



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: God's Direction in My Life – Part 1

Guest(s): Bob Vernon

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And today on the program, we have a very special presentation to share with you. Today's show features one of Dr. Dobson's closest friends, Bob Vernon. Bob Vernon is a retired police officer who served within the Los Angeles Police Department for over 38 years. He began his career as a foot patrol officer in the mid-1950s and climbed the ranks until he retired in 1992 as the assistant chief of police, the second highest position within the force. Bob is also the founder of the Pointman Leadership Institute, an international training group that presents seminars on leadership and ethics to police and other government and private organizations.

Bob Vernon is the author of several books, including: *L.A. Justice: Lessons from the Firestorm*; and *Character: The Foundation of Leadership*. Bob completed his undergraduate work at Biola University and California State University, and received his MBA from Pepperdine University in 1974. Bob Vernon also graduated from USC's Managerial Policy Institute in 1977, and then in 1987, the FBI's National Executive Institute. Bob and his wife Esther have two grown children and several grandchildren. In today's classic presentation, Bob will share some of his testimony and a few stories of God's guidance in his life. Let's go now to part one of Bob Vernon's presentation, which we're calling "God's Direction in My Life" right here on Family Talk.

Bob Vernon: Father, anytime that we talk about spiritual things, we have to ask for your guidance. And I admit that to you right now. And I ask for your guidance, your presence. I ask for a filling of your Spirit so that I can minister to these brothers and sisters here tonight. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, first of all, I don't have any horrendous story to tell about what kind of a bad sinner I was before I became a Christian. Actually, I was just a, I guess you would call it, a common garden variety sinner like most of you. And I wasn't a super weird sinner, just a common garden variety sinner. I don't have any claim to fame. I never was a pick pocket or I never murdered anybody or anything like that, but I was a sinner, and I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal savior

early in life as a preteen, actually just as I was beginning my teens, about 12 years old.

And I was brought up in this real good church, Bible teaching church. And I heard these messages and I believed what I was hearing and it seemed reasonable to me. And at 12 years old, I took the step. I took the leap of faith that many of you have just taken recently and became a Christian, joined the family of God. And of course, as I entered high school, I was kind of interested about doing what God wanted me to do. I'd read several verses. One of them was in Jeremiah, 29th chapter where it says, "I know the plans I have for you, sayeth the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil to give you a future and a hope." And that kind of sounded good. I like that idea. God, the creator of the universe has a plan for me. That's kind of neat. I like to know that plan.

And so immediately after becoming a Christian, and that was one of the first concerns I had, "God, you got a plan for me. That sounds kind of good. I'd like to know about it. Can you let me know what it is?" And so I tried to find out. I have to admit something to you. I kind of expected something miraculous to happen. I kind of expected in the middle of the night. A weird angel standing at the foot of my bed, flapping his wings. "You are to be a radio announcer" or something like that, some weird thing and it didn't happen. And I kind of expected that sometime maybe it wouldn't be quite that. Maybe I'd be sitting in church and all of a sudden, "Africa," and I'd see the spot on the missionary map in front of the church kind of light up or something like that. And that didn't happen either.

And I'm not belittling God. I'm not saying He can't do miraculous things. He has in the past. And occasionally today He does miraculous things. Well, every day really He does them. But I mean that kind of miraculous, kind of the dramatic type with an angel standing in the foot of your bed. You don't hear that too often today. Now once again, I'm not saying He can't do it. But generally speaking, if you're expecting that, let me say this. I don't think that happens too often. We have God's revealed revelation to us right here. We don't need those miracles that they had to have years ago. We have His completed Word right here, the Bible. And that's one of the reasons why I think it doesn't happen.

