



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Awake and Alive: Finding Truth in the Chaos of Today's Culture – Part 1

Guest(s): John Cooper

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome in to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of the broadcast. I'm honored to serve alongside Dr. Dobson as resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDPI. Hey, thank you for joining us today. We're here at the annual NRB. NRB is the largest national and international event that's dedicated to help those in the field of Christian communications. This dynamic expo consists of dozens of organizations. It's an active marketplace for those seeking products, ideas, information, services to enhance their own organization, and we love being a part of it.

Our guest today on the program is John Cooper. He's the co-founder and lead vocalist, bassist for Skillet, one of the best-selling rock bands, Christian rock bands of the 21st century. You may know their songs, "Hero," "Anchor," "Stars," "Victorious," or maybe "Monster." John is also the author of *Awake & Alive to Truth: Finding Truth in the Chaos of a Relativistic World*. That's what we're going to be talking a lot about today. He's married to Korey, who's also part of the band Skillet. John and Korey have two children, Alexandria and Xavier. They make their home in Tennessee. John, what is delight to have you join us here on Family Talk. This is going to be fun. I'm excited.

John Cooper: It's always fun. I already came in a weird mood. I was making tons of dumb jokes, getting everybody, and who knows what we're going to say on this program, but it's great to be here. I feel like my dad will be super happy when I say I was on the Dr. Dobson program. Then my dad will be like, "Oh, I finally understand what you do, son. I finally support you."

Dr. Tim Clinton: I've read a little bit about you. I'm looking back at that ADHD and stuff and things like that, but hey, that's all fun.

John Cooper: Yeah, that's great.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, let's step back for a moment. What a storied career. Christian rock and roll band. You know, back in the day, pretty rebellious. Talking about rock and roll, people were burning albums back in the day. You know what I'm talking about.

John Cooper: Sure.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You step into this world and in the midst of it, as I was reading about you, rebels really in this sense, now positive rebellion, trying to challenge people to go in a different direction. Just take us back. Where'd this come from? What's at the heart of who you are?

John Cooper: Sure. Heart of who I am. Let's see. I got passionate for Jesus as a young person. I think I need to rewind even more. My mom was a fanatical Jesus follower. I mean, my mom was a serious Jesus follower.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I read that story. I mean all the way back to when you were five.

John Cooper: I was a kid. I mean, I don't remember a time when I was not at Bible study at the breakfast table. I just don't remember that time. That was my mom's mission and it worked. I gave my life to Christ when I was five years old. I never, really never in my life have I ever doubted that God was real, that Jesus was the Son of God, His death, resurrection. I don't remember ever doubting that since the time that I remember praying to ask Christ to come into my life and forgive me for my sins. My passion for God really increased in college. I went to college and all of a sudden you're in a different world.

Now I will say I lived a sheltered life. My parents were a little bit more like, "Hey, you're not going to learn about evolution. You're not going to learn about A, B, C, and D." Those are things we don't want to know, so when I hit college, it was a little, I was unprepared. I was unprepared for the sexuality, unprepared with arguments for why I believe what I believe. Those things were challenged very quickly and I became a very serious follower of Christ during that time. I began to love the Bible. I began to understand the Bible maybe for the first time really on my own, and I began to love it. I just said, "You know what? I want my life to be about Christ. I want people to know what I know," because my mom died when I was 15. Sorry, I accidentally skipped that, but she passed away after three years of battling cancer. It was horrible, and we won't get into that right now.

I began to know Jesus not just as a savior but as a friend. I began to know God as the God who is there, the God who sees, which is an absolutely incredible truth of scripture, that God sees me, he knows me, he knows my name, and he is Emmanuel. He is God with me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I want to stay with that just for a moment because if you go back and you think about this. When you got saved, I'm going to add a little piece to this that you can highlight for us. You talked about him becoming your boss as a little

boy. That meant something to you, that you saw him in a unique way. Your mother, again, you talked about her just pouring into your life. She was at the heart of your life.

