Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Reflecting on the 40th Anniversary of This Present Darkness – Part 2
Guest(s): Frank Peretti
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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. This is our continuing conversation with Frank Peretti, a novelist extraordinaire and just a really great storyteller and a wonderful man. His book, *This Present Darkness*, is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, if you can believe it. Originally released at Crossway. Now, David C. Cook is releasing *This Present Darkness*, a 40th anniversary collector's edition. And we have a link for that book up at drjamesdobson.org. Frank Peretti, it's great to have you back on the program today.

Frank Peretti: It's great to see you, Roger.

Roger Marsh: With *This Present Darkness*, it was more than just a novel. And here we are 40 years later. I mean, this is a conversation that is, it almost feels like if you read *This Present Darkness* right now, it's like Frank Peretti just wrote it for right now, I mean, with the current time that we're living in. Do you get that feeling, too, as you look back on those years and say, boy, I could have written this in 1986 or 2026, and it would still be relevant?

Frank Peretti: That is part of the awe, the amazement of, yeah, the issues and the truths and the warfare are the same. Didn't change. It's the same in the 80s as it is now, and the issues are the same. The hearts that read the book are the same. So it's a period piece, you know. Written back then, there were no computers. Or newspaper characters used typewriters. There are no cell phones. They have to get to a phone to make a call. A lot of different things. We even talked about, maybe we should update it. And they said, no. Let it be what it is. I told the publishers, the book is complete. It is what it is. And they said, yeah, it really is. It is what it is. But that's interesting. 40 years, a lot has changed.

Roger Marsh: Well, it's good to be having this conversation. And if you're watching on our YouTube channel, you can take a look over Frank's left shoulder and see a copy of the book. And the wonderful thing about it, yeah, he's pointing to it right now. It's this ominous purple. It's just, it's super cool. I mean, now I asked you earlier if you had any artistic input on this or if they just said, hey, Frank, what do you think? And, well, what do you think?

Frank Peretti: Well, I think it's really great. It's adapted from the original cover we had clear back in ‘86 with the demonic claws coming out.

Roger Marsh: Right, right.

Frank Peretti: And you notice, the claw right here outlines the shape of a church. And then this is open. This is a window that sees through to the actual hard cover of the book. And it's a cool cover because it actually has a map of the town of Ashton on the inside of this dust cover. And it's really loaded. Lots of cool little extras.

Roger Marsh: It took people a while to warm up to *This Present Darkness* when it was first released starting in 1986, and then it really caught fire in ‘87 and ‘88. Looking back now, Frank, I mean, you were a standard bearer in that kind of storytelling world in the line between biblical truth and fictional storytelling. But now it's really relevant today.

You said something in our last conversation I wanted to circle back around to, and that was the number of people who were maybe young adults back in 1986 who first got a hold of this book and read it, mesmerized by it. But now they're in the grandparenting season and some of their kids are coming up to you and saying, oh my gosh, I read this book and it's amazing. It's like you wrote it just for me. What encouragement do you have to people who might have read the original and are saying, gosh, I wonder if this is a story that my kids or grandkids would really resonate with?

Frank Peretti: Absolutely. I've talked to young people. Now, this is the third generation of readers. There's, you know, the people that read it in the 80s, they had kids and their kids read it. Now their grandkids are reading it. And the reaction is always the same. It's a really good story and touches the heart. And so, yeah, let your kids read it. It'd be good for them to be reading anyway.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Frank Peretti: They're on those screens so much like they are right now.

Roger Marsh: When you think about the way kids consume media, you know, and like you mentioned, it's all staring at their hand. My wife refers to my mobile phone as my third hand because I look at it so much. But I understand that that's where a lot of young people are when they're looking at screens and things of that nature. But there's something really wonderful. I'll call it mystical about having to use your imagination and reading a printed word on the page, seeing the story unfold and then letting it, you know, kind of become the story that you visualize in your own mind. And I'm sure that for the millions of people, you have 15 million books sold or in print. I mean, it's amazing how many people have utilized your work, but everybody's got their own personal version of it. And I think that that's the way Frank Peretti would want it to be. Is that an accurate statement?

Frank Peretti: Yeah, I've been called a cinematic writer. You can read the book and watch a movie in your head. as you're reading it. It's very visual, and it's paced like a movie, and it cross-cuts like a movie. It's kind of a big, long prose version of a screenplay.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Frank Peretti: Yeah, which is really interesting because, you know, if this thing ever becomes a movie, then there are some folks, good folks, talking about that.

