



Dear Friends

Shirley and I have come now to our final hours on the staff of Focus on the Family. I have been given the privilege of writing to say goodbye to our friends and colleagues across the nation and around the world. By the time this letter reaches your home, our era within this beloved ministry will have drawn to a close.

As you can imagine, this is a very nostalgic time for us as we prepare to leave. One night last week, Shirley and I “walked the halls” of our campus here in Colorado Springs, after all the staff and visitors were gone. A million memories flooded through our minds on that tearful stroll. I thought about the day, nearly 18 years ago, when I walked through a half-finished structure in what would become the Administration Building. I stood where the studio would be located, and marked the dimensions of the boardroom. Then I watched as the edifice took shape, steel on steel and brick by brick. A short time later, we dedicated the campus to the Lord before a gathering of 15,000 friends and associates. Seven “Lesbian Avengers” protested across the street on that day. Can you guess what *The Denver Post* chose as the headline for their account of our celebration?

As we meandered through the buildings last week for perhaps the final time, we looked at each photo that decorates the walls. People have always been the centerpiece of the décor. I am pictured there with a much younger Billy Graham, and the late Bill Bright, Adrian Rogers and Tony Snow. In another portion of the building, we see Oliver North, Chuck Swindoll, Joe Gibbs, Darrell Waltrip and many more colleagues. My dear friend Chuck Colson is also represented, as are three U.S. presidents, Ronald Reagan—George H.W. Bush—and George W. Bush, during their time on the world stage.

Shirley and I are also shown standing beside Prince Charles on a recent visit to his private home in the Cotswolds, UK. There is a photograph of Sean Hannity, taken the day he came to speak to our staff and talk to our radio listeners. Memorabilia from the past 33 years are arranged in glass cases in the Welcome Center, some of it crystal and some bronze. My grandfather’s gold pocket watch is there, as is a football autographed by every member of the national champion USC Trojans in 2003. Quarterback Carson Palmer’s signature has become faded by the afternoon sun.

A photograph of the crew of the shuttle Columbia is shown just before its launch into orbit. How tragic it is that every one of those astronauts died on the shuttle’s descent to earth, including the commander. They had carried with them a Focus on the Family cap, given by me to Commander Rick Husband shortly before the blast off. A charred piece of that cap was found on the plains of Texas and is now on display in our Welcome Center.

Hanging in the “chapelteria” are 17 colorful silk hoods from colleges and universities that awarded honorary doctorates to me through the years. Each item on this Grand Tour evokes a story, an experience, and a memory of great friends whom we cherish.

Shirley and I returned to our offices after the “walk about,” where the packing process was about to get under way. Valued books would soon be placed in boxes, and my father’s paintings taken down in preparation for the move. Pictures of our daughter, son, daughter-in-law, and grandson were still in their places. On the wall above my couch is a large painting of Sir Winston Churchill, given to me by the board of directors during the dedication of our new campus in 1993. The remnants of many years are scattered there, each one neatly folded and lined in gold.

Our ministry began with the first radio broadcast on March 26, 1977. I had just resigned as an associate clinical professor of pediatrics at the University of Southern California School of Medicine and as a member of the Attending Staff at Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles. Academia had been my professional “home” for 17 years, and it was a scary thing to walk away. Our lives were about to take a dramatic turn. Then, like now, we had no idea where the future led. We leased a two-room office in Arcadia, Calif., hired a half-time secretary (Mrs. Dee Otte) and began broadcasting with co-host Mrs. Flo Schmidt. Immediately, an avalanche of mail and calls came pouring in, as we struggled mightily to respond to so many personal requests. And Focus on the Family had only just begun.

The Focus on the Family film series was released on September 15, 1979, which turned our lives upside down. It was eventually seen by more than 80 million people around the world. Within eight years, we had 500 employees and were heard on more than 400 radio stations. What breathless days those were for us. The ministry grew steadily to a staff of more than 1,400 dedicated people on an 80-acre campus in Colorado Springs. I felt personally responsible for every division of the ministry, and worked tirelessly to protect its integrity.

