You're Only as Good as the Books You Read
Day 1 of 2

Guest: Mark Hamby

From the series: Turn Off the TV and Pick Up a Book
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Bob: Have you ever heard somebody say about a book, "That book really changed my life?" Well, we know that there's really only one book that can change your life, but there are a lot of books, a lot of stories, that can have a profound impact on your life. Here's Mark Hamby.

Mark: Someone sent me this book called "A Basket of Flowers," and when I first read this particular story, I just said, "I've never read anything like this before. This is not just a good story, but there is wisdom in here that I've never experienced before." And each one of these books, I believe, is part of my character development in my own life.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, April 30th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We're going to find out on today's program about a whole bunch of books that had a profound impact on Mark Hamby's life today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Thursday edition. Before we get into what we want to talk about today, I need to ring the bell – ding, ding, ding, ding – this is the last day for FamilyLife Today listeners to take advantage of a special offer that we've been making available for the last couple of weeks. If you sign up to attend one of our upcoming Weekend to Remember Marriage Conferences in any of the dozens of cities where it's going to be held over the next few months, you can buy one registration, and the second one is absolutely free.

The deadline for that offer is today. That's why I was ringing the bell, and in order to take advantage of the offer, we have to know you're a FamilyLife Today listener. So here is what that means – if you're registering online at FamilyLifeToday.com you need to type my name, "Bob," in the keycode box on your registration form. When you do that, we'll automatically adjust the amount that is due to reflect the special offer or call 1-800-FLTODAY, register over the phone and, again, just say, "I listen to FamilyLife Today," or say "Bob sent me," and you make arrangements for one registration at the regular price and the second one is free.
Today is the deadline, so let us hear from you – toll-free at 1-800-FLTODAY or contact us online at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, we’re going to hear today about how powerful stories can be in someone’s life, and we’ve got a little different setup in the studio here today, don’t we?

**Dennis:** I have never started a broadcast where I was afraid, if we had an earthquake, I would die in a book avalanche. But we have the founder and president of Lamplighter Ministries, who is publishing a number of old titles for families today, and, well, let’s introduce Mark Hamby. Mark, welcome to the broadcast.

**Mark:** It's great to be here, Dennis and Bob.

**Dennis:** You really have got a lot of books here. These are all hardback. Some of them are leather bound. You've gone back into history and selected some great titles from how far? How long ago?

**Mark:** Between 100 and 400 years ago.

**Bob:** I think the surprising thing about all of these titles is most of us have never heard of these books, right?

**Mark:** Right.

**Bob:** And yet some of these books sold like hotcakes when they came out, and all of them have a profoundly spiritual theme to them.

**Mark:** Absolutely. In fact, one of them, "A Peep Behind the Scenes," outsold "The Scarlet Letter" by over 2 million copies in 1850. Nathaniel Hawthorne was livid over the book.

**Dennis:** What was the name of the book again?

**Mark:** "A Peep Behind the Scenes."

**Dennis:** A peep?

**Mark:** Behind the scenes.

**Dennis:** Not a peek?

**Mark:** No, a peep, p-e-e-p.

**Bob:** And nobody has ever heard of that book, but it sold two and a half times "The Scarlet Letter?"
Mark: It outsold "The Scarlet Letter" by 2 million copies.

Bob: So how come we've never heard of these books?

Mark: Well, I think what happened is after the Industrial Revolution and into the 1900s, people got so busy in work that reading became a lost art again, and then the moral degradation of our society just no longer was reading this type of literature. But these books were written during the time when there was great trial. People were dying young. There was a need for moms and dads to provide their children with role models, and that's why these books were written in the first place.

Bob: You know, as our kids were growing up, one of the things Mary Ann had the boys read, particularly, was old Horatio Alger books.

Mark: Yes.

Bob: You know those stories, and they're great kind of moral example stories for boys. And they have survived, in a limited way, through to today. A lot of your books are the same kind of literature but done with, again, a profoundly spiritual theme to them.

Mark: In the beginning you said that I found these books. I didn't find these books, these books found me. People ask me how did I find them, and the only way I can answer this is that God brought these books to me.

I have been asking the Lord for years to help me find role models, you know, and I've always looked for living role models. God gave me role models through the stories, and each one of these books, I believe, is part of my personal journey of my character development in my own life.

Dennis: So when you were growing up and were a little boy, you were undoubtedly a bookworm?

Mark: In elementary school, loved to read. I was a good reader. But in high school, junior high and high school, I absolutely hated to read. I hated the printed page. In fact, I hated school. And there was a reason behind that.

