



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Grandparenting: A Higher Calling – Part 2

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: Welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and Family Talk is the listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Today on Family Talk, we're going to share the second installment of a special interview that Dr. Dobson conducted with his friend, Dr. Jay Kesler. This conversation has never been heard on Family Talk before and Dr. Dobson specifically requested that we share it on this program today.

He and Dr. Kesler will be discussing grandparents and their vital importance to the institution of the family and to culture. In God's design for the family, grandparents hold a special, much needed role. Now, before we get right into the program though, let me introduce you to Dr. Dobson's guest today. Dr. Jay 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 85 until 2000. Dr. Jay Kesler is also the author of nearly 30 books, including the popular titles, *10 Mistakes Parents Make with Teenagers*, and *Being Holy, Being Human: Dealing with the Expectations of Ministry*. On today's broadcast, Dr. Dobson and Dr. Kesler will continue their talk about the unique and powerful influence that grandparents can have in a child's life. They'll also tackle the topic of aging with grace and dignity and being a consistent landmark that your grandchild can always rely on. Let's go to that conversation right now on today's edition of Family Talk.

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 a thousand grandparents was done or a thousand people in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Jay Kesler: Yeah, we had a conference, a family conference, primarily a 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 talk 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." And I searched for the reason, I guess, would suggest that they felt "Well, if they're that old and they think so, and they made it then I guess maybe I can." But 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 and sense really, but the literature, I think, is making people afraid to do things. This been true, Jim, your book *Dare to Discipline*. I mean, who thought we shouldn't, you know what I mean? Doesn't everybody?

Dr. James Dobson: Why do you have to make a case for that?

Jay Kesler: Why do you have to make a case, but you did you. The book became a national bestseller and became a real problem to a lot of people with 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.

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 the good old days the good

old days is a poor memory, and grandparents can kind of 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 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. You're being too harsh or you're being too permissive." What advice do you have for grandparents?

Jay Kesler: I suggest in this book that be done very carefully, lest they drive a wedge. And yet there 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 kind like ... You and I are fishermen, so I use fishermen as a 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've got a 10-pound bass on, you got some piece of wire you fish with out in the ocean, you can horse him 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-

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. Everybody was on best ... 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 they 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 onto this very, very quickly.

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

Jay Kesler: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, my own mother had tremendous wisdom with regard to children. I've said that many times and a good part of *Dare to Discipline* came from what I saw her model and the way she approached discipline. She became a grandmother and forgot everything she knew. My daughter and son could just get away with an awful lot there and I wanted her to toughen up because I remembered how she used to be. She just felt she had a different role and that when they came to her house, they were really supposed to enjoy it, even if they went past boundaries that I had and that Shirley had set at home. What do you think about grandparents disciplining? And you think there ought to be a little permissive?

Jay Kesler: I think there ought to be rules in the grandparents' home, and I think they ought to be kept. And frankly, at least we do that, and I talk to others who think it's wise too. We just simply lay out the ground rules of what things are permissible at our home. And they know what things are permissible at theirs, because we work by our rules when they're in our house and they don't seem to have any problem with it because they know pretty carefully what we expect.

Dr. James Dobson: How about for grandparents who do have a problem where there is a confrontation, where there are discipline problems, there is disrespect. How far can they go?

Jay Kesler: Well, I just don't think it's wise to allow them to go very far with that. And I think a lot of grandparents make a mistake of saying, well, we got two sets of grandparents, the in-laws and us, and we're going to be the fun ones and the others are going to be, we're going to be the most fun is we're going to take them more places, spend more money, let them have more so they'll like us better than the others. I think there's a certain level of immaturity there that can really harm kids pretty severely. I think grandparents ought to stick by their guns and pretty much grandparent like they parented, in my opinion. I think it will pay off. Generally the grandparents who say the kids don't behave as well when the parents arrive are grandparents who run a tight ship and they find that they find that tight ship works fine until the parents come and then they push the edges because the parents aren't quite sure where they're at, so the kid will push and push and push until they find out where the edge is.

