



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Rescuing Fatherless Boys – Part 2

**Guest(s):** John Smithbaker

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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: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're continuing revisiting Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with John Smithbaker, the founder of the ministry Fathers in the Field. This Christ-centered ministry provides mentors to the estimated 13 million fatherless boys all across America. On the last edition of Family Talk, John shared his own painful journey about growing up without a father. On today's program, he'll reveal how forgiveness became the key to his healing, and how God transformed his personal pain into a mission to help boys who are walking that same difficult path. That's coming up right now as we begin this classic edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: In the case of boys, they're not born knowing how to be a man. They have to learn that. This was no small thing in your life. When you were young, you knew something was missing and you're a sensitive man. You are not a guy just who could forget it and go on with life. You had a need to be with your dad and there was no hope that that was going to happen and it hurt you. Explain again and then we'll move on.
- John Smithbaker: No, it's devastating. I knew that I was broken and hurt at the same time. Everyone was telling me to get over it and big boys don't cry, but I knew I was hurt, so as much as I tried to forget about it, my soul could not. And then what typically what happens to fatherless boys is that they have these men, stepdads, boyfriends that come into life that they then cling onto and think, well, maybe this will be my dad or dad figure. And the reality is second marriages with kids, it's over a 70% divorce rate. So you go through that hurt again. So you go through another loss and the losses of these men leaving your life compound and your heart develops a very tough, calloused hurt that is really has to be dealt with or it will control your whole life.
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've dealt with a lot of men. What are the characteristics of somebody who has not had a dad to make a contribution in their lives?
- John Smithbaker: Well, they're very sensitive to the fact that they're unworthy and that unworthiness plays out in two different ways in my opinion. They rebel and

they're angry and bitter on the outward and they get in trouble and 85% of them get adjudicated. We see the prisons are full of fatherless boys. The other 15% try to become perfectionist in a way and earn their father's affection in return, and that was the route I took. But in the end, it still controls your life and you put other things above, especially when you become married and become a father yourself. You put yourself above the needs of your children and you really end up abandoning your children through divorce versus maybe out of wedlock.

Dr. James Dobson: You were reaching for him and he was not there. You said that he lived on the other side of town, so you would go over there to see him or be with him, but he really wasn't interested, was he?

John Smithbaker: No, I mean it wasn't long time. I just remember just the fantasies these boys have, I had that my dad would come back on a white horse and rear up, bust the door down and say, "I've come back for you. I have not abandoned you. I did not leave you. I was off fighting this righteous battle and now I've come back." That's the fantasy we have. And then once the fantasy goes away, when you get older co-mingled with adolescences and testosterone, that's when it explodes inside of a boy and that's when it all goes haywire. Children and boys, children spell love, T-I-M-E and this concept that, no, it's the specialness of the time together. These kids don't care what you do, they just want your time. And that's what signals love to them. And that's what fatherless boys don't have. They don't have time from a man. They don't have time. They have a lot of broken promises, but no time.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, John, you did not grow up in what we would call a Christian home.

John Smithbaker: No.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were 40 before you came to terms with Jesus Christ.

John Smithbaker: Amen. Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell me about that experience.

John Smithbaker: Well, we talked about Uncle Bucky a little bit, and I was on the way after work scrambling around to go meet him fishing on the Green River in Wyoming, and it was around midnight and I was driving on a dark lonely highway trying to get to the little cabin we were going to meet to go fishing, and I didn't know how to explain it then, but know how to explain it now. I was overcome by the Holy Spirit and I pulled my truck over the side of the road and I don't know why the Lord plucked me out of the pit of Hell right then. But I pulled over my truck, got out of my hands and knees and I begged for His forgiveness and I was bawling and I saw all my horrible sins flash before me and I thought I was done and I heard the Lord, my Father now speak to me. He says, "No, John, you need to now forgive your earthly father for leaving you." And that's the one sin. That's

the one thing that fatherless boys tell themselves every day, multiple times a day, I will never ever forgive my father for leaving.

Dr. James Dobson: John, that is so important. That's so significant because you couldn't get past the anger and the wound inside until you forgave that man.

John Smithbaker: It was the deepest thing in me.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the hardest thing in the world to do.

John Smithbaker: Yeah, it was the deepest sin in me because we all know that unforgiveness is a sin. No matter the hurt and the pain. It doesn't mean reconciliation, but it was sin. And I pause because I didn't want to do it, but I said, "Okay, I will." When I said that I felt a rush through my body and I knew I was clean and I was healed and I had a relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: But you had to go talk to him, did you not?

John Smithbaker: Well, as soon as I got back, I wrote a letter to my dad and I shared with him that I accepted Christ and basically the summarization of the letter is, "Dad, what you did was terribly wrong, mattered greatly in my life, but through the power of Christ, I have forgiven you."

