



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity from a Christian Perspective- Part 1

**Guest(s):** Jason Thacker

**Air Date:** August 31, 2021

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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:** The topic of artificial intelligence can be controversial, disconcerting and even a little scary. I'm Roger Marsh, and AI really affects every aspect of our lives today, doesn't it? From asking Alexa or Siri what the temperature outside is to the automation at our jobs, AI has brought about some tremendous breakthroughs in modern technology. But it's also changed the way we work, live, and interact with our loved ones. Are these changes good for society, bad, maybe a little bit of both?

Well, today and tomorrow on Family Talk, we'll be discussing all things artificial intelligence, from a biblical perspective of course. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton to introduce our guest and AI expert, Jason Thacker.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Hello, and welcome to Family Talk, a broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of Family Talk and president of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

It's insane how much we use technology every day. I just saw where my screen time's up even more. It's unbelievable. But to connect with your family, at work, social, professional networks, faith, educational communities, how we run our organizations, how we stay in touch with friends, even how we're executing today's broadcast and how many people are hearing it all over the country and around the globe. It's just amazing. It's stunning to think about where we were 20 years ago and where we're at today.

Our guest today is an expert on all things AI, that's artificial intelligence, and how we as Christians and families should interact with and use the new technology that's being created, that's evolving every year, that's changing how we live and communicate and do our jobs. His name is Jason Thacker. He's the author of the book, *The Age of AI*.

Jason is the chair of research in technology ethics at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention. He serves as an

adjunct professor of philosophy, ethics and worldview at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky, earned a bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Tennessee, a master's of divinity from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He's got his finger on the pulse of the new AI technology that's being created every year. We're so glad to have him join us here on Family Talk. Jason, went through the book, studied up on you, quite impressive. This is going to be an amazing conversation. Welcome to Family Talk.

Jason Thacker: Well, thank you so much for having me, Tim. Really appreciate the ministry of Family Talk, and it's a joy to be with you today.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jason, the world, technology, knowledge, everything's changing so fast. It's unreal how much this stuff is just surging. When I went through your book, *The Age of AI*, a fascinating read, I felt it was very challenging. It was concerning to me, and to be honest, a little bit scary at times-

Jason Thacker: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you think about where this is all going. I remember as a boy watching *Planet of the Apes*, I don't know if you remember the movie Planet of the Apes. It used to scare me to death to think the world could change. I grew up watching *The Jetsons*, the cartoon *The Jetsons* or what have you. But where are we going? Is this the age of the machines? Are they going to take over and there's going to be a modern day purge down the road or whatever? But Jason, your thoughts.

Jason Thacker: You're exactly right. Technology is changing so fast, and I think often when I talk about AI or artificial intelligence, or even more broadly about technology, it can elicit one of two emotions. Either there's a fear, a natural fear of not knowing what's coming. It seems that things are changing too fast. Are we going to get left behind? We see it altering our relationships, how we communicate with one another, how we do work.

I remember when I was writing the book I specifically was thinking of my mother, who's about 65 years old, who's starting to think about retirement and starting to see parts of her job be automated, where computers are starting to take over certain parts of her job and it elicits a fear of am I going to get left behind him? Am I not going to be needed anymore?

But then all the way to the way we communicate and the way we raise our families even is that our lives are increasingly mediated by some form of technology. Our children are using devices, especially in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, moving over to Zoom for so many things. We start to see how this alters and changes us, so there's a natural fear.

But then the other side, and we see this a lot in Silicon Valley and some other places, is there's an excitement, almost unbridled excitement. Where you have this on the other side it's fear, on this other side it's going to be more excitement about where are we heading? What are we going to be able to do? We're just continuing pushing the envelope, continuing to develop and all the exciting and new challenges that are ahead of us.

I think both of them have understandable elements to them, but I think a Christian response is a little bit more mediated, is that we're not fearful of the future because we know the God of creation. We know the one who created all things. We know the one who's currently sitting on the throne, who is coming back. That's where our hope is and our peace and our calmness in the midst of the chaos.

We're at a technological type of species. We're a people who create technology from the very beginning, even gardening and the old more agricultural cultures that we grew up with, a hoe and a shovel working in the field. You see the echoes of this in Genesis. Adam was told to go and work the ground and to keep it, and you start to see primitive tools being made even throughout the Bible early on.

But we also see stories about how tools can be abused and how they can be misused. It's not so much are these technologies just simply tools, but how do these tools shape us and form us? How do they alter the way we interact with one another in our families? How do they alter the way we interact with our bosses or our colleagues or those outside in this increasingly digital society? In terms of social media, how do we present ourselves and ultimately present our Christ in the gospel message about the way we reflect him?

