



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Kindness Challenge: 30 Days to Improve Any Relationship – Part 1

Guest: Shaunti Feldhahn

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Dr. 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. Clinton: Welcome into Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, cohost of Family Talk. As a licensed professional counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist, I also serve as president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, and I'm also honored to serve as the resident authority on mental health and relationships here at JDFI. Thank you for joining us on Family Talk.

Today on the program, we have a very special guest who has become quite familiar with our audience, her name, Shaunti Feldhahn. She's been with Dr. Dobson on the radio many times. You might know her from her best-selling research based books, including *For Women Only*, *For Men Only*, and *Thriving in Love and Money*. Her books have sold more than three million copies in 25 languages and are widely read in homes, counseling centers and corporations over the world.

Shaunti received her graduate degree from Harvard University and was an analyst on Wall Street before becoming a social researcher. Today, she applies her analytic skills to investigating eye opening truths about relationships, both at home and in the workplace. Shaunti's findings are regularly featured in media as diverse as The Today Show, The New York Times, Cosmo. She speaks at events in the United States and around the world. She and her husband Jeff live in Atlanta with their daughter, their son, and two cats. Shaunti, always great to have you. Welcome back to Family Talk. Dr. Dobson sends his regards to you.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh, thanks. Yeah, it's always great to be with you.

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, as we get started, your work recently is really just focused in on relationships, your books, your resources so much more. Trying to help people figure out how to have better connection, more healthy relationships in all areas of their lives. I like to say it this way: life's all about relationships; get them right, you're blessed; get them wrong, you're in a world of hurt, and you're going to journey if you don't get that stuff straight. Today, we're not here to talk

about a particular relationship like husband and wife or coworker and coworker, mother, daughter. We're here to talk about a virtue that if we get this virtue right, no matter who you are, it will impact all of your relationships and that word or that virtue is kindness. Shaunti, my dad would say this, kindness is the only thing you never have to take back.

Shaunti Feldhahn: I love that.

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, in our age of rage, I'm thinking about all the rioting we've seen over the last couple of years, the shootings that have been going on, people harassing each other online. What in the world's happened to us?

Shaunti Feldhahn: We've gone nuts, haven't we? It is one of those things where for a society where everyone technically, hypothetically values kindness, not just in the church, but everywhere. Everyone says that they value it. We have become a culture that is remarkably unkind and doing so has become okay, you think, if it's when you're being unkind to "those people." if everybody feels like that, we're just going to keep going further and further in the wrong direction.

Dr. Clinton: It's horrific. Shaunti, you went on a mission and decided to create a book called *The Kindness Challenge*. 30 days to improve any relationship. And there's gold in this book. You and I've talked about it on several occasions. Set us up, Shaunti. You talk, first of all, about how in your research you've learned that kindness is like a superpower. What does that mean?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. The thing that we often don't quite realize is that when God tells us to be kind, he's telling us to do something that he has imbued with miraculous authority. There is something supernatural that happens. If you, for example, are being confronted by, and I'm using as an example, maybe you have a tense relationship with your daughter-in-law or your mother-in-law. And that person can be angry with you, that person can get bitter or can get sharp with their tone, if you refuse to respond in kind and you instead are kind, and you are always trying to be gentle in your tone, you do nice things for them, you avoid talking about them behind their back, you do the things that are true kindness, all of us know that eventually what tends to happen is that person melts. There is a truly supernatural impact that God has given this virtue of kindness that is just as miraculous as someone who is blind being given sight. It's just because it's not physical, we don't often give it that credit that it is just as miraculous to melt a hard heart, for example.

Dr. Clinton: As a part of putting this work together, Shaunti, you went out and I think you did a little research. You pulled together quite a group of people and did some analysis and study. And I think it was pretty shocking what you found. Let's start down that road.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. We had actually, Tim, you know we've done much work together that we've done many of these big nationally representative studies over the years.

And one of the things that we did before we started this project is that I went back and I looked at all those studies and because the whole point behind what I feel like God has encouraged us to do or equipped our ministry to do is really to help people thrive in their life and their relationships. And I wanted to see if there was a thread running through the studies that had any common denominator in what allows you to thrive. And we found that there was this, yes, very strong, common denominator, which is whether you thrive in your life in relationships. It turns out, it is far more related to how we treat other people than how we ourselves are treated.

