



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Families in Crisis: The Anderson Family – Part 1

Guest(s): Roger and Darlene Anderson

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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 division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Today we're revisiting a classic broadcast featuring Dr. Dobson in conversation with Roger and Darlene Anderson. This remarkable couple has weathered extraordinary challenges within their family, demonstrating incredible faith and resilience along the way. Now, the Anderson's journey began when they discovered their third child was deaf, a diagnosis that would forever change the family's trajectory. Rather than being defined by limitations, they chose to embrace God's sovereignty in their circumstances. Instead, and as you listen to their testimony, you'll witness how faith can sustain us through life's most difficult trials. Their story reminds us that even when we don't understand God's plan, we can certainly trust His purpose. Well, now let's join Dr. James Dobson as he introduces the Andersons and their inspiring story on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Roger, you're a businessman. Or you own a business, is that right?

Roger Anderson: Yeah, small business.

Dr. James Dobson: And Darlene, you're a full-time mom, a former school teacher, I understand.

Darlene Anderson: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: How many years did you teach school?

Darlene Anderson: I taught seven years and then retired to...

Dr. James Dobson: Raise children.

Darlene Anderson: -to raise my family. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: My wife Shirley did exactly the same thing. Seven years of teaching and then a full-time mom. Do you think you'll ever go back?

Darlene Anderson: Because I homeschool my oldest two, I really am still actively teaching, so I enjoy that much more.

Dr. James Dobson: How did you get into homeschooling?

Darlene Anderson: I think that...

Roger Anderson: We didn't like the alternative.

Darlene Anderson: I think just from the beginning when my son was just a toddler, just thinking of what we could do with him at home and having been a teacher, I guess I just felt like I would like to share that experience with him.

Dr. James Dobson: Has it been what you expected it to be? It's a lot of work, isn't it?

Darlene Anderson: Yes, it is.

Dr. James Dobson: I'll bet she's a fantastic teacher, is what I've gathered.

Roger Anderson: Between the other kids and problems and things like that, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And the last thing, or the next thing that our listeners need to know about you, Darlene, is that you're going to have baby number seven. Well, we want to walk through your personal story in this program and let people know where you've been and the portion of it that we're particularly interested in here started with the birth of your third child, Darren. Okay. Pick it up there and tell us what you learned.

Darlene Anderson: Well, Darren came along seemingly fine like our other two, normal delivery, but just probably a few months after he was born, we noticed that there was something just slightly different with him. I guess an easy way to say it is he was like a ragdoll, just very floppy and didn't develop quite like the other two had developed. And he was progressing but very slowly and we talked about it back and forth and didn't want to take him in right away thinking maybe we're being a little paranoid.

Roger Anderson: I'm the type of person that if it isn't broke, don't fix it, so I don't go running to the doctor for everything. And so I just thought, well, he was just like a little loose goose. The other kids, I could sit him on my hand and carry 'em around just straight in front of my chest and it wouldn't be a problem at all but him, he'd just go fall right over. Like I said, I just thought it was just a difference in a child, but that turned out to be something more than that,

Darlene Anderson: And we know now that is a warning sign. We were starting to say things I think not even consciously realizing, making observations that we just kind of storing them away. Like Roger would say, "He doesn't know my voice. He doesn't turn to me when I call him."

Roger Anderson: He doesn't listen to me.

Darlene Anderson: Yeah. I remember telling someone, this is not an auditory learner. I think he's visual or something. And finally it bothered me so much that he consented and we took him in and they did an evaluation of him, but basically came back with, "Well, he's a little on the slow side developmentally, but he's still within range."

Dr. James Dobson: What age was he then?

Darlene Anderson: He was probably just about eight months by then. But one little test they had done there bothered me. And when I went home, I decided I was going to try the same test and see if I could get any different results. And that was they had taken a little bell and tried to ring it next to his ear and he turned, but I think he saw the bell. And so I sat him in his highchair and gave him something to occupy himself with and stood behind and rang a little bell. And when I noticed he didn't respond, I called Roger and showed him and he said, well, you have to have something to really get his attention. So he got out a couple big pan lids.

Roger Anderson: Husbands do things in a big way.

Darlene Anderson: And crashed them together right behind him. And when we saw that he was still playing with what we gave him, it was like we knew right then. This answered all the questions. Everything that we had thought and said came together right then. We didn't even have to really discuss it. In fact, right away I got out the phone book. I looked up an audiologist and called and made an appointment to have him seen. Well, of course this was near the end of the week and I couldn't take him in until the first of the next week. And so that was probably one of those long weekends of my life.

Dr. James Dobson: We've all been there over one thing or another,

Darlene Anderson: And I think I questioned and answered all...

