



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Contagious Faith – Part 1

Guest(s): Mark Mittelberg

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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: Hello and welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and your host. I'm here in the woods of Colorado at the home of our broadcast guest. His name is Mark Mittelberg, and he's here with me to talk about sharing the gospel. More specifically, we're going to talk about his new book, *Contagious Faith: Discovering Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others*. Mark Mittelberg is a bestselling author, international speaker, and the executive director of the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and Applied Apologetics at Colorado Christian University.

Mark's published works have sold a total of some three million copies. That's a lot of books. He and his wife, Heidi, live near Denver, Colorado, and they are the parents of Emma Jean and Matthew. Lee Strobel, author of *The Case for Christ* had this to say about Mark. "He has trained more people to share their faith than anyone else in his generation. He's considered one of the world's leading authorities on how Christians can naturally talk about Jesus in a way that's winsome and attractive." Mark, what a delight to have you join us here on this edition of Family Talk.

Mark Mittelberg: Well, thanks so much, Dr. Clinton. It's just great to be with you and an honor to be on this program.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Dobson sends his regards. He has great admiration and affection for you and the work that you are doing, you and Lee together.

Mark Mittelberg: It's mutual. I went to the Dobson school of being a father and husband and leading a family. And I don't know if I've done everything quite right, but he certainly has influenced my life. And I'm blessed because of it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, we hear that story so often all over the country. It's just amazing what God has continued to do in and through Dr. Dobson.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey Mark, as we get started, these are pretty unprecedented times. It's insane, really. But I believe that God is at work in the lives of a lot of people. This COVID thing has spun people. And there's a real stirring going, I think, especially when it comes to our faith. What are you seeing, Mark, out there in the front lines? You're out there every day, as they say, shaking hands and kissing babies, but you're seeing people and you're seeing in their eyes.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. I think there's a lot of things going on. I think one thing COVID has reminded us is that no one's found the cure for death yet. Suffering is real. Life is tenuous on this planet, and eternal things really matter. And so I think there is an awakening to the importance of spiritual matters. Though, there's also confusion and there's a lot of just not knowing who to believe anymore. And I think it really spells opportunity for us as believers to have an influence. If they see in us an authentic walk with Christ, a faith that's not just words or habits or rituals, but is real. And if they see that God is real in our lives and that He's really changed us and given us hope in a world that's losing hope, I think they're going to be open to it. And a lot of them are.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, I'm really excited about your book, *Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus With Others*. I think if you're out there, you're probably like me. You love the Lord. You have a real desire in your heart to share Christ, if the opportunity comes your way. Mark, I think a lot of people have good intentions. They want to do that very thing. And when they feel that unction to share, maybe it's coming home from a ball game, maybe it's over a cup of coffee with someone in a restaurant, maybe it's sitting next to someone on a flight. And the intention is, oh, like the Holy Spirit's saying, "Share the Word. Say something about the Lord here." And often, Mark, you don't.

Mark Mittelberg: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then when the moment's gone, it's like, you feel this weight of conviction and you say, "Lord, I'm ashamed. I should have said something there in that moment." And then you resolve that "next time I'm going to do it." There are a lot of barriers that keep people from sharing their faith, but we're going to talk about how to get through it. But Mark, what are some of the biggest challenges that you see in people?

Mark Mittelberg: You're so right. The Holy Spirit's often whispering to us, "Now's the time, say something, just drop it out there."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Been there.

Mark Mittelberg: And then the other spirit of the world that's on our other shoulder says, "But you don't know enough. You haven't read all those Christian books you bought. You have not gotten your degree yet. Your life isn't perfect. Wait until you

straighten out your life and get a little smarter and then maybe God could use you. But not now, this is not a good time." I think we all know that voice. And even though I speak on these topics and write on them, I hear that a lot. You're not good enough. Your attitude stunk this morning. Don't do this. Don't bring it. And Satan will try to convince us that it's never a good time. And so I think that's part of it. I think there's also just the very practical thing that we're not ready in the sense that we haven't really thought about what we would say or done any preparation, which is...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Or what if they think that's stupid that you brought it up, or I'm embarrassed, or I'm afraid that I'll say something wrong, or I might blow a friendship. Here I am having some influence and maybe I'm going to get a chance to lead him to the Lord. But I don't know if this is the right time, Mark. And all that stuff, it just comes up and it stops us.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes. I've felt all that and often do now. But I remember early on in my walk with Christ, I had just given my life to Christ less than two months before this. I had gotten involved in a Bible study that met a bunch of college students. And so, a gal I had known from high school named Peggy had started coming.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Love this story.