Grandchildren, I think, very often what, at least in the reports I get, what they tend to do is, the grandparents say, "Well, my dad doesn't understand me, or

my dad's too strict, or my dad wouldn't let me go to this or that, or my dad did this." And the grandparent, rather than saying, oh, well, yeah, you do have one of those bad parents or whatever, I'm a nice guy, needs to help interpret the parent to the child. "Now, do you understand why your dad says that? Why do you suppose he does that? What does he got in mind really? Is it because he loves you? Would you rather be over loved or under loved? He's only trying to do his best. He never did this before. This is my son. I happen to know he never did this before. You're the first kid 16 he ever had and so he's doing his very best." And trying to explain, "Mom's not just trying to wreck your good time, but mom loves you supremely."

Dr. James Dobson: You describe that interpreting role of grandparents in the book. I think that's one of the most important concepts there, of attempting to put oil on troubled waters and explain one side to the other. Sometimes you have to explain to parents what the teenagers feeling too.

Jay Kesler: Yes, I think very much. And especially when they're trying to make the kids perfect for your benefit as a grandparent, to back the thing off a couple clicks and say, "Hey, I think the kids are very fine. They're doing very well. You don't have to impress us with this. We know they have their good times and their bad times. You can't have them all spit and polished standing there at attention all the time for the grandparents." Grandparents have to be given little credit too. They understand some things.

Dr. James Dobson: Jay, with so many families disintegrating and so many divorces occurring today, what is the role of the grandparent when a family's breaking up?

Jay Kesler: Well, it's very difficult, of course, to not take sides, to not side with your child versus the in-law, that kind of thing. I've had amazing number of letters about this. The toughest one today, of course, is custody. You have people who have been bonded to a grandchild for six, seven years, and then the parents get a divorce and that grandchild is taken off, say, in the most cases, this would be where you're the grandparent, the father of the son, and then the children get taken to another part of the country. And then the court intervenes and can you write, or can you have contact? And there are, of course, national organizations now set up to deal with the courts and all with this, but it's one of the saddest things. And I encourage grandparents attempt as best they can not to take sides, try to offer love and acceptance to everybody, attempt to keep contact with the grandchildren even if they can only do it through cards and letters. Don't overdo the gift thing and try to buy them back or something like that.

Let them know you're there. Something solid in their lives. I've even gone so far as to encourage that you make your house kind of a predictable place. Grandma's house has a certain smell to it, furniture looks the same. Things are sitting in the same places. When these kids lives start coming unglued, they need something that's pretty predictable. I encourage them about holidays and all. That if they'll start very young insisting that the grandchildren be there on holidays and they get some ritual, some fun stuff going, then later, when the

thing comes unglued, the kid naturally will hark back to that and seek that. And I have some wonderful testimonials of this kind of thing.

Dr. James Dobson: My mother had stocked her house with stuff for our kids. There was this little box of bobbles and pearls and things that Danae just loved. And the moment she would walk through that front door, she'd run for that box, and my mom had all kinds of stuff for Danae and Ryan there, which made coming to her house so much fun.

Jay Kesler: It doesn't have to be all new stuff either. Sometimes that toy box full of all that junk they'd dump on the kitchen floor. She wades around through it while she's fixing dinner. It's amazing. I have people 60 years old writing about their grandparents saying, this is the thing they remember. One of the common themes was grandmas tend to be the person who lets you bake the cookies without making you feel inept. They let you actually do it. They let you stir it and put it in and do everything and lick. Yeah. Yeah. And the boys say, grandpa actually doesn't take the wrench out of my hand. That was a theme. Wrench or screwdriver, whatever. Grandpa lets you fiddle with it. He doesn't act like you're going to ruin the whole world.

One of the things that came through this survey. Grandpa lets me take things apart. Apparently it's a fairly common thing for grandpas in Indiana, anyway, to say to a boy here's a motor or a television, here's a bunch of stuff, you can take this thing apart, and they just seem to love it. That's the best toy in the world to take something apart, get inside and figure what it's all about. And grandpas let you do things like that. It's kind of interesting.

Dr. James Dobson: My grandfathers were older, two of them, the grandfather and great grandfather had died before I came on the scene and my other grandfather was 80 years old. So I don't relate a whole lot. I didn't experience it. But grandmothers, I know a lot about because they had a great impact on my life. And especially spiritually, as I said earlier. How can a grandmother or grandfather go about conveying the most important thing in life to little kids, putting it into their language? I don't even know how my grandmothers did it so well, but I mean, they really did communicate to me that this was important to me.

