



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. Ted Engstrom: Leading with Compassion

Guest(s): Dr. Ted Engstrom

Air Date: March 18, 2026

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. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're bringing you a classic conversation featuring a true giant of the faith, the late Dr. Ted Engstrom, who went home to be with the Lord in 2006 at the age of 90. During his remarkable lifetime, Dr. Ted Engstrom poured his leadership and vision into some of evangelicalism's most influential institutions, from Zondervan Publishing to Youth for Christ to World Vision. He was a builder, a mentor, and above all, a man who never lost sight of the gospel at the center of all of it. Hear his conversation with Dr. James Dobson coming up right now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: What a privilege it is to be able to talk to you today.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Well, the privilege is mine, Jim. Thank you very, very much for this opportunity.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's start by going back to 1939. How did you meet Dorothy and how did you fall in love with her?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Well, Dorothy and I were classmates at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. I came to Taylor in 1935, not as a Christian. I didn't know the Lord at the time, but I was attracted to other Christian young people. My parents were godly people. I came from a fine Christian home. On April 1st in 1935, we had a youth conference on the campus, and following the conference, there was a chapel service in which the gospel was preached. A friend of mine, Park Anderson, a former student, was the speaker, and he gave an invitation. And I was the only person who responded, by the way, to that invitation to come forward in the auditorium that morning. And I met with my physics teacher, Ms. Olivaine Draper. And that morning at 10:30, on April 1st, 1935, I gave my heart and my life to Christ. It was a transforming experience, unforgettable time.

As I walked out of that auditorium, the angel choirs were singing in my soul. The sky was never bluer and I never looked back from that moment on. God met me in my point of need, and for these more than 70 years, I had the privilege of serving Him. I'm so very grateful for that. God has been so good to me and

Dorothy. We had a romance. We began the fall of that year to date. I had my eyes on her, of course, prior to that.

Dr. James Dobson: She wouldn't go out with you though because you weren't a believer.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: I was not a Christian. And she had committed herself to saying she wouldn't date anybody who was not a Christian. She dated other young guys on the campus at the time. And I think probably I was a bit jealous about that, but I never had a date with her until I came back in the fall. I came back to the school under some suspicions, but they're not sure I would make it, but God was very good. And I remember that we had a yearbook published each spring, and I had gone back earlier to had a job back in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. And when the yearbook came, I pointed to the freshman picture in the yearbook to my mother and said to this young lady, "This is the girl I'm going to marry." She said, "Have you dated her?" I said, "No, but I'm going to, I think. And she's the girl I'm going to marry." And that started our romance in the fall and we had a beautiful time together. And a year after graduation, we were married in Columbus, Ohio. And she was a marvelous, marvelous partner to me, so supportive during all of my career path. And I'm so grateful that God gave me this wonderful gift of my partner for life in my wife, Dorothy.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the first high level professional responsibilities you had was at Zondervan Publishing Company. You were a book editor.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: I was the first editor they had. Zondervan began in 1931 or '32, and I joined them in 1940 after I got out of college. And I was the first full-time book editor and had the privilege for a dozen years of interviewing some of the top Christian leaders of that time who were published by Zondervan. And it was a training program for me. I learned from my friends, Pat and Bernie Zondervan who owned the company and got my start in publishing business. Thought I'd be in that role all of my life because I love books.

Dr. James Dobson: The Lord had a different plan, didn't He?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Yes. I thought I would be, before I was converted, I wanted to be the sports editor of a large city newspaper. After I was saved, God changed my ambitions and I wanted to be a writer and a book editor and had this opportunity to Zondervan. And it was a time of growth. I learned a great deal during those days working in the publishing business.

Dr. James Dobson: And you went from there to Youth for Christ as president.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: In 1948, I attended the Youth for Christ Conference in Switzerland and people like Harold Ockenga and Oswald J. Smith and Bob Pierce and Billy Graham and others were there. And I ran the press room for this large international conference with delegates from all across the globe. And God spoke to my heart by His Holy Spirit in a very special way during those days about world

evangelism and the fulfillment of the great commission in Matthew 28. And I said to the Lord at that time in Switzerland, "If per chance I could have a role in being part of the great commission, I'm Yours. You've saved me. I belong to You as Your child, but if I can serve You in some way, I'm willing." Having no idea what would happen. But three years later, a call came to me from a friend of mine, Dr. Bob Pierce, who was the founder of World Vision, and he invited me to come to join with him in this burgeoning new organization known as World Vision.

