



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment – Part 1

Guest(s): John Smithbaker

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome, everyone, to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hello, everyone, and welcome into Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of the broadcast here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm honored to serve alongside Dr. Dobson as resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDPI. We're so glad you've joined us today. Now, if you've listened to the program for any amount of time, you most likely have heard us discuss the problems of broken homes, divorce, estrangement, kids being separated from their dads for one reason or another. That's because fatherless homes are a big issue affecting the family. It also affects our communities and the culture as a whole.

But God has a real vision, a perfect vision for the family, and it includes a mom and a dad bringing up their children together. Oh, and guess what? Mom, dad, that job doesn't stop at your child's 18th birthday now, does it? When children grow up without a father, it's extremely difficult. Well, today we're going to look at the whole issue of the impact of fatherlessness on boys.

The net result when dad is out of the picture is a wounded young boy. More importantly, when those boys grow up and if they don't heal or find a way to fill the void from not having a nurturing father figure in their life, it creates havoc for generations. Collectively, we are seeing the effects of all this around us in today's culture, from a rise in depression, increased alcoholism, drug abuse, fathering children out of wedlock, going into prison, incarceration, and even increased suicide rates among these wounded young men.

Our guest today, a very special friend of mine is John Smithbaker. He experienced the pain of what it's like to grow up without a dad, but because of his experiences, he has courageously leaned into his faith and is leading the fight against fatherlessness with his ministry, which is called Fathers in the Field. He launched it in 2005, it's grown ever since. Today and tomorrow we'll also be discussing his newest book entitled, *Man Enough To Forgive*. John earned his undergraduate degree in Business Administration from the University of Arizona. He has an MBA from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. He's

the former president and CEO of Brunton Outdoor Group. And after he served there, John launched Fathers in the Field to minister to a very specific demographic, boys age seven to 17.

The vision he has is to rekindle and establish the spirit of boys who have been abandoned by their dads. John is also the author of the *Fatherless Wound Journey Curriculum Guide* and the *Great American Rescue Mission*. John's married to Tracy, the love of his life. In fact, he dedicated his new book to his lovely wife. Together they have three grown children. John, welcome back to Family Talk. You've been a guest on the program many times before. It's the delight to have you back. Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, sent their regards.

John Smithbaker: Oh, thank you. Such a blessing to be back. Thank you for your heart. I want to help get this message out and just prayers for Dr. Dobson and Shirley, and they've just been such a blessing in my life and I've always told him, he's the greatest mentor father out there that we have.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, as we get started, Psalm 11, verse three. "If the foundation be destroyed, what will the righteous do? What shall they do?" And John, you and I have talked many times about the whole issue of fatherlessness. I think if you look at the research out there, pretty much everybody agrees the greatest social ill of our day is the absence of dad from the home. It's just tragic. But John, you're also talking now about generational fatherlessness. Tell us what you mean by that.

John Smithbaker: Well, fatherlessness creates more fatherlessness, and the tsunami is on its way because in the last four years, the issue of fatherlessness has accelerated. We're entering the next generation of all these broken families, all these fatherless children now figuring out what it means to have children, create a family, and they're lost because they've had no example. Masculinity is a gift to the world from God. And the world, which is obviously decimated by sin and brokenness, is trying to destroy masculinity. And we have to remember masculinity is from God, ordained by God, created by God, and that masculinity was put into man. And men have a great, ordained, glorious purpose in His kingdom, and he's to be the pastor, provider and protector, and he has a great role in the role of family.

The family is the fortress that God Almighty gave us to withstand and withhold and push back against the evil in the world. That's why Satan goes so hard at the family, because that is the fortress. And when the man leaves the home, basically, that fort, that fortress has raised a white flag of surrender, and the marauding influences the world, just swoop in and destroy the next generation of women, but also of men who were talking about the future, pastor, providers and protector.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, there's nothing like having a dad. Dads do matter. Men matter. I'm with you on the masculinity piece. We all look in the stands for our dads and consider

his impact, his presence, one of the most significant factors in life. And when you have that blessing, it's everything. And when you don't, it really cuts deep.

