



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope- Part 1

**Guest(s):** Mark Gregston

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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:** I became a grandpa four years ago, and I have to say it has truly changed my life. I'll never forget the moment my daughter, Emily and son-in-law Brian called me to ask me over to their apartment. They said they had a gift for me. And when I opened up the box that they handed to me, out popped a bright red, smallest I've ever seen Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim jersey. Now, that's my favorite baseball team. That's Emily's favorite baseball team as well. When I pulled it out of the box and turned it around, what was written on the back was truly inspiring and just literally melted my heart. It said "Grandpa's fan since 2017." And that's when they told me that they were expecting a baby and I was going to be a grandfather. I will never forget how my whole life changed, my whole world changed in that moment.

I'll never forget the first time I held little Isaac in my arms. I truly melted. And now, even though he's four years old and he acts like he's about 17, my days are very, very full knowing that this grandson is here with us in this world. And now Lisa and I have three grandkids running under foot between our two families in the Marsh household. Family get-togethers are so much fun. I love spending time with my precious granddaughters and my grandson, but before they were born, I had no idea that they were going to be such a huge blessing to me. And I know Lisa feels the same way too.

I'm Roger Marsh and you are listening to Family Talk. Being grandparents is wonderful, but when grandkids become teenagers though, grandparents can have the tendency to step away, become less engaged. There are natural barriers that spring up that make it more difficult to stay connected with your grandchildren, of course, but despite these challenges though, our guest today here on Family Talk is encouraging grandparents to stay involved and become a safe place for their grandkids. Our guest is Mark Gregston and he's the founder of Heartlight, a Christian boarding school for troubled teens located outside Longview, Texas. Mark recently sat down with our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton to talk about the absolutely vital role that grandparents can play in their grandkids'

lives. Let's listen to that conversation right now here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There are natural communication barriers between grandparents and teenage grandkids. New and old cultures collide, relationships sometimes fly out the window. Hurtful words stab at a grandparent trying to help. A lot of memories are missed and arguments explode often in a family. The teenagers want attention and relationships, grandparents, they want that too and they want to help. Today on Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute, you're going to hear practical tips on how to start grandparenting teens in a way that fosters connection. As Christian grandparents, the primary emphasis should not be on what you leave to your grandkids' bank accounts when you go to heaven, but what you've deposited in their hearts that has eternal impact.

I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of Family Talk. Mark Gregston began his work with teens 40 years ago when he was a youth minister and then an area director for Young Life. In 1989, Mark and his wife, Jan moved with their two children to Longview, Texas, where they founded Heartlight, a residential counseling center for struggling teens and families in crisis. He's authored nearly two dozen books, including his newest one, entitled *Grandparenting Teen: Leaving A Legacy of Hope*. He's also the host of the nationally acclaimed radio program, *Parenting Today's Teens* heard on over 1800 radio outlets across North America. Mark and Jan have four grandchildren. Mark, welcome to Family Talk.

Mark Gregston: Oh, well, Tim, thanks. It's great to be here. This ought to be a big day for you because you now get to meet your number one fan and I get to meet you. I've been a fan of yours, I've been a fan of Dr. Dobson ever since I get hear, or maybe since I started listening a number of years ago to anyone and it was him. And so I'm most grateful for that. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, we're honored to have you. Mark, as we get started, 40 years, you and Jan working with teenagers, those kids, when they're hitting that kind of tough time in life, that rocky road of adolescents. Take us back, how did you get called into that? And where's God led you?

Mark Gregston: That's an interesting day. When I was 19, somebody walked up to my wife-to-be and I and said, "Would you like to lead a young life club?" And I said, "Well, sure, we'll do that." Within two weeks, a man walked up to me and just said, "Hey, I'm struggling with my son. I don't know what to do." And I said, "Well, let him come live with me." And he did. And so I was a sophomore in college and this young man lived with us. I was leading Young Life club at church, came and said, you need to come work for us. I did for a number of years. And I was always pulled toward those kids that were struggling, having a tough time, not understanding perhaps what scripture means or how you engage that in a world that is confusing for them.

And so, I just said, this is where I think I'm going. And Jan and I have been together since ninth grade when this Christian band came through Tulsa,

Oklahoma, our first date, it's called Led Zeppelin. And that was our first date, but we've been together and we've done this forever. And somebody says, "How did God lead you through this?" "I have no idea." It was never a choice. I never saw myself doing this. I never had this inclination to write books. I never thought I would be living with more than eight kids. I now live with 60 high school kids that come from all over the country and they're wonderful kids. They're great kids. They're just making poor decisions or maybe they've had something happen to them. And so we surround them with a love like they've never felt before and engage them and counsel them through the difficulties of life and help them apply what they've learned early on in life to a world that that is sometimes turbulent for them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know, Mark growing up is a little different today than it was when we were growing up. And we tongue-in-cheek joke about what we grew up in within the rock and roll era and all that. But Mark, these kids are getting bombarded by an online world that's insane, coming at them from pornography to values and different things. And by the way, the loneliness and the lack of connection and more. You've helped that army of parents rescue their kids. Mark, you've taken a turn here and you're challenging grandparents. I love this. You said one of the greatest resources for rescuing and providing stability for kids is grandparents. You're right.