In elementary school I had high structure, high reward, high accountability, and I was in a parochial school. Then when I went to junior high and high school, I was in a public school, and I had – you know, there's low structure, low reward, low accountability.

Dennis: And you were also an adolescent.
Mark: Yes, absolutely, yes. And so for a child like me, that was very highly imaginative, I needed structure, I needed the high reward and high accountability. And so junior high through high school, I didn't learn anything. I didn't read anything, in fact, I enjoyed doing book reports. I'd read the first and last page of every book and make up everything in between. I did not enjoy reading. I did not enjoy school. In fact, school, to me, was like a prison.

And what I would do after high school, I'd go to college, and I have no idea why I went there and still did not read one single book the entire time while I was in college. I just – the reason I didn't like to read is because I couldn't comprehend.

And so if you're always reading something that seems like there is a blur on the page, you've got to reread the same sentence that you just read four times, you don't enjoy reading. And so there's a lot of children out there that are just like I was.

Bob: So why did anybody send you a book much less one from the 1700s, and why did you even read it?

Mark: Well, you're looking now in my adult life something had changed, something had changed drastically.

When I was a senior in college, I came to know Jesus as my Savior and immediately my life started to be transformed. I was a bartender during that time, and I was bartending, I was also reading the Bible at night, and I was reading the Bible to its entirety from Revelation to Genesis, could not put it down. And started memorizing Scripture like – I mena, it just came to me. I was like a sponge. Can you imagine reading the Word of God as your very first book? That's what it was like for me, and I couldn't put it down. I was reading until 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 in the morning. I was so excited. I still remember, 28 years later, I remember the very first verse that I memorized – Joshua 1:8 – "This book of the law shall not depart out of my mouth, but I shall meditate therein day and night that I may observe to do according to all that is written therein, and then I shall make my way prosperous, and then I shall find good success."

And so the Word – the Word of God was what really transformed me from the very beginning, and I knew immediately what I wanted to do with my life. So here I am, as a bartender, you know, this kid out of the '60s, early '70s now, and I don't know what I want to do with my life, and I'm reading "In the Mind of Prophets," – "woe to him who gives his neighbor drink." And so I go, "Uh-oh, I've got a problem here. I can't really be serving liquor anymore at the bar."

And so I started serving ginger ale for beer, and I start serving ginger ale and 7-Up for mixed drinks. I cleared out all the coasters and put Gospel tracts under all the beer glasses and started leading people to Christ at the bar and got fired within two weeks because we lost all our clientele.
Soon after that, a church that I was attending invited me to become the pastor of Christian education, and so there I was, pastor of Christian education. The first year I was in charge of curriculum development. I didn't have any idea of what I was doing, and the pastor and his wife, they looked at me, and they said, "We've got some problems here," and so they decided to send me – you know, I say this with a little bit of jest – and they said, "We need to send him down to Pensacola Christian boot camp." I'm in college.

And so here I was, a young man without really hardly any character development other than I was a hard worker, without any real education, even though I had a bachelor's degree, and they sent me down to Pensacola, and we get down there, and I go to dinner that night, and a young man steps out and says, "I'm sorry, you're not going to be able to have dinner with us tonight."

I said, "Why not?" He said, "Did you read the packet of information we gave you when you first arrived?" It was about, I'd say, three-eighths of an inch thick. And I said, "No." He said, "Well, you need a tie for the evening meal and, therefore, you won't be able to eat supper here tonight because here at Pensacola rules are not meant to be broken."

That's the first time I'd ever heard that. Rules, to me, were always meant to be broken. I called it "BTS" – beat the system. I got a bachelor's degree without reading a book, I can beat the system down here at Pensacola.

So I got to breakfast the next morning, and the young lady steps out, and she says, "Sir, you're not going to be able to eat breakfast this morning." I said, "Why not? I've got my tie on." And she said, "Sir, you don't have a meal ticket." And I said, "I didn't know that was a rule here." She said, "Did you read the packet of information we gave you when you first arrived?" I said, "No, I haven't had a chance to read that encyclopedia," I said, but, "Listen," I said, "I didn't get to eat last night, and now you're trying to starve me from breakfast." I said, "I'm from the North, and you're from the South, is that correct?" She said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, we won the war, and I'm eating breakfast." And she looked at me, and she said, "Sir, here at Pensacola, rules are not meant to be broken." So there I was, no supper, no breakfast. And she looked at me, and she said, "And, furthermore, sir," she said, "You won't be able to eat breakfast until next Tuesday," she said, "because today is Friday, and the office won't open until Monday after breakfast is served," and she just gave me that smile and turned her back on me and walked away.