John Cooper: Oh yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I mean, mom was everything, and so when you talk about losing your mom as a boy, that doesn't even make sense. You're what, 15 years old?

John Cooper: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're trying to reconcile this. In this journey, something starts going deep into your heart, and I think those are the seeds that spring forth the life of what we're really going to talk about becoming alive and awake to truth.

John Cooper: I'm so glad you mentioned that. I just skipped over a ton of stuff that really matters, and you're right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's how I, when you walked in the room, my mind was there. I saw a kid who grew up, who anchored himself and did business with God early on.

John Cooper: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's what was the foundation. People need to hear that because mom and dad, they need to hear that. Sometimes they feel like their kids are pushing back against them. They're not listening to them. They don't hear it. They're wrestling. They're scared to death about losing their kids. This is critical.

John Cooper: What a great point. It's really the most important thing I can think of. People say, "John, what can we do with the culture? The culture's getting crazy." The number one thing we can do is have Christian parents train their children in the Word of God. There's nothing more important, and that's what my mom did. For me, it was memorizing Scripture. She would explain Scripture. She would explain daily life things, and that might sound silly, but I think a lot of parents don't know how to do that. You learn to tie your shoes. Why does it work to tie your shoes? Why does this bow actually work and why would I do that? My mom would teach me things like, this is the way that God created the world. He created the world to work in a certain way, and when you obey his principles, your shoes don't fall off.

She would explain things like that to me that just absolutely made sense. I understood God as my boss, and that was my language as a kid, and it's probably because it was my mom's language. He's the boss of me. You're not just acknowledging, you're not just acknowledging ...

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're not the boss of me.

John Cooper: He is. You're not just acknowledging that there is a God who exists that created a world. You're saying, I acknowledge that, but I also say that he's the boss because if he took the time to create the world with purpose, then that means my purpose is found in obeying Him. That's who I am. That's what I do. That's why we're here, so He's the boss. What He says goes. That was my understanding of that as a kid. My mom would explain that to me, why I need to say that I'm sorry to the Lord. I don't know if she used the word repent or ask forgiveness. Why do you say to the Lord you're sorry? It's like when you do stuff to your older brother. When you disobey me and you know that you shouldn't have done it, but you did it anyway, those are the things you say you're sorry to God about.

She did a fantastic job teaching me about God the boss, Jesus, my savior, and I'm sure she taught me about Jesus being my friend. It's just that that did not become real to me, that part, the latter part, until all of a sudden my mom, she does as, she doesn't even look like my mom anymore. She's 93 pounds, lost her hair. She's shriveled down. She just looks like a skeleton version of the woman that I knew. I can't quite remember what she used to look like when she was a person. It was horrible. It was just a terrible, is a terrible thing to have to go through to see someone suffer. Yet in that suffering, my mom would say, "John, you do know that if I am not healed, you cannot be mad at God." This is where I'm going to get emotional. I would say, "I can't get mad at God. Why? She said, "Because everything God does is good. Everything he does is right. All things work together for the good of those who love Christ according to His purposes. Whatever happens, it's a win-win." That stuck with me my whole life because it's such bravery and such courage and absolutely incredible.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here's what's so beautiful there. You believed her.

John Cooper: I did believe her. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You wrestled with it, but deep down inside you wanted to hold onto that.

John Cooper: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember my dad in his final moments looking me in the eyes and saying, "Tim, it's because of Him I'll see you again."

John Cooper: Come on now.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. He looked at me and said, "I promise you if you serve Him, He'll bless you. Tim, hold onto that." He looked at me, John, I remember this too. "Tim, my ministry started with my family and it ended with my family. Hear me." I can see that wiring up here, so for me, there was a connection of like, wow, so let's journey forward. As you begin to deal with life and you've got all these situations coming, college, like you said, professors, women, all kinds of things coming at you. There's just something going on. People would say that's the

spirit of God alive in your life and He's working and He's challenging and pushing. Enter then the music world and everything that starts going. Take us into that world.

