



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Oblivious to the End – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Dr. Richard Swenson

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Announcer: Today on Family Talk.

Roger Marsh: The Bible teaches that no one knows the day when Christ will return. In the meantime, Jesus warned that there will be great strife and tribulation in this fallen world, so how can we be hopeful even in these circumstances?

Roger Marsh: Welcome, everyone, to Family Talk, the radio ministry of The James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. Today, we're opening our radio vaults to revisit a conversation Dr. Dobson had with Dr. Richard Swenson. Dr. Swenson is a popular author and award-winning educator and researcher. He's traveled to over 60 countries, speaking on how wellness, faith, and culture connect. He's also presented before Congress, NASA, and the Pentagon.

Roger Marsh: Today, Dr. Richard Swenson explains his research and analysis on the predictable end to this world. He'll also touch on the influence of sin in our fallen world as well. Now, Dr. Dobson and Dr. Swenson will be covering a lot of ground today, so let's get started. Here now is Dr. Richard Swenson's opening comments on this edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Swenson: Well, it's a joy and privilege to be in the studio. We're going to talk about a fairly sobering topic, but God is great and He is sovereign and we stand on the foundation that's unmovable and unshakeable, so let's discuss it.

Dr. Dobson: I have a very good physician friend here in town named Dr. Wayne Gage and he sent me a tape of an interview with you on this subject, which was fairly short and it just wetted my appetite and I said, "We've got to get that man here." We have this book now that I strongly recommend to our listeners. First of all, tell us what a futurist is.

Dr. Swenson: Well, a futurist is somebody who looks back maybe 10, 15 years, looks forward maybe 10, 15 years, and is able to integrate not only longitudinally all of the things that you see in that sweep of history, but also horizontally across the

stage of the world today. You have to do a lot of work of integration if you want to have accuracy as a futurist. Predicting the future is a difficult proposition [crosstalk 00:02:13]-

Dr. Dobson: Sure [crosstalk 00:02:14]-

Dr. Swenson: There's been a [crosstalk 00:02:14]-

Dr. Dobson: How can anyone say with any kind of confidence what's coming? We can't even know what happens tomorrow.

Dr. Swenson: There was a lot of futurists that have been rung up the day after the world was supposed to end and asked what they wanted for breakfast. That's obviously a humbling thing, but it also is a very fascinating time to be a futurist. So much is happening on the world stage, more than ever before. We live in a special moment in history. It's a privileged time I think for the Church in many regards. God has given us incredible ministry opportunities that shouldn't be denied or neglected and to understand where the world is going so we can anticipate it and meet it there and be positioned to confront the issues that are in front of us is a real privilege as well as a challenge.

Dr. Dobson: Do you really believe that we're approaching the end of the age?

Dr. Swenson: I do. I don't put a date to that. It might be next week, it might be this afternoon, it might be a hundred years out. When we look at the trends that are explained here and the way that these trends are linked and the radical dynamic of exponential change, the way that power and money and technology and information and communications are increasing so rapidly, it would be amazing to me if we would be able to escape the consequences of this more than a hundred years. More than setting a date or specifics on that, what I'm emphasizing is a process. It's a process, it's out there, it's in the world stage. It is very powerful. It seems to be irreversible. It's compelling. It's binding and we have to understand it and then confront it and figure out what it means for the Church, for our individual personal lives and so on.

Dr. Dobson: Now, I'm no theologian, but I find that in Scripture. It would appear to me that the Bible itself teaches that we are not going to be here forever, that we are hurdling toward oblivion. If you read Matthew 24 and what Jesus had to say about the end of the age, that's coming. How can people miss that in the Scripture?

Dr. Swenson: That's part of the Christian legacy is that we believe that history is leading up to something as opposed to the secular view that where there's just cycles that keep endlessly repeating themselves, which is what a lot of Eastern religions believe in. I believe there is a culmination of history that is talked about in Scripture. I don't know exactly when. We're told not to set specific dates about that. Only God Himself knows. C.S. Lewis even wrote about this and he says, "I

don't know when God is going to bring down the curtain and precisely because I don't know I'm not going to give The Almighty my advice about when You ought to do it."

Dr. Swenson: No, we ought to be ready for that at any time, whether it's now, whether it's a hundred years from now, whether it's 250 years from now. It just seems to me that it's closer that it's ever been.

