



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Running to Win

**Guest(s):** Mark Anderson

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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.

**Roger Marsh:** Greetings and welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. Hebrews 12:1 and 2 instructs us to "throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." Our guest today here on Family Talk might understand that directive better than most. His name is Mark Anderson. He's a former decathlete who was twice named the number one decathlete in the US. He was also the American hopeful for gold in the decathlon going into the 1984 Olympic trials. Despite his success and fame, though, Mark was broken on the inside, and today he's going to share his powerful testimony of God's love and redeeming power.

Mark Anderson is recognized internationally as a dynamic motivational speaker, an inspiring communicator. He's married to Susan and they have one daughter, Shae Anderson. Shae, by the way, is also an outstanding track and field athlete. She's following in her dad's footsteps by attending and competing for UCLA, and just this year, she represented the United States at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as an alternate for the women's 4x400 meter relay. Here now is Mark Anderson on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

**Mark Anderson:** 33 years ago, I was born, a little miracle baby. My mother was being rushed to the hospital and they did emergency surgery on her and they cut her open. They pulled out a six-pound tumor and underneath that was me, at two pounds, two ounces. They didn't even know that I was under there. The doctors only gave three minutes to live, then they three months, then they gave three years and they said I'd never be a normal kid. So, my mother and my father, for some years, lived in fear that this kid would never make it. He'd never be a normal kid.

My mom and dad had never been churchgoers. They didn't know of the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal relationship. They knew of God. My father had many, many struggles, and so did my mother, in their earlier days of their lives. And my father, when I was five years old, was so confused in life that he decided life

wasn't worth it, and when I was five years old, my father committed suicide. And I don't know how many of you here today have had a loss in your life of that magnitude, a lost loved one, a mother, father, son, daughter, but at five years old, I couldn't understand that. I didn't realize why that had to be, and I became very, very confused in life.

My mother and father, again, did not have any knowledge of God nor the Word, and my mother did the best she could. She was a loving lady. She loved her kids with everything she had, but my mother really didn't have a lot of direction as far as the Word of God. She didn't have any, as a matter of fact, and she decided that she would remarry, really, basically out of desperation rather than really knowing the man. And my family and I grew up with a stepfather for the next 11 years that was abusive, physically and emotionally.

My life was a life of torment, and I was a kid that became very, very fearful, withdrawn. I went and hid in the corner because I didn't know what to do in life, and I was told I couldn't, wouldn't, and shouldn't my whole life. And I didn't have the things of a child. I wasn't allowed to have normal things like a bicycle and a baseball and a football. Those things were nonexistent in my life. I became very, very confused and angry and mad, you see, and I was mad at my dad for taking his life. I became mad because, you see, I didn't deserve this. I was five or six years old. I didn't deserve this way of life. I wasn't a bad kid. But my life was so tormenting and so miserable, by the time I was 13 years old, that I also tried to kill myself. And on a number of occasions, I wanted to take my life, and because of the grace and mercy of God, I'm alive.

I want to enhance and I want to really compel you today to look to the grace and mercy of God for your situation. His mercy endures forever. There is nothing impossible for God. There is nothing impossible for the Lord Jesus Christ. There's no affliction, there's no infirmity, that God cannot take care of here today. The only thing He can't take care of is that that we won't give Him. And you're going to hear a story of a man that wouldn't give it up, a boy who wouldn't give it up, and tried to do it on his own.

I didn't know I was ignorant. I didn't know anything about church or God. I wasn't brought up in that environment, and I was just one who was just caught up in the world system. When I was a freshman in high school, I now was in a peer group pressure of people who accepted those who had a good outward appearance, but I didn't have that. You see, I was a freshman in high school and I was five foot tall and I weighed 58 pounds, and my nicknames were Stickman, Sliver, and Zipper.

Those kids didn't realize what they were doing. I share now in schools. I go to high schools. I was in a high school this last week, Grant High School in the local area, and oh, man, I loved it. I love going out and sharing with these kids. I love going and encouraging them. I was the discouraged, and I share this all the time. These kids were the ones that were literally pounding nails in the coffin. They didn't even realize it. See, we have enough discouragement out there in this

world to go around this world two times over. And if I can compel you to be anything today, it would be to be an encourager.

