



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. James Dobson: A Legacy Remembered

Guest(s): Todd Starnes

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and you know it was one year ago today that Dr. James Dobson stepped into eternity and received his ultimate healing. He was 89 years of age, and while we grieve the loss of our founder, today is a day that we will forever remember his legacy and honor all that God accomplished through him. Dr. Dobson spent nearly 50 years in broadcast ministry, and today we want to take you back to a celebration of that remarkable calling. A few years back at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Orlando, Florida, the NRB gathered to commemorate Dr. Dobson's 40 years on the air at that time. *Fox News* commentator Todd Starnes sat down with him for a conversation about how it all began, the risks, the answered prayers, and the millions of families touched along the way. So on today's memorial edition of Family Talk, let's listen in now to this celebration of a life well-lived, featuring Todd Starnes and our own Dr. James Dobson.

Todd Starnes: Well, I am very excited by what is about to happen over the next few moments here in this room. You know, back in 1977, Jimmy Carter was president, I was in grade school, Hall and Oates was playing on the radio, and a Christian radio program started in Arcadia, California. Ladies and gentlemen, I am excited this afternoon to introduce to you Dr. James Dobson as he celebrates 40 years in broadcasting. And we're going to ask Dr. Dobson to come to the stage, and please give him a very warm welcome this afternoon. Dr. James Dobson. Great to see you, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you, everybody.

Todd Starnes: You know, folks, over the next little while, Dr. Dobson and I are going to conduct a Q&A, and we're going to take a look back at your incredible 40 years in ministry. And then we're going to look ahead because there are some exciting things happening in your ministry, and I want you to tell us

all about that as well. But I want to go back to the beginning. And I'm very curious how a man with your educational background decides to go into broadcast radio.

Dr. James Dobson: Todd, I'm happy to talk about that. You know, there is nothing more boring than for somebody to talk about themselves for a half hour. But if that's where you want to go, I'll be glad.

Todd Starnes: That's where I want to go.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Well, I was a professor of pediatrics at USC School of Medicine. in the divisions of child development and genetics. And those are my fields. And I was happy there, was doing research. I really could have been happy there the rest of my life. But I saw the institution of the family falling apart. Even back then in the 1970s, there was a tremendous attack on what it means to be married, you know, raising godly children. And I just felt like I ought to do something about it. So I did one of the scariest things I've ever done in my life. I walked out of there and left the perks of academia where I was very comfortable and started a little two-room office with a halftime secretary. And I didn't know if the phone would ever ring again.

Todd Starnes: Now, you were going to tell us some stories this afternoon that you've never told before and I think these are fascinating. I've been talking to your staff, and they were filling me in with a lot of information that I wasn't aware of. But money was pretty tight back in those early days. As a matter of fact, I understand that you guys ran out of money.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the only way we could start the radio program and do what I thought God was calling us to do is to have a certain amount of money from somewhere. And so I went to Tyndale House Publishers. I was thinking about writing a book and it's all I had to bargain with. And so I bribed him. And I said I would give him my book if he would not pay me in advance, but to give us money as a form of a grant that I didn't have to pay back. It was \$35,000. And Tyndale agreed to that, and that got us started. But that didn't last very long.

Todd Starnes: I understand that there was a moment when you and your wonderful wife, Shirley, were on your knees and you were praying about what happened. And tell us this story. I understand there was a knock on your door.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we were at that point about \$60,000 in the hole. We were not in debt that amount. I just would never allow us to get in debt like that. But

if all the bills came due, we would have been \$60,000 short. This was the second year in. Shirley and I paid for the second year ourselves and this is the third year in. And we were with... my mother was at our house. Shirley was there. And a knock came on the door and it was a very good friend of mine from college, Jim Davis. And he was driving by our house on the freeway, and just stopped by to say hello, knocked on the door. I invited him in. I said, "I'm glad to see you. I know you know how to pray. We're getting ready to pray about this need that we have." And he joined us, and so my mother, who's gone on to be with the Lord, Shirley and I and Jim Davis went into the bedroom. We closed the door. I don't know why, but we did. We got on our knees, and boy, I remember my prayer as though it were yesterday. I said, "Lord, I thought I heard you when you asked me to do this, but I may have made a mistake. But if You're in this, this would be a real good time to hear from You." And that was October of 1979. And \$60,000 came in the next month.