As you know, my father had a profound influence on me during my early adult years. Let

me tell you about a critical decision he helped me make in late 1977. I had been trying to decide whether to continue broadcasting on radio or to concentrate on television. TV was an attractive option for me. I had appeared regularly on network shows while I was at USC, and once went to New York City to make 17 guest appearances in three days. I participated in five telecasts of the Barbara Walters show, “Not For Women Only,” along with another guest, Dr. Benjamin Spock. We talked about the discipline of children on those days. Believe it or not, we both recommended the judicious use of corporal punishment when appropriate. I was also the “mystery guest” on “*What’s My Line*.” Soon, I received a grant to videotape 26 shows in Phil Donohue’s studio in Chicago. Those were heady days for us as the media of television and radio vied for my attention.

As was usually the case when I had an important decision to make, I turned to my dad for counsel. We had a telephone conversation in late November to discuss what I should do. We talked again in early December, when my dad again brought up the issue. He said, “I have been praying about the question you asked me, Bo.” (That was his pet name for me.) He continued, “I really believe your emphasis should be in radio.” We talked about his reasons and I thanked him. Then we moved on to other subjects.

I accepted my dad’s advice, as usual, and radio became my great passion. As it turned out, that was my final conversation with my father. He died suddenly of a heart attack a few days later, and I was deprived of his marvelous wisdom and prayer support for the first time in my life. That forced me to look toward heaven for guidance and direction.

Another critical moment came in March of 1983. Marty Reubenstein, president of Mutual Broadcasting Company, called and asked me to come to his office in Washington, D.C. When I arrived, he said he wanted me to do a two-hour radio show with Larry King. I did as he requested and worked with Larry for the first time. Afterward, Mr. Reubenstein offered me a radio program like Larry’s, and promised that if I would accept it, he would make me a very wealthy man. We decided to air a two-hour program as a trial balloon on March 25, 1983. It was sponsored by Purex®, and was heard coast to coast. The program was successful, and Reubenstein confirmed that his offer was mine for the taking.

What a dilemma! If I accepted the assignment, I would have had an audience of millions of listeners in many countries. It meant, however, that Focus on the Family would have been dismantled and my staff dismissed. We would have closed up shop. We stewed and prayed about the decision, and eventually concluded that my place was in Christian radio. I declined the offer and remained at Focus. I have never looked back.

That next year, 1984, was a very exciting time for us. I was invited to consult with President Ronald Reagan in the White House about the institution of the family. He then appointed me to three national commissions in rapid succession, the first dealing with juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, the second was to study the scourge of pornography, and the third was focused on teen pregnancy prevention. Membership on five more commissions and advisory boards were to follow in subsequent administrations.

Well, I won’t bore you with more stories about my years at Focus on the Family. Suffice it to say that, as Frank Sinatra used to sing, “It was a very good year.” Actually, there were to be 33 of them. Every one contained memories that endure in my mind today, and I am filled with gratitude. Our Heavenly Father has blessed us abundantly.

Now as the final hours at Focus are approaching, we find ourselves heading into an entirely new venture. We are starting a ministry called Family Talk, featuring a national radio program called, “Family Talk With Dr. James Dobson.” We have leased a beautiful little building in Colorado Springs, and have assembled a highly talented team that has chosen to make this journey with us. You can contact us by visiting www.MyFamilyTalk.com or by writing to us at Family Talk, 540 Elkton Drive, Suite 210, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80907.

Our announced plans for the future raise two questions that many people are asking. First, why are we leaving Focus and second why are we starting a new ministry? The answers to both are to be found in divine leading. As King Solomon wrote in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for all things under the sun.” The Lord has made it clear that this is the time to leave Focus and recalibrate my own ministry. As for the new ministry, Shirley and I are convinced that there is still a “call” on our lives and we feel led to respond to it. Three decades ago, I was given a message and a mission. They continue to burn within me today, although God’s specific assignment is changing.

