



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: God is at Work – Part 1

Guest(s): Ken Eldred

Air Date: April 7, 2025

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, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and on today's program, Dr. Dobson will have a fascinating conversation with Ken Eldred, a highly successful businessman with an inspiring story to share. Ken is the founder of several lucrative companies including Inmac and Ariba Technology. Today he serves as CEO of Living Stones Foundation which supports ministries with strategic resources. He's also authored three books, including *The Integrated Life* and *God is at Work*.

During his remarkable business success, Ken discovered that wealth and achievement couldn't fill the emptiness he felt inside. It was his relationship with Jesus Christ that ultimately brought him true fulfillment. On today's Family Talk Broadcast, Ken will reveal how God guided him from a promising but empty career path toward a purpose driven life. His story offers valuable insights for working parents about balancing professional ambitions and family priorities. So here now is Dr. James Dobson to introduce our guest, Ken Eldred, on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We have a very distinguished guest here with us today. I've met him on occasion, met him at the White House a few years ago, but haven't really known him until today. I'm really anxious to introduce him to our listeners. He is Ken Eldred, who has been a very successful businessman for many years. Having earned an MBA from Stanford University and he was a visiting fellow at that university's Hoover Institute. Mr. Eldred is the author of three books and we're going to talk about them. He is married with seven grandchildren, to whom he dedicated his most recent book.

Welcome, Ken, it's a really pleasure to have you here.

Ken Eldred: Thank you, I'm glad to be here.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go back to your early years when you were at Stanford and then shortly thereafter. You hit the ground running when you got out of graduate school,

didn't you? I mean, everything opened up to you and you were very successful in business right from the get go.

Ken Eldred: It was amazing. The business school is a place where they send you out like a proton out of a cyclotron and you hit the wall. And with all the business tools and capabilities that you are convinced you possess when you leave the school. You walk into environments, which I did at American Standard, and began to work there. And I ultimately became the strategic planning manager for a very large division.

And I was very excited about what I was doing and one day my boss called me in and he said, "Ken, I have some plans for you. I've changed your job." And in that 30 minutes, he changed my life. He didn't know that at the time, but he said, "Ken, I want you to take over, instead of being a one man band, I'm giving you 350 employees, seven groups, which I want you manage for the company. I'm giving you a new office in the corner, secretary, and a significant pay raise." Well-

Dr. James Dobson: That take your breath away?

Ken Eldred: I was over the moon. By the time I got home that night, I couldn't even stand, not having the time to think about what this meant for me.

Dr. James Dobson: Were you married?

Ken Eldred: I was single and very excited about my future. And there I was lying in bed and I was plotting out my future. I mean every day, day by day, what was it going to be like. And then I kind of worked my way up to the age of 60 and I ran out of gas. And I lay there and as I was laying there, I heard a voice say to me, "Is that all there is? What if you wake up, Ken, at the age of 60 and find out that you missed it?" And I didn't even know what "it" is. I didn't know what that was.

I was so sick inside and I was so bothered, I was afraid to tell anybody what I had experienced. I had kept it to myself.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you remember a song from way, way back by Peggy Lee called, "Is That All There Is to a Fire?" You ever heard that song?

Ken Eldred: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, it's the same thing. She experienced these wonderful things and then said, "Is that all there is to a fire?" You went through that, didn't you?

Ken Eldred: I did. It wasn't long after that I was married. Our marriage was somewhat rocky. We had no idea, we didn't understand foundations, we didn't know anything. And we turned to California and we said, "Well, we have a son, so we need to

give him the same opportunity we had to decide about God." And we had made the decision that we weren't interested, but he had to have that opportunity.

So like a good business guy, we set up a plan and we're going to go to this church and that church and that church. And we started where I went to church as a child. And God began to talk to me. And He began to say, "Ken, I want you and you need to make a decision about who I am."

Meanwhile, I've had five years of business experience, I'm excited about business. I love it, I had a great education, and I really wanted to do business. And I thought, "Well, Lord, if I become a Christian, I'm going to have to be a pastor because isn't that what good Christians do?"

Dr. James Dobson: Or a missionary.

Ken Eldred: Or a missionary. And the thought was, I'm going to end up someplace in a hut somewhere in total poverty, doing something that was not exciting to me. And I thought, this is not my idea of fun.

