



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Trail Ready: Guiding Young Men to Honor God – Part 2

Guest(s): Mark Hancock

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and I have a question for you. Have you ever taken a walk on a trail? Well, you probably have. And when you first started out, you probably had to first make the decision to go. Then you had to choose which trail to head to, and then perhaps you woke up early so you would be walking in the cooler part of the day. That's a good decision. The clothes that you chose for your expedition had to match the weather and the terrain, and then you probably brought some water and maybe some sunblock and a few other safety items with you as well. Hopefully, you let someone know where you'd be in case something were to happen to you.

A bit of planning does go into walking on a trail even before you get there. And isn't it wonderful when you reach a point on that trail that's got a breathtaking view? Perhaps it's a moment that you realize the culmination of all of your effort. Maybe you even reflect a little bit on the magnificence of God's creation all around you. It's definitely a reward for you to look upon. Now, imagine if you did not prepare for the trail. Maybe you got started during the hottest part of the day, maybe you forgot your sunblock and then wound up getting a sunburn or ran out of water and you felt dehydrated. Well, that is definitely not a good situation to be in. And today many men are facing a similar issue. They're not preparing the next generation to take on the trail of life as a God-led man. Sadly, the effects of this lack of preparation have definitely taken a negative hold on so much of today's culture.

Well, today here on Family Talk, Gary Bauer, our senior vice president of public policy here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is once again joined by his guest Mark Hancock. Mark is the CEO of Trail Life USA, and they'll be shedding some light on the problems facing today's boys and men and offering some solutions on how we can turn the tide for a brighter future. So let's join this conversation right here, right now on Family Talk.

Gary Bauer: Well, welcome back, Mark. Yesterday we began discussing your new book entitled *Trail-Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. And today we're going

to dive in a little bit deeper, but for those that missed the show yesterday, can you just begin today by explaining again what your heart was that led you to develop this really wonderful devotional study that fathers can use with their sons?

Mark Hancock: Yeah. Well, we wrote *Trail-Ready*, understanding the pressure that dads and men really are under in our culture. We're constantly being discounted from the media, from every direction men are being discounted. So we wanted a book that encouraged them, that didn't shame them for who it is that they are, but reminded them who it is that they are. And so they're not really shaming sorts of things. You got to do this more. You have to do this, you have to do this. And it's more just encouraging dads how to connect better with their sons. And we write it specifically for fathers and sons because that bond is so critical, but it's also our sweet spot. It's this place that I live in having raised two sons and also running an organization for men and boys. So it is aimed specifically at men and their sons.

Gary Bauer: As I went through the devotionals, there were so many of them that I wanted to bring to the attention of our Family Talk audience, and we're not going to be able to go through them all obviously. People wouldn't have to buy the book, but I want to get to a couple and right up at the beginning, I think it's the third devotional in the book, it's entitled "Tug of War." And you allude to the old game that most people remember, two teams both pulling on a rope, both trying to get the rope to go in the direction of their team and not the other team. And you compare that to the tug of war that's happening right now over America's children and specifically over our sons.

Dr. Dobson and I, a gazillion years ago, wrote a book called *Children at Risk*. And the whole theme of the book was that we were in a civil war over values and it was raging in every area of American life and that the winner of this civil War over values would get our children and the right to teach them what to believe about life and death, love and sex, freedom and slavery, all the big things. Right. And that we were losing that war. One side, broadly speaking, are people that believe God is and on the other side and not all, but there are people that really don't begin with that worldview. So talk about that a little bit. Isn't that exactly why fathering today is always important, but it's particularly important today because of the powerful forces that are trying to win our kids away.

Mark Hancock: Yeah. And that was an amazing book that you all wrote and that perspective has only become more and more multiplied over the years to where fathers pretty much where their sons are just playing the survival game. I just want to get my son through this, out of the house and somewhat surviving and we're really losing that thing that you and I experienced from another generation that bond, that strong bond between a father and son. It's very rare to see because we haven't set it up correctly. There's so many complications from the culture that's pulling our sons in another direction. And it's almost like we're not careful. We just want to give up and say, okay, I'm going to settle for just not chaos.

