



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Life After Hopelessness – Part 1

Guest(s): Kristen Anderson

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

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we are going to hear a powerful broadcast that was recorded several years ago featuring the testimony of an amazing young woman. Her name is Kristen Jane Anderson, and her story has been told on national talk radio programs, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusade, numerous churches and youth events all over the country. It truly is a heart-wrenching story about a teen who considered suicide, but it's also full of hope and encouragement. By the way, if you have young children with you right now, you want to make sure you turn off the radio and go online to drjamesdobson.org and you can find today's program there where you can listen to it at your own discretion.

If you have a teenager who has seemed a bit out of source recently, turn up the volume, you will definitely want to pay attention to what Kristen Anderson will be sharing with us about identifying the warning signs of teen depression and possibly suicide. Kristen Jane Anderson has written a book about her experience. It's called *Life, In Spite of Me: Extraordinary Hope After a Fatal Choice*. Now, this book has been translated into eight different languages and has had a huge impact worldwide. Since this broadcast was initially recorded, Kristen has since graduated from Moody Bible Institute and has gotten married, and she and her husband have started a beautiful family. Well, here now is Dr. James Dobson and his guest Kristen Jane Anderson, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Kristen, welcome to Family Talk.

Kristen Anderson: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Dr. James Dobson: We just met a few minutes ago and I like you already. We're going to be-

Kristen Anderson: Thank you so much.

Dr. James Dobson: ... great friends. And especially because you have a message to share that needs to be heard, and you have now written it in a book called *Life, In Spite of Me*. We're going to ask you what's behind that title. I know, but we'll tell everybody else. And it has a beautiful picture of you and people have commented on your beautiful smile, but you have had a pretty tough life to this point. I want you to share your story pretty much in chronological order, and you did have a crisis point that we're going to drive toward. But as I understand it, you were a happy child from a loving family-

Kristen Anderson: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: ... and did not really face the struggles that were to come in those early years.

Kristen Anderson: Right. I grew up just feeling very loved and very cared for and even very special. I just didn't have a lot of trials or tragedies in my life at all, so I had no idea how to handle them when they came.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I asked you when you were in my office, if I could ask this question as to whether your mom and dad were Christians when you were young and you gave an answer, share it now.

Kristen Anderson: Yeah. We would've told you that we were Christians, our whole family. We would've said that we were Christians. We went to church every single Sunday. I grew up going to Sunday school and everything like that, but we didn't know that we could have a personal relationship with God or that there was a choice we needed to make to accept Jesus and his forgiveness into our lives. So we really were not Christians even though we thought that we were.

Dr. James Dobson: And one of your objectives with the ministry the Lord has now given you is to introduce people to Jesus Christ.

Kristen Anderson: Undoubtedly that is-

Dr. James Dobson: If things started off very positively in your early years, when did they start to go sour?

Kristen Anderson: Well, when I was in junior high was when I first started to struggle. I mean, that's just when I started to realize just that there were wars going on. It seemed like I didn't really realize that before. I didn't realize that there was sexual abuse before that, I didn't realize how disingenuous people could be or how much they could hurt me, and I just really struggled with that and wanting to do something to make a difference in the world, and I started volunteering at a homeless shelter when I was in seventh grade hoping that I could make a difference. But I think the differences that I did make were probably so small that I couldn't even see them, and I just became very discouraged. And as I went into high school, I just started to focus on trying to make myself, my family and my friends happy, so my world really revolved around me.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, you more or less internalized the sorrow and the sadness, and the difficulty of the people you were volunteering to help, didn't you?

Kristen Anderson: Yeah, in many ways I-

Dr. James Dobson: That affected you emotionally.

Kristen Anderson: Right. Instead of making me feel like, "Wow, I'm so blessed to have a bed and to have a family, and to have a house and to have food," it made me just feel a deeper remorse for what was going on in the world. I couldn't believe that there were kids and that there's so many people that could take these people into their homes that didn't, and I just felt like there's something so wrong with the world.

Dr. James Dobson: You went through a time where you lost some significant people in your life, that also had an impact on you. Who were they?

