



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Tell Someone: You Can Share the Good News – Part 1

Guest(s): Pastor Greg Laurie

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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: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And today's program is a true classic. Back in 2017, our host, Dr. James Dobson, sat down with his good friend, Pastor Greg Laurie, and they discussed how to share the good news with others. Here now is Dr. Dobson to introduce today's program and welcome today's guest.

Dr. James Dobson: Today, I'm actually joined in the studio, not mine but his, with a very good friend of mine, Pastor Greg Laurie. I was in Southern California here and came by to see Pastor Greg, and we are going to do a program today that I hope will be beneficial to all of you. Pastor Greg is already known to many of you. I probably don't even need to introduce him. But let me just tell you a little bit about this amazing man of God.

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside and Irvine, California. He began his pastoral ministry at age 19 after a very stormy childhood and adolescence. He began by leading a Bible study of 30 people, and he's still at that church, only there some 15,000 people that attend Harvest Christian Fellowship here in Riverside and Irvine, and it makes Harvest one of the largest churches in America. In 1990, Greg began holding large scale public evangelistic events called Harvest Crusades.

Greg, I want to start right there by talking about what has happened to you just in the number of people that are coming out to hear you preach the straight gospel. You don't try to embellish it, you just give what the Scripture has to say. That's a pretty good foundation to build on. Does it surprise you to see 50,000 people or more come out to hear you preach the gospel?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, yeah, it surprises me, but then again, it doesn't because I believe that there's power in the message of the gospel. It's not about the preacher, but it is about the message preached. And the Apostle Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation." And I think our

job, Dr. Dobson, is not to make the gospel relevant. It is relevant. So when I walk into the pulpit, I have confidence, not in myself, but in God and in my message.

Dr. James Dobson: You were in Dallas last year, you were actually at the Dallas Cowboys Stadium, the AT&T Stadium. I was there for a football game. You had a better purpose. But there were 80,000 people there.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yeah, I think it was 80,000 plus, and we had overflow, and so we filled it. Now that, I'll say this. That surprised me. It was my hope, it was my prayer that we would fill that stadium. It's the largest crusade event we've ever done. But to see it overflow, I was a little shocked. And plus that signal, like sort of a live video feed went out to campuses around the country and even around the world. We tracked it very carefully because these people contacted us ahead of time and we trained them on how to have a live event and take the feed. We had 350,000 people in total attendance, which makes it, we did our research on this, this makes this the single largest one day evangelistic event in American history.

Dr. James Dobson: Does that take your breath away? I mean, that's just incredible.

Pastor Greg Laurie: It does.

Dr. James Dobson: How many people found the Lord? Or do you have a way of knowing that?

Pastor Greg Laurie: No, we do have a way of knowing that. We estimate that it was around 25,000 people total. Those are numbers that we actually track specifically. So it may have been larger, but we know specifically of 25,000 people that made a profession of faith.

Dr. James Dobson: God obviously has His hand on you, on your ministry and on your life. And given where you came from, and I'm sure that there are many people in our listening audience who have heard your story, but for those who haven't, it was an understatement to say that your family was troubled. Tell us about it.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, there's an expression that says if you've ever seen a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't get there by himself. So when I look at my life, it almost borders on the absurd that God would put me in the place I'm in. But then again, it's almost logical in a biblical way because it seems like God often goes out of His way to pick the most unqualified people to bring honor to His name through. Because God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called, okay. So my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you see yourself that way?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, yes. I mean, I had no credentials. I brought nothing to the table. I mean, I practically clawed from underground to even get above ground, much less rise to a place where I could provide anything of value to God. But my mom was a

beautiful woman. She was from a very large Southern family that came from Arkansas. She was, I'm not exaggerating when I say she was a dead ringer for Marilyn Monroe, just gorgeous. She was married and divorced seven times. She had a lot of boyfriends in between. She was a raging alcoholic. She drank herself into complete unconsciousness every single night. So growing up, I had to learn to be resourceful. I had to sort of, in a way, be a parent to my mother. Think of the Rat Pack era, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin. That was my mother's culture. That was what she wanted for her life.

