



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Champion for Christ: The Zach Ertz Story

Guest(s): Zach Ertz

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners, just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: If you're an NFL fan, you probably remember the epic last few minutes of the 2018 Super Bowl between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New England Patriots. I'm Roger Marsh. And let me set the scene for you. Two minutes and 25 seconds left in the fourth quarter New England ahead by one point, the Eagles have the ball, first down at the 12-yard line. Quarterback, Nick Foles was able to pass the tight end Zach Ertz, who dove into the end zone for a touchdown. The Patriots weren't able to answer in their final possession and the Philadelphia Eagles upset New England to win their first Super Bowl trophy in team history. As an athlete being part of that winning team would have to be a career high, wouldn't it? To catch that winning touchdown though? Oh, that must have been a dream come true.

Well, today on Family Talk, we'll be sharing a 2018 interview featuring Dr. Tim Clinton and tight end, Zach Ertz, the man who caught that winning pass. The interview was recorded at the Men's Ignite Conference just a few months after Zach caught the winning touchdown. And you can feel the excitement from the audience. Dr. Dobson and Dr. Clinton got together shortly after Men's Ignite to give a special introduction to this exciting interview. Let's go there right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson and with me is Dr. Tim Clinton, and we have a very special program for you here on Family Talk. He recorded a program, I was not there, but you're going to want to hear what happened. It was with one of the heroes of last year's Super Bowl, and I'm going to let him tell you about it. Tim, there were 6,000 men in the audience listening to this interview. You called him to the platform, didn't you?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I did Dr. Dobson, imagine a room with a lot of men, a lot of energy going on, guys-

Dr. James Dobson: Testosterone all over the place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And they love the outdoors and they love football, Dr. Dobson. There was a moment during this interview that I think God really moved, you know when you sense a real shift that happens? Well, here we had Zach Ertz, he's an American football tight end for the Super Bowl champion, Philadelphia Eagles of the NFL. He was actually drafted in the second round of the 2013 NFL draft. He played college football guess where? Stanford University. He was recognized in college as a unanimous all American, but let me go back to the Philadelphia Eagles, just for a moment you all. That storybook, NFL Super Bowl Championship started way back with some NFL football players, namely Carson Wentz, who was the quarterback who got hurt. Nick Foles, who stepped in as a backup quarterback, led them all the way to the Super Bowl, so it's an unbelievable story. Zach Ertz and others, they are dynamic Christians.

If you're on social media, Facebook, or what have you, no doubt if you have seen anything about the Eagles you've seen baptisms going on, the players are involved in Bible studies, the wives are involved in Bible studies, the coaches are involved in Bible study and more. They give God the glory. We're so delighted to have Zach Ertz with us, who, by the way, catches the really, what I say is the winning touchdown pass in the Super Bowl. And it was that pass where he caught it, he runs for a couple of yards, he dives for the end zone with his hands stretched, the ball crosses the line and then when he hits the ground, fumbles it. And so the big debate was, was it a touchdown or not? Of course-

Dr. James Dobson: There was a big agonizing pause while they analyzed this. And really the Super Bowl depended on the... outcome hung in the balance while they were deciding whether or not he really caught that ball or not.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here's a great NFL superstar who loves the Lord with his whole heart.

Dr. James Dobson: And he loves his mama.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And he loves his mama. He grew up in brokenness, sports became an outlet for him, but then he goes on a journey and he's on a mission now. He isn't just a superstar on the football field, he's a giant among that younger generation right now. And hey, everybody loves football, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: And again, there were 6,000 men sitting out there cheering and yeah, enjoying every minute of it. Thank you for recording this interview. And I think our listeners are really going to enjoy themselves.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Zach's got an amazing story you guys, I'm going to go all the way back. I want to talk, first of all, about your mom and your mom becomes your rock growing up as a boy. And tell us a little bit about her. She was actually the one, by the way, who said you were destined for the NFL a long before you even begin to think about it?

