



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Christian Journalist's Fight Against Secular Ideology – Part 1

Guest(s): Megan Basham

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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: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. We are so glad you've joined us today. And today on Family Talk, we are joined by a woman who has kicked up a lot of dust in the media circles over the past couple of years, but with good reason. Megan Basham, whose career has taken a fascinating path. She began as a journalist covering Hollywood and movies and popular culture before she made the transition into investigative reporting that focused on the cultural and financial and bureaucratic influences that shaped Christian organizations and the church on the whole. Now, Megan is a wife. She is a mother. She's an author. She's a journalist. She's a cultural commentator. And her work encourages Christians to think carefully and biblically about the ideas that are shaping our world through the lens of Scripture. Today, she serves as a reporter for *The Daily Wire*. She's the author of two books, and her most recent book is the one you may be well aware of. It's called *Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda*. It explores questions surrounding influence, accountability, and the challenges facing the church in today's cultural landscape. Now, today we're going to talk with Megan about her journey as a journalist, what led her to reporting on entertainment to investigating the issues that affect the world around us, and also talk about what it's like to be a wife and a mom and a cancer patient and survivor simultaneously. Megan Basham, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. If Dr. Dobson had not gone home to be with the Lord last August, I know he would be sitting right here and he'd say, "Megan, I am so proud of you."
- Megan Basham: Well, thank you. And I can't tell you what a thrill it is to be on the program founded by Dr. James Dobson. He was a hugely formative influence in my life and in my parents' life. And, you know, I've done a lot of coverage of Dr. Dobson myself. So just really grateful to be here.
- Roger Marsh: Well, I'm hoping, I'm pleasantly surprised to see he didn't show up in *Shepherds for Sale*. So, I mean, that's a good, we're off to a good start here.
- Megan Basham: Nope, not a thing.

Roger Marsh: But I think that it is difficult though. And what Doctor would say is, look, you have to stand for what is right. I mean, the family was, the vehicle, as he used to say, for leading people to Christ. And when you take a bold stand, sometimes it gets a little hot under the collar just because people are looking at what you're saying and they might realize, hey, there's a shred or two of truth in what's going on here. What was it that led to, it's kind of an interesting journey, but led to the *Shepherds for Sale* book because you actually worked for *World Magazine* for more than a decade and it was after you left *World* that this book kind of came about. Kind of fill in the gaps for us for our listeners who may not be fully aware.

Megan Basham: Yeah, so it was all very sort of providential and organic. I absolutely feel that God positioned me to be a person to write this book when I wasn't looking to write this book. So as you said, Roger, I was a journalist at *World Magazine*. I was a co-host of their weekly, excuse me, daily news podcast, *The World and Everything in It*, along with Mary Reichert and Nick Eicher and Myrna Brown, who, if you listen to that program, wonderful hosts, and they all still remain really good friends. But some things started to come in to *World*, which I want to, you know, preface this by saying they are one of the success stories that I would highlight, that they kind of dealt with some of this woke incursion, and they successfully dealt with it. But in the meantime, as that was going on, I, as a mom who didn't cover this kind of hot-button political wrangling that much, started to notice things coming into the church that were new to me, and I didn't know what to make of them. So I had colleagues at work at that time who objected to my interviewing Voddie Baucham, for example, when his book *Fault Lines* came out, because I think they found the premise of that book that there was something wrong with the anti-racism and DEI and critical race theory, the arguments that those kind of philosophies were making, these colleagues' kind of bought into it. So they were offended by things like when I would interview Voddie Baucham or Ryan Bomberger or other, not just Christians, but Black Christians who were critical of this movement.

