



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Honoring the America 250 Essay Contest Winners – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Jack Bodker

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's edition of the Family Talk program, we have a special treat for you. Today is July the 2nd, 2026. We are two days away from America celebrating her 250th anniversary. And in honor of the American 250th anniversary celebration, we hosted a contest here sponsored by the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute in conjunction with our friends at the Herzog Foundation. More than 600 high school and middle school students all across the country submitted essays to us here at JDFI. And the themes were very simple. First, explain how you, in your opinion, believe that the Christian faith was foundational for America's founding and also for her success and flourishing in the future. And then secondly, you as a middle schooler or a high schooler, give us an indication as to how you believe your Christian faith will inform your citizenship and the stewardship thereof in the years to come. Our middle school winner is Jack Bodker, and we're going to get a chance to get to know him in just a moment. You'll hear a conversation that Gary Bauer recorded with Jack, and he will be actually reading his winning essay that netted him a \$1,000 prize. Okay, without further ado, let's get into this special edition of Family Talk now, honoring the America 250 essay contest winners, and today we've turned the spotlight on our middle school winner, Jack Bodker. Here now is Gary Bauer with more.

**Gary Bauer:** Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Gary Bauer, senior vice president of public policy at JDFI. And let me be the first to wish you a happy Fourth of July. This is a momentous year and a momentous event. You know, there's an old story, and I think it's been confirmed by historians, that as the founders were leaving Constitution Hall, there were people, you know, waiting outside. They wanted to know what had happened. And the story goes that a woman came up to Benjamin Franklin and said, "Sir, what have you given us, a monarchy or a republic?" And he responded, "A republic, if you can keep it." Well, I think those last words were the most important part in some ways, if you can keep it. For all these years, we have been able to keep it. And one of the reasons we've been able to keep it is that one generation of young Americans after another has risen to the occasion. They've studied their history. They've committed themselves to making sure

America remained a nation under God, a nation built on liberty and freedom. And so with all that in mind, This year, as part of what JDFI, the James Dobson Family Institute, wanted to do to celebrate our 250th birthday, we ended up partnering with the Herzog Foundation. And we created an essay test for middle school and high school age students. And, you know, we didn't know quite what to expect, but we just got an avalanche of responses, well over 500. And the essays were unbelievable and it was hard to do, but we took quite a bit of time and we picked both a middle school winner and a high school winner. And today, I'm really pleased to interview our middle school winner, Jack Bodker. Jack, welcome to our show, and it's a real pleasure to have you on Dr. Dobson's Family Talk.

Jack Bodker: Thank you.

Gary Bauer: Jack, let's jump right in it. I get to talk to a lot of big shots in Washington, members of Congress, and even get over to the White House periodically to talk to the man himself. But I've been looking forward to having this opportunity to talk to you because you're part of the rising generation that we're all counting on. So how'd you find out about the essay contest and what led you to want to submit an essay?

Jack Bodker: Well, in school, my history teacher let us know about it and I have a decent amount of free time in school, so you know I just started writing the essay. I kept on refining it. I mean, I know it's imperfect but I'm really happy with how it turned out.

Gary Bauer: Yeah, well, you should be happy. We were very impressed. At one point many years ago under Ronald Reagan, I was undersecretary of education at the federal government level. So, you know, over the years I've seen a lot, sadly, a lot of examples of young Americans that have a hard time putting two good sentences together, and you put together a great essay. So have you always been interested in American history or was it just the fact that it's the 250th birthday of America that led you to do it?

Jack Bodker: I don't think it was necessarily either. I've been extremely interested in God's role in everything. That's just about it.

Gary Bauer: So let me press a little bit about what, in addition to being interested in God's role in everything, which is probably the most important priority anybody can have. Certainly a follower of Jesus Christ, as we know you are. But what other things in your life do you—are you involved in sports, or do you like going to movies, or what—do you have any hobbies? Just tell us a little bit more about yourself.

Jack Bodker: I do a lot of piano. And I'm just now starting to teach myself guitar, but it's, you know, mainly music. I don't do any sports.

Gary Bauer: Well, you've already surpassed me in music. I hum along so as not to offend anybody within hearing distance. So how long have you been playing the piano?

Jack Bodker: Since second grade.

Gary Bauer: Wow, that's fantastic. So you started, when you made the decision to write the essay, did it go through many drafts? And from beginning to end, how long did it take for you to come up with what ended up being one of the winners?

