Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Bold Challenge to Keep God First
Guest(s): Anne Graham Lotz
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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. I'm Roger Marsh. When a ministry moves from one generation to the next there's a real danger of drifting away from the very thing that gave it life. Well, Bible teacher Anne Graham Lotz knows that danger all too well. And on today's Family Talk broadcast, she brings a loving caution to all of us. Drawing from the opening verses of the book of Romans, Anne calls us back to the main thing, our love for Jesus, and the gospel that we are sent to share. Now, she first presented this message to friends gathered in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute just a couple weeks ago here in Colorado Springs. So listen closely because this word is for you on today's edition of Family Talk.

Anne Graham Lotz: This is a caution. This is a, it's not as strong as a warning. It's just a caution, okay? That so many times when a ministry goes into the second generation, it starts to drift. And I can use Old Testament examples. Do you remember Joshua, who just was such a warrior? They, you know, led the children of Israel into the promised land, and then he turned it over to his son-in-law, Othniel. Othniel, as long as Othniel was alive, the people served the Lord. When he died, then the nation of Israel went down. And if you remember David, man after God's own heart, greatest king other than Jesus that the world's ever seen, and David left his legacy to Solomon. Solomon started out strong, and then he drifted, and he went south until the kingdom was torn in two. So those are just a few examples. The New Testament example that I'm not going to base the message on, but I'd share with you, is the Ephesian church. And the Ephesian church was founded by the apostle Paul. It was pastored by the apostle John. When it moved into its second generation, Jesus wrote the Ephesian church a letter. And you'll find that letter in Revelation chapter two. And Jesus starts out applauding the Ephesian church and says, I know your deeds. I know your hard work, your perseverance. You're doing more now than you did at the first. You can't tolerate wicked men. You hate what I hate. And then in verse four, He said, but I have something against you. You've lost your love for Me. So I don't know how that happened. My guess, personally, from my own experience, is that they were busy, busy, busy serving the Lord with a bright future, a lot going on, and they just got caught up in it until their work was put before their worship. And Jesus rebuked them for it, called them to repentance. He wants your worship. He wants your

love more than all the things you do for Him. So I want to challenge you in this message to stay focused on the main thing. I'm going to take the message from Romans chapter 1. So this is Romans chapter 1, the first six verses, and then I'm going to touch on verse 16. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, the gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures regarding his son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David and who the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the son of God by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through him and for his namesake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. And then I'm going to tuck in verse 16. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Pray with me for a moment. Father, we bow before You now in awe of who You are, Your greatness, Your glory, and the fact that from the beginning of creation, Lord, there's that thread all the way through human history of Your love for us and the gospel message. And we don't want in this day and time, at the end of human history as we know it, lose our focus. We don't want to drift from the main thing. So I pray that, that we would be focused on You in these last days, that we wouldn't get distracted. We wouldn't get excited with all these things that are thrown at us. We wouldn't get so busy that we lose our love for You. So we commit this time to you. I'm asking for Your blessing on the message, Lord. Speak through it to the hearts of those who are here. And we give you the glory and we praise you because we know when we ask for blessing, You're going to give it because we're asking in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen.

So Paul starts out. And in this passage, I see two things that he's encouraging us to stay focused on. And one is to stay focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of sharing the gospel, but then secondly, to stay focused on the cross. So let's just look first of all at the fact that he's challenging us to stay focused on Jesus, on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says in verse one, “Paul, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, a servant of God.” And I love the way he describes his relationship because it's a beautiful way to describe it. A servant with someone who was available for his master's use 24/7. He was submissive to his master's will. He was obedient to his master's word. He was attentive to his voice. And Paul said, first of all, his first calling. And I heard, you know, it's been said that there's not a first, second, third calling. I've heard it said that we're called to do God's will. Listen to me. Can I just say something? Doing God's will is not a call, that's a command. A calling is a command with your name on it, okay? And I believe He's called us first. This is our priority; we're called to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So sometimes in our business, we can get distracted from the main thing, that our purpose is to just know Him, to enjoy Him, to love Him, to obey Him, to serve Him. But it's Jesus that we're called to.

