



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope- 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: Hi, this is Roger Marsh, and welcome to Family Talk. Did you know that there are over 70 million grandparents in the United States right now, and each month over 75,000 more Americans join that club? Well, here's an even more sobering statistic. Close to three million of those grandparents in the US right now are raising their grandchildren by serving as primary guardians. That's right. They've stepped up and stepped into the gap where a child's parents are not available, or capable of caring for those kids. And yet there are very few resources for grandparents in those situations. Maybe you're one of those grandparents, or you know someone who is, or maybe you're a parent who wishes that your own parents would be more involved in your kids' lives. In any case, today here on Family Talk, we are excited to bring you the conclusion of a two-part broadcast on the topic of grandparenting teens.

Our guest on the program is author, speaker and parenting and grandparenting expert, Mark Gregston. Mark and his wife, Jan, have had a heart for struggling teens, really ever since they were newlyweds. Mark was involved with Young Life and various other youth ministries for several years before founding Heartlight Ministries in 1988. Heartlight is a residential counseling center for teens in crisis located in Northeast Texas. Mark and Jan live on the Heartlight property in Hallsville, Texas, and are immersed in daily life with the teens and young adults who live there as well. Mark Gregston is also the host of the nationally syndicated radio program, *Parenting Today's Teens with Mark Gregston*. He has written 12 books on the topic of parenting, many of which deal with struggling teens. Mark and Jan have two children and four grandchildren of their own.

Today on Family Talk, we are bringing you the conclusion of Mark's recent conversation with Dr. Tim Clinton. There'll be sharing practical, tangible steps that you can take today to begin growing your relationship with your teenage grandchild. Mark explains that a grandparent's goal should be to become the person in your grandchild's life who they can trust and always count on to listen to them, not just to instruct. He says that you can be that person they turn to

when they get into a crisis. Mark and Dr. Clinton will also address those grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and filling both roles of parents, as well as grandparents. Let's join Mark Gregston and our own Dr. Tim Clinton right now on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, so great to have you back here on Family Talk. And yesterday we were talking about your brand-new book, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. You spent your life, you and Jan, your family, to ministering to troubled kids. You've built a ministry down there called Heartlight. It's amazing. It's a residential program. Tell us a little bit about that residential facility and what takes place there, Mark.

Mark Gregston: Yeah, we take kids from all over the country, literally, that come to us and are struggling, having a tough time, they've made some poor choices, or they have, something traumatic has happened in their family, or they've been victimized, or been raped, or sexually abused, or whatever it is. And kids are spinning out of control. If these kids continue the way they're going, they're not going to be around in six months. And so that's when a parent says, I'm going to send them here. They come and spend about a year with us. And we have five licensed professional counselors in group meetings and therapy, but we create an atmosphere of a camp, of a young life camp, of a church influence. And as I said, most of our kids come from wonderful families, wonderful families.

So, we built this facility on 150 acres in Longview, Texas, and it's beautiful. And yeah, but I tell people all the time, just so everybody keeps it in perspective. Every one of these buildings will rot one day. That's not what we're about. What we're about is changing the hearts of kids so that we can change the destiny of a family and those choices that a child is making during those adolescent years.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, you guys have helped an army of parents rescue their kids. I tip the hat to you, Mark, and appreciate your great ministry. You have a brand-new book out again, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. In it, you say, and I love this line, "One of the greatest resources for rescuing and providing stability for kids, it's grandparents." Mark, we talked a lot about that yesterday. We've got a challenge, and that is, there's a big gap between hey, the culture that grandparents grew up in and where they're at, and these kids today, with all the challenges that they're up against, Mark. Mental health issues are off the charts, you know that. And so we've got our work cut out for us.

And we got a lot of parents who jumped up on social media, making comments about their grandkids, et cetera. Mark, and I think a lot of people are turning this one up, because they know how important this relationship is. And we're asking God to do something as we unpack this topic. Mark, yesterday we talked about some of the challenges. I want to focus our energy today on building that relationship. What we can get right. Let's make the adjustments to our swing. Let's figure out how to work with our hands more effectively. Mark, what's the most important ingredient in getting that right.

Mark Gregston:

The most important ingredient, and I think we touched on just a little bit yesterday, was listening to the heart of your team. And it goes back to this idea that we are more concerned sometimes about what we're saying rather than what we need to be listening to. We're more concerned about the message coming from our mouth than we are coming from their mouth. We're more interested in our opinions being shared, than listening to their opinions being shared. Because they live in a culture that nobody listens to anybody, everybody's just mouthing off all the time, and yapping, and complaining, and griping. And I think what happens is they learn that, that's the style that we're supposed to have, but here's the main thing, that you listen so that you can form a relationship with a child, because they don't have the relationships that you and I used to have. They just don't. They think they have followers. They think they have people that have subscribed to different things that they're doing. They have a lot of people that are watching their stuff, and really, they don't have the depth of relationship.