Dr. Dobson: It's my understanding, and this may be apocryphal, but it's my understanding that you were driving on the freeway when many of these ideas occurred to you and you pulled over to the side of the road and wrote them down.

Dr. Swenson: I've been a futurist since 1982. I've been looking at trends. I've collected at least 50 or 80 trends, depending on how many you consolidate that are propelling the world system in a direction it's going. One day I was driving down the interstate in Wisconsin. Beautiful interstate, the sky was blue. I was looking for deer on the edge of the woods. I was just having a good time driving down the road, but my brain is often a poorly controlled explosion, and it was doing stuff that I didn't ask it to do. It was sequencing some of these trends and all of a sudden when the light went on, I had to put the breaks on. I had to pull to the side of the road. I had to open my glovebox and get a piece of paper out and write as fast as I could because I said, "I don't want this to disappear in some kind of poof before I can get it recorded."

Dr. Swenson: If this trend is true, and this trend is true and this trend is true and this and this and this, and they're linked in the way that they appeared to be linked, this has very serious consequences for the world system. That happened four or five years before the book came out because I wanted to sort of sit on it for a while and see if I really still felt that it was compelling and binding and true. Everything that I see developing across the world stage now convinces me this is exactly and precisely true.

Dr. Dobson: Well, let's go for it. What are some of the forces that could create havoc here on Earth?

Dr. Swenson: None of these are particularly novel or dramatic or controversial I think in and of themselves, but when we linked them together I think people will see the drama emerge there. The first one is what I call profusion. Profusion is the generalized phenomenon of more. If I had to assign one word that described modern living it would be perhaps the word "more". Where does more come from? Everybody wants more [crosstalk 00:07:01]-

Dr. Dobson: That's right.

Dr. Swenson: They want more and more of everything faster and faster. All the countries in the world want more. Every individual in America wants more. This is our definition of happiness, more than I have now. It's the wrong definition of

happiness, but progress has given us that and progress works by differentiation. For example, if you ask progress to cut down a tree and differentiate the tree to make baseball bats and fruit bowls and tables out of the tree. If you ask progress to differentiate the tablecloth, it would make hankies and shirts and socks and hats. That's precisely how progress works by differentiation, and then proliferation to whatever the market will bear.

Dr. Swenson: As a result of that, we always have more. Progress builds just in that direction, always in the direction of more. It can't give us less and less of everything slower and slower. That's called regress, not progress, and nobody wants that. You see a very powerful trend, more and more, faster and faster. It is what I call The Phenomenon of Profusion.

Dr. Dobson: How does having more threaten the future of humanity?

Dr. Swenson: It doesn't yet, does it? We'll get there. Profusion is... if people agree that this Phenomenon of Profusion is real, then we'll go on to the next step. The next step is irreversibility. If you were to graph this profusion curve... for example, if you were able to come up with what is called a Profusion Number, add everything together on the world stage and assign it a number, probably only God could do that, but there is a number that could be given. Every single thing that you can possibly imagine. Every piece of paper, every hotel, every missile, every catalog, every ice cream cone. Don't forget anything. Every kernel of rice that's consumed in China. All the people, all the highways and assign that a number, call that the Profusion Number. Now, graph that over 2,000 years. You would find that it always goes up. The only time it stops is during a plague or a depression or a continental war. It stops temporarily and then it goes right back up again.

Dr. Swenson: There is an irreversibility about this. There's several reasons it's irreversible. Number one, our economy is dependent on profusion giving us more and more faster and faster, and nobody wants our economy to fall apart. That doesn't happen by partisan support, so if progress stopped giving us more, our economy would fall apart. The second thing is we're addicted to it. We're really habituated strongly to progress and wanting more and you take television and the NFL away from America and we're gone in a month. We're very addicted to progress and getting more.

Dr. Swenson: The third thing is there is an involuntary retention of things that causes this irreversibility. For example, once atomic bombs are discovered, you can't undiscover them. Once something is learned or known or published, you can't retract that, so you climb up on the next rung above the one you're climbing on now and you don't realize that the rung below you has disappeared. We can't go back down into a previous state of innocence because that state in a sense has disappeared. What's on the new stage, we have to now learn how to deal with it.