But the Lord said to me, and you know, I'm trying to make a decision about Him and I'm hearing Him speaking to me. And I'm speaking back to Him and I don't really even understand this. And He said, "So what? So what if I make you a missionary?" And I remember one day in the parking lot where the Lord said, "So what?" And I listened and I just broke down and I said, "I don't care what You want me to do. You're going to have to change the desires of my heart. But I can't go without having You in my life." And that was the day that my life changed.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, how does that link with what I read that, I think along about that time you experienced seven of the ten sources of frustration or depression or damaging stress that can really cause you problems. You went through a certain number of those there. Did that lead you to Him?

Ken Eldred: Yes, that's what caused what I thought was the search. My marriage was rocky and I didn't know whether it was going to last. I wanted to get back home because I didn't want to leave her, Roberta, my lovely wife. I didn't want to leave her by herself on the east coast. So I thought, well, we'll just move back to the west coast and that'll solve the problem. But it didn't.

And that's what was persisting. The wonderful thing about this whole thing, she was the same place I was. And as we began to seek God and we walked into that church that day, we felt something very familiar. It was the Holy Spirit, but we didn't know that at the time. And we began to search. She went off for a weekend with the women of the church because I told her it would be good to get involved, to get to know what these people are really like.

And so she said, "Okay, I'm going to go on this weekend." And in the back of her head she was thinking, "Los Gatos, California, antique center of the world. Two days, I'll just slip into the back and slip out the door and I'm going antique shopping. I don't have to take care of the kids. I don't have to do anything. Ken's got them and this is going to be great."

She walked into the back of that room with the women, after breakfast and prepared to walk out the door. And that woman began speaking at that conference, which she thought was right to her. Well, that Sunday night she gets to our home. And I said, "Roberta, I have something I have to confess to you." She said, "Well, I have something to confess to you." I said, "This Saturday, I committed my life to Christ." She said, "So did I."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh my goodness. Isn't it interesting, Ken, that the Lord wanted you?

Ken Eldred: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you were hearing His voice and that restlessness inside of you was a result of the fact that He had something he wanted you to do.

Ken Eldred: He did. And it's something that people really need to understand. We talk about the word integrity. And typically people think integrity is a sense of being righteous or being honest. That is a definition of integrity, but that's not the meaning of integrity in the Word of God.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really wholeness, isn't it?

Ken Eldred: It's wholeness. Exactly. And the thing that He loved about Job and he said it twice is he was a man of integrity. And in Proverbs 20:7 it says, "A righteous man walks in his integrity." King James Version. There is a righteousness, but there's also a purpose for every man and every woman. And when we discover what that purpose is and when we walk in righteousness it says that our children will be blessed. And we will be blessed therefore.

Too many people, and I was one of them, who was neither walking in truth or righteousness or integrity in the sense of where I was supposed to be.

Dr. James Dobson: Now your earlier assumption that if you became a Christian and really were committed to Christ that you had to be a preacher or an evangelist or a missionary and that didn't prove to be true in your case, any more than it did mine. Because I came through the same thing. All of my family, all of the men in my family have been ministers, going back four generations. The women were all married to ministers, it's just been a phenomenon in our family. And the Lord never told me to do that.

But, like you, I knew He wanted something from me and wanted it early. And when I was in college, on a tennis trip with other members of the team, I told

them that I thought I was going to be dedicated to preserving the family, the institution of the family. I had forgotten that and they told me that a couple of years ago cause I still know these folks. It's been more than 50 years, but we were talking that day about what I thought the Lord was saying to me. What was He saying to you?

Ken Eldred: Well, He wanted my attention and all of a sudden, I came across Psalm 37:4 which says, "Trust in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart." And so I said, "Lord, I'm willing to be Your servant, but You're going to have to change the desires of my heart because I really want to be in business."

And it wasn't long after that that He opened the door for me. I mean, this was 1973, we were in the worst down cycle we had had since the Great Depression. Stock market was down 48%, people were out of jobs, I was out of a job. And all of a sudden, the Lord opened the door for me in a job and He began to prepare me. And He showed me the next verse. It took me a few months finally to get there, but the next verse in that same Psalm is, "Commit your ways to Him and He will act."

He put me in this company where I spent two years and I thought, well, if I don't have to be a pastor, I don't want to be a weekend warrior. I want my faith to go with me to whatever I do in life. And I need to have God with me.