They spend most of their time in the shallow end of the relationship pool. And what happens in that, is that they don't grow up. They don't have somebody that's sharpening iron with them. They're not sharpening one another. And as a result, they're not maturing. The American Medical Association has increased the age of adolescent to age 27. Our kids are not growing up because they don't have the relationships, but they do have a longing to connect with one another. And that's why every parent and grandparent complains about a child being on the phone all the time. Quite honestly, when you look at it from another perspective, these kids are wanting to connect and fulfill the relational component that they've been created to have in their life. They've been created as relational people.

And so, because they don't have it, because they can't get it off their phone, or just by connecting by words, or images and such, that's why we have so much depression and anxiety, and kids that are now reclusive a little bit, that they would find more interest in a video game than they would a relationship with somebody else. And so the world is perfect for parents and grandparents to engage in such a way that offers them something, a real relationship to be to them who God is to us. And it means that I have got to spend most of my time listening, engaging, doing things with them, but also not being judgmental in such a way that it pushes them away from us. And we have to watch it, because it's easy for us to be judgmental. The minute you quote Scripture, a child will take it sometimes that, that's being judgmental.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Yeah. What are some of the keys to, again, to active listening? You invite them over? How do we begin to step into their life in a way where they don't feel like it's repulsive? And it's like-

Mark Gregston:

I think one of those things, by all means, is figuring out why they're moving away from us. And I would text them. I text them right now. If you're driving car, don't do it while you're driving, but pull over to the side of the road and say, do you think that I want you to be perfect? Do you think I share my opinion too

much? Do you think I'm a judgmental grandparent? If you could change one thing about me, what would it be? What do you hope for to get out of our relationship? And what I'm doing is engaging with them. And so when they respond to me, I'm not telling them they're wrong, or they need to do something different, or you should've said it this way, or I'm justifying by giving an excuse. What I'm doing is moving toward them saying, is it me? Am I doing something? Because once they begin to realize that you're wanting to be involved in their life for their sake, not for your sake, then they don't have anybody else like that in life.

Everybody else is using everybody else. And there's very few people that are allies of our kids. And that's why they feel so lonely, and that's why they feel so hopeless. And kids have an amazing way of connecting with those people that want to be connected to them. And so that's where I tell people all the time, quit correcting all the time, start connecting. Do things with them, ask them the question, hey, what concert do you want to go to? If you could go on a vacation, where would you go? And take them. And somebody goes, well, I can't afford that. And I go, let me tell you something. I've been at enough funerals there I haven't seen one water cash in any coffin anywhere, spend it. It's only money. Spend it and do something with your grandkids. It's your legacy. You're not going to take it with you. So use it now where you can change the destiny of your family.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

When they believe you're there for them, when they know you hear them, Mark, you become a safe place. Next thing you know, they begin conversations like, "Hey, Papa, have you ever had anybody make fun of you? Papa, what'd you do with that?" That's what we're talking about, Mark, we're talking about shifting gears with our kids here. Aren't we getting to a place where we're trying to carefully speak into the life, not, "Hey, get that piece of clothing off. I would never have let your mother do that." That's the kind of stuff that just shuts them down, right, Mark?

Mark Gregston:

It does. And you can spend all your time doing that, you're not changing anything other than your opportunity to influence them. Here's what I want. I want a grandchild to come to me and say, "Hey, Papa, you ever smoked pot when you were in high school? Hey, Mamaw, you ever had sex before you got married?" That's what you're waiting for. That's what you're practicing for. That's where they're wanting guidance and direction in a culture that is so confusing to them. They don't know how to apply the values that they have to that new culture. And when you get to that point, that you give them the opportunity to ask you the tough questions, the hard questions, the really hard questions, and you respond to them and tell the truth, and you're genuine, and you're authentic. And you tell them, this is what I've learned from this. This is how I've grown through this. And now you know why I'm so particular about what I believe.