Zach Ertz: Yeah. She's an incredible woman. My parents, I have three younger brothers, so I'm the oldest of four boys and my parents separated when I was 15 years old. And oftentimes as men, we shut everything off around us. And when with my three younger brothers, I was viewed as the leader and I was just like this, I didn't want to talk to anyone, there was no one around to talk to about what I was going through, that terrible time that I was enduring at that moment while I was 15. So the only way to express my anger that I had pent up was to workout and train. And so that was when I started to get into the weight room, not because I wanted to be a great athlete, but because I didn't have anywhere else to go, sports were my sanctuary away from all the drama that was going on with my family. So it was definitely a tough time.

I think looking back on it, I would have handled it a lot different. I think as a man, we struggle communicating and being vulnerable with other people and even when you're 15 years old, it's been instilled on you already, don't show weakness, men aren't allowed to cry. So it was definitely a time in my life that was extremely tough on me, but my mom was the rock of our family at the time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Zach you said when you were in ninth grade, mom forced you to go back out for football. You actually played again let me say this, quarterback and some wide receiver and you were playing free safety, basically, right?

Zach Ertz: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Can you imagine him playing free safety coming at you?

Zach Ertz: It was a lot of fun.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let me give a name to this guy that God brings into your life Brent Jones. Right?

Zach Ertz: Yep.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So tell us about Brent, I mean, because this is really the page turner for you.

Zach Ertz: Yeah. So Brent was in the area, he played for the 49ers. I grew up in Northern California, our high school was in the East bay his daughter was a year older than me at the high school, she was dating our star quarterback. So he came out and coached me only because my high school football coach said, "Hey, we got this basketball player who thinks he can play college basketball, but he really can't. Will you come out here and show him his potential?" And I was 16 at the time and a former NFL tight end is coming to my high school telling me, "Man, if you do X, Y, and Z, you're going to be playing on Sundays in the NFL." And I was like, I barely even know you, who are you? I thought he was crazy, but obviously he knew what he was talking about.

After my first game of my junior year, I go out and have 140 yards and a touchdown and I started getting these letters from bigger football schools. I was getting letters from small school basketball schools, but I think my first letter for football was Northwestern. And I was like big 10, I would have never dreamed of playing a sport in that kind of size of a conference. And then he actually reached out to Jim Harbaugh at Stanford at the time and said, "Hey, I got this kid in the East bay, he's a tight end, you need to offer him a scholarship." So Stanford comes in, Coach Harbaugh offers me a scholarship and then I commit to Stanford in November of my junior year. But then that's when things kind of still are in motion. At Stanford you have to do a full application. I had to take the ACT twice, Stanford, your senior year, you have to take two honors AP classes.

My senior year, I was like, "I don't even want to do this really. I'm a senior, all my other friends that are going place for college, aren't doing any work, they're just chilling at this point." And so, I go visit UCLA because that was a school that had, they were always on me recruiting me wise and so I go down there and UCLA, you're like, man, this is for me. I'm 17 years old, I don't really know any better, I want to come here. And so I finally get admitted to Stanford and my mom says, "UCLA is no longer an option, you're going to Stanford, you're staying 45 minutes away from me. And it's going to be way better for you long-term," and she was a hundred percent right.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Yeah. That's awesome. Zach, people talk a lot about discipline, attitude, all those different things. Is there one thing that you've seen that has helped separate people up at that collegiate level, maybe up even in the NFL? You say, that's it, that's a big deal right there.

Zach Ertz:

Yeah. I think I had someone speak to our Stanford team when I was a freshman at the time. And he gave this whole speech about how, when he was playing football, this guy was a Hall of Fame guard for the Raiders and he came back to coach Stanford. Steve Wisniewski was his name. He came back to Stanford and gave us this story about how he approached college, how he approached the NFL and it really resonated with me. He said his mindset was all about giving everything he has to football, to life, to his marriage so he has no regrets when he's done. And that's the thing that I've instilled in myself. I want to work as hard as I possibly can, I'm going to prioritize the things that are important in life. Not going out to a party on a Friday night when I was in college, I didn't really do that, any of that stuff in college, I wanted to focus on my schoolwork and my football, because I knew that that was going to be important down the road.

