



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Transform Iran – Part 1

Guest(s): Lana Silk

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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: God is getting ready to liberate Iran. Well, that is the confident hope our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk carries, even as she watches her homeland move through ceasefire, uncertainty, back to battle, and maybe another ceasefire, and quiet revival, which is happening all at the same time. Welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and joining me on the program today is Lana Silk. Lana is President and CEO of Transform Iran, a ministry born the same day the Islamic Revolution began when Lana's own family fled Iran and felt God's call to strengthen the underground church from the outside. And for more than three decades, Transform Iran has trained leaders, planted churches, and brought the gospel to a nation where owning a Bible can literally cost you your freedom. But the good news is today more than 300,000 Iranians have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and many of them have done so in the middle of war or surveillance, or just literally pressures that none of us here in the United States can really fully imagine. Well, there's a lot to get into today, so I'm so excited to have her back on the program. Lana Silk, welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Lana Silk: Thank you, Roger. I appreciate that.

Roger Marsh: Give us just a 60-second overview, if you would, of your story. I alluded to the fact that your family had this situation at hand and this ministry literally was born right around the time of revolution. You were born on the day that the Islamic Revolution began. So you've got a kind of a storied history here. What was it like growing up in those early years of the regime? Talk about that.

Lana Silk: Well, just every year it got harder and harder for Christians. The laws got more tightened, the repercussions increased for breaking them, and Iran became more and more Islamic and more and more oppressive as time went by. From our point of view as a family, and I was a child growing up in that, certainly from my parents' point of view, it was a slightly confusing time at the beginning, having prayed for so many years and served for so many years to see Iran and Iranians turn to Jesus and then immediately sense a setback. But of course, God knew exactly what He was doing, and He used this regime to really unmask and

defeat Islam in Iran. Iranians, by and large, are not interested in Islam. They are vacating their mosques. They're burning down their mosques, and they are looking for something that is true and life-giving. And in that context, we have the privilege of leading them to the Lord.

Roger Marsh: Now, what's interesting about what you just said, Lana, is I'm resonating with all of it. And we've been hearing that report for maybe the last decade or so. But at the same time, a lot of Americans are saying, yeah, that's true. But if that is, in fact, the case, then why did President Trump say, hey, we have to go to the Strait of Hormuz. We have to bring in military might. I mean, it seems like there's two different conflicts going on. There's the spiritual warfare, but then there's also the geopolitical warfare here. Talk about how those two kind of coexist.

Lana Silk: Well, we're talking about a very brutal, oppressive, controlling regime that is the minority as far as the Iranian population is concerned, but definitely the strong players. So the Iranian people are not armed. They battle poverty. They battle all sorts of control, legal systems that have been put in place to silence them and separate them from each other and not allow them to grow in momentum and any kind of sort of uprising against the government. So they really are up against it. And, you know, everything that's happening on the political landscape in the Strait of Hormuz, that is to do with the Iranian government, the very Islamic still, Iranian government, that is still completely committed to their original objective, which was to export Sharia law to all countries, but particularly Western democratic countries.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting, and unfortunately, you see a lot of this happening in places like the United States, where people are kind of buying into that, you know, and saying, this is what, you know, we're fine that. I mean, even the great state of Texas, which recently discovered there was a group that were trying to create kind of, for all intents and purposes, an Islamic compound just outside of Dallas. And the idea that the government had to intervene, Governor Abbott had to step in, but ostensibly a lot of this happened on his watch. So I think people are familiar with that side of it, but it's easy to conflate the two and kind of put them together and say, well, if that's what's happening in Iran, then obviously maybe some people are coming to faith, but it's a very oppressive faith. And you were literally born into that. I mean, not only from the political side, but the fact that I understand your father, who was a gospel preacher wound up going to prison a couple of times, even before you were born, because this crime, and I'll put that in air quotes for people who are watching the video, that the crime was preaching the good news.

