



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Tiny Foot

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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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 ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and of course, all throughout the month of January, we are recognizing sanctity of human life here at the JDFI, it's a time when we reflect deeply on the precious gift of life that God has entrusted to us. This past year and a half has brought historic changes that many of us never thought we'd witness in our lifetimes. It was June 24th 2022 that after nearly 50 years of prayer and dedicated effort from millions of Americans, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the landmark *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision. This represented an unprecedented victory for the pro-life movement and opened the door for states to protect unborn children like never before. And yet even as we celebrate this milestone, we know our work in this area is far from complete. Hearts and minds still need to be changed and women facing difficult circumstances need our support and compassion now more than ever.

Well, today here on Family Talk, we're going to share a letter written a few years back by our very own Dr. James Dobson. In it, he shares the story of a doctor faced with an impossible choice in a delivery room many years ago. This account comes from Dr. Frederic Loomis, who practiced medicine in California during a time when medical options were far more limited than they are today. His experience speaks to the profound value of every human life and perhaps especially when that life doesn't match our expectations of "perfect." Now, as Dr. Dobson reads this letter, I encourage you to listen with an open heart, whether you're driving to work, doing dishes at home, taking a quiet moment for yourself, maybe you're working out at the gym. This story will remind us why we must continue to advocate for the sanctity of human life. It shows us how one decision to protect a vulnerable life can have ripple effects that touch countless others in beautiful and unexpected ways.

By the way, I should mention that during Sanctity of Life Month, here at the James Dobson Family Institute, we encourage you to be praying for the pregnancy resource centers in your area. If you're looking for access to how you can get ahold of the information as to finding a pregnancy resource center in your area, check out our website at drjamesdobson.org. We'll be happy to encourage you or call our resource center at 877-732-6825. The pregnancy

resource centers are doing the heavy lifting, helping a lot of women who may be considering abortion to know that they have other options including adoption or help and support for them when they do eventually give birth to these beautiful babies.

So please keep in mind that all this month we're encouraging you to find a pregnancy resource center to come alongside and support with your prayers by volunteering or by making a financial contribution. Now before we begin, I should mention that while you will hear a few Christmas references in this letter, we deliberately chose to share it now during Sanctity Human Life Month. Though the holiday season has in fact passed, the profound truths in this story transcend any particular time of year. So now let's sit back and listen as Dr. Dobson reads this letter out loud on the special edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson:

Do you have time right now to read something simply for enjoyment? I doubt it. Nevertheless, I'm suggesting that you take a few moments just for yourself. You do deserve a break today. Situate yourself in your most comfortable chair, perhaps with a cup of hot cider and a few low-fat cookies and read the inspiring words of Dr. Frederic Loomis. This obstetrician's story is included in an outstanding collection of writings entitled Christmas In My Heart, compiled by Dr. Joe Wheeler. If this little piece doesn't light your fire, you have wet wood. These are Dr. Loomis' own words recalling the delivery of a baby many years ago, before Caesarian procedures were commonly used to rescue infants at risk. He called his story, The Tiny Foot. And this is what he said.

Two years after I came to California, there came to my office one day, a fragile young woman expecting her first baby. Her history was not good from an emotional standpoint, though she had come from a fine family. I built her up as well as I could and found her increasingly wholesome and interesting as time went on, partly because of the effort she was making to be calm and patient and to keep her emotional and nervous reactions under control. One month before her baby was due, her routine examination showed that her baby was in a breech position.

As a rule, the baby's head is in the lower part of the uterus for months before delivery, not because it is heavier and sinks in the surrounding fluid, but simply because it fits more comfortably in that position. There is no routine spontaneous turning of all babies at the seventh or eighth month, as is so generally supposed. But the occasional baby found in the breech position in the last month not infrequently changes to the normal vertex position with the head down by the time it is ready to be born so that only about one baby in 25 is born in the breech position.