Anyhow, I was kind of expecting the miraculous and it wasn't happening. And I was getting into high school and nothing was happening. No call, no special message. And I started wanting to know what school I should go to. And I began praying and saying, "God, you know I want to know what you want me to do now. Can you just kind of clue me in on the college or maybe the major even. That would even help." And suddenly instead of miraculous weird things happening, angels and all that stuff, very common things begin to happen. For instance, my mom said, "Hey, Bob, have you ever considered Biola?" And after we had the conversation, I went back to my room and I thought, I wonder if God would choose my mother to lead me to it. Hey, that's, that's not too dramatic. Well, I just kind of forgot that for a while.

And my sis came home from college. She was going to Biola. She said, "Hey, Bob, you're going to consider Biola, aren't you?" All in the same week this happened. And then the thing that really topped it off, a buddy of mine that we're graduating from high school together. He said, "I know that transportation's a problem." He said, "I just bought this motorcycle. And I know you're thinking about transportation about college and you don't have enough money to live in a dorm and you need to stay at home. You need to go to a local school. Well, I just bought this motorcycle and I'm going to Biola and I'd just love to come by your house and pick you up." I thought, my mom, my sis, now my best buddy. You mean God leads through those undramatic ways?

Well, things started happening that way. And several other things happened to interest me in Biola and it was nothing flashy or anything. But I just thought, well, I'll kind of start moving in that direction. See what happens. And so I started moving in that direction. I made application. I was accepted. A few months later, I found myself attending Biola. And I thought, well, at least I think that this is God's will now. And I went there for two and a half years, then something happened. Oh, Uncle Sam was knocking on my door. I was one eight. And everybody was being drafted. I was called down for my medical and they said, "Be ready to leave in about 30 days." And so I thought, wow, here I go, Lord. Gee, I don't want to go in as a regular infantryman. I'd like to do something later on I could parlay into doing something on the mission field. Maybe I can have them teach me how to fly airplanes. I've always loved to fly.

And so I made the application for the Air Force in their cadet screening program, not as an enlisted man, but to go in as a pilot. And so I went through a series of tests here locally, and I passed the test and they sent me up to Parks Air Base. And I started going through the tests and there were 33 of us from the Western states, and the first test was the stanine tests. And I got through that. And the next day was a psychomotor test. Got through that. Each day, about half the guys were washed out.

The next day was a medical exam all day. Got through that. And there were only three of us left. They said, "Now there's only one more test left." I said, "What's that?" And they said the psychiatric. Well, that's no problem, the psychiatric. I'm normal. I went in and I sat down. And the guy who was the psychiatrist, there were three of them on the base. I selected one just I thought by chance, later on I found out it wasn't so much by chance, I went in and I sat down and he said, "Oh, I have your history here, Mr. Vernon. See you went to Biola Bible College." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You're religious?" I said, "Well, yeah, I guess you'd call it that. I term it a little different than you. But yeah, that's pretty accurate."

He said, "Well, if you're religious, what is your religion?" I said, "Well, I'm a Christian." "Oh, you're a Christian. Who do you think Jesus Christ was?" I said, "Well, I think he's the son of God. I believe that." He said, "You really believe that?" I said, "I really do." He said, "In other words, you believe in a personal God." I said, "Yes, sir. I do." "And let me hear that again. You believe that Jesus Christ was his son." I said, "That's right." He looked at me. He said, "Let me see

your fingernails." He looked at my fingernails. I'm not kidding. And he said, "Oh, you don't bite your fingernails." And I said, "No, I don't bite my fingernails." He said, "Well, there's definitely an emotional instability here. To be so religious is to believe in a personal God and that Jesus Christ is the son of God." He said, "You're hyper religious." And he said, "I'm afraid we're going to have to fail you in this portion of the exam."

And I thought it was some kind of put on. I thought it was some kind of a deal to make me react. And so I just sat there with my arms folded, kind of smiled at him. He said, "Well, you can leave. You're free to go now." I said, "Well, you mean that's all?" He said, "Yeah. I just told you I'm eliminating you from the competition." I got up and I still thought it was some gag. And I walked toward the door and I expect him to say, "Okay, let's get down to the real interview." And I walked toward the door and I paused and I looked over my shoulder. The guy still hadn't said it. I opened the door and I kind of stalled going through the door. Nothing happened. And I found myself really eliminated.