Jay Kesler: Well, one thing that, almost universally, and this may just be generational and the fact that grandmothers don't know how to run the VCR, I don't know. But grandparents apparently do more reading than parents today. And reading is a very intimate thing, to sit with a child, the body warmth, them curled somewhere near you while grandmother reads and talks to you about things. And somehow or another, I think also this idea of God, the heavenly grandfather, is even more convincing to kids. I know our grandson, my oldest grandson, once we're driving down the driveway and just out of the blue, he said, "Grandpa, if the world got blown up by a hydrogen bomb, do you think God could put it back together again?" And I said, "Well, He did it the first time,

didn't He?" And he said, "Yeah." Well we drove just a little farther. And he starts singing, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand."

And then he said, "He's got you and me in His hand, He had mom and dad in His hand, He had His sisters in the hand." He went through every human being that I know that he knew intimately at the time in his hand. And it just seemed to settle it. Yeah. And I thought, well, why just because said it, but then I'm kind of the authority around. I'm the patriarch of our little clan and I'm about as old as you get. And God must be old like that too. And I think that grandparents can, by talking and affirming to them. Listening was a big thing, running through this thing too. Grandparents tend to listen. Not feel they got to give an answer right now.

Dr. James Dobson: There is a time in child development when those kinds of issues are very interesting to them. If you don't capture those opportunities, then when they're 14 to 16 and 18 is sometimes very difficult to make up for lost time.

Jay Kesler: Another thing I try to do toward the end of the book is to talk about the role of the aging grandparent with dealing with mortality. It's one of my biases, at least, that we've attempted to take death and all out of culture, people don't die, they pass away. Many kids have never been to a funeral. We have college students who've never been to a funeral. In fact, one of the large things I face with college students is the death of their grandparent. It's a huge thing. It's a major event on a college campus. Grandparents die and it's a very major thing to these kids. And I've tried to encourage grandparents to deal with mortality when something comes up about death and maybe the grandparents say something about it and then the child, "Oh, well you'll never die." "Oh yes, we will. Yes, we will. And I'm ready for that" and a chance to give your testimony and tell about how you found the Lord and talk about the peace that passes all understanding.

I've always said, there's nothing quite so unconvincing as a whining missionary. You go overseas a whining missionary, and there's nothing quite so unconvincing as a whining grandparent either.

But you meet some noble wonderful missionary, but you meet some whiners too. And it's pretty unconvincing stuff. But you meet a grandparent who is whining about old age, everything is bad, the world's turning bad on them, sickness, everything, all they talk about is misery and all, as opposed to God having prepared us for this experience and we're going to be with him someday and old things will pass away and all things become new. I actually have sat with numbers of people who've moved off into eternity as committed Christians who did it well. I think it would be a good thing for grandparents to try to do well, grow old well. One probably doesn't need to unbutton a couple buttons on his shirt and get a gold chain and trade in his, what do they say, 40 year old wife or two twenties, and then find out they're not wired for 220 and all that. This whole idea. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Go back. But to really do it with dignity, I think kids respect this and they need it from grandparents.

Dr. James Dobson: I think they that's what my grandmothers did for me. They talked a lot about Heaven. We don't do that anymore. Ministers today talk about getting through tomorrow and capturing the power of God for more successful living and all that stuff. Prosperity. And man, they talked in those days about a few more years to carry on and then I'm going to see Jesus. And they translated that to me as a four, five or six year old in a way that made me want to go there.

Jay Kesler: Well, in a way, it's the theme of the Old Testament. God was faithful throughout history, therefore He'll be faithful to you in the future. A grandparent who can tell a young person about their own youth, about God's faithfulness in their life, the vicissitudes of their life, the things they went through that were painful and struggling. And yet they now they've arrived at old age, happy with what God has given them. They don't have regrets and so on. This is very important stuff. It teaches more about sovereignty than all the theology in the world really.

Dr. James Dobson: I think you're kind of enjoying this role, Jay.

