

# SHOWNOTES - James Spann (32/50)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, greenville, knew, life, father, left, dad, called, georgiana, ashes, james, tuscaloosa, kids, lived, man, child, denny stadium, wife, god, memories

## SPEAKERS

James Spann (Guest), Scott Hilton (Host)

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- S** Scott Hilton (Host) 00:15  
Welcome back to another episode of The that's my dad podcast got James span here with us. Welcome to the podcast James.
- J** James Spann (Guest) 00:22  
It's an honor to be on your show. Yeah. So
- S** Scott Hilton (Host) 00:25  
you're most people know you as the weather guy. Yeah, man. Here's what I do. You know, my, my neighbor, you had a, you had a dog that was scared of thunder. And you're slow associated with whether that when the dog saw you on TV he ran hid under the bed. Yeah, no,
- J** James Spann (Guest) 00:40  
I do that to people to know, that's funny. I mean, it's, I had been talking to people in their closets and in their basements and in these tornado safe places for so long. And everybody's got stories about things like when dogs hear my voice, and when some kids hear my voice, it scares them, really. And I don't want that to be the case. And so that's why I like to hang out in schools. When they see me in the school, they know that I'm really not bad guys. You know, you're okay. You're in weather. Severe weather doesn't happen that often. I mean, it does here, but doesn't happen that often.
- S** Scott Hilton (Host) 01:16  
So you talk people ask you a lot about the weather. And we talk about that. But I happen to know that where your heart really is, it's your dad, and your husband, your children's minister,

and you really have a heart for kids. And I think it goes back to your your background. And I'm wondering if you would be willing to share that story with us.



01:39

So I'm from rural South Alabama, I bet you've never been to Greenville, heavy. Seems like we went through there one day, if you ever go to Gulf Shores or mobile you're gonna go through Greenville. Of course, when I lived there, there was no interstate 65 it was old us 31 that's all we had. And I loved it. I am from Butler County, Alabama. Every time I go back, it's like being dipped in healing waters. I'm a product of rural South Alabama. I'm proud of my heritage and proud of my culture. You go to Ebenezer Alabama, there's a span Street and those are my people. Were from Chapman, Georgiana, Ebenezer industry, south of Greenville bow we lived in Greenville, which is the county seat that's the biggest town in Butler County. And when I was in second grade, my father opted out one night and it was not good. He just left. And he didn't say goodbye. He didn't say Have a nice life. He didn't say maybe I'll see you later, he just was gone. And so it was so hard. And my mom having to tell me and I'm an only child, I'm everybody's got nine brothers and 10 Sisters, I'm an only child. And so our family of three became a family of two. And he also made the decision not to pay a dime of child support. And we were broke. My mom was the secretary at Greenville High School, she was probably making maybe \$300 a year that you try and raise a child on that even in the 60s. And that's not going to work. And you know, I went to work, you know that I don't think we had child labor laws back in the 60s. And so to survive, I went to work, I'd cut grass and carry golf clubs at the Greenville Country Club for these guys. And you know, it was tough. And then at the end of fourth grade, my heart was broken again, because we had to move. We had to move away to this horrible, horrible sounding place called Tuscaloosa. And what happened, my mom knew that she needed to get a better job to support the two of us. And so she was one year shy of having a degree in education. And so her plan was to go back, finish that one year of college and get a job teaching, which she did. And so we moved there and we were just dying on the inside the two of us. And I hope that people are cognizant that there are people just like me and my mom around him every day and you know what we do? We walk past him. We've walked right past him. But I'm so thankful looking back on that. And when I moved there, I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to make friends. I didn't want to have a friend. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was in a total shell. I didn't trust people. My father crushed me like a bug on a windshield. You don't know how bad it hurts and it hurts today all these years later. But there were some wonderful people there that saw two strangers in a strange land and loved us and encouraged us and help This, I'll never forget, when I started fifth grade in Tuscaloosa finished fourth grade at WL Palmer Elementary School in Greenville. And I started fifth grade at Werner Elementary in Tuscaloosa, which was right across the street from Denny Stadium back then. And the principal was a man. And it's very odd for a man to be principal back in the 60s. And but you know, he knew my backstory, and he would seek me out, he would say things like, you look good today. And I know I didn't. But you know what, I started to believe that guy. And he would say things like, I believe in you. And I started to believe that he believed in me. And he would say things like, it's going to be okay. And that's an example of the kind of people that God put in my life in my mom's life, to break us out of this horrific, hopeless pit we were in and bring me to the point of salvation, I made the decision to accept Christ in when I was 12 years old. And this was in 1968. And those men and women that had the guts, to to encourage in love on to strangers that were probably appalling to them, from rural South Alabama, they changed my life, in my mom's life. And we made it it wasn't easy, but we made it. But I look back on all that. And you know, some good things came about as a result of my father leaving. And I guess

