



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Daily Hope for Families – Part 2

Guest(s): Mark Gregston

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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: Welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. As Christian parents, it's important to utilize the wisdom that is provided in Scripture and then apply it to how we raise our kids. Our guest today here on Family Talk is Mark Gregston, back for part two of his conversation with our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton. They'll be discussing how families can become stronger in the midst of their struggles through the hope found in God's Word. Mark Gregston is an author and speaker who is also the co-founder of Heartlight Ministries. Heartlight is a residential counseling center for teens in crisis. Mark also hosts the radio program called "Parenting Today's Teens with Mark Gregston." He has written 18 books about parenting and struggling youth, including *Parenting Today's Teens*, *Leaving a Legacy of Hope*, *Grandparenting Teens*, and *Daily Hope for Families*. Mark and his wife, Jan, live in Hallsville, Texas. They have two grown children and four grandchildren. Now, today's episode was recorded recently at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Florida. Let's join Dr. Tim Clinton and our guest, Mark Gregston, for the remainder of their conversation right here, right now, on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, welcome back to Family Talk. What a delightful conversation yesterday. Again, Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, appreciate your work and sender their regards.

Mark Gregston: Well, there's been two people that I've listened to all my life, and that's Dr. Dobson and Chuck Swindoll. And you put those two together and-

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's a combo.

Mark Gregston: And I tell you what, it has influenced my life. And I would say there are two people that have made the biggest impact in my life more than anybody else just because it's the family aspect of it, but it's the Scriptural side of it. And I think one of the biggest challenges is always saying how I take the Scripture that I know and apply it to my family. And Dr. Dobson always did that. And I always

loved that about him and his ministry. And so that's why it's just wonderful to be a part of this.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So many ministries birthed out of those timeless truths, I call them, that flowed from Dr. Dobson. You in your work, Mark, Heartlight Ministries. So we talked a little bit about that yesterday. But can you just give a quick 30,000-foot flyover of what the ministry's all about?

Mark Gregston: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I live with 60 high school kids. They come from all over the country. I've lived with over 3,000 kids over the last 50 years. And it's kids who are struggling, having a tough time. And we started Heartlight, the residential program, 35 years ago, with the idea of providing a wonderful place for kids to go when parents are struggling, not knowing what to do and feel like hope has left the building. And so these kids come and live with us, and live with us for about 10 months. And we get to help transition their family and get them to a good place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I had a professor years ago, Mark, his name was Dr. David Miller. And he talked a lot about struggling adolescences. And he said when kids hit that puberty zone, it's like something goes off. And a lot of them can go into the crazy zone.

Mark Gregston: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What is it about the teen years? I know developmentally they're asking and answering a lot of questions like, who am I? How do I fit in and more. There's so much development going on. There's so much happening to their bodies. But in their world around them and they're trying to make sense. What do you think it is?

Mark Gregston: Well, I think it's that move from concrete thinking the first 12 years of their life, to now abstract thinking. That takes them to another place that they start wondering about other things. And now with kids being so exposed to so much, it causes them to wonder even more, which beckons the need for parents to be more involved at an earlier age in a child's life when they start asking all these questions. But I think it's definitely, they just start thinking differently because they're being influenced by other people as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I heard you say yesterday you get 12-15,000 calls a year. You have enough room for 60 teens in crisis. And so you got a lot of broken families out there searching frantically for help. You've dedicated basically your life to helping families do repair, to fix that kind of chaos and brokenness. Mark, what do you think really moves the needle? What are you seeing that's working to help families in crisis?

Mark Gregston: Well, anytime a family's in crisis, it's the identification that something is not right. It's hard for men to say, "Something's not right in my family," because they take it as failure. When a dad begins to say, "I got to do something different," that is the first step. I mean, it's that journey of getting your family

back. And when they start to say that, it means I'm longing for something. So when you struggle through something, it's a wonderful time because you start looking for something different. I mean, your best thinking has got parents to this point. And it means I've got to change the way I think about how I'm raising my child. And that may be that you're not doing anything wrong at all, but you just don't know what tools to use and you need some new tools.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And I tell you what, it can get pretty desperate.

Mark Gregston: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It really can. And then fear starts to grip a lot of families. Mark, a lot of what kids are going through is pretty scary. And when you think about the mind, the mind can be a very free, beautiful, creative place or it can get pretty dark and turbulent.

Mark Gregston: Yeah, real fast.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, real fast. And Mark, what do you do with these kids who are losing, if you will, their face? They just don't have any hooks.