Dr. Dobson: Now, we started with profusion, the more and more and more and more in every area of life. Then, we go from there to the irreversibility of that, and then we go to exponential change.

Dr. Swenson: Exponential change. This is a very important part, and most people know a little bit about exponentiality. The trouble is they're underestimating exponentiality and I want to get in a little bit to some of the math related to this. If you were to graph the Profusion Number from zero to the present, in other words everything that existed in the world stage on that particular day and you go all the way back for 2,000 years and graphed this, you would find a very interesting curve. The curve would remain flat all the way up to about 1950 or 1975, and then it would take a right-angle turn and go straight up, fast as the speed of light, fast as a rocket blast.

Dr. Swenson: Now, people say, "Now, wait a minute. There was some profusion in the year 500 and 1000 and 1500." Indeed, there was profusion then, but maybe you had a million units in the year 0 and then you had a hundred million units in the year 500, and then you got up to a billion units. Currently, we have a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion units of profusion. Very dramatic stuff is happening in our generational shift and so if you look at the profusion number graphed over time, you would see an exponential graph in the extreme. The reason exponentiality is important to point out here, when things are changing that dramatically, our intuition is always behind the curve in understanding that.

Dr. Swenson: If you took a piece of paper and folded it in half 40 times, it would go from here to the Moon. If you fold it in half a hundred times, it would go from here to the far side of the universe 15 billion light years out there. You take the Pacific Ocean as another illustration. It's 63 million square miles. It is so big you can fit all of the continents of the world in the Pacific Ocean. Still have room for another Asia. It averages 14,000 feet deep. If you dried up the Pacific Ocean and started with one drop and doubled the drop, after 80 drops the Pacific Ocean would be refilled. On the 70th double, it's only one one-thousandth of the way full. On the 79th double it's only one-half full, and then boom. That's what happens in exponentiality. Things kind of muddle along and they're going along and they're going along and they're going along, and then all of a sudden, boom.

Dr. Dobson: You have this example of it in your book. Whenever Adam and Eve were created in the Garden, if that were zero point for humanity as it is all the way up to the time of Christ, and then 1800 years beyond that to AD 1800, it took that long to reach 1 billion people on the face of the Earth. It took 130 years for the second billion. It took just 30 years for the third billion, and 15 years for the fourth billion, and 12 years for the fifth billion, and 11 years for the sixth billion. The seventh billion is now on the way. Is that what you're talking about?

Dr. Swenson: Precisely, and there's another way of looking at it. There's many ways to look at this. There's a science writer who is an inventor who is a futurist about technology and he says in the next 100 years, we are going to undergo 20,000 years of progress. If something cataclysmic goes wrong with the world system, it

would be my prediction that we might not have a lot of lead time. We might, but there's a possibility that things could cascade out of control very rapidly. Somebody once asked Hemingway, "How do you go bankrupt?" He says, "First gradually, then suddenly." I think we have to worry about that because of this mathematical phenomenon of exponentiality, which is taking hold.

Dr. Dobson: Now, link these concepts together because people have to hold that in their minds as they see where you're going.

Dr. Swenson: First profusion. More and more of everything, faster and faster. People want that. People aren't opposed to that. I'm not opposed to that. I think it's a Biblical mandate in many ways. More and more, faster and faster. Then, to think that it's irreversible. We can't put the brakes on, we can't back up. Our economy would fall apart. People would be unwilling to tolerate that, so there's an irreversibility about this and the curve is an exponential curve and when you get an exponential curve, drama happens very, very suddenly and unanticipated consequences can cascade out of control very rapidly. We're kind of mathematically at that kind of point right now.

Dr. Swenson: The next step in here is people would say this, totally appropriate. They'd say, "But Dick, the good is better than the bad. If you pile up all the good, it's a hundred times more than the pile of the bad. If you were to measure the distance, maybe it's a hundred times, maybe it's a thousand times better than the bad. You're just acting like a pessimist, and are you resisting the fact that we have all this progress?" That's a good point and it's an appropriate question for people to ask me with regard to this. I would say, "You're right, the good is better than the bad", but you have to assign fallenness to this exponential curve and you have to understand that when you factor fallenness in to profusion curve, everything that shows up on that curve has some dimension of fallenness associated with it, either potentially or actually.

