who are using this data to do various things to us. So, it's interesting when you hop online and something you've been searching for all of a sudden shows up in your social media feed, and you begin to realize, "Wow, this stuff's more interconnected than I would've thought." And I think with AI, that's only going to increase, not decrease. And so, we need to decide. One of the things I really appreciate, I think, it was Tristan Harris who does a lot of conversation about social media and technology. He talks about it in terms of what is our desired future? What does it look like? Who do we really want to be moving forward? And right now, that's a pretty ambiguous question, and it's a difficult one to answer unless you're Christian. We know where we want to be going forward.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, in a lot of way it comes back to what we're talking about in psychology right now, paying attention to what you're paying attention to. I don't think people realize how easy it is to get lost, and they don't know exactly what

they're giving their heart, their mind, and, in essence, their soul to. And so, we've got to get back. We've got to dial this back for a moment and just take a hard look at what is happening in the world around me.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Yeah, I would say that's a hundred percent right, and I think that what we give our attention to is at least the beginning of what we worship. And so, we have to be very careful about making sure that we are attending to God in an appropriate manner and attending to what he's asked us to do, which is really just to love Him with all we are and have and to love others as ourselves.

Dr. Tim Clinton: James, I'd love to take a moment and have you close our broadcast in prayer. A lot of our listeners are reaching out. There're in difficult circumstances in life. There's a lot of brokenness. And yet, at the other end of the spectrum, you have a lot of people who are just yearning to be bold, to be strong, to be anchored, to be rooted in Christ, because we know, apart from Him, there is no hope. And so, we look to Him. James, would you close us?

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Will do. Lord, just thanks for this time we've been able to converse through technology. What an amazing gift that you give us, and we ask that you would help us to steward it wisely and to edify you through it. We also, Lord, just pray for those who are lost in the world. We ask that you would give us hearts of compassion and a desire to see them come to you, to recognize the error of their ways, to recognize their brokenness, and to understand that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And we pray, Lord, also for Christians who are just struggling right now to remove themselves from the noise and to hear the signal of your word, to really deeply let that into their hearts and minds so that you become a truly active presence in their lives.

And Lord, we pray for all of us that you would be that for us, that we would feel your presence with us, that we would know that you're there, and that it would motivate us to obey you, to follow your path, and to just imitate Christ in a world so broken that we need to wait for you to fix it. We pray all these things, and we trust that you will help us as we seek to proclaim the gospel to a broken world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amen. James, if people want to learn more about you, the Moody Center, where do they-

James Spencer, Ph.D.: They can go to www.moodycenter.org, moodycenter.org, and they can find out all about me, our ministry, and what we're doing. The book is available on amazon.com. And so, yeah, I'd encourage people to go check us out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest today has been Dr. James Spencer. He's the president of the D.L. Moody Center, an independent nonprofit organization inspired by the life and ministry of Dwight Moody. Brand new book out, *Christian Resistance: Learning to Defy the World and to Follow Christ*. Practical guidance in here about what you can do as a Christian, a believer in a world that is all over the

map, in a world that's struggling with chaos and insanity. We have stability and strength in Christ, and He calls us to that. What a gift to the church. James, what a delight to have you join us on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, our entire team. We pray that God continues to put courage and boldness in your heart as you represent Him. We love you and appreciate your ministry. Thank you so much for joining us.

James Spencer, Ph.D.: Thanks for having me. I really appreciate being here.

Roger Marsh: Well, as you heard today on Family Talk, we, as Christians, can all shine brightly by going dark. That means turn off your devices every now and then, get still, be quiet, focus on your kids and your loved ones, your spouse. Simply be there and be present. You just heard the conclusion of a powerful two-part conversation featuring Dr. James Spencer and our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, here on Family Talk. Now, we at the Dobson Institute want to encourage you, no matter where you are in life or in your faith walk. Don't let the weight of the world get you down. Here at the JDFI, we have valuable resources to help you navigate life in today's broken culture. Just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org to learn more. Or give our customer care team a call at 877-732-6825. Our trained and supportive staff will help you find a resource that can help you today.

Now, friends, before we leave the air for the week, just a brief reminder that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is completely listener supported. It's because of your prayers and faithful tax-deductible donations that we are able to bring quality content to you each and every day, and we can also provide valuable resources for you and your family, as well. Now, the exciting news this week is all throughout the month of June, we have been blessed by some special friends of our ministry with a matching grant. That's right, every dollar that you donate to Family Talk this month will be doubled. Every gift will go twice as far to equip parents, educate kids, and strengthen marriages. But don't wait. The grant goes up to \$300,000, and we know we'll reach that matching point very, very soon. So, please consider a gift today and double your impact.

You can make your tax-deductible donation online when you go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org to give safely and securely on our homepage. Or if you prefer, give us a call. Our customer care team is standing by to speak with you and receive your gift at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And of course, if you prefer, you can also make a donation through the U.S. Mail. Now, we realize making out a check to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is a little cumbersome. It may not fit all the way on there, depending if you write like me.

So, if it's easier, you could just make the checkout to Family Talk or the JDFI. How about that? Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Again, that's the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. From all of us here at the JDFI, thank you so much for your prayers, your faithful financial support, and for making us a

part of your day. I'm Roger Marsh inviting you to join us next time for another edition of Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

Announcer:

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