John Smithbaker: Yes. It's a deep, deep soul wound, because the father-son relationship is the foundation of the world. And when that's broken, these souls are broken. All these broken children internalize that the reason their dad left is because of them. They take on that responsibility. The world tells them that, "You don't need a dad. Big boys don't cry and you'll get over it." And what we know as a ministry is these boys and growing up fatherless myself, what we needed to hear is that, "What your dad did was wrong, will matter greatly in your life, but through the power of Christ, you can be the man God intended you to be." That's the important part. We need to be truthful with these children. We need to apologize to them. We need to tell them that it's not their fault that they are angry, that they are living in chaos and confusion. And so, it is not their fault. And if you're a fatherless child out there, even as an adult right now, it is not your fault. That's a message that needs to be heard by these hurting souls.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And our prayer is that prophetic verse out of Malachi where the Scripture says, "In one day he'll turn the hearts of the fathers toward the children, the hearts of the children back toward their fathers." John, I wanted to say congratulations on your new book. *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment*. We're going to talk about this issue of fatherlessness and we're going to talk about healing the wounds of that very thing, this father thirst, this father hunger that we see so prevalent in culture. Before we go there, you had mentioned that this is personal for you. Your ministry, Fathers in the Field, that we're going to hear about in just a moment. It all goes all the way back. But can you share with us a little bit about what it was like for you as a boy growing up with your dad?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Since my dad left when I was in the womb of my mother, from my earliest memories, I just remember there was a big void. There was something missing and I didn't know what it was. And then as my mom tried to survive single parenthood, single mom-hood, I was shuffled around to daycares where I sat around and wasn't loved and hugged and talked to and played with all day. And I wondered, "Where is everybody?" I mean, because something was just not right. And I remember thinking, "I don't understand what's going on." The fatherhood wound or the lack of a father is something that's missing. And so, if nobody's telling you how to fill that hole because something is missing, it's not like you knew what it was and then it's gone, it's just something is missing. So you're searching for answers your entire life and you're trying to fill that void, that deep hole with things or something that would stop the bleeding, if you will.

But it's really the combination, to answer your questions, the combination of anger and confusion. I share this a lot. You have a decision to make. Are you going to just completely rebel in your anger to show the world how hurt you are? And about 85% of these men do that. These boys do that. That's why the adjudication rate and the jail rate and the prison rates are filled with fatherless

boys and now men. The other 15% become perfectionist, basically trying to earn their father's return, to fill that void of worth with accomplishment, and that's the route I took. Accomplishment. That somehow if I were to achieve things and be something that the world admired, that my father would return and love me. And it's just all fantasy land. You talk about the generational fatherless issue, then we end up potentially just abandoning our children through divorce and separation. And because of our perfectionists, we put our careers, our jobs, our selfish endeavors above our command to love our family and our wife like Christ loves the church.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're focusing in on boys here for a moment. I know your ministry is the boys, but John, the little things that matter to a boy, playing a game of catch, maybe learn how to change a tire, having somebody teach me how to fish, having somebody wrestle with me and teach me how to manage my emotions, how to respect people around me, how to honor women in my life and more. John, that's the stuff that goes missing. It's hard for a five, six, eight, nine, 11, 12 year old boy to verbalize all that, isn't it?

John Smithbaker: Yes, it's a life of confusion where you try and add up the math, two plus two and it never equals four, because nobody's sharing you what that second set of twos are. And so, you try and just fill the gap. And I had a wonderful, strong mom, but she couldn't be a dad. She couldn't be a dad. And she recognized that and she tried to engage me in boy activities. Thankfully she did, and through sports and I had these male figures of coaches that showed what a man is and how to honor your word and you work hard. And so, I got some of that from them. And obviously, one of the biggest roles of men, godly men is to share the truth of Heavenly father, and His truth and how you teach the commands of God and how you treat women who we're supposed to uphold and protect.

And so, it's a damaging thing. And I remember that I got glimpses of manhood by these men who took a little bit of time in my life. And one was my uncle, my uncle Bucky. And he would play catch for me with me in baseball, and I loved baseball, and he would challenge me. And us men and boys need to be challenged. We love a challenge. He would say, "I bet you can't catch this one." And he would throw it so high and I would work so hard to try and catch it. And that sense of accomplishment, of catching something, I just remember... I mean, that might've been 15 minutes when I spent years waiting for something like that. And it made all the difference in my world. I got a glimpse of something, some hope.

And so, there's so many stories like that. Going to the new stepparent house when I would wait for my dad to come pick me up and sometimes he wouldn't show and I'd get even more angry, and then this time he did decide to show, and all he would do is then take me back to his new home, his new life, and where there were other children that he adopted. And I was so desperate for his time that all his time was split between all these other people that I didn't even know. It actually was hurtful. It wasn't helpful, because I got no time with him.

