



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Unlikely Fighter – Part 1

Guest(s): Greg Stier

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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 to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton co-host and president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. Today, my special guest is Greg Stier. He grew up in Denver, Colorado in a violent inner city family of tough guys. They were actually bodybuilders, rough characters. He never had a dad, never felt like he measured up, but God transformed his family one by one and him through the power of the gospel. Greg's written a brand new book called *Unlikely Fighter: The Story of How a Fatherless Street Kid Overcame Violence, Chaos, Confusion to Become a Radical Christ Follower*. He's an evangelist, he's founder of Dare 2 Share ministries, an organization that we love. He and his wife, Debbie have two children, Jeremy and Kailey.

Sammy Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference said this, "Beyond the brawls, bruises, and blood splattered across the pages of this hard to put down book is a story of a scared, scarred little kid on a journey to find his identity and boy did he find it." I recently had a chance to hear Greg at a conference and was so moved by his testimony. I think you will be too. We're going to jump into his upbringing, his book, and his very active ministry efforts. I think you're going to find the next half hour to be enlightening and encouraging. Hopefully hear something that inspires you to kind of come in from the cold if that's where you're at today. Perhaps let go some of the guilt and shame of your own family life, past, present. Or maybe God just wants you to share this program with someone who needs a little hope and encouragement. Greg, welcome to Family Talk. Thank you for joining us.

Greg Stier: Tim, I'm so glad to go here. I was on a couple years ago with Dr. Dobson and what a privilege and honor to be interviewed by such an icon then, and I look forward to interacting with you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, Greg, congrats on your new book, *Unlikely Fighter: The Story of How a Fatherless Street Kid Overcame Violence, Chaos, and Confusion to Become a Radical Christ Follower*. Greg, let's start this way. I've read a lot of stories. I've

sat with a lot of people in the counseling office and I've heard a lot of family things, but I'm going to tell you what, my kids would say it this way. There's crazy and then there's cray, cray. Greg, I think you're over on the cray, cray side. This is a wild story. Start us out. Tell us a little bit about how you grew up there in Denver, Colorado.

Greg Stier: Yeah. As I tell people, when I preach, I don't come from a typical religious church going pew sitting, hymn singing family. I come from a family filled with body building, tobacco chewing, beer drinking thugs. And that's just the women, sadly, but no. My family, three of my uncles were competitive body builders. The fourth one was a bouncer at the toughest bar in Denver. The fifth one was a golden gloves boxer, war hero, judo champion, had five bullet wounds and a bayonet scar. He not only survived, he killed the guy that gave it to him in war. And so my family were just these street fighters that were renowned in this inner city of Denver. Every city Tim's got a city within the city.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. Yeah.

Greg Stier: New York, Chicago's got South Chicago, Lincoln, Nebraska, Denver, Colorado's got a city within the city. And the Denver mafia, the Smaldones, nicknamed my uncles, the crazy brothers. So, when the mafia thinks your family's dysfunctional...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Then we're in a whole different place.

Greg Stier: It's a whole different thing. And so my family extreme violence, and I saw a lot of bloodshed. I joke about it now, but it really traumatized me as a kid. You know this as a counselor, that it shocked me and terrified me. I was afraid of my family. I was afraid of my neighbors. It's a very violent, a dangerous family I was raised in.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to kind of unpack each of the family members and the influence. And I want you describe them and the trauma, because as you do that, there's a narrative that flows through this. And it's the power of the gospel and how God can radically change lives. But Greg, if you don't mind, take us back. You also talk about your mom whom you loved, but your mama was pretty tough.

Greg Stier: Yeah. Mom was tough. I mean, five street fighting brothers that were all afraid of her because she wielded a bat. And I remember the book opens up, I'm playing on the front porch in inner city Denver with a plastic bat and a guy pulls up in a brand new car and I looked and it focused my eyes. It was a guy that my mom had married. She'd been married several times. I was born out of wedlock. But this guy left us. We had no idea where he'd been and I yelled inside, "Mommy, mommy, one of my daddy's is here or something." And she looked out the window. She was doing dishes, smoking a cigarette. She asked for the bat and I had a little plastic bat. I go here, mom. She didn't want that. She

grabbed a Louisville slugger behind the door, ran out, shattered his front windshield, took off his rear view mirror.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Really.