Several years ago, it's been quite a few years ago, the Lord took me through what I would describe as an Isaiah 6 experience. And every time I opened my

Bible, a verse would leap up, and I was convicted of a sin I didn't even know I had. And it went on for seven days, one sin after another. I stayed on my face. I wept. I repented. And then at the end of seven days, it was as though the Lord said, you know, He was finished for that time. So I asked him, are you sure? Because I don't want to go through this anymore, you know, anytime soon. And He indicated He was through for that time. And then I was, I felt. Like I had a bath on the inside. You know, I felt clean on the inside. But to be honest, I felt very spiritually weak and inadequate and unworthy. And I was in ministry. And I had all those layers of sin I didn't even know were in my life. And so I told the Lord, how can I go back on a platform? How can I stand in a pulpit and tell people about You and to get right with You when I'm such a sinner? And so I told him, I said, Lord, I need a recall. I need You to recall me into ministry. Is this really where You want me to be? And He took me to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 9, and I'm going to put my name in it. “Anne, you're called to fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.” And I thought, you know, I can do that. My first calling, my priority is fellowship with Jesus. So every morning I get up and I spend time with Him in prayer. Every morning I get up and I spend time with Him in His Word. Not just reading it for facts and information, but reading it to hear Him whisper to me through the pages. How's your fellowship with Jesus? When do you spend time with Him? Just one-on-one. Not preparing to give a message out or prepare a Sunday school lesson or to answer a Bible study question, but just to spend time with Him. So don't lose your focus. And I would suggest, and this is for you personally, at the beginning of every week, Monday morning. I have a room set aside in our office that's just for prayer. And the staff comes together early, about 30 minutes before the work begins. And we just have a time of prayer. It starts out with a few Bible verses that are read, and then a time of worship, and then a time of requests. And it's that. It's not discussion. It's just prayer. And then every morning during the week, they have a devotional time as the staff just to keep our focus on the main thing. The core of my being is my relationship with Jesus. I've come very close to losing that first love in the business. And that's a whole other testimony I won't share with you. But when you've been in love with Jesus and you've wandered from it and you've lost it, as Revelation 2 says, it's a long way down. And then you just start going through the motions and you're gutting it out. And just let this be a recall. Recalling you to fellowship with Jesus from your love for Jesus first.

We're called first to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, but for the purpose of making Him known. And Paul says, set apart for the gospel of God in verse 1. And Paul was set apart to make Jesus known to the Gentile world of his day. So I know you know his testimony, but he was Saul of Tarsus, Pharisee of the Pharisees, highly educated. And when Jesus was crucified, raised, ascended, and Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given, then the church just exploded in Jerusalem. And Saul of Tarsus, who was zealous for God's name and for holiness, he was incensed. And so he started persecuting the church. And he was there when Stephen was dragged outside of Jerusalem and stoned to death. And Saul of Tarsus held the cloaks of those who were throwing the stones. And after that, he just was in a rage. And he went through Jerusalem and he dragged people out of their homes and he was putting them in prison, putting some to death.

And then he heard that some Jesus followers had gone up to Damascus. So he got the letters from the authorities and he went up to Damascus to get those Jesus followers. And you know the story. On the Damascus road, that bright light shone, blinded him. He fell on his face. And he gives the testimony in Acts chapter 26, verses 15 and 16. “He heard from Heaven a voice saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ And then Saul asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ‘I am Jesus, whom you're persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up. Stand on your feet. I've appeared to you to appoint you as a servant.’” You see that he didn't forget, this is Acts 26 when he's about to go to Rome and lose his life, but he still remembers his calling, right? He was called first to be a servant, called to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he said, not only called to be, Jesus said you're appointed as a servant, but then you're appointed as a witness to make Jesus known. So that was Paul's calling to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and then to make Him known. So this is a point I'll just make to you personally, that the moment, and Saul of Tarsus, as you know, became Paul the apostle. Okay, I don't think I have to explain that, but just the moment he was converted, he was called. The moment he was converted, he was called first to be a servant, just in that personal relationship with Jesus, and then to make Jesus known as a witness. Have you been converted? At that moment, you also were called, called to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, called to make Him known.

