



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Adult Children of Alcoholics - Part 3

Guest(s): Dr. Curt Grayson and Anonymous Panel

Air Date: August 02, 2023

[Listen to the Broadcast](#)

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: A welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And today's topic is a continuation of our three-part miniseries this week. It's the family disease of alcoholism. As you probably already know, it is something that affects millions of families each year. It tears at the fabric of our society and costs us thousands of lives, not to mention the pain, suffering and torment it brings as well, a multifaceted and multi-generational problem indeed. Alcohol abuse and the disease of alcoholism is prevalent and is grown in exponential ways due to isolation and hardships, especially during the pandemic. The latest CDC data is striking. According to the CDC, alcohol related deaths jumped 30% in the first year of COVID. Dr. Dobson has written extensively about this subject before and he's spoken about the toll this disease has taken across generations of American families. And oftentimes the people who suffer the most in alcoholic families are the children of the alcoholics themselves.

This week we've been listening to stories from our brave panel of four adult children of alcoholics. They have shared about what they have endured, some vivid details about the tremendous amount of hurt and trauma they've suffered. For many, the pain they have endured has followed them into their adult lives as well. We must remember to seek comfort in the Lord through all of our trials, and when you think of the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 and 29, they really ring true for adult children of alcoholics. He said, "Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." Powerful words there, indeed. While on today's program, our panel will be sharing how they found peace in God and have resolved some of the anger they carried from the wounds they received as children and the painful memories that they have carried forth.

Our guests will also be sharing how they've been picking up the pieces of their lives to find true healing. And one of our speakers, of course, is a licensed marriage and family and child counselor. His name is Dr. Curt Grayson. The rest of the panel members have asked to remain anonymous to keep their identities confidential, so we will refer to them here on the program as Ann, Chris and Joe. I'd also like to remind you that the content we're about to hear is intended for a mature audience, parental discretion definitely advised. Now, as we dive into today's topic, Dr. Dobson poses a question to the panel asking them about how having an alcoholic parent impacts those around them, and how it also created challenges for other family members to even perform and execute what should be routine life skills and duties inside the home. So let's join the panel and Dr. Dobson right now.

Dr. James Dobson: In addition to all the other things that it means to have alcoholic parents, chaos must be somewhere near the top of the list. Because it takes a lot of order to run a family right, who's doing the taxes, who's keeping track, who's going to the grocery store, who's running the family? And when you have people checked out a great percentage of the time, there must be total disorder there.

Joe: It takes a lot of creativity to run a family that's in chaos when you're not.

Dr. James Dobson: How's it done?

Joe: Well, typically, I suppose my sister and I ran our family when my parents were checked out, and basically we took care of our younger sisters and we took care of the house, and the cleaning and the cooking and the like, all those things that parents typically do, we did. We didn't do everything ...

Dr. James Dobson: At what age, Joe?

Joe: I can remember cleaning and working around the house, and not just chores, I mean, things that needed to be done daily. At six, seven years old, I was responsible for the cooking from 11 years old on.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And the common wisdom would say that would've made a responsible person out of you because you learned to work early.

Joe: Yeah, absolutely. I really learned how to work and work very hard. What I didn't learn how to do is to work at things that were pleasing to me. I learned how to do things that were hard and tough.

Chris: What my thoughts go to are the responsibilities that especially my sister and I

had that were beyond our ages, beyond our capabilities and the tremendous fear when it didn't turn out, that we did not want to upset mother because then mother would upset dad, then dad would start drinking and then the chaos would just build and build, and that terrible feeling of being responsible. I grew up on the East Coast, and having the clothesline breaks and all the clothes would fall into the dirty snow and it was our fault. Being asked to help in a project and holding onto a piece of wood that was way too big for us and that was going to cause danger. That was going to cause more drinking, more chaos.

Dr. James Dobson: Chris, your father went to MIT, didn't he?

Chris: Yes, he did.

Dr. James Dobson: And so you grew up at a different socioeconomic level than most alcoholic families experience. Is that correct?

Chris: I don't know. I don't believe that's true today. I believe that-

Dr. James Dobson: It's at all levels.

Chris: It's at all levels that alcoholism, like a lot of other diseases, does not play favoritism in terms of any kinds of people.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. It can obviously strike anywhere.

Chris: I believe that alcoholism strikes every family of any culture, race, creed, socioeconomic level. The thing that makes it hard or made it harder for me was there was a family myth. We came from a good family and that both my parents graduated from the top institutions of the United States, and we were the up and coming family in our little community, and that's how we presented ourselves to the outside. And no one knew the horror of what was going on in the inside, and you put that together with not knowing what is normal until later.

