



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Families in Crisis: The Anderson Family – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Roger and Darlene Anderson

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's edition of the broadcast, we will continue a conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his special guests, Roger and Darlene Anderson. The Andersons are parents of seven children, four of whom were born almost completely deaf. Now on the last edition of Family Talk, the Anderson shared their journey of discovering this genetic disorder and how God met their needs through countless doctor visits. They opened up about the initial diagnosis and the emotional roller coaster of learning their children would face significant challenges. Today on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the Anderson's will discuss the criticism they received for providing their children with cochlear implants, and they'll share how their daughter Brittany defied medical expectations despite serious complications from spinal meningitis. You'll even hear this remarkable four-year-old sing, "Jesus Loves Me," a powerful testament to modern medicine and answered prayers. So let's join Dr. James Dobson now and his guests Roger and Darlene Anderson for the conclusion of today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Darlene, did you feel abandoned by God at any point along the way?

Darlene Anderson: I think that I was a little frustrated at the fact that it would happen again. Those times weren't as bad as the struggle I went through that I did with Brittany. All of our children have suffered additional problems because of this.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, she had spinal meningitis, didn't she?

Darlene Anderson: Yes, and it's all related to their deformity and hers was the most severe. It was just like a normal day. I put her down for a nap and she got up and vomited and I just thought, oh, she must have a little bug. And the next morning she was very lethargic and slept a lot and by late afternoon, Saturday afternoon, this was just one week before birthday, I picked her up and noticed that she was quite warm. I took her temperature and it was almost 103, so I gave her something for it and waited for it to take effect and took her temperature again. It was almost 104, and we decided we better take her into emergency. When we got there, they

said her soft spot was bulging and they suspected spinal meningitis, so they put her on an antibiotic right away and said they have to do a spinal tap.

Roger Anderson: We were at the med center and they told us to go right to the hospital.

Dr. James Dobson: There are two or three medical conditions you don't wait on. Well, one of them is appendicitis, another one is spinal meningitis.

Roger Anderson: Especially. This was not viral. This was bacterial pneumococcal.

Darlene Anderson: They didn't know the time, but they started her on that anyway, and they said it was a very painful procedure, so we couldn't stay there with her. They put us in another little room and we had to wait while they did that. And that was another very difficult time for us. I remember praying and thinking of the other children at the school that had meningitis. They lost all their hearing and I thought, she has so little now, will you take what little she has? And then I thought maybe it's even more serious than that. And then when they came to get us, they said that as they had said, it was a painful procedure, but Brittany did not even whimper when they did it. And that was their first indication it was quite serious. They said that the spinal fluid should look similar to sugar water and hers came out in a creamy sludge and an attending pediatrician told me much later that then they suspect the brain is dissolving.

But at the time they didn't tell us that. They just said, Brittany may not live through the night. But she made it through the night and Sunday morning, we called all the people we knew at churches and asked them to take Brittany to their church in prayer. And she just laid there very still all that day. And that night, a nurse came in to check her and she had suckers in her pocket and Roger begged sucker off her and he was standing by the crib waving the sucker and talking and she opened an eye and it was like she focused on that sucker and all of a sudden, she moved her hand toward it and I said, "She's hungry." But they said she can't have anything. And that was like a turning point for her. And then the next several days, and we were at the hospital a long time.

Roger Anderson: She moved into the hospital for a lot of days. She lived right there with her.

Darlene Anderson: We had numerous people come in and I thought, oh, they just want to see this little deaf baby. I didn't realize why we had so much attention until the last day we're there. One of the doctors came in, he was an infectious disease specialist, and he said, "I'm about to move out of state. They're having a farewell party after I leave here. But I wanted to come to your room and share two things with you before I left." He said, "One, I have seen hundreds of meningitis cases and I have never in my life seen a child come in so far gone as your daughter and walk out of this hospital untouched by it."

Dr. James Dobson: And you know why, don't you?