And kids, they don't know how to verbalize that, so they stuff all these emotions and feelings deep down inside them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then it explodes, John, because we act out what we haven't worked out.

John Smithbaker: Yes. Listen, every one of these boys have that deep, festering soul wound and they try to mask that pain some way. I try to mask it through accomplishment, but so many mask it through pornography, drugs, alcohol, you name it, women hopping. They are trying to mask that pain. And because of that, it causes a ton of confusion and chaos on culture. And one of the most frequently things that pastors say to me as I travel this country and implement the ministry in all these churches around the nation is pastors saying, "Thank you. We are being overrun as a church with all the symptoms of fatherlessness. We're being overrun with it, and now we can start getting on the front end of this and trying to solve this and help this instead of just dealing with all the symptoms and the brokenness of it."

Dr. Tim Clinton: God began to do a work and we're going to talk on the broadcast tomorrow about being man enough to forgive. How do we forgive our dads? But John, today I just want to talk a little bit about Fathers in the Field, what you're doing in and through this ministry, who it's targeted toward and what's at the heart of the work.

John Smithbaker: Thank you, and I'll just back up a little bit if you have patience with me. Part of the effects of fatherlessness, since it's been about 40, 50 years since the government really accelerated the breakup of the family and tried to make the government the father, but the church has become over-feminized. And so, these men, these righteous men who were sitting in church, men attendance is way down. The ones that are staying in church, the church has left them behind. The ability to serve in a church in their masculine spirit, the way God designed them, the most adventurous ministry in church for men is the security detail. Because they get to carry a gun, they get to fill the role as being a protector. But most men, the way they're asked to serve is to leave church and go do the parking lot ministry, or stay after church and maybe stack chairs.

And if you're really godly as a man, maybe you can collect the offering. They may let you come up and lead a study group and you have to be a good public presenter and know the Bible to answer all the questions in and out. Most men are not in their comfort zone, and I believe the church has left them behind, generally speaking. Obviously there's some great churches out there.

What Fathers in the Field does is we get to come alongside the church and we get to help the church affirm, speak life in these men, and we get to mobilize and engage them in their adventurous, masculine spirit to come alongside a herding young boy. They get to share that passion, whatever God gave them. If it's hunting, fishing, automobiles, sports, you name it, woodworking, they get to share that hobby of theirs that God gave them, that passion, and that's the vehicle they get to build, a committed relationship with these young boys, so

eventually he can start speaking life into this boy, and these men get to be engaged within the church.

They get the feeling of climbing and charging a righteous hill for God, not being regulated to some meaningless ministry. And not that those things aren't needed, but men were born for a great purpose, and you have to tap into that. And that is what Fathers in the Field, we get to come along in church and enliven and engage these men. And I'm going to say something that's very controversial, but that's just what I'm in the business of doing now, it seems. But generally speaking, I'm not saying all pastors, but because of the over-feminization of churches and because of the issue of fatherlessness, there's a lot of beta male pastors. And I'm not being derogatory, I'm being descriptive. God is an alpha God and he wants men to be alpha men. It is a good term. A righteous warrior is an alpha male, where we engage men, men speak boldly, they push back against evil, they speak truth boldly, they don't put up with the garbage, and that is what men are dying for.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I saw in your book, and we're going to talk about this tomorrow too, the three primary roles that you call dad's to, pastor, provider, protector. That makes sense. It's intuitive.