This is fortunate as the death rate of breech babies is comparatively high because of the difficulty in delivering the after coming head and the imperative need of delivering it rather quickly after the body is born. At that moment, the cord becomes compressed between the baby's hard little head and the mother's bony pelvis. When no oxygen reaches the baby's bloodstream, it

inevitably dies in a few short minutes. Everyone in the delivery room is tense except the mother herself in a breech delivery, especially if it is a first baby when the difficulty is greater. The mother is usually quietly asleep or almost so. The case I was speaking of was a complete breech, the baby's legs and feet being folded under it, tailor-fashioned. In contrast to the frank breech in which the thighs and legs are folded back on the baby's body like a jackknife, the little rear end backing its way into the world first of all.

The hardest thing for the attending doctor to do with any breech delivery is to keep his hands away from it until the natural forces of expulsion have thoroughly dilated the firm maternal structures that delay its progress. I waited as patiently as I could, sending frequent messages to the excited family in the corridor outside. At last the time had come and I gently drew down one little foot. I grasped the other, but for some reason I could not understand it would not come down beside the first one. I pulled again gently enough, but with a little force, with light pressure on the abdomen from above by my assisting nurse and the baby's body moved down just enough for me to see that it was a little girl. And then to my consternation, I saw that the other foot would never be beside the first one.

The entire thigh from the hip to the knee was missing and that one foot could never reach below the opposite knee. And a baby girl was to suffer this, a curious defect that I had never seen before nor have I since. There followed the hardest struggle I have ever had with myself. I knew what a dreadful effect it would have upon the unstable nervous system of the mother. I felt sure that the family would almost certainly impoverish itself in taking the child to every famous orthopedist in the world whose achievements might offer a ray of hope. Most of all, I saw this little girl sitting sadly by herself while other girls laughed and danced and ran and played. And then I suddenly realized that there was something that would save every pang but one and that one thing was in my power. One breech baby in 10 dies in delivery because it is not delivered rapidly enough, and now if only I did not hurry, if I could slow my hand, I could make myself delay those few short moments.

It would not be an easy delivery anyway, no one in all this world would ever know. The mother after the first shock of grief would probably be glad she had lost a child so sadly handicapped. In a year or two, she would try again and this tragic fate would never be repeated. "Don't bring this suffering upon them." The small voice within me said. "This baby has never taken a breath, don't let her ever take one. You probably can't get it out in time anyway. Don't hurry. Don't be a fool and bring this terrible thing upon them. Suppose your conscience does hurt a little, can't you stand it better than they can? Maybe your conscience will hurt worse if you do get it out in time." I motioned to the nurse for the warm, sterile towel that is always ready for me in a breech delivery to wrap around the baby's body so that the stimulation of the cold air of the outside world may not induce a sudden expansion of the baby's chest causing the aspiration of fluid or mucus that might bring death.

But this time, the towel was only to conceal from the attending nurses that which my eyes alone had seen. With the touch of the pitiful little foot in my hand, a pang of sorrow for the baby's future swept through me and my decision was made. I glanced at the clock, three of the allocated seven or eight minutes had already gone. Every eye in the room was upon me and I could feel the tension in their eagerness to do instantly what I asked, totally unaware of what I was feeling. I hoped they could not possibly detect the tension of my own struggle at that moment. These nurses had seen me deliver dozens of breech babies successfully. Yes, and they had seen me fail too. Now they were going to see me fail again. For the first time in my medical life, I was deliberately discarding what I had been taught was right for something that I felt sure was better.

I slipped my hand beneath the towel to feel the pulsations of the baby's cord, a certain index of its condition. Two to three minutes more would be enough. So that I might seem to be doing something, I drew the baby down a little lower to split out the arms, the usual next step. And as I did so, the little pink foot on the good side bobbed out from its protecting towel and pressed firmly against my slowly moving hand, the hand into whose keeping the safety of the mother and the baby had been entrusted. There was a sudden convulsive movement of the baby's body, an actual feeling of strength and life and vigor. It was too much. I couldn't do it. I delivered the baby with her pitiful little leg. I told the family the next day and with a catch in my voice, I told the mother.