Jack Bodker: It took about one to two weeks. You know, the way I write essays, I don't know for sure, but I think it's unorthodox because I write the original thing and then I don't...it's not a draft. I just keep on editing it until I'm happy with it.

Gary Bauer: Yeah, now some people may say that sounds a little odd, Jack, but I have to tell you, that's exactly how I write. Over the years, I've written a couple of books. One of them was a best-seller, and it was a best-seller because the co-author was Dr. James Dobson. So he wrote half the book, and I wrote half the book. I don't know if you were suggesting you write it out longhand. I actually write my stuff out longhand, and I usually let it sit overnight, and then I sit down and write it again, you know, and make changes and just keep working on that original draft. So it sounds like that's something close to what you did too.

Jack Bodker: Yes, sir. I just really write the basics down. Then I add more, if I think this certain part needs a little more evidence or if this, I use too much sentence starters here, just stuff like that.

Gary Bauer: So your school is a Christian school?

Jack Bodker: Yes, sir.

Gary Bauer: And you're obviously growing up in a Christian family.

Jack Bodker: Yes, sir.

Gary Bauer: So when did you begin to have your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? When did you make that decision?

Jack Bodker: I've identified as a Christian my whole life, but I could say when I was 10, I really started having a better relationship with Jesus, especially when we switched churches. That helped a lot.

Gary Bauer: Tell our listeners, do you have a good idea... I think you deal with this in the essay, but and you're still young, you can change your mind, but how do you see yourself down the road? Do you want to go into a musical career or into ministry, or what are you hoping that you'll do?

Jack Bodker: I see myself doing whatever God calls me to do as best as I can. I don't know if I'm going to go into music, to tech, or construction for all I know. Whatever God has for me, I'll do that, and I'll do it as best as I can. I'll work diligently. Hard.

Gary Bauer: Yeah. Years ago, I was listening to a guy give a speech. He was just a movie actor at the time. And his name was Ronald Reagan. And he ended up going on to be president of the United States. But I said to my father, after we heard this movie actor give a speech. I said, "Dad, that guy is going to be president someday, and I'm going to work for him in the White House." And my father thought that was kind of stupid for me to say. But when I said it, I felt very clearly that God had laid that on my heart. And many years later, I ended up working for Ronald Reagan in the White House. So wherever God leads you, I think you can't go wrong ending up choosing that as your profession and what you want to do in the future. So did mom and dad encourage you in this essay, and did you all pray about it as you were writing it?

Jack Bodker: Yes, sir.

Gary Bauer: Well, that's good to have parents that encourage you. As I recall, my dad said when I was going to end up working at a White House, I think he said some variation of, "Gary, you're nuts." So it wasn't quite the encouragement I was looking for. So you're really blessed to have parents that wanted you to do this essay, but also are raising you to be somebody that's listening for God's call on your life.

Jack, if you could talk to other people your age, in addition to what you've said in the essay, what would you say to them about how they ought to look at America? Because I've always felt that when we're born in America, God wasn't surprised. He knew exactly where we were going to be born. And I think a lot of young people don't realize how blessed they are to have been born here. They could have been born in communist China or in some place in the Middle East where, you know, you're persecuted for being a Christian. So what would you say to young people that may not understand what a blessing it is to be born in this country?

Jack Bodker: Don't take it for granted. Not everyone can worship God.

Gary Bauer: And we see examples of that all the time, you know, unfortunately, in the news. Well, Jack, I have no doubt that you're going to have great things ahead of you. And we'd like to ask you to read your essay on the air for us. It would be a great way for Dr. Dobson's audience around the country, the audience that we know tunes in on hundreds and hundreds of radio stations that Family Talk plays on for the James Dobson Family Institute. So if you could read the essay to us, we would really appreciate that.

Jack Bodker: Yes, sir. God's role in the founding of our nation and our role in the future of it. It was the morning of August 30th, 1776. Washington and his army had been battling the British on Long Island for two days, but the Continental Army was

losing. So, Washington ordered a retreat from the area to Manhattan, and something miraculous happened. A heavy, dense fog settled over the river they were crossing, hiding the evacuation from British ships that were only a few hundred yards away. But the fog was much lighter to where they were escaping to, allowing for a safe arrival. Even more remarkable, the fog lifted shortly after the last ship carrying George Washington across the river left. While modern meteorologists can tell you how this happened, the why, the when, and the fact that everything happened the way it happened points to God. After all, the fog was described as miraculous and would be later known as the fog that saved the revolution. And this also isn't the only time our God played a significant role in the founding of our nation. To start, most founding fathers believed in God. In fact, some laws made during the founding of this country were influenced by principles of Christianity. In the Declaration of Independence, it states that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are God-given rights. Psalm 37:4 talks about if you give yourself to God, He will give you the desires of your heart.

