



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: An Everyday Hero Being Used by God to Impact the Business World – Part 1

Guest(s): Ken Eldred

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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.

Gary Bauer: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Gary Bauer, senior vice president for public policy of the Dobson Policy and Culture Center. I'm also the host of the Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom podcast. We have an incredible show today. I mean, I think they're all incredible, but seriously, this one is particularly special because we have an incredible guest. His name is Ken Eldred, and he is an everyday hero in every sense of the word. Ken is an entrepreneur. He's launched, listened to this, several multi-billion dollar businesses. He's the CEO of the Living Stones Charitable Trust. He's the author of three best-selling books, including *God is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business*, and *The Integrated Life: Experiencing the Powerful Advantage of Integrating Your Faith and Work*.

Ken Eldridge has served on the board of directors of Regent University and on the board of directors here at Family Talk. In fact, Ken played a really crucial role in helping Dr. Dobson and this ministry get traction during our early years. Ken earned his bachelor of arts degree and MBA degrees from Stanford University. He and his lovely wife, Roberta, will celebrate 55 years of marriage this year. They're the parents of three grown sons and a growing number of grandchildren. Ken, Eldred, welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. When I got up this morning, my first thought was that if Dr. Dobson wasn't with the Lord and was with us today, I know the very first thing he would think about is, wow, today's the day when I'm going to have a conversation with my good friend, Ken Eldred." So I trust Ken that he's watching us as we have this conversation, but he was a great admirer of yours, appreciated you and all you've done for the ministry and for him. So it's really a pleasure to have you on the show today.

Ken Eldred: Well, thank you. And I loved listening to his program when I was younger. He helped train my children. As we grew up, I changed my routine driving plan in order to be a part of the broadcast. And so it was a great experience. And I had this dream that one day I'd actually be on his program. And I was actually in D.C. one day when the phone rang and he said, "Hi, this is Jim Dobson." I thought, no, it can't be. He doesn't know me from a hole in the walls. Long story is how I

got there, but I was so thankful to have that relationship with him and to be able to pay back a little bit of what he gave me over the years.

Gary Bauer:

I was sitting in my office in either the White House or the Department of Education when my secretary buzzed in and said, "Were you expecting a phone call from your doctor?" And I said, "No." And she said, "Well, some guy named Dr. Dobson's on the phone wants to talk to you." And I thought, "Oh, wait a minute. I know who that is." And he had seen me get in trouble because I wrote a report on the family for President Reagan and I was being attacked. And of course, being Dr. Dobson, he wanted to put me on his radio show so I could defend myself. But so you get this phone call from him. So what happened after that that led you to be such an integral part of his ministry and of his work?

Ken Eldred:

It started out, interestingly enough, with Jenanne Jenkins-Rati, I'd been invited to speak at a church in Kansas City, and this happened to be the church that she and her husband went to as they lived in Kansas City. And she was so impressed with the presentation. Dr. Dobson was listening to services, which is the way they worshiped together because it was so hard for him to go to a church somewhere where everybody recognized him.

And he listened to that and he said, "I think I'd like to have him on my radio program." I mean, you know how God works and how these things happen. And he invited me to speak on his radio program. And after that was over, we had another phone call and he said, "I'd like to ask you to be on my board." And this was the beginning of James Dobson Family Institute. And I agreed, readily accepted. I was thankful to be able to do it. We met two months later at our first board meeting and he said, "I think we're going to have to close down the ministry." I said, "Really?" I said, "This is the shortest board assignment I've ever had."

And I said, "What's the problem? I mean, why?" And he said, "Well, we're in the whole half a million dollars." "Oh, is that all? We can manage that. We'll get over it. We'll get beyond it. Your suppliers know who you are. They trust you. They believe you will do it and we're going to get it done. You're a very well-known person and people are going to follow you." And that was kind of the beginning of developing a whole plan to get us out of the hole. By that summer, we were actually in the black.

Gary Bauer:

That's what I was alluding to, Ken, when I was introducing you. I've heard a version of that from Dr. Dobson. And those early years, he ended up having a whole second career still working on all the issues that he loved. That didn't change, but that was only possible because not only people like you stepped up, but specifically that you stepped up with generous support. And I think the very fact you went on his board and you gave him advice and counsel, sent the signal to other people, other Christians in the business world, that that horse still had a long way to run. And of course, this ministry has done wonderful things right up until the very moment that the Lord called Jim home.

Ken Eldred: Well, I remember doing a survey of listeners and of people in the country, and the question was, have you ever heard of Jim Dobson? And what we found was the recall rate was higher than some presidents of the United States.

Gary Bauer: Wow. That's amazing.

Ken Eldred: Yeah, it was amazing.