Greg Stier: Started doing body damage, challenging him to get out of the car. And he made a tactical mistake in getting out of the car. Well, she's got five street fighting brothers that are all afraid of her and there's a reason. She took that bat. She lit him up, beat him. I mean, I joke about it now again, but it shocked me as a kid, scared me. He drove off. We never saw him again. And I remember walking up the sidewalk with this broken bloody splintered bat, thinking to myself, "I'll never disobey my mom again. How did that cigarette never leave her mouth the whole time? And why is she so mad?" And what I discovered years later, she had a shame fueled rage. She was a partier like the woman at the well.

She met my biological father at a party. They partied, she got pregnant. He found out. He got transferred. He was in the army. She drove from Denver to Boston to have an illegal abortion. It was before Roe v Wade. My uncle Tommy, aunt Carol, one of the only believers in the family talked her out of it. They were based in Boston. He was in the Navy. She came back eight months pregnant, had me. And when she would look at me, oftentimes she would burst into tears. And I think it's because she almost killed me in her womb. And so it was rough. Mom was rough. My uncles were rough and it was just a lot of dysfunction going on.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, how did that impact a boy? You had mentioned the word trauma and you're right, it's a big word in modern day culture now. That trauma and some of it gets into what's called complex trauma. Your story certainly fits in that lane. But Greg, how do you begin to see the world and how do you see through that kind of pain?

Greg Stier: Well, through tears, I was terrified. I used to hide behind the couch and underneath the kitchen sink. And I did not fit into my family because I wasn't tough. I was like a Young Sheldon in the hood. I was terrified and I wasn't like my cousins or my uncles. And they whispered about me and I knew they whispered about me because I didn't have a dad. I remember once at a Christmas party, my uncle Dave gave me a present in front of everyone at the very end of everybody opening their presents of my whole family at my grandparents house. I opened it up and it was a doll, a girl's doll. I thought it was a mistake. And I said, "It's a girl's doll."

And he goes, "Yeah, I figured you don't have a dad so you like to play with dolls like a little girl." And I shoved it in his stomach. I go, "I ain't no girl." And I walked back and all my uncles are like, maybe he is one of us. He's got a temper. Well it sent me into a spiral and a search, but it was, you can ask anybody in my family, Tim, you go back to that moment, from that moment on, I was super serious about finding out who am I? Why am I here? So, the book *Unlikely*

Fighter is really about not just my family's conversion to Christ, but it's about a scared scarred little kid trying to find his identity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, in that family mix that you talk about, what do you think it was? Or what do you think was lodged deep in the hearts of your mom, your uncles, and more that precipitated that anger, that rage that poured out of them, the confusion, the violence really?

Greg Stier: It's interesting. I found out all about my grandparents. They're Baptists. They were saved, but I think my family just never felt like they could keep up to the rules. They didn't understand the gospel and they rejected it. And my family just got something in them. They go all in, in a direction. And so before Christ that all in was just crime, and violence, and intimidation, and being the toughest people in the city. We were in a high crime rate area where there were a lot of gang activity. And so you kind of had to stake your ground and they did violently and notoriously throughout the city streets of Denver. And there was something there that just fueled that rage. And it could've been shame of not measuring up to their parents religion, but it was lodged deep inside.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And a hardened heart. Just somewhere in the midst of it, got caught up in the spin and the chaos. And bought into it and became a part of it. When it's dark people tend to think that God may not be working, but God was working Greg and a pastor named Yankee Arnold knocked on your uncle Jack's door. I read this piece in the book, which was fascinating to me. Start that narrative piece of how God was doing what God does.