And I accepted the call from the board to join with them as the executive vice president of World Vision at that time. And then following his death, the board asked me if I would serve as president of the international organization. It was a time of tremendous growth from the early 1960s until I retired about 15 years ago.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's be honest about that term of service. When you went to World Vision, it was virtually bankrupt and that's what you found out after you got there.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: I would not have come here probably had I known in advance what I would find when I got here. We were bankrupt. We were heavily in debt and it was a very difficult time and I probably would not have accepted the call had I known ahead of time what I was facing, but God met us in a very wonderful way and the growth of the movement, the ministry has been tremendous over these years. When I came, our budget is about \$5 million and now as we talk today, the international budget is more than \$2 billion. We had a staff of 40 people at the time. Now there's over a thousand on our U.S. staff and 22,000 full-time employees across the world. And God is blessed and honored that in a very specific way.

Dr. James Dobson: You poured your life into it, didn't you? You were crisscrossing the nation with one great passion in your heart. It was not to build World Vision. It was to feed hungry children and to put an arm around...

Dr. Ted Engstrom: And do evangelize alongside of that, yes. Yes. And to supply that cup of cold water that Jesus talked about, and with that act of love, proclaim the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: In 1979, two years into this ministry's existence, we were starting to grow like topsy. And I had come out of a medical school and I didn't know what I needed to know to run a non-profit organization. And all the challenges with exponential growth, we were doubling every year, every year, every year. That creates enormous problems for staff and funding and putting a roof over our heads and eventually computers and all of that. And so during an early board meeting, we said, "What are we going to do? We're going to have to have some leadership of somebody that's been there, somebody who's done it, someone who knows what we're facing" because we had a lot of bright people, mostly

young people on our board, but we didn't know what to do with all of that. And the Lord was leading in a direction. And so Bob Biehl, who was on the board in 1977, and he said, "I have worked with Dr. Ted Ingstrom at World Vision, and he's a man who knows." And I said, "I'm not acquainted with him." And he said, "Well, we can fix that."

So he set up a lunch and we met at the Pasadena Club here in Pasadena, California, and got acquainted. I liked you from the beginning, and then I sprung the trap. I said, "Dr. Engstrom, would you join our board?" And you very graciously said, "I'm on nearly 25 boards. I've got my hands full. I appreciate so much the implications of that offer, but I just can't add anymore. And my wife Dorothy is concerned that I'm gone too much and I'm going to have to turn you down." And I said, "I understand. The Lord has somebody else for us and thank you for the lunch and for the time together." And shortly thereafter, you invited me to come to World Vision. Let me describe the setting now. We were sitting around a table. There was an hour long film that was grinding away. It was not a video in those days.

And there were about 25, 30 people at this table, and there were about eight or 10 people between you and me. And while watching the film, I sat there and watched it with you all so I could discuss it. You wrote a little note on a piece of paper, tiny little scratch piece of paper. I wish I'd have kept it and sent it down a row and it came to me and it said ...

Dr. Ted Engstrom: I think I wrote in there, "You can count me in." Something to that effect, yes. Yeah. I was so moved by what you were saying, and I have never regretted that decision. One of the joys of my life is being able to serve with you and my colleagues. I have formed some very deep and warm friendships as a result of that. Members of the board past and present have been very special in my life, and this has been one of God's great gifts to me. I enjoy boardsmanship as I've indicated, and I've thoroughly enjoyed attending the meetings and participating and giving whatever council might be needed from time to time.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you said we're a gift to you. I can tell you, you're one of God's richest gifts to us. One of the characterizations I've made from the very early days is that I knew something was going on there. I knew that apart from my ability, my intelligence, my training, my Ph.D., my this, that, or the other, it was not enough. And yet I saw doors opening. We would get up to a door where we really needed an answer and it would fly open because my father had prayed about that and the Lord had made a promise to him about reaching people all the way around the world. And I began to see that there was a divine ordination here that didn't have much to do with me and you were part of that divine ordination. I learned to listen to you. You mentored me. You understood my questions because you had been through the same thing.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Do you remember, Jim, we used to meet for breakfast before we moved to Colorado.

