



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Rescuing Fatherless Boys - Part 2

Guest: John Smithbaker

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, and this is the second part of a very important broadcast that we are going to provide for you today. Our guest is John Smithbaker, but as I said yesterday, in the case of boys, they're not born knowing how to be a man. They have to learn that. This was no small thing in your life. When you were young, you knew something was missing, and you're a sensitive man. You are not a guy just who could forget it and go on with life. You had a need to be with your dad and there was no hope that that was going to happen, and it hurts you. Explain again, and then we'll move on.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. No, it's devastating. I knew that I was broken and hurt. At the same time, everyone was telling me to get over it and big boys don't cry. But I knew I was hurt. So as much as I tried to forget about it, my soul could not.

John Smithbaker: Then typically what happens to fatherless boys is that they have these men, stepdads, boyfriends that come into her life that they then cling onto and think, well maybe this will be my dad or dad figure. The reality is second marriages with kids, it's over a 70% divorce rate so you go through that hurt again. So you go through another loss, and the losses of these men leaving your life compound and your heart develops a very tough calloused hurt that really has to be dealt with or it will control your whole life.

Dr. James Dobson: Well you've dealt with a lot of men. What are the characteristics of somebody who has not had a dad to make a contribution in their lives?

John Smithbaker: Well, they're very sensitive to the fact that they're unworthy, and that unworthiness plays out in two different ways, in my opinion. They rebel and they're angry and bitter on the outward and they get in trouble, and 85% of them get adjudicated. We can see the prisons are full of fatherless boys.

John Smithbaker: The other 15% try to become perfectionists in a way and earn their father's affection in return. That was the route I took. But in the end it still controls your life and you put other things above, especially when you become married and become a father yourself, you put yourself above the needs of your children and

you really end up abandoning your children through divorce versus maybe out of wedlock.

Dr. James Dobson: You were reaching for him and he was not there. You said that he lived on the other side of town, so you would go over there to see him or be with him. But he really wasn't interested, was he?

John Smithbaker: No. It wasn't a long time. I just remember ... The fantasies these boys have I had, that my dad would come back on a white horse and rear up, bust the door down and say, "I have come back for you. I have not abandoned you. I did not leave you. I was off fighting this righteous battle and now I've come back." That's that's the fantasy we have.

John Smithbaker: Then once the fantasy goes away when you get older, co-mingled with adolescents and testosterone, that's when it explodes inside of a boy. That's when it all goes haywire. Children, and boys, children spell love T-I-M-E.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

John Smithbaker: And this concept that, no, it's the specialness of the time together. These kids don't care what you do, they just want your time. That's what signals love to them, and that's what fatherless boys don't have. They don't have time from a man. They don't have time. They have a lot of broken promises but no time.

Dr. James Dobson: Now John, you did not grow up in what we would call a Christian home.

John Smithbaker: No.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were 40 before you came to terms with Jesus Christ.

John Smithbaker: Amen. Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell me about that experience.

John Smithbaker: Well, we talked about Uncle Bucky a little bit. I was on the way after work scrambling around to go meet him fishing on the Green River in Wyoming. It was around midnight and I was driving on a dark, lonely highway trying to get to the little cabin where we were going to meet to go fishing.

John Smithbaker: I didn't know how to explain it then, but know how to explain it now. I was overcome by the Holy Spirit, and I pulled my truck over the side of the road. I don't know why the Lord plucked me out of the pit of hell right then, but I pulled over my truck, got on my hands and knees, and I begged for his forgiveness. I was bawling and I saw all my horrible sins flash before me and I thought I was done. And I heard the Lord, my Father now, speak to me. He says, "No John, you need to now forgive your earthly father for leaving you."

John Smithbaker: That's the one sin, that's the one thing that fatherless boys tell themselves every day, multiple times a day. I will never, ever forgive my father for leaving.

Dr. James Dobson: John, that is so important. It's so significant, because you couldn't get past the anger and the wound inside until you forgave that man.