Gary Bauer: Ken, I mentioned your tremendous business success. A lot of people get involved in business. It's not easy. Tell us a little bit about how you got traction in that world as a believer and sort of what happened to give you the financial and business success that God blessed you with.

Ken Eldred: Well, I'm not going to give you my whole history because it would take too long, but when I was 14, I committed my life to Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade. It lasted for about two or three weeks that I was so excited. I got no support and eventually, I sort of faded away. But the point that I would make here is that God never let me out of the palm of His hand. I mean, I walked all over the edge and just about the time I'm going to fall off, He would hold onto me.

By the time I was 30, I realized there was something really missing in my life. My boss called me in one day and I was working in New York and I'd been the one man development business planning manager for this, what would be today, a \$2 billion operation. And he called me in and he said, "Ken, I want you to take over all marketing functions." I'm 27.

Gary Bauer: Oh my goodness.

Ken Eldred: All marketing functions for the division that was 350 people in seven organizations. The youngest guy on my staff was twice my age. And it was one of those things, and I won't go into that, but that changed my life. And here's how it changed my life. I went home and I started plotting out what was going to happen to me in my life, and I was going to do this, and then I was going to do that.

And I had this sort of plan. I mean, literally by 11:30 at night, I'd worn myself out and stopped thinking about all these things, and I just took a deep breath. And as I took that deep breath, I heard a little voice say in my head, "So Ken, is that all there is to life?" And it seemed so vain and so irrelevant. And I thought, "What happens if I wake up at the age of 60 and realize I've missed it? And I don't even know what it is I missed." Well, that led to trying to find the Lord and trying to see what should be my relationship. And by 30 I'd come to the point where I wanted to have that relationship with the Lord, I still wanted to be in business. And if He was going to put me in ministry, which was the impression I was getting, then He's going to have to change the desires of my heart and I would do it.

But His comment to me was, "So what if I take you into ministry or wonder other field, what does that have to do with your decision about who I am?" And that day, I remember in the parking lot saying, "Lord, at the church, I'm yours no matter what you do with me."

Gary Bauer:

Wow. Complete surrender, right? I mean, that's what all of us have to do eventually.

Ken Eldred:

And that was when I made Him Lord. And I thought, being a young Christian and in terms of Bibles, I'd never read the Bible. I started reading the Bible and I was amazed at what I was seeing when I went away on a retreat and on that retreat, the Lord showed me that He had a series of priorities and that He did have a plan for my life. And so I put a piece of paper on my desk. I was running this company, we'd gotten off the ground and it was just getting off started. The idea of priorities came up when there was a man from the Presbyterian Life Insurance company and I was looking at a slide he put up on the screen, these little plastic slides. And he had a verse and it was 1 Timothy 5:8. And I had to laugh because it seemed like the perfect verse for an insurance company. I said, "Those who love the Lord but fail to take care of their family are worse than the heathen." Though, whoa, it seems like God has some priorities in life. I really need to know what they are. And I began to dig around after that weekend and I found Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to it." I thought, okay, that's number one. And I began to look at what are the things that God has regardless of what I do. And it was number one was God. Number two was my spouse, which was family. Number three, close to the spouse was my children. Because my spouse and I are one, that makes it a little bit of a priority relative to the kids.

Kids will go away and they'll leave, but you have created a lifetime relationship. And then fourth was work. I thought, that's interesting. I said, Lord, we're just starting this company. And I started this company. I said, "Lord, I want to have these priorities and it isn't enough to say that." It says, okay, so how much time are you going to give me? So I put down on my calendar the hours and when I was going to meet with the Lord. And then the next question is, how much time am I going to give to my wife? Because we've got to both build a relationship with Him, build a significant relationship with my wife, and I put down those times. And then it was, "What about my kids? What are you going to do with the kids?" And there are way too many people think that I'm going to give my kids quality time and they don't know anything about quality time. They only know about quantity of time and quantity tells them a lot. So I put down how many hours I needed to spend with the kids during the week. And then finally I looked at it and said, "I need about eight hours of sleep or I get grumpy." And so I put that down. Roberta was asked by one of her friends, "Do you ever wake up grumpy?" And she said, "No, I let him sleep." Anyway, so those were my hours. And I looked at what was left in 167 hours in the week and what were left were 40 hours to start this company with \$25,000 and a grocery bag of connector parts.

Well, I said, "Lord, You're going to have to take over when I'm gone because I can only spend 40 hours a week here." And then all of a sudden I felt blasphemous. I thought, how can I ask God to be involved in business? I mean, it's business. It's not spiritual. It has nothing to do with God. I didn't understand. And most people, many, many people don't understand that business is absolutely meaningful to God. I mean, the whole economic system is part of what God put together for us and that He wants to partner with us.