Dr. James Dobson: We did.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: You and I would have breakfast together in the restaurant there in town in Arcadia. And that was one of the delights of my life to have that time with you on a one-to-one basis.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, have there been such dramatic moments. They flood through my mind at this time. We had a board meeting in 1996, and I had begun to be aware that there are many people listening to us because of the advice that I offered, I and others offered on child rearing and marriage and other things, and that that was what I saw as my mission. And then I began to realize that there were people driving down the freeway in homes who had spun the dial and heard a voice that they liked and heard helpful advice given, but they didn't know Jesus. And what good did that do to help people make stronger families if they didn't know the creator of families? I brought that to the board and I said, "There's something missing here. We need to do more than that." You remember that day?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Oh, indeed. It was a defining moment in the ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: We were all on our faces before the Lord, some very sophisticated people down with both hands over their faces weeping as God met with us.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: I remember our dear friend, Adrian Rogers led us so strongly in that prayer time as well. He felt that need so keenly.

Dr. James Dobson: And he's gone on to be with the Lord.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Ted, are you contemplating going on to be with the Lord? If you were not such a strong believer, I'd never ask you that question, but I know that somewhere...

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Oh, I'm anticipating it. I'm looking forward to it. Sometimes I can hardly wait. After 70 years of serving the Lord, I really anticipate seeing the Savior, first of all, meeting my beloved Dorothy once again and telling her how much I appreciated her being with me and thanking the Lord for His gift to me of her and then joining my friends by the scores, by the hundreds. I often, in my own mind, think of buddies of mine over the last 50 or 60 years, 70 years with whom I've served, who are now in the presence of the Lord. And we're going to have a great reunion. And you and I are going to compare notes up there as well, Jim. I'll beat you there probably by a few years. But to answer your question, yes, I am anticipating Heaven. I'm looking forward to it. I don't dread the thought of death one bit.

Dr. James Dobson: I just can hardly believe how productive you have been to your 90th birthday and the end is not yet. I mean, you just published ... In fact, it's coming out now. Published another book. It's the 54th book you have written, and it is entitled what?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: *Compassionate Leadership*. This is a book addressed to the emerging young leaders. I have three main passions in my life, one of which is Christian higher education and the training of young men and women for ministry and service, whatever the discipline of their life it may be. And this book is addressed to these wonderful young men and women who are coming out of our universities and words of caution, words of guidance and direction that Paul Cedar and I are giving to them out of our experience. We had over a hundred years of leadership experience and we're trying to share that with this emerging young group.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're talking to them about the pitfalls that are there. The danger points.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Things to avoid, things to concentrate on, and just some sound advice from seniors to this wonderful group of young people.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Dr. Ted, when you sit in your room at a retirement facility, a wonderful one, by the way, in the quiet of the night, you have your family, you have Joanne Bingle, who's your daughter that takes care of you, and there's so many others in your family. But when you're sitting alone there and you're thinking about 70 years with the Lord, and those days coming to a close, who knows, for all of us, we live on borrowed time, but when you think about all that, what goes through your mind?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Well, my heart is just full of gratitude to God. I'm so grateful to the Lord. My closing prayer at the close of the day is, Lord, thanks for another day you've given to me. I love you and I honor you. And even though I failed so often, you've never failed me and I just rejoice in your goodness. I am lonely. I must admit that. I don't like living alone, but what's God would have me to do presently, I'm well cared for. The facilities, you and Shirley have visited me there, so you know I'm well cared for with the nursing care and the meals that I have and all. But there's a loneliness when you lose a partner after 65 years and there's a wonderful anticipation of a grand reunion in the days ahead. So Heaven to me is very, very appealing.

Dr. James Dobson: What would Dorothy, your wife of 65 years, say to our listeners if she were here now, what counsel would she give? I can hear it, but you put it into words.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: She would say to the wives, "Look, be loyal to that husband of yours. Support them in every way you can in prayer and backing. I'm the most important person in your life." She would say to these ladies, recognize that and know that God brings these partnerships together and this marriage relationship is God ordained. It's what He had been planned from the very beginning. The great

institution of the marriage is vital and she would say, "Hang in there, stay the course, love your husband with a passion and make sure that he knows that you're standing with him every mile of the way."

Dr. James Dobson: There is a bit of background to that advice because she sacrificed a lot that you might be in Africa and Asia and the continents of the world. You did a lot of traveling in those days. You were a hardworking man and ran this huge organization that was getting bigger and bigger and she was raising those kids.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: She came with the tough. She sure did.

