



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Godly Influence and Opportunity of Grandparenting – Part 1

Guest(s): Larry Fowler

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. This Sunday is Grandparents' Day, and if you're a grandparent, you might sometimes feel like you're on the sidelines, watching from a distance as your grandchildren grow up in an increasingly secular world. But in reality, did you know that you have an essential role to play in your grandchildren's spiritual development? Well, on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're going to discover how grandparents are uniquely equipped to shape the faith of the next generation in ways no one else can. Our guest today here on Family Talk is Larry Fowler, a veteran of over 50 years in children's ministry, an author of the best-selling book called *Rock Solid Kids*. Larry is the founder of Legacy Coalition, an organization dedicated to equipping Christian grandparents to fulfill their biblical role of spiritually influencing the lives of their grandchildren.

Larry believes that while we often feel powerless about cultural decline, school curricula, or political upheaval, grandparents can and do have an incredible influence right within their own families. With 30 million Christian grandparents in America today, each averaging four grandchildren, we're talking about a potential impact on more than 120 million young lives. Now, as you know, our founder and chairman, Dr. James Dobson, loved his grandchildren dearly, Lincoln and Luci, and as we remember his legacy, today we're going to revisit this conversation Dr. Dobson had with Larry Fowler where Larry will share practical wisdom for this sacred calling. You're going to learn how to bless your grandchildren using Scripture, how to balance truth with grace when adult children have wandered from the faith, and what to do when you're told not to mention God. So let's get into today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well welcome everyone to Family Talk. As you know, it's a listener supported ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, which we know affectionately here at the ministry, JDFI. And today we're going to focus our microscope on the subject of grandparents, and it's been a while since we've talked about that and it's such an important topic and I'm proud to say that I am one and it's a pleasure and a joy for me. We have two grandchildren. I firmly believe that the role of grandparents, if it is done properly, is a divinely ordered responsibility

that even in some ways rivals or at least enhances what God has ordained parents to do. And I can tell you that that is the way it functioned in my childhood. I've told you before, if you've listened to this broadcast that I had very godly parents who laid the foundation for a lifelong faith within me.

It started very, very early. My very first word that I learned to spell was Jesus, J-E-S-U-S. I was three years of age and everything in my life has been built around the building of faith in Him, and I felt like I knew Him because in fact, I really did. However, as good as my parents were at that job, my paternal grandmother and my maternal great-grandmother did more to shape my spiritual understanding even than my parents. They were Nanny and Little mother and I loved them both dearly and they talked about Jesus all day long. I'm sure they took their instruction from Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 where we read the words of Moses spoken to the children of Israel, and this is what he wrote. He said, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give to you today are to be on your hearts, impress them on your children." I read it again, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along a road, when you lie down and when you get up, tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your house and of your gates." That again is what Moses said to the children of Israel right before they took the promised land and it was right before he died. So this represents the last words of Moses to the people and you see where the emphasis is there. It's on impressing these memories and these words about your God on your children and to do it all day long. And my grandmother, my great-grandmother did just that and they laid the foundation of faith that holds me steady even today.

So grandparents are not just there to babysit occasionally and to buy toys and little clothes and whatever they do. They are placed there for a purpose and we're going to talk about that today. My guest has a heart for ministering to people and encouraging all across the nation. He's Larry Fowler and back in 2015, he started an organization called the Legacy Coalition to pursue this passion and he does it very, very well. Larry, you and I have not met. We're talking on the telephone today. We're seeing each other virtually, but I've heard good things about what you do. You really do care about this grandparenting thing, don't you?

Larry Fowler: Yes, it is a real passion of mine and of course it's a personal passion first, my wife and I are deeply passionate about doing everything we can to influence our grandchildren, to follow the Lord, but also to encourage the Christian grandparents all across America to do the same.

Dr. James Dobson: Does your great passion for this subject come out of your own relationship with your grandchildren?

Larry Fowler: Yes, it does.

Dr. James Dobson: You have seven of them, don't you?

Larry Fowler: I have seven, yes. I have two sets. I have a younger set and an older set. My daughter married early and then her marriage failed and she and her three little ones moved in with my wife and I. Her husband had made some terrible choices in life and it started for me this thing of being intentional because I did not want my grandsons to follow in the sins of their father.