So I went over to the head of the selection team at Parks Air Base. And I said, "Hey, something really strange happened." The man in charge said that he was a colonel. His adjutant had questioned me first of all. And as soon as I started talking, the colonel got up from his desk and he come out and he said, "You had trouble with one psychiatrist about religion?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "That was probably Lieutenant so-and-so." And he named the psychiatrist. And I said, "Yeah, how did you know?" He said, "Well, you see, we're having a little problem with him." He said, "I want to make something very plain. That is not the position of the United States Air Force. And you have a protestable item." He said, "You can write to Washington, be examined by a panel of three psychiatrists." And he said, "I'm sure everything will be all right if that's the only matter." But he said the guy has a hang-up on anyone who is religious. He says, "I'm a Bishop in the Mormon church." And he said, "I think I'm a pretty good flyer."

So I walked out of his office and as I got back on the plane to come back to Los Angeles, I fully intended to make the protest. And as I was coming back in the airplane, I just kind of think of things over and kind of praying a little bit, and all of a sudden, kind of like a light went on like you see in the comics, light goes on. And I thought, I've been praying for God to lead me and let me know what He wants me to do. And that's kind of a coincidence that I just happened to pick this guy out of all the men up there. And maybe this isn't just a coincidence. Maybe this is kind of the way God leads through circumstances like that. And I began to realize something. God doesn't lead too much today anymore with angels, but He leads through things like that. And all of a sudden, I felt very much at peace about saying, I guess the Air Force isn't for me.

And I came back to Los Angeles and fully intending to be drafted any moment. And I didn't get my notice. And I was kind of in between. I didn't know what to do. And I thought, well, I'll start pursuing my next great love. My first great love was to be a pilot. I had it all planned. I'd go let the military train me. I'd come

back. I'd join missionary aviation or JAARS, that part of Wycliffe translators and fly the jungle planes and all that real romantic. And I thought that'd be great. And God said, "No, don't want you to do that. At least not through the Air Force."

And so my next great love in life was to be a policeman. My father had been a policeman. I knew a lot about police work. I really liked it. But I'll have to be honest with you. I really never thought, just like most of you, I never thought that the two were compatible being a committed Christian and being a cop. And so I kind of brushed it off to the side, but when I came back from the Air Force trip and had nothing to do for a few months, I was kind of puzzled. I didn't know what else to do. And so I thought, well, I'll move toward the police department. See what happens.

So I started going through the exams, and when they started giving me the exam, they presented a motion picture. I'll never forget the title of it. It was called *The 25th Man*. And the title came from the fact that the LAPD only takes four out of every 100 men that apply. And I thought, well, God, there's a good chance to flunk me out. The odds are on your side. So I started taking the test and I took the, once again, the written test, and I got past that. And I went and took an oral examination. I got past that. Took a physical agility. Got past that. Took a medical. Got past that. And they said, "Now there's only one more test left."

Can you believe it? The police department also gives a psychiatric exam. This was a real exam. The other was a three minute interview. This was a real exam, looking at the ink blots and all that kind of stuff and filling out a personality scale. And later on, coming back a few weeks later and sitting down and having an interview with Dr. Rankin, and I'll never forget Dr. Rankin looking at that written exam. And I don't know how it showed up, but he said, "Mr. Vernon, you didn't want to take this portion of the exam." I said, "That's right." He said, "Why?" I said, "I'd rather not discuss it, sir, respectfully." He said, "Well, we'll have to flunk you in this portion of the exam." I said, "I'd really rather talk about it actually." And I told him what happened at Parks Air Base. And when I told him what happened, he said, "You mean, you believe in a personal God?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Would you go over that again about who you think Jesus Christ is?"