Darlene Anderson: And I told him why. I said, we believe in prayer and there have been many, many people praying for her. And the other thing he told me was that somewhere he had read that this pneumococcal meningitis was associated with a mondini dysplasia syndrome. And he said, "I don't know how you're going to find out, but you better find out because it can reoccur again and you better get some help for her." So I had to start doing some more research and eventually she had surgery to try and stop this from happening again.

Dr. James Dobson: But she's doing fine now.

Darlene Anderson: Well, this was before we got to the real part where I began to go through the struggle. Sometime after that, we don't know exactly whether it was surgery that caused it, the meningitis herself, she lost what little hearing she had. And my audiologist, who was not even big on cochlear implants, said her only hope is if she can get a cochlear implant. So I contacted University of Michigan where they did them and they said, "We've only done three on mondini children. We don't even know if they're going to be successful, but you can bring her in and we will test and see." She had to be a few months older. And so we started that and after many trips there across the state, they decided Brittany's situation was, her deformity was too severe to do surgery and that was the blow that really sent me down.

Dr. James Dobson: Have they not been able to do an implant on one of your children?

Darlene Anderson: Yes, they have done it and they did eventually get to Brittany, but that was the part that I had to go through a long struggle. And I really believe that the Lord, again worked really miraculously in that way. And I knew that I had to be willing to accept whatever the outcome was for Brittany. I knew that God wanted to be glorified in her life and He was going to do it His way, but I wanted Him to do it my way.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that's difficult to come to a moment like that.

Darlene Anderson: And I can remember becoming so frustrated. I told Roger one day, I'm not even going to pray anymore because God's going to do what He wants to do anyway. And I don't know if I can change His mind, but I couldn't. I had to keep praying. I couldn't stop because I knew that God really did care for Brittany and for me, but it was still a big struggle in my life and I knew in my mind I had to give her over, but my heart wasn't willing to give her over. And finally one day I got down and said, "Okay, Lord, she's yours." And it was like God said to me, "Okay, now that you have surrendered this, what are you going to do? You're going to sit here and let things happen?" And I thought, "I'm going to find someone who can do this surgery honor even if they won't, meaning U of M."

So I started calling institutions. I started in California and worked my way east to find someone who would do the surgery on her. And I talked to one person who happened to know someone at U of M and she said, "We will look at Darren and

Brittany, but I want you to give U of M one more chance.” And oddly enough, they contacted me and said, “We want to reevaluate Brittany.” And one of the doctors called me one day and he said, “We will be willing to do this surgery if you will consent to the fact that it may not be successful like a normal cochlear implant and she may not receive all the benefit.” And so I said, “We feel like she has nothing, so we have nothing to lose and we will take whatever we can.”

Dr. James Dobson: Did you agree with that, Roger?

Roger Anderson: I'm a gambler sometimes. To us, we had nothing to lose. And I believe that if we were given the opportunity, we could at least take whatever we were given. Even if it didn't give us what most cochlear implants would, we take what we had and go with it because...

Dr. James Dobson: Any improvement is dramatic when you have done.

Roger Anderson: Yeah, I think part of it's just being thankful for whatever you can get and praise the Lord for even if He gives you a little thing.

Dr. James Dobson: So the procedure was done.

Darlene Anderson: Right, but they told us a couple things before the surgery. They said, one, they told us they were going to bring in extra people because this would be the most difficult case they had ever done. And the other thing was they said if they couldn't do it the normal way, they make like a sickle shape cut behind the ear. They couldn't do that. They would close it up and try and go right through the ear, but they would try to get it in.

Roger Anderson: Well, before they do surgery, they'd do what they call a promontory test where they actually stick a nee- I hope this isn't too gross. They stick a needle right in through the eardrum and try and stimulate the auditory nerve, which goes between the cochlear and the brain. They try to see if they can get some kind of response out of it so that they know if they're having anything to do. And she did have some in one ear they felt. So that's why they went for the one ear over the other.

