



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Childhood Memories – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Dr. Kevin Leman and Dr. Randy Carlson

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Have you ever stopped to wonder why certain childhood memories really stick with you while others seem to vanish completely? Well, on today's edition of Family Talk, we're bringing you the conclusion of a powerful conversation on this topic featuring Dr. Dobson and his guests, Drs. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson. Their insights might surprise you because those memories that linger aren't random. They're actually shaping how you live, how you love, and even how you see God. So you won't want to miss a moment of the conversation we're about to begin right now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a real pleasure to have my good friend Dr. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson back with us again. for a second day talking about their book, *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. There's some new thoughts in this book that have really stimulated my thinking, and there's a lot more that we need to talk about today. Gentlemen, welcome back.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Thank you. It's nice to be here.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Good to be here. Thank you, Jim.

Dr. James Dobson: You all have been on a tour around the United States, I guess, how many, 30 cities, I guess?

Dr. Kevin Leman: 31.

Dr. James Dobson: Talking about this book, and by now you should know its content pretty well, I would think. Let me give an introduction for those that didn't hear the broadcast last time or may not know these gentlemen. Dr. Leman is probably best known as the author of the *Birth Order* book, which has now sold over a half million copies. Dr. Leman graduated from the University of Arizona with a Ph.D. in psychology. Randy Carlson also graduated from the University of Arizona with a master's degree in marriage and family counseling.

Well, let me begin where we left off last time, talking about the book *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. And let me do it by describing some research that I remember reading about when I was in graduate school. In fact, they were classic studies that were done by two men named Penfield and Rasmussen. I wonder if our guests recognize those names.

Dr. Kevin Leman: From way back when.

Dr. James Dobson: Two surgeons. They were doing brain surgery with the patient, semi-conscious. And they found almost accidentally that by touching various parts of the brain with an electrode, a very mild electrical stimulation, the patient remembered in full detail. and experience from early in life, in living color, with all of the sights and smells and emotions that accompanied that experience originally. It all came flooding back. And if you touched a different part of the brain, there was a different memory. And it was obvious that with this electrical stimulation, you could access everything that was there. It's all there. Now, you only remember certain events and certain episodes. So it's highly selective. So obviously a lot is being dropped out, which is there. It's locked in. Now, whatever memory is, however the molecules retain information, everything you have experienced is there in the brain. That was the conclusion of Penfield and Rasmussen. Now, with that selective aspect, tell us as a place to start today what that mechanism is that allows certain memories to stick or lodge in the conscious mind and others to be dropped out. The vast majority are not there. You can't reach out and get them unless there was just the proper stimulation, just the right kind of triggering episode from your life today. Most of us don't have brain surgeons to touch our brains with electrodes. So what's the mechanism that determines what you remember and what you don't remember?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, I think it all started with the wonderful way that God created each of us. I've often thought if you ever read the newspaper and read of all the deaths that you read in just your normal course of reading a newspaper from cover to end, if you were emotionally close or too sensitive to all those deaths and destruction and so forth, you wouldn't be able to get up and eat your dinner. You wouldn't make it through the next day. So God has protected us. And there's certain things we know from lots of clinical studies that people have repressed, denied, pushed back that are so hurtful, so harmful, they can't let them get to the conscious level.

And again, Randy and I face this as we meet people. And again, we caution people that this is not a book to run out and buy or go to the library and check out just for the sake of opening up a can of worms, just to go back and look at those slimy little critters. But this is a book for people who are stuck. And let me go to an example, if I may, of a woman who's been married 18 years to a man who she says is a hugger. Now, this is a man who goes up and gives his wife a hug for just absolutely no reason other than to say, "Honey, I love you and I care about you." This is a man who takes the garbage out on Mondays and Thursdays without being asked. This is a man who helps with housework, helps with the children. And her problem, of course, that she brings to me, Jim, is her husband.