Mark Gregston: I think what that means is a family's got to pour into them. Even that single mom that has to learn to pour into their family differently. Because whatever you're doing, if it's not working, then change up how you're doing it. And it may be simple things like mom's not learning to talk as much so a child doesn't turn them off. Because I know that every man knows that any woman in this world possesses more wisdom than all the men in this world put together. And what that means is that you shift the way you engage with your child. Maybe you remaining quiet rather than talking so much. A dad, instead of trying to fix everything all the time, to pour your life into your child and say, "I want to have a relationship more so than fixing you." And you walk away from some of the things that you've done.

You may be teaching, and teaching, and teaching your child and what they need is to be trained. And that training means I need to look at them differently and prepare them for the world that they're going to be living in. Because a child will walk away from any parents that aren't preparing them to live in that world. Then you can either choose to raise your kids to live in a zoo or you can prepare them to survive in the jungle. It's kind of your choice. But your child wants to be prepared. And if you're not doing that, they are scared to death that it's not working.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You put together, Mark, a devotional, a Heartlight devotional after your ministry entitled *Daily Hope for Families*. And Mark, in a lot of ways, this is a tool to help the families that are struggling. Not afraid to take on the tough issues, but wrapping it up in a beautiful easy way for them to, "Begin to think," and maybe have conversation around those issues. Is that the goal?

Mark Gregston: It really is. I think the greatest challenge any parent faces is taking the Scripture that they embrace and know to be true and applying it to their family and getting their kids to embrace that in some way. I mean, I think there's a very difficult time of moving what they know to helping a child learn differently. And so what I've done in this book is really take all the scriptures that I know. I was Oklahoma Bible Quiz champ in 1969.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love it.

Mark Gregston: And so I've always memorized Scripture. But then I've always said, let's be very practical in the way that we engage. And so anybody reads anything of mine or listens to me, I'm all into not giving you the philosophy of how it works. I'm giving you the practical application. These are some things that you can do to engage your child differently, to offer them what they want, to fulfill what your role is as a mom or dad, to make sure that your child is getting what they need. And really hearing about life that we know is in Scripture. Life that we know that is in a relationship with Christ. Life that we know is by having good relationships. That's the purpose of the book.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In the midst of it, you anchor it unashamedly in Scripture, there's something about the power of the written word. When people read the Word, it's "thus sayeth the Lord." And then in the midst of it, the challenge to, "Engage into his presence," to pray together, barriers begin to fade if we do it in the context of a good relationship. And we're using it as a weapon that's going to destroy the very essence of what you hope to accomplish.

Mark Gregston: Well, I mean, if you do it in such a way to condemn a child or tell them all the time what they're doing wrong, you're not speaking to their heart, you're speaking to their behavior. And if you look at Scripture over and over again, I mean, Scripture comes alive with the focus of a struggling teen. And the way that you engage, the way that you move toward them, the way you get them to move from foolishness to wanting wisdom out of life. Those are all biblical principles that move you to a deeper relationship. But it also creates the opportunity for them to pursue life in a different means as well, so that they don't remain in this childish thinking.

And I think that's what's happened in this culture is that so many of our kids have remained in this childish thinking, because they're not being challenged by normal healthy relationships that I would hope that every kid would have. But they don't have that. Most kids think they have a lot of friends. They don't have friends. I mean, you and I have carried on a deeper conversation than most teens would with their friends. And that's sad. They don't have the depth that is needed to help somebody mature, to help somebody let that iron sharpen iron to get them to a better place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. Years ago, I read a book, I think it was Richard Foster's yellow book on prayer. And in it he was talking about deterrence to a healthy prayer life. And the one that jumped off the page to me was the belief that all has to be right in

order to pray. As I think about families in crisis or broken families trying to get things right, that, Mark, you where I'm going here, the belief that all has to be right in order for us to come to God or to have these kind of conversations, is a huge deterrent that ought not be there because authenticity really is what they're looking for. This is what these kids want.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they want genuineness and authenticity. But the truth of it is this. I mean, we will never get to that point there. There's never going to be that point that everything's going to be perfect.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Oh my goodness.

Mark Gregston: And we live under this false identity that it's going to be. Well, it is just won't. I mean, perfection is something now, if you walk around your home quoting Matthew 5:48, "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." I think there's going to be some challenges to that about how that's fleshed out within your home. But if a child feels like they have to be perfect, you have to remember, they're being compared to everybody else in the world. I mean, they see everybody else. They're not happy with the way they look, the way they feel, the position in life, the power they have, the amount of money they have, they feel like they're missing out on everything. You are the one that gets to bring them back to home and help them get to a better place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's why we call it parenting. That's why we call it opportunity to speak life into these moments. One of the things I've also seen is, parents don't want to think that their children are struggling. Or they tend to think that if we don't talk about something, then our kids won't be feeling the impact or effect of it. Or we're not going to put seeds of thought in their life. Your kids are probably wrestling with the issues and they need you to address topics. I know in this devotional, this *Daily Hope for Families*, you talk about alcohol use, you talk about pornography, you even talk about a divorce and its impact. And if you can do it without putting them on the spot, if you can just begin to have dialogue with them, they're listening. They're attuned. They want to hear what you have to say. And oh, by the way, they can read you pretty well whether or not you believe what you say you're believing or not, you know that?

