



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Fathers: Shaping a Daughter's Life

Guest(s): Dr. Kevin Leman

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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: Greeting and welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And Family Talk is the radio home of Dr. James Dobson. Dr. Dobson has been encouraging families via Christian radio for over 40 years. To learn more about the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and the ministry of Family Talk, visit drjamesdobson.org. Now, if you've been following Dr Dobson for any amount of time, you know that he firmly believes that dads have an irreplaceable impact on their daughters. For good or for bad, dads shape their daughter's lives in countless ways with undeniable consequences.

Well, you are in for a real treat today, as we bring you an insightful conversation on that very topic. And joining Dr. Dobson for this discussion is his fellow author and psychologist, Dr. Kevin Leman. Dr. Leman is sometimes referred to as the "birth order guy," in a playful reference to his bestselling book, *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are The Way You Are*. That book launched Kevin's career back in the 1980s. And he has continued to speak into the lives of individuals and families to this day. Kevin Leman is the founder and chairman of the board of the Leman Academy Of Excellence and host of the, "Have A New Kid By Friday," podcast. Kevin Leman is the bestselling author of over 60 books, including, *When Your Kid Is Hurting* and *Have A Happy Family By Friday*. He's been featured on numerous radio and television programs, including *Fox And Friends*, *The 700 Club* and *CNN*. Dr. Leman and his wife, Sande, live in Tucson, Arizona. They have five children and four grandchildren.

Now, on today's program, you're going to hear a classic conversation that Dr. Dobson had with Dr. Leman on the topic of his book, *What A Difference A Daddy Makes*. The book was originally published in 2000, but as you'll hear, the principles are still applicable and important today. So let's get to that program right now, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Raising four daughters, I'd say Kevin Leman is a great resource for practical information about relating to girls. Besides being a great dad, he's an internationally known psychologist. He's just done so many other things, speaks

all over the country. His latest book is called, *What A Difference A Daddy Makes*. And Kevin, that's a great cover on this one. I think it's going to be a best seller. And I know that you must have enjoyed writing this book because you love your kids and especially your daughters so much, don't you?

Dr. Kevin Leman: It's a book that I would have to tell you honestly, I cried writing that book. And it's funny because you know you get a manuscript, look, I'm tearing up thinking about this, but I was on a flight between Tucson, where I live and Chicago, Illinois, and I'm just going through it and making sure everything is right. And I'm reading this poignant page in the book where my daughter, Holly, is writing a letter to me, and I just start to lose it. Well, I'm sitting right there and-

Dr. James Dobson: You are right now, as a matter of fact.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, I do, thinking about... I had to read you the letter. It would set up the program good, I think. But I start to cry. And so when men get emotional, we tend to shut down immediately. We don't want anybody to see that we're emotional. And so I looked away from the guy who was sitting next to me across the aisle and this guy's looking at me. So I looked the other way and this guy's looking at me. I felt so stupid. And I shouldn't have felt stupid. I should have felt, I guess, some healthy pride that I feel that about my daughter in reading the words, because the words that she was writing about said, dad, you really make a difference in my life. I've got it right here. I'll try to get through it as best I can. And this was by the way, on a Father's Day card. But she simply says, this is my daughter, Holly, my oldest daughter.

She says, "Dear dad, you really have given me a lifetime of wonderful memories. I still smile thinking about all the times we'd play big, bad wolf. And you'd smooch me in the cushions and then turn your back to get the mustard so I could escape. And I thought I was so smart. And I still remember one night when you turned off all the lights and you walk down the hall with a flickering candle so we could see Huggy Harry's shadow coming slowly toward our room. And I thought I was so brave. And I remember all the times you held my hand through were all those awful surgeries. And you told me how brave I was to sit through an hour in a small MRI tunnel, because you could never do it. And how you made our trip to Portland actually fun. And I thought I had been so alone. And I remember a letter you wrote to me in college on three small post-it notes telling me how you remembered being 21 and thinking "This is it." And being bewildered that you were an adult, and yet you didn't feel like an adult."

"I still have those faded post-it notes on which you told me how you could relate and that you were proud of me. And I thought I was so independent. And then last year, you've truly been my saving grace, as you held me when I cried from a broken heart, and listened to me for hours talk about my despair and my frustration as I learned that even love at times has its limits. Your gentleness carried me through the year and your encouragement gave me the strength. And I thought I had been so right. You have already given me more wonderful memories than I could ever write out. You make my life a thousand times

brighter. And I cannot tell you enough how much I love you. You truly are the best dad in the world. And I don't know where I'd be without you. Thank you for all you have done and all you do for me. And I know how thankful I am for you. I love you, dad. Your Holly."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my goodness, Kevin. And you've had a lot of awards and a lot of honors in your live. anything outranked that right there?