Greg Stier: Yeah. God was doing what God did. Yankee is a nickname. He's a hillbilly preacher from the deep south whose dad nicknamed him Yankee because I found out later his daddy was a counterfeiter and a moonshiner in backwoods of Georgia.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Really.

Greg Stier: Yankee was born on the run from the FBI in Pennsylvania. So his dad nicknamed him blank Yankee. I will not fill in the blank.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Greg Stier: Well he kept that title, Yankee, all of his life. He's still alive today. Still nicknamed Yankee. And Yankee had a guy going to his church named Bob Daley, who was a believer that knew my family. And he dared Yankee to share the gospel with my uncle Jack, who was the toughest one of my uncles. My uncle Jack big body builder, lamb chop side burns, looks like the Wolverine. Went to jail for choking two cops unconscious at the same time. They were trying to arrest him on assault charges. In and out of jail his whole life. Toughest guy I've ever met to this day. Yankee goes to his door, knocks on his door, says "I'm here

on a dare from Bob Daley to tell you about Jesus.” My uncle Jack talked like this, he goes, “I don't know Jesus. I know Bob. I'll give you five minutes.”

Well, what got him in was Jack's kids, my cousins, Tammy and Jackie were going to youth group at Yankee's church. And Yankee said, “Hey, by the way, your daughters they're awesome. They're the best kids.” And that melted Jack's heart and Yankee went in, sat at the table, explained the gospel that Jesus died for sinners, that He paid the price. It wasn't by being good. It was by recognizing you're a sinner in need of a savior. And you're saved by faith alone in Christ. And Yankee said, “Does that make sense?” And he said, “Hell yeah,” that was a sinner's prayer, was hell yeah. He put his faith in Christ. And my uncle Jack just started telling everybody about Jesus. 250 people, he brought out to Yankee church in one month. It was a miracle. Every salvation's a miracle but this one was a miracle because...

Dr. Tim Clinton: It really stuck. Isn't it something how, again, God uses the foolishness of preaching the gospel to change the lives of people? Your grandma was pretty tough too. I guess, raising those kind of boys she had to have something in her, but grandma was a little wild too.

Greg Stier: Yeah, grandma, she's in many ways a typical grandma, but she had gum and a gun in her purse. She carried a 357 Magnum. She used it. You had to be tough in our neighborhood. But my family, just did not want to mess with grandma or grandpa. Grandpa was the only one of his family born in America. They're all Welsh, all coal miners. He was so strong that he was the only guy at the flour mill. He loaded trucks that could take two, 100 pound sacks, one at each hand and flipped them on his shoulders. And he did that all day, loaded trucks. I think again, you talked Tim a little bit earlier about some of the reasons my family was so strong, so violent. I think my grandfather set an impossible standard for strength and my grandmother set an impossible standard for toughness. And I think the boys and my mom were always trying to live up to that and never quite could.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's go back to this main character in the story, Greg Stier, our special guest today. Greg, in the midst of it, God's doing something in your heart. You had some by the way near death experiences that also caught your attention. Not only the violence and the chaos and the confusion that you grew up in, but God was doing something inside the heart of this boy who was scared to death. Tell us a little bit about that piece of your journey.

Greg Stier: Yeah. It just, it felt like somebody was out to kill me. I mean, honestly, as I look back now, it felt very satanic. I was attacked by two German shepherds for about five minutes. And they were attacking me both at the same time in North Denver on my way to school. Survived that. Went through a window, cut some main veins in my hands. I was bleeding out. Survived that. So I just, I was scared. I was literally scarred. I was, I felt like something was out to kill me. I was terrified of my family. But then my grandparents thank the Lord, kept taking me to church. And on June 23rd, 1974, the gospel made sense to me. I put my faith

in Christ. Then eventually I went to Yankee's church and Yankee had a youth ministry of 800 teenagers. It was crazy, but he trained us and equipped us how to share the gospel.