one of the really good things, you know, what I learned how to work hard. I'm not good. In anything I do. I'm really not. But I learned that work ethic at the age of seven when I became the man of the house, and I work harder than you or you, or you, or you or anybody to get to get a job accomplish a goal accomplished. And that work ethic came about as a result of that, and I'm thankful for that. But the thing, I regret that and you know, the thing I don't like, I didn't learn how to be a dad, I didn't learn how to be a husband, because there's no example in my life, none, zero. And I've had to feel my way in the dark. And I think every boy deserves to be taught that from their father. And I didn't have that. So I've learned it. It's been on the job training. All that matters in life is your relationship with God and how you serve other people. And that's it. And I missed it. And man, I look good on paper. I look good. I mean, I was teaching Sunday school and volunteer and and I mean, you'd look at me on paper, you think, Man, that's a godly man. But I was not where I needed to be. And some guys knew my struggle, and they challenged me to pray a prayer. And it was one of these life changing prayers, I'll never forget that. They told me to pray this prayer, opened my eyes and open my ears, to the needs of the people around me. They knew that would change my life. They knew it. It's not a magical prayer. But if you pray that that will change your life. And they knew that what happened, God would burn somebody in your heart, after you pray that prayer. And you are to go help them if you got the guts to do that. And, you know, it's funny, I knew the next day who was and I was 37 years old, 37. And long story short, it was my father. This guy devastated me. Again, you know, for people that are watching this or listening to it for the ones that have experienced it, they understand, but nobody else understands. And I'm thinking I'm supposed to go help it. Now. Number one, I don't even know if the guy's alive. I'm not seeing this man at 30 years. So

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Scott Hilton (Host) 08:35

he left 22777 You just walked out? You haven't seen him and you're 37 years old.



08:42

And I couldn't and I tried to pray it off. If you ever tried to pray off something. God, you messed up. No, no, you got the wrong guy. It's this guy over here and not me. And that's a waste of time. I couldn't I couldn't shake it. After days. I couldn't shake it. And so I got it with a friend. Every Christian man needs an accountability group and friends. And and the guy said, Okay, well, let's see if he's alive. He must be if you're called to help him. And let's see where he lives. And by golly, we found out he was alive. And by golly, the whole time he was living in this state. I had no idea the whole time. All 30 years he was living in the state. I had no earthly idea. And we found out he was living up around Huntsville, at the time. And so me and this guy just decided to go out and try and find it. And that was an adventure. That was a Saturday that I'll never forget. We went up to this community north of Huntsville, and we started knocking on some doors where we heard he lived and nobody knew him at first and we thought we came all the way up here for nothing. And finally somebody knew him. And he said, go around the corner. Second house on the right, we were out in the corner, second house on the right. And you know what, that door opened up and I was looking at my father for the first time in 30 years. I can't tell you what happened at that moment. I'll try, but it's very hard to describe what happened in first I didn't even read recognize the guy remember, I hadn't seen him in 30 years in Who's this old guy, but I could see the father of my youth through the aging process, and I knew that it was him. And then memories of me and that man doing things together before he left came back. He took me fishing and Georgiana when I was five, and you don't know where

