



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Trail Ready: Guiding Young Men to Honor God – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Mark Hancock

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**Dr. James Dobson:** You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. One of the first words a baby will often say is, dada, my, that surely can warm a father's heart, now can it? Well, what does that mean though, to be a dad? Some people might say protector or provider, even teacher. The Bible says a father should show compassion to not provoke his child to anger, and that he has a duty to teach his children how to follow the Lord. That's a pretty big role in a child's life, isn't it? Sadly, many men aren't up for this challenge, and we see the devastating ramifications all around us in the forms of crime, fatherless homes, abuse, drug use, poverty, and the list goes on. Well, today here on Family Talk, Gary Bauer will be joined by his guest, Mark Hancock, the CEO of Trail Life USA. Mark will be sharing with us his unique insight on the issues facing boys and men. He'll also discuss his brand new devotional entitled, *Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*, which encourages a deeper connection to the Lord and between fathers and sons. So let's join Gary Bauer and his guest, Mark Hancock, right now on Family Talk.

**Gary Bauer:** Hello everyone. I'm Gary Bauer, the senior vice president of public policy here at the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm also the host of Defending Faith, Family and Freedom, our podcast here at JDFI, and I'm honored to serve with Dr. Dobson and the whole JDFI team. Now, many of you have observed in the world around you, that there is an incredible attack on men and masculinity, and it's taken an unbelievable toll on the family. More and more of our children are raised in homes without fathers and that trend of fatherless boys and girls, sadly it's linked to a variety of social ills, poverty, educational under performance, rising crime. We're going to talk about this a little later because I don't want to discourage single parent families out there. Single parent families can overcome the odds, but if you're trying to figure out which way for the country to go, you need to look at what the research shows.

So what do we do about this? Men need to stand up and hold each other accountable. We need to teach and encourage each other about what it truly means to be a God led man. And another significant part of this is that we have

to reach boys that maybe aren't being fathered the right way. And we need to reach young men who may be fathers themselves now, to help them not make the same mistakes that previous generations of fathers have made. And that's what our guest today is all about. Our guest is Mark Hancock, the CEO of Trail Life USA. He has got a fantastic new book out, *Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. Mark is an author, writer, speaker, and a pastor. He's earned two master's degrees in counseling and perhaps his best qualification of all, is he and his wife have two grown sons. And Mark, I believe you just graduated one of them at Liberty. Is that right?

Mark Hancock: The second one to graduate from Liberty.

Gary Bauer: Second, fantastic. Well, welcome to Family Talk Mark, Dr. Dobson and Shirley send their best regards to you.

Mark Hancock: Well, we are big fans. I'm glad to be here today, Gary.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic. Before we get into some of the devotionals themselves, what was your heart for this? There's a lot of devotionals out there, so what really drove you in this direction and what makes this devotional unique compared to some of the other many alternatives one could get?

Mark Hancock: Yeah, well, I love that question. I've had the privilege of serving as CEO of Trail Life USA and watching across the country, sons interacting with their dads in troops all over the country. And so that just gave me a unique perspective. And I'm also observing that Dads today, and pretty much so many of us, are outsourcing so many things. And there's less and less that we can do as things get more complicated, whether it means going out and working on the car with your son or whatever. There's just fewer places that we connect. It's hard to sit down with your son and play a video game because you don't have the time to get as equipped as he is. So, I see this challenge where we're outsourcing more and more and more, but you can't outsource being a dad. I mean, you've got to be the one who's there for your son. And so, I wrote this, not as something to shame dads because men are being shamed in our culture all over the place.

Gary Bauer: Man, aren't they ever? It's incredible, absolutely incredible. Remember years ago, I think it was Gloria Steinem who said, the big feminist at the time, women need men like a fish needs a bicycle, which means women don't need men at all. But we're seeing what the absence of men does to both women and children. And you're right, a lot of men are afraid to do anything. They think whatever they do is going to be wrong.