I was not the physical makeup of a great athlete. I pursued athletics, but I was unsuccessful, and I started to believe I would never become anything. Well, I sold out to drugs and alcohol by the time I was 15 years old, because that happened to be the group of kids that was where I was, and they were confused and they were hurting and they were the ones that received me and accepted me for who I was. But they were just as gone in the mind as I was, and we proceeded to drink away our problems.

But something very interesting happened. When I was 16 years old, there was a man of God that was sent in my life. I didn't know this and he didn't know this, but there was a Christian man who was a track and field coach. And that track of field coach didn't come up to me and talk about Jesus. He just came up and he talked with me about track and field. He says, "Hey, come on. Hey, come on out for the team." What he was saying in essence was, "I believe in you. Come on, join the team, come on. Here's something positive in life."

That one man stood in the gap for me for the next 10 years. That one man knew Mark very well, that confusion, bitterness, hatred, anger, and all that stuff that had riled me up in my flesh, within my body that I was living in, he knew. I went on to have fair success as a high jumper in high school. At the age of 17, I had made a decision in my life that if my stepfather had abused me one more time, I was literally ready to kill and I'd become a violent kid and a rebellious kid. And I had premeditated this, but somehow, some way, God in His grace and mercy allowed me to leave that home situation. I lived on my own. I left and I lived in a car for a period of three weeks. I took a shower in the locker rooms. And the way for me to survive was to become a drug dealer, so by the time I was 17 years old, I'm now a drug dealer, abusing alcohol and drugs, and I'm in track and field.

But you see, the glory of God touched my life in that track and field setting, and the man of God brought it in and he didn't even tell me about it. He didn't even know it himself, but he brought it in. And God was giving me a window of opportunity and a way of escape. The Word of God says, "There will be no temptation that will overtake you except that which is common to man. But God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape." God had brought me a way of escape.

I went on to junior college. I got bored with track and field. I told the coach I was going to quit, and he says, "Well, why don't you try decathlon?" So I did, and I was miserable. At my first decathlon, I think I took last place, and I certainly wasn't somebody who was going to become a great decathlete. I'd grown from 5', 58 pounds, to 5'9", 114 pounds as a senior in high school. Phew. Whopping athlete, huh? I went from 5'9", 114 to 6'1", 150 in a period of four months at junior college. But still, 6'1", 150 is pretty thin.

And I tried decathlon and I was pitiful. I went to my home and I was selling drugs to one of my old high school buddies who happened to be the great football star and basketball star, and I told him I was going to become a decathlete, and you know what he did? He laughed at me like everybody did my whole life, and this was my buddy. I don't know how many people have told you that you couldn't, or you wouldn't, or you shouldn't, but God says "You can." God says "You will." Through Him, you will.

And He wants to birth in you today dreams. He wants to birth in you today a vision. God wants to use His people. He doesn't need a great athlete. He doesn't need a great man. He needs a yielded vessel. He never did extraordinary things through extraordinary people. He did extraordinary things through ordinary people, and that's who we are. And the day that we become extraordinary people is the day that He's going to bring us to our knees, like He did me, so I could be an ordinary person.

Well, I went on to have great success as a junior college athlete, and within six months I had the fastest progression of any decathlete in the history of the sport. I went from a nothing, nobody, to the number one guy in the nation within six months. I was then offered a scholarship to any college in the nation, and I chose UCLA because they happened to offer me the most. And I met an alumni guy that put me up in a high-rise condominium, right on Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica, overlooking the ocean. A \$4,000 a month pad was given to me free of charge.

I then took my money that I made in the drugs and I parlayed that into cash and capital and I bought a brand-new Corvette. And I went off to UCLA a starving student with some \$80,000 in the bank, driving a brand-new Corvette, living in a high-rise condo, \$4,000 a month. Big difference from a drug abuser/drug dealer, living in a Volkswagen. In six months. That's amazing, isn't it?