So, everything I've done has been with that attacking mentality that everything in football, I'm going to pour into, because when I'm done playing in hopefully 10 years from now, I'm going to look back and say, I gave everything I possibly could to football. And then when I'm done, I can't say that I regretted doing this, or I regretted doing that, or I wish I did this is probably the one thing that people that didn't make it to this level, always say, man, I wish I would have done that, I wish I did that or I wish I worked harder, but I have that mindset where I'm just given everything I have into this. And it's really in my spiritual life

too, is I'm putting everything into this because I don't want to get to heaven one day and say, man, I wish I would have done this or I wish I would've done that.

And so that's been the mentality that I've had and anytime I speak to someone that's in high school, is focus on the things that are truly important in life to you, whether it be school, whether it be academics, whether it be chess, be the best chess player you can possibly be if that's the avenue you've been called to do. And when you're done with it, when your career is over, then you'll have that right mindset.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And let's fast forward to 2013, it's draft day. Zack gets picked 35th overall, so you were round two pick three and guess who called? The Philadelphia Eagles, did you think you were going to the Eagles? Did you want to go to the Eagles man?

Zach Ertz: I did not think I was going there, the Eagles just signed the guy in free agency that they were paying a lot of money to. They had an Eagles probable Hall of Famer Brent Celek who had been there forever. I was like this, I'll probably not go into that team, I thought I would go from picks like 20 to 40 when I didn't get picked in the first round, I was really bummed. My wife and I had a couple of donuts that night to indulge in, to boost my spirits. But Philly at the time when they called, I was shocked. My wife now, my girlfriend at the time, is a year younger than me in school. So, she was a junior when I was a senior coming out and so it was definitely a lot of uncertainty in that regard, going 3000 miles away to the East Coast, going to the NFL when you hear all these bad rumors about NFL players, for her, it was tough. She was not the happiest of campers at the time, she was in tears, but it worked out. There was definitely a reason, a much bigger reason than I would have known at the time of why I'm in Philly.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And Zach, a part of the journey here, you wound up that one year with a serious groin injury and then right after that, a concussion, I mean, you got hammered. Talk to us about that adversity piece there. Did you think it was over? I mean, what was going on?

Zach Ertz: Yeah. So I've been dealing with groin issues my first two years in the league and then that summer training camp, it finally just comes off the bone. I tear three, I had doctors off the bone. They had to go in and attach all those. They tied my abs down, back to my pelvis, because those were fraying a little bit. And the first game was in four weeks. So I was like, "I'm not missing a game." So they said six to eight week recovery, I was back in three and a half weeks just because I was pouring everything into this recovery. And so I started off slow, I definitely wasn't myself, the first quarter of the season for sure. And then I start slowly getting better back to myself. Then I get a concussion, miss a game and then I end the season really strong, but that's also the year our head coach gets fired. So there's a lot of uncertainty going into the off season.

I signed an extension in Philly that off season, so at that point I'm like, okay, I'm good, I'm set in Philly, adversities over, in football I'm good, I'm ready to go.

Which couldn't have been further from the truth. So yeah, it was definitely tough. Those injuries are part of the game though, adversity you're going to deal with it, like I said, in every walk of life, it's about how you respond to it though.

Dr. Tim Clinton: 2016, new coach, got a new quarterback, guy named Carson Wentz. This relationship though starts a friendship, you and Carson Wentz are close friends and this spiritual thing, let's go into this year. I mean, you're building this success, people are looking at Philadelphia thinking they're going to go all the way, the Super Bowl you started the season. I mean, you've got up on social media, baptisms happening, people Bible studies, tell us a little bit about the climate, what was going on? And we're going to talk about Carson going down here in a moment, but, I mean, the bonding thing that was going, it seemed like it was crazy strong.