Jay Kesler: I am, I am. And the thing that I'm enjoying most is a realization that it's a live, real function. I even take the time in this book to get into kind of the heritage of it, the thought of assuring their education for instance. When you think about it, I think about our kids and our nine grandchildren, will they be able to afford to educate our grandchildren? And if I can participate in some way in that process, I'll feel very good to be able to provide Christian education, for instance, as opposed to saying, well, I need one more trip to wherever. I'm not sure I do.

Dr. James Dobson: Does that actually affect your spending decisions today?

Jay Kesler: Absolutely. You pass on money to your children about the time they don't need it, but in fact, grandchildren and their education and all, and I think you can direct some of it that way. Inflation does move along, but when you look at it in raw numbers, it's really frightening. And at some point the rag will hit the gears. And I think grandparents can think about that. Do something about it, as opposed to saying, well, let's just blow this somewhere. I drove with a grandparent out here in the airplane who's going to Las Vegas for Christmas. Well, I not sure that's where I'd like to spend Christmas.

Dr. James Dobson: You deal in your book with what you call surrogate grandparenting. You need to explain what that is.

Jay Kesler: What I've found is that there are a great many lonely grandparents, really in our churches whose families have disbursed across the country. The grandchildren live in Philadelphia and they live in California or whatever. And yet the church also, because that same thing has a lot of little nuclear families in it, where there are families whose grandparents live a long distance away or single parent families. And one thing I found very effective is grandparents who kind of adopt families and become surrogate grandparents, come to our house on Easter or come to our house on Thanksgiving. You're not going to be able to go to

Philadelphia, come to our house. And I found that this grandma and grandpa, whatever, in the church is a wonderful function and gives many grandparents a great sense of belonging and sense of well-being, a sense of accomplishment and contribution. In fact, especially maybe with some of these little families with a single parent, totally cut off, they're the only human in the world, and to be able to come to someone's house and to get in a family configuration that is powerful, powerful stuff.

Dr. James Dobson: And do some mentoring for them.

Jay Kesler: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Grandparents who are perhaps located a long ways from their kids are often the most underutilized people around because they got 20 years experience in parenting and they're no longer fulfilling that role.

Jay Kesler: Don't just sit on the back pew. Invite them to the house and you'll find they'll come, they'll want to come. And it's a powerful, powerful thing. I have a lot of data that shows it.

Dr. James Dobson: And you know what, the kids fall in love with them too.

Jay Kesler: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't have to be in the family for kids to fall in love with you.

Jay Kesler: That's right. And some of them really do not have any other known grandparent and so you end up being a lifelong grandparent and that's a special blessing to certain people.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk. And that was part two of Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Dr. Jay Kesler on the topic of grandparenting. What an encouraging and poignant reminder of the value and influence of older generations in a child's life here on today's installment of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Proverbs 16:31 says, "Gray hair is a crown of splendor. It is attained in the way of righteousness." Grandparents and older adults are in a unique position to pour wisdom, grace, and love into younger generations. So today, why not take a moment to ask God to show you how you can begin encouraging your grandchildren. Now to hear any part of today's program that you might have missed, visit drhamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast, or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. We have team members available around the clock to take your call.

Now, before we go, I want to tell you about a special campaign that we are supporting here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. As Easter quickly

approaches, wouldn't it be great if there was an easy way to introduce people in your community to Jesus Christ, to have an opportunity that isn't confrontational and is also a blessing to them as well? Well, that's exactly what we're providing with our new Life Baskets Initiative. Here's how it works. First, pray for God to put a person or maybe a family on your heart who He would like you to share the gospel with. It could be a neighbor, coworker, or maybe someone else in your life. Then take a simple basket and load it up with treats and other goodies for that person or family to whom you are led. Add an invitation to your church's Easter services, along with a small Bible and a gospel tract. And then finally take it to that person and then watch the Lord go to work.

For more information on how to create a life basket and all helpful links for what to put in it, go to drjamesdobson.org/lifebasket. That's drjamesdobson.org/lifebasket. We can't wait to see what God does. Well, we've come to the end of our time on today's edition of Family Talk, please join us again tomorrow for the third and final installment of Dr. Dobson's important with Dr. Jay Kesler on the topic of the high call of grandparenting.

Thanks again for listening and may God richly bless you and your family today and every day. Join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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