Dr. James Dobson: You experienced incest, you told us on the first program, Chris.

Chris: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You want to say any more about that?

Chris: There are so many rape and incest victims from alcoholic drug abuse families,

and I think the tears are for myself as well as for others of the lost childhood. And believing it growing up that something inside you was taken away that will never ever be replaced. And I believe that, that's the reason why I did not know that I was an incest victim until after I came to the Lord because very slowly but very steadily, he's teaching me, it is fixable.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't remember it until then?

Chris: I had no memory at all. The first memory I had was when an outsider raped me at age four because my parents weren't around to keep their eye on me. And because I was raped at age four and outsiders knew, then that broke the family myth, so that made me the scapegoat. And then I thought that I became an incest victim because I already was defiled. I already was dirty. And one of the hardest things for me to deal with, and I put that in the present tense, is that my father molested me and raped me before age four. The devastation of what that does to a man or to a woman, it's just incredible.

Dr. James Dobson: Chris, you've never married-

Chris: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that related, you think?

Chris: It's a hundred percent. It is a desire in my heart to be married. I have always wanted to be married. I've always wanted to have that fantasy family life that I never had. I praise God, I did not get married because I'm in a whole different place than I am now. And I think out of my tremendous brokenness as a child and as an adult, it brought me to the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you hold any bitterness at all against anybody, but especially against God?

Chris: I certainly..., I'm in that process of healing. More than once I would scream out to God, "Why? You say you knew me before you put me into my mother's womb. Why did you put me in that mother's womb?" The answer that God would give me is I put into you what it would take to survive this kind of thing. And I would say, "God, but why?" And he took me to John 9 where the disciples asked Jesus about this blind man, "Why is he blind? Did his parents sin?" "No." "Did he sin?" "No." "Then why is he blind?" And the answer is, "So the glory of the Lord, so that the work of God can be shown through this, so that the healing can be to the glory of God." My first response has been, "What an honor, Lord." And my second response was, "How dare you," and I am in the process...

Dr. James Dobson: And both of those emotions bubble down there someplace.

Chris: ... yes. And I am in the process of trusting God with my anger.

Dr. James Dobson: And Ann, is anger something you've had to deal with too?

Ann: Yes. I mentioned a few years ago having the memories of Christmas, and I was very angry at my dad, angry for not being there for me, not being there to meet my emotional needs or that his own needs were so great that he couldn't possibly fill any needs that my mother and I had. And I worked through that anger and recognize that my response today, I'm responsible for me and my actions, and that I forgave my dad and I can get on with my life with God now.

Dr. James Dobson: Have you forgiven God?

Ann: Yes, I have.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you have to forgive God?

Ann: Yes, I did.

Dr. James Dobson: You were angry at God. Joe, are you angry at God?

Joe: Oh, sure. One of the things that was so difficult for me to turn my life over to God was that I looked at God much in the same way as I looked at my earthly father, and I was fearful. Absolutely fearful and angry, and I didn't know God until I knew God. I knew my father and that metaphor was there, so it was very difficult to trust God.

Dr. James Dobson: Curt, what about yourself?

Dr. Curt Grayson: I agree with you too, Joe, because I feel in my relationship with God, the issue is, as a Christian, I'm supposed to trust my heavenly Father and love him and let him be over my life and be able to rest in his arms. But my experience growing up as a child was there was nobody's arms to rest in. So I know what I struggle with now is I struggle with, how do I trust God and be able to separate out what happened with my earthly family? I'm learning and part of my recovery to trust God and to separate out what happened in my family with my earthly parents and recognize that my heavenly Father loves me and wants me to have healing so much.

Joe: I think something that's real interesting that I found out is that if I give God 1%

of the chance that I gave my earthly parents, he works every time.

Dr. James Dobson: You kept going back to him, didn't you? You needed him even though they failed you.

Ann: Mm-hmm.

Joe: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Is this inability to trust God common to children, adult children of alcoholics?

Chris: I believe so.

Joe: Absolutely.

Chris: I believe it's very strong. I still struggle with Father's Day, and every time that comes once a year, I remind myself, "It is my Father's Day, Abba Father in heaven." And the biggest difficulty I have and I'm working through is my heavenly Father is not inconsistent. My earthly father was horrendously inconsistent, and when my earthly father would give me something nice, I never knew when the rug would be pulled out from under me, and that's how I perceived God. When God would discipline me, when God would purge me, when certain things would happen, I'd immediately go back into that old kind of thinking and say, "God's interested only in what I do and I've done something wrong and he's punishing me, and he's pulled the rug right out from under me." It's been really hard.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't it interesting how we confuse our earthly father with the magnificent God of the universe? It's a very old illustration for me, but when our son, Ryan, was two years of age, he had heard us all say grace many, many times, but he'd never been asked to say grace because he was too young. And I was out of town at the time, and Shirley sat down at the table and just spontaneously turned to Ryan for the first time and said, "Ryan, would you like to pray for your food today?" And it startled him and he looked around, and he had never thought of doing that. And he bowed his head and he said, "I love you, daddy. Amen." He was praying to me because he identified me with God. It scared me to death.