that is. Nobody cares. But it was a big deal to me. And you know what, maybe he loved me, I cling to that hope. I don't know if he never told me I don't know. To this day, he took me to the circus in Montgomery, the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus at Garrett Coliseum. When I was six before he left, I mean, I can smell the popcorn, the memories were so rich, and they still are today. Rich, and clear, and vivid. And those memories are very important to me, because I cling to the hope that he loved me. So at that instant, when I saw that man, I was blessed beyond my wildest imagination in that some of the stuff I was fighting was taken away. And those memories came in to fill that void in my soul. I think I was there that day. And again, I was called to help him. And I think I was there that day to share the gospel with him. And so I laid it out. Very simple. Getting the gospel is simple getting sometimes people in adult ministry get way too complex here. But only perfect. People go to heaven. I told my father this and I didn't know what to call him. I called him sir, I was always told to call an older man, sir. And I didn't call him dad. I didn't I didn't. I had I felt no connection with him. The only perfect people go to heaven, and it leaves you out. And quite frankly, it leaves me out that the Bible says we're all short of the standard. And God knew that before the beginning of time, and he sent his son that lived the perfect light yet he was beaten, tortured and murdered, to pay the price for me and you and all you have to do is accept it like a child accepts gift at a birthday party. And I gave him a chance to become a Christian that day. And that's kind of the very abbreviated version of it. I didn't do a long gospel presentation, but he didn't accept it. And quite frankly, he couldn't. He was drunk. And I learned that day my father had a condition called alcohol dimension, years and years and years of chronic alcohol abuse. And it was like talking to this wall back here. I don't think he knew that it was me. His behavior was embarrassing his language. I can't tell you on the show what the words that came out of his mouth and what he called me and my friend and he urinated in his yard twice. He wouldn't let us in the house. But he urinated in his yard twice while we were talking with him. And while I was sharing the gospel, I tried to to establish a relationship with Him found out that I had a half brother and never knew I had. But he would die soon after that from that condition. It's some government facility. I think he owed the federal government because zillions dollars back taxes is just a train wreck and nobody in the family wanted anything to do with him. So I had him cremated, and I took his ashes down to the little family cemetery where all our people are buried down in industry and sprinkled his ashes on the grave side. That ride we had from the Tennessee Valley where I picked up his ashes down to Greenville, I talked with him pretty much the whole way. And nobody understands that he was in a little box ashes. And that was very healing for me. Tell him I told him the same thing. I told him the day that I saw him when he was drunk. I needed to tell him that. Listen, understand, you've got no problem with me. I've forgiven you for everything you've, you've done to me. I needed to say that to him. And I said, God's forgiven me for the horrible things I've done to him. The least man I can do is forgive you. But I don't know if he heard that. And I said that a lot. I wanted to be sure that he knows somewhere that I've forgiven him. And I don't I have no idea why I needed to say that over and over again. But I thanked him for taking me fishing. And Georgiana and Chapman at the McGowan place. I thanked him for taking me to the circus. And I asked him if he loved me. I don't know if he did all these questions. Why did you treat my mama's so bad? Why did you treat me so bad? And some of that came out? And it wasn't really an anger. It was just trying to have a conversation. And of course, obviously there's no answer, and they'll never will be an answer to that. But it was it was, I don't know, therapeutic for me. I was by myself. I didn't and I didn't meet one of my sisters, my aunt at the gravesite. So when I sprinkled his ashes she could be there and see that and I thought somebody also needed to be there just to see that the kind of have some closure on his life. But you know, Max in his name was Max mustard. My middle name is Max. And I don't think about it a lot anymore. Obviously after I saw him again, and that happened, you know, I don't now my focus is on trying to be a better father and a better husband.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 15:25

You mentioned a principal at a school. When you went to Tuscaloosa Do you remember his name? Yeah, Archie hits? And what did he tell it? Tell us about that experience.



15:34

So so he stepped in and filled the gap in my life. And those simple words started me on a journey of coming out of that, that shell of just hating the world hating people, distrust of everybody. And it opened the door where I Maya in my heart was hard. And understand I was in fifth grade when I moved there. And most kids that age still have a tender heart. Mine was hard as a rock. And you've seen that in the adults, you know, these hard, hard adults. And then that's what I was, but he softened it. And the cool thing about Mr. Hits and you know, he kept up with me, and, and he stayed at Werner for a long time. And even after he retired, and they moved the school from right there by Denny Stadium over across the river, to where it's currently located. But after he retired, if he knew I was doing a weather program at Werner Elementary, he would put on a suit and drive all the way out there and sit in the back of that class to support me. How cool is that?

