



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Grandparents and Their Vital Role – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Larry Fowler

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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:** Hello, and welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, hoping that you had a wonderful Christmas and that your celebration was centered around thanking God for the priceless gift of His Son. The reason for the season is anchored in the Biblical truth that our savior was born to redeem us and will come again to call us home. We celebrate His birth and we anticipate His return.

Now today on Family Talk, we are sharing another one of our most popular programs from the past year. You're about to hear the first half of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Larry Fowler on the topic of grandparenting. Yes, grandparents and their vital role. No matter where you are in life, today's program is for you. If you are fortunate enough to have a grandparent with you for Christmas, you're going to enjoy this program.

Or if you are a grandparent like yours truly, I certainly hope that you are able to enjoy some time with your kids and grandkids in person. But if not, for whatever reason, do know that we here at the JDFI pray for you and your family each and every day.

Well, let's listen now to part one of Dr. Dobson's recent conversation with Christian grandparenting advocate Larry Fowler right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Grandmothers and grandfathers were designed by the creator to play an important role in helping to raise their grandchildren and moms and dads should honor them as such. And frequently that does not occur either at home or unfortunately at church and we're going to talk about that. Obviously, it is a different responsibility than given to parents, but it's vital in the case of nurturance care of children especially in regard to spiritual training.

I think I've mentioned this before on the air, but we're saying again. I was blessed to have a wonderful grandmother, my dad's mother whom we call Little Mother, she weighed 97 lbs and she knew what she was doing. And the one is

my mom's mom, that would be my great-grandmother and she was called Nanny. And she also helped to raise me. Both talked about Jesus all the time it seemed and they made Him come alive in my mind.

Little Mother and Nanny told me Bible stories and taught me to pray. Now we're going to take a close look at grandparenting today with a help of a specialist in this topic. He is Larry Fowler who is the founder and CEO of the Legacy Coalition, which is a ministry that exists to equip and encourage grandparents in the role that God would have them play. I'm told that there's an estimated 30 million Christian grandparents in the United States and the people at Legacy Coalition are convinced that if mobilized and motivated, these senior members of families could actually help to start a national revival through their influence.

Larry was my guest a while back and I really loved this guy. We're getting well-acquainted. And that was a very popular program on Family Talk. Some of you will remember hearing it. So I invited him to be back with us again today. Welcome back, Larry. Good to have you here in the studio. We were on the telephone together last time. You finally got here in person.

Larry Fowler: Well, I did. And it's a pleasure to be able to be with you and to just have a great talk together. I think we share a lot of things in common and particularly our appreciation for the grandparent role.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I am a grandparent and that's why I appreciate what you're doing on behalf of grandparents everywhere. Before we went on the air, you talked about the fact that churches frequently overlook the resource that grandparents can be and the responsibilities churches have to them. Talk about that.

Larry Fowler: Well, that was one of the things that prompted us starting our ministry. I had been asking churches all across the US in my previous role in ministry and I'd asked them, "So have you ever thought about doing anything on grandparenting?" And Dr. Dobson, 100% of the time the answer came back that they had never thought about having a ministry to grandparents.

Dr. James Dobson: You're not going to name them, but you could and they are big influential churches that minister to all aspects of the family, except this one.

Larry Fowler: Yeah, exactly. And many of the pastors were and are grandfathers, yet it had never occurred to them to actually have some teaching or some encouragement or something on the role of a Christian grandparent. In late June, you and I were at a conference together. I won't name the conference, but you got an award at the conference. I was there the day earlier to be able to present the grandparenting ministry and I started by asking them, this group of about 250 people, "How many of you have ever heard a sermon on grandparenting?" Dr. Dobson, three people raised their hands.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that incredible?

Larry Fowler: And then I said, "So how many of you have ever attended a class or heard of a class on grandparenting?" Same three people, nobody else. But that's what we were finding that this role of a grandparent is just almost entirely overlooked by churches, yet they get it about how important it is to equip parents.

Dr. James Dobson: Why do you think?

Larry Fowler: I don't know. And in fact, what's interesting is I get the slap in the forehead by senior pastors often. You know what I mean? They hit their forehead and say, "How could I have missed this? How could I have overlooked it?" Because it's not only very, very significant in the discipleship of children, but you know what? It gives purpose and meaning to the older third of their congregation at the same time.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it tells them what their heritage exactly is and they can tell about days when you were young and how different it was and tell them stories.

Larry Fowler: See, you see grandparent ministry is all about the kids. It's all about the kids, all about the teenagers. And if you have a pastor that says, "I will want to reach the kids, I want to disciple the teenagers. I want to reach them." Well, so do we, so do grandparents. So it aligns the grandparents with the ministry of the church, rather than putting them on the shelf.