So, you know, that created a point of tension. And at the same time that that was going on, I started to experience it a little bit in our personal lives as well. So my kids were at a small Christian school. We were at a different church at that point. And I remember one day, the children's ministry director sent out an email, and this was in 2020 after George Floyd's death, and it included resources on how to talk to our kids about their white privilege. And that was, yeah, really the record scratch moment for me that I went, what's happening here? You know, the same things that I find disquieting at work, some of these influences, I'm also seeing it. in our church. And I was seeing, not to quite the degree, but similar things happening at our children's school. And this was a small Christian school. So I was just starting to go, what's happening here, Lord? And so around this time, as there was some conflict with some of the...and I'm going to use this word freely because I think it applied to these woke colleagues, as that friction was going on, some of them left and departed to *Christianity Today*, which I think was a much better fit for them. And in the meantime, I happened to do an interview with Andrew Klavan of *The Daily Wire*.

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Megan Basham: And he's a brilliant novelist, wonderful commentator. We disagree on some things in terms of church doctrine, but I love Andrew, and it was a great interview. And so afterwards, I asked him... it was just like the picture he painted of what *The Daily Wire* was doing was so exciting and inspiring to me. And I knew at that point that I had seen these influences and I wanted to write about them. And it was hard to write about them from within the evangelical house. So I just happened to ask Andrew, I said, "Gosh, you know, do you guys feel like you'd have any room for me over there?" And he said, "Well, send me your resume." Just a little bit in a fit of pique after some conflict with one of those more woke colleagues, I did, and then I kind of forgot about it. And then a few weeks later, I received a call from someone at the *Daily Wire*, Cabot Phillips. If you watch our programs regularly, he's the host of *Live Wire*. He messaged me and said, hey, we'd love to interview you. And so I started talking to them about covering culture and social issues and entertainment. But I also said in that interview, "Listen, I see some things happening in the church that are concerning to me and I'd like to write about them. Would you be open to that?" And he's like, yeah, absolutely. You know, as long as the reporting is sound and you can back it up, come on over and write it. So I did. And the first couple of stories I did in that vein, one was on immigration and it kicked up a little bit of dust at that point. That was probably my first "Shepherds for Sale" type story. And then I did a story on National Institutes of Health director, Francis Collins.

Roger Marsh: Oh, yes.

Megan Basham: Yes. And how he was making the circuit to all of the evangelical outlets and doing interviews with high-profile pastors and evangelical figures, and none of them were pushing back. And journalistically, I sat there and went, I know that he is making claims that cannot be supported by the evidence or at least are highly questionable. And yet no one was pushing back on him. And not only that, they were sort of bolstering things that to me as a Christian, I went, well, we should have some big questions when a government official comes out and says, need to shut down your churches or you're not loving your neighbor or being a good Christian. I went, okay, this claim deserves some scrutiny and nobody was scrutinizing it. So I published a piece on it and that blew up.

And at that point, an editor reached out to me and said, wow, you really seem to have struck a nerve. Do you think there's a book here? And I said, you know, I think there is, but let's start doing some investigating and find out. And kind of the rest was history.

Roger Marsh: So you actually did research on this. And I say that somewhat sarcastically, but you did research on this as opposed to finding some talking points and some memes and things that are existing on social media that we all know are true. And I recall during that same period, I was hosting a radio program in the Los Angeles area and BioLogos was one of always pushing for coming at us with, you know, this is their view of the world. And they had a new president and Francis

Collins had launched it. And they said, oh, you know what? Well, he's going to be available for the interview too. It was the shortest interview I ever did because I asked him one question about NIH and he refused to do any more talking. And I thought, well, no, wait a minute. We're Christians, right? We're all on the same team, right? You know what I mean? He got indignant. We have an \$800 million budget. And I thought, oh. Okay, well, this is very interesting. So I'm not surprised that you ran into some opposition. But at the same time, though, you're a wife, you're a mom, you're a believer. You've had that, Megan Basham, you've had that story that so many of us do, where you grow up in the church and then you go to college and decide, yeah, maybe church isn't for me. And that's well documented. I read an essay you wrote for *First Things* a few years ago about what it was like for you to kind of come back to faith. How do you think that is influencing what you're doing right now? The fact that you had that foundation, you wandered from it. You've kind of lived the cultural dream as far as what's happened in the world, and especially in American landscaping. And now here you are saying, I'm a believer. This is real for me, my husband, for my daughters, and we need to tell the truth about these things.