When you start sharing those things, that's what they're looking for. They don't get it at all. They don't get the truth from people around them. And it's hardly

spoken in love. They don't get encouragement. They don't get a sense of hope. They don't want your opinion, they want your perspective. They want to know, okay, in the midst of all this, what you've seen, out of all the wisdom, Papa, that you've embraced your whole life by observation and reflection and experience, what's your perspective on this? And what would you say? So, give you're your perspective, because they don't get it, because they do not have older people involved in their life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guest, Mark Gregston, he has a new book out called *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. Mark's unique though. He's got 40 plus years with his wife, Jan, in ministry to today's generations. They've developed an amazing counseling residential program out of Texas, where they've helped rescue a lot of families. Mark gets it. Mark, I loved this one chapter in your book called, "Don't Give Up When they Hurt your Heart." I've seen that happen to a lot of grandparents. They get hurt, and they get bristly. They might bite back, or they maybe will just shut down completely, Mark. I tell you, the enemy loves to use that, because it's a great divider. Mark, speak to us about when that happens. How do we put things in perspective and how do we keep the relationship going?

Mark Gregston: There's nothing you can do to make me love you more. There's nothing you can do to make me love you less. And I always said that to my son until he told me that he was having an affair and leaving his wife of nine months, and immediately I thought, "Okay, maybe there are some things I don't love you anymore." But I found that it's easy to say it because it sounds good. But when life really comes and happens, then that's where it becomes very difficult. And there is something about moving towards somebody during that time, it's called grace. And grace is giving something when you have every reason to move back away from it. When somebody has offended you, grace is moving toward them. When somebody has wronged you, grace is moving toward them relationally. And so when kids do things wrong, as grandkids do, and even your own kids, when they do things wrong, God would say, keep moving toward them.

And part of me just says, get used to it. It's like the child who says, "I am going to go ahead and marry this guy and live with him for a while." Okay. I'm going to keep moving towards you, because the tendency is, if you don't agree with me, then I'll walk the other way, or when you have that child that says, hey, I think I'm gay. Now, you're going to have the opportunity to share more and more with them, but you only have that if you remain engaged with them. And so whatever it is, it's moving toward them at a time where you have reason to walk the other way. And that's hard, it's difficult, but it's rewarding, and it ushers in an opportunity for you to continue to have an influence in their lives that would have otherwise have been casted away a long time ago.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Because you never know, Mark, when something happens and they need to go somewhere, they need someone to press into, and you have just made yourself available no matter what, you're there. Mark, we've seen it in family so much.

Hey, another piece that you do in the book really well, and I love this. Not everyone's argument needs arguing. Mark, so many grandparents and parents, it's like, no, we're going to straighten this out right now, right here. That's ridiculous. I don't even know why you brought that up at the table. Everybody blows up. Mark, sometimes it's like Julie and I look at each other and say, uh-uh, stay out of this. This isn't our battle.

Mark Gregston: A man told me once he goes, "I'm surprised you didn't fight that." And I go, "I'm surprised that you think that, that's my battle." We spend so much time in frivolous arguing, listening to opinions and opinions and opinions all the time that I get tired of it. I just go, you know what? I'm not going to enter into every battle there is. There's some things I can't change in this world. It's like somebody complaining about kids using phones all the time. You know what? You're never going to change that. It's something that's moving. What I can do is be an influence amidst that.

Like I said in another radio interview, I said, this isn't about me. This is about them. So how do I move toward them? How do I constantly always have the intentionality of saying, I'm going to be involved in this kid's life, regardless of what they do. When they hurt me, when they say things that I don't believe in, when they go against what I embrace, I'm going to continue to move toward them because God has given me the opportunity to do that, because of the love that he's shown me, I can now show others. He has taught me about unconditional love. He has moved toward me when I've hurt him, so I will move toward kids when they hurt me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. "Papa loved me. Gigi loved me." You have two more pieces in this book that I thought were wild. I love them. Mark, one was, you want me to do what? And I love it because it sets up the close that I want to wrap today's program on. But Mark, take us down that you want me to do what piece? It's everything about them, isn't it?

Mark Gregston: It is. Our kids will say, "Well, let's go do this." Okay. If you want to do it, that's what we'll do. It's all about them. It's engaging with them in such a way that they know that it is about them, and it's just shifting gears so that, that grandchild knows that they are a valuable gift during their teen years, the same way you felt when they were two and a half years old, or when they were born and you heard their first cry, or when you were so excited at her first dance recital and your heart whelped up. They're just as precious when they're struggling. And that's when I think they need you the most.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It reminds me, Mark, of that Trace Adkins song, "Just Fishin'." She thinks we're just fishin', but what's taken place there in those moments, whatever they are, when you're available and you step in, that's the transformation piece. Mark, let's close this way. "Don't save what is best for last." It's like eating your ice cream before dinner. Mark, why's this so important? Why is this piece the catalyst, I think, that just explodes this opportunity to connect between grandparents and teens?