Dr. Kevin Leman: No. Not at all. I mean, those are our gifts.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me tell you what I want to do with the program. A battleship has one function, that function is to serve as a platform for the big guns. Right?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Today, I'm the battleship and you're the big guns. I'm the platform. I'm going to ask you a lot of questions I have opinions about too. And I'm going to get you in position and let you fire the big guns. Okay?

Dr. Kevin Leman: I'm in school. Good.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Let's start with the one I just asked. Address the issue of what a good daddy contributes to his daughter. And then I want you to talk about what a rejecting or ineffectual father doesn't give.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I think a good dad is one that's there for their kids. You've got to be there, number one. That's one of the principle things you've got to do. A father who understands. You've got to understand your kids. I think a good dad is a father who honors his wife because the kids are always looking up. They're taking emotional notes, spiritual notes in how does dad treat mom? And then a father who believes in his daughter is a good daddy. You got to believe in her. If I'm going to make a mistake in parenting, I'm going to make a mistake on the side of believing in my daughter, rather than doubting what she says. And then I think a good dad lets his daughter hurt. He lets his daughter fail. And that's a tough one because as men, you know we love to solve things. Young women are just like older women. They don't really need that. They want to know that we understand what they're up against.

Dr. James Dobson: Exactly. All right. What are the deficits then, for a father who doesn't play that role properly?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, a couple things. That woman is going to grow up an overachiever. She's going to try to make up for that void. I call it, daddy-attention-deficit-disorder in the book. There's so much talk about ADD and ADHD. I thought, well, how about dad? DADD, daddy-attention-deficit-disorder. And when daddies do not leave that wonderful indelible imprint in a positive way on a daughter's life, there's a tremendous void there. And Dr. Dobson, as well as you and I are sitting in this

studio today, there are millions of women listening to us right now whose husbands are paying for the sins of their father-in-law. Their wife's daddies were not the daddies they needed to be. And so if we want to really help a whole generation, we're going to help people see that this marriage thing is really a God ordained institution.

And it's not a great idea or a fine suggestion that the two shall become one. It's a commandment. And when the two become one and those kids look up and see mommy and daddy enter into this intimate relationship called marriage, the blessings come down on the kids. And that isn't to say that the kids aren't going to have some curve balls in life. We've had a daughter that's just gone through it with the opposite sex. It's tough. It's tough watching your kid suffer through things that you never thought were going to happen, but that's the way it is in life. But the bottom line is, our daughter would say, I knew you were there for me and I knew you'd support me. And I knew you'd loved me. And that's what makes a difference.

Dr. James Dobson: Hmm. I'm sure you would agree, Kevin, that when a little girl and her father have a wonderful relationship, it has great impact on the kind of man that she chooses.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Oh, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And when she has a bad relationship with the father, she spends the rest of her life looking for someone to replace that void in her life.

Dr. Kevin Leman: And it's not only the bad ones. I mean, I wrote about Hillary Rodham Clinton in this book and I found it interesting to note that her dad, when she brought home straight As, his comment was, "Must have been an easy school you went to." It's interesting, I even wrote down one of her quotes. Now this is her writing now, Hillary writing, she says, "Children without fathers or whose parents float in and out of their lives after divorce are precarious little boats in the most turbulent seas." See, I think she's writing about herself. I mean, I think a lot of people I write in the book, again, I'm not trying to clinically examine someone that hasn't been in my office, but it was such public information what's happened. People wonder how she could have withstood all these things, all these affairs and everything that's happened in their marriage. And it probably had a lot to do with the fact that dad wasn't the affirming daddy that he could have been for that daughter.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you say to the guy out there who says, I hear what you're saying. I know that I am important to my daughters, my sons too. And I'm such a flawed individual. I just don't feel up to this task. I am struggling to try to make it professionally and academically. And I just know I'm failing at home. Where do I start? How do I put this together?

Dr. Kevin Leman: I think sometimes what you do, Dr. Dobson, is you start with an apology to your kid. You say, honey, you might be talking to a 12 year old and say, "Honey, I owe you an apology." A 12 old would say, "What are you talking about? For what?" "Well, I've been thinking about our relationship and I'd have to be honest with you, there's some things I really feel bad about. And dad has had to work hard and I'm not always here. And sometimes I feel like I'm on the outside looking in." And my guess would be that if a dad approached a daughter like that, that most daughters would come right back and say, well, daddy, no, I love you. You're my daddy. He would get a little jumpstart right there. I would try to sell that man on the fact that there is this indelible imprint, and it's not too late to make a difference in your daughter's life.