Her name was Charlene. I went on Charlene's wild ride and I had to grow up fast and help her. One night she got in a drunken brawl with one of her husbands she married while we were living in Hawaii. And I heard a loud thud and I came into the front room, my mom was lying on the floor in a pool of blood. He was standing over her with a wooden statue, and he said, "Go to bed. It's only ketchup." I remember that. It's only ketchup, blood coming out of my mom's head. So I climbed out of my window in my bedroom and ran to a neighbor and called for help. And an ambulance came. The police came. He almost killed her.

So we moved back to California, and at this point, I'm in my preteens. And then as I became a teenager, ironically, I started drinking. The very life I didn't want, I was now experiencing. I'm drinking, and smoking, and partying on the weekends with my high school friends. And I became disillusioned with that. And the drug culture was coming on strong at this point. This is late sixties. So I actually believed in this.

Dr. James Dobson: So, you came out of the Jesus Movement?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, that came a little later. Yeah. So I went from drinking to drugs, and then on my high school campus in Newport Beach, California, I came across a group of very outspoken Christians who were having a Bible study on the front lawn, and we called them Jesus freaks. And this was from the Jesus Movement. And I'd never seen anything like this before. It was a whole new experience. I'd heard the gospel before, I'd seen Billy Graham on television preach the gospel when I lived with my grandparents, but it never resonated. I never understood it. And for the first time, I understood the gospel. And that was the day I accepted Christ on a high school Bible study on my front lawn in 1970. The front lawn of our high school, I should say.

Dr. James Dobson: And it was for real.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: So, at 19, you were leading this Bible study.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yeah. So I'm 17 when I become a Christian. So I went out and started sharing my faith, just going up to people on the beach, on the streets, wherever they were, and just started talking to them about Jesus. And I saw that God had sort of

gifted me to do this. And then a little Bible study opportunity opened up in Riverside, California, which is about an hour from Orange County. And I started teaching this Bible study of young people, and that became the nucleus for what is our church today. I never intended to be a pastor. In fact, I thought that God was calling me to be an evangelist and I was traveling around with some of the Christian bands of that time, and I would preach the gospel after they played. And I thought, "This is what I'm called to do, to preach the gospel." And I was called to do that, but the Lord also wanted me to be a pastor. So I was doing both for a while. But in 1990, we started our large scale evangelistic events, as you said earlier.

Dr. James Dobson: That began in Angel Stadium in Anaheim. At least that's the first time I ran across you. There were 50,000 people there, which blew me away. You asked me to come.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yes, I interviewed you.

Dr. James Dobson: To do an interview on that occasion. And man, I saw what the Lord is doing here. And a lot of them are young, aren't they? It's like you have a window on the younger generation.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, we have all ages, but we do have a lot of young people, and most people make their decision to follow Christ before the age of 18. So it's a very critical time to reach a person. We use a lot of bands and music and things that they'll relate to. We keep up on all the latest social media, all the tools we can use. But ultimately what I'm doing is really no different than what D.L. Moody did or Billy Sunday did, or what Billy Graham did. They just brought the gospel to their generation using all the tools that were available to them.

So we started at the Pacific Amphitheater in Costa Mesa. And by the way, Chuck Smith had the original vision, you remember Pastor Chuck. I was doing a Bible study at his church and he said, "Let's take this to a larger venue." Then the next year we went to what was then called Anaheim Stadium, and they've changed the name of that stadium many times. Now it's called Angel Stadium. And then fast-forward a number of years when I interviewed you in front of 45,000 people or maybe 50,000, and we just talked about what matters in life. So in a way, the way we do Harvest America, it's like doing 10 crusades at once. With all the technology we have today, we can reach a lot more people than any other time I can think of.