Dr. James Dobson: Did you actually go to see him?

John Smithbaker: I did. And then we exchanged letters for a little bit and then finally the Lord convicted me and I said I need to share the gospel in person with my dad, and I did it. It was one of the last things I did with my dad. Last thing I remember my dad telling me, he said, he doesn't believe in that, and shortly thereafter he came down with cancer and he died.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't hate him today.

John Smithbaker: No, not at all. In fact, I told him, I said, "Dad, when you stand in front of our heavenly Father, you will know that your son loves you because when you share the gospel with somebody, you're telling them you love them, you care enough about them." Obviously it still hits a scar today. It's not. But I do love him because we're all sinners. We all need to be forgiven. We just do.

So I was thankful to the Lord that he gave me that opportunity, and I believe it can't happen without the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit in life.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely.

John Smithbaker: And that's the key, that's the center of the Fathers in the Field ministry is not to do activities with the fatherless, but it's meant to address that father wound in them and to let them know that through forgiveness of their father leaving

them, they can still be the man God intended them to be. But it will not happen if they have unrepentant unforgiveness in their soul because our father tells us in Heaven that sin gets in our way with having a relationship with Him.

Dr. James Dobson: After you ask Jesus to forgive you and your life changed and you begin to try to reach your father, the Lord laid a ministry on you. We've got to talk about Fathers in the Field. You felt a responsibility to reach out to all those kids who don't have a man in their life and you are doing it and you're doing it well. I'm proud of you, John. Tell me and tell everybody else what you're doing.

John Smithbaker: Well, thank you. That very encouraging coming from you. Fathers in the Field is a Christ-centered mentoring ministry that specifically deals with the father abandonment wound in boys. And the way we do that, through my experience and my hurt and pain that the Lord took me through, we have written a curriculum that specifically deals with that and helps the mentor father interact with this boy. And we intentionally address, we don't avoid it, we don't sidestep it. We intentionally address this father wound in this boy because if we don't, these boys are hurting. And you can see most of 'em get adjudicated and a lot of 'em go to prison and they cause havoc in this world because they're hurting. Wounded people hurt other people.

Dr. James Dobson: You're not talking about just about inner city kids.

John Smithbaker: No.

Dr. James Dobson: You're talking about boys everywhere you look.

John Smithbaker: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Black, white, all races. Many of them, a high percentage of them, about 12 million in the United States have that pattern.

John Smithbaker: Well, practically it can be suburbia, it can be wherever. But no matter where you look, every boy you see, every child you see walking around, two out of every four are fatherless. What are we doing as a church to intentionally address them? What we're doing is we're walking by them, but we're not addressing the wound. So Fathers in the Field Ministry allows the church to do its biblical mandate and defend the cause of the fatherless through their church. The church has to adopt that. This is their ministry. We just help them and coach them to do this because they're the ones that raise up men. They're the ones that raise up mentor fathers. They're the ones that hold them accountable. And the church, the holistic approach of church, God's bride, helps heal this boy and the broken family, and that's what's so special.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, Fathers in the Field now has a relationship that you just described with more than 200 churches and you're growing all the time.

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Another several hundred in the works of enrolling, we call it enrolling, and I basically speak to churches to get them off their duff, to reach out to the fatherless in their community. Stop walking by them.

Dr. James Dobson: John, how does it make you feel when you've seen one of these kids that's just so broken and so lost and have no man to take the time to show him and teach him and tell him about Jesus and then you have an opportunity to change a boy? Do you see changes in these kids?

John Smithbaker: Our first field buddies, his name was Mason. God took us through this to share the redeeming quality that God has planned for us if we intentionally reach out to these fatherless boys. Our church, the grandmother called, said, "My grandson needs a mentor." Great, we have a mentor father ready for you, Scott. He's actually the pastor of the church at the time. And Mason took to Scott. They planned elk hunting trips, they did all kinds of things. But when Mason did the curriculum and he got to the point said, Hey, you need to forgive your earthly father, he wrote in his journal, "I will never ever forgive my earthly father." Shortly after he wrote that, he got a letter from his dad who was in prison, never met his dad. Dad finally wrote him a letter and said, "Son, I'm going to be getting out soon. I'd like to see you." He was stunned, you know what I mean? Shortly thereafter, that Mason came in. I was a Sunday school teacher at time, said, "Guess what? I forgave my dad."

And it's powerful stuff. "I forgive him last night. I want to be baptized." And he was. He wrote in his journal that he did all those things, but he asked us because the date was coming up now about the prison seeing his dad. He said, "What do I do?" And we asked him, "What do you think you should do?" He says, well, "I'm going to write him a letter that I forgave him and I'm going to give him a Bible." And that's what he did. He went to prison and he saw his dad and he did that. His dad says, "I'm going to be getting out in six months. We're going to start doing all kinds of stuff together." And this kid was so happy. That time came six months later, his dad didn't call, didn't show up. He just got out of prison and left. Mason was heart...