Lana Silk: That's right. Yes. My parents have both paid personal costs in following Jesus in Iran and since then for the mission that they founded. And then we have many friends, even just last week, I had a word of friends who were arrested in Iran because of activities in the country. So that continues. You know, the gospel is supposed to cost us something. It's not always going to be that it'll cost us our freedom or our life. But Jesus was very clear that this is a costly gospel, and we

have to pick up our cross and follow him. And in a persecuted context, that is something you don't get around. So immediately, the Iranian believers live lives of sacrifice and full, wholehearted, committed to Jesus, no matter where it takes them. And I think that is why the church is growing. And Roger, I'm going to add an addendum to what you were saying at the beginning as well.

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Lana Silk: It's safe to say that there are well over a million Iranian Christians in Iran today. I would think probably more than 3 million today. So the numbers are quickly growing and escalating.

Roger Marsh: That is wonderful news to hear. As we're talking with Lana Silk today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, Lana is the President and CEO of Transform Iran. And we have a link for their website up at jdafi.org. So you can learn more about this outstanding ministry where literally millions of people in a place like Iran, where we typically think of, okay, If we hear enough stories about the government, the tendency is to think, okay, that's the way the country is. But as Lana has been sharing with us, that's really not the majority view. That's just the well-armed minority that's kind of bullying people and using the government too. And there comes a point where a lot of Iranians, I'm sure, as they come to faith in Christ, they will stand and fight for their faith. I remember hearing this from a lot of Syrian Christians who didn't want to be exiled, didn't want to be shoved out of Syria and transported to places like the U.S. They wanted to stay and evangelize. But at some point, your family had to make that decision to immigrate and to move away. You were about 10 years old when this happened, I believe.

Lana Silk: Yes, that really was an act of obedience with the hearts left behind in Iran. It wasn't an escape as such. It was a very direct call from the Lord. My parents heard God speak to them in their own separate devotions, telling them that it was time for them to leave. They doubted it for some time, felt nervous to even raise it with each other. Took a little bit of courage to finally approach each other and say, I think God is saying that it's time for us to go. You know, how can this make any sense? Because bear in mind, we're talking about 10 years post-revolution, we were post the Iran-Iraq war. So Iran has been busy and preoccupied fighting its neighbor. Now that's finished and they can look inwards and start dealing with internal affairs. In that context, persecution is increasing. Christians are escaping. My parents were pastors and really keen to continue to strengthen the church and respond to the huge need and openness in Iranian Muslims to the gospel. So in that backdrop, then God says to them, you've got to leave. They spent another month then praying and fasting and really making sure they heard right. They took it to the overseeing pastor who still disagreed and said, you must have heard wrong, we need you here. And they were delighted with that response and said, that's great, we want to stay here. But then the Lord spoke to the pastor and he had a dream, and the dream God confirmed that they needed to leave. And so it happened very quickly, but it really was just an act of obedience to the Lord rather than trying to get away.

Roger Marsh: What was it like for 10-year-old Lana to be sitting there saying, wait a minute, I know this is crazy, but it's home. What was your mind wrapped around at that point, being such a young girl and realizing, okay, my parents are in tune with what God wants them to do. But it feels kind of weird for me being 10 and saying, we're going to go someplace that I have no idea where we're going.

Lana Silk: Yeah, very unsettling, a little upsetting. The whole process was very intense anyway because there was such an urgency from the dream that the pastor had had that we had to go quickly and it was really much for months before everything was really given away and we left because we couldn't take anything with us. They searched us on the way out and that was it. You say goodbye and we didn't know why we were leaving initially God had only given us the first part of course we have precedence for this in the Bible, how God will call, He called Abraham out of one place and before he knew what was coming, he had to first leave. And really that was our experience. We left and then the Lord spoke to my parents very clearly and said, the church is going to be driven underground, this persecution is going to increase in intensity. And you are to prepare to meet the need from outside to resource and strengthen, nourish this fast-growing church, pioneer ministries that can overcome the barriers of censorship and control that the government is setting up. That's what they've been doing. So we really went straight into meeting with Christians that we knew in Western Europe. And all my memories of those years, between 10 to maybe 13, 14, were traveling from country to country across Europe and gathering the believers that we knew that had left in one. And had the same feeling like, oh my goodness, bear in mind, this is in the late 80s. You know, there's no internet connections and satellite TV. Well, there was, but it wasn't a normal way of communicating and doing mission. People felt that that was it. It was over. They had no way of doing anything about the need in Iran anymore. And it was an opportunity from my parents who were real seers and forward thinkers to say, guys, there's going to be other ways we can do this. And we just prayed with our friends in Denmark and Holland and Sweden and Finland. I mean, literally country to country, traveling, gathering them, praying, seeking the Lord. And out of that really birthed this network and movement of Christians who caught the vision and were prepared to engage with digital media. And that's where a lot of our ministries started coming up.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I can see that the heartbeat of Transform Iran came from that type of activity where God said, we're taking you here, but you're still going to be focusing on the Iranian people. You're still going to be focusing in that case, in that specific moment, on the church that had been driven underground. But to see the kind of support, and it must have been really inspiring for you, Lana, as a young girl, early preteen years, to see all of these different believers in all these different countries as you traveled around where God was speaking to them. And it wasn't necessarily a big broadcast per se. It was as you're moving, they're catching the vision too. And boy, that really must have been, I think of 10 and 11, 12 year olds who were trying to get them engaged in vacation Bible school, you know, maybe have a good, you know, two or three day experience with the

