



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Grandparenting: A Higher Calling – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Jay Kesler

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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.

**Roger Marsh:** Hello, and welcome to Family Talk the radio home of Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. And today on the program, we're bringing you a very special interview. Now, this program has never been aired before here on Family Talk. It's something that we have curated from our vaults, an archival master, featuring Dr. Dobson and his good friend, Dr. Jay Kesler. Over the next three days, they'll be discussing grandparenting and its vital role to the institution of the family and to culture. Grandparenting is as much needed today as it was when this conversation was first recorded, probably even more so. I could tell you firsthand, Lisa and I are so busy right now leaning into the relationships we have with our grandkids, probably as busy now as we were when we were parents to our young ones ourselves. Now, let me tell you about Jay Kesler.

Dr. Kesler is the former president and chancellor of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. He graduated from Taylor in 1958 and is best known for his writings and radio work. He has served as preaching pastor of Upland Community Church, was president of Youth for Christ from 1973 to 1985, and was president of Taylor University from 1985 to 2000. Dr. Kesler is also the author of nearly 30 books, including popular titles like *Ten Mistakes Parents Make with Teenagers* and *Being Holy, Being Human, Dealing with the Expectations of Ministry*. Today, Dr. Dobson and his esteemed guest will be highlighting the undeniable influence of grandparents. Here now is our host, Dr. James Dobson with today's edition of Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Go back to 1978 in San Antonio, Texas. I addressed a group of about 3,000 people at Trinity University, Laurie Auditorium. On that morning, I started speaking. I think I talked all day about grandparents, and I read something that I had gotten from the staff newspaper, a newsletter that was put out by Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. I was on the staff at the time, and they had a little paper called "The Chatter." And a nurse by the name of Juanita Nelson, who has since retired, submitted a little piece called "What Is A Grandmother," written by a nine-year-old girl. I don't know who this little girl is, but I know that

she sure understands grandparents. So we're going back to 1978. I'm going to read this written by this little girl, this little unnamed girl.

She said, "A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own. She likes other people's little girls and boys. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys and they talk about fishing and stuff like that. Grandmothers don't have to do anything except to be there. They're old, so they shouldn't play hard or run. It is enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is and to have lots of dimes ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down, pass things like pretty leaves and caterpillars. And they should never say hurry up. Usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth and gums off. Grandmothers don't have to be smart, only answer questions like, why isn't God married and how come dogs chase cats? Everybody should try to have a grandmother because they are the only grownups who have time."

I think that's a great little piece. And it serves to introduce our topic today because we're going to talk about grandparenting with a man who knows where of he speaks. Dr. Jay Kesler is with us today, and he has nine grandchildren of his own. You don't look a day over 90, Jay.

Jay Kesler: That's true. Don't feel like it either.

Dr. James Dobson: We're delighted to have you with us to talk about such an important topic. Dr. Kesler has spent 30 years working with kids of all ages for Youth For Christ, has a bachelor of arts degree from Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, plus six honorary doctorates. Jay has written many books. One that we're going to talk about today is called *Grandparenting: The Agony and the Ecstasy*. That sounds like it might be about Michelangelo or something, but that's a great title. Jay is grandparenting all it's cracked up to be?

Jay Kesler: I said it's one of God's two or three really great ideas. It's really a good thing. But on the kind of serious side of getting this thing started, I got into it by discovering as I did family conferences around the country, that anymore grandparents were performing beyond the milk and cookies role that I had thought of here before. And so I began to do some research on the subject and really find that grandparenting is a very central thing.

Dr. James Dobson: With the disintegration of the family, at least in so many instances where there's a dysfunctional situation. And I'm told now that three million grandchildren are being raised by grandparents instead of by their parents. That has an awesome impact culturally when you think about it.