Another thing it says is that all men are created equal, and for all men to be created equal, all men must have been created. Moreover, Isaiah 33:22 states, "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king. He will save us." And the Lonang Institute, as well as other places, credit this verse with influencing the founding fathers to create a three-branch system in government. Now, not every law reflected biblical principles. Most notably, the slave trade was still legal and explicitly goes against what the Bible has to say. But then again, Christian principles eventually led to the abolition of slavery.

Not only has Christianity played a major part in the founding of this nation, but as pointed out earlier with the fog that rolled in during the evacuation of Long Island, God also helped using divine intervention. For instance, the revolutionary army shouldn't have won at all, due to the British's major advantage in experience, training, and organization. In contrast, the revolutionary army was poorly organized and in need of training. Another thing to note is not every American was a patriot. Despite the majority supporting the cause for independence, many still welcomed the British and revered them as liberators. But the American army still won, thanks to a French alliance, perseverance, and God's help, which in Psalm 41, the first verse through the second verse, most apparently in keeping George Washington alive. According to Eric Metaxas' book, *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness*, Washington found himself in many instances where his life was in danger, particularly in the Revolutionary War. However, his life was never taken from him, and for this reason, he considered himself to be ordained by God. However, the same God these Founding Fathers believed in is the same God that is now being taken out of America. The principles and worldviews that the Founding Fathers had are no longer as prevalent. People have blurred the lines in between genders, normalized abortion, and have removed religious education of the Bible in public schools. This was ruled by the Supreme Court in 1963 with the case of *Abington v. Schemmel*. The percentage of North Americans that are Christian have fallen from 97.1% in 1900 to 72.6% in 2020, according to [gordonconwell.edu](http://gordonconwell.edu). That's why I believe God is calling me to shape what is

coming next. This nation is in dire need of Jesus, and I as a Christian have an obligation to bring this culture back to the Christian principles that this nation was founded upon. I can share my testimony with those who will listen, and I can always pray for the delivery of this nation, that this nation comes back to the God who protects and provides, back to the belief that God sent His one and only Son to die on the cross for our sins, that we may not perish, but have eternal life. I'm hopeful this nation will come back to God and His principles, but I know we can't save it without Him.

Gary Bauer: You're as great a reader of your essay as you were a writer of it, Jack. That was really well said and obviously well written.

Jack Bodker: Thank you.

Gary Bauer: And I have absolutely no doubt that God has great things planned ahead for you. And all of us at the James Dobson Family Institute know that America is only going to survive the dangerous years ahead if God's hand of protection stays on us, and if the rising generation of young Americans, as they always have, step up and defend faith, family, and freedom. And so you're a real encouragement to us. And I'm sure the people that hear you talk about your essay and hear this interview are going to be as encouraging as well. But Jack, I don't want to leave without saying hello. to your mom if she's there, and if she would want to share a couple words with us, that would be fantastic.

Gary Bauer: Hello, how are you?

Misti Bodker: Hi, good, how are you?

Gary Bauer: Good to meet you.

Misti Bodker: Good to meet you.

Gary Bauer: I'm Gary Bauer.

Misti Bodker: Hi, Mr. Bauer.

Gary Bauer: No, Gary, please. I wanted to make sure we had a few seconds with you, because first of all, I wanted to just personally say to you, great job, mom. I mean, you and dad have done a fantastic job in raising a wonderful young Christian citizen. And I wonder if there's a, you know, Jack didn't brag about himself very much, but I wonder if as his mom, if you wanted to share a few words with us about the great young man you've raised.

Misti Bodker: Yeah, I would love to. Jack is, he's our middle child. We have three boys and my husband and I just adore him and love him. We always have fun. Jack's always been our go-getter. He's never shied away from a challenge. He's never been one to be like, "I don't know that I could do that." He's just like "Yeah. Let's do it let's go. Show me where it is, I'll go." So it's been exciting to see him whether it's

a piano recital or an essay or just doing something where personally I would have been, I don't know if I could do that. That's in front of a lot of people. Jack's just like, no, I got this. We're good. And he just goes full force and enjoys it, too. So, it's just been a real blessing to see him develop his relationship with Christ as well as his talents and just go with it and live it to the fullest.

Gary Bauer: Jack, as I said, your faith is so obvious. You can see it in the wonderful essay and just in the few minutes that we've spent talking together. And so, Misti, is it okay if I call you Misti?