When I came home, Shirley told me this story because I don't want to stand in God's place for him or for Danae. That ain't something I would choose. It's too big a job. I can't represent God adequately. He's perfect. I'm imperfect, but I don't have any choice. The kids put me in that position and you put your parents in God's place too, even the mothers to a lesser degree, but certainly the

fathers, and they let you down. Therefore, it contaminates the relationship with God himself.

Joe: And the disease of alcoholism, Dr. Dobson... And I know because I lived it. When a person becomes alcoholic, they actually think they are a God. So not only does the child naturally place their father, mother or parents in a high position, but that parent who is sick begins to behave and believe themselves that they're God unconsciously, if you will, and sometimes consciously, and it's just crazy. So it isn't all the kids' fault by any means.

Dr. James Dobson: Joe, tell us how you found the Lord. You did not grow up in a home where you were taken to church and so on.

Joe: Well, I grew up in a Catholic environment. We went to church a lot. However, it was more a regimen, and I went to parochial schools and the like. But as far as really knowing God, I didn't.

Dr. James Dobson: You found him through alcoholics anonymous?

Joe: Yes. What happened there was, as I say, I became an alcoholic. And really honestly, the reason why I went to AA, it's not out of some religious zeal or anything like that. It was because it was almost dead. And I knew that, that organization was known to help some people, and they introduced me to a 12 step program, which to encapsulate it, basically is a way to get to know God. And they told me that if I was alcoholic, truly alcoholic, that I had an incurable disease and then unless I got, their experience was unless I got God in my life, I was a goner.

Dr. James Dobson: They call it a higher power and they've been criticized for that, for not calling him Jesus Christ and the Lord of our lives and so on.

Joe: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: But they led you to Jesus-

Joe: Well-

Dr. James Dobson: ... in an indirect way, didn't it?

Joe: ... well, I don't know. I thought about that a lot and I can remember the day I went to AA. I remember getting down on my knees, agnostic me getting down on my knees and saying, "Jesus, please help me." That's the truth. Then I went

there and got a little well and then I said, "I don't need this Jesus stuff." And finally there came a day when all of the AA program, the AA meetings, the steps, the sponsorship, all of that program I had done to the best of my ability and I was going crazy. I wanted to drink again or commit suicide, quite frankly. The pain was that intense. At that point in time having been exposed to the solution, which is God, I turned it over and it was over.

Dr. James Dobson: Chris, you found the Lord through your misery too. Tell us how.

Chris: That's right. Out of my sickness, I crawled, emotionally crawled into AA. I had no belief in God. And as I mentioned before, I said, "How do you not drink?" And they said, "You come to these meetings and you say these words, please God keep me sober." And that's exactly what I did. Like a parrot I said, "Please God, keep me sober." That's the only two things I had done differently. And then a few years later, in the 11th step of a 12 step program, it says, "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve your conscious contact with God as you understand him," and I started seeking God, what was my idea of God? And I thought I was being very unique. And my favorite prayer was, "God, give me the eyes to see and the ears to hear who you are." Well, later when I came to the Lord and found those exact words in the Bible and realized that the Holy Spirit had given me those words, those weren't my words. I mean, you know...

Dr. James Dobson: He was reaching for you.

Chris: Now, I look at and I go to the 12 step programs. I go to AA and I go to ACA. And if people come up and say, "Chris, we like what you have spiritually," then I look at that as a point in terms of being an ambassador of Christ. If they say, "Who is your higher power?" I can say, "The Lord Jesus."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we need to talk to all of those people out there in the listening audience who have not found that healing yet. Is the Lord available for them? Does he care as he did for you, Joe? Does he care for other people?

Joe: Of course. And I have a message for maybe some people out there that have quit drinking yet haven't got into those emotional issues. There is healing available and don't sit around and hurt. God doesn't want that, and there is help. And I know it takes some courage, but take God with you and go for it because it'll work.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you recommend to those who can't find such a supportive group?