Mark Gregston: Teens need a little bit of wisdom. They're not getting it from the normal places because they are so bombarded with information that hits them from all sides. When you and I grew up information, codified information in this world doubled every 13 years. Isn't that amazing? Do you know how quickly it's doubling now? Every hour and a half. And next year, it'll be instantaneous. And what that's doing is giving our kids so much information that they now don't need information. Wisdom, that's what they're looking for. But the problem is, the way the world has become so critical, and I'm not an anti-world kind of guy, please don't hear that, but the world has become so critical that it's just about ruined every authority in their life that they would usually go to for wisdom. And they're not getting that wisdom from those normal places that you and I did when we were growing up.

And so, they're looking for it, they're trying everything. They're trying to fill the void in their life. And what they want is a little bit of gray hair to speak to them and to give them not just their opinion, but they're longing for someone to give them perspective, to give them hope, to give them a taste of something that they would long for the rest of their life. And they're looking for help of how to apply all these Christian values and principles to the world that they live in, not the world that we want them to live in, but the world that they live in. And it's one of the most ignored groups of people, I would say teens are.

And the other part of it is older folks, by golly, they get ignored as well. Out of all the people that have lived age 65 and beyond since the beginning of time, 82% of those people are alive today. It's the greatest resource we have to the

greatest need, which are young people are struggling to look for help and gain a little bit of hope and encouragement in a world that's very confusing for them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's a big gap often between the culture and how we do life up in years versus that young culture and the connection that's like ships missing each other in the middle of the night. That's probably the biggest piece here that we need to figure out here, isn't it?

Mark Gregston: It is. Here's the reason. Those ships are being, the winds have shifted. They run differently. They're not made the same. And the tendency is we use our old-school style of engaging with kids, thinking that what we did in the pre-teen years is going to be effective in the teen years. And this is the only time that I tell people they're wrong. I really never tell people they're wrong, but I tell them this. If you think that the skills that got you those world's most greatest mom in the world, greatest dad t-shirts and coffee mugs during the preteen years, that those skills are going to work during the teen years, you are wrong. You've got to shift your style. In the first place, that a grandparent has got to look at is going "Okay, what is it about me that is keeping that from happening?"

Am I angry? Do I always voice my opinion? Am I always talking all the time? I mean, am I incessant? Am I more concerned about my program of helping a kid get to a different place or I'm more concerned about them? Do I not listen? Am I am noxious? Am I a nerd? Am I somebody that's so disconnected with culture that all I do is come across as an authoritative judgmental person who's demanding perfection?" And I've got to look at myself first, before I look at kids and say, let's look at the speck in your eye. I've got to look at the log in my eye and say, is there something about me that needs to change? Lord, search me, know my heart, see if there's any hurtful way in me, because I may be the cause of the very thing that's keeping us from connecting.

And it may be just because I'm not loving my kid with the right love language. There's more than five love languages. There's hundreds of love languages. It may be that I am doing things that are pushing them away. It may be that I'm still trying to teach them when I need to be training them. I need to train them up. And there's a difference in those two. In the book what I talk about is shifting from a teaching model to a training model so that you're preparing your child, just not trying to shove more information down their throat because they've had it up to here. They don't need any more information. We've taught them well, we've taught them well. "This is how you live this out. You can watch me." They need to see the word become flesh and dwell among them in such a way that it's attractive. And they go, I like this. I really like this. I can do this.

So, I think that's the first place that somebody's got to look and say, "What is it about me that needs to be doing something different?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: A relationship...

Mark Gregston: Yeah. I think the second part of that is saying, "What is it about my home? Am I too much of a perfectionist? Do I have too many rules?" I've got grandkids that are eight to 21 years old. I don't have any rules at my house. There's a few like don't burn it down, close the refrigerator door, but there's not many. But I don't correct them if they're wearing something I don't like, if they parked in the wrong place in our driveway. I don't care. I want them to have a place of rest. "You come here and you'll find a sense of encouragement. I'm going to cook you the best meal. We're going to talk about what you want to talk about. And more than anything else have somebody that listens to you and wants to hear your heart." And after you deal with those two things, now let's start dealing with their stuff because you've created an environment, a relational environment that welcomes change. And that means change for you as well as a grandparent.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, host and our special guest today is Mark Gregston. He is the author of a brand-new book called *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving A Legacy of Hope*.