Dr. James Dobson: And that is your purpose. It's nothing more complicated than introducing people to Jesus Christ.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yeah. When I'm here at the church, I'm a pastor. My job is to teach the Word of God, it's to help people grow in their faith, it's to shepherd folks. But when I step out of this church, I kind of put a different hat on, and it's sort of my evangelist hat, if you will. And my job is to proclaim the gospel. And I think our

country needs to hear the gospel, Dr. Dobson. And you would think most Americans have heard the gospel. I think most Americans have heard the word gospel, I think they've heard people preach, but have they really heard an understandable, biblical articulation of what the gospel is and how to come into a relationship with Christ? And my answer is I don't think they have. So I feel a great burden to reach our country with the message of the gospel.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's what primarily we want to talk about today with the time we have left. It's related to your new book called *Tell Someone: You Can Share the Good News*. It really does go to the heart of how to go about leading people to Christ.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yes. Well, yeah. Dr. Dobson, when I wrote this book, it was a great challenge. The folks over at Lifeway asked me to write a book on evangelism. They said, "You have 30,000 words." So I looked around in my library to find books of that size, and I realized that's a very small book. And it was a good challenge because it meant that I needed to sort of...

Dr. James Dobson: You don't waste a word.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Don't waste a word. Every word has to count. So I decided to write it in a different way. Normally when I write a book, I'll preach it first. They transcribe my messages, I edit the transcriptions, and that becomes the book. Instead, with this one, I wrote it myself. And I wrote it conversationally as though I were sitting with a person like yourself over a cup of coffee, and we're talking about how to share your faith. So I wrote it in a very understandable way, an accessible way, and I decided to include some of the mistakes I've made in evangelism as well as some of the things I've learned. And I share principles that have worked in stadiums and in one-on-one conversations. And I didn't write the book to beat a person up who's not sharing the gospel. I wrote the book to encourage them and to say, "You can do this too. God can actually use you."

Dr. James Dobson: You not only can, but you must.

Pastor Greg Laurie: You must. That's a good point.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." That's not optional. That is what we're here to do. You say in this book that you made some early mistakes in trying to lead people to Christ. Tell us about the mistakes.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, as a young believer, I just didn't know that much. And so it was an amazing thing. Right after I became a Christian, like a couple of months, I went out and found some middle aged ladies sitting on the beach about the age of my mom, and I thought, "Maybe she'll be nice to me." I had a copy of *The Four Spiritual Laws*, remember that little booklet?

Dr. James Dobson: I sure do.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Campus Crusade, Bill Bright. And I was so new at this, I hadn't even memorized the contents of The Four Spiritual Laws. So I literally was reading it to her. And as I'm reading it to her, I'm thinking, "Why am I even doing this? This isn't going to work." But when I got to the end of the little booklet, there's a question asked, "Is there any good reason why you should not accept Jesus Christ right now?"

And I realized, "Oh, that's a question." So I ask her, "Is there any good reason why you should not accept Jesus Christ right now?" And she said, "No." Then I realized she wants to accept Christ, and I didn't know what to do. I had planned for failure, not for success. So I'm frantically searching this booklet for what do I do now. And I said, "Let's just pray. Close your eyes." And I'm searching the booklet, what do I do? And I found a little prayer which I led her in. And Dr. Dobson, she prayed that prayer and I thought, "Wow, God's called me to be an evangelist."

So a week later, I'm talking to someone I actually knew. I'm telling them all about my faith. I think, "Oh man, God's gifted me in this." Well, some guy came up to me with five typical questions that non-believers ask. They weren't even hard, now looking back in retrospect. But I didn't have the answer to one of them. And I was completely blown out of the water. So I determined that I was going to go back and study and prepare myself more so I would have the proper answers to people when they ask because they will ask hard questions. But our objective is answer the questions as best as you can, but always get back to the essential message of the gospel. I don't think there's a better example of this than Jesus himself when he had that conversation with the woman at the well. He answered her questions, but he brought her back to the main thing.