Darlene Anderson: Normally they do the worst ear and save the best ear, but in her case, they did her best ear. So the day of the surgery, everything was going as normal and he went to check to see how they were coming.

Roger Anderson: It's about a three to four hour operation.

Darlene Anderson: And he checked and there was the surgeon standing there. The surgeon was out in the waiting room and he said, “We're done.” And he said, the surgeon said, “I want to tell you, we have many disappointed people back there because they were expecting some really unusual surgery and everything went smoothly.” And also one other thing they had told us before was that they may not be able

to get all 22 electrodes. They put in 22 electrodes and they said they would put in as many as they could get in. And so our first question was, how many electrodes did you get in? And he said 22. So we again knew the Lord had really worked a miracle in her life, but not the miracle that all the educational people, all the medical people in Michigan that work with her have answer for why she's doing what she's doing today. They gave her such little hope. I brought this here. There's Brittany.

Roger Anderson: She outpaces everybody.

Darlene Anderson: She's doing better than any of the ones they've ever done.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that right? Is she really? Now, what's her age now?

Darlene Anderson: Four.

Roger Anderson: Four.

Dr. James Dobson: Four years of age.

Darlene Anderson: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: I understand she sings.

Darlene Anderson: Yes, she's singing.

Dr. James Dobson: She sings Jesus Loves Me.

Darlene Anderson: Takes after her Dad.

Dr. James Dobson: Somebody told me she sings, "Jesus Loves Me" louder than anybody in your class. Is that right?

Darlene Anderson: Well, she could get kind of loud sometimes.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have that on tape.

Darlene Anderson: Yes, we have that on tape and they brought her in there too, but...

Dr. James Dobson: I wonder if she would sing for us.

Roger Anderson: We can try.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's try it. What have we got to lose, right? Bring Brittany in, will you? We've got to cheer for you.

Darlene Anderson: I want to say this... Come here, Brittany.

Dr. James Dobson: Hi, Brittany. Come on up, sweetheart.

Darlene Anderson: They told us after the surgery not to get our hopes up until they activate. It takes a month for it to heal and then they activate them.

Dr. James Dobson: And how much hearing does she have right now?

Darlene Anderson: With her ear implant she's hearing about 25 decibels, which is pretty good. She can hear whispers, but it took a month after she was activated, before she even started turning to sound. On July 29th, 1994 was the first time she turned to a voice when I called her name.

Dr. James Dobson: Was that a happy day in your life?

Darlene Anderson: It was. I charted every new sound she heard. Every day she'd tell me she heard something new every day.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, she's on her daddy's lap and she's hearing you now, right?

Darlene Anderson: Yes. Brittany?

Dr. James Dobson: Look at that smile. Isn't she beautiful?

Darlene Anderson: Brittany, can you sing Jesus loves me for us? Would you do that? Okay.

Darlene Anderson: Let's sing "Jesus Loves Me," okay? Do you want to get her started, Daddy?

Roger Anderson: Jesus Loves Me, this I know.

Darlene Anderson: Sing out loud.

Brittney Anderson: For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak but he is strong. Jesus loves me, this I know. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.

Dr. James Dobson: That is great. All those people are clapping for you.

Roger Anderson: She has done the whole thing right.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, thank you Brittany. You sing pretty.

Darlene Anderson: Brittany, he said thank you.

Brittney Anderson: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Bless your heart. She can stay or whatever she wants to do.

Roger Anderson: Do you want to go over there and sit down? Sit here over there and sit down?

Dr. James Dobson: Sure. Come on over.

Roger Anderson: You mentioned earlier that there's some controversy about some of these things. There are people that feel that a cochlear implant is child abuse.

Brittney Anderson: No more, no more.

Dr. James Dobson: We got the message, Brittney.