And that is so backwards from the way that we try to get ourselves to be happy. Like, "if you treat me well, I'll be happy." And there's nothing wrong with wanting people to treat us well, but we don't realize that actually the way God has paradoxically set up his world, that we will be far more thriving in the end if we treat others well, because it does tend to come back to us. And so we did a big study. We had a thousand people, a little more than a thousand people in our study group, and we did this 30 day, we ended up finding what we called the 30 day kindness challenge, which is three elements that you do every day for 30 days for one person. And at the end of the 30 days, we found that 89% of relationships had improved.

Dr. Clinton: That's shocking.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And many of these were really tough relationships. And yet, it makes perfect sense that 89% of relationships would improve because when you're practicing being kind, and we can talk about what those elements are, but big picture, when you're practicing doing these things, the biggest thing that you're doing isn't really truly pointed towards the other person. Although it is, you're not just changing the temperature of the relationship. What you're really doing is changing you.

Dr. Clinton: Yes. Shaunti, when I think about my children, I can tell you the people they like and the people they don't like. And typically, you know what they say? "She's nasty. She's mean. Yeah, don't want to be around her." And see, that lack of kindness, that bite that people naturally have, it's like, "Huh-uh, not going over there, not going to do that, not going to engage them." Shaunti, what you're saying is say, listen, we've got a lot of insanity in our modern day world. Kindness could be a strong antidote here. If you don't have a lot of emotional closeness, if you're struggling and you want more closeness in your relationships, Shaunti, you're saying kindness, this kindness challenge is what can be the answer.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. And the most important answer, before you start doing the three things of the 30 day kindness challenge, the most important answer, I hate to do this because I'm going to slightly offend your audience, are you okay with that?

Dr. Clinton: It's okay.

Shaunti Feldhahn: I hope everybody in the audience is okay with this. Here's what I had to realize about myself, and we all have to come to grips with, if we're going to truly be part of what God wants to do in this culture, we have to recognize that one of the biggest issues is that all of us who value kindness, who truly believe in the gifts of the Spirit, who want to be people of Christ-like kindness, we're not as kind as we think we are. We think we're kind and I'm here to tell you, I realized, oh my gosh, we're deluded actually about the ways that we are unkind every single day. And we don't realize it at all.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. Shaunti, I want to give our listeners a word about why we specifically are doing this topic today and tomorrow for a moment. Dr. Dobson, our entire team have felt motivated, encouraged in their spirit to say, "Hey, listen, let's all get on this kindness train together. Let's take this 30 day challenge." And so starting Friday, July 1st, we're going to join with you, and we want to challenge all of our listeners out there to join in on this. Let's do the kindness challenge, 30 days to improve any relationship, together. And Shaunti, we're going to take the rest of the broadcast today and tomorrow, and talk a lot more about what that's all about. But you can sign up and Shaunti, can you tell us what's happened? And I'm going to direct them where to go, but what does this mean? What's the value here?

Shaunti Feldhahn: So the benefit of this, we'll explain what the 30 day kindness challenge actually is in a minute. But the key benefit, the key import here is that I realize we need a bootcamp to become the people of kindness that we already think we are. Because like I said, we don't realize we're blind to some of this. And so that's what we found when we started doing the research of these three things that you can do every day for 30 days. And it took us about two and a half years to really identify and narrow down what exactly matters most. And so the key is this is your boot camp to become that person of kindness that you already think you are, and to really help you build a habit that will carry you every day for the rest of your life, if you let it.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. Shaunti, it's interesting. I saw that Dr. Dobson was tied into how this all came together. Can you share a little bit of how that happened?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. I am forever grateful for Doctor, even though it was because he put me on the spot at an event. One of the things that I had been doing for years is at women's events, I had been sharing about how to improve relationships. And there were often women in difficult marriages who said, "I know you say I need to appreciate my husband, but what if I don't? What if he's hurt me? What if there are these things?" And as I started to learn about some of these elements that we're talking about here with a 30 day kindness challenge, I started to suggest some of these. And there was a church in Northern Colorado that one woman asked that question and I shared these things and – you know, I always fly away: I never hear the end of the story.

Well, three years later, I was in Colorado Springs and I was doing an event where Dr. Dobson was the speaker. And he was being asked questions by

people in the audience. And one woman stood up and asked a very similar question to that. And she said, "What if my husband's hurt me?" And he said, "That is a really good question. Shaunti? Would you like the answer that?" And I'm like, "Are you serious? You're the PhD, come on." And he had this twinkle in his eye and I'm like, "darn it." And so I said, "Look, the only thing that I can suggest is something I've seen in the research." And I explained, I shared about the 30 day kindness challenge. And this woman said, "Okay." She sat down and another woman raised her hand, and she didn't have a question.