And I'm thinking, "Oh, dear." Well, this goes from bad to worse. I go to bring my books back for this one course that I'm taking, World History I and World History II and Christian Perspective, and the teacher's name is Miss Roseanne.
Piedermayer. I don't know if you can get a visual image of this lady, but she is a very petite lady, loved the Lord, and I called her a "five-star general."

I brought my books back to the library, and they said, "That will be $2.25." I said, "For what? I got them back the day that they're due." He said, "But they're not here the time that they're due." I said, "You've got to be kidding me."

And he said, "Sir, did you read the packet of information" – I said, "Don't say that." I said, "I gave that packet of information to my wife and said, "You've got to read this." So I went to Miss Roseanne Piedermayer, and I was failing her class, and I said, "Miss Piedermayer," I said, "I'd like to do some extra work to get my grade up in this course." And she said, "I think I'm looking at a young man who has never done his fair share of his work academically in his life." I thought, "Whoa, this lady means business. What gave her that impression?" My grades.

**Dennis:** Your track record.

**Mark:** So I said, "Ma'am," I said, "I want you to know something. I'm a baby Christian." I said, "The other 73 men in this master's of administration degree," I said, "they were raised in Christian homes, went to Christian schools, Christian colleges," I said, "but I've not had any of this stuff." I said, "You're requiring me to remember all these prophet, priests, kings, and dates in these history books, and I just don't have the advantage that these men have. I have an unfair disadvantage here."

I thought that would sweet talk her, and she looked at me, and she said, "Young man, has God called you here?" I said, "Yes, He has." She said, "Then faithful is He who calls you will also do it," if you do your part first.

I said, "Ma'am," I said, "What do I have to do to get a passing grade in this course?" All I had to do was get a B so I wouldn't have to take the course again. She said, "I added up your grades. You have to get 100 on the final exam." I said, "They're true and false?" She said, "No, sir," she said, "200 questions, fill in the blank, it's a three-hour exam, it's on next Friday." She said, "You need to study like you've never studied before."

I said, "That's not going to be easy." She said, "Remember, faithful is he that calls you will also do it if you do your part first." I said, "Ma'am," I said, "You know something?" I said, "I don't think that I'm asking for too much here." And she said, "Mr. Hamby," she said, "I think you lack the character to do what it takes to be able to get a passing grade in this course. I said, "No, I think you stepped over the line, ma'am." I said, "You know, I think this reminds me more of Communism than Christianity, and I don't think I need your school." I mean, I just went way over the line, and I said, "I'm just a baby Christian. This is the first time God has ever tested me, and I'm not doing very well."
And she looked at me, and she pointed her finger right in my chest, and she said, "You leave here, and God is never going to use you." And I thought, "That's it. You stepped over the line, and I'm outta here." I said, "I don't need you, I don't need your school, we're leaving," and I left there, and my wife and I packed up our belongings, and we got in the car, and we drove about 60 miles.

And I'll never forget the verse that God used to turn me back. It was the Apostle Paul saying, "God forbid lest I become a castaway," which means put on a shelf and never to be used. I looked at my wife, and she was crying, and I said, "What's wrong?" And she said, "I think you've got to back." I said, "I know. God has already told me that.

I went back, went right to Ms. Rosanne Piedermayer's door, knocked on her door, and she opened up with this great big smile, and she said, "I thought you'd be back." I said, "What do I have to do, ma'am, to get a passing grade in this course?" She said, "I added up your grades. You have to get 100 on the final exam. I said, "They're true and false?" She said, "No, sir," she said, "200 questions, fill in the blank, it's a three-hour exam, it's on next Friday." She said, "You need to study like you've never studied before."

And, I'll tell you, I didn't sleep the first night, I slept four hours the second night, three hours the third night, but on Friday I came prepared. It was 73 of us men in this class, and the test is three hours long, and in the first hour and a half every man is done. I'm in there changing answers, putting new answers in, and I'm sweating this out, and she's sound asleep on her judgment seat up there.

And, all of a sudden, the three-hour mark, I'm changing an answer, and she comes behind me, and she takes my test, and she pulls it off my desk, and I was just ready to change one of the answers that I knew I had, and it was, like, "Oh, I got it." I said, "Ma'am, can I have that test back. I've got to change one answer," and she said, "No, sir." I said, "Ma'am, please, can I have that test back?" She said, "No, the three-hour mark is over." I said, "Ma'am," I said, "I remembered the answer before the three-hour mark was over. Please, can I have the test?"