Dr. James Dobson: Your own questions

Darlene Anderson: -my fears and everything that weekend. And I don't think we ever said God, why? We always felt like this is the way God has made him. But at the same time, I still grieve because I started thinking he'll never hear music or the birds or...

Dr. James Dobson: Your voice.

Darlene Anderson: -my voice say, I love you. And I went to church that Sunday and took him, and I didn't want to tell anyone because I wanted to make sure that it wasn't just some silly idea we had. And so I went through the motions and everyone put him in the nursery with all the other children who were playing. And it was a

very difficult time for me then to realize I know there's something wrong and I can't really share with anyone.

Dr. James Dobson: And the next week you had it confirmed medically?

Darlene Anderson: Yes, the audiologist put him in a booth and did all kinds of sounds, of course. And we have no family history of deafness, so this was something totally new to us and we really knew nothing about it. And the audiologist was, now we believe a poor choice, but we had no knowledge of audiologist either. He was scribbling on paper and basically when he got finished, he said, "I've confirmed this is right. Your son is deaf. You'll probably want to do some more tests later on." That was basically all he told me. And I noticed he had been writing on a paper and I said, well, can I at least have a copy of what you're working on? And what it was was an audiogram, which is a paper, it's like a graph. You have decibels which are loudness on going vertically and frequencies going across. And I took that home and tried to figure out what this paper said. And at the bottom he wrote no response at 90 decibels, which is fairly loud.

Dr. James Dobson: Did he write the word profoundly?

Darlene Anderson: No. There was a key on it. Well, what I did was I went home and called the library and I said, can you give me some look up decibels and tell me what different sounds make how many decibels? And of course we learned, we've learned a lot since then, but maybe 10 decibels, it's like leaves wrestling, and then you get down to 120 decibels, which is a jet airplane taking off. So you have everything in between. And so 90 is pretty bad when there's no response at all.

Dr. James Dobson: If he didn't hear that, he's not here.

Darlene Anderson: So we contacted him again. He said, your son is so deaf, he'll never learn to talk. Hearing aids will never help him. So I suggest you decide to start communicating with him through sign language.

Roger Anderson: And we were fortunate. God worked in that He brought other people in and she's going to get to that. But whenever something like this happens, just don't take the first opinion that you get. You have to be an advocate for your kid. You have to go out there and do the research yourself. Because on this, we thought our only recourse was to go with doing sign language. And I thought, man, I'm never going to learn sign language when it comes to that sort of thing. I'm pretty slow.

Dr. James Dobson: First. Roger, tell me how this diagnosis hits you.

Roger Anderson: I've been a Christian ever since I was four years old. And in the back of my mind, I've always tried to reference things in a Christian perspective. At the time, it all comes down to your frame of reference. What are the principles, what are the

things, what determine how you handle things? And it really came down to the fact that God is sovereign and whatever is His plan, I have to go with that.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a theological position and an understanding. But pain was still there and it's in your eyes and your voice right now.

Roger Anderson: Yes, it is. It's not nearly so much with me as it is my wife. She responds to that so much more than I do. I guess it's because of the way I'm sewn together inside. But I remember when we first realized that it happened and we were at church on a Sunday morning and we sort of waited around for the pastor to kind of get done with the bulk of the people and everything so we could kind of let him know what had happened. And Darlene was there, and of course she wasn't doing well emotionally, but I just felt a lump in my throat about the thing. And we told him that he was deaf. And in some ways, there's so little deafness out there. A lot of people don't even comprehend.

Dr. James Dobson: No understanding.

Roger Anderson: They have zero understanding about it, and they know it's a serious thing, but they don't really understand all the ramifications of it. It's like right now, it's very difficult to tell our son about how to be saved because there's so many concepts of Heaven, of eternal life, of sin. You're talking to a 7-year-old, but you got almost like you're communicating to a baby in order to explain sin. We have to call it bad things. Where with my other son that was four years old or almost five when he was saved, it was very understandable, but we have to twist everything and frame it so that...

Dr. James Dobson: You really had to learn to be the parents of a deaf child, didn't you? You don't automatically know how to do that.

Darlene Anderson: You have to learn to think for them sometimes.

Roger Anderson: You have to think in a way that they can understand that you don't communicate with other people that way because their frame of language is so limited. It is just very narrow. So you have to focus everything down into a real tight channel.

Dr. James Dobson: You obviously then began exploring this problem medically, and you found that the cause of the deafness was what?

Darlene Anderson: Well, it was determined that he has a form of what's called Mondini dysplasia. And just to simplify it, it's with a cochlea, the little snail shaped part of the ear that has all the little hair fibers in. It stops growing at a certain point, and the normal cochlea has two and a half turns and his only had one and a half turns.

