



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Chad Robichaux: Still in the Fight, My Service, My Battle – Part 2

Guest(s): Chad Robichaux

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

Roger Marsh: The following program is intended for mature audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

Hello and welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and on yesterday's broadcast you heard the first of our three-part series of programs featuring decorated former US Marine Chad Robichaux. Today we're going to hear some of Chad's personal story and also hear about his battles with PTSD. In addition to his time with the US Marines, Chad Robichaux is a former US Department of Defense contractor with eight deployments to Afghanistan. Following those deployments, Chad founded the Mighty Oaks Foundation, a nonprofit organization serving the active duty military veteran and the first responder communities around the world. With faith-based combat trauma and resilience programs.

Chad is also the co-founder of Save Our Allies, a nonprofit organization that focuses on the evacuation and recovery of Americans, our allies and vulnerable people trapped in Afghanistan and now in Ukraine. Chad is also a bestselling author and is written a number of books related to veteran care and overcoming life's challenges. He is a medal of Valor recipient for his bravery beyond the call of duty in law enforcement. He has earned an MBA from New York Institute of Technology and is a board certified pastoral counselor with a focus on PTSD. Chad Robichaux is married to his wife Kathy. They have one daughter, two sons, and two granddaughters.

On yesterday's program, Chad shared about some of the things he has seen on his trips to Ukraine since the war broke out there. Today he'll be sharing some of his own personal testimony. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton to introduce his guests on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chad, welcome back to Family Talk. What an amazing program yesterday and we got to pray that God would really be in the midst of all that's happening over in Ukraine with our leadership for such a time as this. Welcome back.

Chad Robichaux: Thanks for having me back.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Most of you who are listening know that I have a deep love for those who have served, those who serve and their families. I come from a pretty strong line of military patriots, was taught early on by my dad, who by the way, was a World War II veteran Chad. My dad served in the US Navy, actually he was on the USS Pennsylvania, was in the South Pacific during World War II. Tom Brokaw called them the greatest generation ever, because of their service Chad and he taught me that freedom wasn't free.

Chad Robichaux: Absolutely. I mean, especially when you watch young men and women go put themselves in a harm's way and we have an all-volunteer military in the United States put themselves in harm's way for the cause of freedom. It sounds like... You turn on the news and no matter what channel you watch, it feels like some of that's lost. But I tell you it's not lost, young men and women raise their hand and make oath every day to defend our constitution, defend our way of life, defend our freedoms, and they're still bravely going on a battlefield to defend that for themselves here and for people around the world who can't defend themselves.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know, through the years as a counselor too. And Chad you this, this is what your heart is all about. I've learned the toll or the impact that's serving in the military, that war in particular can have on you. When you witness the atrocities of war, it can scar you deeply and reintegration back into a civilian life, it can be more than hard, Chad. It can be brutal to try to reintegrate. The PTSDs real. When war comes home, it's a journey and we're going to hear a lot more about that Chad, everybody has a story and you've got an unbelievable story. I want to go all the way back. You enlisted in the Marine Corps, I think about age 17 basically to escape a pretty tough life growing up. Chad, take us back, your world.

Chad Robichaux: Yeah, I mean growing up for me was, my father was a Marine, both my sons are Marines. I was a Marine. So Marine Corps a big deal in our family all the way back to my uncle who served in World War II. So over 80 years of service in my family. And for me, joining the Marine Corps was a second chance of life, a way to escape my childhood because my father was a Vietnam veteran. Very angry, a lot of physical abuse in our home. We had a lot of trauma in our family. My older brother, he was a year older than me, we had planned on joining military together and start training. We were planning on going special operations together, that was our kind of life goal to escape that lifestyle.

And when I was 14 and he was 15, tragedy in our family, he was shot and killed and it was devastating to me at the time. And I went in a deep isolation but kept that focus to join the military. And when I was 17, I enlisted in the Marine Corps, within a year I made it into special operations in the reconnaissance community, made it into recon, went over the forest recon eventually. And then after 911, I remember those planes flying in the World Trade Center buildings, I'd been in

almost 10 years at that time, I was a sergeant at 3rd Force Recon company, a team leader.

And watching that happen, watching those planes hit those buildings, I knew my life's about to be different. I'm about to do what I've been training the last 10 years to do. End up going on a JSOC task force, a joint special operations command task force with the premier special operations unit in the world in my opinion, in most people's opinion. And I had the privilege of serving there, representing the Marine Corps there. And that was my job and my interpreter at the time was a man named Azeez who did all eight deployments with me, incredible human being. He saved my life multiple times, at least three specifically, but probably every day.

And we became very close, not just my interpreter, but became my teammate and my friend. I was there when his first two kids were born. I didn't go back to base when we went in operating, I stayed in his home. So Azeez and I became family and over the years of being there and losing friends and doing difficult things, that anxiety started to manifest to me in some different ways. And one of the things, I think it first started to be a frustration, I really believed that God wasn't present in Afghanistan. I believed that the presence of evil there, I'm mistaken with the absence of God not knowing.