The first person on my heart, Tim was my mom. I wanted her to come to Christ. So I started sharing Christ when I was 12 years of age with her. And she would say, "You don't know the things I've done wrong." Well, I knew everything because my grandma had told me and I said it doesn't matter Jesus died. So after three years of trying to share Christ with my mom, I finally just had her sit down at the kitchen table. I laid it out one last time. And in between puffs on her cigarette, she goes, "All right, I'm in." She put her faith in Christ. And I had the privilege of leading my mom to Jesus Christ. And it was one of the best days of my life.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

As I was reading that piece of your story, Greg, it was so moving. It just slows your way down and lets you realize the real priorities of life. But when you see God work like you've got to witness in that family situation, the power of God alive, you understand the dynamis of God that Paul talked about in Romans 1:16. That really it is the power of God onto salvation. And when God does a work, He does a work. Greg, I put a lot of fire down inside of you to really get involved in evangelistic work. We're going to talk about Dare 2 Share, your ministry and what God's doing and how you're reaching today's generations. But Greg, before we go there, I think we'd be remiss if we didn't go back and say trauma does have its impact, trauma has its impact.

Trauma does stuff to the heart that goes deep. I think of the life of Joseph, when he came through what he experienced with his brothers, remember he had that coat of many colors and they sold him into slavery really. And how he journeyed and by the way, he's second only to Pharaoh. And when he finally reveals himself, if you go back to that story in Genesis about chapter 50, it says that he wept so loud out that the entire house of the Pharaoh and the Egyptians heard him cry after all those years. He's second, only to the Pharaoh. It's pouring out of him. So when you go through a broken family, Greg, it does go deep. There's a piece in this story that we haven't shared yet. And that's the whole piece about your dad. Do you mind telling a little bit about that and how God had to work in your heart and you got to peace over your biological father?

Greg Stier:

Yeah, I will. But before, I just want to affirm what you just said. Writing a memoir, this is the closest I've ever been to therapy. I mean, I did not realize when you write a memoir, like *Unlikely Fighter*, you are inviting the reader to come with you into a time machine, going back to that dysfunction room.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Yeah.

Greg Stier:

And you have to live there. Relive there. I called my wife several times and I'm not a crier. I was bawling my eyes out like Joseph, like what is happening? And when I reread the book and it really, I felt therapeutic, but when I was done, because I felt like, a lot of things were just brought to light. So yeah, my

biological father, again, what I knew about him was that he abandoned me and my ma before I was born, that he didn't want to have anything to do with me. He didn't care about me. So I hated my biological father. And people would ask me from the time I found out about him when I was 12, because I thought my brother and I had the same dad for 12 years. When I found out about it, people would say, "What are you going to do if you ever meet your dad?" I said, "I'm going to kill him." I didn't know he was already dead. But I knew where grandma's 357 Magnum was, it was in her purse. I wanted to kill him. I hated him.

And I was at a conference one day where the speaker spoke about forgiving your fathers. And I was at this event with 5,000 other people at the Denver Coliseum, teenagers. And when he said that I broke in the middle of this conference and I began the bawl and I said out loud, the words "I forgive you, dad." And I remember the burden falling off my shoulders in that moment. Now I had to do it a thousand other times after that. But that first time was the hardest. And forgiving my dad, I really felt the love of my Heavenly Father surge into my soul. And the healing really begin.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, we're fighting time here on day one. And I hope that you'll stay with us and we can do a second broadcast here because I want to talk a lot about today's generations and Dare 2 Share, your ministry and what God's using and how he's using it. But before we go there, Greg, I want to kind of bow tie this piece. This entire story, there's a thread again of the gospel through the whole thing. When you really reflect back, Greg, who is Jesus to you? What does he really mean to you? What's our message to those who have been listening today?

Greg Stier: Jesus changes everything. He's a redeemer, he's a restorer, he's a reconciler, he's a healer. He uses all that trauma and all your pain can be a portal of his grace to you, but then His grace through you to others. So there's not a wasted trial. There's not a wasted problem. I mean God redeems all that stuff. So don't underestimate the power of the gospel. Don't underestimate the person of Jesus. The gospel changes everything.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know there may be some parents listening right now, Greg, what would you say to them? They may have a prodigal son or daughter. They weep over them. They're desperate. They've been crying out to God to do something in their family. And they want that story, that narrative that you just told and the impossible to be true in their home. What do you say to them?