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Frank Peretti: They're going to be creating their version of it. And I've talked to them about, well, what do the angels look like? What do the demons look like? How does this work? And that's pretty cool. You see, like, on the book, this claw thing has a kind of a flame motif on it. Well, for instance, the angels, at least the way I see them, they don't have the big goose feather flapping wings like you see in the art and everything. Oh, no, no, they have wings of light and fire and rush, you know, and they're really cool. And so it's a whole imaginative vision and journey of what angels and demons look like. Man, that was fun. And people really enjoy reading it because then, ooh, then they can see it too.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, it is fun. It's a great fantasy type story. But we in the body of Christ know, obviously, the spiritual warfare is very real. And the fact that you use this fun device, if you will, to bring us into something with regard to evil, the unseen realm, and that type of thing. What word of caution do you have for believers who are getting a hold of this book, maybe for the first time, and they're realizing that this was written during a time where, in the public eye anyway, Christianity was a very dominant force. I mean, Ronald Reagan's in the White House. Dr. Dobson and Gary Bauer are there with him. I mean, there was a moral majority of people. I mean, there was a good versus evil component, and good was winning everywhere we looked. And yet you introduced this concept of, no, not so fast. I mean, this is what it's going to be. How should a Christian today take a look at *This Present Darkness* and realize that not everyone's out to get us, but spiritual warfare is real?

Frank Peretti: I think they should look at the whole scheme of things here as a warfare. What's fascinating or noteworthy or prophetic, however you want to say it, it's much more intense. You're right. As you were talking about, when it was written, it's almost prophetic. I don't want to use that word. Pretty good prediction, pretty good observation of trend where we wrote it and put it in a college town, and the college was where a lot of the spiritual influence was going on. And now we find in academia today, wow! Wow, there's a lot of deception and delusion and spiritual darkness going on in academia and in the rest of the culture and the rest of the world. Things are tightening up quite a bit. But the principle is still the same. The warfare is still the same. The book still provides a really good insight as to how that warfare happens and who is ultimately going to win. That's the beautiful part of it.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, that's wonderful. And now when you have a new generation that's going to be discovering Ashton for the first time, they're going to really look at spiritual warfare differently because I'm sure so many of them have had their minds and hearts saturated with video games and crazy horror movies. It boggles the mind, doesn't it, to look at what plays in theaters now or what's on the Netflix world or whatever and how dark and demonic it is and people just accept that. Well, this is the story. This is the way it is. And not realizing that, wait, there is spiritual warfare. Yes, we as believers are drawn into the fight. And how would Frank Peretti today look at Frank Peretti in 1986, who said, let's write a cool story about angels and demons, but it'll be a really cool story. Now, then people started looking at you and saying, well, Frank Peretti, you're an expert on demonic theology, and what's your comment on this, that, and the other thing? You're like, hey, I was just trying to tell a good story. But how has your understanding of spiritual warfare kind of grown kind of evolved over the past few decades? Because I'm sure it's grown a lot more than perhaps maybe you thought it was going to.

Frank Peretti: Yeah, well, when the book first came out and really picked up steam, one thing that happened, and I've reflected on this quite a bit, suddenly Frank Peretti became an expert.

Roger Marsh: Right, right.

Frank Peretti: People looked at Frank Peretti, oh, let's have him come speak and let's ask him because he knows everything about it. And the Frank Peretti of today, I'm just kind of quiet. I'm listening to the Lord. I'm just letting Him do what He wants to do with the book, with me. I've been through some real physical challenges with cancer and heart failure and all that stuff. And I remember many, many times, I'm still saying it, Lord, I am Yours. You take me, You use me, however You want. But however God wants to talk through this book today in this world, well, all I can say is amen. We'll let Him do it. And I'm more in a reflective mood now. I reached a point in my life; I used to travel and speak and do all this stuff. I don't travel anymore. I don't really have anything to say. I just want to listen and be wise and let the Lord do what He wants to do. So this is a whole different season from this book in terms of the author.

The first time the book came out, the author was gung ho, we're going to get out of there. We're going to wage that warfare. We're going to speak for it. You know what it reminds me of is that Scripture in 1 John, John writes to the children. Then he writes to the young men because they have overcome the evil one. Then he writes to the fathers because they have known him who is from the beginning. I used to be the young man who's overcome the evil one, you know? I was that kind of Christian. We're going to get out there. And now I'm one of the fathers who has known him who is from the beginning. I rest in the sovereign Lord, just trusting him and knowing. He's working things out. I just want to be wise and quiet and listen and let him speak. So it's an interesting season in life that I've transitioned into. It's the old father, the wise old man.