John Smithbaker: They're not my descriptives, they're God's descriptive. But there is a difference between men and women. God made a difference. They're both glorious in His eyes. They both have an ordained role to fulfill, but there is a difference. And when men are regulated to not those roles, they wither and go away, and society hurts when men goes away. Women have the best ability to thrive when righteous men fulfill their roles.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, what has happened since you began Fathers in the Field? What's taking place right now? Tell us a little bit about the programmatic side of it. I know we're battling time here, but I want to make sure and get this in. I want people everywhere across the country, around the globe to hear of what's happening in Fathers in the Field.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Well, it is just beyond description. It's the desire to engage and mobilize men in their church is profound. Pastors are embracing this because now they have something actually not just to talk to their men about, but to engage their men and put them to kingdom work that's meaningful and that engages their masculine spirit and the attendance of men in churches, their involvement just skyrockets when they have a righteous way to involve themselves in kingdom work. And every day, we get to see boys paired with godly mentor fathers and start the process of sharing a Heavenly father with them that will never leave or forsake them, and the ripple effects is just having an unbelievable impact. And it's just awesome to see God work.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And this is happening in churches all across the land right now?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. I mean, we've been in ministry now over 15 years, and the curve is really starting to accelerate, but we're in 37 states now and just growing. And we knock on churches' doors, get them established, help raise up a lay leader team, help them mobilize their men, train their men, and then they can go out in their community. And once that happens, then we get to go to the next church and build them, and the next church. Every fatherless boy is in reach of every church. This is a solvable issue. If God's bride, His church fulfills the top mandate of them after the Great Commission, defend the cause of the fatherless right in their own community. We are the mission field now. It's just not a distant land. The days are over, in my opinion, of writing out a check, walking over all the carnage onto the way to the post office. We are the mission field now. We can't ignore that fact anymore.

Dr. Tim Clinton: If there's a man listening, maybe a woman who wants to get some information to the men in her life, John, about Fathers in the Field, where would they go?

John Smithbaker: Yeah, thank you for asking that. Fathersinthefield.com. Easy to find, we have a lot of traffic there. And it says, "Enroll my church," or, "I need help." And if you're a godly woman, single mom who's going to a church, then we work with you to try and get your church going. If you don't attend church, we can still provide help, so don't let that be a discouragement to you. And we will work our tails off to get a church close by you enrolled, so your precious son can be helped

Dr. Tim Clinton: Fathersinthefield.com is the URL?

John Smithbaker: Yes. Fathersinthefield.com. Yes, sir.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And John, I follow you on social media. I see the pictures all the time, especially of those kids and the joy that comes to their hearts because of this kind of connectedness. That loneliness, that brokenness, that troubled spirit, it needs a place. And that energy, again, this is a program oriented primarily towards seven to 17 year old boys, right?

John Smithbaker: Correct. Yes. And it's not a weekend commitment. It is a three year, one year at a time commitment where these boys understand that this man is making a huge commitment in his life, and that is profound. These fatherless boys, anecdotally, generally speaking, get abandoned seven times before they're 18. In their mind, in their heart and their soul, because they have a grandfather step up in their life for a little bit after their dad leaves and then he passes. Or second marriages with kids have a high divorce rate, 70% or more, so then they experience another divorce. Or they've had a boyfriend come live in the home and call him dad, and then the boyfriend leaves. These boys are deeply, deeply wounded and they have callouses and hurt. Three years is what's needed because one man gets to look this boy in the eye and say, "Listen, it's me and you. I'm committing to you." This is not a general program. This is not a mass marketed program. This is about you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that, John.

John Smithbaker: And we tell these men, for the first year, these boys aren't even listening to what you're saying. They don't care what you say. In fact, they are telling themselves, "You're another liar."

Dr. Tim Clinton: "You're just going to leave too."

John Smithbaker: It takes a first year to build that trust and that commitment, so then you can speak into their life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, this is all about a curriculum, a set program, and more. They put all the tools in your hands to create this ministry in and through the local church. God, raise up a generation of men who would dare to care about the lives of our young boys. John, I know as a part of that curriculum, you give the gift of forgiveness. You teach these boys what it means to "deal with that wound," and to forgive their dads. That's a journey. We're going to talk about that tomorrow based on your new book, *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment*. John, what a delightful conversation today. Man, I'm praying for you. I pray for the ministry. You know that. And that God would continue to give you courage and boldness for such a time as this. Hey, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team, we salute you and pray that God would continue to fill your heart with joy and expand the reach of your borders, if you will, for Fathers in the Field. Thank you so much for joining

John Smithbaker: God deserves all the glory. Thank you, Dr. Tim. Appreciate it.

Roger Marsh: Fatherlessness truly is a huge problem, and unfortunately it has touched many, many lives. Perhaps you or someone have had to deal with its rippling effects. If today's conversation here on Family Talk touched your heart, be sure to join us again tomorrow for the second part of this conversation featuring our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton and his special guest, John Smithbaker. They'll be discussing how important forgiveness is and how to approach it, especially if you have deep wounds left by the absence of your earthly father. You will not want to miss this special edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk today and for making us a part of your day. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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