Dr. Curt Grayson: Well, first of all, I think the very thing that we're doing here in the studio today is

simply talking and sharing our stories. And I find there's a very healing part of just sharing your story and having somebody accept you and acknowledge that what you went through was true. So if you can find anybody else that's an adult child of an alcoholic, maybe talk to your church. Maybe your church could possibly start a support group and hopefully we'd like to see that happen.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's a worthy objective because there are millions of people who need it.

Dr. Curt Grayson: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: If it cannot be found in a group situation, some people may have to look for individual counseling-

Ann: Right.

Dr. Curt Grayson: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: ... if the symptoms are severe enough.

Dr. Curt Grayson: That's right.

Chris: What I was just thinking of is the person who feels very alone and has symptoms and wants to work but is not close to any support group, but if there is just even one person on the same sex that you can talk to about your past and have that person the love of the Lord shine through that person on discipling and leading and that kind of thing, healing can happen that way also.

Dr. James Dobson: Sharing one another's burden.

Dr. Curt Grayson: Amen.

Chris: We ACAs have never been parented, and we need to see the parenting of those people who are mature Christians. And that's why with someone like me who's known the Lord for seven years, that those of you who've known the Lord and grown up and are stable Christians, that's what you have to give to us.

Ann: One of the valuable things of a group though is that some people can't talk yet. It's too painful. They can't share their experience, but in going to a group and hearing others share, you begin to get little glimpses of yourself. You begin to identify and say, "That's me. I had that feeling too," and you begin to be able to identify your own feelings, which you've suppressed so long, so I found the group very helpful to me.

And Curt, while ideally having that Christian support group is our first choice. I'm sure there's people out there that live in areas that they will not find that. But Al-Anon, AA, ACA, I believe is all across the country. And while you may have an experience such as I did of going to a meeting and feeling that this isn't for you, don't give up. It's just like going to a church and coming away feeling, "Well, that didn't quite hit the mark." You go to another church until you feel that love and warmth and welcome. And so I would encourage people to visit other meetings, ask around, ask for recommendations of where people have attended and find recovery themselves.

Dr. Curt Grayson: Yeah. That's a good point. They say it takes about six meetings in a row to come out of denial and to really recognize what's happened to you. So oftentimes they'll find people come and they get nothing out of it the first two or three times and then the third time, bam, it'll hit and the whole picture becomes clear to them. And the other-

Dr. James Dobson: All the emotion floods right out the eyes, doesn't it?

Dr. Curt Grayson: ... that's right. And the other thing I was going to say too, I think it's a good idea. There's a lot of secular ACA groups around, and maybe what you might want to do is to go to one of those groups, and I'm willing to bet there's one or two other Christians there-

Chris: Yes.

Dr. Curt Grayson: ... that might be interested in starting a group.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I thank you all for sharing your wisdom, your knowledge, your emotions, yourselves with us these last three days. This has been very meaningful. I know we'll get a lot of mail from people who are experiencing what you all have experienced. Is there a certain fraternity, a certain camaraderie between those of you who have been through this same thing?

Chris: Uh huh

Dr. James Dobson: Do you feel a oneness with all those hurting people out there who as five year olds and six, and seven year olds saw the drunken father come through the door and saw the fights, the violence and the vile language and all the rest of it? Do you feel a oneness with all those people?

Dr. Curt Grayson: I really wish that we could have everybody who's listening to the broadcast for

the last three days, I wish we could have had them in here so we could be with them as they cried as they felt. Because what helps us is to be with each other and to go through what we go through and know that we care.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we'll hear from them. And Curt, we're going to send all the mail to you. Thank you everybody. We love you in the Lord.

Dr. Curt Grayson: Thank you.

Ann: Thank you.

Chris: Thank you.

Joe: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, I hope that you found the conversation over the past three days to be encouraging and, perhaps, you can even pass it on to someone who is dealing with or suffering from the residual of a childhood brought up with the chaos of alcoholism. Now, if you'd like to hear the complete three-part hour long discussion in its entirety, or if you'd like to review any part you might've missed over the past couple of days, visit our website to listen again. Just go to dr.jamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's dr.jamesdobson.org/familytalk. If you or someone you know or love is suffering from the throes of alcoholism, please know that help is available. Professional Christian therapists are available to support you with mental, physical and biblically rooted counsel.

To begin that process, we recommend you visit the website for the American Association of Christian Counselors, www.connect.aacc.net. That's connect.aacc.net. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. Please know how much we covet your prayers for the Dobson Family Institute, and thanks for your financial support. We're able to keep growing and going strong. By the way, if you'd like to make a donation to support our ministry, all you have to do is go to dr.jamesdobson.org to find out more. Thanks for tuning in today to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. We'll talk to you again next time.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone. This is James Dobson, inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around

your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?