Todd Starnes: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: We really never looked back from that point on.

Todd Starnes: At one point, you were on 7,000 radio stations.

Dr. James Dobson: Around the world.

Todd Starnes: Around the world.

Dr. James Dobson: 150 countries, yes. About 220 million people a day.

Todd Starnes: Now I know, I remember the first time I was sitting in a studio, a radio studio, you have this microphone in front of you and the light comes on that says on air and you don't know what's going to happen next. I remember just being incredibly nervous. What was that like for you the first time that on air light came on?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I'm just glad you don't have a recording of it because I had a whole lot I needed to learn. My background that the medical school did not prepare me for Christian radio, but I learned and I listened and I brought people together for lunch around a big table. I put a microphone in the middle and then I took what they all said back to my secretary and had her type it off and I studied it and I began to learn what I was trying to do.

Todd Starnes: It's almost as if you were having a conversation with the country. You know, it wasn't, you know, a lecture or some sort of a phony voice. It was

just a conversation, almost like you were sitting in our homes or in our cars with us.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, people today come up to me on the street and I don't know them from Adam, but they know my kids, my wife, all my relatives, my dogs. You know, it is a conversation. It's not a monologue. It is a conversation. And people connected with us personally before they knew anything really about us.

Todd Starnes: And it's a partnership, too. And I know that your wife, Shirley, is here. Can we say hello to her?

Dr. James Dobson: Please do. Shirley, would you stand, please? Shirley, some of you know, Shirley's been chairman of the National Day of Prayer for 25 years and just stepped down, tossed the ball to Anne Graham Lotz, who is now handling the National Day of Prayer. I'm really proud of Shirley. You know, when Vonnette Bright asked Shirley if she would take this responsibility from her, Shirley told the Lord, I can do that for a year or two. And 25 years later, she was still at it, and I'm very proud of her. By the way, we're about to celebrate our 57th wedding anniversary.

Todd Starnes: Is that right? Wow. Dr. Dobson, what should Christians be doing? What should families be doing over the next couple of years here in America?

Dr. James Dobson: I've watched the electorate for a long time. I've drawn some conclusions that may be different than what folks here think. But the American people tend to relax when a conservative is elected president and they say, "Boy, that was a struggle. Now we cannot worry about that anymore." And they go back to sleep. On the other hand, when a leftist president like Bill Clinton, for example, just to pull one out of the air.

Todd Starnes: Just randomly.

Dr. James Dobson: When he was elected president, I was at Focus on the Family. And we had an \$8 million surplus in that first year because everybody was afraid of him. And they were looking for conservative ministries that would hold him accountable. But now that we have Donald Trump in office, many ministries around the country are in the tank, including mine, Family Talk, because people say, "Wow, that's over. Now we can go back and do what we were thinking about before." I know I didn't say that very well, but you understand where I'm coming from.

Todd Starnes: I do. In my new book, I talked about that. Reagan brought morning to America and conservatives took a nap, went into hibernation.

Dr. James Dobson: That's absolutely true. I was there.

Todd Starnes: And then we had the read my lips, no new taxes. And then we had a community organizer in the White House.

Dr. James Dobson: And everything changed.

Todd Starnes: And everything changed. You're absolutely right. So what is it that Christians should be doing? How should they be engaging the culture and engaging ministries?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, first of all, you ought to be encouraging this president with regard to the life issue and marriage. And the other things that he is planning to do, getting rid of the Johnson Amendment, for example. That's been a plague to me all these years. And we need to, you know, he's getting a lot of heat from everywhere. I mean, people hate that man already. And we need to stand up and tell him that we are standing with him.

Todd Starnes: You know, we talk about some of those things. I know that a group of very prominent conservative leaders, evangelicals, signed a letter, the Council for National Policy, sent a letter to the president yesterday.

Dr. James Dobson: I signed the same letter.