This became very personal for me. I can remember the time, it was 1974, I was pregnant with my third child. My husband and I were invited to the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland. And we went there and we heard amazing speakers. They gathered hundreds of evangelical leaders from around the world. And the challenge made to them was that they would take the gospel into the whole world. So it was just to, you know, complete that great commission. And it was great. And as I got on the plane and I went home, I began thinking about it. You know, there was a lot of work that went into that. That was a lot of organization. It took over a year to set that up and to find all those people. And that took a lot of money to put that on. And then came the thought, this is how the Spirit starts to whisper to me in my own thoughts. But it's like, you know, if average Christians like me in America were sharing the gospel with our neighbors, we wouldn't need a Congress on evangelism, at least in America. And then the whisper was, Anne, when have you shared the gospel with your neighbors? And it scared me to death. And I got home because I never had. And before I lost my nerve, I picked up the phone. I called my neighbors, invited them for coffee. They all came to my house for coffee. So they filled the living room. And we sat there for an hour talking about babies and diets and what was on sale. And finally, I didn't even make a transition. I was so scared. I just blurted out. Well, I had invited them, and I just shared the gospel. And one of my neighbors, she just ran right out the door. And then the others looked at me, and they talked about their little Bibles that they hadn't been reading and the church they went to. And it was a disaster. But let me tell you something. Within two years, every single one of my neighbors came to faith in Jesus Christ. So there is power in the gospel. So don't be afraid to share it. And you can share it and make a mess of it like I did, but God still takes what you say, and He takes

the truth, and it can impact people's lives. So that command to go into all the world and take the gospel became a call in my life in Lausanne on my way home, that I wanted to share the gospel with my neighbors, and the Lord blessed it, and that really launched me into ministry, and I won't go into that now. But we're called first, I believe, to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, keep the fire of love for Him burning in your heart. And then for the purpose of making Him known, sharing the gospel between your own two feet. The James Dobson Family Institute would be a major strategic effort to reach the world with the gospel in a way that is unique. It's just with families and parents and children. But for the purpose, not just of telling them how to handle a baby that's lost his temper, but the purpose of telling them that there's someone greater than they are that can come alongside and help them and tell them about Jesus. Jesus loves the little children. And Jesus loves parents of little children and grandparents of little children. And so for the Institute, stay focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of making Him known, using the tools that He's given you in such an incredible way.

And then the second, his mission was, his message was the gospel. Well, verse 1, verse 2, verse 9, verse 15, verse 16, verse 17, it was God's gospel. His message was the gospel. And he said in verse 2, it's the gospel he promised beforehand through the prophets. That's the Old Testament. So the gospel is not a new idea. The gospel is God's idea. Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, that very obscure promise when Adam and Eve, just before they were removed from the Garden of Eden, and God said He's going to send the seed of a woman, and women don't have seeds, right? So that was a prophecy of a virgin birth, the seed of a woman who would come and he would crush the serpent's head, his heel would be bruised. It's a prophetic pointing out to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, virgin born, whose heel would be bruised at the cross. But when He died, when He rose again, when He ascended into Heaven, He crushed the head of that old serpent. So yes, Satan doesn't know he's defeated, but his power has been broken at the cross, the power of sin and death has been broken at the cross and the resurrection. So, yeah, amen. And that was Genesis 3.15. And you go on through to Deuteronomy, and God told Moses, “I'm going to raise up a prophet like you, not who will deliver my people from bondage to slavery, but bondage to sin.” And then you go on, and you can go through the Old Testament, but the more familiar ones in Isaiah 9, that “unto you is born a child, unto you a son is given. His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father. Of his reign there'll be no end.” And Isaiah 53 tells us that he's going to be a lamb who would be slain and by his wounds we would be healed, that he would bear our iniquities on himself. And Jeremiah 31:11 is not a familiar one, but it's a dramatic one. When God promised that He would make a new covenant with His people. And Jesus, the night He was betrayed, He took the cup that represented His death. And He said, this is the blood of the new covenants. Because there's a new covenant. And it's the blood of Jesus. Yeshua, our Messiah. Paul never forgot His message. It was the gospel. And so I would challenge you personally not to forget the gospel either, that that is our message, because can I just tell you, and I don't want to be offensive, okay? But it's the truth. I know Dr. Dobson was passionate about eliminating abortion,