Jay Kesler: Yeah. And one of the things I was trying to establish in the book early on was that this is not a surprise to God. In fact, you knowing me, of course, know that I start always trying to find the Scriptural basis for what we're doing. And in the

Bible I found in one of the most ancient stories really that Lot for instance was a young man who was apparently orphaned early on, raised by his grandma and grandpa. Grandma died then. Grandpa kept him for a number of years. Then grandpa died. Then he was raised by his uncle, Abraham and suddenly began to dawn on me that throughout the Bible we have this pattern of God building redundancy into the human condition. That is every child has really six adults God has arranged to care for them, grandparents on each side and parents.

So, if the system works properly, someone of those six ought to be around to provide family for every child. And what I really discovered was an awful lot of people of grandparenting age today, my age, and a little younger, many of them young, by the way, really look at the empty nest, a way to get away from grandparenting and say, buying a bumper sticker for their RV that says we're spending our children's inheritance or something like that. And that's all funny enough and so on. But the truth of the matter is with all the woe in the culture over disintegrating families, the grandparents suddenly have that same role that they had in ancient times when wars and famine and so on did to them what Lot's family did to him.

Dr. James Dobson: Even though it's God's plan of redundancy, it's also a very stressful thing. When grandparents who thought they had that job done are now disciplining and training and guiding and doing homework, and then taking them through adolescence again with all of that, the implications. That's tough.

Jay Kesler: Anytime we babysit, any grandparent, they understand. It's grand when they come and grand when they go. You know why God gives small children to younger people. And yet one of the thesis of this book is to help Christians to evaluate this. I've talked to, I can't tell you how many dozens of grandparents in tears over the fact that they say, "Hey, we spent our whole life to try to get free. And now we find ourself doing exactly what you're saying, raising a toddler or something like this." And I said, "Wait a minute. You sit in church and keep saying to God, 'God, I want to be useful. I want to serve your kingdom. I want to find something to do. Give to the missionaries, become part of a ladies' fellowship or something.' Well, those are all noble enough, but it's there anything more important than the children in your own family?"

And so, in some cases I've seen grandparents suck it up and say, "Well, we're going to make another go at this." And they are wiser and they're more relaxed. And some of them do it very, very well. And so part of the purpose of the book was to encourage them to do this without sensing that God is gypping me in some that God is giving me meaning maybe, and maybe in some cases they can do it better the second time around than they did the first time.

Dr. James Dobson: Now we're referring to those situations where grandparents actually assume custody and raise those kids, but there's another whole category where your children with their children come home to live again. They rebound. The so-called "rubber nest." That all of a sudden, you have a house full again.

Jay Kesler: Yeah. And when think about who's responsible for this, I think families must understand that this is part of what God builds into the family. That grandparents have this role. And yet it's not all dysfunction of course. There are millions of families where grandparenting provides some other things. One thing I've talked about in this book at quite great length really is the role of grandparents to be culture carriers, to have a longer memory, to tell kids what it was like in a former generation and give them kind of a sense. I look on this as like David, when he stood in front of Goliath. He said, "The same God who was faithful in the past, that delivered me from the paw of the bear and the mouth of the lion, He delivered me from this uncircumcised Philistine." that is, God has been around a long while. He was faithful in the past. He's faithful now. He'll be faithful in the future. And I think grandparents have a long enough view to make that a convincing argument to young people.

Dr. James Dobson: As a child, I was blessed by some of the most wonderful grandparents. The role that they played in my life second only to my parents, but still having tremendous influence on me, especially from a godly perspective. I had a little grandmother weighed about 97 pounds that just lived in the presence of the Lord. And she just so able to communicate that to me and get me on my knees about everything when I was five, six, seven years of age. And that was a very important part of my childhood. You had some wonderful grandparents too.

Jay Kesler: Yeah. That's right. In fact, my grandfather, my dad's side, lived with us for many years when I was growing up as a boy. And so I think of one time really, boys and I had gone down the alley and we found a trash can with a hot plate in it. One of these flat hot plates. And if it had a cord plug on it, boys will try to figure out doesn't work. We sneaked in the garage and plug it in. Sure enough, it heated it up. So we were taking ants and sticking them on there and letting them try to run toward the edge. And before they get to the edge, they'd burn their legs off.