John Smithbaker: It was the deepest thing in me.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the hardest thing in the world to do.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. It was the deepest sin in me, because we all know that unforgiveness is a sin, no matter the hurt and the pain. It doesn't mean reconciliation, but it was sin. And I paused, because I didn't want to do it. But said, "Okay, I will." When I said that, I felt a rush through my body and I knew I was clean and I was healed and I had a relationship with-

Dr. James Dobson: But you had to go talk to him, did you not?

John Smithbaker: Well as soon as I got back I wrote a letter to my dad, and I shared with him that I accepted Christ. Basically the summarization of the letter is, "Dad, what you did was terribly wrong, mattered greatly my life. But through the power of Christ, I have forgiven you."

Dr. James Dobson: Did you actually go to see him?

John Smithbaker: I did, and then we exchanged letters for a little bit. Then finally the Lord convicted me and I said, "I need to share the gospel in person with my dad," and I did it. It was one of the last things I did with my dad. The last thing I remember my dad telling me, he said he didn't believe in that. Shortly thereafter, he came down with cancer and he died.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't hate him today?

John Smithbaker: No, not at all. In fact, I told him, I said, "Dad, when you stand in front of our Heavenly Father, you will know that your son loves you." Because when you share the gospel with somebody, you're telling them you love them.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

John Smithbaker: That you care enough about them. Obviously it still hits a scar today. But I do love him, because we're all sinners. We all need to be forgiven. We just do. So I was thankful to the Lord that he gave me that opportunity, and I believe it can't happen without the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely.

John Smithbaker: And that's the key. That's the center of the Fathers in the Field ministry. It's not to do activities with the fatherless, but it's meant to address the father wound in them, and to let them know that through forgiveness of their father leaving them, they can still be the man God intended them to be. But it will not happen if they have unrepentant unforgiveness in their soul. Because our Father tells us in heaven that sin gets in our way with having a relationship with him.

Dr. James Dobson: After you asked Jesus to forgive you and your life changed and then you began to try to reach your father, the Lord laid a ministry on you. We've got to talk about Fathers in the Field.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You felt a responsibility to reach out to all those kids who don't have a man in their life, and you're doing it and you're doing it well. I'm proud of you, John. Tell me and tell everybody else what's you're doing.

John Smithbaker: Well thank you. That was very encouraging coming from you. Fathers in the Field is a Christ-centered mentoring ministry that specifically deals with the father abandonment wound in boys. The way we do that, through my experience and my hurt and pain that the Lord took me through, we have written a curriculum that specifically deals with that and helps the mentor father interact with this boy. We intentionally address, we don't avoid it, we don't sidestep it, we intentionally address this father wound in this boy. Because if we don't, these boys are hurting and you can see most of them get adjudicated and a lot of them go to prison and they cause havoc in this world because they're hurting. Wounded people hurt other people.

Dr. James Dobson: You're not talking just about inner city kids.

John Smithbaker: No.

Dr. James Dobson: You're talking about boys-

John Smithbaker: Boys.

Dr. James Dobson: Everywhere you look.

John Smithbaker: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Black, white, all races, they have, many of them, a high percentage of them, about 12 million in the United States have that pattern.

John Smithbaker: Well practically. It can be suburbia, it can be wherever, but no matter where you look every boy you see, every child you see walking around, two out of every four are fatherless. What are we doing as a church to intentionally address

them? What we're doing is we're walking by them, but we're not addressing the wound.

John Smithbaker: The Fathers in the Field ministry allows the church to do its biblical mandate and defend the cause of the fatherless through their church. The church has to adopt that. This is their ministry. We just help them and coach them to do this, because they're the ones that raise up men, they're the ones that raise up mentor fathers, those are the ones that hold them accountable. And the church, the holistic approach of church, God's bride, helps heal this boy and the broken family, and that's what's so special.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, Fathers in the Field now has a relationship that you just described with more than 200 churches and you're growing all the time.

John Smithbaker: Yep, another several hundred in the works of enrolling, we call it enrolling. I basically speak to churches to get them off their duff, to reach out to the fatherless in their community. Stop walking by them.