Rather than saying, my gosh, there's something beautiful in the relationship, a good solid relationship between a father and a son and a son desperately needs someone to speak in his life. Tell him who he is, remind him who he is, show him who he can be, even in his later years as he's growing up where the father is older than he is, someone to reach out to and say, "Hey, I've never seen this before. Can you give me some wisdom on this?" We need those sorts of relationships and we're looking at a generation that's being raised by Google and we think that that's enough. I mean, you can ask Siri all kinds of things that dad used to tell you, but there's something else to that bond, to the bond with a person. It's more real, it's more lasting, certainly it's more emotionally satisfying to have that kind of bond rather than just being able to get all your questions answered.

So dads have kind of backed up some and we're just encouraging or reminding them who they are as they have a spot. There are places that only a dad and a mom should be living in terms of what it is that's being shown, taught, shared, whatever with those sons and those daughters. And we're drawing dads back to that space, giving them what it is that they need. It's not complicated. It's not rocket science, it's not deep theology. It's like saying, "Hey, this is going on right now. Be aware of it and look out for it." Like you said, there's a tug of war going on. Understand that's what it is. So make sure you got your end of the rope and you're hanging onto it tightly.

Gary Bauer:

Yeah. And God gave us these children, right? I mean, we have a responsibility to raise them the way God would want us to raise them. We've talked quite a bit at Family Talk and written about it in recent months. We've had this tremendous uprising of parents who I think maybe it was because of Covid, they started looking over the shoulders of their kids when the classroom was being done by Zoom. And they were like, what? What was that I just heard? And so we had parents all of a sudden showing up at school board meetings and saying, "No, that's my responsibility to teach my son or daughter about love and sex." What are you bringing the drag queen in to lead that?

And I was happy, and I know Dr. Dobson was too, to see that sort of uprising of parents saying just a second. But on the other hand, Mark, I was a little disappointed. Why wasn't every parent at that school board meeting? And I think some parents have basically said, well, look, I mean they're the professionals. They know how to do it better than I do. Not true. I mean, and that's a dangerous surrender of your God-given responsibilities.

Mark Hancock:

It really is. And we talked yesterday about the outsourcing of our responsibilities. And a lot of parents, frankly have just done that. The school is going to raise my kids because it's difficult. Homeschool is difficult. Being that invested in your son and your daughter's life is challenging. It's a lot easier to put them on a bus and send them off. But I got to tell you the results and the payoff. I'm getting to experience right now with my second son graduating, going off. That it says, this stuff works. Paying attention to your kids, paying attention, particularly dads to your sons and saying, "Hey, I'm here for you."

That's a powerful statement. "Hey son, I'm here for you." Even though it looks like he's incredibly engaged with all that social media, that's all phony, that's virtual, that's not real.

Gary Bauer: Yeah.

Mark Hancock: But you're a real person who really knows him, who's been there all along, and you have dad, you have the opportunity to say, "I am here for you." And to draw that young man out specifically and let him know you're there.

Gary Bauer: God, in His infinite sense of humor. I'm not an athlete, which probably is not news to you as you're looking across the table at me. I was first board on the chess team, but our son is six, two and a natural athlete. I mean, he was captain of the basketball team. I can only look at admiration at that. Took the soccer team to the state championship, just a natural athlete. And I went to those games even if I had to take a red eye back from California. And I'd like to say my purpose was noble because I knew I had to be there for my son. And there was a big part of it was that, but I just enjoyed like heck watching him and seeing him excel. All three of our kids are married now and he's now the father of two little boys. And Mark, you're right, the payoff. I can see in the things he's already doing with those two little boys that I believe he picked up in the household with his mother and I.