Roger Anderson: We were reading an article not long ago that there's a community of deaf. They have their own college. And so sign language...

Dr. James Dobson: This is what I was saying before, every aspect of deafness and the treatment they're off is controversial.

Roger Anderson: Oh yeah. Because they have their own culture. See a blind person can still communicate, but a deaf person is very limited in his communication. He's only limited to those people that he can sign with. So they in some ways have formed their own culture and they try to put a hedger around that and protect this culture because with some of the medical advances they've had, they're getting threatened. Almost everybody that is deaf has some residual hearing that can be used and amplified with hearing aids. There's two schools of thought. There's audio verbal and then auditory. Auditory verbal, excuse me. And then there's total communication, which means we try every total avenue we can to bring in communication to the child. The problem is if you go with total communication or sign language, it is so easy for a deaf child because they don't have good hearing to pick up on the sign that they will head that direction and won't use the hearing that they have. So we were kind of read the Riot Act over not going into sign language.

Dr. James Dobson: But you feel what you did was right.

Roger Anderson: We know what we did was right. When

Darlene Anderson: You see Brittany and you see what she's doing, we know we've made the right decision and now three of our children have cochlear implants.

Dr. James Dobson: Now give us a very quick summary of how the four children are doing. We're almost out of time. How are they making it?

Darlene Anderson: Well, Darren is going into second grade and in the program that he is in, they still work with him on learning the language and speech, but he's also given a regular academic curriculum. And so he is reading and doing math on level, and Brittany is in preschool still. And Bethany started last year also. That was one of the things that was difficult for me, especially when I homeschool my children

to have to send my toddlers off to a school. We've been very blessed with the people that work with them. They've become almost like part of the family. And so Bethany was implanted just last November.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you yet know how that's going to take?

Darlene Anderson: Well, she completed her activation and they say it usually takes about a year just like a normal child takes a year. They're taking in things, learning things, and then before they start coming back. And that's how it was with Brittany. And Bethany completed her activation in the middle of January. And I have marked in my book that the first week of February, she said, "That's too loud." And now she's already saying many of the expressions and things we've taught her and she's just been activated a little over half a year.

Dr. James Dobson: We have to be thankful for the medical expertise that's available and out there today. Now, do you have any indication, Darlene, about the baby you're carrying?

Darlene Anderson: No. There are tests that can be done, but we feel that...

Dr. James Dobson: You'd prefer not to know.

Darlene Anderson: Yeah, this is something...

Roger Anderson: It doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter because what God's given us, He's forming this one in the womb just like He did me and my wife and the rest of our children.

Dr. James Dobson: You really mean that, Roger? It's really up to him?

Roger Anderson: Well, it is. The only reason we wouldn't mean it is if we had no faith and we had no anchor to set our philosophy. And like I said, I think our philosophy determines how we respond to things even though we vary some, I think our anchor, if it's in the right place, you always come back to that point.

Dr. James Dobson: Darlene, mothers are a little more vulnerable than fathers sometime. Are you okay?

Darlene Anderson: Actually, I claimed a verse and I found one day as I was struggling in Psalm 86, and I really believe that the Lord would be good to me and give me a hearing child. I think I took that verse out of context. So when I started having those doubts that eight month, well, did this baby respond to that sound? Did this baby respond? I kept thinking, no, I think the Lord is going to be good to me and give me a hearing child. And I was in the hospital room all by myself when I got the call finally about the test results, and I opened my Bible to Psalm 86 and I said, "Lord, what did I miss here? Why didn't I understand this before?" And it

was very clear to me then that the Lord's goodness to me was to give me the strength that I would need. And He has done that.

Dr. James Dobson: And He was good to you. And He gave you a precious child.

Darlene Anderson: And He did. In fact, that was what Roger, when I had shared that thought with Roger just before the baby was born, I thought God would be good to us and give us a hearing baby. He said, God may choose to be good to us and give us another deaf child. I had to work through...