I just wanted to do everything that I could to help those little guys, especially, to understand the value of faith and to be a part of that. So that's where it started, but then what really did it was Deuteronomy 4:9. You fast forward a few years ahead and I was doing a study and I saw Deuteronomy 4:9 with new eyes, especially the last part of it where it says, "Teach your children and your children's children." I never saw that I had a two generational responsibility to pass on my faith before that moment. I've been a sincere Christ follower. I've wanted to fulfill my role as a dad, but I never understood the power of that passage in instructing me to continue into the second generation of passing on faith.

Dr. James Dobson: Did your children allow you to play that role with your grandchildren?

Larry Fowler: Yes, and I'm so thankful. I just appreciate them so much. They do. They allow my wife, Diane, and I to have that role in their lives.

Dr. James Dobson: Do they live near you?

Larry Fowler: I have three little ones that live a mile away, and then the older set, my daughter set that lived with us for a number of years. I actually live in Colorado Springs where you are.

Dr. James Dobson: Really? Well, you got an excuse to come see us.

Larry Fowler: I do. I do. It doesn't take me too much to get there.

Dr. James Dobson: What do the grandkids call you?

Larry Fowler: They call me grandpa. So just a normal...

Dr. James Dobson: That's not very creative. Is that the best you could do?

Larry Fowler: That's the best I could do.

Dr. James Dobson: Mine call me Jimpa.

Larry Fowler: Oh, they do.

Dr. James Dobson: And Shirley is Mae Mae. Her middle name is Mae, and so they call her Mae Mae, but what a joy they are. Doesn't that touch your heart when they come running in and throw their arms around you?

Larry Fowler: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you think the church fully understands what grandparents are supposed to do? Do they provide the support for grandparenting that you would like to see them provide?

Larry Fowler: The simple answer is no, but let me elaborate a little bit. My calling in life has been children's ministry and I've been a part of the ministry of Awana for actually 39 years, and my last assignment was to be a coach and a consultant to children's pastors in megachurches. I have relationships with many of the children's pastors and big churches, and we would go in and we would talk about ministry and I started asking them, has your church ever done anything on grandparenting. And Dr. Dobson, a hundred percent of the time, the answer I got back was no. They never even thought about such a thing.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you explain that? Why would that not be?

Larry Fowler: I don't know, because many of the pastors are actually grandfathers themselves and they dearly love their grandchildren, but it just has not been a topic that's discussed in churches.

Dr. James Dobson: Here's this fantastic resource sitting out there in the pews who would give their very lives for their grandchildren and that's not honored and developed and appreciated.

Larry Fowler: Well just think, there are probably tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of churches that have done seminars or classes or something on parenting, and they probably used a lot of your materials over the years.

Dr. James Dobson: I hope so.

Larry Fowler: I hope so too. And yet their heart has been a church that has done anything on the topic of grandparenting, and it's as if church leaders often just haven't thought about the incredible value that grandparents bring to the discipleship process.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that what led you to start the Legacy Coalition?

Larry Fowler: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Describe it. What does that consist of?

Larry Fowler: Well, the Legacy Coalition is we believe that many Christian grandparents are missing opportunities to pass on their faith, so we want to help them to fulfill that biblical role that we see that they have, and we're going to provide them with resources and events to help equip them to have a greater spiritual impact in their family. That's what we do.

Dr. James Dobson: Well talk more about what the Bible has to say about grandparenting. I don't know if I've ever seen anybody actually go through the Scriptures and find those verses that relate to it. You've obviously done that. You named one.

Larry Fowler: The thing about it is there are only two times in Scripture that the word grandparent or a form of it appears in Scripture, so I think maybe that's a reason why it's overlooked. But then you start looking at all the passages that talk about multiple generations. Why is God called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Why three generations there? And then all the passages that talk about inheritance and heritage and all of those issues really come to play in a grandparenting life. Grandparents are to teach two generations, but they are to think four generations. If I'm going to follow Psalm 78, I have to be thinking about what I'm doing as a grandparent about how will it impact two generations that are not yet born. That's the grandchildren of my grandchildren, and that kind of makes my brain hurt to do that, but that is a kind of thinking that we are to do as we look at what are we doing in our last half of life.