Dr. Swenson: For example, let's take a look at some individual things. Toothpicks, toothpicks are benign, they're innocent. They're simple. A billion people use them every day, but you know what? There's a fallenness defect applied to toothpicks. Sometimes are people using them to do what toothpicks do and they seed their bloodstream with some bacteria and the bacteria goes to their heart valves and they get endocarditis and they get sick. Some people swallow toothpicks. There's a whole medical article about problems with swallowed toothpicks and they perforate the intestine and people get peritonitis.

Dr. Swenson: I saw somebody in the emergency once. They were walking barefoot in their house and they hit a toothpick in their rug and it buried itself totally in their foot and I had to go in there and search and pull the toothpick out. A toothpick isn't completely innocent. Look at penicillin. Penicillin is a wonderful thing. It saved tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives, but there's also adverse reactions to penicillin. Lots of adverse reactions. Some people even with anaphylactic reactions will even die related to that and there's some bacteria

developed resistance related to that, so that's the fallenness defect related to penicillin.

Dr. Dobson: Fallenness refers to the sinful nature of the world, coming from Adam and Eve's sin and that it affects everything. Second law of thermal dynamics that says everything is moving downward.

Dr. Swenson: There you go, and it's probably the only Christian doctrine that I'm applying actually in this book which otherwise is just trends-based research, but G.K. Chesterton says, "Fallenness is the one Christian doctrine that's empirically provable." You don't have to be a spiritually-minded person to recognize there's a flaw out there in the world system and things go wrong and things go wrong all the time.

Dr. Swenson: To account for that, you can call it The Flaw if you want to, but we would call it fallenness. This is not a perfect world. A perfect world will be coming when God comes to set everything right, and I can't wait for that, but in the meantime we have to deal with these flaws that are maddeningly persistent in our lives. A car drives down the road and a tire blows and three people hit a telephone post and are killed. There was no malice there, there was no mischief, there was evil except a natural evil that has to do with fallenness.

Dr. Dobson: Now, let's link that together with the other three.

Dr. Swenson: You have this exponential curve, more and more, faster and faster. Very dramatic in terms of the math involved, but you have to factor a certain percentage of that is given to fallenness, and now we're back to where people will say, "Yes, but Dick, still the good is going faster than the bad." If you were to break this great big exponential curve into two curves, two subcurves, a curve of all the good and then a curve of the fallenness, a curve of the implications of the bad, the curve of the good would be a hundred times or a thousand times greater. That's precisely correct, but it should not lull us into too much complacency because if the bad is bad enough, there has to be a separate accounting between the bad and the good.

Dr. Swenson: If the bad is bad enough, it will doom the entire system no matter how good the good is. This is a standard trick that people fall into, particularly futurists or other people looking toward the future that an accounting error that they will make is to say, "Well, if the good is better than the bad, you subtract the bad from the good. If we have a positive net, then we're okay and we can go in that direction." If the bad is bad enough, it will doom the entire system.

Dr. Swenson: For example, you go to your mailbox and you have 10 pieces of mail there and the first nine pieces of mail are great. One says your book was published. It was accepted by a great publisher. Another says you won the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes for \$10 million. Another one says your child was accepted with a full ride scholarship to a prestigious university. You go on and on. Nine

pieces of wonderful mail. The last piece of mail comes from the public health department and it says you're HIV positive from an inadvertent needle stick. Now, the good might outnumber the bad nine to one. Does that mean you're better off? Not exactly. People can see where I'm going with this. You have to account the bad independently and negatively.

Dr. Dobson: With exponential change comes the potential for more falleness, even though it's a smaller percentage-

Dr. Swenson: Precisely.

Dr. Dobson: But it still has the potential of destroying everything else.

Dr. Swenson: Both of these curves are growing very rapidly and people look at that progress. Progress has put on a tremendous parade that's dazzled us all. We've got space shuttles and super computers and all kinds of things. We've got the healthcare system and the educational system. We've got just some amazing things that progress has given us and we should be grateful for those things, and so we think we're insulated and protected, but meanwhile in the shadows, falleness is assembling its own parade and we need to look very seriously about the implications related to that because falleness will come out of the shadows when it has enough power. It is increasing exponentially, too. Slower than the positive is, but it is increasing, that second curve of all the bad, all the negative, all the falleness is increasing exponentially, too.