Mark Hancock: Sure he did. I guarantee he didn't learn that from TV. He didn't learn that from the school board.

Gary Bauer: Right.

Mark Hancock: He learned that from mom and dad.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Mark Hancock: How to be a good dad. And it's so critical for dads to be connected with their sons involved in their lives, to help them understand the difficult emotions, the difficult challenges, the culture that seems to not like them very much. That whole sit still, be quiet, pay attention thing. Boys aren't built for that. And they go to school and they sit there for hours expecting to behave like Susie, and they're just not wired like Susie. And that constant kind of shaming dismissal of boys begins to pay a price over time to where a school isn't a place that they fit and college isn't a place that they fit. And now an organization called Boy Scouts isn't a place that they fit, but what you did is you provided for your son a sense of you belong and your mine. I'm here for you. And I'm sure that they recognize that sacrifice and they grew with that confidence.

Gary Bauer: I used to say in speeches, of course, these were almost always to audiences that were fairly traditional and so forth. But that one of the greatest sounds I would hear even when I was working at the White House and I'd be out doing

something, maybe flying on Air Force One or whatever, but coming home and opening the front door and hearing my son yell, "Hey dad, let's wrestle." I can still hear that sometimes today when I'm dropping off to sleep and how empowering that was to know that little boy wanted to try to take me on again until he got to the point where I didn't want to wrestle him anymore. But these are the things that really we will remember when this journey is finished.

Mark Hancock: That's beautiful.

Gary Bauer: I was for a number of years, Undersecretary of Education, and I remember seeing at one point a list of the 10 biggest problems in America's schools in the 1950s, and it was chewing gum in class, talking when the teacher was talking, et cetera. And I'm looking at this thinking, oh, for the days. Another one of your devotionals early on in the book is what some of the things are that our kids are dealing with now, moral relativism, humanism. And this is something that I think a lot of, even our people, broadly speaking "our people" may miss materialism and all three of those things can ruin a life. Share some thoughts on that, if you would, why that was a particular devotion.

Mark Hancock: Yeah. Well, those are foundational to your whole worldview, moral relativism, all those things. The dismissal of good and evil and right and wrong. That's shocking. And that's the generation, that's the culture that our sons are being raised in right now. So it falls to us even more as fathers in this generation to reach back to what it is that at least you and I can remember what truth was.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Mark Hancock: And what it meant to be a man, what it meant to be a woman. You got to remember we're decades now into this whole sort of social experiment and on dismissing those sorts of roles. And boys desperately need to know who it is that they are, and then the materialistic piece that comes in because of course the social media feeds into that. I've got to have more. I've got to have more. And so when you're focused on that, you're not focused on your family, you're not focused on the next generation. And that's when this thing really begins to snowball as girls and boys get farther away from what it means to have a mom and dad and then have no idea at all of what it means to be a mom and dad. So generationally, it just snowballs.

Gary Bauer: You remind the reader in one of the other devotionals, that one of the most frequent commands in the Bible is fear not. And there's a lot of fear around America in the face of a culture that is labeling so many things that used to be just givens. What is marriage? How many genders are there? Will I get in trouble if I go to the school board meeting and get angry with the school board? I think we've talked in passing a little bit about the Boy Scouts.

I think some of the changes that have been made there that have in my view are not positive, have been out of fear. They got set upon by forces that we see all

over the place in the popular culture, in the halls of government. And some people will buckle under that. And so isn't one of the most important things you can teach a son, not a false bravado or not that I can lick you and take all four of you on, but to not give into fear, to have a heart about certain things that you will defend and do it reasonably but strongly no matter who and what is pushing back against you.