Mark, I can imagine people just saying, let me turn that up. I want a stronger relationship with my grandkids. I want to figure this out with my kids, how that we can have a true legacy impact. I want that relationship, Mark. That's at the heart of all this. But let me ask you Mark, I didn't really know my grandparents growing up. Honestly, my grandfathers were both gone and my grandmother on my mother's side, she had lost her eyesight. And I can really recall very few instances of being around her, never got to know her. And then my dad's mother, Grandma Daisy, she would come and stay with us a couple of times, but didn't spend a lot of one-on-one time. But when I think of grandparenting, I'm thinking about Julie and I, we have a brand new granddaughter, Olivia. And Mark, I can't get enough of that girl. It's just like, she has changed my life and my vocabulary. "Hey, Papa's girl, hey, Minnie Mouse." Mark, what was it like for you? And a lot of people don't have this connection for a moment. And why, again is this becoming so prominent and so important?

Mark Gregston: What happened to me is I became a grandparent at age 46. My daughter came to me and said, I'm pregnant. And she gave me this grandpa shirt and I kind of went, "Oh, gee, you got to be kidding me," in my excitement. But in my head I was going, I'm not that old. And I was, and so I told her over the next few weeks, I said, "Hey, I just want you to know that I don't do babies real well. And I don't do elementary school kids well, and I really don't like middle school kids. I just kind of went through this thing, excusing myself that when they get to be teenagers, I'm all in, you can count me in for anything.

When I heard my granddaughter's voice, her first cry, it was almost like God enlarged my heart and showed me a love that I've never had before and showed me that I was capable of something more than I ever have been. And I mean, it changed my life and that was 21 years ago. And it changed it in such a way that I thought, okay, I want to make sure that I'm involved. It's a Mulligan. I mean, I get to do it over what I miss with my own kids, now I get to do for my

grandkids. So now my daughter comes to me and says, "Dad, it's almost like you like them more than us." And I go, "I do." Or she may say, "You want to spend time with them and not us." I do. There's something special about that and because of that, that's why I kind of move farther into saying then how do I maintain that relationship during the teen years because as their social circles begin to expand, usually grandparents are the ones that are the first ones to be lopped off and they miss it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Their whole world's changing, Mark, everything around them. Their social network, they start looking to their friends for guidance and information, and they don't want to hang out so much. They are involved in sports. Kids are so busy. Families are so busy and it's like, grandma and grandpa are out on the peripheral or something.

Mark Gregston: Well, yeah, and I thought at that time it would be easy just to keep doing the same thing I was doing. And I realized that's not going to work. I got to do something different. I thought I was going to be able to coast through these years because I'm so good with teens. Surely my own grandkids would love me more than everybody else during those times. And I found I had to work twice as hard during those teen years, because there are other things that are pulling them. Maybe the reason they don't want to spend time with me is because they're getting bored with me. Maybe they're tired of hearing stuff. Maybe I'm no longer exciting. When a video game is more exciting than a grandparent, then we're not going to change the world of video games. But I want to change the world of a grandparent's role in the life of a child so that they can get something that's very real.

I don't want to be replaced by a video game. I don't want to be replaced by Tik Tok and Snapchat. I want to remain engaged with them. I want to use everything I can to communicate with them, but I want to do things with them as well, because at the core of it, Tim, is this. I really believe that, and most people know that I was the Oklahoma Bible quiz champion in 1969. I believe that when you hide God's word in your heart, it will come out and so my job is not to just preach, preach, preach, my job is to be present where they can see me and how I live my life, how I engage with people and what I do and to walk blamelessly so that I'm an example before them, because they don't have any examples anymore and they want that desperately.

So, if they want that desperately and they're looking for something, then what I have to work on is making sure I'm spending time with them. I want to grandparent them like God parents me. That's what I'm longing for. And I think people undercut that, they think we have to go back and teach, teach, teach, and I go, "no, no, no, you don't." You have to be present. You have to engage. You have to spend time and they will see it because they're looking for it because this is what you've trained them up to be.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There are millions of grandparents out there who are parenting right now. They've had to step in and become "mom and/or dad", if you will, even though

it's Papa and Nana at the same time. Mark, speaking to them, they're probably saying you're right, but it's exhausting. But Mark, you have to be intentional, don't you? You have to step in and work on building that relationship because if you don't, this thing will go sideways.

Mark Gregston: Absolutely. And to that grandparent that's acting like a parent, and has to do that, I would say this, hey, be the parent on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, be the grandparent. I mean, it's a dual role. So enforce rules some of the time, but not all the time. Pick out what's important, what really matters. Choose which hill you're going to die on and lighten up a little bit. God's going to use you and you can trust that God has been involved in the life of your child. So sit back and relax a little bit and quit taking it so serious. Deal with the hard issues, but listen.