Dr. Swenson: We have to look at the implications related to that. There are many ways that this could exact a toll on the world system. Weapons of mass destruction, there's the new things in robotics and in nanotechnology and the genomics. There's lots of issues that could be brought up. It's predicted we'll have infinite energy by the year 2050 through nuclear fusion. What is falleness going to do with infinite energy? Think seriously about some of these issues. What people fail to do is they fail to take it far enough out. Take it far enough out. Be sure to factor in all the technology, all the exponentiality, and all the falleness, and sooner or later you see that smaller numbers of people, smaller and smaller and smaller numbers of people have more and more ability to exact damage on the world system.

Dr. Swenson: It used to be it was just the United States and Russia, but now there's a lot of rogue nations. There's a lot of terrorist organizations. There's a lot of... even the Unabomber kind of people who before only had pipe bombs, what happens when they have antimatter at their disposal? If you just take a raisin, a raisin has in its mass converted to energy, has enough to provide all the electrical needs of New York City for one day, a raisin. Now, if we can get antimatter the size of that, what would falleness do with that? That's basically my question. I'm not trying to depress people, I'm just trying to alert people. Science is going very fast right now and I'm not sure we have the wisdom to figure out how to direct this or slow it down or control it when we need to.



Dr. Dobson: There are times when the short length of this program is a real problem, and this is one of them because I really want to carry this on tomorrow. How in the world we're going to summarize what you just said so that those who don't hear the program tomorrow will understand where we are and still leave time to take it on through I'm not sure, but this is a fascinating subject. It does link to our faith. Despair is not the answer. The Bible does not call us to despair. Despair is a sin and yet you're talking about potentially catastrophic things that can happen to us and we've got to harmonize those two and we're out of time. We're going to have to do it next time, but in the meantime, this book, *Hurdling Toward Oblivion*, I think spells out very, very clearly what it is that you're talking about.

Dr. Dobson: The bottom line, give me one sentence to explain here halfway through our discussion what you're trying to say to people.

Dr. Swenson: Perhaps simply stated, each of the following factors are increasing exponentially without any proportional decrease in fallenness, the power of weaponry, of technology, of communications, of information, of mobility, of money, of speed, of population. They're all increasing exponentially without any commensurate diminishing of the fallenness problem.

Dr. Dobson: Any one of those could wreak havoc [crosstalk 00:23:20]-

Dr. Swenson: All of those together could. Convergence is a major subtheme of progress today, all things happening and coming together at the same time, and it's all exponential. Their convergences are simultaneous and exponential. That is up to something in our generational shift and this isn't necessarily bad news. It's worrisome at a certain level, but you're right, despair is not appropriate. God is God. God is sovereign. God is powerful. He is informed. He is involved. He is a genius, and so it turns out the only hope that we have is the only hope that we've ever had, and that's [crosstalk 00:23:53] and hope [crosstalk 00:23:53]-

Dr. Dobson: That's right. We'll pick it up next time.

Dr. Swenson: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to a classic edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and Dr. Dobson's guest has been educator and author Dr. Richard Swenson. Learn more about his research and his book, *Hurdling Toward Oblivion*, when you visit today's broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). Stay up to date on our newest programs by using your Amazon Alexa. This hands-free device allows you to listen to Dr. Dobson anytime with a simple command. Once you enable the Family Talk Skill, say, "Alexa, play today's broadcast of Family Talk." It's that easy. Discover how to access our daily program on your device by going to [drjamesdobson.org/alexa](http://drjamesdobson.org/alexa).

Roger Marsh: Be sure to join us again tomorrow for the second part of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Dr. Richard Swenson. They'll examine the looming dangers of our fallen nature and why we can fully trust God's sovereignty regardless of what happens. That's next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you'll join us then.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi, everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton, Executive Director of The James Dobson Family Institute. Our ministry here exists to honor The Lord through ministering to today's families and marriages all over the world. We couldn't accomplish that, however, without your support, and as the JDFI, The James Dobson Family Institute, continues to grow, we need your help. Visit us. Will you do that? At [drjamesdobson.O-R-G](http://drjamesdobson.O-R-G), or call us toll free at 877-732-6825. Stand with us and fight for righteousness and culture.