That's where in the book I really try to peel back this a little bit, because I think you're exactly right. When we think about technology, we naturally think of computers, smartphones, maybe robots, maybe a Roomba running around our house. But if we step back a little bit, and I think that's what's really important for Christians when we encounter maybe what feels like new problems in society, is technology naturally wants us to speed up and to become more efficient and to continue pushing the envelope.

But a Christian response would call us often to slow down, and to reflect, and to understand what's actually going on here. I think that's what I try to do in the book is slow us down a little bit, and ask some of the big questions. Let's ask some of the big questions of a Christian worldview, "Is there a God" and if so, "What is He like? What does it mean to be human?" Then ultimately, "What is technology?" I think if we go in that order, we can have a proper theologically and ethically sound response to these new technologies that's neither fearful nor unbridled optimism.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes. Jason, I have in front of me my phone, I actually have an ear piece that goes with it. I've got an iPad sitting there. We've got a computer sitting in front of me here. We've got all kinds of gadgets running at the same time.

But let's step back as we think about all this stuff that's around us and the word technology, and then the artificial intelligence. Help us understand what artificial intelligence is. Let's give some basic awareness and understanding of what we're talking about, and then we've got a lot to talk about.

Jason Thacker: Yeah. Artificial intelligence, when most people think of it they think of Hollywood thrillers. The thing that we need to do when we slow down a little bit and start to ask some of these bigger questions is "What actually is it and how are we using it?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Jason Thacker: Because I think often, especially in our families, it's a bold assertion to say you use artificial intelligence every single day. Most people say, yeah, I use technology but I'm not really using robots and stuff like that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Jason Thacker: I don't have any robot devices.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Jason Thacker: You do though. On your computers, on your devices, smart phones, any type of device that's considered smart is actually powered by some form of artificial intelligence. I opened the book, talking a quote from a really famous Googler and computer scientist named Ray Kurzweil, who's written a lot on artificial intelligence over the years. He said, "If tomorrow all of our AI systems woke up," and that's the doomsday scenario that you see in a lot of Hollywood thrillers.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Jason Thacker: "If they all decided to wake up and revolt we wouldn't be able to communicate with one another. We wouldn't get money from our banks. We wouldn't be able to shop. Some of our cars wouldn't run. Our military would be vulnerable. Our stock market would crash. Our manufacturing would grind to a halt." It's because we're dependent upon this technology. We use it every single day and we really take technology for granted in our lives. It's running behind the scenes and powering so much of the smart devices that we see today. But essentially artificial intelligence is the ability of a computer to do things that were once reserved for humans, so being able to calculate, to process, to "think", and that's where you start to see in a lot of the conversations about artificial intelligence, where you start to see a blurring between human intelligence and artificial intelligence.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's a big distinction right there, Jason, yeah.

Jason Thacker: Exactly.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Because you're talking about getting them to use language. You reference form concepts, solve difficult problems, improve themselves through learning, and more. You see this happening. It really is. Ultimately is their goal to outsmart man, I guess?

Jason Thacker: Yes and no, and that's where it depends on who's actually behind the technology, some of the goals and the uses in that. There are three basic forms of artificial intelligence. One, is a narrow artificial intelligence, which is everything we have today. What I mean by narrow is that it's designed for one task or a set of tasks, and it does those really well. So, a Nest Thermostat, my thermostat can automatically change the temperature in my house based on what it's learned about how we use it so I wake up and it's a little cooler. The thermostat automatically turns it down. That's narrow artificial intelligence. That's all we have today.

But then you have next level, artificial general intelligence, which is more like human intelligence, and then what's the Hollywood thriller of super intelligence where it takes over the world. We're nowhere near even close to those general intelligence or super intelligence, but we do have a lot of questions about artificial intelligence today, about what does it mean to be human? "What is distinctly human?" If a machine can do things that once were reserved for humans.

That's where it can get a little complicated. But I think the gospel response, the biblical response, is very clear about how we approach these tools, that we can use them ultimately to love God and love our neighbor, and we use them in ethical ways to seek the common good and human flourishing throughout our society.

Dr. Tim Clinton: While you were talking, Jason, I was just thinking, there's a lot going on. You figure people can now geotarget people in their areas. You can track people. You've got the capability with the military. They can tell you how many people are in the house. You've got drones. They're doing all kinds of different things.

People get really heightened to this when you begin talking about suppression and censorship and all that stuff that's going on. Let's keep this going, this conversation going, because behind it all, what's the world view? What's the mentality, the mindset, there that drives this? Is it reducing everyone down to basically machines?