Dr. James Dobson: And this is a genetic.

Darlene Anderson: It's a genetic. And at the time, in fact, we were told it was viral, that I probably had contracted something during my pregnancy and caused it. So even that, we had so much misinformation and things at first, but I had started very aggressively learning sign language. In fact, I had it arranged that we would have a private tutor come to our home even and teach us. And I was getting this all set up and Roger said, "I know this may be the way we have to go, but I just don't feel this is right. He has to grow up in a speaking world, a hearing world, and we want him to be able to be independent." Our philosophy

Roger Anderson: To be able go to McDonald's and order a hamburger and not try and make gestures.

Dr. James Dobson: Now that's a very controversial point of view, isn't it? People have strong feelings about whether you teach sign language or English or some other.

Roger Anderson: Well, auditory verbals.

Darlene Anderson: The program we call. So anyway, I decided maybe I needed to do some more research. So I started writing and contacting people and well, actually someone suggested I get a second opinion. We had him taken in and this audiologist did work more with an oral program. And when she got done and showed me the audiogram, which by then I had learned a lot more about audiograms, it was totally different from the first one. She had him charted that he had some low frequency hearing. And I said, "Now how do I know yours is right? And this other one was wrong." And she said, "I believe this is accurate. I really have faith that he tested well today and that this is where he is." And she suggested we get him into hearing aids right away, which we did. And by 15 months old, he was able to say moo and bow wow. And we became very aggressive and I educated myself as much I can. I read and worked extensively with him and he made very rapid progress then.

Roger Anderson: Well, what's really tough is how do you test an eight month old? I mean, they can't respond, "Oh, I heard that." They can't do that. And so all the audiologists can do is look for eye movements when they hear a sound on their right or their left. And so it's extremely difficult because they can really give you nothing other than response and maybe a facial gesture, a turn of the head or a glint in the eye, and that's all they can really use to test where they're at.

Dr. James Dobson: So you can't do it with precision, but you do get a diagnosis. You do know that.

Darlene Anderson: Yes, it takes a very trained person.

Dr. James Dobson: You do know there's a hearing problem in most cases, don't you?

Darlene Anderson: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you all then were faced with a very important question about additional children.

Darlene Anderson: Well, not at that point because we still had gone on the premise that it was viral, and plus this had just happened.

Roger Anderson: No family history.

Darlene Anderson: No family history. And in fact, when I was expecting my fourth child late in the pregnancy, Roger was outside and he wanted to scare me, and he lit off fire cracker. And he didn't realize that at that very moment the baby had been stirring. And so I was kind of patting my tummy and talking to the baby. And then when he made this loud noise, I realized the baby didn't startle, which I had remembered my older two startling in the womb later in the pregnancy. And I became concerned about that. So when I went to see my doctor a couple days later, I told him about that and he said, "What a silly thing for you to think about." He said, "don't you realize that was some crazy fluke with that pregnancy?" And he said, "I want you to get that out of your mind and don't even think about that again."

Dr. James Dobson: He was trying to be kind to you, wasn't he?

Darlene Anderson: I think so.

Roger Anderson: Well, there's an attitude out there, and I don't want to say necessarily an attitude, but deafness is so rare, pediatricians almost, they don't test for it. There's nothing that they do that way and it's just so uncommon that they write it off.

Darlene Anderson: Anyway, that's when I began to do more research on genetics, and I began learning some of the things that we know now that everyone carries six to 10 bad genes. And if you happen to meet with someone who is also carrying one of those bad genes, that the chances of the right combination is one in four. So basically, we would have a 25%, every child we'd have would have a 25% chance of having that happen.

Dr. James Dobson: It's mendelian recessive, which means that you both carry the gene for this deafness.

Darlene Anderson: Right. And so when our little girl was born and we were at the hospital, I begged and pleaded for the doctors to test her. I just still had the uneasiness and they wouldn't do it. They said, "Well, you have to be scheduled ahead of time and it's too loud in the nursery and this and that." And I was quite frustrated, but maybe I wasn't as much of an advocate and as bold as I am now. And so I let it go and when we got home, I told him to get out the pots and pans again, and as she was going to sleep, just that first night, she was only two days old. He banged the pots and pans and she didn't respond.

Dr. James Dobson: And this is your daughter named Brittany? Brittany. Brittany.

Darlene Anderson: Once you leave the hospital, then you have to go through all kinds of things to have tests done and things like that. So she was actually six weeks old before we were able to get an auditory brainstem response test on, which is pretty objective to let them know if there's hearing or not.

Roger Anderson: Bear test they call it.