Now, there are women listening to us right now who would kill to have a husband who would be a hugger as opposed to a grabber. There is a difference. And yet, I went to early childhood memories with this woman. And we went back and started to pull some memories out, some rather benign ones. And in the process of interviewing her, She told me one thing that seemed a little out of place, seemed a little strange. She mentioned in conversations she hated the color blue. Well, I made a mental note of it, and I scratched it down on my yellow legal pad that I take notes on. And again, we're pulling up these memories, and all of a sudden, the look of terror comes over her face. And it was just a panic-stricken, hysterical-like look on this woman's face. And I knew what happened. One of those memories. had slipped up from the unconscious level to the conscious level, and she said, "Oh, I can't believe it." And I'll shorten this as best I can, but she remembered her father taking her out in a boat and molesting her when she was nine years of age. Guess what color underwear she had on? Blue. And maybe that's a far-out example, but it was through the early childhood memory exploration that we're able to free her from that and get her moving with her husband, who was the envy, I should point out, of all of her friends at church. Everyone thought this guy was super and she had the greatest marriage on the face of the earth. But there was something blocking that.

- Dr. James Dobson: Randy, let me take that one step further. If the memories are selective because there are certain experiences that are so painful as with this molestation, that the mind protects you from it. In other words, there's a mechanism there to keep you from being hurt. It's a defense mechanism.
- Dr. Kevin Leman: It is.
- Dr. James Dobson: Why do we want to circumvent it and get below it and get past it and relive that bitter experience?
- Dr. Randy Carlson: Well, as we say in the book and in our own seminars and in counseling, there's no reason to look at memories unless you are stuck, unless there's a reason to gain some information about yourself. Most of us in life can learn a great deal to be better at what we're doing as believers, as daddies or mommies because we still carry those threads from our childhood which keep us stuck. And so we can gain a little information or a lot of information. But like we say right at the beginning of our writing, don't go back there and find a parent or someone to sacrifice on the altar of your anger or bitterness. That's not what it's about. We want people to look at their memories only from the standpoint of moving ahead.
- Dr. James Dobson: Being stuck means what? Explain what you mean when you say you're stuck.
- Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, being stuck perhaps in your spiritual life. Perhaps you're a person that doesn't believe that God is who He really says He is. That He can take people like you and I who are imperfect and love us in an unqualified manner. There's a lot of people who struggle with that. And again, they tend to be the

types who bite off more than they can chew and procrastinate and a few other things. But see, the lie that they've been living is locked in those early childhood memories.

Dr. James Dobson: Perhaps with an authoritarian father.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Good distinction between authoritarian and authoritative. And many, many women, I deal with so many women. That's why I draw on them more than I draw on men, if you'll pardon me. But so many women tell me that they grew up in homes where their father would just have to look at them to get them to straighten up. And see, they come away with a view of Almighty God. As someone who might be very vindictive, very authoritarian, he might be looking for people like you and I who are imperfect. And he might have the biggest whammo slingshot on record looking for us, you know, to let us have it. And so a person has to attack that lie.

And Randy and I talk about the ABCs of true therapy and that is accept the fact that some of your memories might in fact be lying to you. That's one thing we have to look at. We haven't talked about that yet. They're all tinted. If three or four kids, Jim, all see the same thing happen in their family, they will all report it 32 years later very differently.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Your memories can be liars, right?

Dr. Randy Carlson: And it may not be your own memory that you're trying to unlock. It may be trying to understand the people that you live with. It may be a spouse who is really hidden deep within himself or herself or a child that you're trying to understand or a teenager or someone you work with.