Lord. But you had a totally different experience as far as that goes. How did Transform Iran come about? At what point did your parents say, okay, this is where God is calling us to stay. We're going to put down some roots and get this ministry off the ground.

Lana Silk: Yeah, It was a few years into that because it was growing in size.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Lana Silk: People naturally look to my parents as leaders. They are inspiring leaders and real visionaries. What they saw as possible for Iran was greater than what any of us had envisioned. Either even possible for what might happen in Iran, but also possible for how we might take part in all of that. And it was in that context that people were saying, we're looking to you to lead us. But, you know, there's so many of us now. Let's formalize this. We need a name. We need a structure. You know, we look to you for leadership. So they went to pray about it. And as they were praying, the Lord gave them the Scripture 2 Timothy 2:2, which is a discipleship verse. *"The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses and trust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."* And there was this mandate from God that this is going to be built on people, people who are qualified and full of character that you will be entrusting this vision to who will also then be passing it on to others. And that's really how the whole thing began. They called it 222 Ministries for many years. We rebranded to Transform Iran about five years ago. And it really was a case of who were the people upon which God is going to build this movement and through which God is going to transform this nation. And that's how the ministry has grown. And really, as a child, you know, my parents were so good at never underestimating what God can do through children. I am one of four girls and all four of us have the same sense that we are part of this. We have valuable contributions to make to this and we need to get involved, we are needed. And so all of our early teens and growing up beyond that, we had that sense of we're needed to contribute to this overall vision. We're going to make a difference. And I think that's probably what informed a lot of the decisions that we've all made growing up, knowing that God has entrusted things to us as well. So yeah, it's been a joy to be part of that kind of setup.

Roger Marsh: Hearing your enthusiasm and realizing that the acorn didn't fall too far from either tree in your family, but especially for you, because now where are you in the birth order? Kevin Leman is calling me right now asking, are you the oldest? Are you the youngest?

Lana Silk: I am the eldest. I'm a very typical eldest, yes.

Roger Marsh: You certainly are. I was going to say, because you've got three sisters, but you're the President and CEO of Transform Iran. So I mean, we'll just let, we'll kind of let that one sit where it is and good for you for carrying that mantle. But you know, it's interesting to, I can imagine there are a lot of parents who are listening to our conversation. right now or maybe watching it on YouTube. And

they're asking the same question. Okay, this is a lot for my kids. You know, I mean, we try to keep news of the world, you know, and wars and, you know, bombings in the Strait of Hormuz. And we try to keep that away from them because they're kids. We want to protect their innocence. And yet, if you were 10, your sisters were younger than that when all this was happening and your family launched into that. Talk to the parent right now who says, I want to get my kids excited about this type of thing, but I don't want to burden them with any kind of undue evil thoughts because there are people who are dying. There's a bad government regime. We'll talk about the change in leadership in just a moment. But how would you encourage a parent to say, if you've got eight, nine, ten year old kids at home they're old enough to be able to understand at least what Transform Iran is doing.

Lana Silk: Yes, absolutely. I mean, you've hit on a bit of a soapbox.

Roger Marsh: Fire away.