She looked at the first woman and she said, "If you will do what she just suggested that you do, you'll find it changes everything." And she looked at me and said, "You won't remember me, but three years ago you came to my church in a different part of the state, and I asked a similar question and you gave me a similar answer and everything in me wanted to ignore everything you just said, but I didn't want my kids to grow up in a broken home either. And so I tried it." And she said, "Everything changed because I suddenly realized that for all these years, I had been looking at all the things my husband was doing wrong." And there were some big issues in their relationship and in his life. And she said, "But I had no idea how often I was part of the problem as well."

And so she said, "I started trying to be kind and withholding the negativity." And some of the other things that we're talking about with this challenge. And she said, "I saw him soften and he became more loving towards me. And then that made it easier for me to be more loving towards him. And it became this positive cycle." And she said, "Now three years later, our relationship is so good that our church just asked us to be marriage mentors for other people going through difficulties." Because if they can do it, you can do it principle. And I thought, whoa, I need to make this an actual official research project. That is too powerful. And it never would've happened if Doctor wouldn't have said, "Hmm, great question. Shaunti?"

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, that's fascinating. It takes me back to my dad. I often describe him as the kindest man I've ever known.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh, what a gift.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah, my dad, he's been gone a while, but he was such a beautiful man. Fun to be around, what a character. But he made you feel like you were the only person in the room and all that mattered to him was you. Shaunti, help us understand what kindness is maybe first of all and what it isn't.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. So the most important thing that I've seen for myself is to make a distinction between being kind and being nice. Because we often, especially in the church, there's a desire for niceness, which there's nothing wrong with wanting to be nice. Don't hear me saying otherwise, however, it can be very surface-y, and it sometimes can lead us to be like, "Ah, I don't want to rock the boat and say some things that maybe need to be said because I'm trying to keep everything pleasant on a surface level." Kindness by contrast, cares about the

best interest of the other person. And so sometimes one of the things that we can be called to do in a challenging relationship situation, there are going to be cases where the kindest thing that we can do is to put in place boundaries.

For example, "I am not going to continue to enable you to behave in this way and to speak in that way to me because it's not just not good for me, it's not good for you. It hurts your heart when you're cruel towards me." And so sometimes in some relationships, we have to actually put in boundaries, but there is also a bigger picture that if we will practice kindness, which we'll explain in a minute of these three elements, that it really is transformative to us. And it opens our eyes to, "Oh my goodness, how much of a need there is in all my relationships, not just this difficult one."

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, I have the verse in Ephesians 4 going through my mind right now. Ephesians 4:32, be kind one to another. Tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as Christ has forgiven us, even as God has forgiven us in Christ. Shaunti, to go there sometimes can be tough. Sometimes I don't feel like being kind because I got a bunch of nasty people around me. Hey, wait a second. All I've been doing is giving, giving, and giving. All they do is take. That's all they do is take. I'm tired of that. I don't want to do this anymore. When they start giving to me, then I'll think about coming back to the table.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yeah. That is one of those situations where we have to come to grips with the fact that when Jesus talked about "love one another," when he's talking the sermon on the Mount, when he's talking about the requirements of love and kindness and do unto others as you'd have them do unto you, we have to grapple with the fact that that's not just this sweet sentiment. Every religion around the world embraces that sentiment. Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. We have to recognize when you look at the text, Jesus is actually talking about just the situation you're talking about. He is talking about a situation where people are being actively unkind and unfair towards you.

For example, they're stealing from you. And he says, "I am calling you to be people who will treat that person who is being unkind towards you in the kind and generous and grace filled way you wish they were treating you." That is what "do unto others as you'd have them do unto you" means in context. It is exactly the difficult situation you're talking about

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, that doesn't mean that you have to lay down and be a doormat and let people abuse you and all that. We're not talking about that, but kindness is crucial.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Unfortunately, we can put in place boundaries, but we don't have any excuse. There is no out for being unkind.

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, as we launch into our 30 day challenge, set the table for us on how and where we begin.

Shaunti Feldhahn: So you begin with something that for some of you may have a question mark over your head when I say this, but you have to pick one person that you're going to do the 30 day kindness challenge for. There is a temptation to say, "Oh, but I want to do this for everybody." No, that's understandable, but in order to be a bootcamp, in order to have our eyes opened, what we found scientifically, statistically is that you have to do it for one person the first time.