Every foreboding came true. The mother was at a hospital for several months. I saw her once or twice and she looked like a wraith of her former self. I heard of them indirectly from time to time. They'd been to Rochester, Minnesota, they'd been to Chicago and to Boston, finally, I lost track of them all together. As the years went on, I blamed myself bitterly for not having had the strength to yield to my temptation. Through the many years that I have been here, there's developed in our hospital a pretty custom of staging and elaborate Christmas party each year for the employees, the nurses, and the doctors on the staff. There's always a beautifully decorated tree on the stage of our little auditorium. The girls spend weeks in preparation. We have so many difficult things to do during the year, so much discipline and so many of the stern realities of life that we have set aside this one day to touch upon the emotional and the spiritual side.

It is almost like going to an impressive church service, as each year we dedicate ourselves anew to the year ahead. This past year, the arrangement was somewhat changed. The tree on one side of the stage had been sprayed with silver paint and was hung with scores of gleaming silver and tinsel ornaments without a trace of color anywhere and with no lights hung upon the tree itself. It shone but faintly in the dimly lighted auditorium. Every doctor of the staff who could possibly be there was in a seat. The first rows were reserved for the nurses, and in the moment, the procession entered each girl in uniform, each one crowned by her nurse's cap, her badge of office. Around their shoulders were their blue red cross capes. One end tossed back to show the deep red

lining. We rose as one man to do them honor and as the last one reached her seat and we settled in our places again, the organ began the opening notes of one of the oldest of our carols.

Slowly down the middle aisle, marching from the back of the auditorium came 20 other girls singing softly. Our own nurses in full uniform each holding high a lighted candle while through the auditorium floated the familiar strains of Silent Night. We were on our feet again instantly. I could have killed anyone who spoke to me then because I couldn't have answered and by the time they reached their seats I couldn't see. And then a great blue floodlight at the back was turned on very slowly, gradually covering the tree with increasing splendor, brighter and brighter until every ornament was almost aflame. On the opposite side of the stage, a curtain was slowly drawn and we saw three lovely young musicians all in shimmering white evening gowns. They played very softly in unison with the organ, a harp, a cello, and a violin. I'm quite sure I was not the only old sissy there whose eyes were filled with tears.

I've always liked the harp and I loved to watch the grace of a skillful player. I was especially fascinated by this young harpist. She played extraordinarily well as if she loved it. Her slender fingers flickered across the strings and as the nurses sang, her face made beautiful by a mass of Auburn hair was upturned as if the world that moment were a beautiful and holy place. I waited when the short program was over to congratulate the chief nurse on the unusual effects she had arranged. And as I sat alone, there came running down the aisle a woman whom I did not know. She came to me with arms outstretched, "Oh, you saw her? She cried. "You must have recognized your baby. That was my daughter who played the harp and I saw you watching her. Don't you remember the little girl who was born with only one good leg 17 years ago?"

"We tried everything at first, but now she has a whole artificial leg on that side. But you would never know it would you? She can walk, she can swim, she can almost dance. Best of all though, through all the years when she couldn't do those things, she learned to use her hands so wonderfully. She's going to be one of the world's great harpists. She enters the university this year at 17. She's my whole life and now she's so happy and here she is." As we spoke, this sweet young girl had quietly approached us, her eyes glowing, and now she stood beside me. "This is your first doctor, my dear, our doctor." Her mother said, her voice trembled. I could see her literally swept back as I was through all the years of heartache to the day when I told her what she had to face.

"He was the first one to tell me about you. He brought you to me." Impulsively I took the girl in my arms. Across her warm young shoulder, I saw the creeping clock of the delivery room of 17 years before. I lived again those awful moments when her life was in my hand. When I had decided on deliberate infanticide. I held her away from me and I looked at her, "You never will know dear," I said, "You never will know nor will anyone else in all the world just what tonight has meant to me. Go back to your harp for a moment please and play Silent Night for me alone. I have a load on my shoulders that no one has ever seen, a load

that only you can take away." Her mother sat beside me and quietly took my hand as her daughter played. Perhaps she knew what was on my mind. And as the last strains of Silent night, holy night faded again, I think I found the answer and the comfort I had waited for so long.