Kristen Anderson: I lost three different friends when I was in high school. One died in a motorcycle accident, one died in a car accident, one died to suicide. And I had another girlfriend who was diagnosed with cancer. She had a brain tumor and she was basically waiting to die, and I also lost my grandmother. So that was within a year and a half's time when I was 16, 17 years old. And with those things and some of the other things that were happening, I just had no idea how to handle any of it. I was being stalked by two young men, I was raped by another, and I just spiraled down into a really deep and scary depression that I didn't even know I was in.

Dr. James Dobson: That physical assault had a major impact on you, didn't it? It came at a very critical time in your life. You were 16 years old.

Kristen Anderson: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And you had a crush on a boy. See, I've been reading your book.

Kristen Anderson: Yeah, you did read.

Dr. James Dobson: And you all were drinking. You got into some stuff you really shouldn't have been doing, right?

Kristen Anderson: Right. I had started smoking and drinking, trying to just, I felt so icky inside. I was hoping that I could feel some fun if I would drink, and it numbed the pain. I was self-medicating, trying to just escape the pain, but really it just made my problems worse, and drinking that night really impaired my judgment. It really took away the fight probably I would've had or the wisdom I would've had to leave his house when my friends left and things like that. And I really ended up in a very compromising position where he took full advantage of me. My parents were very present in my life. They definitely knew some of the things

that were going on. They didn't know most of it. I'm really sorry that I didn't tell them more about what was going on. I always felt like I could talk to them, but I had a lot of pride and I didn't want to have the pain or the problems that I was having when I was raped, especially I had the hardest time accepting or believing that, and that's one thing that I never told them.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't tell anybody, did you?

Kristen Anderson: No, I didn't.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't report him or anything else?

Kristen Anderson: No, I didn't.

Dr. James Dobson: Why?

Kristen Anderson: Well, because in one way I felt like that would make it more real, and I didn't want to believe that that had actually happened to me. I didn't want to be one of those girls. I just had a lot of pride and a lot of shame, and I didn't want to face it. I was afraid that I would have to go to court. I was young and naive, and I just felt like I would have to talk about what happened in front of all these people that I didn't know, and I was afraid that if I turned him in, he would come after me again.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were referring to compromising your judgment when you do that, you're not able to think rationally. In fact, going back to the event itself, there were people around you when you started drinking and then you began to realize you were alone with this guy.

Kristen Anderson: Right. I didn't even realize all of a sudden it just seemed like all of a sudden everybody was gone and I had no idea where everybody went. I knew that one of my friends or a couple of my friends had left to go get another friend, but I expected them to come right back, and it didn't seem like they were coming back, and I didn't know where everybody else went. It was very strange. I still don't understand it to this day.

Dr. James Dobson: And it was not consensual.

Kristen Anderson: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Kristen, the things that we've talked about, the stresses that you were under, some youngsters would cope with that, it would be difficult, but they'd go on. For you, you spiraled downward into things that you absolutely could not control and deal with, and even to the point of not wanting to live, explain what happened there.

Kristen Anderson: Well, one night I had left my parents' house when I wasn't supposed to. I was supposed to be grounded because of some things that I had done.

Dr. James Dobson: Grounded forever?

Kristen Anderson: Well, grounded until further notice. And I really was just completely discouraged. I feel like I was very materialistic and very focused on my friends, and being grounded until further notice and having my parents take away the things that they got me for Christmas was just devastating to me because that's where I found so much of my hope at the time and my value, and it was really sad, but they grounded me. And I remember my friend called me and she wanted me to come make gingerbread houses at her house, and we made the unfortunate decision that even though I shouldn't be leaving, I couldn't get in any worse trouble because I was grounded until further notice, and so I left and I was at her house for about five hours. And when another friend of ours dropped me off down the street and I started to walk home, I just didn't feel like I could go home.

I knew my parents would be upset with me. I didn't want to face them. I didn't want to disappoint them. I didn't really want to just deal with my life anymore. I didn't feel like I could take it. So I walked to the park that was kitty-corner across the street from my parents' house, and I started swinging on the swings, and I remembered all these happy times when I was a kid that I swung on those swings. And I started to think about how I was feeling now and why did I feel so different? And, "Why do I feel like I can't go home? I've never ever felt like this before. I know I can go home, I just don't want, don't want to deal with my parents or my life at all anymore." I just started to become very discouraged and very hopeless.