The gentle nudge to release the reins began eight years ago. I stepped down as president in 2003 and passed along administrative authority to Don Hodel. Then Jim Daly succeeded Don two years later. In February 2009, I resigned as chairman of the board. Now, we are completing the three-stage process and I am moving on. The story is as simple as that. I don’t want to be like the pastor who resigns from his pulpit but remains in the pew. That is usually not a good idea. It is better for him (and me) to work in another part of the vineyard. Besides, Jim Daly and his excellent team are doing a fine job, and I am proud of them. Focus on the Family will continue doing its vital work, I pray, as long as God deems it necessary.

You may have seen one of the many articles in the secular press asserting that Family Talk will be in direct competition with Focus on the Family, and that there will be enmity between them. Not only are those reports contrived, the opposite is true. In fact, Focus is donating one million dollars to help Family Talk get established as a ministry. We are extremely pleased by this expression of generosity and Christian brotherhood, and intend to work together with Focus on the Family toward a common objective. Pray for us, if you will, as we seek to do the same work in a different setting.

As we prepare to leave the organization that has been the focal point of our lives, there are some people that I want to thank from my heart. At the top of that list is my wonderful wife, Shirley. She has been my companion, partner, friend, and sweetheart throughout this journey. She encouraged me at every turn, and graciously accepted the sacrifices and inconveniences imposed by national visibility and a burgeoning ministry. I love her more today than when we stood together at the altar as my dad asked the Lord to bless our union. This was his spoken prayer on that majestic night.

O eternal God: We bring Thee our children, Jimmy and Shirley. They were Thine but Thou in love didst lend them to us for a little season: to care for, to love and to cherish. It has been a labor of love and has seemed but a few days because of the affection we bear them. Fresh from Thy hand they were, in the morning of our lives. Clean and upright, but yet two separate personalities. Tonight we give them back to Thee - no longer as two - but as one flesh. May nothing short of death dissolve the union here cemented. And to this end let the marvelous grace of God do its perfect work!

It is also our earnest prayer for them, not that God shall have a part in their lives, but that He shall have the preeminent part; not that they shall possess faith, but that faith shall fully possess them both; that in a materialistic world they shall not live for the earthly and temporal alone, but that they shall be enabled to lay hold on that which is spiritual and eternal.

Let their lives together be like the course of the sun: rising in strength, going forth in power and shining more and more unto the perfect day. Let the end of their lives resemble the setting of the sun: going down in a sea of glory, only to shine on undimmed in the firmament of a better world than this.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,

Amen.

Those words concluded our marriage ceremony 50 years ago, except for one last comment. My dad ended by saying in his southern drawl: “Kisserjim.” On August 27th of this year, Shirley and I will celebrate the Golden Anniversary of that occasion. My father’s prayer has been answered abundantly. One of the highlights of our years together has been the development of Shirley’s prayer life. She has become an incredible woman of God, and I am very proud of her leadership with the National Day of Prayer. Her petitions on my behalf pulled us through some frightening trials and struggles. She was there praying fervently for me when I had a heart attack in 1990, and now, nearly 20 years later, my heart is stronger than it has been since the illness. I have the energy of a man 30 years younger, and am excited about the challenges that lie ahead. When I think of God’s great blessings to me, I am most grateful for the continued love and companionship of the woman I love. The late Adrian Rogers used to call her, “Shirley, goodness and mercy.” She is all that and more!

I also want to thank our grown children, Danae and Ryan, for their understanding of the calling that has been on our lives. It is not easy being the son or daughter of well-known parents – especially those who are engaged in a family ministry. Adolescence is difficult under the best of circumstances, but it is particularly burdensome for those in the glare of a ministerial spotlight. It illuminates one’s private world in an intrusive way, and some people delight in finding fault when the kids are trying to get their legs under them. Nevertheless, our son and daughter have grown up to be godly, caring adults who have made us proud.