Mark Gregston: I think we save for those special occasions, and the older you begin to realize that today was a very special occasion. I woke up, I'm here. When your granddaughter, or your grandson walk into your house, you know what the special occasion is? That moment. It's not thinking, "Well, six months from now, we'll go do this, or a year from now, or two years." We live with a delusion, I think, that everything's better and good in the future, when really it's today. You have the opportunity to influence your child today. And tomorrow may look completely different for your family based upon choices that your teen makes.

And so, take advantage of that. Don't wait, don't wait, whatever you must do, do it now and engage now. It's like now, if you need to ask for forgiveness, then get on the phone and ask for forgiveness. If you need to text your teen grandchild and tell him you love him, do that now. Don't wait till tomorrow, because tomorrow may not be here. And you want to make sure that you're engaging the best way you can at the moment that you think about it, the moment that God puts your grandchild on your heart, do it then, don't wait.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It reminds me, Mark, of Josh McDowell's quote to me one day, corrected me when we were doing a program together, he said, "Tim, you don't make memories with your kids." And I said, "Huh?" He said, "You don't make memories with your kids." He said, "You are the memory." What your kids need are heavy doses of you, period. That's what they want. It's great to go to the Braves game. It's great to have an annual fishing trip or something, but what they really want, Tim, is you. Mark, you say heavy doses of you. You say it's all about that piece, being at the heart of the legacy. A lot of lines can get blurred. This thing can get sideways. It's challenging. It's whatever, but don't let this stuff deter you from being in their life, in the moment, right now. Mark, close this way for us. What does it mean to have a legacy? What does it mean to, I'm seeing that closing scene in *Saving Private Ryan* when they're walking through the cemetery. "Tell me that I'm a good man."

Mark Gregston: I think that that everybody wants to end it that way, but I also don't want to do anything, say anything, or be anything that's going to damage my family in the future. So the legacy may be that he was honest, he was genuine, he was authentic. He wasn't afraid. He was one who gave us everything. He's the one that showered us continually. He connected with us. That's what I want to be. He was more interested in me than he was about himself. And I think those are admirable goals. Your legacy is not the amount of money that you leave in their bank account, or what property you leave them, or what gun you give them, or whatever it is. But it's what you've deposited in their hearts. And if you're only going to be remembered as long as your grandkids are around, then make sure you're pouring into them with intentionality on the basis of a relationship that they know that there's nothing they can do to make you love them more, nothing they can do to make you love them less.

Dr. Tim Clinton: National Grandparents Day, this coming Sunday, Mark. Some words for us all about how we can make that day special.

Mark Gregston: Well, hopefully they're making it special for you, but that may be the time that you clear up some things, that may be the day that you say I'm going to do something different, that you commit to something different. Just ask them questions about themselves. Invite them to come spend some time with you. And when they do, you make sure every meal that you cook is their favorite meal. And you can have a wonderful, wonderful time with them, building a legacy into their life. That's important.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest again, Mark Gregston. An amazing work, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. I hope everybody gets a copy of this. You probably know somebody who needs a copy of it. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team at Family Talk, Mark, we salute you. Thank you for the work you're doing. I hope to get down to Texas sometime soon and see that amazing ministry you have down there.

Mark Gregston: That'd be wonderful. You're always welcome.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a delight. Thank you for joining us.

Mark Gregston: You bet.

Roger Marsh: Well, that concludes Dr. Tim Clinton's two day conversation with parenting and grandparenting expert, Mark Gregston, right here on Family Talk. Their discussion was based around Mark's new book called, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. Mark offered some excellent tips and creative ideas for how grandparents can build relationships with their teenage grandchildren, but he kept going back to one principle, keep reaching for their hearts. Even when it's hard, show your grandchildren grace. Even when there's miscommunication, try to understand. Even when they don't deserve it, love your grandchildren.

Now, if you know someone who might be blessed by this program, remember you can request a CD copy when you go to our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's DrJamesDobson.org/broadcast. While you're there, you can also learn more about Mark Gregston, Heartlight Boarding School and Mark's many books, including his latest, *Grandparenting Teens: Leaving a Legacy of Hope*. Again, that webpage is drjamesdobson.org/broadcast, or you can always give us a call at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825. We love hearing from you that way. Well, thanks for joining us today for Family Talk. For Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, Dr. Tim Clinton, and all of us here on the broadcast team at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Have a wonderful rest of your day.

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