Dr. James Dobson: On the cover of your book, you have three statements here. One of them says, "Change your negative memories into positive ones." Can you really do that? I mean, Kevin, going back to the story you told of the little girl who was molested, how's she going to change that?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well, what she has to do is realize that, number one, she was not at fault. She was a victim of sin. And anytime sin happens in life, people get hurt. But I like to point out that Oprah Winfrey, who was raped by a cousin, who was kicked in the teeth in life lots of times, has overcome a lot. And so the person must come to grips with the fact that, yes, some things happened to me that shouldn't have happened to me in life. But what am I going to do? Am I going to stay stuck, point my finger at that person and say, there's the reason I'm never going to do anything in life, or am I going to step forward and keep going with God's help, one step at a time. In the first seven or eight years of life, I think there's not many psychologists and psychiatrists that would disagree with the fact that personality is formed in those years. And Randy and I refer to personality as sort of like a grain of wood. And yet we have all these self-help gurus and psychologists and psychiatrists running around the nation. On many of the talk shows that I'm on, I'll point out, we have some very interesting conversations. I try to hold my own with them. But they say such things that don't make any

sense whatsoever. And in vogue today is the fact that you'll hear people say, "Oh, listen, I know the problem. The problem is you need to get in touch with your feelings. And if you'll just get in touch with your feelings, you'll know the right thing to do."

Now, when you look at it from a humanistic standpoint, I mean, that line is so nauseatingly repeated across the airwaves of America, it's unbelievable. And I'm here to tell you, you can't go through life just following your feelings. In fact, Oprah and I had a rather lively discussion on one of her shows. She's one of those people that wants to shoot from the hip and ask questions later, and she sort of goes with the flow. And I challenged her on her own show and said, "Wait a minute, you can't go through life like that. If you and I would do that for 30 days, we'd end up in the county jail together. You can't go through life just following your feelings." And so you have to use the good brain that God gave you to look at situations and say to yourself, all right what does old self do in this situation, and what is new self going to do differently? And this is what North Americans must do and that is they have to realize that what feels good isn't good for them. The things that they need to master are things that don't feel good, that don't feel right. It's a little bit like putting on that new pair of shoes. And you gravitate to the old comfortable. And there's so many people today who go through one relationship after another, and they tell themselves the vicious lie, hey, I've got me a new Chevy. And the fact of the matter is, they got the same old Chevy with a different paint job.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it possible in your perspective to change those tapes and be different than your foundation?

Dr. Kevin Leman: If you understand Romans 7 and what Paul was trying to say, when he was saying, you know I don't understand myself. I tell myself I'm not going to do these things, and I do those things. And those of us as parents tell ourselves, "I'm never going to be like my mother. I am never going to be like my father. I'm never going to be like that teacher." And we go ahead and repeat it. What we have to keep in mind is that like a magnet, you're sort of pulled back into that earlier learned behavior. Yes, you can change the behavior. But what we want to tell you is the wood grain remains, and you must fight it one day at a time. Just like the Alcoholics Anonymous people fight alcoholism one day at a time, you must do the same thing in your personal life.

Dr. James Dobson: But you don't believe in determinism. You have a free will. You have an opportunity to make your own decisions. God gave you that ability and opportunity.

Dr. Randy Carlson: I think in life there's a point along the way where we must forgive those who went before us. We were raised by imperfect people. And unless we cross that bridge of forgiveness, at some point, I think we carry a lot of that baggage into our adult life. And maybe just a little bit of baggage, or maybe a lot of baggage, but forgiveness becomes the key.

Dr. James Dobson: And so many people feel they have so much to forgive, don't they? They're bitter and angry at siblings and at parents especially. Let's look then at the practical steps to do what you're recommending in your book, *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*. We're talking to people with a flood of memories. As we've been talking, they've been thinking, yeah, I remember that first encounter with my mother, my father, my siblings, and so on. What do you suggest they do? How do they go about unlocking their memories?