Dr. James Dobson: John, how does it make you feel when you've seen one of these kids that is just so broken and so lost-

John Smithbaker: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: And have no man to take the time to show him and teach him and tell him about Jesus, and then you have an opportunity to change a boy. Do you see changes in these kids?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Our first field buddy, his name was Mason, God took us through this to share the redeeming quality that God has planned for us if we intentionally reached out to these fatherless boys. Our church, the grandmother called and said, "My grandson needs a mentor." Great, we have a mentor father ready for you, Scott. He's actually the pastor of the church at the time.

John Smithbaker: Mason took to Scott. They planned elk hunting trips. They did all kinds of things. But when Mason did the curriculum and he got to the point and said, hey, you need to forgive your earthly father, he wrote in his journal, "I will never, ever forgive my earthly father."

John Smithbaker: Shortly after he wrote that, he got a letter from his dad who was in prison. Never met his dad. Dad finally wrote him a letter and said, "Son, I'm going to be getting out soon. I'd like to see you."

John Smithbaker: It was stunned. You know what I mean? Shortly thereafter that Mason came in. I was his Sunday school teacher at the time, said, "Guess what? I forgave my dad, and it's powerful stuff. I forgave him last night. I want to be baptized," and he was. He wrote in his journal that he did all those things.

John Smithbaker: But he asked us, because the state was coming up now about the prison, seeing his dad, he said, "What do I do?" And we asked him, "What do you think you should do?" And he says, "Well, I'm going to write him a letter that I forgave him, and I'm going to give him a Bible." That's what he did. He went to prison and he saw his dad and he did that. His dad says, "I'm going to be getting out in six months. We're going to start doing all kinds of stuff together." This kid was so happy.

John Smithbaker: That time came six months later. His dad didn't call, didn't show up. He just got out of prison and left. Mason was heart-

Dr. James Dobson: That's downright cruel.

John Smithbaker: I know. Mason was heartbroken, but he shared, he says, "I'm okay, because I know I have a Heavenly Father that loves me, that will never leave or forsake me. It hurts, but I know I'm forgiven and I've forgiven my dad.

Dr. James Dobson: John, as you know, the relationship between a child and the father is symbolic of the relationship between an individual and God.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's sometimes very, very difficult for a child to comprehend a loving God because he's never seen one. He's never been the recipient of it. How do you tell these boys that Jesus loves them when they've only been beaten or rejected or ignored?

John Smithbaker: That's a great question. These boys have been lied to, disappointed, and so many promises and commitments broken by men, especially their dad, so words have no meaning to them. We tell these mentor fathers the most important thing you're going to do in your life in the early part of your relationship with this boy, is when you say I'm going to pick you up, you show up. Because that will make his heart leap for joy.

John Smithbaker: So what we do as part of the curriculum is we get to show how much the Heavenly Father loves us. He gave his Son to die a painful, shameful death on the cross for us. We show him those examples. It's not about the words, it's about the demonstration of action of love of our Heavenly Father. What I like to say is Fathers in the Field has translated the gospel into a fatherless boy language that they can understand.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what did you do? Do you do scouting type things? Do you go out in the woods?

John Smithbaker: Yeah, that's a great question. Mentor fathers, what we do is we release men to do ministry work through their church. So they raise up, say I'll be a mentor father, and the church vets them and approves them. If they're a mature,

spiritually mature Christian man, they're ready to be a mentor father. Whatever their passion is, if it's outdoors, fishing, hunting, woodworking, automotive, that's where they serve. We like to keep them in their comfort zone so they can be the hero in these boys' lives.

Dr. James Dobson: And the boy will love anything he loves.

John Smithbaker: Yes, exactly. So what they do, as we said, it's a three-year commitment, but it's broken down in one-year terms. So every year they do an end of year celebration event. So if it's a hunting trip, they go on a three day, two night hunting trip with other mentor fathers from the church and they progressively plan to take that end of your trip throughout the year. So every month they get together and say, "Is it a white tail? Is it a mule deer? Are you using a bow or using a rifle or what?" They progressively ... They go to the shooting range. They get their hunter education service that they need to. But whatever it is, they're hands on with this boy throughout the year.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the age range now? What are the youngest you take?