Mark Gregston: Yeah, I mean, it's in the connection.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But having dialogues, that's what's important here.

Mark Gregston: It is. It's the connection between your lifestyle, whatever you're doing with what you're saying, and they're seeing a combination of those two. I admit to kids, kids will ask me questions and I go, "I don't know the answer to that. I need to think about that. That's something that I haven't thought about. I need to think a little bit more," so that I can come to a conclusion or maybe the next question to ask them to bring them to a different point. The issue is having them reflect on life to come to a realization of the need for everything we've taught them,

rather than me always teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching them more stuff. Our kids have had a lot poured into them. And so what I need to be pouring is wisdom, not just more information, but wisdom.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that. You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host here. And having an incredible conversation with our special guest, Mark Gregston. He's again, a counselor, par excellent. He's been helping teens in crisis, families in crisis for a long time. Heartlight Ministries is the name of their organization, residential facility to help teens work through those tough issues, and to help put families back together again. Got a devotional out right now, brand new *Daily Hope for Families*, hoping that it'll be a... No. This is a tool to help families that are battling through that kind of brokenness. And to create conversation, meaningful conversation to re-engage and to love on each other.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. It's a daily reminder to take the Scripture that you know to be true, along with some practical helps about how to engage your child. And the point of it isn't just a poor Scripture into their life, it's to pour Scripture into their life so you deepen the relationship with them and give them a taste of what it's like to have a relationship with our Heavenly Father. It all kind of fits into place. The more that we learned about love, about loving one another, the more we learn about loving God, the deeper the relationships go. So they not only hear about the word of God, they get to experience the word of God in their life in such a way that it can be transforming.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, I want to go back to conflict for a moment. Families that are in trouble tend to escalate quickly. In other words, they know how to push each other's buttons and how to take each other, if you will, to the ozone fast. And at that point, there is no communication. Everything's shut down, and this is in total disarray or chaos. And people just kind of go off into their own rooms, literally or figuratively, and they shut down. And they just, "Go on," only to escalate again and again. And somewhere the wheels start coming off the bus. Mark, that's the stuff that you have to, "Get into," to help shut that down in order to create an opportunity to make something happen. Can you just give some practical tips on what families can do if they're in that situation.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. And the tendency that most people have is to, I'm just going to let it go. And unresolved conflict at an earlier age is going to postpone itself to a later time, where it's going to affect more people and cause more damage. I mean, you have the opportunity as a parent to say, "Let's deal with this now." And it may be saying to a child, "We're going to deal with this now because I can't let it go on because it's not helping you. It's not loving you. It's not caring for you the way that I need to be caring for you." "Yeah, but dad and mom, you did this and you did this." The first place to go is say, "That is, we haven't done it all right. We haven't done it the right way. Matter of fact, we've missed your heart. Matter of fact, I just don't think I've been that good of a dad. I don't think I've been that good of a mom."

Now, and it's just saying that you position yourself to say, "But I want to have a better relationship." Because I know at the core, your child wants to have that better relationship. So it's going to them. So if you have a child that's spinning out of control, and their grades are failing, and everything's gone dark, they're isolating from you, they're loving the things they used to hate, and they're hating the things they used to love, then you're beginning to see a change in your child where they're not talking to you. They go upstairs, one person, and they come down the next morning as somebody completely different. That's when you've got to say, "We've got to intervene. We've got to do something different."

And it may be that it's either coming to a Family in Crisis conference. It may be saying, "We need to get some new tools to put in our parenting toolbox." But you have to do something. Because if not, this will continue on when they go off to college, or get in the military, or get a job, or get married, and you begin to see the impact of you not taking care of things early, now changing the destiny of your family in the days ahead.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, for the mom or dad in the car right now listing and they're thinking, "I'm trying to figure out where we're at as a family." What are the red flags? When do we know, Hey, this is the time to move. What kind of a situation is that?