and we are too. So am I. Not just abortion on demand, abortion, period. We can do other things. We can eliminate abortion. We can eliminate nuclear weapons. We can clean up the environment. We can, you know, do the things they're calling on today. All of those things we need to work for. And you can clothe the naked and house the homeless and feed the hungry. And we need to work on those things too. But listen to me. Every single person you help will go to Hell without Jesus. So when it comes to coming alongside, parents and grandparents and helping them manage their children and raise their children in a godly way. Please don't forget that you can help them handle a child's tantrum and do some of these other things, but it's got to be more than that. You've got to put in the gospel. You've got to tell them how their children can be safe for eternity by putting their trust in Jesus. So I just challenge you to stay focused. on the purpose of sharing the gospel. So Paul never forgot his message, never got off mission, and aren't we glad?

So can I just tell you, what is the gospel? I'm so glad you asked. Don't we love to just stand in awe of it that God so loved us, you and me, that He gave His one and only son that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Can I just point out, if you do not believe, you will perish, spend eternity separated from God. So when you're born into, you know, physically born, you're born with a sin nature. And as you just go through life, you can become very successful, you can become prominent, your name can be known, you can write books, you can be on TV, you can have a powerful position, or you can just be a nobody. But if you just go ahead, in life, the way you were born, you're just going to cruise right into Hell. God doesn't condemn anybody. It's our sin that condemns us. God doesn't condemn us. God loves us so much that he sent his own son to save us from judgment and Hell and to save us from our own sin, forgiving us at the cross. So there, Jesus said, In John 14: 6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” No one. No Jew, no Muslim, no Baptist, no Buddhist, no atheist, no agnostic. No one will come to the Father except through Jesus. So many ways to Jesus, there's only one way to God. Jesus is the only way. Acts 4:12. His only name given under Heaven among men whereby you can be saved is just the name Jesus. But as many as received him, John 1:12 says, “You receive him, you believe on his name, you receive the right to become a child of God.” So I don't ever want to get over the wonder that I'm saved, that my sins are forgiven, that Heaven is my birthright. And I want to share that with others who have no idea. That God loves them so much that He sent His own son to save them. So stay focused on the message. The message is the gospel. And I think you're going to have temptations to take His messages all that broader and better and bigger. And I don't know how the temptations will come. But do not compromise the gospel. Do not water it down Those who honor God, He will honor. So stay true to the gospel.

Roger Marsh: Amen and amen. Stay focused on the main thing. That was Anne Graham Lotz's challenge to all of us, to keep our love for Jesus first and to never back away from the gospel. You've been listening to Anne Graham Lotz today here on Dr.

James Dobson's Family Talk. And if you'd like to hear this program again or share it with a friend, I encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are looking to the future and our mission hasn't changed. We are here to strengthen marriages and families and to introduce as many people as possible to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And your partnership is what keeps this work moving forward. When you give to support this ministry, you help make sure that the next generation hears the same unchanging truth that Anne Graham Lotz pointed us to just a moment ago, that there is hope, forgiveness, and salvation in Jesus' name. Your donation of any amount makes a real difference. So you can make that contribution online today when you go to drjamesdobson.org. If you prefer, you can send your tax-deductible donation through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or just use those initials, JDFI for short. 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 Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening 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.

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