These are things I really didn't understand and most people don't. Well, it turns out that over the years, the company grew and within 11 years, we went from zero to \$250 million in revenue. And how did we fund it? I mean, I said, "Lord, You're going to have to fund this. I don't know how to fund a company that's growing like that at that rate." And sure enough, He did. We ended up going public with \$250 million in revenue, \$100 million in inventory and receivables and \$250,000 in paid up capital. I mean, for people at no companies, that's nothing short of a miracle.

Gary Bauer:

That's amazing. And this is quite a few years ago. So in today, I mean, \$250 million is a lot of money no matter when you're talking about, but in today's dollars, that would just blow people away. We're talking about many times that. And so you're growing this business and you're creating jobs by doing that and you're putting God in it instead of putting God in His own little cubicle away from where most of us spend our time, which is wherever it is we work and how we make a living. And this is something you've been dedicated to all your life, right? Putting God in the middle of your business.

Ken Eldred:

Well, there are a couple things there, Gary. One is that... another retreat. If I go to a meeting where there's one great idea that comes out of it, I'll go back. If nothing comes out of it that's great, that's helpful to me, I don't go anymore because I just don't have the time. So I went to this retreat and they said that God has a plan for you. And I thought, He's got a plan for me? What's that? And I said, "You need to pray about it and ask God to show you what that plan is." So I put a piece of paper on my desk and it sat there, this was years ago, over 40 years ago. And I thought, "Lord, show me what it is that You have for me in my life." And that paper sat there for two weeks with nothing on it.

My admin finally came in one day and said, "Would you like me to remove that piece of paper from your desk?" "No, no, no, you got to leave it." Well, that particular day, He gave me one point and I wrote it down. A few more days passed by and there was another point, a couple more days after that, the following week, a third point, and that was it. And I thought, "This is what you have for me to do." And everybody's plan is different because it really comes from Ephesians chapter two, verse 10, where it says that we are made in the image of Christ Jesus to accomplish the works that He has planned for us from the very beginning. So each one of us has a unique plan. And my plan may not look very meaningful to anybody else, but it's very meaningful to me. And this plan has been the basis of my thinking for over 40 years.

Most people don't realize that beyond salvation, there is a responsibility they have to God. God has given them gifts, and it's our turn to turn around and give Him a gift from the gifts that He's given us.

Gary Bauer: You ended up being the owner and CEO of these businesses, but along the way, did you ever get pushback about your faith being too visible in the business? Because today that happens.

Ken Eldred: Oh, of course. I had people ... And California, think about that. I mean, bringing faith into a company and me being the CEO. I'm pressuring them. That's the view. Well, the first thing is that because of my faith, I loved everybody in our company. God says, and they're all unique and they're very important in what they do. Understanding that the body of Christ and the body of corporation are the same kind of thing. If it works for the spiritual world, it works in the physical world. So I made sure that people understood that I recognized their value and what they did, and I would share with them, just out of love, what was on my heart. And they kind of looked at ... It's kind of like Monday morning after the football game, everybody's sharing their team's results and excited about it. Well, I'm sharing mine.

And people would listen to that and I never forced them to listen, never asked them to stop here and do this. But I put tracks in the lobby and there was this young lady came into me and she worked for my vice president of marketing and she was very upset about something, but he was leaving in town for a couple days. He said, "Would you please talk to her?" We talked about what he thought the issue was so that I would be prepared for her and I would tell him exactly what happened because you don't meet with lower employees without having people above them there in the room so they can hear. So she came in and what I thought was the problem, we settled immediately. It was not a big issue. She said, "Well, that's not the problem." I said, "What's the problem? It's those tracks in the lobby. I keep taking them."

And I said, "Well, were they there when you came?" She said, "Yes, they were." And I said, "They'll be there until I'm there. And when I leave, they can go, but not until I leave will those tracks go. But what I will tell you is that I'm going to show you, I'm going to write a letter that's going to put with those tracks." And I don't know if people know what tracks are, but they're little sort of cartoon stories or little stories or pamphlets about salvation typically.

So I wrote a letter saying, "This is what my faith means to you. You don't have to adopt my faith, but this is what it means for you. You're going to be treated with respect. You'll be treated fairly. You'll be recognized as a person that has great talent in the things that you do." And I went through a list of things like that, put them on it, and "if you want to talk to me about it, call this number." And literally I put my extension down and people would call me, but it was always at a time that Lord had the downtime for me. So she said, "That's not the problem." I said, "Well, what is the problem?" She said, "I've been taking those tracks." I said, "I've noticed they've been going rapidly. I'd keep buying more

and putting them in their place." She said, "That's not the problem." I said, "Well, what's the problem?" She said, "I don't know how to get saved. What do I do?"

Gary Bauer: Ah, my goodness.

Ken Eldred: And right there in my office, we knelt down and prayed and she received Christ.