Mark Mittelberg: She was showing some interest, some openness. She had a religious background, but didn't really get what it meant, or wasn't living it. And I sensed for several days, maybe even a couple weeks, I sensed the Holy Spirit prompting me to reach out to Peggy. And I was feeling that discomfort, it's not my gift. It's not my area. I don't know enough. And then I was there, it was in our hometown in North Dakota, I'm driving along, it was actually my first Christmas as a true committed follower of Christ. And there's Peggy walking along the Eighth Street bridge in our hometown. And I pulled over and rolled down the window and said, "Hey, Peggy, what are you doing out here? It's cold out here. It's snowing." And she said, "Yeah, I live close to here. I'm just out for a walk."

Well, it led to us talking and I started telling her, I was so glad she was part of our Bible study and she said she was enjoying it. But then I finally got the courage and I'm going, "Why doesn't God send a pastor, an evangelist, not me." But I finally got the courage and I just took a breath, and I said, "Peggy, I'm just curious, you're learning, you're growing in this area, but have you ever come to the point of putting your trust in Jesus personally?"

And I don't know if I said it right, I don't know what I said exactly, but the gist of it was, have you ever come to that point of trusting him for forgiveness and for salvation? And I'll never forget, she looked at me, she said, "No, I've never done that. No one's ever told me I needed to." And it opened up this conversation, actually, it was a short conversation, then she had to get back to her family for dinner, but she said, "Could you come by later?" So I'm like, sure. So Christmas night I came back, we ended up talking for hours. And in spite of me, in spite of what I don't know, the Holy Spirit used me and He spoke through me, and I

found out He had been reaching her in various ways. He often orchestrates a whole bunch of influences. We're rarely alone in these efforts.

But I had the privilege that night of bringing her across the line of faith. And I prayed with her and she gave her life to Christ. And I just want to say something to our listeners right now, because most of us are in that category where we say, this is not my deal. It's not my gift. I'm not ready for this. And I just want to tell you, if God could use 19 year old Mark Mittelberg who knew nothing, He can use you to impact someone's eternity. And if I can add a quick PS, years later, Peggy not only got married to a Christian guy, they gave their lives to ministry. They went to Papua New Guinea, one of the darkest places, spiritually speaking, in the world. And they gave almost a quarter of a century to spreading the gospel and translating the word of God in that part of the world with Wycliffe Bible translators. And to this day are serving God in ministry. And I got to be a part of that. And you can too, we can all be... Yes. Yeah.

And I say in the book that I think, 37,000 years from now, I'll probably get to meet some young Papua New Guinea young man who will come up to me say, "Hey, I just heard something about you. And I want to say, thanks." And be like, what did I do? And he'll say "You helped reach Peggy who came with her family and they reached me. And my family knows Jesus today and you were a part of that," and I'll just say, "Praise God. Boy, I wish I had done a whole lot more of that." So, that's something we can all do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I heard Jack Wyrzten from Word of Life. I don't know if you remember that name, but I heard Jack Wyrzten preach one time saying, "God has no greater plan than to use people as the vehicle through which he communicates."

Mark Mittelberg: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's the message of grace and hope and mercy and life. And Mark, you make a statement early on, and we're going to go on a journey here today in this *Contagious Faith* book. But Mark, you make this statement early, that as Christians we are made for more than just a normal Christian life, what I was just referencing, that there's something more here. Mark, what do you mean by that?

Mark Mittelberg: Well, and it's not to discount the importance of going to church, or being part of a fellowship, or praying, or doing the normal Christian life. It's all good, but it's not adventurous and it can become quite mechanical and predictable and frankly boring. I actually talk about this toward the end of the book that, if you want adventure, you have to add a little bit of risk. And Tim, you're out here with me where I live, you're out here in the woods. Well, I ride a mountain bike out here. And riding bike it's fun, it's good exercise and all that, but it's not that exciting unless you see the bears in my neighborhood. And I'm serious.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to see one.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. Sometimes they walk right here by my office window and they look big from the car, but I'm telling you, when you're riding a bike, they look huge. And I often encounter them, thankfully I have not tangled with one, but I bring that up to say, that's part of why mountain biking's an adventure for me, is there's a little bit of danger out there. When I talk about my friend, Peggy joining Wycliffe and going to Papua New Guinea, this is over there, there's head hunters over there. And there's some danger over there, but she's got an adventurous life to point to and to talk about and great stories to tell. And again, I just want to appeal to everyone listening to us right now, God wants you to be out on the edge of adventure, serving Him. And there's no better way to do that than to take small risks to talk to people about your faith.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And the Lord Himself said these words, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And He puts that same mission in us. He calls us to that. You tell of another story that I thought was fascinating about some time in England.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And it had a real impact on you. I think it's very apropos to what we're talking about here, of just stepping out and into a direction and understanding what we're trying to do.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. My first story was a success one in spite of me, my second one was when I thought I knew more, but it was more failure. I was going to graduate school, getting my degree in philosophy of religion, apologetics and so forth. But I'd just started and my wife and I heard about an opportunity to go overseas for a summer of ministry. And there were a number of locations, we weren't sure where we would end up, but we thought "This sounds awesome. Sounds like adventure." We signed up. We ended up in London, England on the south side of London with a great church and great people, but doing things that absolutely did not fit me at all. In fact, I got there, I remember meeting a team captain and saying, "Hey, we're so happy to be here. We're anxious to serve. What are we going to do?"