Dr. James Dobson: That's downright cruel.

John Smithbaker: I know Mason was heartbroken, but he shared. He says, "I'm okay because I know I have a heavenly Father that loves me that will never leave and forsake me. It hurts, but I know I'm forgiven and I have forgiven my dad."

Dr. James Dobson: John, as you know, the relationship between a child and a father is symbolic of the relationship between an individual and God.

John Smithbaker: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's sometimes very, very difficult for a child to comprehend a loving God because he's never seen one. How do you tell these boys that Jesus loves them?

John Smithbaker: It's a great question. These boys have been lied to, disappointed, and so many promises and commitments broken by men, especially their dad. So words have no meaning to them. We tell these mentor fathers the most important thing you're going to do in your life and the early part of your relationship with this boy is when you say, "I'm going to pick you up," you show up because that will make his heart leave for joy. So what we do is part of the curriculum is we get to show how much the heavenly Father loves us. He gave His son to die a painful, shameful death on the cross for us. We show him those examples. It's not about the words, it's about the demonstration of action, of love of our heavenly Father. What I like to say is Fathers in the Field has translated the gospel into a father's boy language that they can understand.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you do? Do you do scouting type things? Do you go out in the woods?

John Smithbaker: Great question. Mentor fathers, what we do is we release men to do ministry work through their church. So they raise up, say, I'll be a mentor father, and the church vets 'em and approves them. And if they're a mature, spiritually mature Christian man, they're ready to be a mentor father. Whatever their passion is, if it's outdoors, fishing, hunting, woodworking, automotive, that's where they serve. We like to keep them in their comfort zone so they can be the hero in these boys' lives.

Dr. James Dobson: And the boy will love anything he loves.

John Smithbaker: Yes, exactly. So what they do, as we said, it's a three year commitment, but it's broken down one year term. So every year they do an end of year celebration event. So if it's a hunting trip that go on a three day, two night hunting trip with other mentor fathers from the church, and they progressively plan to take that end of your trip throughout the year. So every month they get together and say, is it a white tail? Is it a mule deer? Are you using a bow or using a rifle or what? And they progressively, they go to the shooting range. They get their hunter education service that they need to, but whatever it is, they hands on with this boy throughout the year.

Dr. James Dobson: What's the age range now? What are the youngest you take?

John Smithbaker: Yeah, we say seven to 17. Anything before that is more like babysitting to men and 17, they're pretty much adults then.

Dr. James Dobson: And it doesn't cost the mother anything.

John Smithbaker: It doesn't cost the mother anything. That's the great thing. You have the relationship for the church, the single mom and the mentor father, that is the triangle that is used to help this boy in a circumstance. So some men asked one of the most common questions, say, what if I have young kids myself and I had young kids, and what I did was I sat my kids around down around the table and say, I'd like to be a mentor father. I'd like you to consider this next week and

pray to the Lord to tithe some of your time of mine to this father's boy. Would you be willing to do that? And they all came back and said yes. So having kids does not prevent you from doing this. In fact, for me, it was the best way for me to share Jesus in my home versus giving a sermon. They could see Jesus in action through me because I love the unlovable. My selfish time that I used to call it. Now I'm spending it in kingdom work. That is the liberating fact that we tell men, you can serve the kingdom in your passion. God made you for a reason. Don't believe this world. You can serve the kingdom. You don't have to have all these letters behind your name. You don't have to go to theological school. If you're a spiritually mature Christian and you love the Lord and your leadership team approves you, you are ready to serve.

Dr. James Dobson: John, you got a smile on your face and there's a twinkle in your eye and your voice shows excitement. You love this, don't you?

John Smithbaker: Yes. I mean to see Jesus's love and action should bring joy to us. We can hear about Jesus all we want, but until you experience Jesus, you're missing something. And these boys and these men get to experience Jesus.

Dr. James Dobson: Now enough time has gone by for some of those kids to become men. Do you maintain a relationship with 'em? Does the mentor continue to be important in the life of a man like that?

John Smithbaker: Absolutely. It's probably the second most asked question we get. What happens after that mentoring relationship? We say these three years are a mentoring relationship, but after that three years, then you have a relationship, a disciple relationship, a friendship, and a lot of these mentor fathers after the three years with a boy that gone off to college now, they'll invest into a life of another boy. You become maker of disciples.

Dr. James Dobson: Because so many single parents and their children are really destitute. They're really struggling financially. Do you help them financially?