Jason Thacker: In many ways it is, and this is where it's more of a scientific worldview or materialistic or naturalistic. Depending on if you learn philosophy throughout college, you probably learned a little bit about these kinds of concepts, about

this idea that we reduce everything down and there is no God often in these worldviews. But that doesn't mean that all artificial intelligence is driven by that-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Jason Thacker: Because you have faithful Christians creating these tools for the glory of God. But by and large, it's a more secular, it's a more scientific-based worldview that dispenses of God completely, and it ultimately reduces humanity down to what we can do. That's a lot of the basis of modern ethics even, is your value, your worth and dignity is based on what you can do and what you can contribute.

That's where I think the gospel and ultimately the biblical message of the image of God that humanity is created in God's image, and we're not defined by our worth in terms of what we can contribute to society or our utility. We're defined by the image of God that says that our dignity, our value and worth of every single human being, whether they are supposed enemies or not, they're created in God's image and thus they have ultimate value and worth and dignity because of that.

Then in those worldview questions of, "Is there a God?" Yes. "What does it mean to be created in God's image? What does it mean to be a human being?" Then we get to "what are these tools?" They're tools. They're tools that we can use to love God and love our neighbor.

We live in this irony in *The Age of AI* in some sense, of at the same time that we're trying to humanize our machines by giving them names or acting like they're somehow on par with us as human beings. At the same time we're doing that and humanizing them we're dehumanizing ourselves, acting like we're nothing but just a bunch of atoms that were miraculously put together and that there's no ultimate value there's no ultimate purpose or end. That's where a Christian worldview comes in and rearranges and said, "No, there is a God. He created you in his image."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Jason Thacker: We're to use these tools for the glory of God ultimately, but also to love our neighbor and to uphold their dignity, value, and worth.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and your host. Our special guest is Jason Thacker. He's the author of a new book called *The Age of AI, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*.

It's interesting, Jason, that everything you hear in the news now is about the data and the science. The press in is it's to, I think, wipe out that discussion you

just had with us about humanity and just reduce it down to all numbers. Let's go a little deeper in this, because when you begin to think about this conversation and then everyday life, like being up on Amazon or Netflix or something. Somebody is watching everything you're doing, and what they're doing is they're aggregating all this data, aren't they? They're ultimately trying to track you. They're trying to understand you, and then even further, they're trying to mimic that data too, aren't they?

Jason Thacker: Yeah, and you're exactly right. We live in a data rich society where every day every type of tool we're using is collecting certain types of data. Now again, that can sound really fearful and you might go, "Oh my, I don't want anybody tracking me."

But we also have to understand there's a lot of convenience to these things, and a lot of things that we naturally, willingly give consent for our data to be collected. On Netflix, for example, I like sometimes the algorithm or the AI on Netflix being able to recommend a show that my wife and I might want to watch. We've watched this so you might like this. Ultimately those recommendation engines are built on some form of artificial intelligence. The question then becomes at what level is it appropriate for companies to be collecting data? What are they using that data for-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure. Absolutely.

Jason Thacker: And how are they influencing or maybe shaping the way that we see the world around us? A lot of folks will start to talk about surveillance capitalism in the sense of we live in a society that these companies make money. One of the reasons Google is free or Facebook is free or Twitter is free, is because they are collecting data on you and they're targeting ads to you that then they can make money on or they're being able to pull these things together and sell certain types of products because they understand us and know us better.

So, we live in that tension of there's a lot of convenience in the digital age, but at the same time, we fear being known to that level. I talk about it in the sense that we're always known but we're rarely loved. What I mean by that is that these companies know all sorts of things about us, but do we think or believe or trust they maybe have the best interest, our best interest, in mind at times? I think that's where we live within this tension.

But going back to one thing that you said earlier that I think is really important, is often, especially in a lot of the cultural conversations we're having today is its just trust the science, as if science and faith are opposed to one another.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Jason Thacker: But as Christians, we know that ultimate reality is grounded in God, that he created the entire universe, and He created us in His image. That means that

the science is not actually at odds with faith. If anything, these things are ultimately wed together in the person and work of Jesus Christ as God Himself. In a lot of these secular conversations, people of faith are sidelined. But people of faith historically are some of the most brilliant scientists the world has ever known. They're actually coming and understanding that God created all these things. They created a knowable and observable universe.