Mark Hancock: And it really is tragic. So my heart towards men is I don't want to shame you because you're not praying enough, you're not working hard enough, you're not doing this, you're not spending enough time. All the things that we're bringing to shame them, I don't want to shame them. I want to remind them of who they are because what's in a man, once he understands his purpose and he's pointed

in the right direction, he knows that he can make a difference. That's what brings a man alive. Now he's in a place where he's not, hey, I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm equipped to talk with my son about these issues. So, we wrote these devotionals thinking in terms of, let's not shame men anymore, let's remind them of who they are.

Gary Bauer: So, there is a specific God-given connection between a father and of course all of his children, but between fathers and boys, there's something very unique there. Father with a son really has a special responsibility and a special role.

Mark Hancock: Yeah, he really does. And I don't think this is too radical to say on this program, but men and women are different.

Gary Bauer: Wait, well, just a second mark, you're trying to get us kicked off of... no, no, you're absolutely right. If you can't say it here, then all indeed is lost.

Mark Hancock: Well, and it's not a value statement. It is saying that they're just different. One isn't any more value than the other, but what it is that they bring is different. And a boy needs a dad as much as a girl needs a mom, because what are they looking at in that person that's raising them? They're looking at their own future. Who is it that I'm going to be? What should I model myself after? What are my strengths? What am I geared for? Who can I follow after? So it's critical to have that person in place. Now, Trail Life USA, we have a lot of single moms who put their sons in the program because they understand that that son may not have a father in the home, but he has so many dad-likes in that group. So, whereas it's very critical for that father to be raising his son, that's the ideal, but there's also a lot of power in a dad-like stepping in, and taking that place so that a boy can have an idea of what it looks like to be a godly man.

It's very difficult to raise godly boys without godly men. And so, this devotional is written to help fathers to make those connections. And also if there's a dad-like for a boy, for him to understand what it is he's dealing with, because that's a marvelous creature that son. And the book is specifically for fathers of sons because they're just different than girls. I didn't write a book about fathers and girls for a couple reasons. One, I have two sons, and the other thing, I run an organization with 50,000 members of men, men and boys. So that's my sweet spot. So that's what we're speaking to, fathers and dad-likes and sons, and how to help raise them in a godly way.

Gary Bauer: Well, since you mentioned Trail Life USA, which is the organization you run, tell our audience a little bit about the organization, separate from obviously this devotional, although the devotional reflects the values of Trail Life USA?

Mark Hancock: Yeah. Trail Life USA is a Christ-centered, boy focused, character leadership, and a venture organization for boys. We start at kindergarten, go through 12th grade or, for your home schoolers, 15 through 17 years of age. And we do everything you should expect in a boy's outdoor organization. Hiking and

camping, and fishing, and canoeing, and uniforms, and handbooks and robust awards program, a pinnacle award called the Freedom Award, all those things that you expect, that maybe you've seen in other organizations, but we specifically are Christ-centered and boy focused. Christ-centered, that we're not just an organization having a Christian experience. We are at our core a ministry, a Christian ministry that uses the outdoors to grow boys into godly men. And we are boy focused because we think that boys and girls are different, and boys need a program that's aimed at them. So that's what Trail Life is all about.

Gary Bauer: So Trail Life is seen, I think, in many cases as the Christian alternative to sadly where the Boy Scouts have drifted in the last couple of decades. Is that fair to say?

Mark Hancock: Yeah. We started about 10 years ago and it was clear that the Boy Scouts were abandoning some of the more traditional values that they had held for well over a hundred years. And we knew that churches were going to have a difficult time chartering Boy Scout troops because they could no longer morally align with them and that would threaten their 501(c)(3) status. And we knew that an organization was going to have to rise up, not just for those legal purposes, but also because boys needed an organization that believed in them. And so, we started 10 years ago, around some of those decisions of the Boy Scouts, and have grown now. We're in all 50 states, have almost 60,000 members in over 1200 churches across the country.