John Smithbaker: Yeah, we say 7 to 17. Anything before that is more like babysitting to men, and 17, they're pretty much adults then.

Dr. James Dobson: And it doesn't cost the mother anything.

John Smithbaker: Doesn't cost the mother anything. That's the great thing. The relationship for the church, the single mom and the mentor father, that is the triangle that is used to help this boy in his circumstance.

John Smithbaker: Some men ask, one of the most common questions, what if I have young kids myself? I had young kids, and what I did was I sat my kids down around the table and said, "I'd like to be a mentor father. I'd like you to consider this next week and pray to the Lord to tithe some of your time of mine to this fatherless boy. Would you be willing to do that?" They all came back and said, "Yes." So having kids does not prevent you from doing this. In fact, for me it was the best way for me to share Jesus in my home versus giving a sermon.

John Smithbaker: They could see Jesus in action through me because I love the unlovable. My selfish time that I used to call it, now I'm spending it in kingdom work. That is the liberating fact that we tell men, you can serve the kingdom in your passion. God made you for a reason. Don't believe this world. You can serve the kingdom. You don't have to have all these letters behind your name. You don't have to have gone to theological school. If you're a spiritually mature Christian and you love the Lord and your leadership team approves you, you are ready to serve.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. John, you got a smile on your face and there's a twinkle in your eye and your voice shows the excitement. You love this, don't you?

John Smithbaker: Yes. To see Jesus's love in action should bring joy to us. We can hear about Jesus all we want, but until you experience Jesus, you're missing something. And these boys and these men get to experience Jesus.

Dr. James Dobson: Now enough time has gone by for some of those kids to become men. Do you maintain a relationship with them?

John Smithbaker: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Does the mentor continue to be important in the life of a man like that?

John Smithbaker: Absolutely. It's probably the second most asked question we get. What happens after that mentoring relationship? We say, "These three years are a mentoring relationship, but after that three years, then you have a relationship, a disciple relationship, a friendship." So an intentional mentoring relationship just ends and a discipleship relationship starts. A lot of these mentor fathers after the three years with a boy that's gone off to college now, they'll invest into a life of another boy. Just like in any Christian walk, you become a maker of disciples.

Dr. James Dobson: Because so many single parents and their children are really destitute, they're really struggling financially, do you help them financially?

John Smithbaker: Well again, what we recommend in the church is let all the ministries of the church holistically come alongside this broken family. When the mentor father interacts with that family, we call it a front porch policy, they go there. They never go inside the home of the single mom. But when the single mom says, "Hey, we don't have any food or the roof is leaking or my car broke down again." Again, we coach the men to say, "Well, thank you so much for sharing that with me. We will tell the church and the deacons will come help you." Let the deacons do their ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that's Christianity in action, I'll tell you.

John Smithbaker: Isn't it? It's awesome. Let the women's group come alongside the single mom. We have these mom groups in these churches now that give a corsage to these field buddies on Mother's Day, and they get to take home a corsage to their mom for Mother's Day. It's beautiful. They would never have that opportunity. It speaks volume that the Lord loves them, the church loves them.

John Smithbaker: We see children coming to church. I'll have to share one story. In Wyoming when we started, we were mentoring these two boys in one family, and they had two mentor fathers. They lived a couple blocks away from the church. They had a daughter, a sibling, in that home. She was 12, 13 years old. The two mentor fathers went and picked up the boys, brought him to church and I was a Sunday school teacher. All of a sudden the daughter shows up. She's barefoot. She walked two blocks in winter time to come to church. She wanted it to be part of it.

Dr. James Dobson: John, it occurs to me that one way to phrase what you do, we're living in a culture where the family is just disintegrating and it's in crisis, and this is first aid for the family.

John Smithbaker: Yes it is.