And she said, "Mr. Hamby," she said, "If you've done your best, then let God do the rest." She said, "You go home now." And I went home, and I knew that I didn't get 100 on the final exam, but it was fine. I came back the next morning, she handed out the tests alphabetically, got to the H's, she came up to Hamby, and I took it, and she pulled it back, and she lowered and looked in my eyes, and she said, "Faithful is He that calls you who will also do it if you do your part first." And I looked at my test, and I got 100 on the final exam.

I learned later she wasn't sleeping up there, she was praying for me that entire time, and she knew that I had that answer right, and she wasn't going to give the test back.
And that morning I would go to a seminar where there would be 3,000 people, and there was a special guest speaker. Now, had I left, I wouldn't have attended that seminar. The special guest speaker's name was Charlie T. Jones, otherwise known as Charlie "Tremendous" Jones.

**Dennis:** And I know the quote you are about to give.

**Mark:** Well, it wasn't the quote at first. He is speaking and, all of a sudden, he looks out at the auditorium of people, and he says, "I know you're out there, and I'm going to find you." And he goes out into the audience, and he starts, literally, kind of like knocking people around, you know? If you've ever been around Charlie, he's this big six-foot-four giant mammoth man with a husky voice, and one guy, he pulled right out of his seat – took his ankle, pulled him right out of his seat and said – the guy had his legs crossed. He said, "Sit up like a man, you woman," and every man put their legs down real quickly, you know? Another guy, he kind of just roughly him up, kind of gave him a little tap on the face and said, "You thumbucker, sit up," and everyone is kind of like, "Whoa, this guy is going to hurt somebody," you know? Well, after, everyone is laughing thinking the whole thing is staged, he walks down – and I'm sitting right on the front seat, of all places. He walks right by me, stops, turns around, looks at me, and says, "I gotcha."

He grabs me by the elbow, lifts me up like a vice grip and brings me up onstage in front of 3,000 people and says, "Young man, what great Christian literature are you reading in your life these days? Christian literature, what's a Christian literature. And I'm thinking, "The Bible, Mr. Jones, the Word of God." I was petrified. I've never been in front of that many people before during that time, and he says, "That's good," he says, but I want to know who your mentors are – what biographies are you reading? He says, "I want to know what the best book was that you read last year? What was the best book you read last week, and what book were you reading last night? And spun me around, and he started hitting me on the back, and he says, "Tell these people right now – who's your mentors – D.L. Moody, is it George Mueller, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael," and he's just – he's really just kind of shaking me, and I'm going from bright red to pale yellow, and the only thing that came to my mind at that moment was – I'll never forget it – was, "I Like Your Hat, I Don't Like Your Hat, Go, Dog, Go."

[laughter]

It was the only book that came to me. I'm trying to pull out a book, and just the books my mother read to me when I was a kid, and he looked at me, and he said, "I don't know how I pick you losers out every time." And I looked at him, and he says, "Go to your seat, I'll you later." And I thought to myself, "You will never, ever see me later." In fact, when this thing was over with, I told me wife, I
said, "Listen, this guy's in the back there, and everyone's going by him." I said, "I'm going to go out a different door."

I couldn't get out a different door, and on my way I'm ducking behind people to get out, and, Charlie, he's on his tiptoes looking for me, and when he sees me, he's running through the crowd, and he grabs me, he picks me up – I'm telling you, I looked like a figure skater, and he's got me with my arms locked to my side, and he gives me a slobbering kiss on my right cheek, and he says, "I love you."

And I looked at him, and I said, "You've ruined my life. Put me down." And he would not put me down until my wife gave him our address. I said, "Debbie, don't give him the address. Just go back to New York, I'll meet you there."

Bob: He'll be by tonight, yeah.

Mark: So she gives him the address, because he was not putting me down, and we – I'm telling you, I drove from Florida to New York and guess what's waiting for me? Special delivery box from Charlie "Tremendous" Jones. And I know there's a bomb in it. I'm not opening it.

Dennis: [laughing] Something far more dangerous than a bomb.

Mark: Oh, yes, there were a dozen books in that box. He had sent me a dozen books, a dozen biographies – D.L. Moody, George Mueller, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, Abraham Lincoln, I can go on and on. I remember it as if it were yesterday.

I picked out the very first one, it was D.L. Moody, and I turned it sideways, and it was about three-eighths of an inch thick, and I said, "I think I can do this." And I went in the bathroom and two hours later I had emerged, and I had read my first book and 28 years later, I still pray the prayer that I found in the book – that the world has not yet seen what God can do through one man wholly committed unto Him, and I pray I'd been that man.