Think you'd appreciate it? I didn't. You see, I was so mad and so angry at everything that I wanted to succeed, that I would prove to people who I was, and I began to become a person that was self-centered, self-seeking, egotistical and prideful. And now I was written up in the magazines as the star, and I won the NCAA championships my first year and went on to become the US decathlon champion. I didn't lose another decathlon since the very first one I had done. Everything I did turned into something. God was blessing my life in a way that I didn't realize it.

And then what happened is the enemy came in, and as he took our Lord up to the mountain and said, "Worship me, and you can have all this," He came back and said, "Wait a minute here. It's written, it's written, it's written," but Mark didn't know it was written because he was ignorant to the truth, and he said, "All right, that's good. Oh, that looks so good. Yeah. That's what I need to make me happy. That'll take all the pain away," and I just took it all, and it became everything for me, me, me.

After my UCLA days, I was preparing for the '84 Olympic games in my hometown, Los Angeles. I was predicted to be the next Bruce Jenner. I hated that because I was blonde-haired and he was brown-haired, and he made 10 million and I had planned on making 20 million. So I said, "Quit calling me the next Bruce Jenner because I'm the new Mark Anderson." I was a legend in my own mind.

The man of God and I got back together after I finished UCLA. The Lord led us back together. We didn't even know it. And I asked him if he would coach me for the '84 Olympic games. He says, "I'll talk to my family." Little did I know he was going to go and pray with his family, and his family was going to say "Yes." Very key thing that he prayed because he was directed by God to do it, and he was going to need that, because if he did it in the flesh, it was never going to work. He had to be led by the Spirit to do this or it never would've happened. But he coached me for the next year and a half, taking a leave of absence from school without pay. He lived on his life insurance money and on his savings for the next year and a half of his life.

I didn't pay him one penny for his time, and he came as a servant on his knees, and this man of pride and ego and self-centeredness chewed him up and spit him out every day he was with me. I didn't even look to his help. I just wanted everything for me. There was days when I was out signing the contract that that man would be coming and waiting on that stadium and waiting for me to show up for a six-hour workout and I would never show up, and he'd be waiting there the whole time. I'd never apologize. I would just say, "Hey, that's the way it is." He coached me and trained me to become best in the United States of America preparing for the '84 Olympic games.

We had to go to the Olympic trials to qualify for the games. I had not been beaten now for five years. I was in the best condition of my life. I trained for five years, six to seven hours a day, and was unbeaten. Coach was faithful. Mark was unfaithful. But we still were ready. Prepared for the '84 trials, show up, and I'll never forget what happened to me. Hundred meters is the first event in the decathlon. I had never lost a hundred meters race in my decathlon career, and I was unbeaten. And when the gun went off, I was there and I went backwards, and they beat me and I lost by some 15 meters.

I ran the worst hundred meters race of my life, even from the first decathlon I had ever done. And I can only explain it this way. Whatever was going on in my body was uncontrollable, and it's like somebody put a 15-pound army vest on me, 20-pound army boots on me, and given me an injection of embalming fluid and said "Run." And I couldn't do it.

You ever have a dream where you're either falling or something's going on, it's like forever, and it's like you're falling in the air or you're trying to get somewhere, you're running away and you can't do it? It was like a dream, but it was happening in reality for me. And I'm running as fast as I could, but I can't move. I just couldn't move. And I'm saying, "What's going on with my body?"

Normally in a hundred meters race, you're done and you're finished before you know it. But in this particular time, I can see everybody to the left, everybody to the right, everybody behind me, and everybody in front of me. Instead of the crowd going "Yeah, yeah," they were going, "Ooh, ah, ooh, ah."

Roger Marsh:

That was the voice of former decathlete and Olympic hopeful, Mark Anderson, on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and Mark was just describing his performance at the 1984 track and field Olympic trials. Mark was the US hopeful to win gold in the decathlon that year, and as you heard though, things weren't going as he had planned. Now, Mark had a very hard childhood. His dad committed suicide when he was just five years old. His mother remarried, and Mark's stepdad abused him regularly. It seemed like a hopeless situation for this small, angry kid. Track and field became his life, and his Christian coach from high school coached Mark as he prepared for the Olympic games. By the way, if you've missed any of today's broadcast, you can listen to the full program online at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Here now, once again, is Mark Anderson to conclude his story of desperation, and eventually hope, right here on Family Talk.