So I went through this learning experience and ultimately the company was sold and I was now again without a job. It was still 1975, we had not recovered from this recession. We were starting to, but we hadn't recovered. And I sat with a friend and was talking about business ideas and he said, "Well, I've got half a dozen of them." And he began to rattle these off. And in the middle of this discourse, I heard the Lord say, "That's it." It was the idea to build a company around computer products. We built a company from zero, and that's a whole different story, to 400 million, roughly, run rate, when it was sold in 1996.

Dr. James Dobson: My goodness. Now, when did you lose your dad along the line there?

Ken Eldred: Uh, when I 27.

Dr. James Dobson: So it was before this?

Ken Eldred: It was one of the stressors, one of the seven stressors. I lost my father, my job changed, I was married, I had an adopted son, we were living in a brand new house, living in a new state.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were very close to your dad?

Ken Eldred: I really, I adored him. I probably was too-

Dr. James Dobson: And he had guided you to that point?

Ken Eldred: He had. He was a very, very successful businessman and he had been really helpful to me. He was not necessarily a believer. I didn't know much about that, he didn't go to church. But he was an honest man, he was a strong individual and I wanted to be a lot like him.

Dr. James Dobson: You obviously went on and made an awful lot of money and had to decide what you were going to do with it. Where did the divine calling fit into that? Because running a business of that size is a full time job.

Ken Eldred: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, that's something that could take you 80 hours a week. But the Lord was talking to you about that too, wasn't He?

Ken Eldred: Well, I still was not convinced as we started this company, and that was a couple of years later, this is 1977. I was not convinced that my role was to be in business. We had started this company, it had grown up to roughly \$2,300.00 a day in sales and it was a very important point to me, you know, sales rates, because we shipped everything same day. So if I didn't have any orders the next day, I was just out of business. It was that simple. There was no back log, nothing.

So all of a sudden, I began to see our sales revenues drop. And I went home to my wife and I said, "I'm not sure that God really wants me here. Is this really what He wants for me? Am I supposed to be in business?" And she said, "Well, what's bothering you?" And I told her about sales. And she said, "Well then, we need to pray that God would give us a sign." I said, "Well, that's a good idea. What do you have in mind?" She said, "Well, how about a \$7,000 day?" Well, that's four times what we've done in the past. I'm the spiritual leader of our family and I'm going, "There's no way that's going to happen."

But I couldn't look not spiritual to her, so I said, "All right, we'll pray about that." And I'm just sort of reeling from this idea. And we agreed to pray for ten days about this. And at first, I was really afraid of what's going to happen. What's going to come out of this? Well, as God would have it, the tenth day was Sunday night. And we got up from prayer. I said, "Roberta, I think God's going to give us a \$7,000 day tomorrow." There was nothing in our data, I mean, it continued to drop every day. There was nothing in the data that would support that kind of an idea.

So I went to the office that morning and I got my staff together and I said, "We're going to have a \$7,000 day today." Well, the looks on their faces altered from total disbelief to where did I put my resume? This guy is cracked! I had one person, Nancy, who was in charge of customer service, and about 2:00 in the afternoon, Nancy walked into my office and she said, "Hey, we could have a \$5,000 day today," with the sort of look of, "I'm letting you off the hook." You don't have to commit to this. I said, "No, Nancy, it's going to be a \$7,000 day."

Well, at 5:00 we get a phone call from Hawaii. It's 3:00 in Hawaii at that point, we're in California. And at 5:00 we get our last order. Well everybody in the office is excited and, you know, we're a computer company, but we couldn't afford a computer, so we had a ten key adding machine. And old Nancy, she's there just adding these orders up. And at the end she looks, she added them twice, everybody was afraid to look at the totals. She looks at the two red numbers, it \$7,050.

I call my wife and I say, "Guess what!" She says, "I know, you had a \$7,000 day. Now come on home, the kids need you." Now, talk about bursting your bubble. The next two Mondays we had \$7,000 days in a row, so we had three of them in total and I never looked back. I said, "I know I'm where God wants me and I don't care what happens to this business." Well, He built it into a \$400 million business. And instead of \$1,600 a day, which was what we were experiencing, at the end, it was \$1.6 million a day in revenues.

