



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Ramsteads Revisited – Part 1

Guest(s): John Ramstead

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Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton, Executive Director of the James Dobson Family Institute and president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. Wanted to take just a brief moment to let you know that we love, appreciate, and are praying for you. Our entire team here at Family Talk is doing that very thing. We also wanted to encourage you, if you're struggling or you could use some encouragement, to feel free to call us and pray with us. Our toll free number is (877) 732-6825. That number again is (877) 732-6825, or you could also connect with us online at drjamesdobson.org. thanks for letting us be a part of your life every day. We are going to get through this. Dr. Dobson said we are going to get through this challenging time, and we're going to do it together. Let's go now to our regular programming.

Roger Marsh: Hello everyone. I'm Roger Marsh, and welcome to Family Talk, a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. Today, we are revisiting a classic interview originally aired here a few years ago. Here now is Dr. Dobson to set up this broadcast.

Dr. Dobson: Many of you may remember a story that I've shared with you about an accident that I had in September of 2011. It was actually on September 10th, and I remember it well. I fell off a horse, and I broke my clavicle and my scapula. I was in the hospital and in rehab for 17 days. I've completely recovered from that fall now, but I tell you that I'm thankful to be alive. I have no residual effects from that fall, but there was a time when Shirley was leaning over me that we both thought that I was going to die. The Lord was gracious to me. The day before I fell on that September 10th, there was another accident. It is a freaky thing. It was at the same ranch where I was, and he's joined us in the studio today to tell us the rest of the story and catch up with what's happened recently.

I'll give you just a bit of a clue as to where we're going, because John is a walking miracle. What he went through was absolutely unbelievable, and he's going to give us a quick recap about that in a minute. If you really want to know what the lord has done for him and what he's brought him through, you need to download the broadcast from the website to get all the details, and it's well

worth listening to. Before we get started, let me introduce John Ramstead to you. He's the founder and CEO of Beyond Influence. That's an LLC where he works with leaders to create the life God meant for them to live. John is also a certified Christian Leadership Coach and founder of the Eternal Leadership Podcast with the mission to equip and inspire leaders who work in God's kingdom. That podcast is now heard in 160 countries.

All this has happened since John's accident. He is a remarkable man. He was in the Navy. He actually flew a Navy F-14 in combat situations, in armed attacks, and in desert storm, so that's another history. The amazing thing is he came through combat like that in that stressful and dangerous situation, and came home without a scratch. He came home and fell off a horse. Now, explain that one! What is also remarkable is what I've already just said. On September 9th, the day before I fell off a horse, John was riding a horse and had an absolutely horrendous fall into a metal fence. John, first of all, thank you for being here. You're looking great. God has done a miracle. I said it. It's really true, isn't it?

John Ramstead: It is, and thank you for having me, Dr. I really appreciate you and Shirley, and just this whole journey has been a very long, challenging journey. You and Shirley have been there through this whole thing, and your friendship has just been invaluable to us, so I thank you.

Dr. Dobson: It's been a challenge not only for you but for Donna, your wife.

John Ramstead: My wife, Donna, and my three boys.

Dr. Dobson: She's a physical therapist.

John Ramstead: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: And you have three boys.

John Ramstead: Yes sir.

Dr. Dobson: Your great concern through all that you were going through was for your family, because when something like this happens it affects everybody, the entire family ...

John Ramstead: That's right, Doc.

Dr. Dobson: ... But they've landed on their feet, and so have you.

John Ramstead: Yeah. They're all doing great today.

Dr. Dobson: Well, let's go back to that day on the 9th of September, 2011. You and I were riding horses together. I was right behind you, and you were taking a lap around the corral and your horse spooked. Explain what happened.

John Ramstead: Yeah. I was on the horse, and it started walking. Then, it was just kind of a trot, and then all of a sudden my horse just pivoted to the right and just bolted and took off. I remember being almost flat on my back, where it felt like his rump was hitting me in the shoulder blades, and every step he's accelerating. He's going faster, and I'm just trying to get my weight back up on the saddle. I was scared I was going to flip off the back of this horse and get kicked in the head. I'm squeezing him as hard as I can. I didn't know this at the time, but I guess I was telling the horse to go faster.

Dr. Dobson: Well he did.

John Ramstead: I didn't read the instruction manual.

Dr. Dobson: I was right behind you, John, and the amazing thing is you and I had just had a conversation saying that we were not unfamiliar with horses. I grew up in Texas. I don't know where you grew up, but ...

John Ramstead: I grew up in Minnesota, and we'd done a number of trail rides and things like that.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. I rode a lot as a kid, yet moments later you had your accident and I had mine the next day.