Misti Bodker: Yeah, absolutely.

Gary Bauer: So I assume you're familiar with the work that Dr. James Dobson did over the years. And I wonder whether his books and his radio show had any impact on you guys as you started your own family and were raising these boys?

Misti Bodker: I remember the name definitely as a young child growing up, Dr. James Dobson in my family. My husband and I are really blessed with our heritage. We both come from Bible-believing parents and grandparents, so it's just been a generational blessing to have curriculum such as James Dobson, his stuff, as well as the Bible just passed down to us. So definitely it was a familiar name growing up.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic. Well, we were very encouraged, as I said. We not only read Jack's essay, but many others that we received. Again, you know, I'm getting at that point in life where, you know, I think back on the good old days when things were so much better. And would they ever be like that again? But anytime I come across somebody like your son and families like yours that are teaching their children to honor our faith to be, you know, for strong families and to defend liberty. I'm encouraged about what the future has to hold. So from the James Dobson Family Institute, not only congratulations to your son, but congratulations to you and your husband for raising such a great young man.

Misti Bodker: Thank you. We don't take that lightly.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic. Well, folks, you've been listening to the James Dobson Family Talk show, and we spent time today with one of the winners of our essay contest. We want to encourage all of you out there who are doing your own great jobs raising your children in a country that's culture is sometimes off the rails. Don't give up. Keep on teaching them to love God and to be committed to faith, family, and freedom. And there's a lot of people at the James Dobson Family Institute that are doing everything we can do to make that job easier for you.

Jack Bodker: Thank you.

Gary Bauer: Well, God bless you both and your family, and thanks again for being part of the essay contest. And there's some other great things that are going to happen down the road, and we'll be talking to you all about those.

Misti Bodker: Well, thanks for the opportunity and for involving the next generation. That was pretty cool. Like I said, the childhood name, I'm like, oh, yeah, they're doing stuff for his grade.

Gary Bauer: We know Dr. Dobson is watching us, you know, and so we intend to preserve his legacy. And I knew him very well. He would have loved to have done this interview, and he probably would have done a lot better job than I did. But so he's smiling down from Heaven on us.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a gift to spend time with young Jack Bodker today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. His prize-winning essay reminds us of a truth our founders understood all too well, that this nation was built on faith in God, and it can only be sustained by returning to Him. Our thanks to Gary Bauer, our senior vice president of public policy here at the Dobson Policy and Culture Center for a wonderful conversation with Jack Bodker. And congratulations to Jack for winning the middle school division of our contest.

Well, this Saturday is July the 4th, 2026. It marks our nation's 250th birthday. It's a milestone our founding fathers could only have dreamed of. And as we celebrate American Independence Day, let's remember the words of Benjamin Franklin. After the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, America's founding fathers went to work to create our U.S. Constitution, and a very famous exchange with a woman who asked Benjamin Franklin, what exactly are you putting together, a monarchy or a republic? Ben Franklin responded, it's a republic, if you can keep it. Well, keeping it means raising up a generation that loves God, honors family, and defends freedom. Young people like Jack Bodker give us great hope that the rising generation that is coming up behind us is ready to answer that call. And equipping families to raise those children is exactly the work that we are committed to do here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. For the entire month of July, your support of our ministry will go twice as far. Thanks to some generous friends of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we have a special matching grant in effect, and that means that every gift you donate will be doubled in size and impact. At this pivotal moment in our nation's history, your doubled gift will help us reach even more young Americans like Jack Bodker and equip families to stand firm in their faith. By the way, it's a \$250,000 matching grant in honor of our nation's 250th anniversary.

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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 as we continue honoring the America 250 essay contest winners. We'll be joined by the winner of our high school division, Crystal Konadu. That'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.

Here's today's Dr. Dobson Minute with Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: The U.S. Civil War ended with Lee surrendered a grad at Appomattox. And what fascinates me about that conflict is the toughness of both the Yankee and rebel soldiers. Their lives were filled with deprivation and danger that's hardly imaginable today. After one particularly bloody battle in 1862, 5,000 men lay in an area of about two square miles. Many of the wounded remained where they fell for 12 or 14 hours with their groans and cries echoing through the countryside. Now, I'm not glorifying the horrors of war, certainly, but I am amazed that the troops didn't crack under these deadly circumstances. They were committed to their cause, be it Yankee or Rebel. I do wonder at times if this generation would make a similar sacrifice if required to defend our most cherished ideals.

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