Dr. James Dobson: I talked about my two grandmothers. Did you have anybody in your family to do that for you?

Larry Fowler: No. Sort of, but not really. My mother's father was not a believer until about three weeks before he passed away.

Dr. James Dobson: Really? My grandfather too, by the way.

Larry Fowler: He lived about 100 miles away and I don't ever recall a single conversation with him, not one.

Dr. James Dobson: About anything.

Larry Fowler: Nothing. Now my dad's dad lived on the same ranch with us. I grew up on a cattle ranch in Western Nebraska and my dad and grandfather were partners. And my grandfather, my dad's dad was a wonderful, godly, deeply devoted Christ follower. But when I became an adult, I even kind of felt cheated by him because I learned from my older brother who's nine years older than me that this grandfather would go into town to buy supplies and take my older brother along, which is a 40-mile drive in Western Nebraska. And all along the way, he'd disciple him.

I mean, he'd talk about spiritual things. He'd talk about how to treat a woman, all sorts of good stuff. But when I came along, he never did that with me. And that's one of the reasons that I want to be a different kind of grandfather.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's one of the reasons we're doing this program today, because we want to encourage grandparents, both grandmothers and grandfathers to invest themselves in the spiritual lives of their children. What more important thing could you do in those years of life than getting to know them and to talking to them about the Lord? It's hard to do for some people for some reason.

Larry Fowler: Yeah. I've been involved in ministry all my life as you have. Not at the level you have, Dr. Dobson, but I've been involved in ministry all my life. And even though I value the opportunity to do that, you know what? The thing that I want more than anything else in this world is that my kids and my grandkids are going to be in Heaven with me.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen, if you don't get that job done you'll never see them again. That fact alone is the most significant thought I have ever had about family life. If you don't win your kids to Christ you won't see them again. They won't be there. What could be more important than that for parents and for grandparents?

Larry Fowler: And of course it's their decision. They on their own can choose to accept or reject Christ, but I want to do everything I can.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And you want to love them like crazy.

Larry Fowler: And love them like crazy. Yeah. That's a big one.

Dr. James Dobson: You have seven grandkids.

Larry Fowler: I have seven.

Dr. James Dobson: What are their ages?

Larry Fowler: Six to 25. I've been through a few battles and I'm in the middle of some.

Dr. James Dobson: And Diane, your wife is also deeply concerned about this ministry?

Larry Fowler: Oh yes, oh yes. What a wonderful godly grandma she is.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you start the Legacy Coalition?

Larry Fowler: I did.

Dr. James Dobson: And that was about five years ago?

Larry Fowler: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Before that you did what?

Larry Fowler: I have been involved in children's ministry all my life. I was 39 years on the staff of Awana Clubs.

Dr. James Dobson: But you felt like it wasn't enough. And you created the Legacy Coalition? Tell us what it is.

Larry Fowler: Equipping grandparenting is still children's ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Of course.

Larry Fowler: It's just a different set of workers. I worked with church workers before. Now I work with some who actually have way more potential because they have a relationship with those children. If we can get grandparents to realize their potential and step up, we can really have an impact.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what's the Coalition doing?

Larry Fowler: Well, we equip grandparents through our resources and events. You'd mentioned earlier 30 million Christian grandparents in America. There's not been much research done about Christian grandparenting, but what has been done says that three out of four of them tend to take a more cultural view of grandparenting rather than a Biblical view. And the culture of you is love your grandkids and spoil them and sugar them up, and send them home.

The Biblical says "I'm going to be intentional about passing on faith to my grandkids." So our mission field is that three-fourths. And we want to help them to realize their potential, realize what Scripture says and then equip them and engage them so that they are doing their very, very best to take those grandkids to Heaven with them someday.

Dr. James Dobson: The evangelical church's primary motive and mission is to win people to Christ. Why wouldn't they be themselves invested in the people who are positioned best to help with that task?

Larry Fowler: Well, they care, they just often don't know what to do or they haven't been challenged. My good friend Josh Mulvihill, who's written a number of materials on grandparenting says this. "That the most common, the most frequent attitude of a Christian grandparent is pray and play." In other words, they know to pray for their grandkids and they do. But beyond that, they haven't thought about what specifically they could do, practical terms to really have an impact in their grandkids' lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Hmm. Tell us more about the Coalition.

Larry Fowler: Well, we started in 2016 and we started because of what we saw was this gap of national attention on the role of Christian grandparenting. And it was my wife and I and some other wonderful godly Christian leaders in children's and youth and family ministry that started.

Dr. James Dobson: I read that you have now 70 staff members and volunteers.