John Ramstead: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: It was really a freaky kind of deal, but the horse is now running. He's completely out of control. I'm behind you. I see it. I knew you were in trouble, and you were doing everything you could to do stop that horse. You were really giving him whatever's necessary on the reins, and he went straight into a fence. I will never forget it. Tell everyone what happened.

John Ramstead: We're going faster, and we're going faster and faster. My first thought was, "I've got to turn the horse", because you remember that fence line ended, and if you turned to the left, it was open up toward the mountain. I figured he's going to turn, and I pulled as hard as I could on the rein, the left rein, and he pulled his head straight back and almost pulled the rein out of my hand. He's just still going straight at this fence, perpendicular to it, faster. Then, I'm kind of starting to panic. I've been, like you said, in combat and flown at low levels and landed on a boat at night. I've actually never felt this out of control before.

I tried to pull his head again, and he pulled his head back straight. Then, I realized ... I'm thinking this horse can't be suicidal. He's got to turn, and I got to jump off this horse, but I'm up so high and we're going so fast. If I jump off, I'm going to break my neck. Then, the next thing I knew I'm looking at the fence, and I realize there is no escape. It's like just everything slowed down, and I just had this moment of clarity. I said to myself, "This is not going to end well." I

remember saying that, and that's the last thing I remember, Doc, until I woke up on the ground with everybody around me holding me down.

Dr. Dobson: I will never forget that experience. My horse was spooked too. He saw what had happened to the other horse and you, and he would not go near there. I couldn't get him close enough for me to try to help you, because he wouldn't go near it. It was just an absolutely tragic moment of all our lives. I finally got off the horse and ran to you. By then, other people had gotten there and you had suffered not just a head injury, but a near life-taking head injury. Explain again. You hit a metal fence with your eyebrow, didn't you?

John Ramstead: Actually, the fence was like that three inch rolled steel bar, so when I got thrown into the fence, the horse bucked me into the fence as he kind of ...

Dr. Dobson: He threw you off.

John Ramstead: He threw me off. He actually flipped over is what I understand. I didn't see it, but I guess he flipped over.

Dr. Dobson: I saw it. That's what he ...

John Ramstead: And crashed into the- and when he did that, he launched me. That top bar hit me from my teeth up through and across my left eye. It hit me across this part of my face, so I lost eight teeth. These have all been replaced. I shattered the entire left side of my skull, the base of the skull, the base below the brain was all broken, and my left eye is blind permanently. All the bones behind the eye socket shattered and cut the optic nerve. I broke vertebra in my neck, in the base of my skull, and pretty much destroyed my right shoulder. The second bar down ... I'm guessing this is what happened, but it hit me across the chest in kind of the same way. I broke four ribs, and then one of the broken ribs punctured my left lung. Then, to fast forward, I ended up spending seven weeks in ICU, 20 months at Craig Hospital with a traumatic brain injury, and in that intervening period of time I had 25 surgeries and procedures. That's how serious what happened to me was.

Dr. Dobson: We called for a helicopter, a Flight for Life helicopter, and it came ... It seemed like very quickly, but we were having to hold you down, because you were unconscious, and yet you are trying to get up. It was awful, John. I've never experienced anything. I saw Pete Maravich die in my arms, but I have not seen anything as traumatic as what occurred to you there. Your eye was on your cheek. Obviously it's been replaced with a false eye, but you look good, John. It's amazing that to look at you, one would never know what you've been through.

John Ramstead: You know, they were actually able to save it? This is actually my eye, even though I can't see.

Dr. Dobson: That is your eye.

John Ramstead: Yeah. I don't have to have a prosthetic.

Dr. Dobson: It's no wonder it looks like it's real. Now, they had to take a portion of your skull off, and the brain had been compressed down into your cheekbone area. They had to lift it twice, didn't they?

John Ramstead: Yeah. They had to do two craniotomies. Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: And describe that ... They took your skull off.

John Ramstead: The good thing is you're not awake during all of this, but they go from ear to ear. They took off the whole front quarter of the skull, and the front sinus on the left side was so damaged. They just removed it, and the lining around the brain had been lacerated from broken pieces of bone, so they had to repair all of that. The base of the skull that the brain rests on was multiple fractures, and little bone fragments sticking out. They repaired all that, and then they put it all back together. It's amazing what they can do medically, but because of all that damage, the day after that first craniotomy when I was in ICU, I ended up getting meningitis that was very, very bad. It was very life threatening ... had a fever that was almost 107. Then, 10 days after that first craniotomy, there was a lot of complications. Every time I'd move, my heart rate would crash and my blood pressure would crash. My poor wife going through all this ... They thought this was another life threatening situation.