And with a little too much enthusiasm, this guy goes, "Oh, we're so glad you're here. We're going to go out tomorrow. And we're going to knock on doors of people in neighborhoods all around the church and tell them about Jesus. It's going to be great," he says. I remember just reeling and going, "Wait, just strangers? These aren't people that call the church or visit?" "No, no, no, these are just people in the neighborhood and it's going to be wonderful." And I said, "And we're going to do this all day?" He said, "We're going to do it all summer." And I'm thinking, "Oh man, what did I sign up for?" And Tim, it was tough. I had to, every day, try to gear up and go and knock on doors and meet strangers. And I don't know if you know this, but Americans fresh out of Heathrow airport in London, England knocking on doors of strangers to tell them about Jesus, it was not a real popular thing in British culture.

We actually had one woman, she accused me of having an American accent, if you could imagine. And I tried to keep it light. I said, "Well, yeah. What a coincidence. We are from America." And she said, "Well, why don't you go back and pester people in your own country?" Which at that moment sounded like a good idea. Let's go home. And I got through them, eight weeks count them, eight weeks. And by the time I was done, I was on the airplane flying back to the US. And I don't think I said it out loud, but I certainly was thinking, I was like, "I'm done with evangelism. This is not my deal. It's not my gift." The stuff we already talked about, that so many of us as believers feel, but here's the lesson that I started to learn there and then learn much more fully when I got home. And that was, we started to figure out that people opened the doors a lot more readily when wife would knock on the door.

She's an attractive, vivacious, just outgoing person, kind of person that makes new best friends on elevator rides. She's real outgoing. And we realized, let's have her knock on the doors and I'll hide behind her in the bushes or something. And when they open the door, and welcome her in, I'll rush in behind her. And it worked, all of a sudden we're getting invited in more and people are making tea for us. And then they would start asking spiritual questions. And then Heidi would look at me like, okay, it's your turn buddy. It's like handing the baton to me. That's actually how I got through of the summer.

And I'm not like some introvert, but I just don't like walking up to strangers, but I got through it because I learned to divide the labor and do teamwork with my wife, Heidi. And we got through it that way. Well, then when I came back, I heard a sermon at my church where the pastor talked about how even in the pages of the Bible, they took a whole bunch of different approaches to sharing their faith. And they didn't lay guilt trips on each other to... Peter didn't tell Paul to be like me and Paul didn't tell Matthew, you ought to imitate me. It was more like, we all are called to share the good news. Now let's find ways that fit us. And that was liberating.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Would it also be appropriate, Mark, to drop in the parable, the sower? Some people, you're out there trying to grind up the ground.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Other people, you're trying to figure out how to clean it up a little bit.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Other people are planting seeds. Other people are...

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. Paul talks about that. Paul Waters, but we work together.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes. What's interesting here though, is God put something in your heart that I think will really resonate with our listeners, and that you began to see styles of evangelism.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That there are different ways that people evangelize, share Christ. And I want to make sure up front, we let our listeners know this too. We're in no way diminishing those who knock on doors.

Mark Mittelberg: I admire them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. I grew up in that too.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we know that Paul says that God has chosen the foolishness of preaching, that [inaudible 00:18:09] of the gospel. Some people do what, they [Karuso 00:18:13], they get down the street corner. My dad loved tent evangelism, and just out there preaching.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: For some people, that's their gifting.

Mark Mittelberg: And in my book, it's one of the styles I talk about. I call it the truth telling style. It's the fifth of the five that I talk about. But I honor it. In fact, it was one of them that reached me when I was 19. A guy who I knew from high school, guy named Terry, he challenged my life because he knew I claimed to be a Christian, I was a church kid, but I wasn't walking with Christ. Well, his challenge woke me up and God used that within a week's time of that challenge. I gave my life to Christ. So I honor this approach, but it's just not the natural approach for me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, could we do this? We're fighting time a little bit here, but I'd like for you to just give a taste of these five styles.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then I want you to come back for tomorrow's broadcast so we can go over them in depth, but can you start us out? And we talked about the confrontational style, the truth teller.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. Let me go back the beginning, the friendship building style, which is what my wife Heidi is. And it's in Scripture and maybe in the next broadcast, we can talk more in depth.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Kind of a relational style.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. Someone who cares about people and builds bridges and has hospitality, and sits and has coffee with someone, but then opens up conversation. Love that approach. And again, that's my wife.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I do too.