And I'll have to be really honest with you. Just for a few seconds a thought entered my mind. Vernon, you need a job, man. You better water this one down a little bit. You better tell him that you think that Jesus Christ was a great teacher that had good principles, was a great leader of men. You better let it go at that. I almost said that. And then the other thought that came in my mind was, wait a minute. If God doesn't want me here, I don't want to be here. And if God wants me here, no psychiatrist is going to keep me out. Be honest. So I said, "Sir, I believe." I really thought I was going to get flunked out again. So I thought I'm going to go out in a blaze of glory.

I said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God." And I carried a step further. I said, "He's alive today. And I know Him personally, talk with Him." He looked at me. He said, "Do you really believe that?" I said, "Yes, sir. I really do." He said, "That's great to see a young man who knows what he believes. Stick by his guns." He said, "We're very happy to have you in the Los Angeles Police Department." I said, "You mean..." He said, "Well, I'm not going to say that I agree with everything you've said." But he said, "That psychiatrist, I don't know what he was thinking about."

He said, "But we're finding out the facts that we're getting from Korea." And this at that time was right at the time the Korean conflict was winding down. He said, "We're finding out from Korea that men who have a profound faith in God are more emotionally stable and able to endure more stress than someone who has faith in nothing." He said the first men that the communist separate from the rest of the group when they start their brainwashing is anybody they see praying or that somehow manifests a faith in God. They say, "Get that guy away. We don't want him to pollute the rest of the guys." And so he said, "You see, we feel that this is a very good trait, even though we don't agree with all your doctrine perhaps. We just like to have you aboard." And so I found myself entering the academy and a few months later graduating.

Well, I had some doubts. I found myself walking a beat on East 5th Street between San Pedro and Central Avenue. That was tough in the fifties and loving it. And I really enjoyed it. I still enjoy police work, but I felt a little guilty. Do you mean that when you're in God's will, it can be fun? Somehow, I thought that God's will was all sacrifice and you really didn't like what you were doing, but you were giving something to God and God would always put you somewhere that you didn't want to be. In fact, I heard some people get up and say that. "The last place I wanted to go was Africa. And where did I find myself? In Africa." And the guy, and I heard that before and I kind of expected, certainly God won't place me where I want to be. And so I felt guilty. I thought I must be out of God's will. Even though I've been praying, I must be out of God's will.

And so I began praying, God, let me know, am I really supposed to be here? I love it. God, I'm sorry, but I like it, but am I really supposed to be here? And just like God spoke to me, I didn't hear a voice or anything like that. Nothing dramatic, but things began to happen. I have a story I like to tell teenagers because it's kind of funny. But it I think illustrates what began to happen during those early few years. Literally every day weird things. I was always at the right place at the right time. In police work that's really important. You like to be driving by the bank when the band that's come running out. That's really neat if you're a cop. Or driving down an alley when a guy comes out the window, a burglary, and that's really kind of neat.

Well, let me just tell you this one story. I'm going down Avenue 43 right there in Highland Park Area. Rather not Avenue 43. Come down North Figueroa Street approaching Avenue 43. And right at Avenue 44, there's a 76 Union gas station. And I came driving down. And guy out in front of the gas station is jumping up

and down. Great big guy and he's pointing over toward Avenue 43. So I figured something must have happened. So I kind of looked over toward Avenue 43 and sure enough, there's another guy. He's pointing down toward the Pasadena Freeway. So I turn left to Avenue 43 and I'm going down Avenue 43. And about two blocks later, I get to the freeway, and right alongside the freeway is Carlota Boulevard. There's a little side street there that runs parallel freeway. And there's another guy pointing down Carlota Boulevard. Now, by this time I'm curious.

So I pull over right on Carlota and there I see what had happened. There's one guy chasing another guy and the guy in front has got both hands filled full of money. You can see the bills sticking out. Guy's running. And right behind him is a guy with a 76 Union gas station uniform on. Now, us cops, we're pretty smart. We figure out what's going on. So I jumped out of the car and I started chasing the guys, and now there's three of us running. The only problem is they had run about four and a half blocks or so. And they were kind of tired. And so I caught up with him quite rapidly and I passed the guy with the uniform. I figured he was all right.