And then a very practical thought came into my mind, and I remembered that in this small town that I grew up in, the police check for people in the park at night, you're not supposed to be in there after dark, and if you are, they'll make you go home. So I looked around to see where else I could go, and I looked to the edge of the park and on the edge of the park, there was a freight train that had been parked there for about three weeks. I knew that had been there. I'd driven by the train tracks and day after day, I figured it wasn't going anywhere. So I walked over to the train and I sat on it, and that wasn't something I normally ever did. I didn't plan trains or train tracks when I was a kid growing up. But sitting there triggered a thought process that I'd had about three months beforehand, and that was when I was struggling through my friend Brandon's death, and he's my friend who died to suicide, and his death was the one that I struggled with the most.

And the thought process that I remembered was when I was grieving through his death. I remember just not understanding why he did it, and I remember just feeling like, "I don't know why he did that. How could he do it? How could he ever do it the way that he did that?" I just didn't understand. But in trying to understand my thoughts, somehow it shifted, and I started to think, "Well, that I

could never do that. I could never ever commit suicide." And then I thought, "Well, if I ever did, how would I do it?" And then a train went by my parents' house and I just heard the whistle and I felt it shake our house, so I felt the power of the train and it felt like it just snapped in my mind, "That's one way I would never leave through it," and I never thought about it again until three months later is when I'm sitting on the train, and it was such a hypothetical thought process.

I never, ever, ever thought that I would actually try to take my life or that I would ever do it in that way. Never even in any way did I think I would try to commit suicide. But when I thought about it sitting on the train that day, it became a consideration. And that's when I really just started to consider it. And there was a very spiritual battle going on in my mind because I would think, "Well, no, there's a reason I'm here. There's something I'm supposed to do here," but then I would think, "there's no reason I'm here. There's nothing I'm supposed to do here, and I don't think it's going to get better. And I don't think, no, it's not going to get better. And I don't think there's a reason I'm here, and I don't think there's no reason I'm here."

It was that back and forth for probably about an hour and a half, but I couldn't find any peace in taking my life. I never felt like it was the right answer, but I wanted the pain to end, and I felt like this might be the only way that the pain was going to end. I felt like this was going to be my only hope. And I was really just very deceived, very discouraged, very lost. And all of a sudden as I'm trying to figure this out, going back and forth in my mind about what I should do, a train starts to come. And I didn't know what I was going to do. I hadn't made a decision really. I didn't want to die. I just wanted my life to get a little bit better.

Dr. James Dobson: You heard the whistle, didn't you?

Kristen Anderson: Yes, I heard the whistle and I saw the light and I just saw it coming at me and it was coming fast. And I felt pressure to make a decision because I didn't know how long it was going to be until the next train came. It was freezing cold out. It was the beginning of January, it was 8:30 at night, and I knew that I needed to do something. I either needed to go home, go somewhere else or make some kind of decision because I couldn't stay out in the cold any longer. And I didn't know how long it would be before another train came, so right before the train got to me, I made the impulsive decision to lay down on the tracks. As I laid down, I remember I clenched my fist and I closed my eyes and I turned my head in the opposite direction than the train was coming from because I didn't want to see it actually come at me. And I just laid there and tried to brace myself for what was to come, and it was just a second later when it started to go over me.

Dr. James Dobson: Was there any thought of God at that moment?

Kristen Anderson: Well, I remember hoping that I would go to Heaven, hoping and praying that I was a good enough person, that I would go to heaven, hoping that Heaven would be a better place than my life on earth.

Dr. James Dobson: And the train came closer, and you stayed there?

Kristen Anderson: Yeah, I stayed there. And the train went over me almost immediately. And what I felt when the train first started to go over me was I felt it first begin to suck me upward almost into itself, which I guess, is what should have happened because of how fast the train was going. The police report says that 33 freight train cars went over me at 55 miles per hour.

Dr. James Dobson: Unbelievable.