I talk in this book about slipping your daughter a commercial announcement. And just two weeks ago, driving our daughter, Hannah, to school, I missed her mom in the morning. I make the breakfasts and get the kids to school. It's quite a site. And I'm in a carpool on top of that. And I meet all these mothers at a library and pick up the kids. They all pile in the van. And it's so funny because you get these opportunities to talk one-on-one with your kid before you get to the carpool site. And I'm talking to our daughter Hannah, who was just turning 14, and I said, "Hannah, I want to tip my hat to you." And she said, "Well, what do you mean?" I was using an expression she didn't understand. I said, "Well, honey, I just want to pay you a compliment, I guess."

And I said, "I've been thinking about the friends that you hang out with. It seems to me, you've made some really good choices in your first 14 years of life because your friends are really neat kids, it seems to me. And I just wanted to pass that along to you." Now, I call that slipping your kid, a commercial announcement.

Dr. James Dobson: You know what? In many cases, those commercial announcements will be remembered for a lifetime.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Sure, they will.

Dr. James Dobson: A casual little comment. Hillary Clinton reflecting the opposite. That was just a spontaneous, quick comment by her dad that wounded her and hurt her. And she remembers it all these years later.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yeah. All the men who are driving in their automobiles, as I do, who are not with their family right now, they're divorced, this conversation is hurting. It might be really troubling. I want to encourage those dads to be a good dad, not become the Disneyland dad. When you have your son or your daughter over to your home, don't give them things. As a man who could afford to give his kids "anything they wanted in life," I take great pride not giving them squat diddly jack. We haven't given them things. We've given them us. We've given them love. We've given them discipline.

And I think the irony is that kids want to belong to us. They want to belong to our families, but we've institutionalized this, getting kids out of our home, way, way, way too early and getting them in far too many activities and all that. That's a whole nother book and a whole nother story perhaps. But my message to parents is, you want to hold these kids close. And dads and moms who see your kids every other weekend, you're in a divorce situation, don't get your kids in the middle. Be the best parents you can be, but give your kids time and give them affirmation and be involved in their life in as positive way as you can be.

Dr. James Dobson: Kevin, I am certain that for us to talk about a subject like this with such passion and emotion, it puts tremendous pressure and guilt and hurt on the single parent who's out there, who's trying to raise a daughter in this case and there's no man on the scene to do what you're saying here is so important. What a difference a daddy makes. There are very few sources of pain that are worse than for a little girl to sit by the phone and wait for her daddy to call, the daddy who's now left the family or been divorced and he doesn't call, or he says he will and doesn't come. That's horrible. What do you say to encourage those? There's no easy answers to that. I mean, there's-

Dr. Kevin Leman: No, there's not. But let's take that scenario you just painted where, here's a mom who's raising her daughter and dad calls and he's going to do this and he's going to do that. He's going to come by and have her ready because I'm going to take her skiing or I'm going to take her here or there. And the time comes and he doesn't show up. Well, ladies, what do you feel like doing at that point?

Dr. James Dobson: Killing him. Yeah.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yeah. Do you feel like getting on the phone and saying "You jerk, don't you know your daughter's out here waiting for you?" That's not going to help. But when your daughter says to you, with tears in her eyes, where is daddy? You say to that daughter, "Honey, I don't know where dad is, but you know his number. Why don't you give him a call?" Now the wisdom in that I think is this, you keep the proverbial tennis ball of life where it belongs. In other words, the relationship has to be the relationship that it is. In other words, that daughter has to deal with that daddy, good or bad.

The best thing you do as a single mom is be the best single mom you can and be, be as consistent as you can be and exalt the routine in your home. There's something wonderful about the routine. It gives kids a sense of security and young women are probably more security minded than young boys are. So even those moms who are going it alone and dads, we hear from dads who are raising-

Dr. James Dobson: That's true. That's true.

Dr. Kevin Leman: We've got a guy who calls our show, who is raising five daughters by himself. Be the consistent parent. Yes, there's other men, maybe your dad, grandpa, or

maybe an uncle or people from church who can help, but I'm here to tell you, they're not going to replace dad. There's going to be that void in her life. And that's where I think you challenge the daughter, that this God that we worship, that we sing praises to, He's worthy of our praise. God's not going to let you down. His promises are true. And that's where you really get a chance to put your faith to test. One lady told me, she said, I said that to my daughter. And she said, "But mommy, I want to see a daddy I can see." How astute that little kid's remark was. And kids know that there's that void.

Dr. James Dobson: As a matter of fact, girls who are raised without fathers often have difficulty perceiving God and understanding who He is and understanding His love, especially if they've been rejected by their dads. So single mothers do have to really work hard at explaining who God is and bringing Him into every conversation. The Scripture is just replete with examples of God's love for the fatherless child and the widow, in a sense, a divorced woman is in the same situation as a widow. And over and over and over the church is told, care for the fatherless child and the widow. And we need to do that. We need to be there for our families that are fractured in that way.