Little nice kids. And grandpa I know, came in and he stood there and looked ever so sad, and he just then gave us a little lecture about all creatures, great and small, and took us out in the alley and showed us an anthill and got down on one knee and showed us they're carrying these pieces of bread down this hole. And they organized and a little army of ants. And he didn't really scold us in the sense of making us feel like we were awful, but I'll tell you from that point on, I was not a stabber of frogs or a shooter of sparrows or whatever, because he had a reverence for life and a created order. And he made me know that a little ant was part of the idea too, though I didn't understand ecology in those days.

Dr. James Dobson: A poll that we took talked about adults and their parents. We asked people to write in and describe their relationship with their parents and what were the joys and frustrations. And I missed it all the way around and what I expected to come from that poll. I thought people going to in about in-law problems and complain about my husband's mother and father and so on. Instead, the number one complaint adults have about their parents is that they wouldn't

allow them to grow up. And they were still telling them how to peel carrots and stuff. You remember that? And the number two complaint was that the grandparents were not really interested in their kids. They were off into their own world. They were doing other things. That they didn't have the time. As that little girl said, "Grandparents are the only ones who have time."

They were complaining by saying, "My parents don't have time for my kids, and aren't interested." I'm going to now come forward a couple of more years, and we had a guest on the program whose first name was Florence, about grandparenting. And I don't remember her last name, but she brought a poem, and I dug it out right before we came in here, about what we're talking about. And the title of it is "Where Have All the Grandmas Gone?" She said, the author said, "In the dim and distant past when life's temple wasn't fast, Grandma used to rock and knit, crochet, tat and babysit. When the kids were in a jam, they could always call on Gram. In that day of gracious living, Grandma was the gal for giving. But today she's in the gym exercising to keep slim. She's off touring with the bunch or taking clients out to lunch, going north to ski or curl all her days are in a whirl. Nothing seems to stop or block her now that Grandma's off her rocker." That's the idea.

Jay Kesler:

Well, that's surely true. And yet I have a one course I teach, and it's a course in contemporary youth ministry. And I start with Timothy where Paul speaks to Timothy about his grandmother, his mother, and then himself. And so I try to go back three generations with these kids and help him understand how we got where we are as young people today and how youth ministry got where it's at and how youth culture. So I start out with an open-ended question. I say, "Tell me your parents' story, your father's story." And there will be silence. Then I ask them, "Tell me your grandparents' story." It'll be like popcorn. They'll say, "Well, my grandfather, he believes in hard work. He grew up in the Great Depression, or he was in the Second World War, and he knows something about patriotism." Or, "My grandfather feels there's no free lunches or whatever."

And they'll give me about 50 little pieces of folk wisdom that are immediately they identify with their grandparent. Then I go back to the parent thing and say, "Well, what's your dad's story?" And they're very, very quiet. And I've discovered that for some reason or another, there's kind of a skipped generation here. The parents of today's college students, own parents seem to be uncertain about many of the certitudes of life. And so then we get into, "What were your parents doing when they were you your age?" Well, we're in the middle of the sixties, we're in the sexual revolution, X percentage we're involved in recreational sex, X number of percentage we're in drugs and whatever. And so what we find is that these kids, a lot of, at least today's college students have to skip a generation to go back to any sense of certitudes. And I find this fascinating, and I think grandparents can by inserting some of the things they've picked up over time, can do something about the relativism of this particular culture.

Dr. James Dobson:

It's a sad commentary on this generation of parents. Isn't it?

Jay Kesler: Well, sad is the right word, I think. It's sad in the sense that I think for instance, one of the things the kids conclude is, "My dad doesn't want to be a hypocrite." That is, he was sexually irresponsible as a boy. Therefore, he doesn't want to tell me to be careful because he doesn't want to be hypocrite. At least I'm not a hypocrite. Or they are afraid to talk to me straight on about alcohol and drugs, because that was such a part of their youth, and they survived it after all. And so they just kind of get quiet on these subjects. And the kids are saying, "What is the real story here?"