And just as I get next to this other guy, I notice that he's got a weapon tucked in his belt and turns around. He sees me. He reaches for the weapon. And legally I could have shot him really, but rather than shoot him, I was close enough. I just whipped out this little thing we call a sap. It's a little leather thing that has lead in the end. And it really slows people down. And I just wrapped him on the head with that and he just fell asleep real quick and he's lying there, and the money's going all over the street. And the guy from the gas station, he's collecting the money. And I took the weapon from the guy, and I threw it in the front seat of the police car, and I put the handcuffs on this guy and he's starting to come around now. And I drag him over to the police car and I open up the back door of the police car.

And just so I open up my radio, 11075, 11075. That's me. 44 till tap of the service station just occurred Avenue 43 in Figueroa. "The suspect was wearing black trousers." Black trousers. "Red sweater." Red sweater. "He was last seen running toward the Pasadena Freeway." I reached over and I picked up the microphone. She's still broadcasting. "He took \$85 in miscellaneous." I broke right in. "11075. Suspect in custody." She couldn't believe it. She said, "11075, repeat." So I repeated. And finally she believed me. And so they canceled the all units broadcast. And I drove back to the service station. And the first guy that was pointing, the first guy in the civvies, turns out he's the owner or lessee or whatever you call of the service station. And he said he was walking around, throwing his hands in the air. He said, "It's fantastic. It's amazing." I said, "What's that, sir?" He said, "This modern police department. Scientific advances." He said, "I just hung up the phone and there you were."

Well, God was good. And God answered that question I had. Lord, you really want me here. And I knew it was outside of my control. Something was happening outside my own capabilities and abilities to figure things out. And so I

said, "Oh, okay, I get the message. I am supposed to be here. Okay. I get that. Thanks for that. Now, why do you want a committed Christian in this slot of being a cop?" That was my next prayer. And almost as soon as I began uttering that prayer, that was two or three years after I got on the police department, I began getting answers to that prayer. I began getting opportunities to share with various groups, agencies, schools that normally would not ask a preacher or pastor to come into their group and give them a talk.

For instance, PTA groups. They'd say, "Now we understand that you know quite a bit about juvenile narcotics. We'd like for you to come and speak to our PTA group." And my normal answer, which still is I still get requests, I say, "Well, fine. I'll be glad to give a talk. I want you to know that when I do these on my own time though, that I have to let you know that I go a little deeper than you may want me to go." And they say, "What do you mean by that?" "Well, a lot of these problems like narcotics problem, that's a surface problem. You have to get down to some very root, basic problems. Basically there's some moral issues involved. And if you're going to talk about morality and morals, you have to talk about, you have to have a foundation for those morals. And I think that the Bible happens to be an excellent foundation. If you don't mind me quoting from the Bible and talking about some moral issues and some spiritual truths from the Bible, I'll be glad to come."

And for some reason they're not afraid of cop. They say, "Well, you're a policeman. Now, that's all right. You can come tell us anything you want. Just give us the answer, whatever the answer is." And so I found that God began answering my question of why.

Roger Marsh:

Well, we hate to interrupt this entertaining and insightful presentation, but we are running out of time for today's edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And that was a classic presentation by Dr. Dobson's good friend and former LA assistant chief of police, Bob Vernon. Please join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Bob's presentation right here on Family Talk.

In the meantime, if you missed any of today's program, remember you can stream it when you visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Now, if you've been blessed by Family Talk or the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, won't you consider making a financial contribution in support of our ministry? We are completely listener supported and every tax deductible donation is used to further our mission of strengthening the family and defending righteousness in the culture. Remember, you can give a gift online at drjamesdobson.org, or to find out how to make a donation over the phone, call us at (877) 732-6825. And as always, thanks so much for listening to Family Talk. Please join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Bob Vernon's passionate and entertaining presentation that we've titled "God's Direction in My Life." You won't want to miss it on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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