Dr. Randy Carlson: Well, as far as unlocking the memories, it's good to write them out and to write out several of them if possible and find the thread that pulls them together. It may be the emotion, it may be the color, it may be a father that's present in all the memories, or it may be that you're alone in all of your memories, and you'll start to see the thread that comes together. Once you've gained some insight on what your memory tells you about yourself, you need to do something about it. And we talk about the ABCs of truth therapy. The A simply meaning accept the fact that your memories might be lying to you. When I think back to that fourth grade memory for me and the spelling bee, misspelling the word, feeling like a dummy, I've had to rewrite that for myself. Accept the fact that that is lying to me. I didn't misspell the word because I was a dummy. I misspelled the word because I didn't study. I wasn't prepared. I didn't like spelling. I didn't take the time. That's the truth. And so A is accept the fact that your memories might be lying to you. And then B, believe the truth. For me, the truth was that I'm not a dummy. I just misspelled the word. And then change becomes a matter of choice, doesn't it? It's a matter of deciding to change my view of people.

We have a chapter where we talk about letting mom and dad off the hook. And a lot of people can get up to that point, but when they get to that bridge that I talk about of forgiveness, that's where they get stuck. They believe everything we're talking about, but they won't cross that bridge and change through the process of forgiveness.

Dr. James Dobson: Kevin, you have experienced this yourself, and we had devotions together this morning, and you were kind enough to express some of these ideas to the members of our cabinet and our staff. And you said something that you may not want me to ask you to repeat here. And if you don't, I certainly understand that. But you talked about your relationship with your own father. And you said that you weren't ready to be very open about that because personal things in your life. I won't take you too far down that road. But you had to forgive your father for some things, didn't you? You've kind of used your early memories in the way that you're recommending to others. This is sort of autobiographical, isn't it?

Dr. Kevin Leman: There's an awful lot of Randy and I in that book. And that certainly points directly to my life, squarely to my life. And the forgiveness factor is something, like you say, I've learned. Let me say this, Jim, that I have a lot of memories of my father that are hurtful, terrible. I won't discuss them in detail, but I'll let it go at that, that there's hurtful, terrible memories there.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet you said this morning that he became your best friend.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Yes. He was a drinker. He embarrassed me. Kids in my school referred to the local gin mill as my father's office. I used to laugh it off to try to save face with the peer group. But something happened when I was 19 years of age where our family was clustered in a hospital meditation room with a surgeon. He was telling us that my father had less than 50-50 chance of pulling through the surgery. And it was my sister, my brother, my mother, the surgeon, and myself. And all of a sudden, my father went by on a stretcher being wheeled into surgery. And my mother, who was a registered nurse, looked up and said, "Oh, there he is." And she shot off after him. And my sister and brother went out the door, leaving the surgeon and I there. Then the surgeon went out the door. And I was standing there, 19 years of age, and my thought was, "Well, I suppose I ought to walk along and catch up to him to at least appear that I care." Because the fact is that I couldn't have cared less if that man lived or died. And yet, in 1983, when my dad passed away, there weren't two people on the face of the earth that were any closer than my dad and myself. And it's a long story, but at age 20, I met my wife. She was the believer. She was the trigger that God used in my life. Through forgiveness, I saw my father completely different. My father came to know the Lord in his 50s. Like I say, there weren't two people in this world that were closer.

Dr. James Dobson: The reason I ask you to share that is because it gives hope, obviously, to others who don't like to think back on their childhood. They don't want to think of those early memories because they're bitter and they're hurtful, and they were wounded back there, and they'd rather keep it all closed down. But by going back and reliving it and looking at it from an adult perspective and from a Christian perspective, you reconciled your relationship with your father.

Dr. Kevin Leman: If you close it up and bottle it up, it'll seek its way out. That's the way stress is in our life. You can't keep things bottled up. It's going to seek a way out, either through the muscular, the skeletal system, some way it's going to get out. Or it's going to be just dumped on other people in other relationships. In other words, it's going to be a scapegoat theory. I'm mad about this, so I'm going to take it out on you, you, and you.

Dr. Randy Carlson: We only experience the process of healing when we run toward our hurts and not run away from them. And that's what we help people do with their early memories, to look at them, not only the bad ones, but the good ones as well. And even within seemingly negative memories, there are strength. We can find things about ourselves through our negative experiences that do give us hope for today and for tomorrow and tell us a great deal about ourselves.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm sure you would agree, Randy, that where those memories have been most painful, that the individual may need some help.