Dr. Dobson: She was out there for five hours during this surgery with nobody with her.

John Ramstead: The second surgery ... Because the whole family and everybody was in town, we had people visiting, and everyone was around ... They didn't foresee this second surgery, which was 10 days after the first one. Remember, I was in ICU for five weeks, so the day that they decided they have to go back in, she was alone in my room and had to go wait in an operating waiting room for five or six hours, just hoping that I come out alive. The doctor also told her, "I'm not sure if ..."

Dr. Dobson: If you're going to make it.

John Ramstead: Well, not just that. The other hard part was, "He could survive, but he might not be the person you remember." Also, right? We're dealing with the brain and damage to the brain. They wouldn't make any promises or set any expectations with her, so I understand the surgeon's point of view, but that's pretty hard for a wife to go through.

Dr. Dobson: And she's out of town. She doesn't know people.

John Ramstead: There's nobody up there that we know. Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: I was in the same hospital that you were, in another part of the hospital, not nearly as badly injured. How freaky is that? I mean, we're both riding horses

side by side and talking about the fact that we're not unfamiliar with horses. A day later, we're both in the same hospital from a fall from a horse.

John Ramstead: Yeah. I'm not allowed to ride anymore.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Nor am I. Nor am I. I'm on blood thinner, so I could have died very easily from that, just from the loss of blood. We had six shooters and we were riding around the corrals shooting at balloons, so I was holding a six shooter, a real gun, but with blanks. I fell on top the gun, and that's what broke my shoulder. It also saved my life, because if I had hit my head that hard on the ground, I wouldn't have survived. God's been good to you and me, hasn't He?

John Ramstead: Yeah. He sure has.

Dr. Dobson: Now John, just getting out of the hospital was not the end of it for you ...

John Ramstead: No.

Dr. Dobson: ... Because you have really been in stages of recovery and repair ever since. How are you doing now, and what has that journey been like?

John Ramstead: Today, I only can work about 25 hours a week. I can do 30 hours a week on occasion, depending on my schedule, but I have to really manage my time. My brain injury was so severe that when I first checked in to Craig Hospital, the expectation I was told later was that if I recovered 40 or 50 percent cognitively, they would have been pretty happy with that, because of the damage that I had. At the accident, God showed up and took away the pain that I was in. He told me he was going to heal me. When I checked out of Craig Hospital, and I did all the neuro psych testing, IQ, and all these ... I had recovered 100 percent cognitively, which was really neat.

I got another chance to share with my neuropsychologist my whole testimony, because through this whole period of time I've been able to share my testimony with thousands, if not millions, of people. Before the accident, doc, I probably shared it with literally five or six people my whole life. You know, anything that was personal about my faith ... Every day, there is just chronic pain in my neck. There was just so much damage and scar tissue. I think I've had ... I don't even know. I've lost count. Seven or eight surgeries just on my neck just to try to ...

Dr. Dobson: As we came in here a few minutes ago, you said you're in pain today.

John Ramstead: Yeah. My neck up here in the base of my skull, and I always have a headache here in the back. Then, when I get tired, if I am not careful with managing my energy or taking naps throughout the day, I get a really bad headache across my temples, and then this headache. It's like two separate headaches, and sometimes they connect. That's not good. Also, the part of the brain that was damaged was the whole area of emotional control, social filters, and things like

that. When I get really tired, I have to be very careful around my family. When I'm in that mode, I don't let myself go out in public, go out to dinner, or do a speaking engagement.

Just even around my wife and kids, I have to be careful, because I'll overreact to things. I'll hear things they didn't say, but I've learned how to manage a lot of this, live a life, give back professionally. One of the benefits is this long of a recovery and being at home for ... I mean, Donna was my caregiver for almost two years. It was a great time though to just spend some really quality time with my wife and kids, as I was just trying to figure out, "Why did God even save my life? Why am I even here? What is this, this second chance I've been given? What do I even do with it?"

Dr. Dobson: John, I said at the beginning of the program that I have great love and appreciation for you, and that you're a remarkable man. One of the reasons is because of the way you have handled this and what you've done with it. You and I were having lunch together a while back, and you told me that if you could go back and relive that day, you wouldn't change it. How could that possibly be true? Did I understand you correctly?