Megan Basham: Yes, and if I can preface this, Roger, it's funny that you tell that story about Francis Collins because I actually had a similar experience, which I recounted in *Shepherds for Sale*, where he was doing some kind of high school curriculum and they were wanting to promote this high school science curriculum for Christian schools. And there were some things in that science curriculum I had an issue with too that was kind of evolutionary theology and that kind of thing. Adam and Eve being hominids and, you know, some doctrinal things I disagreed with. But, you know, when I got the email saying, would you be interested in interviewing Francis Collins? I immediately went, yes, please. And I signed up for an interview slot and they agreed and they're like, great, yes. You know, so I'm scheduled. And literally I was sitting there, it was past time for our appointment. I'm waiting for him to show up and I'm going okay, we're now five minutes past our interview time, 10 minutes. You know, my little Zoom screen, 10 minutes past our interview time. And then finally it blinked out. And I ended up talking to the PR company who gave me the runaround a little bit first. And then they finally admitted he recognized my name. And they just like summarily like closed the Zoom feed and canceled the interview past the time that it was scheduled. So that was pretty wild. But to get back to, get back to your question. I just had to share that, you know, that was the same experience.

Roger Marsh: Fascinating. Yes.

Megan Basham: But to get to your question, Roger, yes, that, I mean, that was part of why I think I feel so defensive of the church's mission and that it shouldn't concern itself with, you know, worldly trendy political ideologies. So, I basically crawled to Christ out of a mire of drug addiction, alcohol abuse. I've joked that you can colloquially call it party girl, but I was at Arizona State University. This is probably still true of Arizona State, unfortunately, but it was like the number one party school, according to Playboy, at the time that I was there. And I very much participated in that culture, which in the nighttime seems pretty fun. And

in the daytime, as someone who grew up in a Christian home, but I don't think I was a believer at that time because I had no sustained interest in spiritual things. But there was still enough of the knowledge of the truth that I felt guilt and conviction, which you should feel when you're sinning.

Roger Marsh: Yes, perfectly normal.

Megan Basham: So as you said, I kind of detailed in *First Things* how some medieval English literature and my degree program of English literature at that time was part of what led me back to Christ. But when I saw these things coming into the church, I think that's part of why I so fiercely wanted to protect what the gospel is, that we don't change the definition of the gospel, because you started to hear that everything was a "gospel issue." Like, if you didn't take a particular position on Black Lives Matter, well, that was a gospel issue. Or if you didn't take a particular position on immigration, that was a gospel issue. And I was someone who went, no, no, no, no, no, that is not the gospel. You know, these are things that they may be important issues and we can debate them, but they are not the gospel. And we need to not be confused or muddy what the gospel is because it is the power of life to save people like I was. And so I wanted to protect that for the next Megan who, you know, she's not coming to the church to hear a lecture about her white privilege. She is somebody who is maybe ensnared in sin. She has these chains and she wants to hear about freedom in Christ. She doesn't want to hear how she possesses white guilt. And so all of that was what was really motivating for me. And I'll be honest, I felt angry about it when I saw this kind of thing because I remembered who I was and I just thought, particularly during COVID when you had all of these ministry leaders saying, it's fine that we're shutting down churches. It's fine that in a moment of national and international crisis, when so many people were looking for hope, they were looking for the truth of the gospel. They were looking for some optimism about what the future might hold. And they were looking to be told, hey, God sees you. He knows what's happening here. This is not a surprise to Him. And instead, we had so many ministry leaders saying it was fine to shut the churches. It was fine to not be doing ministry during that time. And you had people who were drug addicts like I was, who were abusing alcohol, who were dying for not being told the truth during this time. And they needed those ministries. So, you know, I felt pretty impassioned about it. And that was a big part of what started motivating me to write about it.

