



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment – Part 2

**Guest(s):** John Smithbaker

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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.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Welcome back into Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of the broadcast here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Hey, if you were with us yesterday, you heard an amazing encouraging conversation with our special guest, John Smithbaker and myself. John is back on the program today to discuss his latest book, *Man Enough to Forgive*. John's the founder and president of his ministry called Fathers in the Field, which he launched in 2005. He earned his Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Arizona, his MBA from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. He's the former president and CEO of Brunton Outdoor Group, which sells some pretty cool outdoor gear. John is married to his wife Tracy. Together they have three grown children. John, welcome back.

**John Smithbaker:** Oh, thank you. I am so grateful for your guys' heart for the fatherless and the widows and the distress. Thank you for having me on. It is a joy, a privilege. I want to commend you guys for the kingdom work you do. Thank you.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** John, I wanted to also commend you again on your new book, *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Fatherhood Abandonment*. John, I think it's going to be a best-seller. I really believe that. I tipped my hat to you. I know this is your heart, your passion, but I'm going to go John to a conversation I had recently, teenage boy. "Why didn't my dad care about me? Why didn't he reach out to me?" I'm not doing justice to the level of emotional pain when this boy looked me straight in the eyes. And when you don't have much words, you hear what I'm saying? It's like, "Hey, let me put my arms around you. Let me carry you for a little bit here." So you know that. John, it's so sad. I know. I said yesterday, we all look in the stands for our dads.

**John Smithbaker:** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** And consider his presence. And by the way, his input one of the most important factors of life. And when you don't have a dad in the stands, for whatever reason, it leaves a big gaping hole in your heart.

John Smithbaker: Yes. As we've said, first of all, I know you get it because you had a wonderful dad. And so everybody gets this from one perspective or the other. Dads matter. Dads fulfill a glorious God ordained purpose. They're not disposable. They're not replaceable. And he's God's chosen man to shepherd this child He gave him into righteous manhood. And when that is broken, the consequences are devastating. And the void in these boys is profound and causes mostly havoc on society because they are hurting, they are confused, and they are trying to fill that void with the things of this world. And it doesn't satisfy.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I know your ministry Fathers in the Field is oriented toward boys ages seven to 17. And so much of our conversation is going to be about boys, but it's true for girls and boys. When dad's gone, it's empty. It's broken. The land is barren. And we salute, by the way, all the moms out there who "stand in the gap" or doing everything they can-

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But I'll tell you what, to put the burden of them being a dad on top of, it's just not right or fair either. You know what I'm saying?

John Smithbaker: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So John, in this journey, you are very open. You talk a lot about your own personal journey, but you want to address the issue of father abandonment.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so John, let's go straight into that. What is it? What does it mean to you? I mean, as you've really not just looked in your own life, you've done a lot of research. You look in the eyes of boys every day.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What does it mean?

John Smithbaker: First of all, I can see a fatherless boy by just looking in his eyes. When I coached little league, I saw them. I mean, I could tell who the fatherless boys were the very first practice. They have a limp. They are hurting. They are desperately seeking for direction and instruction. They know there's a void. And so when God saved me and put Fathers in the Field on my heart, we created a ministry to go after these hurting boys. And then we get to go and knock on churches', doors, get churches to respond to the biblical mandate, to defend the cause of the fathers in their own communities. And God is having great impact there.

But every time we engage with the church, I have the pastor pull me aside and say, "Listen, the impact you guys are having is remarkable on these boys. But we have this whole host of men who are fatherless boys that have never dealt with

the hurt and the anger and the unforgiveness who are now men and my church, our church, the church, is being overrun with all the symptoms of fatherlessness in adulthood. Would you please create something to help us help these men deal with the fatherhood wound?" And so that was the genesis of creating *Man Enough to Forgive*. It's a four part series curriculum that specifically deals with the fatherhood abandonment role in these men.

It's written in a man's language, not a boy's language. It's direct, it's frank. It pierces all the excuses that men and the world give. It lays it bare, and it confronts men with the biblical concept that believers are commanded to forgive. And understanding that these fatherless boys carrying around that fatherhood abandonment wound from youth into their adulthood still believe, just like the boys do, that the father abandonment wound is the unforgivable sin. They view it as the unforgivable sin.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, John. And when you have to carry it, when you got all that anger, you got hate in you because of what happened. You know that and however it came about. I'm thinking about kids who grew up in homes where dad's screaming down the third base line, "Swing the stupid bat. What's the matter with you?", to dad coming home drunk and raising his hand to him or something? You hear what I'm saying?