Mark Anderson:

Yeah, for that first day of competition, I had five personal worst events, worse than the first decathlon I'd ever done at 150 pounds. But now I was 200 pounds, 6'3", and in the best condition of my life. I had trained for five years. Explain that one.

I'll tell you what it was. It was the Spirit of God coming into the situation. I fell on my face. I was embarrassed in front of the whole crowd. We were driving home from the competition that day, and this man of God ... Oh, I love this brother so much. This man, again, had never shared Jesus with me to this point. He had just lived it. You can't deny it when somebody lives it.

And you know what? Every time I saw him working out and stuff, I used to see this man, and he was like, he was happy. You know, he had something I didn't have. And he would get to that practice. He'd have a skip in his step. What is it with this guy? I have everything. He's got nothing, but this guy's happy, and I'm miserable. He displayed that, and it was a reality that I saw day after day after day after day in my life. I couldn't deny it. The glory of God was near me every day. But the man also was obedient to pray. The man was also obedient to continue. And we were driving home from the Coliseum and here he was just like he always was, even in the midst of the trial, the defeat.

I mean, I was defeated. I was in last place. No hope. I was not going to make the team. My life had ended. My career was over. All I knew, two things in life. One was drug and alcohol abuse and selling drugs. Number two was athletics. My athletic career came up in six months, in a year or two years and three years, and it came down on one day, because the enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy, and he will not continue to bring people up. He wants to destroy everything that God's plan is.

God's plan was for me to succeed, and now God comes in and gives me the opportunity, and this is how He does it. That man of God smiling? Here he was, driving home, smiling. I'm down, man. I'm just destroyed. He's smiling.

"Mark, I don't know what just happened," he goes, "but I do know God can turn it around. God can turn this around." And I looked at him. I said, "God, what are you talking about?" God? My concept of God was 10 commandments, don't do this, don't do that, weddings and funerals. I didn't know anything about church on the way. I didn't know anything about Christian television. I had never heard a Christian broadcast ever in my life at this point. Talk about ignorance. Talk about being blind. And this man says, "God can turn it around." Wrong answer for me.

Ultimately, what God was saying is, "Mark, you've done it without Me. Now choose Me and I'll turn it around." He gave me an opportunity, and I denied it. Came back the next day for competition, had the worst hurdle race of my life. Miserable. Embarrassed myself again. I guess the best way I can explain this to you is I felt as if somebody who'd come back another day and they'd undressed me halfway the first day, and they took the rest of my clothes off the second day and said, "Now run a hurdle race in front of everybody and hit every one of those and make just a mockery of yourself." And I did.

I left that stadium day that day, and then this time the coach, the man of God, was very direct and very bold and very real. And as we were driving home, he says, "Mark, Jesus Christ is your answer." And I chose again to do it on my own. You see, my whole life, I'd done it on my own. My whole life, I had felt that I had done it on my own. From five, six, seven, eight, nine, and 10, I'd taken care of myself. Lived on my own at the age of 16 and 17 years old. I'd done everything on my own. I wasn't ready to let somebody else do it. I didn't even understand if somebody could. You see, my concept that God was not, God was alive, but that God was just this invisible thing.

I was addicted to cocaine. The following day that I got home from that decathlon, I got strung out on cocaine. My girlfriend came right in with me, because you see, she put her whole life into this too. And now we're addicted to cocaine to the point of death. We were doing \$2,000 of cocaine a day.

And you see, cocaine is a false euphoric high. It brings you up and it kind of takes you out of your problems, and that's why you do it, but you don't ever want to come down, because the coming down is worse than the going up. So, what I would do to stop myself from having to come down is I would take and I would drink one-fifth of hard liquor straight. I would take 50 to 100 milligrams of Valium. And then if that didn't work and knock me out quickly, I would drink one to two bottles of NyQuil. You know why I'm rejoicing today?

Because God is alive. There's really a Jesus. God is alive, working in your life, even if you don't know Him. And there is not anybody here that is here by accident, to hear this and respond and let God completely set you free today.