Gary Bauer: Well, first of all, fantastic and congratulations on the success, but it's a sad marker that once again there's an institution like the Boy Scouts and you can come up with so many others that under the pressure of the secular culture, which captures more and more territory in our daily life all the time, they bent under that and have drifted away. And it explains why there needs to be like what you run. So, the organization is all in on outdoors. The devotion is, Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads and their Boys, I sense a double meaning here, right? I mean you promote the idea with a couple of examples from each state of where a father can fairly easily take a son to be outdoors and see the wonders of God's creation. You've given the book a couple of examples of how in each state, there're a couple of places where a father and son could easily go in order to show them the wonders of God's creation. But the book, I also is I assume, a reference to how do you lead your son along the dangerous trail of life in America in 2024?

Mark Hancock: It really is. It's preparing both the father and the son for what you're talking about, a cultural trail that can be ripe with challenges. And so we're helping that dad to walk along that trail, not because he's weak, but because he's got in him what it takes to do that. And we just want to encourage him, let him know we're walking with him. And like you said, each devotional features a day hike from some state, and so you read about that day hike and perhaps take your son out and do it.

Gary Bauer:

Mark, you mentioned that you have two sons, and again, congratulations. Some of the craziness going on on America's University campuses, graduating a couple of men from Liberty, pretty good, a likely outcome there. So, good for you. Parents, you need to be really careful about where you send your kids to school. Dr. Dobson has been talking about this forever. Why would you work and save and make all the sacrifices you make in your life, only to turn around and send your child to some school that's considered an elite school, and this is the way he's going to make a lot more money. And while he's there, he's being taught that everything you taught him or her, was wrong, is bigoted, is behind the times, etc. Mark, I can't tell you over the years how many letters I've gotten from heartbroken mothers and fathers that have their child come home, after one year in one of those schools, and they don't recognize that son and daughter anymore. But what were some of the lessons that you learned maybe on your own raising those two young men, that helped you and led you to write this book of devotionals?

Mark Hancock:

One perfect segue from what it is you just said, my wife and I really purposed that. When we found something that our sons were interested in, if it was the right people and the right vision and the right mission, we went all in and we supported them in that and showed up for them in that, because there's so many opportunities for them to be led astray. If you put them on a sports team, you can say, Hey, that's the most winningest team that I know of, and my son's going to be a great star. Well, take a look at the coach, take a look at his heart, take a look at the character, take a look at the way that the team composes yourself because your son, he may become a good soccer player, whatever it is, but he's also going to adopt the values of that group that's around him.

So you may say, I'm putting them there because it's the best soccer coach, but you got to look at the values that he's going to learn in that place because he will become that group. Boys are always asking three questions, who's in charge? Who's with me? And what is our mission? And if you're not careful, you can put them in a place where the mission is different than the mission that you have. And so my wife and I decided early on, when they were attracted to something, if it was good for them, and was good for God, it was uplifting to God and the other families in there shared our values, we were going to go all in because that's what we wanted our boys to be surrounded by, is people who felt the way that we did about things, and understood things like truth and values and family, and all the things that we hold up to be true.

So I want to encourage parents, don't look at whether he's going to be the best soccer player in the world, look at the values of the thing because he may be become the best soccer player, but he's also coming with those values. When you talk about the kid who comes home from college after being there for a year, yeah, it may have been a good school for him academically, but he brought home those values too. And that's more critical than the academic piece.

Gary Bauer: With the phones that can record everything that's going on, video, still shots, all the rest of it. One of the most disappointing thing to see in recent years, because I've always associated sports by and large with great values, teamwork, being sacrificial, you don't always have to be the star discipline, etc. But fairly regularly now, we see young men in sporting events who didn't like a call by a ref or have some other problem and don't just argue about it, but quickly violence breaks out, which again makes you wonder how many of the young men that one might see in one of those videos, in fact doesn't have a father at home to teach him that that is not being manly, that's just being a thug.