For the very first time in my life, I read about, I heard about, someone who had lived for Christ that I had only dreamed about.

Dennis: Yes, the great exploits of faith. Share with our listeners the quote that Charlie Jones gives.

Mark: Oh, well, Charlie, when he's up there, he says, "You'll be the same today as you'll be five years from now except for the people you meet and the books you read."

Dennis: That's it.
Mark: Yes, and that is so true, because each book – I picked out George Mueller, the next book, he dared to trust God for countless orphans and, all of a sudden, I learned what D.L. Moody did on his feet, George Mueller did on his knees. And then Gladys Aylward, she took 200 Chinese orphans across enemy lines. In the book, Japanese and Chinese said that they would have to shoot her and the children if she tried that. And she said, "No, my God will fight for me."

And history records that when she went through that valley that they saw armored tanks around her breathing out fire, they said. And Gladys said, "There was no one with us that day," she said, "but those angels must be pretty something with those swords of fire."

Bob: Okay, all right, I surrender. Load me up with some books.

Dennis: I was just thinking about this, Bob. If this broadcast has not been like a salt lick, you know, just creating a thirst for the human soul and the spirit to be able to feast on some great writings, I don't know what we could do for listeners.

In fact, as I listened to you, Mark, I was thinking about the image you were giving us of curled up, reading a great piece of literature about heroic faith and great exploits for Christ and turning on television – that vast wasteland.

Bob: To watch a rerun of "Leave it to Beaver," right?

Dennis: And the toxic waste – well, "Leave it to Beaver," I mean, that's nothing compared to the toxic waste dump that fuels sewage into our homes today. What a great alternative you've given us and, you know, I think what our listeners need to do is they need to take advantage of some of these books that we've got stacked up here. In fact, Bob, do you want to tell them about some of the bundles we've put together here?

Bob: Yes, I'll try to explain what we've got. We have taken some of the best books that Mark has found and put them together and put them in three different groupings.

We've got one group of books that are primarily – well, they're picture books for younger children. Books that parents could read to a very young child, or that a younger child could begin reading for himself or for herself.

Then we've got another group of books that are for – well, these are for elementary age students and, again, if your students are younger, you might read these are books to your children and, as they get older, they can start reading these books to themselves.
And then the third bundle, these are some of the young adult books, the teenager books, that would be great for a son or a daughter to read on their own or they would be good books for family to read together as a part of family devotions or just around the dinner table.

So you can go online to figure out where your family is and which group of books makes the most sense to you, and if you've got kids in all three age groups, you might want to order all three of these bundles and then when they arrive, you tell your children when they finish one book, they'll earn an activity, a trip to the park, or play putt-putt, or a special night out at a restaurant, something like that.

Come up with some creative ways to encourage your children to be readers and not just to be readers but to be reading books that will help shape their thinking and help shape their lives. Go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. There is information about all of the bundles available there.

Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order from us online, if you'd like, or call, toll-free, 1-800-FLTODAY, 1-800-358-6329. You don't have to order a bundle. If you want to just order a single book, you can do that as well. Again, the website has the information – FamilyLifeToday.com, or call toll-free, 1-800-F-as-in-family, L-as-in-life, and then the word TODAY.

Now, I need to remind our listeners today is the last day that you can contact us and make arrangements to attend one of our upcoming FamilyLife Weekend to Remember Marriage Conferences and take advantage of the special offer we have been making for FamilyLife Today listeners over the last couple of weeks.

If you register today, and, again, this is the last day you can do this – and you identify yourself as a FamilyLife Today listener, when you purchase one registration, you get a second registration free. So you pay your registration fee, and your spouse comes at no cost.

If you want to take advantage of this opportunity, you need to either go online and register today at FamilyLifeToday.com. When you come to the keycode box on your registration form, type in my name. Just type in "Bob," and automatically when you're done, the special offer will kick in, and it will be reflected on your invoice.

Or call 1-800-FLTODAY, say "I listen to FamilyLife Today," or just say "Bob sent me," and when you sign up for a Weekend to Remember, you'll be eligible for this special offer. Purchase one registration, and the second registration is free. Call us today at 1-800-FLTODAY or register online at FamilyLifeToday.com.

And let me encourage you to join us back tomorrow. Mark Hamby is going to be here again. We're going to hear about a number of the books that he has come across that – well, their classics. They're great books for families and great
books for kids to read. We'll talk more about that tomorrow, I hope you can join us.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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