



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding My Way Home

Guest(s): John Houston

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hello everyone, and thank you for listening to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counselors and cohost of Family Talk.

Counselors often hear stories from people who grew up in broken homes and suffered from emotional and physical neglect. Living in that kind of a situation as a kid always leaves a mark, and people often deal with the emotional consequences of their hard childhood for the rest of their lives. Well, our guest today knows about that firsthand. We're going to be talking to John Houston of John Houston Custom Homes in Texas. When John was just 11 years old, his parents divorced, and not long after that, he and his 15-year-old brother were living by themselves with little or no adult supervision. We're going to talk about John's story today, but first, let me tell you a little bit more about John.

John Houston is the founder and CEO of the JH Family of Companies, including John Houston Homes, a premier builder of custom homes in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and Waco, Texas. And he has Trinity Oaks Mortgage, which was recently ranked by National Mortgage News as the number one best mortgage company to work for in the United States.

During his journey of building his businesses, John has stayed true to his core belief of putting God first, family second, and work third. He's been married to his wife, Tracy, for 27 years. They're the parents of two young adult kids, Austin and Ashtyn. John is also the author of the new book, *Finding My Way Home: A Journey to Discover Hope and a Life of Purpose*. It came out in April of this year, and that book is going to be the topic of our conversation today.

John, I remember as a kid, my third-grade teacher was Mrs. Thomas, and what I remember distinctly about her was the story time we had, she would read to us *Boxcar Children*, and we couldn't wait for the story. And I've learned a lot about life is all about narrative or story. And no doubt, every time you engage someone like you, you realize there's a lot of backwater. There's a lot of

narrative that kind of wires up who you are and why God has you in the place he does today. John, it's amazing. You have a phenomenal story, but John, it all starts with a broken childhood. You want to take us all the way back when your mom and dad divorced.

John Houston: Yeah, man, it's so true that we all have a story, every listener you have. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the Message version of Romans 4. When it says, when Abraham entered into what God was doing, that was the turning point for him. It was a God story. And I love that. And so when I look back on my childhood when I was 11 and my brother was 15, our parents sat us down, and that's when they told us they were going to get a divorce. And that, when our story kind of really began to change very rapidly. And so my brother, who was 15, ended up starting to raise me at that point because our parents moved to two different cities, and we basically stayed there-

Dr. Tim Clinton: So you guys were living alone? Is what you're saying.

John Houston: We were.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So you have this experience where mom and dad sat you down and say, "Hey, listen, the world's about to change." And then you guys basically wind up on your own.

John Houston: Yeah. And what's crazy about it is we've never even seen our parents fight. So we had no idea this was coming. And so they sat us down and told us that, and my dad moved to Houston, my mom moved to Nashville. And that's when my brother had... He had already just started a landscaping company, mowing yards. And so, we had to grow that and that's how we ended up making a living. Our parents would check in on us from a distance. But man, I give my brother a lot of credit for walking us through that.

When I was 16, my brother got married and moved to Dallas, and somehow miraculously, I continued to live by myself. After that stayed in school, continue to run that business. And that's how we took care of ourselves. And so, yeah, it was a crazy God story. When I look back on it, I'm like, I can't even say that I was on fire for God or even following God at the time. But that's what I love about the story that God's given us to ride as I can reflect back on that. And even in the midst of that crazy hard time, God was there, but I didn't even recognize that until years later.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Part of the story is you actually chose to live with your dad. You wound up living with dad. You and Mike did. Your sister actually went and lived with your mom. Little situation in this whole process was that it didn't work out in the new stepfamily. Dad decides he needs to move out. Your dad says, "Hey, you guys can have a home." So here your brother, Mike's 15, you're 11, you're kids, you're kids.

I was sitting back as I was reading the story. I was thinking about where'd the food come from? How did somebody help them with homework, the life lessons? And by the way, who talked to John? Who talked to Mike about what happened and who they are? Yet, you guys were resilient, and you never felt like you weren't not going to make it because you were pretty tough kids.

John Houston: In fact, when we were going over this book with my family, I even said that, man, my perspective was I don't even know where all this stuff was coming from. But my brother was really care of me and really raising me. And it's so crazy is that we can grow up in a world like that and not even realize it's not normal. So to me, this dysfunctional family to me felt normal. I didn't really know the difference because I had never really seen different.