Dr. James Dobson: This is such a point of passion for me. I've mentioned that word several times and the people who listen to me regularly will have heard me say this, but it's worth repeating that my great grandfather, his name was McCluskey, he died before I was born. He died a year before I was born, so I never met him, but he was praying for me three generations back. He was praying actually for four generations of his children, those born and those not yet born. He was praying for me. He was a minister and he gave the hour from 11 to 12 o'clock every day to pray for his children and his children's children, even his great-grandchildren. That entire four generation lineage has been Christian with an exception or two, but it is amazing how his prayers reach across four generations of time and influenced what I do with this day. Man is that power.

Larry Fowler: That is incredible power, and that's exactly what we're talking about because though the topic of grandparenting is not discussed very much, especially in churches, the only voice that Christian grandparents hear is a cultural voice. And most Christian grandparents I believe, think they're good grandparents. They've never heard that there's more to grandparenting than just what culture says, and those things aren't bad. Culture doesn't have a bad view of grandparents. It's a good view. It's just not enough, and Scripture adds so much more.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell me this, do you think sometimes grandparents do not get involved in the spiritual life of the child because they think that's a parent's job and they don't want to interfere with it?

Larry Fowler: Absolutely, because again, that's a message that they've heard and think about this, think about the power of this. Imagine the biblical ideal. The biblical ideal is two parents and two sets of grandparents devoted to every child following God. Now, we know that most families don't have the biblical ideal because of things that happen, but that's a biblical idea. Every child has six adults devoted to discipling him long-term. Now, that's way more influenced than any Sunday school teacher can ever have, and that's not to downplay Sunday school teachers, but in God's design, there's going to be those six people devoted for all a childhood to help a child follow God.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, when you consider what's at stake here, we're talking about eternity now. I mean, what's more important than that? Yes, you want to teach children to read. You want to teach them as much as you can about math and science and all of the academic subjects, but does anything outrank knowing who Jesus Christ is and what He did for us and where we're going to spend eternity? It breaks my heart really that people don't grasp the gravity of this. I call it job one. It's more important than anything else in the culture, anything in your assignment, it's more important than your health. It's more important than your work. It's more important than making money or saving money or preparing for your old age. It outranks everything. Do we really believe that?

Larry Fowler: Isn't this the most important purpose that any of us have in the latter years of life? God has favored you with an incredibly long ministry life. You're still actively involved in your age and ministry, and yet I would've guessed that you would still agree with me that those two little precious grandkids that you have, you want to see them in eternity with you as much as anything in this world.

Dr. James Dobson: Here's a prayer that Shirley and I pray often, "Lord, we know that the culture has forgotten the fundamentals of the faith, and not only have they forgotten it, but they're antagonistic to it and we're not going to be here very long." I mean, it's the nature of things. It's the way of all flesh. Our time will go and we will go, and those kids are not going to have our influence around, but for a fairly short period of time who's going to be there to tell them the things that are essential, the things that matter so much, and what is the culture going to say to them? What are they going to hear at school that there's nobody there to counteract. You better do it while you can and do your preaching and do your praying while you have an opportunity to do that.

Larry Fowler: I was one of the vice presidents of Awana when God really began to stir our heart. The headquarters for Awana was in Chicago. Our son was starting his family in Southern California, and I went to the president and said, "I can't do this anymore. I've got to move because God is stirring me to be close to my grandkids and to be an influence in their lives, and I can't do that so good from 1800 miles away." So we moved and it meant a demotion for both my wife and I, but it was a small thing to do to have the opportunity in these later third or the later quarter of life to be able to do something God had put on my heart to do.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I'm talking today with Larry Fowler about the most important subject I can imagine, that having to do with winning your grandchildren for Christ and being the kind of godly grandparent that I think is not only scriptural, but it's the substance of this second part of our lives. You get another chance. You raise your children and then you get an opportunity to have an influence on the next generation, and we certainly want to capitalize on that. I'd like to ask a question related to this, to our listening audience. If you really comprehend the urgency of what we're talking about and that's intergenerational faith, if you really recognize that eternity depends on it, is there anything you would not do to make a contribution to that objective?