And so that can be anybody that you want to improve a relationship with. It could be your spouse. It could be like we said, maybe it's your daughter-in-law. Maybe it's your mother-in-law. Maybe it's your child. I did this for our 16 year old daughter. She was a great kid, but 16, sometimes I just wanted to like, ah, and so it's anyone. Now it doesn't mean you have to have a bad relationship with a person that you're doing this for. Like I said, you could have a great relationship with your spouse and you just want to make it better. The key is pick one person to start.

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, take us in then to once we have that done.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes.

Dr. Clinton: What are some simple acts that are transformational?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Okay. So the three things that we found are transformational are first, for 30 days, you don't say anything negative about that person, at all, either to them or about them to somebody else. And that's often where we trip ourselves up.

Dr. Clinton: Got to bite my tongue a little bit.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes. We have to bite our tongue. Second thing that you do every day for 30 days is you look for one thing that you can sincerely praise and sincerely affirm about this person. And you tell them and you tell somebody else. And then the third thing you do every day for 30 days is you do one small action of kindness or generosity towards them. And what we found is that if you do these three things for 30 days, that's where 89% of relationships improved.

Dr. Clinton: Shaunti, go over them one more time here. We're getting close to the end of the broadcast, but I want to set this up because I'm going to take and challenge everybody to jump on board with us. Everybody listening, I want you to join us on this 30 day kindness challenge.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yep. The first thing is you say nothing negative about that person, either to them or about them to somebody else. Second is you find one thing at least that you can praise about them and you tell them that, and this is every day for 30 days, and you tell somebody else. And then the third thing is to do a small action of kindness or generosity for them.

Dr. Clinton: Our special in studio guest, Shaunti Feldhahn, the author of numerous books like *For Women Only*, and *For Men Only*. But we're talking today about her work, *The Kindness Challenge, 30 Days to Improve Any Relationship*. Dr. Dobson, our entire team at JDFI, the James Dobson Family Institute want to engage with you, our listenership. Would you jump on this 30 day challenge with us? This 30 day kindness challenge. You can do that by going up on our URL, DrJamesDobson.org/kindnesschallenge. Get that locked in your brain or put it in your phone. DrJamesDobson.org/kindnesschallenge.

Everybody get on board. Everybody can pick a person, Shaunti, that's what we're doing. And we're going to start out with those three acts of kindness. Three simple steps to see what God just might do. Shaunti, this is powerful. Tomorrow, on the broadcast we're going to talk a lot more about the significance of what you found and more ways of battling through this so that we don't get sidetracked, get lost. And we can have that fruitful outcome that we all want. Shaunti, I'm going to give you the last word.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh, I just want to encourage everybody truly to do this. I have to confess and I'll talk about this more tomorrow I'm sure, but I have to confess when I started this, I thought I was a kind person, and I had no idea how deluded I was until I actually had to start doing this. The first few days were very eye opening and I hope they will be for you too.

Dr. Clinton: The kindness challenge. We're doing it together here at the James Dobson Family Institute. Shaunti Feldhahn, our guest again, 30 days to improve any relationship. Go up to DrJamesDobson.org/kindnesschallenge. Shaunti, so great to have you. Thank you for joining us. So looking forward to tomorrow, we got so much more to talk about. Thanks again.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And that was the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's interview with speaker and bestselling author, Shaunti Feldhahn on the very important topic of kindness. Shaunti's team is partnering with the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute to host a 30 day kindness challenge for our listeners. Anyone and everyone is invited to participate and believe me, these are a lot of fun. Listen, with everything moving so fast in the culture right now and all of the division we see all across the country, don't you think a little bit of kindness from all of us could help make the world a better place? And as Christians, we are all called to be kind. It's a fruit of the Spirit, after all. Remember, big change can start with small acts of kindness from me and from you.

Go to DrJamesDobson.org/kindnesschallenge to learn more. That's DrJamesDobson.org/kindnesschallenge. If you want to see your relationships improve, then sign up for that 30 day challenge today. And if you missed any part of today's discussion, featuring Dr. Tim Clinton and author Shaunti Feldhahn, remember, you can find the program in its entirety on our website as well. That's DrJamesDobson.org/familytalk, or just give us a call at (877) 732-6825.

Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of Dr. Tim Clinton and Shaunti Feldhahn's conversation about the kindness challenge. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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