The book that the young man wrote years ago is out again. Now what's the old man going to do about it? How's he going to handle it? Well, he's going to let God move. That's all. Let God do what He wants to do.

Roger Marsh: That's beautiful. Frank Peretti is our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The new edition of *This Present Darkness*, the 40th Anniversary Collector's Edition, is now up at drjamesdobson.org. And I love the way you're settling into this season, Frank. You mentioned the health challenges, some of the other things that you've gone through. But this, I mean, that kind of adversity isn't necessarily new. I mean, anyone who's read your work about your childhood and how you came to faith and some of the things you dealt with there, know that this has been kind of a, it's a prickly journey for you. I mean, it sounds like.

Frank Peretti: Yeah. And the big choice that has to be made there is how do you respond to the adversity?

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Frank Peretti: The prickly journey, as you put it, do you just let bitterness settle in you or do you respond and say, okay, Lord, I remember. Just as a particular example, when I had the cancer, it just hurt, hurt, hurt. I remember many times, I remember one specific time, sitting out on my back porch there, and I was crying because I was so tired of the pain. I said, oh, Lord Jesus, haven't I hurt enough? But I kind of had Gethsemane sort of moment. I said, Lord, You are Lord. I'm telling You, Lord, because You really are. I said, Lord, whatever this is for, whatever You're trying to do, please help me to get it. Help me to get it. Change me the way You want to change me. And may this be fruitful in my life. Because, you know, there's times, of course, when you suffer, you don't know what God is trying to do. You don't know why you're suffering. But it's a real choice. You can be bitter. You can be mad at God. You can say, well, I don't trust You anymore. Or you can go through it and come out a different person than at the start. And that's what I wanted. And that's what happened, too. I'm a lot different now than I was before that.

And it's a little difficult to say, well, exactly how are you different? It's so deep. The changes are, you know, God changes you in ways you don't even know. You can't really articulate it. But anyway, He's good. The Lord God is good. He'll get you there. He'll get you there.

Roger Marsh: I love that. Sovereignty means he always gets what he wants. It may not be something that we fully understand, but he definitely does. And Frank. As you think back now on this 40-year journey that's gotten us to where we are with the 40th anniversary of *This Present Darkness*, which is now up at drjamesdobson.org, if you were sitting down today to write this book, to write this story, to tell it, knowing what you've been through these past four decades, what would you change or would you change anything about the approach? I

mean, how would you change the characters? I mean, do you ever think about that?

Frank Peretti: Yeah, I think it would be really different. It'd still be a good story. I think after all these years, I would write it a little tighter, writing the Irene and the prose. It's good. It's good. But me, now, I'm probably going to write it a little tighter. I think the struggles the characters go through; I have the deeper perspective that I can use. I would write it from a deeper perspective. I was in my 30s when I wrote it. I've been in my 70s now. You're going to see things different. It's a different man. The guy that wrote *This Present Darkness* isn't around anymore. There's me. Yeah. But still, as a writer, an author, even a self-critic, I look and I say, you know what? That structure and how I handled the intrigue and the suspense and the action, it's pretty good. That worked pretty good. I made long, little changes, you know. We thought about this and we thought if we should update it, but no, we should just leave it the way it was, the way it is.

Frank Peretti: I'm so glad you left it alone. I mean, in that regard, because we know that there have been so many different times when somebody has done the proverbial painting of the flames on the side of the Mercedes and said, oh, that'll make it updated and the kids will really like it. And it's like, no, leave this one alone. It's a classic work. And it really does, I mean, when you started writing it, were you thinking about prayer as much as this book is known for being a prayer book in terms of praying in spiritual warfare times?

Frank Peretti: Yeah, I think so. Prayer was a big factor, message-wise and fiction-wise. The message, of course, is the efficacy of our prayers in spiritual warfare. It's real. It's there. It's something we can do. Fiction-wise, it became a fictional element where the angels had to get the saints praying in order for the conflict to go the way it was supposed to go. So that was a story element, and that became one of the theological disputes over the book. How dependent is God on our prayers before He can do what He wants to do? That's, yeah, that's a heavy theological point. And I'm not going to defend the book or anything. I appreciate what they had to say. It's a story. It's a metaphor, you know.