And there's so many things facing kids today that we never had to deal with when we were in high school or junior high, that one of the best defenses is learning how to listen to their heart and not passing judgment immediately. Just let it set. Sometimes kids just verbalize things because they're processing out loud, and so I don't always have to correct them all the time. You will have an opportunity eventually to share those things with them in time if you just listen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, you've spent your life working with teens and families, especially those who are in trouble. Give us the sugar stick stuff, Mark, upfront, the two, three things that you say, listen, Tim, these are the most common mistakes that grandparents are making. And it's why they're not connected with their grandkids, especially their teen grandkids.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. Here's the first one. You're not listening. You're not listening. Sometimes you're so concerned, grandma and grandpa, about your own program that you forget, this is about them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's not about you.

Mark Gregston: When you move into the teen years, it's about them. It's not about you. When Paul said, I have no one that looks after the interest of others, they're all looking after themselves, except for Timothy. And so a grandparent needs to be one, I'm looking to your interest, not mine. Discipline now is not giving punishment, discipline is helping a child get to where they want to go from where they don't want to end up. And so I think it's changing that perspective and it's listening to their heart more than anything else.

The second thing is when they start talking, don't correct or judge them. You don't have to. Let them process it out loud. You have a long conversation with them the rest of their life, that's the goal. It's not little bits of conversation that give them one little nugget of truth and one little nugget of truth and one little nugget of truth at different times. It's almost like we get this idea, well, I've got to do that. I've got to pass something on to them. I assure grandparents, you are

passing something on to them. And sometimes the one that appears wise is the one that's the most quiet, that listens and says, "Hey, I've got an idea. What do you think? Hey, you want an opinion or you want an answer?" And sometimes a kid will say neither. Okay, I'm not going to give it. Instead of always giving the answers, start asking questions, because once a child realizes that you're connected with them, then there is something about that, that they know they can come to you. And that's what I want.

I live with 60 high school kids. It's interesting to me, I'm 66 years old. I still feel like I'm 21, but there's a part of me that always thought that this youth thing, this youth minister thing or Young Life thing is going to pass and kids won't want to spend time with me one day. I have more kids wanting to spend time with me today than I ever have in my life. And it's not because I'm teaching, teaching, teaching because I don't do that. But I listen well, and I spend a lot of time and I make myself available and I'm not judgmental. And I welcome them and I want to create an atmosphere that says ... and that would be the third thing, the message that there's nothing you can do to make me love you more. There's nothing you can do to make me love you less.

And that's when a kid comes home and says, I think I'm gay. I've been smoking pot. Hey, when they're 21 years old, I'm going to move in with my girlfriend. It's saying to them, I just want you to know, you can ask me questions about those things and I'll be happy to talk to you, but I want you to know there's nothing you can do to make me love you more. There's nothing you can do to make me love you less. And the power of that love has an amazing way of creating an atmosphere of change and positions you as a grandparent in their lives so they will come to you and start asking those tough questions about how do I apply the values that I've been taught and I embrace into a world that is completely different than when I learned those things. And I think that's where a grandparent has an amazing opportunity to offer something that no one else could ever give.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, we've wrapped up today's program here, Mark. We're running out of time, but there's so many nuggets in your new book, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving A Legacy of Hope*. I want to share those with our listeners in tomorrow's broadcast. But give us a closing word, Mark, from you to all of us about just pressing in, relationships. It's all right there. Get it right, you're blessed. Get it wrong and it's going to be a journey.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. You know what, God isn't keeping you around so you can hook up an RV and drive to Arizona and play shuffleboard the rest of your life. God's keeping you around because he needs you desperately in the lives of your teen grandchildren to offer them hope, to offer them help, and a sense of encouragement. And it will change the destiny of your family.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Such powerful words from Mark Gregston our guest today here on Family Talk. I'm a grandfather myself and I listened very closely to that entire conversation between Mark Gregston and Dr. Tim Clinton. I don't think there's a



grandparent among us who does not want to reach the hearts of our grandkids. And I hope that you will take some of the advice that Mark gave today and implement listening and loving over talking and teaching in your relationship with your grandchildren. I know I will.

Now, if you missed any of today's broadcast or if you'd like to learn more about Mark Gregston, his ministry to youth or his new book, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving A Legacy of Hope*, you can find all of that when you visit [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Or you can give us a call at (877) 732-6825.

Well, thanks so much for listening today and make sure you join us again tomorrow as Dr. Tim Clinton and Mark Gregston talk some more about how you could reach the heart of your grandchild. That's coming up right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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