Dr. James Dobson: Last summer, Shirley and I had an opportunity to visit the Normandy area where the landing occurred in June 6, 1944. And we went to the American cemetery there and went to the little chapel. And I mean, it was deeply moving. I just knelt there in that little chapel and wept and I walked back and forth and looked at all these crosses and the dates of birth of the men who were buried there, a few women, but mostly men. And they were 19, 17, 18, 21, 22. And of course the generation that produced those soldiers that died there, produced the generation that went into rebellion in the late sixties.

And I was just thinking that the young men and women who paid that supreme sacrifice, not just those who died there, but those who died on other foreign fields during World War II and those who survived but were separated for years and their lives were torn up. That generation produced the generation of kids that hated them, that despised them. They paid that price for our freedom and for the victory. And yet, they were absolutely rejected by their own children who threw over their values and mocked their values and mocked their God. It's just an interesting cultural thing.

Jay Kesler: Well, perhaps they were indulged. Sometimes people who paid such a price and lost their youth came back and decided that's not going to happen to my kids. Therefore, they had been raised on solid values. And then they said, "Well, I'm not going to have my kid working for a living. I'm going to provide this for them." It's the period that for instance the education became an entitlement for everybody and so on. And so in a sense, there was indulged generation there whose parents said, "I'm going to spare them this kind of problem. I was raised in the Depression. Then I went away to war and I've lost my youth. I'm going to let them have a real good one." Well, it may not be the best thing in the world.

Dr. James Dobson: It just doesn't work that.

Jay Kesler: Yeah. It doesn't seem to be. History has lessons to teach.

Dr. James Dobson: Jay, your book, *Grandparenting: The Agony and the Ecstasy*, deals with these practical things we're talking about. Let's focus on some of the suggestions and recommendations in this book. First of all, I'd like to know the background to it because it's my understanding that a survey of 1,000 grandparents was done or 1,000 people in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Jay Kesler: Yeah. We had a conference, a family conference, primary women's conference. And I told the women that I was going to try to do a book on grandparenting. And I'd like for them to dredge up out of their experience what their grandparents had contributed as significant others in their life. And I was amazed when I got the mail back, how powerfully grandparents had affected the value system of these people. In fact, grandparents were in some ways more important to them than parents. And so I collected a lot of this stuff and it was very helpful to write off of this in the grandparenting thing.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us what several things grandparents should be trying to accomplish with their grandkids.

Jay Kesler: Well, I talk about growing pains for instance. The fact that kids grow up pretty insecure. "Will I ever become a pretty young lady? Will I ever be a manly man?" Well, I about the importance of grandparents affirming these things over and over in the survey. The people said, "My grandma or my grandpa is the only person who ever really believed in me. They always said, 'Yes, you can do it. Go ahead and try it. You can do it. You're going to be something you're going to amount to something.'"

I'm encouraging grandparents here to do a lot of this affirmation of kids. That they need the assurance that yes, if you've lived a long time, yes, you will find a husband. Yes, you will be able to go to college. Yeah, you can pass. I did. That kind of stuff. Grandparents did a lot of that stuff. People have a lot of common sense really, but the literature I think is making people are afraid to do things. This been true. Jim, your, your book *Dare to Discipline*. I mean, who thought we shouldn't? I mean, doesn't everybody? Why do you have to make a case? But you did. The book became a national bestseller and became a real problem to a lot of people, modern social theory, because someone said dare to discipline. Well, basically you didn't teach people how to discipline. You affirmed something they already knew.

Dr. James Dobson: They also play a role in encouraging parents, don't they, in saying, now don't look too quickly for the person your child is going to be. This is really going turn out all right. This is-

Jay Kesler: Don't count the score at half time.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right. This is a phase. This is going to pass.

Jay Kesler: And to remind the parent that they went through this. A lot of times parents have selective memory too. The thing that makes a good old days is the good old days is a poor memory, and grandparents can remind their own children. "Hey, remember when you were going through this struggle when you were 17. Remember that boy that you fell in love with. And I didn't really think he was the right kind of boy and so on. And we are argued and you pouted and well, that's what she's going through. Back off. It'll be all right." Yeah. It's a very

important role of grandparenting. Not hands on, but affirmation, cheerleading, on the edge, assurance affirming this kind of role.