Kristen Anderson: Because of how fast it was going, I should have been sucked up under the train and basically torn to pieces. But after I felt being sucked up, I felt all of a sudden something pushed me down almost into the ground, and I really believed that was God protecting me and holding me down and just really sparing my life and preventing me from being torn to pieces. And I just believe that He was so present and so faithful to me in that moment just loving me and protecting me because I would've never thought he would've done something like that.

But when the train kept going over me and when it stopped is when I started to really think about what had just happened. And I remember just unclenching my fists and opening my eyes and starting to look around to try and figure out if I was even alive or dead. I didn't know obviously what it was like to die. I didn't know what that would be like or anything, but as I looked around, I looked behind me to my left, and about 10 feet behind me on my left, I saw my legs and I knew they were my legs because they had these brand new bright white tennis shoes on them that I had just gotten for Christmas. But it just felt like this was a horrible nightmare. This could not be happening. This is just not real. This cannot be happening. So I remember just trying to gather myself emotionally.

And as I crawled out from underneath the train, I looked down at my left leg, and when I looked down, I didn't see anything there because my left leg had been severed well above my knee. So I turned my attention to my right leg and it looked like it had been severed directly below my knee, but I had never seen my leg like that before and really had never seen an amputated leg before. So in trying to just understand if this was real and if this had really happened, I took my hand and I ran it below where it had been severed because I knew if I could do that, my leg was actually gone. And in doing that, I brought my hand up to my face, and that's when I saw the blood and that's when the pain really hit me. And I feel like it was something psychological because it was like I knew that I was still alive and I knew that my legs were gone, and I started crying harder than I've ever cried in my life, almost like a small child when-

Dr. James Dobson: You were still alone?

Kristen Anderson: Still alone.

Dr. James Dobson: And were you in a great deal of pain?

Kristen Anderson: Yes, I was. I mean, when the train was going over me, I felt a lot of pain, but it was kind of a generalized dull pain. Once I realized my legs were actually gone and I saw the blood, it was like a sharp, loud, stinging pain, and I was inescapable.

Dr. James Dobson: So Kristen, your torso, your body was in between the tracks?

Kristen Anderson: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And your legs were extended over one of the tracks?

Kristen Anderson: Correct. My body, my arms, my head, everything was between the tracks and my legs were hanging over. And I never really thought of... I mean since I didn't plan this, I never really thought about how I would sit, stand, lay, anything. It was such an impulsive decision, and that's just where I landed. As I was laying there, I started crying for my mom, and when I felt this pain, I started crying for my mom like a small child would. And my mom hates that part of the story because she was looking for me and she wishes and she wonders if she didn't hear me, and there's really probably no way she could have ever heard me. And even if she did hear me, there's nothing she could have done to help me. But in that moment, I started to feel this amazing peace just cover me.

And I started hearing the song Amazing Grace play over and over and over in my mind. And I really believe that was God just meeting me in that moment and showing me how real he was, how personally He was, and how powerful He was, and how much He really cared about me and how much He wanted to help me. Because really, there's nothing my mom could have done in that moment to help me.

Dr. James Dobson: No, she couldn't.

Kristen Anderson: I was crying for her. There's nothing she could have done. Only He could save me, only He could help me in that moment. And I remember just resting in that peace waiting to die, thinking this could only be music from Heaven. I must have lost enough blood. I must be dying, waiting to die. And as I rested in that peace, all of a sudden the next thing I remember was feeling a firefighter come up to me and pull my hair off my face and behind my ear, and it was really a surprising moment because I wasn't expecting anybody to find me. I didn't want help.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the engineer had seen you and immediately tried to stop the train, but it took what 30 cars went over you, something like that?

Kristen Anderson: 33 cars went me.

Dr. James Dobson: 33.

Kristen Anderson: Yeah. The police report says that the engineer said to the conductor, "Did you see that yellow flash?" And the conductor said to the engineer, "Yes, I think we just hit someone." The flash that they saw, the yellow flash was my bright yellow winter jacket that I was wearing, and I am so grateful that they saw me. It breaks my heart to wonder how that has actually probably impacted their lives. I hope that they know that I survived, and I hope that they know that them calling the paramedics was obviously very helpful, but I wasn't expecting anybody to find me. I was hoping nobody would find me. And when they did find me, I had a mix of emotions. I mean it was-

Dr. James Dobson: You still wanted to die?