Dr. James Dobson: That conversation you had with the women violated everything I think and know about trying to introduce people to Christ. You were unprepared and you didn't really know what you were doing. And yet somehow the Lord blessed it. A lot of people are frightened about a moment like that for fear they'll be rejected. Why do we not take advantage of the opportunities that we have?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, that's a great question. I don't really know if I know the answer to that. I think it's fear of failure, but maybe it's fear of success. Because if you have the privilege of leading a person to Christ, there's a responsibility that comes with that. And really, what is the Great Commission? Well, in Mark's gospel, it's to go into all the world and preach the gospel. In Matthew's Gospel, it is to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded us. So put them together, the Great Commission is this. Go share the message of the gospel, seek to lead people to Christ, and after they come to Christ, get them grounded spiritually and get them up on their feet. And then go and repeat the process. It's like wash, rinse, repeat, do it over and over.

And I think sometimes we're a little intimidated by the idea of, "Wow, what if a person became a Christian? Now I have a new believer in my life." And it would be one of the best things for you because it's sort of like going to Disneyland

with adults or going with kids. If you go to Disneyland with adults, first of all, they're going to complain about how much it costs. After you eat lunch, they're going to wonder, "Is there a place called napland here because I'm tired," and you know, you have Tomorrowland and Fantasyland. But adults see things differently. But if you take a child to Disneyland, or take your kid or your grandchild.

Dr. James Dobson: It is the wonder of it.

Pastor Greg Laurie: The wonder of it. So the same is true of a new believer. If you only hang around older believers and you never have a new believer in your life, you can find yourself complaining, being critical, taking things for granted. But when you have a new Christian in your life that's hearing it for the first time, you not only help to stabilize them, but they help to motivate you and remind you of things you've maybe forgotten. So it's good for you to do this.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you still come up to people you don't know and introduce them to a whole new concept of Christianity?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Does somebody on a plane, for example, you're sitting around, do you try to take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Well, I'd like to say I take advantage of every opportunity, but if I said that, that wouldn't be truthful. There are times I don't. People might be surprised to know that it's not easy for me to go up to a complete stranger and talk. In fact, it's easier for me to stand behind a pulpit and do it than it is to go to someone cold and just start a conversation. I do it, but it's something I almost have to either discipline myself to do, say, "Go ahead and take a shot here." But even more, look for opportunities.

For instance, I was in a cab not long ago. I'm driving to the airport and we're driving along. The cab driver's name was Tom. And we drove by what is called a ghost bike. It's a bike that's painted white on the roadside to commemorate a cyclist that died there. Sometimes people put flowers around them. And I commented to the cab driver, "Tom, hey, Tom, that's really sad someone died there." And he said, "Yeah, I know a lot of people who've died on this road."

And I said, "Tom," before I could even catch myself, I just said, "What do you think happens after we die?" And Tom gave his philosophy. He believed in reincarnation, and I just let him go. I didn't interrupt him. Then he was done. He said, "Well, what do you think happens after we die?" Well, that's perfect. So I told him I believe that if we put our faith in Christ, we'll go to heaven one day. And I shared a little bit of the gospel. And Tom said, "I like your version of the afterlife better than mine." And I said, "Well, it's not my version, Tom. It's what Jesus said." And I went on to share more with him.

So I think a lot of times in evangelism, you don't have to go up to a person and just say, "Are you saved? Are you going to heaven?" You could do that, but more effectively you could go up to a person and just talk to them, because here's something you need to know. Everyone's favorite subject is themselves. So I walk up and say, "Hi. What's your name?" You tell me your name is Jim. "Well, Jim, where do you live? What do you like to do?" I'll just ask you things and just shoot the breeze with you.