John Smithbaker: Yeah, absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And physically hurting them or he's a workaholic and he doesn't have any emotional energy or care, doesn't show up. He makes promises that he doesn't keep. Or John, maybe dad died. He's just gone. Everybody else has a dad and I don't have a dad. And I'm angry about that. It's like, "Dad, why did you die?" You know that?

John Smithbaker: Amen. Listen, this is a big issue in our nation, and you hit all the right issues. I talk to men all the time. There are bad dads out there, but the abandonment wound still is the deepest of wounds because they said, "If my dad was there, this wasn't happening." And so the reason the book says the fatherhood wound and not the father abandonment wound, it's the fatherhood wound, is because we have to, as a church and prayerfully as a society, have to define what a father is. A father is a pastor, provider, protector. Those roles cannot be fulfilled if the father is not in the home. And then first thing, men will say to me, "Well, are you saying I don't love my children because of divorce?" No, no. This has nothing to do with love. This has to do with the fulfillment of the God ordained, God designed roles of fathers and fatherhood, and you need to be in the home.

As soon as the man leaves the home through divorce, death, whatever, this boy views himself as fatherless. I'm talking about looking at the world through a precious fatherless boy's eyes and what he needs from a shepherd. If that shepherd is not in the home, there is no way he can fulfill the God-ordained roles of pastor, provider and protector. And there is a deep wound when that happens.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So what you're saying is the consequences then are profound.

John Smithbaker: Yes. Deeply profound. And as well as attended, it may be by moms, by churches, by schools, by counselors, by coaches, they tell these-

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're not going to get rid of the consequences.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. They say it's going to be okay. And they say, well, how is it going to be okay? How? How is that void filled? It's not. It's not. You need a godly man to speak godly truth into that soul. And now it's even harder because he's hurting and he's calloused and scar-tissued up around his heart and soul.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then the fruit of it is you got a boy who's grown up or a man who is confused about what he believes about himself and what he believes about others.

John Smithbaker: Oh, I know. Yeah. Looking back, after I got saved at 40 years old, living on top of the world, making more money than I thought, having more fun and flexibility and all that in life, when after God saved me, He made it very clear, I'm on the road to divorce. I was going to abandon my children because of my selfish pursuits and my selfish desires. I put myself above my wife, my family, and my children. That is just a hard truth of it. Praise God, He saved me when he did because I would've abandoned my fatherhood roles by leaving, by leaving. And thankfully I didn't. I'm not saying I'm a perfect father, but I do know now that I need to ask for forgiveness all the time. And that is part of sacrificial love and fatherhood. But I have to tell you that there's over a million fatherless children a year that enter adulthood.

Every year there's a new crop of adults, a million a year, that go into adulthood that have never dealt with the fatherless wound inside them. And it creates havoc in marriages, workplace culture. And all we hear are the ones that have blown up out of complete anger and causing havoc on the world. Or you have men who are passive, men who are effeminate, men who are homosexual, men have abandoned their roles in silence and given up. You have mental illnesses. It is profound. If you really, really, really look at our culture and the state of men, it is shocking what is going on. The tsunami is on its way, and it is going to hit.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, we've got to get into what the heart of the book is all about. And that is the journey to, I'll call it freedom.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. John, take us there because this begins the journey toward healing, the journey toward how I get through this thing, how I can forgive.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm going to be a generational legacy type dad myself.

John Smithbaker: Amen. Amen. Fatherlessness strikes at the heart of the identity of men. *Man Enough to Forgive* is geared towards believers. And it shows you who you are in Christ. You are a new creation. There's no shame in your past. You were born for a glorious purpose and most importantly for the fatherless boy identity and soul herding perspective, you are now an adopted son of the most-high God, King, Savior, your Heavenly Father, who knew your name before the foundation of the world. You are now a redeemed, adopted son. That is your identity. And once a fatherless boy understands that we all need to be adopted, that he is no longer weird or different, we all end up needing to be adopted or our souls will perish in Hell.