Dr. James Dobson: What role do grandparents play in second guessing parents? How far do they go in saying you're making a mistake there now that's really, you're being too harsh, or you're being too permissive. What advice do you have for grandparents?

Jay Kesler: Well, I've suggested in this book that be done very carefully, less to drive a wedge, and yet to is a time I think when serious things are happening to take a son or daughter of your own aside, away from their own spouse and in a quiet atmosphere. Simply say, "I've been observing this. I'm concerned about it. I'm sure you have your reasons, but here's something I'm observing." And I found in this survey that a great many parents felt they'd been helped that way. But on the other hand, this is like you and I are fisherman. So I use fisherman's metaphor. But if you've got a 10 pound bass on and you know you got a three pound line, you handle them in a certain way. If you got a 10 pound bass on, you got some piece of wire you fish with out in the ocean. You can horse them in the boat.

I think the thing I'm saying to grandparents is you always sense "I've got a 10 pounder on here with a three pound line," and you do this very carefully. It takes skill. You can't horse them in the boat, or they'll simply just feel you're interfering. Mom and Dad don't know, and so on.

Dr. James Dobson: A good memory crutch for me is A, but not O. Advice, but not ownership. You say, "This is what I would do. I think you're making a mistake here. There might be a better way to do this, but it's your child. And if you don't choose to take my advice, I accept that, because I had my day and this is yours." And you don't try to force it. There's a whole different attitude there.

Jay Kesler: There was one universal that ran through the whole survey that I found absolutely fascinating, humorous and Janie and I had to confess it's ours too. And it was that universally grandparents agree that grandchildren obey better when the parents aren't around. When they're in the grandparents' home and the parents aren't around, the kids do real well. As soon as the parents walk in the door, the dynamic changes and the kids start misbehaving and so on. And we struggled with this quite a bit. I talked to quite a lot of parents about this. And the conclusion was that many of them felt that they could not be themselves around their own parents.

They were so anxious to be the best parent in the world that whenever they were in their parents' house, first of all, they drive up in front of the house and warn the children, "Now, we're going to Grandma's house. I want you to behave." And everybody was, it's like standing ready to make a free throw, and someone calls time out to ice them, and they're iced when they come in like that. And so I suggest off of that, we can learn a real lesson. And that is to, in the home when the parents are there, this is the parents problem. Not your own.



Back away and let the parents do the discipline. Two people can't do it, because kids catch on this very, very quickly.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh boy, they'll play one against the other. Won't they?

Jay Kesler: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Jay, the title of your book again is *Grandparenting: The Agony and the Ecstasy* by Dr. Jay Kesler. And there's a lot of practical advice in here. We're not just talking about grandparenting. Jay is talking to grandparents about the very real world kind of problems that come up. And there's just an awful lot here that we need to talk about. We're going to do it by recording tomorrow. Thanks for making this long journey to be with us. And we'll plunge right back into your book in a moment or two.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk. And that was part one of Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Dr. Jay Kesler on the topic of grandparenting. As a grandfather myself, I found today's program especially helpful. It's good for us grandparents to remember that we are cheerleaders both for our grandchildren, as well as their parents, our adult children. We are in a unique position to provide encouragement, affirmation, and wisdom. So let's not take our role and responsibilities lightly.

To listen to any part of today's program that you might have missed visit [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. And hey, if you want to drop us a line, please write to us at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Zip code, 80949. I can tell you that Dr. Dobson loves to receive your letters and his team makes sure that each one is read. If you can find it in your heart to support the broadcast financially, we encourage you to please prayerfully consider making a gift to Family Talk. Together we can change culture and strengthen families for the future. Again, our ministry address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949. Well, that's it for today. Please join us again next time for part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Dr. Jay Kesler right here on Family Talk.

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