Let's leave our listeners with this. Kevin, you are now, we'll say, at the latter end of your life, let's suppose you're 70, 75, 80, whatever it is and there are health problems in your life. And you're looking back on all these things, all this radio, all this television, letters that come to you, accolades that you've gotten, the calls from secular television, all the rest of it, and you're looking back and you're saying, what was worth it? What really mattered? What thoughts are going to go through your head?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, I don't think I have to be 80 and in poor health to think about those things because they're follicly challenged and a little too fat.

Dr. James Dobson: Follicly challenged.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I can look back already and my one regret is, I was a part of a ministry and we had a weekend schedule. And these schedules, these weekends get scheduled two years in advance. And how did I know that my daughter was going to be the homecoming queen of Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania? And stupid me. I mean, I can kick myself in the teeth. I wanted to get out of that seminar early. And I asked, I said, "Hey, can I bail out a little early? I think can get a flight to Pittsburgh and see Holly's graduation." The answer came down, no.

Dr. James Dobson: That's your biggest regret?

Kevin Leman: That is my biggest regret. I didn't get to see... Saw the video, but I think what bothers me is, my little sweet Holly didn't see me there. That's what makes a difference. For the mom who told me once, she said, oh, "I got my girlfriend to videotape the fourth grade play." I about hit her over the head, just like I'm

hitting myself over the head right now. I said, "Hey lady, that's not the idea. The idea is that your daughter doesn't see you in the audience. It's not that you get to see her play." And so, when I look back, I can honestly say, you know what, I don't have a lot of regrets. I have little regrets. That's a little regret. But what I'm proud of is when somebody says something to me after they meet my kids and they say, "Kevin, you've really got nice kids." And I say, "They're givers. They're not takers." And if you can raise a kid who's a giver and my hat's off to Sande. She's a great mom. And she wouldn't hurt a fly and people love her.

Dr. James Dobson: And now, in all this regret, what about missing a book deadline, disappointing a publisher?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Those aren't the things I worry about. I pray for my kids' safety. I pray for their walk with Christ. Those are the things that matter.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I pray for our marriage, that we'll always be strong and will always love each other. I mean, I've been blessed. I got a wife who's pretty as a picture. And I'm a chubby little psychologist and God has blessed me with this wonderful woman. And she loves me despite my flaws. And I have all kinds of flaws. They have fun with me. They make fun of me sometimes. We laugh and we have fun in our family. And I think there's an essential ingredient for raising a great daughter, a great son, have fun in your family.

Dr. James Dobson: Kevin, thanks again for coming to be our guest.

Dr. Kevin Leman: My pleasure.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm amazed that you're willing to get on a plane, fly over here. When we need you, we just kind of whistle and there you are. And you're a man who's getting calls from all over the place. So thanks for being with us again today.

Dr. Kevin Leman: It's my pleasure. I love being here and because I think I've probably said this on the air, but you've always been a mentor to me in so many ways. I've just enjoyed the great counsel that you've given people. And I know I'm speaking for millions, we love you, Jim. And we pray for you and pray for your family.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, thank you. Bring Sande next time. You used to bring me little gifts and things that Sande sent to me. You haven't brought me a gift in a long time.

Dr. Kevin Leman: I shouldn't say this. You almost got a loaf of bread, but-

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, is that so?

Dr. Kevin Leman: That shabby chic store she started, it's taking too much time.

Dr. James Dobson: She brought me preserves back in the 1980s. See, I haven't forgotten that ever.

Kevin Leman: Raspberry jam. How can you forget raspberry jam?

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being with us, Kevin.

Dr. Kevin Leman: You're welcome.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Well, you've been listening to psychologist and bestselling author, Dr. Kevin Leman, along with our host, Dr. James Dobson, today here on Family Talk. As a girl-dad myself, I was touched and humbled by today's program. I think that we dads sometimes forget the undeniable impact that we have on our daughters. When they're young, they look to us for safety, approval and love, but when they grow up, our influence shrinks a bit. But you know it's still there. If you have a daughter, no matter how old she is, take some time to send her an encouraging text over the next day or two, or take her out for a meal this week and pick up the phone, give her a call. Dads, your relationship with your daughter is crucial. Please don't neglect that responsibility.

Now, if you'd like to learn more about Dr. Kevin Leman, his many books or even listen to today's broadcast, once again, you can do all that and more when you visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. And while you're there, you can request a CD copy of today's show to keep or to share. And you'll be able to take a look at other recent broadcasts as well.

Now, if you're in need of some prayer or encouragement, please give us a call. Our team is available 24/7, 365, to take your call to pray with you and suggest resources that might be of benefit to you. The number to call is (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we hope you'll join us again next time for another edition of Family Talk.

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