And so, when my dad actually got remarried and ended up moving with his new family, it just became that we had to get up at daylight when we started mowing yards. My brother would take me, drop me off at school. I'd go to school throughout the day. He would go to school. He'd pick me up after school. We'd go work till dark. And we just started all over every day. And that just became our life and our cycle. And what we really thought was normal at the time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Something was wired deep down inside of you. We're going to work our way through it. We're going to work our way through it and trying to scratch out a home, I guess, a life. What did everybody in your neighborhood think? No doubt. Everyone knew you guys were alone. I had to get out through the town, if you will.

John Houston: Yeah, it did. Back then, you didn't have social media, and you didn't have all that stuff driving the drama. And so, interestingly enough, man, so many of those families that lived around us man, honestly looking back on it, they just loved on us. I didn't actually recognize that God had sprinkled those people throughout my life to help take care of us and just love on us where we were. And so sometimes I actually saw more of a nuisance than I did till years later, and I recognized that they were actually trying to love on me and help me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, when you really think about your story, your narrative, you should be a statistic. You should be over here in the disaster lane and headed for probably prison or something based on what was happening in your everyday life. In the midst of it. Let me keep going here just for a moment. Your older brother, Mike, a few years later, at age 20, gets married. You're probably what? 15, 16 years old. He gets married. He leaves, you're living alone all by yourself.

John Houston: Yeah, it's 16. And I think that's where I really started creating this loneliness inside. And so that's when I really started even putting more work and more effort into the work that I was doing and not even realizing that work actually and making money honestly actually became my identity. That's how I saw my value. I saw my worth based on how much money I could make, but praise God, we serve a God of reconciliation, redemption, and restoration. And honestly,

that's one of my hope for this book is that people can look back, and as they're reading my story, they can reflect back on their own story in a different perspective of even as I'm reading this book, God shows me in my own life that you were actually there in my life. And it just really begin to change my perspective of my whole life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I could see it as I'm going through your book. There's this tale you can just flow. You can see what's starting to wire up inside of a kid who's trying to scratch out a life in a world that doesn't make any sense, but God, but God, but God. Let's go to there's always a romance piece in every story, a little girl named Tracy. Tell us about her.

John Houston: Man, I met Tracy in church. She was probably one. I was probably five when we first met. And man, when my brother had left, as you said at 16. And by the time I was around 20 man, I was like, "God, there's got to be more to this life than just coming home by myself every day." And that's one of the first times I really remember crying out to God, going God, like, "Man, I need a family. I need something," and one of the first times I really remember hearing this still small voice in my head. And I felt like He said, "Call Tracy Miller." And I was like, dude, first of all, this doesn't even work because I'm 20, she's 16. The math doesn't work there. But I just felt this confidence.

So, I did, I called her and asked her out, and we actually got married Christmas break of her senior year in high school. We're married 28 years this year. And man, she had just been. Her whole family honestly has just been a rock in everything God has done in my life. And that's one of my favorite things about God. Well, there's so much I love about God. One of the things I love about it is Tracy's gifts are so different than mine, but men, they're so unique. I would not even be where I'm at today if it wasn't for the giftings and the heart that God gave her, and I just love that about God, how He knows what we need and when we need it, and I'll have to do is follow Him through the process, even when we don't even realize it sometimes that e's guiding us. He still is. And so for God to guide me to Tracy and then guide me to her, her family, and to see a home and what a godly home should look like, it literally changed the trajectory of my life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm following the themes here, church, you had a lot of Godly influences in your life. You have a family now and an experience of what it means to love and be loved, God's at work.

You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host, our special guest today, John Houston, a brand-new book out called *Finding My Way Home: A Journey to Discover Hope and a Life of Purpose*. John, I wanted our audience to hear this piece, in particular about your mother. Tell us about mom. She was on a pretty tough road while you were growing up.

John Houston: Man, she was on a tough road, and she grew up Unitarian and so she didn't have the foundation of Christ. And so, I was actually a junior in Bible college,

and for years, for almost 10 years, my mom would call me drunk and tell me she was going to kill herself. And as a little kid, that was so hard, and where the rubber really met the road for me was, is that there was one night that she actually called me about 1:30 in the morning and said, "Hey, Johnny," she called me Johnny. And she said, "Hey, I'm going to take my life tonight. I just can't do this anymore." And that's the night she actually took her life.

And I want to say for your listeners out there too, is that if that is something that you're struggling with or something you're having a hard time with, get professional help on that because there's nothing wrong with crying out for help and saying that you need that help because it's not something that everybody can understand. So I sympathize with those listeners, but I know there's hope in Christ.

So, with my mom's story, though, she called me and told me that. And that was the first time in 10 years that I said, "Mom, you know what? There's nothing I can do to help you. I've tried to help you for 10 years." And that's actually the night that she took her life. And I was the last one that she talked to. While at the same time, I'm having Christians that I knew calling me and telling me, "Oh man, I can't believe your mom went to hell because she committed suicide."