Larry Fowler: High-level volunteers. Yeah. That's kind of our inner circle. So God is expanding our ministry and we're seeing some amazing things happen. We do podcasts. We do webinars. We write books. We create resources. We do seminars and we run the only national conference on Christian grandparenting.

Dr. James Dobson: This makes sense to me, but I'm a grandparent and I haven't done that job very well. Can you help me?

Larry Fowler: The answer is yes, we certainly can. Visit our website and see some of the things that are there. Our website is [legacycoalition.com](http://legacycoalition.com). And we tell people start with our webinar. Our webinar is called "Grand Monday Nights." Every Monday night it is a free online webinar where people can go and hear various speakers talk about grandparenting from all sorts of perspectives. We've had some amazing guests.

It becomes a very directed focus on the role of a Christian grandparent. We want to give them vision. We want to solve the problems that they have to overcome in their grandparenting. So that's a good place to start because it's free. Our focus is on local churches and in particular we would like to see local churches give validity to the role of a grandparent.

Dr. James Dobson: That'd be a good topic for a sermon, wouldn't it?

Larry Fowler: It'd be a great topic for a sermon. In fact, one of the things that we do is we create a whole kit for churches to use. It's a free kit. It's slides for their screens. It's bulletin inserts. It's giveaways to the grandparents. It's everything because we want to equip them to give grandparents a recognition they deserve. Now we've done something else because you know Hallmark or other people can pronounce any month such and such month. So we've pronounced Legacy Coalition the whole month of September as Grandparents Month.

Dr. James Dobson: Great idea. Great idea.

Larry Fowler: Now we don't quite have a cloud of-

Dr. James Dobson: Why not a whole month?

Larry Fowler: Yeah. Why not? And the reason why is because in local churches, they have lots of things they start in September. So we want to broaden it from one Sunday to

the whole month. So in case they can't honor grandparents on the 12th, they can another Sunday maybe.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we're talking to Larry Fowler who has a heart for grandparents and has headed up this effort for five years now, but really a lot longer than that I'm sure because you've been and working with families and children for a long time. Let me tell you the question that I'm being asked now and see if you've got an answer for it. The world is changing radically and it's not for the better, it's for the worse. The culture is sliding into chaos and the Christian faith is no longer honored in places where 30 years ago it would've been.

And the question that some parents are asking me now is that, "My husband and I or my wife and I are deeply committed to Christ. And we tried to honor Him in our home, but our children are not Christian. And our grandchildren are being raised without God. And they're also being told godless things in school, LGBT and all that sort of thing. And my children don't want us to talk about the Lord. They don't believe what we taught them and they're raising their kids in a godless way. And we don't know what to do. We feel it's so important for us to get to those kids, but we don't want to fight with our children who are now grown." What do you say to them?

Larry Fowler: Well, first thing I would say is anybody that says that, they're not alone. It is something that there are probably a few million Christian grandparents.

Dr. James Dobson: That's why I'm hearing about it.

Larry Fowler: Yeah, yeah. We got to step it up now, grandparents. So, here's my answer to the grandparents that feel like that they've tried and they haven't gotten anywhere, especially with their adult kids. The whole thing of adult kids being a barrier to teaching grandchildren is so very, very common. So if what they've been trying hasn't been working, it's time to try a new strategy.

And what that may mean is it may mean, first of all, understanding that influence in their grandchildren's life comes first through a relationship with the parents. So if you are a grandparent, your adult children are not agreeing with you, one of the first things to understand is if I don't strengthen the relationship with those adult kids, the barrier between me and my grandkids is just going to get higher.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. It starts with relationships, doesn't it?

Larry Fowler: It always starts with relationships. Influence always comes through relationships. If the adult kids are not accepting it, then you got to look at so how is my approach? Maybe I need to try a different approach. And so often what we do as grandparents is we try the approach of we want to tell them the truth and we want to get them to accept the truth. Of course, we do, but what's interesting is there's often cases in the gospels where when Jesus wanted

people to accept truth as a strategy, He led with grace first. And that is really significant.

I would say grandparents, think about what you've been doing because we can't change our adult kids. They can change themselves. The Holy Spirit can, but we can't. So you think about, "Well, what can I change? I can change me and I can change my strategy."

Dr. James Dobson: And I can live it in my grandkids.

Larry Fowler: And I can live it and that's part of-

Dr. James Dobson: Praying at the meals.

Larry Fowler: Praying at the meals, but making sure that you're loving them unconditionally too and exhibiting grace. Grace and love do not mean accepting the sin. Grace and love do not mean accepting the sin.

Dr. James Dobson: I talked at the beginning of the program about my grandmother Little Mother. She had subtle ways to get the message across to me. One of them was to give me a dollar every now and then. And when I was four-years-old, that was of money.

Larry Fowler: Sure, sure.