Mark Hancock: Yeah. And you make a really good point about the certain things because we used to be able to say, "Hey, be courageous. Do what's right." Now we don't even know what's right. And so we have people all over the country who believe they're being brave because they're standing up and saying something, but is what they're saying right? So we have to be careful not only to say, "Hey, we want you to be brave," but you have to have something to stand on. You have to have a foundation that isn't going to move, that isn't going to change with every wind of doctrine that comes along. And that's the word of God. And that's why it's important. This devotion is important to remind the dad the scripture in there every day to read, to bring him back to his source.

Now you can say, son, this is what I want you to be brave about. It's not enough to be brave. You thought you were brave when you stood up in your classroom and you were disrespectful towards the teacher because you stood up and you felt like you were being brave. That wasn't being brave. You need to be brave around the things that make sense and the things that, so dig down, find the values, the things you're going to stand for, the things you're going to be convicted about. You mentioned the Boy Scouts. When the Boy Scouts changed their membership policy as a family, I had to sit down with my sons and say, "We're not going to do this anymore. We just can't do this." And my son was an Eagle Scout.

Gary Bauer: Wow.

Mark Hancock: And when the Boy Scouts,-

Gary Bauer: There had to be pushback, right.

Mark Hancock: Oh my gosh, there wasn't any because he got an email from them and it said, "Hey, we noticed that you haven't rejoined. Why?" And he said, "Dad, do you mind if I respond?" He's 13 years old. I said, "No, son, that's fine. Go ahead and just be respectful in your response. Don't be mean." And the next day he came to me with his response. He said, "Dad, can I read this to you? I want your input on it." I said, "Sure." And I was expecting pages of something. He was a philosophy major. So he was very, very expressive. Gary, he said three words. He said to the Boy Scouts, he said, "You weren't brave."

Gary Bauer: Wow.

Mark Hancock: And I knew at that point that my son who had earned their highest award, that if I wasn't brave for him around the right things, my relationship with him could be threatened because he needed me to be brave too.

Gary Bauer: Man, oh man that is a fantastic story. There's another book right there, Mark. You weren't brave.

Mark Hancock: Yeah. And that's why this devotional is important because it's reminding fathers who they are, the truth behind who it is that they are and what's important.

Gary Bauer: That's a fantastic story. Mark, you must have been extremely proud. And as you alluded to, you already knew where that young man, your son was going when at the age of 13, that's what he wrote back to the Eagle Scouts. These days, there's an effort to demonize Christians who love America. So people that love Christ and love America as Christian nationalists. I'm not going to get into the theological. There is something maybe called Christian nationalists that is, I don't know what exactly it is, but what the popular culture is labeling as Christian nationalists is that if you love Jesus or God and you also are really patriotic about America, you're a danger to our democracy, to our constitutional republic. I was really happy when I was going through the devotional to see one entitled "Stand and Salute" and talk about that devotional and the point that you were trying to make.

Mark Hancock: There's a great opportunity for dads to pass on to their son the ideals of an amazing country that they get to live in. And so encourage dads to be proud of who it is that they are as an American, and to pass that on to the son to make sure that is lived out before him. So when the flag passes, you stand and salute. You do the right thing, son. You do the right thing. It may not be popular, but it's the right thing. And so just encouraging dads, live your life in a way in front of your sons, that just encouraging to know who you are. See you standing for convictions, seeing you not just doing what's easy or what everybody else is doing, but doing what's right. And you do that enough times, little rights over and over again, you're building a strong young man.

Gary Bauer: Absolutely. Mark, you must have a lot of great stories about Trail Life and the work there. Does a specific story come to mind of how what you're doing through that organization helped father and son to grow closer together?

Mark Hancock: Oh my goodness, that's so hard because there's just so many. And even stories about single moms who cried out to God for an organization that would help them raise their sons. Or the young man who came from a single family household and stood in front of that troop and said, "You taught me to shave and you taught me how to love Jesus."

Gary Bauer: Wow.