John Ramstead: No. You're correct. I was asked that question recently. Life is a series of events and processes. You wrote that book about *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. You gave that to Donna and I, which was a huge comfort. Anybody out there that is just going through a period of time that it just doesn't make sense, that's a great book to read. You know what? You cannot connect the dots, I don't think, in the present or even looking forward. It's only until enough time has passed. If I look at the dots between the accident and today, and the richness of life God's given me in some new relationships ... A relationship with you, a relationship with thousands of people through our podcast, the hundreds of people I've been able to coach and equip, the companies I've been able to work with, and the relationship I have with my wife and my kids. I think even more important to that are two questions that I really had to answer as I went through this recovery that were life changing for me ... Who really is God?

When I was in God's presence at the accident, I had never seen God before as somebody who is a person that I can have a personal relationship with, the same way I can have a relationship with you or especially my wife, Donna. I think he's modeled marriage after this relationship that's at so much of a different level, right? I'm from the military. My view of God was more of this authoritarian figure. He loves you. He's got your back, but you don't go up to the Commanding General and say, "Sir, I'm having a bad day. Can I have a hug?" That'd be what we call a career limiting move. I never understood that until I was in God's presence, He spoke to me, and He took away the pain. He told me he was going to heal me. I immediately realized that this God ... think about this though ... The God of the universe who created everything, who's everywhere, and who's omnipotent cared about me as a person individually to come and minister to in that moment, and realizing that He cares ...

Dr. Dobson: That's incomprehensible.

John Ramstead: ... And loves everybody that way, Doc. That's the message ... That it's not just me. This isn't special and unique to me, John Ramstead. He wants to have that relationship with everybody. You know, something else I reflected ... When I was in that moment I felt this love, because the first thought I had that went through my brain as I'm laying there just crushed and I felt God's presence, the first thought I had was, "I'm not worthy of somebody loving me like this. Something I really reflected back on was that everything else I'd ever done in my past, good, bad, sinful, or otherwise, was not even relevant to how he felt about me as a person. It was life changing.

I had to answer that question, "Who is God, and then who am I?" I think a better way to ask that question is, "Who did God create me to be?" Those are the two questions that as I recovered, I really read scripture, thought on, prayed, listened to sermons, listened to you, and listened to podcasts as I was just searching for meaning of this second chance that I'd been given. I've talked to some other people that have been in this situation. They've almost felt like the second chance was a burden. I never really felt like this was some burden or something I had to live up to and perform too, but it was a gift. I had this beautiful gift, and it was up to me to open it and bring it to fullness. I was sharing with ...

Dr. Dobson: You call it a gift. A lot of people get angry. They get angry at God for doing this. [crosstalk 00:22:11] Did you ever feel any anger about this? It didn't have to happen. God could have prevented it. He didn't. That's the wall that I talk about, that sooner or later everybody hits a wall.

John Ramstead: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: We all do. It's part of life. I call it not being able to make the pieces fit. Sometimes, I think Christians experience that more intensely than those who are not, because they expect nothing. We're kind of led to believe that He is going to be like a winking blinking grandfather who's going to protect you from everything unpleasant. If it does come about that you experience something bad, you're going to understand it; it's going to make sense to you. The truth of the matter is it usually doesn't. You will be asking questions that he does not answer. I don't know why that's true, but it was true for Jesus on the cross who also asked the "why" question. Everybody asks it and, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on God's point of view of course, we have to try to figure that out on our own. Finally, you get to the place where you just say, "If God wanted me to understand this, he would have given me a whole lot more information, because I don't understand it. I will someday."

Roger Marsh: That's an insightful point to end this edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I pray that you've been blessed and encouraged by John Ramstead's story. Every one of us will encounter a valley in our Christian walk. Pain, loss, and struggle are unavoidable parts of life, and sometimes we can't help but ask God, "Why?"

If we put our trust in him during those desperate times, he promises never to leave us. You can learn more about John Ramstead and his story by going to today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Apart from this broadcast, another way we hope to encourage you is through our helpful resources, and the one we want to highlight right now is Dr. Dobson's book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. This best-selling work tackles the tough questions we ask God in moments of extreme heartache. This timeless book can be yours. It's our way of thanking you for your gift of \$20 or more in support of Family Talk.

Go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, and make your donation there. Or call (877) 732-6825 and discover how easy it is to support our ministry over the phone. Again, that number is (877) 732-6825 and please know how much we greatly appreciate your generosity, and we pray that this resource will be a blessing to you and your family. On the next edition of Family Talk, you'll hear the conclusion of John Ramstead's powerful testimony. He'll explain how God used this accident to his ultimate glory. The conclusion of this story will absolutely encourage those who are in despair right now, so you won't want to miss out on what John Ramstead shares on his testimony on tomorrow's Family Talk broadcast. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

Announcer:

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