John Cooper: Man. Well, another piece of this that I should mention is my mom was a piano teacher and a voice teacher and a flute teacher. I never played the flute, but I do play piano. It was just a rule. All of the boys, me and my two brothers, we have to play piano.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I got forced to do a little of that. But I didn't do a very good job.

John Cooper: No ifs, ands, and buts. You're going to play that piano, son.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember those days.

John Cooper: My house was full of opera. My mom's singing opera, piano, my mom's singing hymns, teaching me to sing, teaching me to play the piano, so music was absolutely a part of my life. As I started listening to, loving rock music, my mom was dismayed. I shouldn't take that part out of the story because I think it's pertinent for a lot of parents who are little dismayed about what their kids are listening to. I just could not wrap my head around the idea that God created music, but there was a certain kind of music that was inherently evil. That was my one major fight with my mom and my dad. I was like, "I don't know, so rock music is evil. Why?" I understand the lyrics are bad, but why can't we just make the lyrics good? I just couldn't understand it because I'm like, "but you're the one that told me that the devil doesn't create anything. He twists things, so doesn't music belong to God?"

I didn't know anything about theology, but now that I'm older, that's a pretty good theological argument. The devil doesn't create, he twists stuff. We need to take it back from the devil and put it under the lordship of Christ where art belongs. That was a big struggle of mine. When I heard of Christian music, I was excited. You know what I mean? I'm like, okay, Petra. You know what I mean? Michael W. Smith. I'm like, well, they're doing what I think they should be doing. It was a big argument. After my mom passed away, I was 15, at that point, I could do what I wanted to do, I guess you would say. She wasn't there to tell me no and this and that and the other. My dad wasn't theologically upset with rock music. He just thought it was stupid. It was just like a dream. Why would you care about music? That's a dumb dream and I can understand that.

All that to say, when I graduated high school, I just believed in my heart that God was calling me to make music for His name. I just believed that. I couldn't shake that for several years. Could not shake that I think that that's what he wants me to do. I know that my mom wouldn't have liked it or maybe not understood it, but I just feel like this is what is in me. I prayed about it for a long time, and that's how we started doing music.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk at division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host. Our special guest today, John Cooper, lead vocalist, bassist, songwriter, producer for Skillet, one of the best-selling rock bands of the 21st century. Two-time Grammy Award nominated, 12 times, platinum band, took home a Billboard Music Award and more, stunning, really. John, as we step back here and I think about all that and what God did, some of it goes back to there's this piece in here, people have got to hear this, went back to I think 2011 and a conversation where you got pushed about your faith, Christ and what you were doing. John, hey, you've got, here it is. The world's before you. Go have all you want. It's like Jesus in the great temptation in some sense here, just for a moment. Go to what happened in that moment because that sets us up for what you're doing in terms of being awake and alive to truth.

John Cooper: We started the band in '96, that's when the first album comes out. We were in the Christian market, but when I signed with this indie label, they had a Christian division and a mainstream division. I said, "Hey, I don't want to only be a Christian band. I want to sing Christian music in the mainstream world." They said, "Well, we have both. We're going to do both." We released on the Christian market, and the plan was six months later to release on the mainstream side. Within that six months, their mainstream side just went away. They said, "No, we don't have any the money. We're canceling all the bands." They just shut it down. I was like, "Okay. I mean, I'm fine doing Christian music, but I always wanted to be in the rock world." Then people kept saying, "You just can't. Nobody's going to sign you because you're too, you're too jesusy. You talk about Jesus too much."