Zach Ertz: Yeah. I got hurt the first game of the year, I separated my rib, it was pushed back, they were worried that I was going to lose feeling in my arms so I wasn't able to play. So I was worried about that as I was playing. And then we played the Bengals week 10 and this guy is running at me and I think Carson's running out of balance and so I'm like, I'm not going to hit this guy. And so at this point in my life football was the thing that I thought I always had control of. It was the thing that God, you can have everything else because at this point I had known Jesus, but I didn't have a relationship with him. And so at this point I'm injured, I'm trying to protect this thing, but I'm trying to give my all to the city and my teammates. And so, Carson goes out of balance. I don't block the guy and the city of Philadelphia at that point was not letting me have it. Being labeled soft in Philadelphia is a Cardinal sin, according to them.

So, the whole world seemed like it was caving in around me, my football, everything I had done in my career up to that point, it was getting attacked by everyone. And at this point I had guys that have been placed in Philly to spread the gospel; Carson, Nick Foles, Trey Burton, Jordan Hicks, Jordan Matthews. And these guys were, I was always like this with football my whole day, my whole life revolved around it, these guys were even killed, nothing affected these guys, their mentality was so much bigger, their perspective so much bigger than mine. So all this stuff was going on outside of me, that's when I stepped back I said, "God, I don't know how this is going to end, but I want to give you everything. I'm not trying to control anything anymore, I just want to submit my life to you." And at that point, my perspective in life saved my life.

That week was probably the toughest week I had from an earthly perspective, but from an eternity perspective, that was the best thing that ever happened to me. And so it was the guys that I had around me helped me on this journey way before I would have ever realized, because they were placed in Philly.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Zach. Yeah. Amen. For you and your teammates, there really was a spiritual revival or something that started taking place. Carson outspoken, you outspoken. A number of the team, Nick Foles, but what was this peace? I know I had a good buddy, we have a mutual friend, Scott Lindsey from Logos Software.

You guys got trained in their software so you could do Bible study at a whole another level and press into your relationship with Christ in a whole new zone.

Zach Ertz:

Yeah. The spiritual, I mean the brotherhood on our team from a spiritual bond is nothing like in the NFL. We had a lot of guys get hurt this year like Jason Peters is a Hall of Fame, left tackle, Darren Sproles, arguably Hall of Fame running back. Jordan Harris will be a pro-bowl linebacker, Marigos will be a pro bowl, special teams' player. And then we lose our MVP quarterback, the best player on our team, the guy that we're 12 and two with, this guy is lighting everything on fire. And the thing about our team is that we really didn't miss a beat, even the injured guys, when they were hurt, realized how special we had, as a team that they were finding joy even though the darkest of times were attacking their football career.

On the morning of the Super Bowl, we had our chaplain come in from New Jersey and he gave us the story of Gideon and it was eerie. It was in my opinion, God's showing us that He still had us at this time. Gideon was going to fight, he had 22,000 men with him. And at the start of the year, the Eagles, we probably have the most talented team in the NFL. And God told Gideon that's too many men, if you go into battle with this many men, I'm not going to get the glory, the men are going to get the glory. And so then God, then there's 10,000 men and then God said, that's still too many. So then there's 300 men with Gideon, and then he goes out and dominates like he always does when people lean on God. And so we got that word the Sunday of our Super Bowl. And we have been talking about that early in the year. But to have that word given to us the Sunday before the Super Bowl, we truly felt like there was nothing that could stop us.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Zach, whenever you guys made your way into the dome for the bowl, the Super Bowl. I mean, there must have been an aura that was kind of a David and Goliath story here. Come on, you're going up against Belichick, Tom Brady, the tradition of the Patriots. They're there, everybody's talking about them, you guys are... What was it like walking in there?