Roger Marsh: Megan Basham is our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. We have a link for her book, *Shepherds for Sale*, up at jdfoi.org. We'll also link that *First Things* article as well. Let's talk about the book for just a brief moment longer here, simply because there are a lot of people. I know it was very eye-opening for me. There are some folks in there that I have talked to before. I wouldn't necessarily call them great friends, but I've always held their ministries in high regard. And then you read a book like this and you say, no, wait a minute. I hadn't thought about that. I hadn't thought about that. And I didn't. It wasn't just a wholesale now I'm on a campaign to blow them off the face of the earth. But rather, I appreciated the fact that you did the due

diligence. You had, as they say in the culture, you had receipts that were right there for us. And I'm thinking because you're a mom, you're a wife, you're a believer who's very active in this battle. You're basically saying, look. If we are taking our calling as Christians seriously, we have to acknowledge that there are political influences that are hindering the church. There are financial interests that have possibly even compromised some Christian leaders in ministries. Was there any one ministry in particular to where you said, oh, no, not them. Please, God, not them. Or was it all pretty much you kind of had a feeling because of your investigative chops, your journalistic background, you knew where this was going to wind up?

Megan Basham: It was both. So there were certainly some large ministries where I went, I knew what they were doing, and I knew that there was very likely, even before I found the money trail, that it was very likely, knowing what I had known from covering some secular political organizations, that, okay, there's probably some funding that is influencing this. So if you look at an organization like the Evangelical Immigration Table, I didn't know who was funneling money to them initially, but, you know, pretty quickly, I was able to determine, yes. The denials that they did not receive any funding from George Soros's Open Society Foundation were obviously false. George Soros's own board books from his foundation acknowledged that, yes, we gave money to the umbrella group of the Evangelical Immigration Table, an organization called the National Immigration Forum, which is secular and left, that they were taking money from George Soros and other left-wing foundations, and they were using that to create this evangelical front group to move resistant evangelicals on the issue of endorsing amnesty type policies. So I knew that was going on, but it's also understandable. And it's part of why I wrote the book was that there were organizations that were connected to the evangelical immigration table who were involved in some of their work. You know, I think I saw something like Prison Fellowship or someone like that, you know, people that I respect and like.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Megan Basham: And that's why it's important to distinguish, okay, you have the people who, the leaders who are in bed with some of these secular left-wing organizations who are taking that funding, but you also have people who are well-meaning and are busy. And, you know, high profile pastors who signed some of these letters who I like, you know, people I listen to and respect. But I also wanted to inform some of these pastors that, look, you need to understand how this game works because you're busy guys and you don't know. So the way it would work is, for example, the Evangelical Immigration Table would draft a letter of general principles saying something like, we want to acknowledge that everyone who is coming into the country illegally bears the image of God, and we should love these people, and we should care for their spiritual and material needs. And all of that is something that I think any Christian could agree with. So what would happen is these high-profile ministry leaders and pastors get a call from a friend who is connected to the Evangelical Immigration Table, and they will say, will you sign this letter? You know, it's a general statement of principles and the

pastor reads it and thinks, well, my friend is encouraging me to sign it and I trust my friend. And these are all things that I can agree with because why wouldn't you? I would agree with them too. And what they don't know is that those letters that they signed would then be taken to the GOP member of Congress in that state or in the current administration. And it would be used to then say, look, evangelicals support this particular policy. Now that's different from the general statement of principles that the high profile pastor ministry leader agreed to. So they would not realize, hey, when I signed that letter saying I agree with this, that letter was then going to be taken and used to say evangelicals agree with something much more than that letter stated. So it's kind of a cute little game. And so, yeah, it was disappointing to see some of the people that I like and trust signing some of these letters. But it's also understandable that they're not all cynical old journalists. So they don't know how this game is played. And so, you know, some of them I did mention in the book, but not everyone. And, you know, this has been kind of a point of contention because the title is *Shepherds for Sale*.