Roger Marsh: And it's a great one. And it's one that I hope new generations will pick up. And this is a golden opportunity for grandparents, for parents, but especially grandparents, because, I mean, I'm grandfather, and I'm looking at this through the eyes of my six grandkids, too, saying, Is this the kind of story that they would resonate with? And I can think of my nine-year-old, especially, who loves these types of stories, that we could sit and read this together. And I'm so grateful, Frank, that you were obedient to the calling God had on your life back in the mid-1980s to write this out, to do it on the typewriter with liquid paper and all the different things that went into that because people just assume now, well, I'll have a word processor. It'll take care of everything, but you didn't have that. And yet in doing it with all the odd jobs and all the other things, and for the people who are, you know, pondering this type of ministry, look at the great, fantastic work that God did in and through you while you were helping in other

ministry areas and trying to keep food on the table for your own family. So it's really quite an achievement.

Frank, we've got about 60 seconds left in our time together here. What is your hope for this re-release, or I should say this new release of *This Present Darkness*, which is updated in the sense that it has new material in it that was not part of the original story, but the story itself is still intact.

Frank Peretti: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, my hope, my prayer is may the, whatever the Lord God has been doing through this book, amen. May that continue because it just goes right through the generations and the new people, younger people picking up all the time and it still works. That's what I want to see. It's been joy. It's been great to, I mean, hey. I'm here for a reason. That's great. Yeah. Praise God for what He can do.

Roger Marsh: Amen. And amen. Well, Frank Ferretti, *This Present Darkness*, the 40th anniversary collector's edition is up at drjamesdobson.org. We are so grateful for your life and your ministry, Frank, but we're also grateful too, for the connection of course, that you had with Dr. Dobson. That made it even more extra special for us to have this time together for the past couple of programs. So thank you so much for being with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Frank Peretti: Fantastic. It's great to see you, Roger.

Roger Marsh: Well, today's conversation with author Frank Peretti reminds us that spiritual warfare isn't simply the stuff of novels. The battles we face are real, but so is the God who hears our prayers. And after 40 years, Frank Peretti's greatest encouragement may be his willingness to trust the Lord, even through cancer, heart failure, and seasons he never expected. You've been listening to Frank Peretti here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we've been discussing the 40th anniversary of his landmark book, *This Present Darkness*, and the brand new 40th anniversary collector's edition that is now available. You can learn more about this special edition book as well as hear the interview in its entirety when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

You know, Frank Peretti also reminded us that prayer isn't a dramatic device reserved just for the pages of fiction. It's a privilege that God gives his people. And when life becomes painful or confusing, we need more than just a compelling story. We need the truth of Scripture to steady us. And that's why I'd like to point you toward the vast library of previous conversations available from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. For example, there is a great program called “Walking in Victory”, a Family Talk conversation with author and speaker Priscilla Shirer. Drawing on the armor of God in Ephesians chapter 6, she offers biblical encouragement for recognizing spiritual opposition and standing firm in the Lord's strength. It's a fitting companion to Frank Peretti's reflection on the unseen battle and the importance of prayer. We also have “Winning Spiritual Warfare in the Home.” This is an audio blog that brings this

subject into everyday family life because spiritual challenges don't always arrive with dramatic warning signs. Sometimes they appear in the pressures facing our children, the strain on our marriages, or the discouragement that quietly settles in over a household. This resource encourages families to hold fast to God's word and to face those pressures with faith. Those are just two of the many wonderful broadcasts that you'll find when you look through our audio library at drjamesdobson.org.

And as you visit, please consider making a financial gift to support the ministry of Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. The JDFI exists to strengthen marriages, equip parents, and help families apply biblical truth into a world that desperately needs them. Every broadcast and every resource represents an opportunity to reach somebody who needs hope, direction, or reassurance that God has not abandoned them. And your support keeps these conversations available. It provides practical resources and brings biblical encouragement nationwide. We can't do this work without faithful partners like you. You can make a contribution today securely through our website, drjamesdobson.org, or if it's easier, just type in those initials, jdfi.org. You can also write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or just use those initials, JDFI for short, 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 joining us today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another 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.

Hello, friends. Roger Marsh here. In today's rapidly changing world, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute remains committed to our founding mission to preserve and promote the institution of family and the biblical principles on which it is based. Thanks to your prayers and faithful support, we're reaching millions through our daily family talk broadcasts, online resources, and policy initiatives. As President Reagan wisely said, freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction, and that's why we are working tirelessly to uphold... strengthen families and protect our God-given freedoms. Thank you for standing with us in this mission. Together, we're making a difference for generations to come.