Zach Ertz:

Yeah. It was surreal honestly, if I'm going to be honest, that game was the game that you watched growing up as a kid, that whole week is not about football, it's the spectacle of the Super Bowl. We got there Sunday night, we had an hour interview, Sunday night, Monday, same thing, Tuesday, same thing. The top 10 guys on the team were up on these podiums with all these reporters in front of you for an hour straight, which is never the case. And then so every day you have these media obligations and then you get to the game finally and you're like, "Finally, we're playing football." And then there's a 10 minute, I think played for what seemed like 10 minutes in my eyes for the National Anthem. And then the halftime show was like 35 minutes long.

So, there was all of these outside chaos around you, as a first-time team in the Super Bowl and you're going against the Patriots who go there every year, it seems like. And if you told me going into the game that we would be in a

shootout against Tom Brady, I would say, "Oh, we got no chance, that guy's the best of the best, Bill Belichick the best of the best," but we made enough place and God was on our side. I truly believe that it's not a coincidence everything that happened this year, the stage, the platform that He put us on for how outspoken a lot of guys are about their faith that, I mean, this isn't a coincidence.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Couple of big time plays in that game, of course, false, first quarterback, I think to throw a pass and catch a pass for a touchdown, that was insane. That was a big time momentum shift. But also you guys are down and there's this play and this is guy number 86 who catches the ball and is diving for the end zone. And the ball goes across the plane, hits the ground, comes out of your hands. Did you think it was a touchdown?

Zach Ertz: Yeah. I'm going to interject right there.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know.

Zach Ertz: I caught the ball, I ran-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here we go.

Zach Ertz: And then dove, and the ball at that point had already crossed the goal line. So I thought it was a moot point.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Talking to Zach here, one of the things I realized was "He's different, there's something inside of him that's different." To go up there, man, and do all that stuff and then come here, he wanted to be here. I appreciate it.

Zach Ertz: I mean, this is what I want to do, I want to share my story. I want to encourage people to learn about Jesus, not just to learn about Him, but to truly get to know Him and what He's about and what He did for all of us. It is truly remarkable when you read, when you understand, when you gain that relationship and that perspective, how much different and how much better life can be on this earth and for eternity. And so, when Coach Peterson goes up there, after we win the Super Bowl, he says, "I want to thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ." That sells the team, "I see what you guys have been doing, I'm encouraging you guys to do whatever you want to do to give God the glory. And so, I want to interact with you guys, I want to help you guys out."

One of the things, I wouldn't be here without the group of men that have constantly encouraged me each and every day. So if I could encourage you guys to surround yourself with people that are going to hold you accountable, that are going to make you a better believer, that are going to push you to understand the word better. That is something that changed my life, sports and whatever walk of life you are in, the people you surround yourself are going to shape who you are and how far you're able to develop as a believer.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, you guys, if you appreciate his testimony, let him know it. Philadelphia Eagles Super Bowl champ.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is James Dobson again, and Dr. Tim Clinton is with us. Tim, thanks for recording that program because that's really has substance. For somebody within the NFL, he's got fans all over the world, so you win the Super Bowl, you're a big deal. And yet he cared about his mom and the Lord. You brought all that out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It was one of the most, I think, genuine, tender, real interviews I've ever done. He sat there in the audience, I'm across from him and you believed him. He really loves the Lord. Thank God for men like that. You know what? And let's pray that God will continue to move among the hearts of men in our country, in our homes. I think it's probably one of the greatest challenges of our day is for men to step up and take their rightful place.

Dr. James Dobson: With a program like this, the majority of the listeners are often women, usually are women. And I love it when men are in the audience and they respond with a message to the heart. And that's what took place here.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You bet.

Roger Marsh: If you missed any of today's broadcast, remember you can find that and more by visiting drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's D-Rjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Thanks for making Family Talk a part of your life today and every day. If you've been blessed by today's program, please consider making a tax deductible donation in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. You can learn more by visiting drjamesdobson.org, or by giving us a call at (877) 732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening. God's richest blessings to you and yours.

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