Gary Bauer: That sentence to you is what we all hope for, right? When we share the gospel, people, they think there's something magical or there's 10 steps they have to complete or some book they have to read. All of those things can be helpful, but it's just this question of, are you willing to open your heart accept Christ as your savior and welcome Him into your heart? That's what it's all about.

Ken Eldred: And what I found, Gary, is that when people argue with you about God, it's because God's talking to them.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Ken Eldred: And that's the time to share, when people have a problem. Well, let's talk about what does it mean? What's going on for you? And she was struggling and that's what made her angry because she didn't know the answer.

Gary Bauer: Oh my goodness.

Ken Eldred: I'd come back from my European operations. We were in countries, 10 countries in Europe and Asia, besides the United States. And I come back from a trip to Europe for two weeks, reviewing operations. And it was Friday afternoon, eight o'clock in the morning, next morning I was supposed to take my youngest son out to soccer game thinking, I am exhausted. Eight o'clock in the morning, you've got to be kidding. And he's probably eight or nine years of age, and I'm sitting way up in the top of the bleachers.

Nobody's up there, nobody's going to go up there. I got a cup of coffee. I am not going to talk to anybody. And there's a few women sitting down talking to each other on the first step. And then there was a man sitting there by himself. And I'm kind of looking at this group and the Lord says, "Go talk to that man about My son, Jesus." I'm saying, "Lord, I'm too tired. I'm exhausted. I don't even know how to even begin to deal with that." So he silenced for a while. He says, "Go talk to that man about My son, Jesus." So this happens the third time. And I said, "Okay, all right, Lord." Now I'm negotiating. So I said, "I'll tell you what, I'll go down there and I'll introduce myself, but You bring up the topic." So I go down there, I introduce myself.

We're talking, he said, young executive, maybe 40 years of age, sharp looking, we're talking for a few minutes. And he looks at me, he says, "Do you know

anything about churches in this area?" And I said, "Well, yeah, what do you mean?" He says, "Well, I really need to know more about God."

Gary Bauer: An immediate answer to your prayer, right? You ask God to pave the way for this.

Ken Eldred: Exactly. But here's the thing, if I had walked down there and said, "God told me to come talk to you about him, look at the power that would've unleashed."

Gary Bauer: Yeah, that's a good point.

Ken Eldred: And it was my loss. It was my loss. The Lord really said, "Okay, we'll do this, but it's going to be your loss." And we sometimes do the things, but we put conditions. The conditions we put, He'll accept that, but it doesn't mean that it's going to be a great success for us. Ultimately, the man came to Christ. I started a Bible study because I thought I needed to have young people that middle-aged people who really need to know the Lord. And that Bible study was 1982, and we've been doing it ever since. I mean, I'm no longer in the Bay Area, but it still goes on.

Gary Bauer: That's a wonderful story. The time is passing so quickly, and I got so many other things I want to ask you about and share with our listeners. Is there any chance ... I know how busy you are, but is there any chance you could come back with this and be here another day?

Ken Eldred: No, I'd love it. I would enjoy the privilege of being able to speak to people about the great things God is doing.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic.

Roger Marsh: Ken Eldred shows us that faithful stewardship in business can become one of the most powerful forms of ministry, creating jobs, building communities, and opening doors to share the gospel right where we work. You're listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring a remarkable conversation with entrepreneur and author Ken Eldred and our own Gary Bauer, senior vice president of public policy here at the Dr. James Dobson Policy and Culture Center. They've been discussing integrating faith into every corner of life, especially in the workplace. And if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you simply want to share Ken's inspiring testimony with a friend, visit jdfi.net. Once you're there, you'll find the complete program along with information about Ken's books, including *God is at Work* and *The Integrated Life*. Again, all that information is waiting for you at jdfi.net. Ken Eldred's emphasis on biblical priorities, God first, family second, and then work reflects exactly what the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute has championed for decades, and we were privileged to have Ken as a member of our board for many years.

We are dedicated to preserving and promoting the institution of the family and the biblical principles upon which it stands. Through our broadcasts and other resources, we are working to introduce as many people as possible to the gospel of Jesus Christ while defending the sanctity of human life, God-honoring sexuality, religious freedom, and righteousness in our culture. These broadcasts literally reach millions of listeners each month because friends like you believe in our mission. And if today's program has encouraged you in your own workplace calling, you're invited to partner with us in this ministry. Your prayers and faithful financial support helps us to keep broadcasting biblical truth to families all across America. You can make a secure donation at jdfi.net. That's jdfi.net. If you prefer, call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if you prefer, you can send your tax deductible donation through the U.S. Postal Service.

Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. One more time, that is P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the JDFI, thank you so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for part two of Gary Bauer's inspiring conversation with Ken Eldred that's coming up 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.