Todd Starnes: And you signed that letter. Your name was on that letter. urging the president to issue an executive order protecting religious liberty. What's that all about?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, President Trump has made promise to evangelicals specifically, but to Christian people generally, that he is going to protect religious liberty, and especially the Johnson Amendment that he has spoken often about. And he wrote an executive order saying that. I haven't read it but the people I know who have says that it's very well written and it would protect people like us you know we've been in a lawsuit with the federal government for some time for over two years having to do with an organization, a Christian organization being required to give abortifacients by way of contraceptives to their employees And abortifacients kill babies. That's the definition of an abortifacient. And so we were selected, among others. Churches are exempt. They said, we're not Christian enough. So they have demanded that we give abortifacients to our employees. I wrote a letter to the president and sent it to our constituency, and I said, "Mr. President, this is evil. This is killing babies. I will not comply with it. Come get me if you must."

Todd Starnes: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I've been... I've been, we were sued by the federal government and we have been in a lawsuit ever since. And it would have gone to the Supreme Court. What has happened with this election result is that we may not have to carry that through. We may be excused from that mandate. But that was included in this executive order that the president has written. But a member of his family is very committed to LGBTQ principles. And took that, they saw it, and took that executive order to the *New York Times* and to *Nation Magazine*, which is one of the most leftist organizations in the country, and released it. The LGBT community went crazy. And now the president is in a bind because he's made promises to us. He's also made some promises to the other side. I don't know what he's going to do with it, but he's sitting on it right now. And we really need to have him sign and release that executive order.

Todd Starnes: And I think that's why it's important for Christians to let the president know when he's done a good job, but also to let him know when he's steering off the path.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely. We have to hold him accountable.

Todd Starnes: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, looking back over your years of ministry, decades of ministry, what are some of the blessings? What are some of those moments that just really make you smile?

Dr. James Dobson: You know what makes me smile more than anything else that's happened is when I get a letter from somebody that said, I found the Lord while listening to your broadcast. That's the highlight for me. And above all else, yes, we want to build strong families. But what good are strong families if you don't know Jesus? I began to realize that when I left USC, my goal was to build marriage and help parents raise their kids and so on. And it was several years later before I began to realize that there were a lot of people out there who were driving in their cars on the way to work and they were spinning the dial and they heard something about family life and they got interested in it, but that they are not Christians. They don't know Christ. And we changed our whole emphasis whereby every department was asked to explain what they have done in their department to introduce people to Christ. That's at the top of the list. Nothing else. I mean, speaking to parents, that's job one. There's nothing more important in life. than introducing your children to Christ. Because if you don't get that done, you'll never see them again in the afterlife. What could outrank that? And so that's got to be at the top of the list.

Todd Starnes: I want to ask you about the future. And also really talk about broadcasting, religious broadcasting in general. I think it's safe to say that your program and your ministry really revolutionized what Christian radio is all about. You know, when I was a kid, my parents, my mother always used to play a Christian radio in the car. And I remember my early days listening to your program in the 80s. And it really made an impact in my life. You know, what do you think the future is going to look like for Christian radio, for religious radio? A lot of people say, well, radio is dying. You know, there are other forms of getting news and information out there. What's your take on that?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, there are other forms. And, you know, digital has come along. And there's all kinds of things, the Internet and everything. We have 6.5 million likes on Facebook. I think there's nobody that comes close to that.

Todd Starnes: Those are like Obama numbers. I mean, that's really popular.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, and, you know, having an opportunity to communicate with that many people, that is wonderful. There are probably people in this room, when I left USC and academia, and opened a little two-room office and announced that I was going to do a radio program, there were 34 outlets, 34 stations that gave me airtime to start that. And I don't know, anybody here, one of those 34?

Todd Starnes: Right over here.