Dr. James Dobson: Show an interest in them.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yeah, show an interest in you. And then you'll say different things and I'll say different things. And I'll look for a little opportunity from our conversation to jump in with the gospel. I try not to force it. I try to keep it natural. But I'm looking for an opportunity after I've engaged you. And then maybe I'll just pop that question. I have a friend who uses this question. He'll go up to nonbelievers cold with this question, and I've seen it work very effectively. He'll say to a person, "Has anyone ever told you that there is a God in heaven who loves you?" And I'll tell you, sometimes people say, "No, and I don't want to talk about it." That's one out of 20. The rest of them are either intrigued and some will stop and say, "I've never heard that before." So it's asking a question and it's a great way to start the conversation. The objective in evangelism is to build a bridge, not burn the bridge. It's to win.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't argue. You're not looking to make them angry.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Yeah, and that's a good point. The objective is not to win the argument, it's to win the soul.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You say in this book that you had an encounter with somebody in a bathroom, you actually led them to the Lord in a bathroom.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Crazy story. So I went into a restroom in a department store. So I'm there and someone came into the stall next to me, or maybe they were already there, I can't remember. And then this person, there's two of us in the restroom, he says, "Excuse me, were you supposed to meet me here?" And I'm thinking, "Oh my goodness, what is this?" I said, "No, no, I'm not supposed to meet you here." And then he said, "Oh." And then I was curious. I go, "What's going on here?" And I said, "Well, what were you going to meet someone here for?" And I was thinking of all kinds of horrible things they wanted to do. And he said, "Well, I was going to make a drug buy." "You're going to buy drugs?" And he said, "Yes."

And then I thought for a moment, "Could God use me in a bathroom? Dare I use this as an evangelistic opportunity?" And I thought, "Why not?" So I said to him, "I have something better than drugs for you." He was excited. He said, "What?" I said, "A personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ." This guy says, "Oh, I know all about that." I said, "Really?" He says, "Oh yeah, I went to church and everything." I said, "Well, where did you go to church?" And this is what he said,

Dr. Dobson. "I went to Harvest Christian Fellowship." Well, that's the church I pastor.

I said, "Do you know who I am?" He said, "No." I said, "I'm Greg Laurie, the pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship." And I said, "Buddy, God must really love you to send your pastor to you when you're trying to make a drug buy." So I said, "I'll tell you what, I'm tired of this bathroom evangelism. I'll meet you outside." And so I went outside and the socks were there. I was waiting. He comes out, he was easy to spot. He was the guilty looking guy. And I prayed with him and he made a recommitment to Christ. So God can use you anywhere.

And the Bible says, "Be in season and out of season." Or another translation I like, it says, "Be on duty at all times." So I think you should always be looking for opportunity. It's a good thing to say, "Let's go witnessing." I don't discourage that. But better than that, be a witness always. And you never know. It could be walking down the street. It could be someone you encounter here or there. And so you're always just sort of open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to take that risk and ask a question or make a statement or do something to engage a person.

Dr. James Dobson: Greg, I love talking to you. Our time has gone by too quickly. And they explained at the beginning of the program that I'm actually in your office. You're not in mine in our studio. And it's a pleasure to visit here with you today in Harvest Christian Fellowship, and to have this chance to talk about your new book, which is *Tell Someone: You Can Share the Good News*. You can. The emphasis is on the word can. You can do this. You not only can, but you must. This is a commandment. This is the Great Commission that Jesus has given us. And it's a pleasure talking to you about things that we would give our lives for. Do you have any more time? Can we keep talking?

Pastor Greg Laurie: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we're out of time. We're going to be off the air, but let's keep on talking and we'll let people hear what we're about to say next time.

Pastor Greg Laurie: Great. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an insightful conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and Pastor Greg Laurie here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. I'm moved when I think of the gospel of Mark, chapter 16, verse 15, when Jesus says to his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." And Pastor Greg is a great example of someone who has taken that message to heart and put action behind those words. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of this conversation right here, wherever and however you are listening to us.

If you missed any part of today's program, by the way, remember that you can hear it at our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Our web address once

again, drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Thanks so much for your prayers and your faithful financial support, and thanks for joining us today. Be sure to listen again tomorrow for the conclusion of this powerful conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and Pastor Greg Laurie right here on Family Talk.

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