Lana Silk: I'm really passionate about this. I think that we sometimes do our children a disservice by sidelining them until the time that we think they're ready. And I think they're ready a lot earlier than we give them credit for. And it's so exciting as a young, as a preteen, to be part of something bigger than yourself and to know that you have a valuable contribution to make to that. And I would say that it doesn't have to be the really gory, inappropriate sort of details that we expose our children to. There are a lot of good resources out there that really help children catch God's vision for a people group, or a demographic, or a country, you know, whichever way God wants to tug at their heartstrings, we can help inform them in those areas. There are resources like Operation World, you can literally get books that are designed for children, where you can be flicking through that book saying, okay, which country jumps out at you? Let's learn more about it together. Let's pray about it together. Let's find out what life is like for a child your age. Maybe get alongside an organization like Compassion and write to a child your age in that country. You know, there's so many different ways that you can really think beyond yourself. And when we do that, then God allows us to have a much different perspective to all sorts of things, including our own lives. And it gets us out of ourselves. You know, that sort of entitlement that we battle with with our children in the West, that is dealt with when they look beyond themselves and real needs in the world and real differences that they can make in others' lives.

Roger Marsh: I'm talking with Lana Silk today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and we're discussing Transform Iran and what's happening in the Iranian battle with the United States. But moreover, the fact that literally millions of Iranians have come to faith in Jesus Christ, we began to see what God is doing there. And we've got a link for transformiran.com up at drjamesdobson.org if you want to learn more about Lana's ministry. You mentioned the underground church and your family left, what, 30-some years ago to start well, ultimately to start Transform Iran. It wasn't, you know, my Western brain says, oh, you left and went over here and got a board of directors and started a ministry. It wasn't like

that at all, but I mean, God eventually brought the ministry to fruition. Talk about what's happening in the underground church right now. I mean, was there a point where under the regime they were able to start, you know, being a "normal church" again, or is it still pretty much underground because of the oppression that they're facing?

Lana Silk: It was driven underground not so many years after the revolution, and it has stayed that way since. Now, technically, Iran would say, we allow Christianity because they consider Assyrian and Armenian communities who are considered ethnically Christian to be allowed to practice their religion. And that their word is the key word there, as long as it's separate from the rest of Iranian society. So there are laws about allowing Muslims into their meetings, about any kind of worship or Bible teaching or Bibles in languages other than their own, Armenian and Assyrian. And so it's very, very limited. And it becomes a sort of trophy piece, I suppose, for the government to say, look, here they are, there are these churches, and we're fine with them. But as soon as Christians catch God's heart for the lost, which of course is supposed to be all of us, and us begin to evangelize and share and bubble over what God has done in their lives through to the world around them, then they get into trouble. And the martyrs of Iranian martyrs have been Armenians and Assyrians as well as Iranians who have dared to step past that line and the government has dealt with them.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting to see the reports and to hear about them and yet to hear the testimonies that you are discussing, Lana Silk, because as you mentioned at the outset, I want to make sure I heard you correctly, it is still illegal to own a Bible in Iran. Is that correct?

Lana Silk: Yeah. They have a law of apostasy in Iran. So any rejection of Islam is punishable by death. That is, they don't always kill people, but they can, even within the law, go ahead and execute people for rejection of Islam. And within that comes any kind of evangelism as well.

Roger Marsh: It's incredible to think about this because you and I have all heard reports in the news here in the United States that one of the issues that, and Gary Bauer talks about this a lot in his Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom podcast, the left, if you will, capital L, will say that, well, one of the biggest dangers that we face in America right now is that you have a right-wing religious President who wants to turn America into a theocracy. And I'm thinking to myself, well, no, religious liberty, First Amendment, that's not going to happen in the United States. But for all intents and purposes, that's the heartbeat of Iran. Is that correct?

Lana Silk: Oh, yeah, absolutely. They have a very clear agenda that Islam is the right way, that Sharia law is the right way. And within that comes a mandate from Allah for them to wipe out any kind of opposition and to export. I mean, Khomeini's own words when he established the revolution in 1979 was, we will export this revolution to the ends of the earth. And that is very much still their agenda. You know, we have to understand when we talk about coexistence and peace and tolerance, that we use these words to mean different things. In the West, even

if we aren't practicing Christians, our sort of worldview is Christian. Our definition of these words is very different for someone whose worldview comes out of Sharia law and Shiite Islam. So, you know, they would say, absolutely we want peace, but their definition of peace is your submission to Allah's ways.