Darlene Anderson: And then when we went to the audiologist, she had tested Brittany at three weeks. I asked her and she wasn't really sure, but then she realized that Brittany was far worse than Darren. And also at the same time Darren had stopped doing well. He had plateaued and he wouldn't learn anymore and we couldn't understand. Brittany got her hearing aids at nine weeks. My audiologist tested Darren again then and found he had lost all of that low frequency hearing he had. So now we had two children in a very profound state of hearing. And so then progress went much slower then.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Now we come to that question of additional children.

Darlene Anderson: We knew at that point that if we had any more children that this definitely could happen again. We only, we had two and two, and I think we were really very optimistic during our fifth pregnancy because we felt...

Dr. James Dobson: Chances were 75%.

Darlene Anderson: Yeah, that's what I said. We have 75% chance of this child hearing.

Dr. James Dobson: Roger, did your friends support the idea of additional children?

Roger Anderson: We've had very few friends support the idea of additional children. God has for you I think a core of people, not the bulk of Christians in your church, but there's a few core people that God brings you to help you through these things. I wish it was better. I wish that the whole church rallied around you, but there are a few people that God brings in to help you through these.

Dr. James Dobson: Things. And there were a few that got you through it.

Roger Anderson: There was a few, and they would come at Darlene with, "Why doesn't Roger have an operation? Or how come you're having more kids when they could be handicapped?" Things like this that really, you're struggling enough as it is. You don't need that. You need encouragement. You need to be exhorted.

Dr. James Dobson: What is particularly painful about that is that there's an implication behind the statement like that a child with a disability should not be born, that he or she is less of a human being. And that comes through in a moment like that.

Roger Anderson: There's something bigger out there, and this is one of the things that I have a problem with about the attitude of the people in our country, is that they've lost the idea that there is something bigger than ourselves out there, that God has things in mind that He really would like us to keep our hands off of. And it's a terrible thing to hear about babies being aborted when they're most of the way out of the womb and everything like this. It stabs in your heart when you know that Darren with his defect and Brittany with hers, they're just as valuable as any normal kid out there. God says in Genesis, I forget who he was talking to. He says, "Who has made man's ear?" God takes full credit for my child's defect. He doesn't apologize for it one bit.

Dr. James Dobson: And He can use it for good.

Roger Anderson: He certainly has.

Dr. James Dobson: So you decided to go ahead and have another child?

Darlene Anderson: Yes. It was, I think a little more difficult for me because I knew that if it happened again, how much work it is. It is a lot of work raising them and working with them. And so I probably struggled with that, just making the decision to go ahead. But when I look back now, and I guess I would say that had we made this decision to stop because of what might happen, we would've robbed ourselves so many joys.

Dr. James Dobson: You would know those other kids.

Darlene Anderson: And they're a lot of work, but they're precious children.

Dr. James Dobson: The third child was also born deaf.

Roger Anderson: Well, actually the fifth child.

Darlene Anderson: The third deaf child.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Darlene Anderson: Our fifth child.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And a fourth one.

Darlene Anderson: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And a sixth.

Darlene Anderson: Yes, our sixth child.

Dr. James Dobson: So you have four hard of hearing children. Are all of them profoundly deaf?

Darlene Anderson: Yes, they are.

Dr. James Dobson: Before we go any further, talk about where God is in this for you. Obviously, you prayed about those other three children after the first child was born deaf. What did He say to you and what are your conclusions about where he is?

Roger Anderson: I don't think God doesn't make sense. I think God makes perfect sense, but this world is so distorted by sin and it's under a curse. The ground is curse that we get our food from, and it really appears that God doesn't because we look at it and I think we want to say, what did I do to deserve this? Or I think we look at it from that perspective, but...

Dr. James Dobson: I don't you understand that is the implication of the title *When God Doesn't Make Sense to Us*. He makes perfect sense.

Roger Anderson: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: He always makes perfect sense. It just doesn't make sense to us.

Roger Anderson: This world is not what it's supposed to be. This world was created to be something far different than what it is today, and we suffer in the light of that. We have defects, we have imperfections, we die. It's something that isn't supposed to be this way, but because we're in this world, we have to deal with it. And I think emotionally we come up with those feelings about why doesn't God make sense?

Roger Marsh: Well, we've barely scratched the surface on the Andersons remarkable journey, so I hope you'll make plans to join us again next time when we continue this conversation here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and we've just heard part one of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Roger and Darlene Anderson. Now, if today's broadcast resonated with you, why not share it with someone who might also need this message of hope as well? You can easily access today's program and share it with others by visiting drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

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Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at Family Talk, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's fascinating conversation with Roger and Darlene Anderson. That's coming up on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer:

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