Dr. Randy Carlson: Exactly. And this is where a professional counselor, psychologist, or pastor would come into play to sit down with someone to help you really process the information you're gaining. This is a starting point for many people.

Dr. Kevin Leman: But look for someone who wants to get rid of you, meaning you want to find a counselor, a psychologist who has a game plan, someone who doesn't see therapy lasting forever, and someone who really does believe in termination because it really does help.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that is really important because you become a meal ticket to somebody, and they have something to gain by just keeping you hanging on forever. There really does need to be some direction with an end point in mind.

Dr. Randy Carlson: In putting this manuscript together, we wanted to help people start on that road, to realize that they can start on the process of looking at their early experiences and learn something about themselves so they don't need to stay stuck with those messages.

Dr. Kevin Leman: The letters we've already gotten from lots of people I think are significant because most letters are starting off with, I've read your book, and all I can say is, wow. It's given me new insight into our entire family. And they're reminiscent of the letters I got from people when the *Birth Order* book first came out.

Dr. James Dobson: This book has a whole lot to do with our spiritual lives too, doesn't it?

Dr. Kevin Leman: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: It has a lot to do with our relationship with God because we tend to see Him the way we saw our fathers and to a little lesser degree our mothers in the earlier experiences.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And we build this on Philippians 4:8 where Paul tells us to think on those things which are right and true and admirable and good report. And so many of us don't do that. We put the old videotape on and we go back to the negative things. And so putting our minds on positive things and looking at Scripture, Scripture memorization is a big part of the process of healing as well.

Dr. James Dobson: I think of Proverbs 23:7 that says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." In other words, we are what we think. What you all are saying is that you can change how you think and how you see your past and begin to go rewrite those...

Dr. Kevin Leman: Well we are what we remember.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's right.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And we are also implanting into our children's lives memories.

Dr. James Dobson: Now there's a whole new subject that we'll have to talk about sometime because you are forming the memories that your children will later look back on.

Dr. Randy Carlson: And it's very important as a parent to understand that they will look back on their childhood with you. And we talk about how to approach that as a parent, how to not repeat some of the same parent traps that our parents experienced in raising us.

Dr. Kevin Leman: And the bottom line is, I think it's an uplifting statement that you're better than that. And most people tend to have a very critical look at themselves, and they see those flaws and they magnify them.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Kevin and Randy, thanks for being our guests these two days. You've brought, as usual, Kevin, a new twist on things. The books that you write are not just repeated things that other people are saying. This makes us do some new thinking. Randy, appreciate your part in it. Did you actually write the book?

Dr. Randy Carlson: We worked together. It was co-authored.

Dr. James Dobson: How can I find a person like you?

Dr. Kevin Leman: It was a wonderful experience and we're still friends.

Dr. James Dobson: I appreciate you being with us.

Dr. Kevin Leman: Thanks, Jim.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a fascinating look at how our earliest memories quietly shape who we are and who we. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and today's program featured a conversation with Dr. Dobson and Drs. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson discussing the power of childhood memories. If you missed any part of today's broadcast, or if you'd like to go back and listen to part one, you can do so when you visit [JDFI.net](http://JDFI.net). Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are committed to preserving and promoting the institution of the family and the biblical principles upon which it is based. We invite you to partner with us in this important mission, and you can make a secure donation when you visit [jdfi.org](http://jdfi.org).

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. And I'd like to take this final moment of our broadcast time to wish my mom a happy birthday. Kathy Marsh celebrating 93 candles on her cake, and then she'll be enjoying that with my sister later on this afternoon. Mom, I love you so much, and thank you for the many fond memories that you helped my brother and sister and me to enjoy all those years when we were growing up. I love you, Mom. Happy birthday. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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