Dr. James Dobson: This is really Christians coming in there, Christian men, not just women. Women usually do the work of the church. It's Christian men saying I can make a difference here, and I can win one of these kids to Christ. I will know him throughout eternity.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about a benefit-

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: To what you do. I tell you John, I believe in it, and I'm so excited to hear about this.

John Smithbaker: Oh, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Are you holding up? Is this something you're going to wear out on? Because I'm sure you got a thousand components to it.

John Smithbaker: Well, the Lord encourages me every day. That's what I love. I wake up in the morning, I'm ready to do the Lord's work. It doesn't mean it's not hard, but most things that are good are hard. We have to raise support. We need financial supporters. We need mentor fathers. We need churches to believe in us. But that's okay. God just asks us to be obedient and go, and as long as we're going and the Lord's in it, he's going to open the doors. He's going to raise the men. He's going to convict the churches. He's going to supply the funds. All that will be worth it if we reach one boy.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's it. John, I say this because it will help others. You found my book, Bringing up Boys, very helpful.

John Smithbaker: Oh, it was the best book I ever read, growing up fatherless and being a new father. Yes, it was.

Dr. James Dobson: That came into your life when you were starting to reach out to boys. You have to understand who they are first.

John Smithbaker: I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know how to interact with them. I didn't know what he needed from me. That's why you've always been a father figure, almost a hero to me, because there was no place else to turn to learn this for

me. So the opportunity to meet you and talk to you here is a dream come true, so thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I've got moist eyes from hearing you today, and thank you for coming and being with us again. I'd like to have a long-term relationship with you and your ministry.

John Smithbaker: Well, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Fathers in the Field.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And how can they reach you?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Fathersinthefield.com, and I'd just reach out to men out there. Don't believe the lie the world has to tell you. You can serve the kingdom. God made you and gave you the passion for a reason. Use it for a kingdom pursuit versus a selfish pursuit. Intentionally invest in the life of fathers in your own community. You can do this. If you love the Lord, you're ready to serve.

Dr. James Dobson: John, thank you for being our guest. We've been talking to John Smithbaker, and you've made a lot of new friends because there are a lot of folks out there that are going to resonate with what you've been saying and what you're doing. I ask our listeners also to pray for you.

John Smithbaker: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And pray for those men. Nearly every man's got more to do than he can get done.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He's busy. His business has taken the measure on him or whatever he's doing. If he's a physician or a lawyer or whatever he is, you can bet he doesn't have any time to just sit around. Yet these guys are taking their time and going out there and investing in a boy. So this is first aid for the family.

John Smithbaker: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: John, thank you. We're out of time. I love you brother, and keep in touch with us.

John Smithbaker: Love you too. Thanks for having me.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to John Smithbaker, the founder of Fathers in the Field, a Christ-centered mentoring ministry for fatherless boys, along with our own Dr.

James Dobson here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. First John 3:18 has become part of their DNA. "Let us love not in word or talk, but in deed and in truth." Like Dr. Dobson said, this is first aid for the family.

Roger Marsh: Now to learn more about John Smithbaker, his book, The Great American Rescue Mission, or the ministry of Fathers in the Field, please visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

Roger Marsh: Dr. Dobson, of course is continuing to work on his latest book and he and his bride, Shirley, are in Southern California right now soaking up the sunshine. He'll be back in studio with us again in May.

Roger Marsh: Now before we go, another reminder about a very special premium that Dr. Dobson has created for families of all ages and all stages of life. It's the powerful eight DVD collection called Building a Family Legacy. The set consists of eight, hour long films based on some of Dr. Dobson's best-selling books and teachings, including Bringing up Boys, Bringing up Girls, Dare to Discipline, Love for a Lifetime, and more.

Roger Marsh: Now we'll be happy to send you a copy of this eight DVD collection as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the ministry of Family Talk today. Bear in mind an eight DVD box set would cost at least \$50 or more if you were to purchase it in the open marketplace. So give generously when you call or click today. Drjamesdobson.org is our web address. That's drjamesdobson.org, or call us at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825.

Roger Marsh: For all of us here at Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening, and 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.