Mark Hancock: What came to mind is a man and his son in Ohio. I went to speak at a Trail Life gathering at a campground. We had to walk from one area to another, and I came alongside a dad and he said, "I need to tell you something." He said, "I'm here with my 12-year-old son." He said, "Our relationship's been a little bit rocky. I figured, okay, he's going into his teens. We're done." He says, "I was walking along the path after I was spending a couple days here at Trail Life." He said, "Mark, he reached up and he held my hand." And he said, "I thought that was over." He says, "This weekend is a new beginning for my son and I. I'm looking for the relationship that we're going to build from here forward." That just never would've happened if he hadn't said, I'm going to commit to some time in this event with my son, and here God just opens up this beautiful thing to bring healing instantaneously.

Gary Bauer: And such a simple gesture. Right.

Mark Hancock: Just so simple.

Gary Bauer: You don't know how important holding hands with your child is until many of them get to that point where they don't want to do that anymore. And there's a real pain you can feel, that that is gone already. That's a fantastic story.

Mark Hancock: Yeah.

Gary Bauer: There was a story not too many months ago, and it relates to patriotism again, but the young boy, the young man involved was also raised in a Christian home. This young man in a high school in Indiana. He had a truck that he drove to school every day, and I'm not sure why he made the decision, but one day he decided to put an American flag on the back of the truck and middle of the day he gets called into the principal's office and told, "Not allowed to have an American flag on the truck." This is in Indiana. And the young man says, "Well, what are you talking about?" "Well, we have regulations against that." So he went home and he looked through the regulations and there was nothing about it.

So he went back the next day and said, "I'm an American and I love my country. I'm not bothering anybody. I'm going to keep the flag in the truck." And they threatened to expel him. The day after that there were 20 trucks and cars in the parking lot with American flags. Ultimately, the school said, "We misread the regulations." The story gets a little bit better, Mark. So months pass, and a family in Oklahoma whose 13-year-old had been battling cancer since he was three and the battle was over and they were saying to this boy, their son, "In the time you have with us, is there anything else we can do for you?" And he had read or saw on social media about the boy in Indiana who since had turned his whole truck into a flag. He made it into a decal, was put on it like an American flag.

He said, "I want to be taken to my grave site in that flag truck." And so a caravan formed in Indiana of neighbors and others of the boy that stood up originally. They drove all the way to a town in Oklahoma to take that boy to the cemetery. The mother of the first boy said later, "I told my son, you just stand up on the little things and God will use it and look how God used this."

Mark Hancock: Beautiful.

Gary Bauer: So I think Mark, the whole message of your devotional, and it sounds like your whole life has been teach young men to stand up for what's right, to be brave and courageous. Do it the right way, but God will use it for their betterment and for the betterment of a country that needs more young, godly men and women. Would you mind closing us out with prayer?

Mark Hancock: I would love to. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your goodness and grace over our lives. Lord, we just pray that the words from our hearts that came today would accomplish what it is that you desire for them to do God. And that through all this that we've given glory to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Gary Bauer: Amen. Thank you, Mark. What a fantastic day to spend some time with you.

Mark Hancock: Thank you, sir.

Roger Marsh: Well, amen. And indeed Mark, what a great prayer. Thank you for sharing that with us as we conclude today's two-part conversation featuring Gary Bauer and Mark Hancock here on Family Talk. Now, if you are a father or you know someone who would benefit from Mark's brand new devotional book, we encourage you to drop us a line. The devotional is called *Trail-Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. And to reserve your copy, simply visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. We'll be happy to send you a copy as our way of thanking you for your donation of any amount in support of the JDFI today.

Now, you can also reserve your copy using the Family Talk app on your smartphone, or give us a call at 877-732-6825. And by the way, if you haven't yet purchased a gift for that father or father figure in your life, this devotional would make a great resource to share with him on Father's Day. Again, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and reserve your copy of the brand new devotional called *Trail-Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of everyone here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thank you so much for listening today. We appreciate all of our listeners, and we would not be here on the air without your prayers and faithful financial support. 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.