Dr. James Dobson: And it was very exciting to me. The very first thing she would do is just say, "Now you need to pay tithe on this." Then she would explain what tithing is and the next Sunday I would put a dime. And it was just her way of illustrating there's some principles here that we live by.

Larry Fowler: The most succinct verse in the Bible on the role of a grandparent is Deuteronomy 4:9. Moses is speaking to the elders of the children of Israel right before they go into the Promised Land. And the first two words of this one, "Watch yourselves." And the most important thing any grandparent can do is their own spiritual walk, their own testimony.

And we've had stories too. I mean, I had this happen. I was teaching a class and when I got done this very refined-looking grandma stood up. She said, "But Mr. Fowler." She says, "My son has said I can see my granddaughter or I can talk to her about God, but I can never do both. Because the minute that I mentioned God to my granddaughter, I'll never be allowed to see her again."

Dr. James Dobson: That's heartbreaking.

Larry Fowler: That's heartbreaking. But is it hopeless? No, it's not hopeless, but it is the greatest hurt of life.



Dr. James Dobson: You know, sooner or later your grandkids are going to hit a wall. They're going to run into a problem they don't know how to solve and they may bring it to you.

Larry Fowler: They will, especially when they get to be young adults. So what you do is you start preparing for that time. At the same time, you are looking at your own life saying, "I want to make sure that I'm the most godly I've ever been in my life." Now none of us are perfect, but shouldn't we be growing all the way to the grave in terms of our godliness? Shouldn't this be a thing where we're never stepping backwards in our commitment to the Lord?

And we don't know. I mean, you think about the power. Let's assume there's a family where parents don't talk about God at all at home, it's never mentioned or anything like that. And the parents say to the grandparents, "Don't you ever talk about God." But the grandkids are able to go visit the grandparents. And when they go to visit, they see grandma bow her head silently before the meal honoring the boundaries of parents have said.

Grandkids have never seen that before. They don't know what that is. That can be a memory that they remember for the rest of their life. Just that simple act. That's what a godly life does is it gives them a memory so that when they become young adults and they're out from underneath their parents' authority, then they may very well come to grandpa and grandma, especially if there's a loving relationship there.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that is really valuable information.

Larry Fowler: It's really important. But you know what? Our generation and has grown up really valuing Scripture highly and I do. And I don't mean to belittle that at all. But what that does is that it has developed in many of us the pattern of when there's a problem in our families, we want to apply the Word to the problem. And sometimes it's Scripture, sometimes it's our opinion. But in any case, we sometimes lead with truth. Our truth or Scripture truth. And that's very appropriate sometimes.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You can also put a Scripture on the wall of your home and that happened to me also. I had a great-aunt. I would go over to see her and her house spoke of Christianity. It spoke of the Lord and she didn't have to talk about that. The walls spoke.

Larry Fowler: And we should be decorating our homes with Scripture and with saying of things we want our grandkids to remember. I have a question for you.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes, sir.

Larry Fowler: If you were to pick one phrase from Scripture that you would want your grandchildren to remember more than any other phrase of Scripture, what would you pick?

Dr. James Dobson: I have to think about that.

Larry Fowler: Well, I have one ready because I was ready. So this is my wife's life verse. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." You see, that's one of the things that an intentional, purposeful grandparent will do is they'll think, "Okay, so what do I want my grandchildren to remember for the rest of your life?" And then you repeat that over and over again, and you do. You put it on the wall of your house. You put it where they can see it. You do all those things.

Roger Marsh: Hmm, that is great encouragement for grandparents from Larry Fowler. Larry is the founder of the Legacy Coalition, a ministry that equips grandparents to be godly influences in their grandchildren's lives and also in their children's lives as well. I'm Roger Marsh and that concludes part one of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Larry Fowler. Today they emphasize the importance of having good relationships with your kids and your grandkids. And they also gave some practical tips for how you can really make that happen.

Be sure to join us again tomorrow for the insightful conclusion of this discussion. You will not want to miss it. Now, before we leave the air for today, I'd like to remind you that thanks to some special friends of our ministry, we have a matching grant in place during this month here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. That means that any financial contribution that you make to the JDFI between now and the end of the year will be doubled. You will have twice the impact on the family and give twice the encouragement to people who need it.

As you are making your year-end financial planning decisions right now, remember that a gift to Family Talk is the perfect way to ensure that Biblical values are defended on the airwaves and in the public square. Help us remain on the air and to fight for the family you love with the voice that you trust. To make a tax deductible donation online and to have your gift doubled, go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) or call us at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825.

Well, thanks so much for are listening today. We are so grateful for your prayers and your financial support. From everyone here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh extending God's richest blessings to you and your family. Be sure to join us again tomorrow right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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