And when you're adopted, you have a new life, you have a new King, and you have to follow his commands. We are not talking about you. As a believer, you are commanded to forgive sin. You are commanded to forgive. And if you harbor any unforgiveness, that is a sin. That is the blunt focus of this book. Unforgiveness is a sin. And as a believer, you have to understand when you have unconfessed, unrepresented sin, you are out of fellowship with your Heavenly Father. The one who adopted you, you are out of fellowship. And what's it mean to be out of fellowship with your Heavenly Father? You're on the sidelines just where the devil wants you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So John, what you're saying is, if I hold or harbor this in my heart, I am angry. I am frustrated. I am alone. I feel abandoned. If I keep harboring it in my heart, I'm drinking my own poison, so to speak. I'm allowing it to fester. And I can't break free from it unless I let it go, unless I release it to God, unless I quote, like you say, cancel the debt. In the book you're talking about forgiveness. It's a pardon. I'm letting it go. But John, it gives me power in a sense to have anger or hatred. You hear what I'm saying?

John Smithbaker: You've hit the nail on the head. See, because the fatherless wound created an identity crisis. These boys now view their identity as a fatherless boy, a fatherless man that deserves to be mad, deserves to be the victim. And we have to tell these, no, no, just like you said, I may not understand every single fatherless boy hurt and the destructive, abusive, damaging issues that happened in their life. But do you know who does? Christ. Christ does. And He's the one that commanded us to forgive. He doesn't give us an out say, "But this one, we have got to forgive." And I want to talk to all the men out there that are saying, "But you just don't understand." I do not, but Christ does. And he commanded you to forgive. He's not saying what your father did was correct or right. He's saying it's bad. It's sin.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. You're not glossing over.

John Smithbaker: No.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What you're choosing to do, is to allow it not to harbor or fester in your heart anymore.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: While you were saying that, John, in my mind that Tim McGraw's song popped up in my brain, Live Like You're Dying. And then one of the key lines in that was he gave forgiveness a try. You got to let it go because listen, it's a gift.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That doesn't mean, hey, your dad's going to accept it. That doesn't mean you're going to reconcile because that may not be possible. He may not want, like, "You don't know my dad. My dad won't even talk to me." Let it go.

John Smithbaker: Amen. We do a very poor job, in my opinion, in the church body of differentiating between forgiveness and reconciliation. This book talks about those differences. But this book has nothing to do with the motivation of reconciliation to your father. It has to do with your relationship with your Heavenly Father and for you to be the man God intended you to be by following God's obedient plan for forgiveness. And listen, when you're out of fellowship with your Heavenly Father, many things happen. You cannot be the righteous king in your dominion. When you have unforgiveness in your heart, you cannot do it. You cannot be the man God intended you to be. Now, listen, when you're out of fellowship with your Heavenly Father, some of the consequences of that, that means our Heavenly Father may not even be listening to your prayers.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's what Peter wrote about. He said, "Yeah, your prayer life will go hindered."

John Smithbaker: Yeah. So you're praying for your children, you're praying for your marriage, you're praying for your work, you're praying for your other family members. And God may not even listen to those because you are harboring unforgiveness in your heart. It's the brutal truth.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But John, it's so hard, you know that. These are hard truths, but they're filled with grace.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here's the word. God will go with you. God will give you the strength to do it. God doesn't want you to harbor or hold that in your heart anymore. John, what was it like for you when you let go with your dad?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. I can remember it like it was yesterday. I had a road to Damascus conversion. And when I was on my knees crying my heart out, begging for God's forgiveness, I saw all my earthly, fleshly sins flash before me. And I gave up

those so fast. But I heard my Heavenly Father illuminate to me. He says, "John, now you need to forgive your earthly father for abandoning you." And that is the one sin I did not want to give up because every fatherless boy tells themselves multiple times a day, I am never, ever, ever going to forgive my dad for abandoning me. It's the deepest of sin in fatherless boys. It's the deepest of sin in us. That's the one we don't want to let go. That's the one we think is unforgivable. So when I was on that ground in that dark road, as soon as I heard my Heavenly Father say that, I pause and said, "Do you know what you're asking? Do you know what he did and what he didn't do?"

And when I forgave through the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I then felt the rush go through my body. I then knew I was born again and I was a new creation. How can we not forgive our father for the horrible sin of fatherhood abandonment, when we fully know what Christ has done for us on that cross. It's unearned, it's unmerited. We are waiting for our father to say he's sorry and I was wrong, but that probably never going to happen. But we are called to forgive just like Christ forgave us. The most basic prayer that all believers know is our Lord's prayer. Our Father who art in Heaven. That prayer says we are to forgive. And it's very clear in the Scriptures of Mark that if we do not forgive, our Heavenly Father will not forgive us.