So, I've got all these things all from my childhood, all the way into this that I'm really battling with when it came to a relationship with Christ in the first place. And so it was that day that I said, "You know what, God, I'm done with you. And I'm done with your people because if this is how you love, and if this is how your people love, I don't have anything to do with you." And so I walked away from the Lord for a year and praise God that Tracy's parents specifically just loved us where we were. They just continued to love us where we were and allowed us to walk through that process, primarily me to the place where almost a year later, they asked us to go to church. And I was like, "Man, just to get them off my back, I'll go."

Go to church, and I remember sitting there. I couldn't tell you what the pastor said, but I remember God saying, "Hey man, I'm giving you time to mourn now you need to make a decision on whether you're going to follow me." And I literally ran to the altar, and I said, "God, forgive me." And that's really what really changed my life. And it was that day that I really believe I entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the thing is, I can look back and know that my mom was doing the best she knew how to do. She had never been tied any other way. And I know she loved me. And so it gave me a lot of hope in that too.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

If you're just joining us, John Houston is the founder and CEO of the JH Family of Companies, including John Houston Homes, a premier builder of custom homes in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and Waco, Texas, and also Trinity Oaks Mortgage, recently ranked by National Mortgage News as the number one best mortgage company to work for in the United States. He's the author of the new book, *Finding My Way Home: A Journey to Discover Hope and a Life of Purpose*.

John, you've learned it again, trust in His faithfulness, His goodness in your life, John, your businesses share a little bit about the miraculous story here as we look at, of course, again, the narrative here, you can see how you're pretty driven guy, but it's interesting to me that God has you doing something, building homes. In other words, it's like an imagery of the very thing you've always wanted. You're helping people create. That's kind of the mission you're on.

John Houston:

Yeah. I mean, that's what I love about it. I had graduated from Bible college and went to work for an investment company, and just a couple of years into that is when God told my wife and I to start a home-building business for two reasons, to reach people for Christ and give to the kingdom. And so that put us on this journey. We had to build a business plan, begin to pray about it. It was five years of praying and waiting for God to say, "Okay, now's the time to get to do it." But it radically began to even change our lives because our hope is helping people find their way home. And we want to do that by being a joyful, hope-filled, loving guide.

And so, one of the interesting things about home building is because it's one of the biggest purchases people will ever make in their life, they open up about everything. I mean, you have an opportunity to live life with people because it's going to take nine months to 12 months to build a house. So you get to know them, you get to know about their marriage. You get to know about their kids. You get to know their family history. There's so much that goes into building a house because they have this picture of their story that they want to have happen in that house. And we actually get to live life with them doing that. And man, that's what I love about it. It's so cool to me that God always takes me back. And He said, "John, remember, I never, one time told you to sell a house. You said, I told you to reach people of Christ and give to the kingdom, and the businesses are simply the tool that I'm using. They're the vehicle that I'm using for you to do that."

And so, when you see that, you can actually see that, like in our home building business, for example, we believe we have 60 touchpoints. We have 60 opportunities to share the love of Jesus throughout that process. So our salespeople, they have 10 opportunities. Our builders have 42 opportunities, and our closing, they have eight opportunities. So every person in the whole company has a part to play. And I love that because doesn't that represent the beauty of the body of Christ is whether you're a pastor, whether you're a business person, whoever you are, you play a huge role in the body of Christ because if we all do our part, then all of a sudden we can help lead people home, which is our eternal home. And we do that and all of a sudden look at the beauty and the product that comes out of that. It's life-changing.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

John, they say scars in life, things that are healed, but you have these visual reminders of what happened. I have a scar on my right arm from being pushed through a door by a neighborhood girl and cut my arm all the way down almost to my elbow.

John Houston: Oh, gosh.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But John, the healing there is what it's all about. One of the things you said in here, men tend to, again, I guess men and women do when we're broken, we try to overcompensate, we get lost in business. We get lost in a pursuit, maybe things that really don't matter. We become successful, "In the things that don't matter." But John, one of the things in here you recognize was that you never really learned how to love, and it kept drawing you back, drawing you back, drawing you back. I think this is really a message, the message probably of the broadcast today. Can you address that and speak to our listeners? Maybe someone who's out there right now lost, and the priorities are all wrong, John.