Mark Gregston: Yeah. I mean, kids kind of to themselves and rolling their eyes at you, that's not the reason to send them off. This is when a kid can't stop a drug addiction, when they've had trauma in their life that is far beyond, when they are withdrawing. When you see the life in them starting to die out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When the light goes out.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. And there's probably no better way to say that. It is gone. The happiness is gone. Their lust for life has changed. They may be cutting, they may be depressed. They may be overly anxious that they can't even function. They're flunking out of school.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're scared to death about what's happening.

Mark Gregston: Yeah. Everything is just going downhill. That's when somebody would get ahold of us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, we're fighting time here, but I wanted to maybe close out this way. Hope. Mark, you have a verse around hope that you press into that really represents what you do.

Mark Gregston: Yeah, I do. It's Ephesians 1:18. It says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be filled with light so you may know the hope to which he has called you." And it speaks to all of it. It speaks to this is about your heart. It's about the light of a relationship with Christ. Those two things, even if you can't see it, has an

amazing way of bringing hope to the situation. We're going to get on the other side of this. This chapter's going to be closed one day. Your child's going to grow through this. Take advantage.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And when you know hope, K-N-O-W, you have everything.

Mark Gregston: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: If people want to learn more about the ministry and maybe how to get a copy of this new devotional, *Daily Hope for Families*, really a devotional for families in crisis. Families dealing with tough issues. Hey, preventative tool too. Get the conversation going now before the wheels come off the bus. Mark, where do they go?

Mark Gregston: Yeah. They'd go to a Heartlight Ministries to find out about Heartlight. But to find this, go to where our radio program is, parentingtodaysteens.org. I mean, that has resources. It talks about our podcast. It'll tell you how you can listen to radio. There's so many resources there. You won't be able to go through all of them. It's parentingtodaysteens.org.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, what a delightful conversation, Mark. Always fun to spend time with you. I love your heart. I love what God's doing in and through your ministry. On behalf of Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, again, we tip the hat.

Mark Gregston: Thank you so much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And say, hey, stay strong. Keep on fighting.

Mark Gregston: Thank you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Especially for our kids and our families.

Mark Gregston: You bet. God bless you guys.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Thank you for joining us.

Mark Gregston: God bless you guys.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an encouraging conversation with Mark Gregston and our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, right here on Family Talk. Whether you're a parent or grandparent, there is certainly hope for your family if you have a teen in crisis. In Proverbs 24:14, we read, "Know also that wisdom is like honey for you. If you find it, there is a future hope for you and your hope will not be cut off." Friend, if you want to share both parts of this interview with a family member or friend, remember you can easily do so by going to our website. Just visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Remember, you can also share this program right from your smartphone on the

Family Talk JDFI app. And by the way, you can download the app today from your app store. Trust me, you'll be glad you did.

Now, in these final moments of our program today, I want to remind you that Family Talk is a listener supported broadcast outreach. And every dollar you donate makes it possible for us to provide one more resource that can touch the heart of someone seeking God's love in a tough situation. Until the end of the month, that would be today, we have been blessed by some special friends of the ministry with a matching grant of \$300,000. That means for every dollar we receive right up until the end of business today, it'll be automatically matched up to our \$300,000 goal. Double the impact.

To make your donation reach twice as many families and marriages, you can visit drjamesdobson.org and give a gift securely right there on the homepage. That's drjamesdobson.org. Or if it's easier, pick up the phone and give us a call. A member of our customer care team is standing by to speak with you, to pray with you if you need to, and also to receive your donation. The number to call is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Please know how much we appreciate your prayers and your ongoing financial support. And from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, please accept our heartfelt thanks for your contribution. I'm Roger Marsh, and you've been listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Someone said, if you connect a boy to the right man, he seldom goes wrong, and I believe that to be true. If a dad and a son or a daughter can develop some common interest together, the rebellious years really shouldn't be all that troubling. I had that kind of relationship with my own father. And the full force of his contribution hit me a few years ago when suddenly he laid dying of a major heart attack. As I stood by his bedside, I thought back to the very happiest moments of my childhood, how my dad and I would get up very early on a wintry morning, and head about 20 miles outside of town to our favorite place. We'd park the car, we'd climb over a fence, and follow a little creek bed back to an area that I called the big woods.

He'd get me situated under a fallen tree that made a little secret room. And then we'd wait for the sun to come up, listening to the squirrels, and the birds, and the chipmunks. And the entire panorama of nature unfolded before us. Those moments together with my dad were absolutely priceless to me. There was a closeness that made me want to be like him, to choose his values as my values, and his dreams as my dreams, and his God as my God. That's the power of a man to set a kid on the right road. And I can think of no wiser investment of time in the entire realm of human experience.

Roger Marsh: To get involved, go to drjamesdobson.org.

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