There are others whom I must thank generously. In 1977, there were 34 managers of Christian radio stations that made airtime available for us as we prepared to launch a brand new broadcast. Most of them didn’t even charge us for this service. They took a chance on a guy they hardly knew. Many of those stations carry “Focus on the Family” to this day. Others came along later, creating a battalion of 1,500 stations and affiliated facilities across North America. Thank you, again, men and women of our network, for your prayers, support and continuing partnership.

I would be very ungrateful if I didn’t also tell you about the role the Ambassador Advertising Agency played in the formative years of our ministry. Al Sanders, the dean of Christian radio, and his son-in-law, the late Jon Campbell, came to my office in 1979 and said, “We know you can’t afford our services in representing Focus on the Family, but we are going to reduce our fees and put it on the map.” They were the architects of the network of stations that came together. I knew very little about Christian radio at that time, having been engrossed in medical research, writing and family counseling. Al and Jon advised me and shaped the ministry that was growing by leaps and bounds. They even came to our board meetings to help us make wise

decisions. I will always be grateful for their counsel and leadership.

It should not be surprising that when I began thinking about starting a new radio program last fall, the first person I called was Al. I asked him if he was willing to help me again. He hung a pause, and with a smile in his voice said, “In a heartbeat.” We are working together today.

I also want to express my deep appreciation for the staff of Focus on the Family and for their dedication to this great cause. Thousands of men and women came together at some point along the way. Anita Fuglaar is one of them. She joined my “team” as the second employee in 1978, and has worked for us continually for 32 years. What loyalty! A businessman told me once that he had never seen more gifted and hard working employees than those at Focus on the Family. It is true. Let me speak directly. Most of you could have earned much more money elsewhere, but you came to us for reasons other than financial reward. Thanks for praying for us and for this ministry, and for putting up with my foibles and shortcomings.

Our board of directors, past and present, also deserve our deep appreciation for their dedicated service. These are some of the finest people I have ever known. None of them had the time or energy to serve in this capacity, and yet they came together to provide the leadership that kept us on course. They have prayed for us and encouraged us through the years. One of them who has gone on to be with the Lord, Dr. Ted Engstrom, missed only one meeting in 25 years. He was literally dying when he attended his last board gathering, and required the assistance of his daughter to make the trip to Colorado Springs. Every time we faced a financial hardship, Dr. Engstrom said, “God has been with us in the past. He will see us through this time of need, too. Stay the course.” I did, and the Lord did. Thank you, men and women of the board. I love you all.

In conclusion, I must pause to thank our radio listeners and readers, who have stood with us through the past three decades. I’ll speak personally: Millions of you have “been there” for us time and time again. You have prayed for us and given sacrificially to keep us in the black. You are God’s gift to us, and we are grateful for your partnership. I wish I could give each one of you a hug, and maybe that will be possible, if not before, when we meet on Resurrection Morning.

We are planning a reunion in that beautiful city “just inside the Eastern Gate.” I offered that invitation in one of my 350 monthly letters, and a recipient wrote back to ask for directions to the Eastern Gate. I don’t really know, but we’ll find it together on the golden streets of heaven when we see the Savior face to face. What a glorious day that will be.

The guest of honor will be wearing a seamless robe, with eyes like flames of fire, and feet like fine brass. As we bow humbly before Him, a great voice will thunder from the heavens, saying:

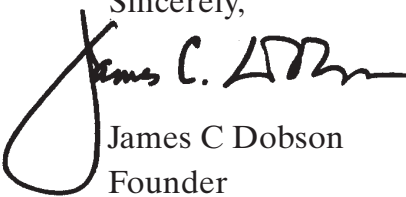
Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old things will have passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

And, again the mighty voice will echo through the corridors of time:

“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:16-17).

What a wonderful promise with which to leave you. Goodbye, my precious friends. I will see some of you within the confines of a brand new ministry. Until we meet again, God bless you all. Shirley sends her love and prayers.

Sincerely,



James C. Dobson
Founder

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