I think that's helpful when we're talking about a lot of these technologies, is that people of faith need to step into these questions. We need to be training up the next generation of computer scientists and data experts and lawyers and technicians to step into these fields to proclaim the glory of God and to ultimately hold ourselves and our companies and our government even to a higher standard than this consent but to say how do we use these things for human flourishing? How do we use these things to uphold the value and dignity and worth of every human being, no matter where they are because they're created in God's image?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jason, I would say I agree with you 1000%, huge value for good. But it can be used in a horrible way. It's the old saying, figures don't lie but liars figure. Here, he who controls the data can control the world. When you sit back and look at the good for a moment, we're working with some companies that really are looking and tracking individuals.

If you've gone through a loss, maybe we can target you and send grieving resources to you that we think are going to lead you in a way to understand God in the midst of all of it and more. Christian organizations are going to use that kind of data and try to do that kind of targeting.

But here's the concern, like our kids. They take this data about our kids and then they can control and even influence the stuff that's being fed to our kids.

Jason Thacker: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How do you explain as parents AI to our kids?

Jason Thacker: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Because a lot of them are way ahead of us, but they don't want to hear this stuff. They don't see the evil necessarily or see what potentially is dangerous in this.

Jason Thacker: That's where I wanted to focus an entire chapter on the book on the family. Because I think as parents, we need to be involved with our children as they're being exposed to these various technologies instead of handing them a device and saying, "Okay, go and do this and mommy and daddy will be over here," is engaging with them and learning alongside them to be able to explain to them what's maybe actually going on at age appropriate levels.



The same is true is not maybe introducing certain tools like smartphones or iPads or tablets or what have you early on. Maybe slowing that down or basing it on their maturity level and how you can explain to them what's really going on and how to model better habits with our technology.

Because the thing is, is that we're going to be able to shield our children from technology. I think that sometimes we think, "Oh, we'll just cut it off and we'll be a cell phone free house." Well, you really won't be, because you do depend on these devices. You do use them. There are benefits. But there are, as you said, there are extreme dangers. So how do we interact with these tools, show them the benefits, but also show maybe some of the ways that these tools are changing how we interact with one another, how we care about and love one another, and then ultimately even sometimes forming our understanding or even our worldview? Even as Christians maybe these tools are actually shaping and forming our worldviews to a greater extent than we actually realize.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. At the end of the day, you had mentioned a new world order, that ultimately there's this mindset that machines eventually are going to save us from ourselves and protect us in ways that we never thought was possible. Jason, from screen time to the loss of connectivity to the increasing loneliness that we're seeing, mental health issues and more that are surging, there's a lot to talk about.

Jason Thacker: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Give us a closing thought as we wrap up today's broadcast. I want you to come back again tomorrow because there's some issues in here that were stunning to me that I look forward to talking to you about tomorrow. But Jason, just a closing thought to us all, individually and as parents, on how we look at artificial intelligence and what the big takeaway is from today.

Jason Thacker: Yeah. I think what I would say is these tools aren't going anywhere. This isn't something that's going to fade away. This is becoming the part of our society, our digital society. The question isn't do we use these tools or not, it's more so how do we use them? I think that's the ethical question that we need to be asking.

As we engage in a lot of these big questions from content moderation and digital governance to AI and robots, even to warfare and the effects on our work and how we interact with one another and our family, I think the ultimate takeaway for us in a society that's continually speeding up and trying to be more efficient, is to slow down. What I mean by that is to question what we hear, to ask is this true? Does this align with the biblical worldview? Does this help me to understand and to ultimately love God and love our neighbor better as Jesus says in Matthew 22?

That's what our ultimate goal and our purpose in life is, especially as we're raising our children. So in a society that's continually speeding up and trying to be more efficient that at times is kind of dehumanizing, we can slow down, especially as Christian families. But ultimately as the Christian community and church in a society that's plagued by loneliness, that's plagued by addiction, to say we can model a different way of living, a way that's full of hope and peace and calm that ultimately centers on the personal work with Jesus Christ on the cross and the gospel.

That's what changed us. That's what's made a new creation in Christ. With that hope and with that foundation, we can engage some of these really pressing challenges of the day, not fearful, but not overly optimistic, but realistic grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest today has been Jason Thacker, brand new book out called *The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*. There's some amazing content in here that we get to go over. You don't want to miss tomorrow's broadcast. Thank you for joining us.

Roger Marsh: Some incredibly insightful words and perspectives from Dr. Tim Clinton and our guest today here on Family Talk, Jason Thacker. Please join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of this fascinating conversation on the topic of artificial intelligence and the future of humanity, all from a grounded Christian perspective.

Don't forget, if you want to learn more about Jason Thacker, his book, *The Age of AI*, or to share today's program, visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). You can also give us a call at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825.

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Well, thanks for listening. We look forward to reconnecting with you again next time here on Family Talk.

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