Greg Stier: I would say don't give up, don't give up praying. Like Jesus said, pray and don't give up. Just be as relentless toward them in prayer as Jesus is toward us. Right. Secondly, I would say it is our responsibility to build a lighthouse that's so tall and so bright that even if our kids stray out of the Harbor, when the storm hits, they know where home is. So keep loving them, keep shining the light of Christ, keep dropping those breadcrumbs, and keep praying until one by one they're fully redeemed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, what do you say to that person listening who might say this, there's no way that God could love me. If He knows me the way you say He knows me and a lot of what Greg was talking about, that's some of my backwater, my narrative. And maybe He can reach Greg, but I don't see it happening here. Or I don't even know where I'm at. I don't even know how I feel.

Greg Stier: Well, when Jesus hung on the cross, he said these words, it changed the course of humanity, "It is finished." The Greek word is to tetelestai, means paid in full. So when Jesus died on the cross, no matter what sin we've committed, it's paid in full. Jesus, the God of the universe wrapped Himself in a cloak of flesh, lived a perfect life we could never live. Died the horrible death that we deserved in our place for our sins. And He offers us forgiveness and the very righteousness of Christ, not by being good, not by going to church, but by simply receiving that through faith, believing Jesus died for us and trusting Him alone to forgive us. And we do that. We enter into a personal permanent relationship with the God of the universe that can never be broken by us and will never be broken by Him. And it's not a license to sin. It's a reason to worship. It's a reason to serve.

Dr. Tim Clinton: If someone wanted to know Christ right now, Greg, could you lead them in an invitation to know Him?

Greg Stier: Yeah. Just say this prayer in your heart to God. Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. I know I've messed up. I fall short. I missed the mark, but I believe Jesus died in my place for my sins. I believe He rose from the dead and I trust in Him alone to forgive me for my sins and to give me eternal life. And if you just said that prayer, you are saved. Not because you said a prayer, but because you put your faith in Jesus, who's a savior of the world. Welcome to the family of God.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amen. I love that Greg. That's the good news. Greg, if people want to learn more about you, where could they go to find that information?

Greg Stier: Yeah. Dare2share.org, the number two, dare2share.org. And then if they want to find out more about *Unlikely Fighter*, they can find that wherever books are sold.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You bet. *Unlikely Fighter: The Story of How a Fatherless Street Kid Overcame Violence, Chaos, Confusion to Become a Radical Christ Follower*. Greg, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire family out there at Family Talk, we salute you. Thank you for what you're doing. Keep up the good work. We're going to stand back in the corner and cheer you and all those that you serve with on. Thanks for joining us today.

Greg Stier: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: An incredible riveting first half to Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with evangelist, author, and speaker Greg Stier. Make sure you join us again tomorrow to hear part two of their conversation right here on Family Talk. Now to learn more

about Greg Stier, his book, *Unlikely Fighter* and his ministry for teenagers called Dare 2 Share, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast, or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Now, as you heard on today's program, Greg Stier is a living example of God's redemption and the power of the gospel. And he is using his God given gifts to spread the good news and raise up a generation of passionate Jesus followers. And to think his mom almost chose to end his life in the womb before he even had a chance to take his first breath.

Well, today is the last day of January. And so I want to remind you that this month has been Sanctity of Human Life Month here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. In honor of that, we've produced a resource for you. It's an audio CD called "Standing Strong for Life," and it features conversations with pro-life leaders, including Kristan Hawkins and Dr. Robert and Carlota Jackson. Now you'll hear three riveting encouraging programs when you request this special CD. Just go to drjamesdobson.org/standforlife to request your copy. That's drjamesdobson.org/the word stand, the word for, and the word life, or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Thanks again for listening today. I'm Roger Marsh inviting you to join us again next time for another addition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. James Dobson: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program, I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. And I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.