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Scott Hilton (Host) 16:41

Where do you think you would be? Who would James Spann be today? If it hadn't been for though?



16:45

Man, I listen. I would probably be the all night DJ, you know, some radio station in Peoria or something like that? If that much, but But if all that stuff didn't happen, if those people didn't respond to God's call, the help a little boy and his mama, that were strangers in a strange land, I would not, I'd probably be dead or in prison. And, you know, I try to be cognizant of that. That's why I'm going to school every day. I don't have to do that. I don't get paid a dime to go. I was in Athens today. That's a two hour drive up there. Two hours back. elementary school, high school. Why do you do that you don't get paid anything. You're you could be home with your family. You could be taking a nap. I mean, I feel like I owe it because there's hurting kids in those schools. And you know, I'm not one of my gifts is not discernment. It's not, I think my gifts or encouragement and evangelism. But I can discern one thing, I can go into any elementary school, I can look a child in the eyes. And I can tell you if they're hurting, I can see it. I can see it. I can feel it. It's visceral. It's flowing through me. And they're everywhere. And it's not just some people think, Well, that's an inner city problem. No, it's not the most influence schools here. You see him, I'll be walking out of the school. There'll be a third grader hanging on my leg like a Mississippi leg down. Why do you think kids hanging on to me, we're literally I'm walking out the door with a kid hanging onto my leg. Because he was a man willing to invest 45 minutes in them. And he knew, I gave them my full attention. And I wanted to be there. And he sensed that. And he didn't want me to leave. And he's not getting that at home.

And I don't know what the circumstances are. But you know, that's why I do that stuff. Because I want to put myself in a position to invest in the lives of kids now, because of the ones that did that for me when I was young.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 18:47

So I want to know, what do you say to first of all, let's just take that little guy whose dad's just left would you address him?



18:57

Well, first off, that your father doesn't define who you are, okay, your father does not define who you are. Don't Don't let that happen. I thought about that a lot. But my father didn't define me. You look at my father and me, we are radically different people, and you're going to be a radically different person. If your father abandoned you, and left you broke, and penniless and hurting and dying on the inside. Okay? So that's got nothing to do with you. You have to make the decision now to go in the other direction and choose a godly life, being a man of integrity, and that's good. All that matters is your relationship with God and how you treat other people. That's it. It's really easy. So if your father just walked out on you, number one, at your earthly father, your heavenly Father has never ever, ever, ever left you. He was always with me, even if I didn't feel it. He was there right by my side. And I look back on it and I can see see time and time again where I know now he was with me. So he's with you, even if you don't feel it, your heavenly Father has not left you, you will never, ever be alone if you give your life over to Christ. And the other thing to consider treating other people better than your daddy treated you. And that's a way of maybe showing him, let me show him what I can do. And that's important. And when you do that, you'll be blessed.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 20:27

So let's speak to the guy who's a little older. And he does, he's got a child or one on the way. And he's thinking, I have no idea because I didn't have a dad, I don't know how to be one. How did you figure that out?



20:39

I think the most important thing is communication with your wife. And I pretty much sucked at it. For the first part of my marriage. Again, we've been married 42 years, and she knew what she was buying into. And she knew my background. And she knew that I came from a train wreck. And she she was a woman is a woman of grace and love and mercy. But you got to have an open line of communication in and I've evolved to say, if I'm doing it wrong, please tell me, if I'm doing it wrong in terms of being a husband, in terms of being a dad, you had a better background than me, you know what it should be like, and I need your help to make me better. And if you're willing to communicate like that, and listen, and that's the main thing is listening, then you'll learn you will learn, you will get that on the job training through your wife, and through your children. Of course, when the kids are young, I didn't tell them, hey, I don't know

how to be a dad, I didn't want to I didn't want them to know that because that would scare them half to death. But as they got older, they knew my background and started learning some things about me. And they, they both helped me to

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Scott Hilton (Host) 21:50

what would you like to say to your boys? What do they mean to you?