Many people, business guys in particular, see their business as their child and their work as something that is as valuable to them as a child. It is, of course, not, but in those days, that's the way I saw it. And God had to take me through a whole series of learning and He had to get rid of a lot of thinking that I had and put in new thinking. We went off to a retreat at Mt. Hermon. And while we were there, the speaker put up on the screen a picture of a letter from the First Presbyterian Life Insurance Company. And 1 Timothy 5:8 was the verse and it said that those that failed to take care of their family but are believers are worse than the heathen. And it struck me that God must have some sense of priorities.

And I began to look around and sure enough ran into Matthew 6:33 where he says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." And I thought, okay, well that's got to be number one. And then, of course, taking care of the family would be my wife first, my children second. These are the things that I listed in terms of those objectives. I looked at my wife, who is number two, and I said, "I need to have a ... so invested with her because that's what life is about, it's investing in people and I need to invest in her." And we need to have a strong relationship. I needed to bring my kids to a point where they felt that there was a value in God, that their life was important to them and that they learn certain principles, so when they grew up, they would love me because I was available to them.

So I put the time down for all of those and then I put down eight hours of sleep because I needed the rest. And then added I all up and I looked at how many hours in the week were left and it turned out I had 40. That was it. I thought, well that's interesting. Some people, everybody's a little bit different because we walk in our own integrity in terms of what God has in mind for us. So I thought, well, whatever business I get involved with, I can only do 40 hours a week.

About this time, I was starting this company and I went to a Venture Capitalist because I needed money to fund this corporation. And they were very excited about it, they said it was a great idea. They thought it was brilliant and all of that stuff. And it was because it was from the Lord. Then I felt duty bound to tell them that as a Christian, I could only work 40 hours a week. That was immediately when their arms got very short and their pockets got very deep.

So, I was without any funding, with the exception of some friends, and we went ahead and started the company anyway. And I think I am, in fact I'm sure, I'm the only entrepreneur in Silicon Valley that started a major corporation on a few thousand dollars and 40 hours a week. I was home at night. I realized that I had very little time at work to start a company, we didn't have anything. And so I said to the Lord and I almost felt blasphemous at the time. I mean, I understand it now, but didn't then. I said, "Lord, I can't be here except 40 hours a week. You're going to have to take over when I'm gone." And He did.

When we honor Him and we do the things that He's called us to do and we follow His priorities and we make His righteousness our responsibility, He does the outrageous in our lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Well the title of your book, one of the three, is, *God Is At Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business*. And I'd like to pick up with this book next time and with the thought that you just shared because God is a God of integrity, you mentioned that before, of wholeness. That means family and church and relationship with God and business. And you can't afford to get over committed to earning a living and forgetting the other three.

Ken Eldred: Amen.

Roger Marsh: You know when we prioritize our faith and our family, God will bless other aspects of our lives as well. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a classic conversation Dr. Dobson had with his dear friend, Ken Eldred. Now Ken is the author of the book called *God is at Work* and if you'd like to hear today's program again or share it with a friend or learn more about this fascinating book we've been discussing, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And keep in mind you'll find all of our audio content on the Family Talk app as well.

Well with Easter less than two weeks away, there is no better time than to intentionally share Christ with your kids. That's why I want to invite you to download our featured resource called "Sharing Jesus with Your Children." This beautiful, practical guide offers specific strategies for introducing your children to the resurrection story and helping them understand Christ's sacrifice and triumph over death. Simply go online to drjamesdobson.org and then click the link for "Sharing Jesus with Your Children." Then enter your name and email address and you'll receive a digital download of this valuable guide. It's our gift to you to help make this Easter season a meaningful time of spiritual growth for you and your family, for your kids and your grandkids. Again for more

information on the pamphlet called "Sharing Jesus with Your Children," go to drjamesdobson.org.

The programs you hear each day here on Family Talk and the resources that are available to you as well are made possible through the generous support of friends just like you who understand the critical importance of passing faith on to the next generation. When you partner with the James Dobson Family Institute, you're helping countless parents find practical biblical guidance for raising children and grandchildren who know and love the Lord. Your tax-deductible donation today ensures that we can continue providing these practical resources to families just like yours. Remember you can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. You can also give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

And of course if you'd like to send your donation through the U.S. Mail, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. Again that's P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to join us again next time for part two of this powerful conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his dear friend, Ken Eldred. 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.

Announcer:

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