It's a powerful statement. We need to take it serious. As believers, we need to confront it, not make excuses. This book leaves it at the footsteps of these men in clear terms. So then it becomes a decision. Forgiveness is a decision. It's not restitution. It's not because he first asked for forgiveness. It's a decision by a believer to follow the commands of his Heavenly Father to forgive. And I can guarantee you when you do that, you will be relieved of the deepest of hurt, the deepest of anger. You will no longer have a festering wound. You will have a scar. You may have a limp, but you will no longer let unforgiveness control your life. And men, listen to me. You can be the man God intended you to be. And it's all through forgiveness. The whole gospel, the whole Scriptures is about forgiveness. How can we withhold forgiveness when He didn't withhold it from us?

Dr. Tim Clinton: We can forgive because we're forgiven. That's where it starts.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And maybe God's saying to you today, "It's time to let it go. Stop carrying that burden. I understand the pain and I'm asking you to let it go." The spirit of God, I believe, is moving John and He's calling his children back to Himself, and we've got to do this work of forgiveness we do. It's time to give it a try. John, I want to congratulate you again on your new book, *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment*. And John, if people want to learn more about your new book and this curriculum that you've got, a four-part series that goes with it as well as it learn more about your ministry called Fathers in the Field and how they can engage this fatherless generation in and through the local church, it's time John to do this work. Where can they go?

John Smithbaker: Thank you. Listen, men have been the problem, but men are the answer. Men, you are born for a glorious purpose. Don't let the devil steal it from you through unforgiveness. You can directly go [manenoughtoforgive.com](http://manenoughtoforgive.com). You can read about it more. There's some podcasts that help deal with this issue. Or you can go to the Fathers of the Field website and go to Man Enough to Forgive. But this effort was written, so you can do this on your own or you can do it in a men's study at your church. So bring it to your church's attention, your men's minister, men's pastor. But this is a four-part series, so it's a year-long study. It is going to be impactful, profound in your life. Forgiveness is what it's all about. Men, be the man God intended you to be.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, John, would you close us in a word of prayer, praying specifically for the men who've been listening, for the women who have turned this one up. Maybe she's got a father wound too, or she's praying for her husband.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The dad of her children and more.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. God Almighty. Thank you, Lord first, for being our Heavenly Father. What a joy it is to say, what an honor it is to call you Father. Lord, it is where it's at. Lord, I do pray for this audience, for the men out there, the women who grew up fatherless, who have a wound that they just do not know how to deal with. Lord, through your help and the movement of the Holy Spirit in your children's lives, Lord, help them understand. Don't let the devil hold them captive to unforgiveness. Lord, give them the strength, give them the courage, give them the faithful obedience to follow your lead.

Lord, we are to follow your lead to become more like you and Christ, You demonstrated your love. You demonstrated your forgiveness by faithfully going to the cross and doing your father's will. Lord, may we be the men you created us to be. Lord, may we create a revival in this nation, in our families. Families matter. Men matter. Masculinity matters. Thank you men for willing to be listening to this. May it convict your heart. Do not let the devil steal who you can be in Christ through the act of forgiveness because we have been forgiven so much and God's mighty name. Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, our special guest, again has been John Smithbaker. *Man Enough to Forgive: Healing the Wounds of Father Abandonment* is his new book. You can find it everywhere where books are sold. Fathers in the Field is the ministry that God is using for such a time as this, to minister to seven to 17 year old boys. John, we tip the hat to you on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team. We pray that God would continue to strengthen your heart, give you boldness and courage, and by the way, expand the influence and reach of Fathers in the Field for such a time as this. Thank you for joining us.

John Smithbaker: Thank you, brother. Love you. God bless you.



Roger Marsh: Well, dads certainly do matter indeed and men, we can stand together and lift each other up to positively impact the future. Boy, that was a powerful prayer today here on Family Talk from our guest, John Smithbaker. It's also the conclusion of a two-part conversation featuring John and our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton. Now, if you want to share today's program with a friend, or if you want to go back and review any part you might've missed or just another part that you want to hear again, visit our website at [drjamesdobson.org/family talk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/family talk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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