Dr. James Dobson: Something I tried to write about in my book *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, is that every person I know, every person I've ever talked to has something in their life that represents and if only for them. If only we weren't infertile, if only we hadn't had the car accident, if only I didn't have heart disease, if only my job was better. I can't seem to find the right job. Everybody has something like that. And there are circumstances in life where the Lord says, "This is what I want you to carry. Accept it. Don't fight it. Go with it. My grace is sufficient unto you." The apostle Paul had an if only he had something that he went to the Lord three times for and asked Him to remove it and the Lord said, "No. My grace is sufficient. You carry it." And in some cases what you carry is a lot more painful and a lot harder than it is for other things. But we all have if onlys, and eventually we face the end of life and all that that means. And we go through some really tough if onlys, but if there is a central theme or a message in what you've all said is that this is difficult, but you can make it with God's grace and He's been there for you.

Darlene Anderson: Yes, He has.

Dr. James Dobson: There's a real temptation in a situation like this where we're talking to the Christian community out there and a lot of other people to paint a picture that's a little rosier than reality. And life gets difficult. It gets tough for all us here.

Roger Anderson: It's very difficult for my wife because not only does she have the emotional struggle of deafness, the physical struggle of her pregnancies, and even after that there's doctor after doctor visit running them here for this thing. I mean, they get ear infections and then we got to have tubes. I mean, two of our kids have had to have tubes. We're back and forth, back and forth, and I have to work for a living. So she has to carry most of that load. And it is difficult for her. And I don't have a good answer for it, to be honest with you, how to make things any easier.

Dr. James Dobson: Darlene, I ask you if you're okay now, I ask you again in light of that comment, how can we pray for you?

Darlene Anderson: There are days when I probably don't have the emotional strength to think about the future and all the work. We have to go through teenage years with these children. But I can look back and know that there are days when friends or

someone in my family must've been praying for me because I made it through the day and God gives me the strength.

Dr. James Dobson: He brought you to this point, didn't He? He was there in all the low moments, the scary moments, and He'll be there for the future too.

Roger Anderson: And when she says God gives her the strength, that means she just made it barely through the day and was able to drag herself in the bed. She didn't come through it riding on a horse at the end of the day.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I understand that. Well, I'm going to ask our listeners, Darlene, especially to pray for you and for those beautiful children. That little Brittany, what a precious child, and they all are, they were in my office earlier and to just kind of put you on their prayer list. We got a lot of people out there who just live in the presence of the Lord and they write and many of them tell me they pray for me every day and I tell you, that's what gets me through the day as well. We're out going to ask them to pray for you. You're doing a magnificent job. You're doing a job that's more important than anything else in the universe. Taking those little children, those little lives in a very difficult circumstance and raising them to love God and serve Him. Little Brittany talking about Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so, it's worth it. And our prayers and our love are with you all. And I deeply appreciate you sharing your story with us today.

Roger Marsh: Amen. Those sweet notes from little Brittany of "Jesus Loves Me," reminds us that God's faithfulness shines brightest in our deepest challenges. You've been listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring the inspiring testimony of Roger and Darlene Anderson. Their journey with their deaf children reveals what's possible when faith meets determination. Now, if you miss part one of this conversation or you'd like to share both parts one and two of this remarkable story with another friend or relative who would benefit from this inspirational message, go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. We're committed to preserving and promoting biblical principles that support marriage, family, and child development. And when you partner with us through your prayers and financial support, you help us to continue bringing stories of hope like the Andersons to millions of listeners nationwide. To donate securely online, go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org), or to make a tax deductible contribution over the phone, call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Before we leave the air for today, I'd like to wish my parents, Warren and Kathy Marsh, a happy anniversary. It was 70 years ago today, August 5, 1955, that mom and dad tied the knot, and as I thank them every year on their anniversary, thanks for getting married and thanks for having me. And now on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI. Thanks so much for listening 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.

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