John Smithbaker: Well, again, what we recommend in the church is let all the ministries of the church holistically come alongside this broken family. So when the mentor father interacts with that family, we call it a front porch policy, they go there. They never go inside the home of the single mom, but when the single mom says, "Hey, we don't have any food, or the roof is leaking, or my car broke down" again, we coach the men to say, "well, thank you so much for sharing that with me. We will tell the church and the deacons will come help you." Let the deacons do their ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that's Christianity in action.

John Smithbaker: Isn't it? It's awesome. And let the women's group come alongside the single mom. We have these mom groups in these churches now that give a corsage to these field buddies on Mother's Day and they get to take home a corsage to

their mom for Mother's Day. It's beautiful. They would never have that opportunity. It speaks volume that the Lord loves them, that church loves them, and we see children coming to church. I'll share one story in Wyoming. When we started, we were mentoring these two boys in one family and they had two mentor fathers. They lived a couple blocks away from the church. They had a daughter, a sibling in that home. She was 12, 13 years old. The two mentor fathers went and picked up the boys, brought 'em to church, and I was a Sunday school teacher. All of a sudden, the daughter shows up. She's barefoot. She walked two blocks in winter time to come to church. She wanted to be part of it.

Dr. James Dobson: John, it occurs to me that one way to phrase what you do. We are living in a culture where the family is just disintegrating and it's in crisis. And this is first aid for the family.

John Smithbaker: Yes, it is.

Dr. James Dobson: There's really Christians coming in there. Christian men, not just women. Women usually do the work of the church. It's Christian men saying, I can make a difference here and I can win one of these kids to Christ. I will know him through eternity.

Speaker 4: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you talk about a benefit to what you do. I tell you, John, I believe in it and I'm so excited to hear about this.

John Smithbaker: Oh, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Are you holding up? Is this something you're going to wear out on? Because I'm sure you got a thousand components to it.

John Smithbaker: Well, the Lord encourages me every day. That's what I love about. I wake up in the morning, I'm ready to do the Lord's work. It doesn't mean it's not hard, but most things that are good are hard. We have to raise support. We need financial supporters. We need mentor fathers. We need churches to believe in us. But that's okay. God just asks us to be obedient and go. And as long as we're going and the Lord's in it, He's going to open the doors. He's going to raise the men, He's going to convict the churches, He's going to supply the funds, and all of it will be worth it if we reach one boy.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's it, John. I say this because it will help others. You found my book *Bringing Up Boys* very helpful.

John Smithbaker: Oh, it was the best book I ever read growing up fatherless and being a new Father. Yes, it was.

Dr. James Dobson: And that came into your life when you were starting to reach out to boys. You have to understand who they are first.

John Smithbaker: I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know how to interact with them. I didn't know what he needed for me. And that's why you've always been a father figure, almost a hero to me because there was no place else to turn to learn this for me. And so the opportunity to meet you and talk to you here as a dream come true, so thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I've got moist eyes from hearing you today and thank you for coming and being with us again. I'd like to have a long-term relationship with you and your ministry.

John Smithbaker: Well, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Fathers in the Field, and how can they reach you?

John Smithbaker: Yeah. Fathersinthefield.com and just reach out to men out there, don't believe the lie. The world has to tell you. You can serve the kingdom. God made you and gave you their passion for a reason. Use it for a kingdom pursuit versus a selfish pursuit. Intentionally invest in the life of fathers in your own community. You can do this. If you love the Lord, you're ready to serve.

Dr. James Dobson: John, thank you for being our guest. We've been talking to John Smithbaker and you've made a lot of new friends because there are a lot of folks out there that are going to resonate with what you've been saying and what you're doing. I ask our listeners also to pray for you.

John Smithbaker: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And pray for those men. Nearly every man's got more to do than he can get done.

John Smithbaker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He's busy. His business has taken the measure of him or whatever he is doing. If he's a physician or a lawyer or whatever he is, you can bet he doesn't have any time to just sit around. And yet these guys are taking their time and are going out there and investing in a boy. So this is first aid for the family. John, thank you. We're out of time. I love you, brother, and keep in touch with us.

John Smithbaker: Love you too. Thanks for having me.

Roger Marsh: When you hear men step forward to heal the father abandonment wounds that took place when they were boys, restoration begins. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a revisiting of a classic conversation Dr. Dobson had with John Smithbaker talking about his ministry, Fathers in the Field. John

has also written a great book called *The Great American Rescue Mission*, and you'll find all that information along with the audio for both parts one and two of Dr. Dobson's discussion with John Smithbaker. That's all up at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Dr. James Dobson devoted his life to one unwavering conviction that's strong families are the foundation of a healthy society today. That foundation is facing unprecedented assault from every direction. And the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will continue Dr. Dobson's tireless work of equipping parents with biblical wisdom, defending the institution of marriage, and advocating for the sanctity of every human life to stand with us in this mission. You can give a gift online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org), or you can call with your donation at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The voice you can still trust, for the family you love.

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