The idea was that maybe we'd, throughout the years, '96 to 2001, we were talking to labels, talking to secular labels. They said, "Look, we can sign you, but you can't talk about Jesus so much. You know what I mean? Just play the music, let the song speak for themselves." I said, "No, I can't do that." Long story short, we did get signed in 2003. We signed to Atlantic Records, which we're still signed to, the mainstream label. Around 2009, Skillet finally started making it as a mainstream artist. All of a sudden we were actually selling, we were doing 75% of our business in the secular music world, not the Christian music world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's unreal.

John Cooper: I never truncated my message. I've always talked about Jesus. 2011, we were on a tour and we were just beginning to get really known. We were on this tour, it was after the show, we were the first band. There was three bands after us, all multi-platinum acts. It was a massive tour, 10, 15,000 people a night. We were the first band of the night, and we were fairly successful at that time. They invited me to the after party to go bowling. I was like, "Oh, sure, I'll go to the after party." It was this gig where there's all the king makers. You had promoters, radio folks, celebrities had shown up. None of them know who I am and I should go. I'm going bowling, which at that time my kids were young and they were on the road with me, so I never stayed up past 12 because my kids were up at 6:00 AM.

I was like, I'm going to stay up late and do it so I can schmooze and the whole thing. This guy comes in, a very important guy, and he says, "Hey John." I didn't know he knew my name. I said, "Hey." He said, "Hey, can we talk?" I was floored. This guy knows whose Skillet is. He even knows my personal name. He knows my name John. Whoa. He pulls me aside. He says, "John." He says, "I want to tell you something because nobody else is." He said, "I believe you could be the biggest band in the world, the next biggest rock band at the time." He said, "I think you could be the next Nickelback, but you've got to strike while the iron is hot."

I said, "Okay, thanks so much." He's like, "Do you hear me?" I said, "Yeah." I didn't really know what he meant, but I thought it was cool. He's like, "I don't know if you really know what I mean." I said, "Well, I think I do. I don't know what." He goes, "All right, I'm just going to," he'd been drinking so he was feeling a little free. He is like, "I'm just going to say it like it is because no one else is going to tell you, brother. You could be the biggest band in the world, but you've got to stop talking about Jesus. Don't do Christian events. Don't do Christian interviews. You just need to be like Bono." That's what he said from U2. In other words, that's what he said to me. He goes, "Everybody likes Bono."

What he meant was, "Do good for the world. Do social justice. Raise money for the poor. Stop talking about Jesus and that's all you got to do." He said, "John, imagine what you could do for your God in years to come. If you stop talking about Him now, you get rich and famous. Imagine the money you could give to the poor." He is saying these things, and I was listening, thinking, well, this doesn't sound right, but that is kinda true. He's like, "These things are coming in your mind." Long story short, I went back to the bus that night. I told my wife about it. We prayed about it, and it was just almost like, "Hey, we're going to pray about this." 30 seconds later everybody's like, "Yeah, that's not what God is saying. That's not what God wants us to do."

That would absolutely be such a compromise from what my whole life's mission has been about. The Word of God was brought back to my memory, "If you confess me before men, I'll confess you before my father. If you don't confess to me before men," that doesn't end well. It just comes back to me. I said, "You know what? Not only am I not going to take this advice, I am going to talk about Jesus all the more because if this is what the devil wants me to do, then you know what? It's time to go to war." We're going to war, Jesus time. It's gospel time. Come on now.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

John, you have. You've made a statement. When you look at the industry, when you think of rock and roll, I go back to my days growing up as a kid. I remember we had a cabin and they were buying every album it could back in the day. We were listening to BTO, Alice Cooper, all this kind of crazy stuff. I remember there was that Cooper song, "Go to Hell," was playing and convicted in my own spirit. I remember leaving the building that night and going back up to my home. My dad was a pastor. Would you believe, that cabin, I mean we built a cabin with

multiple rooms everywhere. We had everything, everything in it. It was called the Blue. Burnt to the ground that night.