And to be honest I don't think this is entirely an ingenuous critique but some people would say, well, because that was the title, if anyone was in the book, that means you were saying they were for sale. And that's not the case. There are people who were for sale. And as you said, Roger, I document, okay, here's who they were taking money from. The organizations that were taking money from George Soros, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, eBay founder, Pierre Omidyar, and many, many more. There are those people, that's one group, but there are also the people who were downstream from them, who were being influenced by what they were doing. They were being drawn into these spheres of influence. And so it is important to distinguish between both of them. And my book covers both. And the title should be read as, you know, a general title that applies to those who were taking money and doing this influence peddling, not necessarily every single person who was involved in these organizations.

Roger Marsh:

Well, and I appreciate you saying that, Megan Basham, because I know there are those in the body of Christ and people who are kind of straddling the fence maybe a little bit, you know, in terms of, well, I used to be part of the evangelical, you know, mob or whatever they call it, but now I'm on the outside and I'm an outlier and I'm going to point the finger at, you know, I'll do the expose for you. I won't mention names here. And I understand that there's definitely that need to know, I think. You know, I mean, it's healthy, you know, to ask the question, did you realize this is who you're aligning yourself with? But at the same time, the thing I've always appreciated about your work just from afar, and this is our first time meeting, is the fact that you approached it from a, hey, if you didn't know then now you know. And if you do know, my question is, why are you doing this? I mean, I think it's a fair question rather than saying, I'm trying to build a base. I'm trying to build an audience. I mean, God has blessed your ministry remarkably even before the book came out. And now you've got this you know, kind of cultural lightning rod for a whole generation. And we are coming up here on the end of part one of our conversation. So I have to ask you

the question, Megan, will you be able to join us again next time so we can continue this dialogue on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk?

Megan Basham: Yes, absolutely. For Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, anything.

Roger Marsh: Well, we have only scratched the surface here and there is plenty more to come in part two of my conversation with journalist and author Megan Basham. So be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and we'll hear that conclusion. By the way, if you'd like to hear this program again or pass it along to a friend who might be wrestling with some of these same questions, you'll find the audio online at jdfi.org. And while you're there, you can also learn more about Megan Basham's latest book. It's called *Shepherds for Sale*. Again, you'll find all that information and more at drjamesdobson.org, or if it's just easier, go to jdfi.org. You know, Megan Basham's reporting gets at something we care about here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. In a culture full of loud and competing voices, families need a trusted place to turn that's anchored in Scripture. That's the work you make possible when you donate to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Your gift helps us preserve and promote the institution of the family and the biblical principles upon which it is based. It also helps us introduce as many people as possible to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to defend the sanctity of human life and religious freedom. So today you are invited to partner with us. A donation of any amount keeps trusted biblical wisdom reaching families all across America and literally all over the world. To give securely, visit jdfi.org, or call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And keep in mind, you can also mail your donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for part two of my conversation with Megan Basham as we'll continue discussing a Christian journalist's fight against secular ideology. It's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

One of the great tragedies of human experience is that the natural curiosity of children often disappears over time.

Roger Marsh: Here's today's Dr. Dobson Minute with Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: So many parents ask me how they can keep that curiosity alive in their children. According to educator Cheri Fuller, one good way is to identify the areas they are naturally interested in and capitalize on them. If your son neglects his studies to pursue his baseball card collection, use his interest in baseball to explore math. How do you figure hitting averages? You need to know math to

find out. Another friend's daughter expressed an interest in health care. Now at 13 years old, she's volunteering at a hospital. It's done wonders for her self-esteem and for her interest in science classes. Find out what your child is good at and then give them the tools and encouragement to run with it.

Roger Marsh:

For more information, visit drdobsonminute.org.

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