John Houston: Yeah, man, the story, the journey that God, I call it a God story because it's really God's story that he's written with my life. And when we reflect back on that, the thing that I didn't realize was I was really great at checking the boxes. Okay. I had my prayer time. I read the Bible. I went to church. I did these things. So I would check those boxes off of what I did. And it was years later, and I actually had two kids. And God actually spoke to me through somebody else and said, "You're a condemning manipulating father." I've gone to Bible college. I had an associate's in Bible, I had a business degree, everything I was doing, I was doing for Christ, but I was doing it all without love. And it was because I didn't know the love of the father.

And so, I was so great at living by law, but not by love. And so, God's had me on a journey for over the last 10 years. I think that's what a lot of your listeners, a lot of us, people that are living in this world, we don't realize that for God it's not about what we do for Him. He just wants a relationship with us. He just wants to love on us as a father. But because I didn't have a father's love, I didn't even know what that looked like. He wants to be our friend. He wants to walk this journey with us.

But literally, I've been on this journey for over 10 years of God, just trying to, "God, show me your love, teach me how you love." And it really has changed my life. So, what I say to your listeners is don't overcomplicate it, but just listen and hear the father tell you how much He loves you, but listen to Him all day long, because sometimes we can get so wrapped up in what we're trying to accomplish for Him, that we don't even realize the whole reason why He wants us to do that is so that people will know His love.

And it's really changed every area of my life. And so I don't want to send the message to your listeners either that I've got this all figured out. I'm telling you, this is a journey for life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're all on a journey. John, we really are.

John Houston: And that's what the Lord told me is, I'm like, "God, I just want to stand before you. And I want to hear you say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' And I

love you." And you know what the Lord told me? Is I felt like he said, "Son, why do you want to stop there? This is an eternal journey. It's not just there. So I'm going to continue to teach you, my love, from here through eternity. You're going to get to spend the rest of your life with me for eternity." And I'm like, "Man, what a great reminder. It's not a destination that we're getting to. It's a journey." So just a little bit every day, if you can just get to know God's love a little bit more, and then we can take that and teach other people. Man. It's life-changing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: For years Dr. Dobson taught that we often view God through the eyes of our own father, and to do a reframe, it's work. It's just like showing up every day, John. That's what I love about listening to your story. Let's close this way, Tracy and your two children, Austin and Ashtyn. What's God doing? What's it all about now?

John Houston: Yeah. What it's all about for us is that every one of us, myself, Tracy, Austin, and Ashtyn, we all have a story. There's part of that story that we're living as a family. But now that Austin is 23 and Ashtyn is 19, God's beginning to build their story for their family. And that's what God just continues to remind me. Today, my dad, who actually became the mayor of the city we live in, is a Christ-follower. My step-mom is a great woman of God and they live across the street from us. Tracy's parents live across the street from us. Great man and woman of God. Our son lives next door to us.

And so, I say all that to say, what God is doing is He's allowing each one of us to continue the redemptive story that He saves us, then we can enter into this reconciliation process where He makes us right with Him. And then He begins to restore what the enemy had stolen, what the enemy had broken, and that's what God is doing in our life. So we're nowhere from perfect as a family, but God continues to reveal us things that we need to work on. And we continue to work on those so that we know the love of Christ more. And I believe that's what God is trying to do with the whole family of God.

From the beginning of time until the end of time, we're in that reconciliation in a restoration process with Him after we come to know Him as Lord and savior, it makes me look at my wife, and it makes me look at my kids completely different when I realized that God, He's still working on me too. And I love that, but I see the hope in when I look back on what He actually already has restored, and it gives me the hope to go, "Okay, I haven't even seen the finish line of this. Let's continue to walk this story out with God and see what else he can do."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow. John Houston, building for others a sense of what you wanted as a child. What an amazing story. The book, again, *Finding My Way Home: A Journey to Discover Hope and a Life of Purpose*. What a delight John. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team at Family Talk. We salute you. We pray that God continues to lead, direct and bless you and your ministry and that calling that's on your life. Thank you for joining us.

John Houston: Dr. Clinton, you know if I could just wrap up with one thing and I hope I can say this without crying. I truly say this, out of everything that God has allowed me to do through this book, being on this show is probably the one that means the most to me. Because what you guys do, what Dr. Dobson has done for so many years, has impacted my life so much that I honestly cannot thank you guys enough. I'm humbled and honored that you guys would even give me the opportunity to just share what God has shared with me because you guys have poured so much into me over the years and you didn't even know it. But it has radically changed my life for Christ and I am just blessed and honored to be on here.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a delight to have you.

Roger Marsh: Well, that's it for today. We thank you for listening, but before we leave, I'd like to remind you that if you missed any part of today's program, go to our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org and listen to the entire episode streaming and on-demand anytime that's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Dr. Dobson is always there for you.

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