Dr. James Dobson: Right there. And over there. I want to thank you all for standing with me for that long. You didn't really know me. A lot of you didn't at that time, and we had to get acquainted. I do believe in Christian radio. I believe it's going to endure, even with the other forms of communication. I think that what I love about it is that Jerry and I were talking about this yesterday. You go to the U.K., and they have a few radio stations, but not like we do here at NRB. And as a result, there's no connection between the Christian people. They don't know what's going on. They don't know where the threats are. They don't know where the victories are. We are blessed here to have a thriving NRB, and I really appreciate and honor the people who have done this and Jerry among them.

Todd Starnes: Dr. Dobson, I know that Jerry wants to come up. We have a very special presentation for you, just another way to honor you and this incredible milestone of 40 years in broadcasting. Jerry.

Jerry: You know, we talk about branding. I've been saying this two or three times here at NRB. NRB is a brand, but there are certain broadcasters

that become a brand, and it's that kind of a brand that we are very proud to be associated with, you know. So Salem is a brand, Bott is a brand and we're very proud of those and I'm just here to say today, Dobson is an NRB brand we're very proud to be associated with. And you may not know it, but 40 years ago he began broadcasting and this is kind of quirky, but I know you like basketball. And I thought, you know, I want to do something here. And I'm not sure you're an Orlando fan. Dr. Leininger didn't like this. He wanted a Spurs, but we bought you an authentic Orlando jersey, all right, here.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my goodness.

Jerry: And we've got some of the NRB leadership and broadcasters. I see Dr. Erwin Lutzer's name. I see June Hunt. I see Dr. Jim Leininger and Colby and Nina May. And I even signed it and John Carley. And what we want you to do, though, is to know we are proud that you've been with us for 40 years. We love you, and we stand with you. God bless you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a gift to look back on a life that pointed so many people to Jesus Christ and to the God-given importance of the family. You've been listening to a celebration of Dr. James Dobson's 40 years in broadcasting, at least at the time of this recording. And today here on Family Talk, we have been sharing this again with you today as we mark the one-year anniversary since Dr. Dobson went home to be with the Lord. Now, if you'd like to hear this program again or share it with someone who was shaped by Dr. Dobson's ministry, visit drjamesdobson.org. Or if it's easier, just use those initials jdfi.org.

In his final days, Dr. Dobson made his wish clear. He did not want the ministry to end simply because his time on earth was through, and so we are carrying his legacy forward. The principles Dr. Dobson taught are biblical, which means they are eternal, and they are as practical today as ever before. We invite you to partner with us to help preserve and promote the institution of the family, to introduce as many people as possible to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to defend the sanctity of human life and religious freedom. When you make a donation of any amount in support of our ministry today, we want to thank you for that tax-deductible contribution by sending you a copy of our legacy edition of Dr. Dobson's Best of Broadcast collection. This is a six-CD set that we prepared right after Dr. Dobson went home to be with the Lord. And this legacy edition includes some surprises, like the first-ever edition of the Family Talk broadcast from May 13th, 2010. It also features Dr. Dobson's final words spoken in the studio, as well as the final interview he ever recorded and some of his highlights, including interviews with Joni

Eareckson Tada, Victor Marx, and more. When you make a contribution of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today, we will thank you for that contribution by sending you a copy of the legacy edition of our Best of Broadcast collection. So reach out to a member of our constituent care team right now by phone. You can call them at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. If it's easier, you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Or if it's easier, use our secure website at jdfi.org.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thank you for remembering the life of Dr. Dobson with us today and for standing with this ministry as we carry his legacy forward into the future. And be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust for the family you love.

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

Dr. James Dobson: What causes a child to be what's known as a slow learner?

Roger Marsh: Here's today's Dr. Dobson Minute with Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: It's now believed that there are enzyme systems in the human brain that must be activated very early in life or else the opportunity that they provide is lost forever. Mental stimulation is the mechanism by which this activation occurs. That's why it's so important for a baby and a toddler to be talked to and cuddled and given interesting and colorful toys and later on exposed to good books and puzzles and taken to exciting places. Those boys and girls who are deprived of this kind of rich environment may be learning impaired for the rest of their lives. The bottom line is clear. It's our responsibility as adults to see that every child receives the nurturing and the stimulation needed to ensure proper brain development.

Roger Marsh: For more information on this topic, visit drdobsonminute.org.