Kristen Anderson: I still wanted to die. I didn't want help. I worried about silly things like I didn't want to cause my parents medical bills or anything like that, and I just didn't want to face my life. I was hoping this would just be the end of the pain and my life would be better, or I would be better somehow after this.

Dr. James Dobson: And the EMT people came very quickly and began trying to stabilize you and stop the bleeding.

Kristen Anderson: Right. The firefighter called to all the paramedics and told them my location and my status, and as soon as they got to me, they tried to call Flight for Life because I had lost eight pints of blood. And scientifically, you're supposed to die after you lose five, and so they were just in a panic mode trying to save my life hoping that they could keep me alive. But I don't think they realized that God was really keeping me alive. They tried to call Flight for Life and they couldn't Flight for Life me because the weather was so bad, it was too cloudy out and too foggy. So they did something that they've never done since, that wasn't protocol, that they'd never done beforehand. And they blocked all the roads in the intersections from where I was to the closest hospital that could take me, and it was normally a 45-minute drive, but the police report says that they got me there in eight minutes.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you remember anything of the ride?

Kristen Anderson: I do. I remember one of the paramedics just telling me that it was going to be okay, that it felt like she just had the most soothing, motherly, calming voice. And I remember still just waiting to die hoping that this would be the end. And as they wheeled me down into the operating room, I remember looking up to the man in the white jacket to my left who I assumed to be the doctor and asking him if he thought I was going to die, and he says that he told me he didn't know. And he says that he said that because he needed me to fight. If I had to die, if I had to live one way or another, I needed to fight. And I remembered that I just went into surgery that whole night. I fell asleep right away. I don't remember any of that. The next thing I remember was waking up the next day in Intensive Care with my mom and my dad, my sister, my brother-in-law, all in the room.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Kristen, we've tried to summarize your life in just 25 minutes or so, and obviously that's not possible. There is so much more that you need to tell us about your story and what the Lord did with you. It is not a message of depression and despair. It's a message of hope and life. And in fact, you have titled your book, *Life, In Spite of Me*. Guess who is the author of that life? You know because you have found out, and so we want you to tell us more about Him and about how the Lord brought you through just the terrible struggles that you were going through. But you have come here to Colorado Springs to do this program and you have to leave. Let's just continue to talk about your story, and we'll have to end down, but we will let people here tomorrow what we're about to record. Is that okay with you?

Kristen Anderson: Yes. That sounds wonderful. Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: We appreciate so much you coming to be with us. You're a delightful lady, and obviously God is using you in a dramatic way, and I think this is just the beginning.

Kristen Anderson: Oh, thank you so much. It's such a pleasure and honor to be here. I can't wait to see what God does.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Thank you for being with us.

Kristen Anderson: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Oh, my goodness. Kristen Anderson has quite a story to share. It's very graphic, it's very compelling, but there's a hopeful thread running throughout. Please be sure to join us again tomorrow as Dr. James Dobson will continue his conversation with Kristen Jane Anderson here on Family Talk. She'll share about how God used her experiences to help others. And if you'd like to learn more about Kristen or her book called *Life, In Spite of Me*, simply visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. I know there are many parents who are listening right now who might be asking yourselves if your son or daughter is in a vulnerable place emotionally just like Kristen was. If you feel that you or someone needs that kind of support, please do not hesitate to contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, just dial 988. Again, that is 988, and you can talk to a skilled counselor and get support.

Now, the call is confidential and you can call anytime 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are not alone, and God loves you. Again, if you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of depression or possibly even considering suicide, call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 today. Well, it is now the month of July, and we are in the midst of summer. As you may be spending more time with your spouse this summer, you may notice that aspects of your marriage, even though it seems pretty good, can in fact be strengthened to make it a great marriage.

If you and your spouse could use some encouragement, you will certainly enjoy the marriage and parenting videos available on our home page at drjamesdobson.org. Just go there now and click on the link for the marriage and parenting videos to start exploring today. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thank you so much for joining us today here on Family Talk. And be sure to tune in again tomorrow as we'll hear the conclusion of a powerful conversation with Kristen Jane Anderson. It's coming up next time, right here on Dr. Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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