Mark Hancock: Yeah, we're really looking at generations. Of course, Dr. Thompson would speak to this so clearly, where we change the way that we parent and all the powers in the kids. The parents just rally around the kids, what do you need? What do we do? How can I help you? What do I need? And instead of the parents upholding something for the kids to look up to and follow after, the parents become servants to the children, and that just puts it backwards. So when they go to that sporting event, they're expecting the adults to behave correctly and give them what it is that they want. And I call it this generation of unproductive narcissists. If we're not careful, we're producing this generation, these kids are unproductive because we don't expect anything of them, and the narcissist because we haven't allowed them to fail. And so in Trail Life USA, we put these sorts of challenges in front of boys to say, Hey, listen, here's something really hard.

You're going to hike that mountain, or you're going to do that 40 miles with 60 pounds on your back or whatever. You're going to do this thing that you're never done before and you're going to look and you can say, I'm not sure I can do that, but you're going to it. And when you're through, you're going to say, Hey, I did that. And that's where true self-esteem comes from. Not from everybody telling you you're wonderful and you haven't done anything, but actually in accomplishing those things. We challenge those young men. We let them get the sense of trying something hard and succeeding and that brings true self-esteem.

And then we also tell them, Hey, that's just wrong. What is that you did there is wrong. And let me show you in scripture, and Trail Life USA is founded on scripture. We're not a Sunday school in the woods, but you're going to find biblical truths in every piece of Trail Life USA. It's like carrot in the carrot cake. We don't have big hunks of carrot in there, but you're going to get carrot in every bite. And that's how we infuse these biblical values throughout Trail Life. And so boys are constantly exposed to what's the truth about this? And so, they don't get to have their own truth. It is a truth that aligns with what it is that God has for them, and that produces a much more solid foundation than what the world's delivering today.

Gary Bauer: You know Mark, at the beginning of our conversation, we were both alluding to the fact that there are a lot of homes without fathers, and there have been a lot of studies done. There was a senator years ago, Patrick Moynihan, who released

the study about what the ramifications were of father absence in minority communities and why it was linked to some very bad trends. And the reaction of the popular culture was not to thank Senator Moynihan, who was a liberal Democrat by the way, but to attack him. He was a racist, he was making stereotypes, etc, etc. Well, now the figures that worried him 30 years ago, those figures are way beyond just minority communities. By the way, I've been sentenced to work in Washington DC. The government keeps getting bigger and bigger. I was thinking about this the other day. A big driver of the government growth is trying to make up for the absence of a father in a home, and a bureaucrat and a check in the mailbox is not going to do that. So, are you optimistic or pessimistic about whether this whole trend of fathers not keeping their promises to the women and children in their lives, are you optimistic that can be turned around?

Mark Hancock:

I am. And a lot of it's because of my seat. I get to see if there is a remnant that's rising. People are starting to recognize what it is that we're doing with kids. Now, I remember those days, I remember the Murphy Brown statement, I remember the Dannie Quail gang, and all that hot water around that. I remember those days. And now those chickens have come to home for roost. But now we've got one in four boys in a household without a dad. 76% of public school teachers are female. 80 something percent of Sunday school teachers are female. So, girls have these wonderful role models and you talk about the single mom who's doing an amazing job of raising a family, but boys are lacking these role models. They're lacking this father figure. And everywhere they go, there's a woman in charge, that boy in this single parent household, he's got a mom in charge.

He's looking at her and saying, wow, that's what a strong person looks like, but I'm not one of those. And he goes to school and the lady at the front of the room is, ah, I'm not one of those. And he goes to Sunday school, I'm not one of those. And that's why boys is twice as likely to be in special education, now three times more likely to have ADHD. They've fallen behind girls, Gary, in every single academic category, and now more girls going to college than boys. And then you have this organization that used to be called Boy Scouts, takes boys out of the name of their program. These messages that were given to boys, like there's some sort of social disease that needs to be eradicated, is having horrible effects on boys in particular, but that affects all of us. Now you're asking about the good news.