Mark Mittelberg: Then there's the selfless serving style. And this is someone who sees needs that maybe a lot of us don't see, but they find joy in meeting those needs and serving people. We will look at the example of Tabitha in Acts 9, who made clothing for needy people and God used that. And I love this one because it reaches the hardest to reach people. People who are hurting, need someone who shows love in tangible ways.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And it really means something to them.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It opens their heart.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes. So that's selfless serving. The third example is the story sharing, someone who speaks out of their own experience. My buddy Lee Strobel, a former atheist. And he writes about it in *The Case for Christ*. But anytime you hear Lee speak, he's like, "Well, when I was an atheist, when I was working for the *Chicago Tribune* and I was a reporter," but he tells the story how his wife became a Christian and that led him to investigate it. Well, we all have a story to share. And for some of us likely that's our main approach, is story sharing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When I think of that approach, I think of those who say, man, I want to tell you what God has done in my life.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes. And then they connect what they learned and experienced with the person they're talking to, to help them see that you could benefit from what I've experienced, or what I've learned. So yeah. Story sharing. And then the fourth in my list, the reason giving. And this is mine. When I speak to audiences, I love to joke, this is the most godly of the five. This is the best one, well, maybe not, but it is an important one. And again, that summer, I talked about how Heidi, the friendship builder, would knock on the doors and open them, then we'd get inside and they'd ask a hard question and I would perk up then because I'm made to be like, Paul is our example in Scripture, to give reasons, to give evidence, to try to show the rationale of the gospel.

And that comes very naturally to me. And, in fact, as I mentioned, I was getting a degree in philosophy of religion learning apologetics. And I've seen over and over how giving good reasons can open the door and help someone reach that point of saying yes to Jesus. So I just want to encourage you as you're listening, you could do at least one of these. As I speak on this around the country and talk to people, almost everyone says, I'm number three, or I'm number two and

five. And I just say, then do that, try that. Don't be something you're not, don't force yourself to try things that don't fit you, but get your feet wet and try this and do it for fun. Do it as an experiment, do it as an adventure like we were talking about. And God can use you in ways that you just will be shocked by.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's a beautiful way to also demonstrate love. I think of Dr. Dobson through the years has often used this phrase, "Be there." And it was really in reference to making sure that your kids know Christ.

Mark Mittelberg: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And the greatest gift any parent can give to his kids is this gift.

Mark Mittelberg: Yeah. Eternal life through Christ.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Eternal life.

Mark Mittelberg: Our ultimate calling is to reach our own kids and our own grandkids and to have an impact in our own family. And finding your natural approach will liberate you to do that with confidence.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest again today has been Mark Mittelberg. Brand new book out. You've got to get your hands on this called *Contagious Faith: Discovering Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others*. We're going to talk a lot more about this on our next broadcast here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Mark, thank you so much for joining us.

Mark Mittelberg: Oh, my pleasure. This has been fun.

Roger Marsh: At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus gave his disciples very clear and specific instructions for what they were to do after He was taken up to Heaven. This passage has become known as the great commission and it reads his follows, "Go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I, Jesus have commanded you. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And you just heard the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's inspiring conversation with Mark Mittelberg, about a Christian's call and privilege to share the good news of Christ. In today's program, Mark explained that not everyone is called to share the gospel to thousands of people from a stage, but we are all gifted in individual ways and we can and should use those gifts to share the good news of Jesus. The Christian life can be an evangelistic adventure for sure.

Allow me to ask you a question, and to challenge you. What have you done today to advance the great commission? If there's something else you can do today to spread the good news, or minister to another human being, an eternal soul? Well, to learn more about Mark Mittelberg or his latest book, *Contagious*

Faith, just go to drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Mark is also the executive director of the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and Applied Apologetics at Colorado Christian University. The Strobel Center offers online, MA and BA programs, certificate programs as well. If you've been wanting to learn more about apologetics and how to share your faith with others, you can find information about the Lee Strobel Center on our website as well. That web address, once again is drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Well, thanks again for joining us for today's edition of Family Talk, make sure to listen again tomorrow to catch the remainder of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Mark Mittelberg, as they discuss how all Christians can have contagious faith. That's coming up next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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