God's alive, and that's why I'm alive today. I should be dead 50 times or better right now. That what I just told you, I did that every three to four days for eight months.

And one day while I was at my home, I looked in the mirror and I saw death. I'd never seen that before, but I looked in the mirror, and I had tried to quit this drug and I could not quit. And after I saw myself in the mirror, I went to my wife and I had admitted something for the first time in my life, and this is what we all have to admit and come to terms with someday in our lives, and that it was this. I said to my wife, "Susie, I can't quit this drug. I've tried and I can't quit. I can't do it on my own. I need help." And when I said, "I need help," oh, the heavenly host rejoiced. "That's right," they said, "that's right. You're getting closer. You need help. Oh, here it comes. It's on the way. It's on the way. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and Moses. Yeah, Lord, get him. Get him, Jesus. Get him now. Come on, bring him in. Bring him in." I just admitted that I couldn't do it on my own. I needed help.

A few days later, I was proceeding to get high on cocaine in my home, at my office, blown out of my brains, solving the world's problems, when all of a sudden, I hear this, "Mark, pray." There was nobody behind me, though. "Who's that?" I thought I was hallucinating. "Mark, pray." And this loving God of grace and mercy, who I had not known, swept over my body, and His presence came. When it hit my eyes, I cried for the first time since I was eight years old. When it hit my nose, my nose holes that I had in my nose from cocaine were healed. When it came to my mouth, my mouth quivered, and I couldn't even control it. When it came to my heart, it exploded and it felt like electricity going through me, and had I not been sitting down, I would've been down on the ground. And the power of God went through my body and literally delivered me from every single force of hell that was raging into my body. And I was delivered and set free that day, that moment, of every ungodly force.

I couldn't even think. I didn't know what to do, and it's like, "Wow. Wow." And I couldn't even think, and all I could say was, "God is real. God is real." And I went out in the living room, I'm jumping around, "God is real. God is real. God's alive. God's alive. He's real. He's real." And my wife thought I was freaking out, but you see, I was in my right mind instantly, and I was on a new high. It's never gone away. As a matter of fact, it gets stronger and stronger and stronger and stronger.

He filled me up with his rivers of living water. Instead of that junk coming out of my mouth, I became this one who wants to share that life with people. And here's the biggest miracle, brothers and sisters. God, the loving God, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the blood of Jesus cleansed me and washed me clean. I'm not ashamed of where I am today. I'm not ashamed to get up here and tell you, because after I came to know Jesus Christ, oh man, I've been through it. Oh, the devils come at me every which way, much greater than they ever did before a believer, because I'm out there sharing the faith of God. I'm out there sharing Jesus Christ, the love of God.



But the love of the Lord Jesus Christ took me, this man of exile, and brought me into the kingdom and gave me love. He gave me peace. He gave me confidence. He gave me boldness by the Spirit of God. And he says, "Mark, go out and give. And if you would give what I've given unto you, I will give back unto you good measure, pressed down and shaken together, running over. Go out and let the rivers of life flow out of you, for I have filled you up for this purpose. Go and declare my good news to the ends of the earth, for I've given it unto you."

You know what the biggest miracle was? I thank God for the deliverance. I thank God for all of that. But the biggest miracle that reigns today in my life was that God took that man that had a heart of stone and he made it into a heart of flesh. Extraordinary things through ordinary people, extraordinary things that man of God did as an ordinary man.

Roger Marsh:

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone. The new is here." Mark Anderson's story is an amazing example of Christ's redeeming power. And I hope that you've been encouraged today and reminded that nothing is too hard for God, and no one is out of his reach.

Now, to learn more about Mark Anderson or to listen to any of today's message that you might have missed, please visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast), or give us a call. Our number is (877)732-6825. We have members of our team standing by 24/7 to answer your questions about the JDFI and Family Talk. They're also happy to take your prayer requests and to pray with you as well. Again, our number is (877)732-6825.

And remember, you can also join in on the conversation about today's broadcast by visiting our Facebook page. Just go to [facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk](https://facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk). There you'll find encouragement from Dr. Dobson and helpful conversation with fellow believers who are dedicated to supporting families. Thanks for listening today. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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