21:54

Well, you know, I won't, and I want them to understand. God has wired them differently than me, you'll never be me, and I'll never be you, they will do things I will never ever, ever, ever do. Never, I can't do. And they cannot do what I do. So, you know, just guys, don't try to be me. And I'm not going to try and be you find out what your passion is in life. God has burned in your soul and heart embody a passion in gifts to do certain things. I was born to stand in front of a green wall when there were tornadoes flying around here. And I was born to minister to children, and I figured it out. And when you figure it out, that's when life gets good. So find out what God has called you to do, and plug into it. And then you will never work a day in your life. Never you got to follow the God given passion that you have. And you'll know what that is because you love it. It will be a joy. It might not be easy. But it's going to be an absolute joy to do that. And I think they've gotten that message. I see that and both of them.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 23:01

What would you want them to say about you?



23:04

Oh, goodness, that's a that's for them to say just that maybe I was there for him. As best I could be there for him. I provided for him. They had food on the table. They had family love, they were accepted. They knew that I would never ever, ever leave them never. They knew that the love there was unconditional. And that was for me and my wife from both office. And they felt secure. I think they did. Unlike me that had no security none. They knew that this family unit is going to stay together. And by golly we have and a lot of that's my wife. She's the greatest I mean she she's the glue that holds it all together.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 23:45

So James we do we do a little reference check before we bring bring anybody on Toby



23:51

Great. kicked off the show here. This is great.

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Scott Hilton (Host) 23:55

And so I thought you'd be interested in seeing our reference check because I think if we're going to you know present guests who have been great dads, and you're what we call a script flipper, we've interviewed lots of script flippers on this program, guests who've come out of terrible situations and they turned it around our our whole focus with that's my dad project is it's a podcast, it's books, its own thing. But our whole focus is that young men who who are not blessed with the best situation, can can flip the script can turn things around in their children will have the kind of life that your kids have had. So we want to share with you what your kids had to say about you.



24:42

I joined camera shot here and here with two special guys that has something they want to say to you.



24:49

Hey, Dad, I just wanted to say thank you for being a terrific father and a terrific husband and always taking care of us and being there for us and overcoming the obstacle. holes that you've overcome. It's inspirational. And thank you for all that you've done. And you're such a hard worker and a good man and proud to call him father.



25:10

I just wanted to say thanks for being so supportive, Thanks for always being there. Especially when I need guidance or need help. I have no idea what I would do without you, even though you play the most obnoxious style of tennis I've ever seen in my life. So appreciate.



25:28

We love you. Thanks, James, for being the best husband and the best father to our wonderful sons. And we just love you so much.



25:38

You're gonna make an old man cry. Don't do that now. Oh, man cry very easily, you know that. Thank you for doing that. They're being way too kind?

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Scott Hilton (Host) 25:49

I don't think so. So as a kid that grew up without that, just to see your kids respect and honor you and appreciate you what does it mean to you?





25:59

You will make me Don't make me it means the world to me. I mean, goodness, we all did this long journey. 42 years of marriage and two boys coming along 13 years separately. I mean, it's my heart is warm and fuzzy now. I mean, it's, it's, it feels great. And I've been blessed. I mean, understand, God bless me. I don't deserve this, that that, that I don't deserve any of this. This is God's grace. You wanna see God's grace? My wife, she was a sorority queen. I was a social zero dwe but nobody, and she was willing to go out with me. And you know, we fell in love and how did that happen? And then, these two guys are just the greatest kids. So anyway, it means the world to me. So thank you for doing it. I didn't know you're gonna do that. Surprise, surprise. Whoop.



Scott Hilton (Host) 26:55

Well, this has been good, James. You know, you're busy guy, and you are kind enough to come and share your time with us. That means a lot to me. So I appreciate that.



27:04

Well, thanks for your ministry. He's awesome.



Scott Hilton (Host) 27:06

Thank you, James. That concludes this episode of The that's my dad podcast where we're inspiring fathers to be great dads, and we're breaking chains of generational fatherlessness. Thanks for joining us. Thanks, James. See you next week.