John Cooper: Oh wow.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I will never forget it. It put a stake in the ground for me as a kid about dabbling. They had Ouija boards down there, all kinds of stuff. It was like God ringing something up in my spirit and saying, "Listen, hear me." John, we're coming to the end of day one here, and fascinating conversation about you, but you went counterculture. You became rebellious in what people saw as a rebellious industry. John, it was all about truth. We're going to talk about that on the broadcast tomorrow and more. Bow tie this for us. What does it mean to anchor ourselves in truth and to really follow after Jesus? You've made a statement. You've sent a statement to the rock and roll community about who you are and what you believe.

John Cooper: I think the statement that I want to make is that there is a truth. There's only one truth, so there aren't lots of truths and there aren't your truth and my truth and a version of a truth, and a truth that all women have in common, and a truth that all fill in the gap with whatever identity group truth, it's getting muddled. It has turned us into a relativistic mess to where basically, hey, something works for me then that's my truth, and that's just the way it is. That is going to lead us into absolute moral chaos, and it has done so. What I want people to know is that there is a peace, there is something you can put your feet on that is solid ground. That is not going to change and that is not going to, well, it worked yesterday, but not really working so much for me today, so today, maybe I'll try some of that.

I tried the Ouija board yesterday. Maybe I'll try the health diet today. Maybe I'll try the so-and-so. We're trying all these various different things, trying to find solid ground, but the truth is just so simple. If you root yourself into the word of God, you will be unshakable. Not because you are unshakable, because Christ is unshakable. I believe it is the peace that people are looking for. These poor young people growing up in this, the world they're growing up with, it's so evil, and I feel so sad for these young people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So much bondage.

John Cooper: Oh, it's heartbreaking to hear the things they're going through. I would be a mess if I was a kid growing up with this, without my mom. I'd be a total mess. The truth is that Jesus offers a way out of this mess and it is so much better than what the world has to offer if people just knew it. It would be like finding the gold at the end of the rainbow. You would sell your life, you would give everything in your life for this kind of peace. That's what I want people to know and that's why I've become so outspoken.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, you've written a book called *Awake & Alive to Truth*. Tomorrow we're going to talk a lot more about what that means. That's where we're at. In the end, here's what Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth and the truth will ..." What?

John Cooper: Set you free.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It'll set you free. That's what we hold onto. What a delightful conversation. John, thank you so much for taking time. Can't wait to jump to our conversation tomorrow. Thank you for joining us.

John Cooper: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, that was John Cooper from the Christian rock band, Skillet, along with our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk. Friend, if you enjoyed hearing personal stories from John, be sure to tune in again tomorrow and you'll hear about his life on the road with his family and some inspiring moments that impact his music as well. You will not want to miss it, and you'll hear it right here only on Family Talk.

Now, as you may know, we are a truly listener supported ministry and last month during the month of June, we had a matching grant in place of \$300,000. We asked you to partner with us to fight for families, children, and pre-born babies everywhere. I'm excited to announce that your response was indeed mighty. Here at the Dr. Dobson Family Institute, we want to thank you because we met our match. Thanks to you, we are able to create more programs and materials for moms and dads and people everywhere. Also, over the next few weeks, you're going to be hearing about how you can get involved and come alongside us to support expecting parents, young families, and new mothers in need, so make sure you listen each and every day to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope today's program has inspired you to stand firmly in your faith. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

Roger Marsh: Hey everyone, Roger Marsh here for Family Talk. Where can you go to receive support and advice for you and your family? Family Talk interacts with millions of people every day with inspiring advice and tips from Dr. James Dobson on what matters to you the most. Whether it's marriage or parenting, you can be sure our Facebook page will keep you updated with how your family can succeed. Join us each day for the latest broadcast, resources and inspiration. Nowhere else can you hear a thought of the day from Dr. Dobson, as well as a special message before you say goodnight. Now you can be sure that every post on our page is created with you and your family in mind, so please take the time to visit us and become part of our online community at

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