Larry Fowler: Yeah, of course. We all respond individually by faith to Jesus Christ, amen?

Dr. James Dobson: Right.

Larry Fowler: But I want to end this life being able to say, I've done all I can to model the Christian faith for my grandkids, to share my faith, to tell my faith story, to be a blessing to them. I want to go out having done everything I can possibly do. I don't want any regrets when it comes to passing on faith to my family.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm an evangelical. That means that I want to win as many people to Christ as I can. That's my primary objective in living. That's why I am here on the radio above all else. I want to make strong families, but it doesn't do much good to have strong families if they don't know Christ. They don't know where they're going or what they really believe. So I am an evangelical. My primary job in bringing people to Christ is my own family. That's where it starts. It doesn't end there. It starts there. Through the years, ministers have had the notion that if they work hard to bring all the people they can to Christ and lose their own kids, they've missed a great opportunity and therefore they've kind of said, "I'll do these things that God asked me to do in the wider world and He'll take care of my family."

That's what was believed a hundred years ago.

Larry Fowler: Yes, it was.

Dr. James Dobson: And God was sort of obligated to get them into the kingdom if he went out and served God to the best of his ability, but I wish it worked that way. Shirley and I are reading 1 Samuel right now, and he was one of the most godly men of the whole Bible. I mean, it's admirable. I mean, everything that he did and he lost his own kids. Can you imagine that? You would've thought God would've rewarded him for all the wonderful things he did with the salvation of his kids, but it didn't work that way. You have to do it. It's your primary responsibility, so pastors who are working yourself to death doing all this stuff and getting out to see Mrs. Jones who's in the hospital, Mrs. Jones will always be in the hospital. Don't cut your kids out because you could lose them and God is not obligated to bring them into the kingdom if you don't do your job.

Larry Fowler: And then there are those where that's already happened, and there are probably listeners that already have adult kids that have walked away.

Dr. James Dobson: That's heartbreaking.

Larry Fowler: And it's one of the greatest heartbreaks of life. We find often that they feel just stymied. They feel like they don't know how they can do anything now. No, there's hope. That's one of the things our ministry wants to do, is we want to provide ideas and new strategies that will help the grandparents whose adult kids have walked away, help them to be able to think in a new, fresh way about what they might do to restore those relationships and see their adult kids come to Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, my guest is Larry Fowler and we just met a few minutes ago before we started the program. I like what you say and what you do and the way you think. God bless you, my friend. Thank you for being my guest today. You've inspired me. You've reinforced the things that I believe more than I care about my own life, and that is being ready for the world to come, and I don't want the circle to be unbroken.

Larry Fowler: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the passion of your heart, isn't it?

Larry Fowler: Amen. That's my passion. That's it. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Will you be with us again?

Larry Fowler: I would love to. I'd love to.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, blessings to you and I ask people to pray for you and your ministry.

Larry Fowler: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: If you're a grandparent and you thought your most important work was behind you, well think again. Your greatest ministry opportunity might be happening right now. The spiritual influence that grandparents wield might just be the most underestimated force in Christianity. I'm Roger Marsh, and you're listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. An inspiring conversation Dr. Dobson recorded with Larry Fowler of the Legacy Coalition about the incredible impact grandparents can and do have on their grandchildren's faith journey. Now, of course, as we're remembering the life and ministry of Dr. James Dobson, we know how much he loved his grandson, Lincoln, and his granddaughter, Luci, and with Grandparents' Day coming up this weekend, this conversation is important for us to revisit as well. If you missed any part of today's broadcast or maybe another grandparent who needs encouragement in

this area, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and you'll find the audio for both parts one and two on our website.

While you're on our website, remember to browse through the myriad of different materials that are available to you as a parent or grandparent that will help you as you learn how to do a better job of the contemporary culture of raising those kids. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute continues to exist to strengthen families like yours through biblical truth and practical wisdom. When you support our ministry, you are investing in the spiritual heritage of countless families all across America. Now, you can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. You can call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. Or if you'd prefer to write, here's our ministry mailing address, Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in again next time for part two of our special conversation with Legacy Coalition founder, Larry Fowler, talking about the godly influence and opportunity of grandparenting. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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