I read Dr. Loomis' story at dawn this morning as tears streamed down my face. When Shirley awoke a few minutes later, I shared it with her and she quietly dabbed at her eyes with a hanky. We both thought of the 30 million unborn babies who though entirely healthy and brimming with human potential have been denied the opportunity to live and love and learn. Undoubtedly among them were future musicians and scientists and teachers and ministers and homemakers who were never given a chance. What a tragic loss to the human family. Dr. Loomis' story also spoke volumes about the worth of every child, especially the handicapped and needy. Jesus once referred to such individuals as, "The least of these my brothers." Each of them is precious. Since my years of service on the staff of a large children's hospital, my greatest respect and admiration have been reserved for the mothers and fathers like those in this story who have devoted their lives to the task of raising a physically or intellectually challenged boy or girl.

If that is your circumstance today, you may not receive the acclaim that you deserve in this life. The media and the world outside may never even know that you're there, but the Lord has seen your sacrifice. If you remain true to your calling, He will say those incredible words on resurrection morning, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." There's another profound lesson tucked within the story that we've read. It focuses on God's sovereign will, which is preeminent whether or not we understand or agree with it. Dr. Loomis almost overlooked that truth. He apparently concluded that providence had made a disastrous mistake, tempting him to take matters into his own hands. But there was a purpose, a divine plan unfolding in that delivery room that he failed to comprehend. We simply must not attempt to play God in matters of life and death, which are the exclusive prerogatives of the creator.

Our obligation is to trust Him even when the pieces don't fit. God makes sense even when he doesn't make sense. There's an order, an intelligent design to the universe even when everything seems to be swirling out of control. Jesus came to bring life and life more abundantly to whosoever would simply believe on His name. By His advent, by His death 33 years later on a cruel Roman cross, and by his resurrection, we are adopted into his family and given the promise of eternal life. What a blessing. Indeed, every good and perfect gift is linked to that miraculous event in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago. All the transcendent values in which we believe including our reverence for human life find their origins in the words of the master. Even the story we just read evoked these eternal themes, which is why I shared it with you. I don't know if Dr. Loomis was a believer in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, although I think he must have been. His compassion for a tiny deformed baby certainly reflects the teachings of the one who said to his disciples, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Roger Marsh:

Well you've been listening to Dr. James Dobson share one of his powerful monthly letters on this edition of Family Talk. And to hear this program again or to share it with someone you love, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Now, as I mentioned at the beginning of our program, this message comes at a particularly meaningful time of year as we observe Sanctity of Human Life Month here at the James Dobson Family Institute. The story we heard today of one doctor's internal struggle and the beautiful outcome of his choice for life touches something deep within all of us. There's something profoundly moving about Dr. Loomis' journey, his initial doubts, his moment of decision, and the joy of seeing that young harpist years later. It speaks to the immeasurable worth of every individual, a message our society desperately needs to hear and embrace. While medical technology has advanced significantly since this story took place, healthcare professionals still face similar ethical dilemmas even today, often complicated by political pressures and opposing worldview.

And that's why here at the James Dobson Family Institute, the work of Family Talk remains so crucial. Every day we strive to defend the sanctity of human life and support those making difficult decisions. We reach out to families facing unexpected pregnancies. We advocate for the unborn and provide resources to those in need, but we can't do this work alone. When you partner with Family Talk, you help us continue bringing these important messages to millions of families all across the nation. Your enables us to produce programs like the one you heard today. If today's message has touched your heart, we invite you to join us in this ministry. You can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. You can also call with your gift at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. We also encourage you to explore the many resources available on our website, including articles and broadcasts about the sanctity of human life. You'll find links to pregnancy resource centers in your area and other ways to get involved in protecting life when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

And speaking of new technology, 2025 brings with it the launch of a brand-new JDFI multilingual app. We call it The Family App. It's currently available on Apple devices in English and Spanish. It will simply default to your phone's language setting if you're wondering how to set that up. But three additional languages will be released in 2025, as well as an Android version. We're seeking to reach millions of people for the Lord with Dr. Dobson's biblically based teachings, including a brand-new Dobson Marriage Podcast and Dobson Parenting Podcast, and the popular newly remastered Dr. Dobson Minute as well.

Now, these can be personalized to your interest, saved in your library, and quickly shared with those you love. So learn more about the new JDFI multilingual app, we call it The Family App, it's now available for Apple devices in the Apple Store, it'll be available in Google Play for Android very, very soon.

Well I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and the whole team here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening. 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.