I'm seeing these men, we have this remnant, 30,000 volunteers across the country are rising up and saying, we are going to do something about boys. In fact, we've identified a proven process that turns boys into godly men. We tell our churches, if you charter a Trail Life troop and they're not becoming godly men, you get your money. I see these men who are saying, I get it. I get it. I understand now what boys are going through. They're not a defective girl. They are a different thing. They're a marvelous and wonderful thing that needs to be paid attention to. They're the ones who would storm the beaches of Normandy to free us from tyranny or get on top of a rocket ship and go to another planet

or charter, in uncharted waters and cross an ocean, because allow that winning focused risk and competitive drive to take place. And we're seeing it being restored in Trail Life USA to boys. Where they're out in the outdoors and they're enjoying that interaction, getting to know God in a new way, surrounded by godly men who care about them and are helping them to be drawn up into being godly men themselves.

Gary Bauer: I was in the Boy Scouts a gazillion years ago. It feels like it was a different country and a different century. Well, it was a different century. My goodness. At any rate, I learned a lot, the years I was in there and one of the things that led me to be involved was there were some adult men obviously, involved in the troop, that I could look up to and so forth. My home was challenged, my father struggled with alcoholism and there were all sorts of other issues. And so, it was a modeling of what a man could be that I wasn't always getting in my own household. So, that's important. And I saw the other day that the majority of Boy Scout troops now are led by women, which nothing to... thank God there's some women willing to volunteer, but still, there's something about an adult man teaching a young boy, as long as the man is morally upright, teaching the young man about how to themselves grow up to be a upstanding and moral young adult.

Mark Hancock: Yeah, I know. Boy Scout gave us an amazing number of generations of presidents and senators and civic leaders and great men, and for them to walk away from that is really tragic. Like you said, since 2018, they've lost a million boys, but they've gained 176,000 girls. So I think it's just a matter of time before they've taken boy out of the title, before you take the boys out of the organization completely. Just really sad, what has happened. Boys need a place where they can go and be boys?

Gary Bauer: Well, I think they still have America in the title and the way they've been surrendering year after year, I wonder how long America will be able to stay in the title because in a lot of our schools, we're teaching young boys and girls, America's a very bad place. It was founded by slavers that killed the indigenous people. You really should be apologizing for America, not looking up to America. So, they've gotten so used to surrender. I wonder if they'll even be able to draw a line there.

Mark Hancock: It's a warning for all of us and to pay attention because you could easily lose your way in the messages that we're bombarded with. And so, we are restoring men and boys to those core central messages of the gospel of the truth that comes from the Bible, and this young man you can count on. And that's helping them to grow.

Gary Bauer: Mark, there is so much more I want to talk about. Any chance you could come back tomorrow and spend a little bit more time with us?

Mark Hancock: It'd be my honor. I'd be glad to come back.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a genuine and uplifting conversation here on Family Talk. And if you'd like to hear more from Gary Bauer and Mark Hancock, be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of their discussion. They will be diving deeper into Mark Hancock's new devotional book called, *Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. Now, if you'd like to reserve a copy of this encouraging and insightful devotional book, simply visit our website at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk), and then click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page. We'll be happy to send you a copy as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of our ministry. Again, go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk) and click the link on the bottom of today's broadcast page. Or if you'd like to reserve your copy over the phone, call 877-732 6825.

Father's Day is less than two weeks away. This will make a great Father's Day gift for that dad or father figure in your life. Finally, before we leave for the day, please remember that if you enjoy listening to Gary Bauer here on Family Talk, you can check out his podcast called *Defending Faith, Family and Freedom*. Gary is the senior vice president of public policy here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and he releases a new podcast each and every week. To listen in, just go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and then click the link to his podcast right on your homepage. You'll be selecting your favorite listening platform to hear the latest episode once you're there. And keep in mind *defending Faith, Family and Freedom* is now available at [oneplace.com](http://oneplace.com) as well. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day, and 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.