Roger Marsh: Right.

Lana Silk: So, you know, we are at a disconnect here. And we have to separate also the people who are just as much held bondage to this religion, you know, Muslims, to Islam itself. There is definitely a difference there. There are millions of Muslims who don't adhere to that kind of thinking, though I would caution that that is what the Quran teaches. But there are millions of Muslims who do want to get on well with their neighbors and do want to be good citizens. And I've had friends like those many times over over the years but Islam in its true authentic state in what the Quran is teaching and what um followers of Islam to its fullness would say, I'm trying to be careful with my words, push, is not peaceful and does not want to coexist peacefully with us. And that's why we've just got to be wise. We don't need to be racist or push hatred, but we have to be wise to what some of the schemes of the enemy are.

Roger Marsh: So it sounds like, and I don't want to oversimplify this, Lana, please correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like for every Christian, I mean, because you've got kind of equal numbers of people who would identify as Muslim, whether by birth or by actual practice. And it's kind of neck and neck with Christianity. Maybe Christianity is a little bit further ahead. But we all know people here in the States, especially who are "Christians" because they go to church. You know, they tithe a little bit. Basically see themselves as good people, but if you got right down to it, they would have a really hard time looking at some biblical tenets that you and I would say, no, that's a non-negotiable. It sounds like there's a number of Muslims who are kind of in the same category when it comes to Islam. Is that accurate?

Lana Silk: Yes, very, very much so. A lot of it comes down to just the lack of discipline in really learning about the faith and ensuring that you apply. And I mean that for Christians and Muslims alike.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Lana Silk: You know, sometimes it becomes a ritualistic thing, a cultural thing, a social thing. And that's very different to those who really dig in. And I think in the same way that Christians can be called extremists, Muslims are called extremists. And I you know sometimes I play with those words and I think well are they really extreme or are they just extremely authentic because you know it's about how literally you take the teachings of your holy book, let's say, because it applies to God, and apply it. And there are very unpopular Christians, just as you've said today, who are doing that, who are looking at the Word of God and saying, whatever it costs me, however unpopular it makes me, this is

what God said, and there's no compromise. And those are the Christians right now who are being ostracized.

Roger Marsh: Well, Lana Silk is President and CEO of Transform Iran Ministries, transformiran.com. We have just scratched the surface in our conversation, but we've run out of time for today's program. Lana, can I ask you to come back next time so we can continue this discussion?

Lana Silk: Yes, let's do it.

Roger Marsh: The difference between nominal belief and true faith often comes down to a single question. How seriously will I take the words I claim to believe? Lana Silk reminds us that all across Iran, there are believers answering that question with their very lives. You've been listening to a very special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring my compelling conversation with Lana Silk, President and CEO of Transform Iran Ministries. And we are only halfway through this conversation, if you would like to hear this program again, or want to pass it along to a friend who needs to hear what God is doing in Iran. You will find it on jdfi.org. And keep in mind that on the next edition of Family Talk, you'll hear the conclusion of our conversation.

Now, stories like Lana's don't reach the airwaves on their own. They reach you because friends of this ministry believe that families need a trusted voice, one grounded in Scripture, unafraid of the culture, and pointing always to the hope of the gospel. That is the heartbeat of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, to strengthen the family, to defend the sanctity of every human life and religious freedom, and to introduce as many people as possible to Jesus Christ. It's a big mission, but your help makes it all possible. So today, I want to invite you to stand with us, partner with the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute in prayer and with a gift of any amount, and help us keep bringing bold biblical truth to families here at home and all around the world. Your generosity carries this message further than you may ever know. To give a gift online, visit JDFI.org. Or you can call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk and for supporting the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Be sure to join us again next time when Lana Silk returns to share more about the quiet revival sweeping across Iran and how God is moving in the middle of war and uncertainty. You will not want to miss a minute of 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.