Dr. James Dobson: And when she says stand by your man, she knew what she was talking about.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: She was the one who sacrificed. I didn't sacrifice. She was the one that sacrificed. She had raised the kids and she took other stuff and her sacrifice standing with me was unmeasurable.

Dr. James Dobson: In closing, let me ask you to give your very best advice to the people who are listening to us. Let's address first those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and share with them what you most want to communicate with them, something that will outlive you whenever that time comes.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Many years ago, the Lord gave me my life verse from Psalm 32:8, where God says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will guide you with my eye." That verse has been very, very meaningful to me over all of these years. God has kept his promise to guide and direct me as an individual, and I'm so very, very grateful. You can trust the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. Fall in love with Jesus over and over and over again.

Dr. James Dobson: What about those that are discouraged in their faith?

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Well, God always has your best interest at heart. He wants the very best for you. Not second best, not something second rate, but the very best. And you can lean heavily on His promises. Get in the Word. Let the Word of God speak to you. This is my 90th birthday. And somebody gave me a birthday card the other day with Psalm 90 highlighted, which God talks about these last years of our lives, how faithfully He remains to us till our last breath.

Dr. James Dobson: Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: That's right. And Psalm 90 is a great verse for a 90 year old person. And so you can trust the Lord. He'll never let you down. He's forgiving. He's compassionate. He loves you with everlasting love. You can depend on Him completely and stay the course. And if you don't know the Savior, you can buy your heart wherever you are and just ask Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory to come in and forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness and He'll do it. He keeps His word. He's a God of His word and you can trust Him every inch of the way.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's close by addressing another constituency out there. Those who don't know Jesus Christ have never yielded their heart to Him. Have not been sure that there was any reason to talk to those individuals and then Dr. Ted, pray for them.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Jim, you and I have a very dear friend in Chuck Colson, who is a prophetic voice for our day. He met with this Christian friend of his in Boston who was a fine believer. And this man talked to Chuck Colson about the book that C.S. Lewis had written on *Mere Christianity*. And following that conversation, our friend Chuck Colson, again, in his car on the highway, pulled alongside the road and bought his heart and gave his life to Christ. And God took him at his word. And he's had a tremendous influence because that one decision he made that day. The most important decision that any individual can make is a decision to receive Jesus Christ as savior and Lord. Nothing compares with that one great decision, inviting Jesus Christ to come in, to forgive of us of our sins, to lead us by his Holy Spirit, and to guide us as we live our lives.

Nothing is more important than any person can ever do. The most important decision that you can make today is say, Lord Jesus, I need you. I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I need help. Please help me. And He'll do that for anyone today who will just invite Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the son of God, to come into their lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Pray for those now who have heard your words and are enticed and are beginning to see there's something there that they have not been willing to take seriously, who want and need forgiveness, who are not sure how to go about doing this. Pray for them, Dr. Ted.

Dr. Ted Engstrom: Lord God, I do pray now for that man or that woman, that young person, that teenager who's been listening to our conversation these last few moments and who long to know that they can be set free from the bondage of sin. I ask Lord that they may commit their lives at this very moment to you. You promise to answer the cry of our hearts. And I pray for that young person, that individual, that man or that woman who wants to know meaning in life. And we recognize that the only final meaning in life comes with a relationship with you, Lord Jesus. And so I pray for those who listen to this broadcast today, many of whom may not know you personally, they may come to faith because of what they've heard today. Grant this request, Lord, and may Heaven be populated because of people who respond to your invitation to come.

You said, come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you a rest. You said You would forgive us of our sins and promise eternal life, life forever with You. It's hard for us to comprehend what eternity means, but how terrible it would be to be lost throughout all eternity. So I covet, Lord, that many people may come to faith in the Savior because of our conversation here today. In Jesus' name, I pray. And for His sake, amen.

Roger Marsh:

While you're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk in a classic conversation featuring the late Dr. Ted Engstrom. What a life well lived, decades of faithful service, selfless leadership, and an unshakeable confidence in the goodness of God. Near the end of his life, Dr. Ted reflected on his homegoing with remarkable peace. He said, "Whenever the Lord calls, I'm ready. I'm not only ready, I'm eager. I'll have all of eternity to celebrate God's goodness and grace." And what a beautiful testimony from a man who spent 90 years walking faithfully with his Savior. Now, if you'd like to hear today's program again or share it with a friend, we encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org. You can also get there quicker if you go to jdfi.net. The websites are one and the same.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thank you so much for spending time with us today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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