And I felt like I had to make a decision in my life that faith is something I could do later on when I get older. But right now I have to be a warrior and I can't do both. And I believe this, I think there's something that men and probably a lot of young men as people transition from boys to men struggle with when they say, "I have to trade my masculinity for my Christianity and I'm not willing to do that right now." And that's-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chad, I want to stay with that. 911 happens, let me make sure I'm following the story here for a moment. You eventually deployed, Afghanistan. First couple of months there you began to see the evil that you had been hearing about. The evil acts of the Taliban and more. Chad, I wanted to ask you, what did that start doing inside of your heart? Because this is a big part of your story. What kind of impact did it have on you, all that evil, brutal stuff you saw in Afghanistan? Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Chad Robichaux: It manifested in hate. I became bitter, cynical, I began to hate the enemy, the Taliban had zero... Don't get me wrong, I still feel that good versus evil hatred towards Taliban today I even do. But the way I responded to that hate, the hate of evil was different. And so I went to a very dark place and I believe that decision to make the decision and not have God in my life because I thought that would bring a weakness in me, actually left a giant hole inside of me that I fill with that hate and that rage and that anger and bitterness and that darkness really took over me. And I became very angry person, very frustrated person. And I would even say not stable, I was able to do my job as a professional really well. But emotionally and mentally and even spiritually stable, I was not.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chad, part of your story was, there was a story in about a Toyota pickup truck following you. Chad, do you mind sharing some of this? Because again, if you don't understand the wiring that's going deep inside people who begin to wrestle with the atrocities of war, you'll never understand PTSD. You'll never understand why they struggle so much here stateside. And the reintegration piece that we're going to talk a lot more about but take us back, Chad, tell us what happened.

Chad Robichaux: Yeah, so this particular day was myself, Azeez and a Navy seal that was on our team and we were in a Toyota Prada, which is like a 4runner. And we were wearing plain clothes, we each had a pistol, maybe in our waistband, but nothing much to defend ourselves. We weren't looking to getting any kind of contact. And so I noticed in my rear view mirror, I was driving a Toyota Hilux, which is like the national vehicle of the Taliban. All the Taliban drive these Toyota Hilux's and it was loaded with guys that looked like Taliban fighters, big beards, tribal clothing. They were dusty. They all had AK47 assault rifles, even a RPG, a rocket propeller grenade launcher. And I always wanted to make sure they weren't following me. So in my training we have what's called deviating a route.

So, I'm on [inaudible 00:09:29] by road and I make a right and they continue to follow me, as I make the block and come back to my original route. I turn on my original route, they turn and follow me, which let me know they were in fact following me. That also lets them know that I knew they were following me, which started a pretty aggressive pursuit. So they start trying to wrestle off the road and I'm trying to get away from them and I made a decision to go into the city of Kabul and try to lose them in the traffic. And we're going through all the traffic and I bang into cars and I made it to this major intersection called Massoud Circle. And as I got to Massoud Circle, the traffic began, the congestion and just stop and it wasn't really anywhere to go. There was one little pathway I was trying to squeeze through but as I did, that truck full of Taliban guys got in front of us and cut us off and roadblocked us in.

And I remember when that happened, Passenger stepped out and you could tell he was in charge. He was very calm, collective. He even took the time to close his door behind him. He had his AK47 rifle in one hand, in his other hand he gave me a hand signal to stop my vehicle and actually made eye contact with me. And in that moment I knew we were in a very bad situation, and this situation in our training and experience is called being stuck on the X. The X is a ambush site, it's a kill zone. A couple of rules you learn in training about the X is rule number one, you have be able to recognize that you're on the X, right? You got know you're in a bad situation. Rule number two, it's pretty simple. You have to get off the X, you got to move or something bad's going to happen.

And I'm so thankful for military training because you train for every scenario, every year go to a place called Bill Scott Raceway and drive counter pursuit training and one of the situations is a roadblock situation. You execute a ramming technique, and so I hit my GAZ and I aim our vehicle towards theirs

and it spun out of the way. And we were able to get off that intersection that day and I don't know what those bad guys wanted, but I know this, if we would've stopped them at X then we would've stopped the Massoud Circle. We would've put up a heck of a fight but the truth is we probably would've been killed or taken. And I could fast forward a few years later, I came home from Afghanistan and found myself in that X again dealing with anxiety and depression and debilitating panic attacks.

And the difference this time is I didn't follow those two simple rules. I didn't want to identify that I was on the X because of my own pride or shame. And because of that, I chose not to get off the X and chose to stay there for a period of almost three years and it almost cost me everything.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chad while you're over there, again you see things, you experience things that human minds sometimes just can't put its hands around if you will.

Chad Robichaux: Especially the atrocities of children that's like-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, Chad I was just going to ask you about that because I know that there were a couple of times where there were young girls who you cared about and you saw evil and hatred worse than that. You talked about how the Taliban would rape and beat many of the young girls, some of them so bad that they would commit suicide by throwing themselves off the top of buildings. Chad, when you see that stuff, somewhere I think along the way what happens is you stop feeling.

Chad Robichaux: Yeah. I mean-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Explain that to us, that journey here.

Chad Robichaux: Well one, and I will take a side note and say unfortunately that's happening again right now. These girls are being, 20 million women in Afghanistan, women and girls are being made into sex slaves right now after the draw. But I could digress to that, but it's just so horrific to even think about. But yeah, when you see those things, I'll write a chapter in book an unfair advantage about the girl in Chicken Street and this little street kid that we just so adorable and so sweet and her being killed right in front of us. And then seeing the sexual molestation of little boys and little girls, it just really makes you want to do something about it. Something inside you wants to solve it, but you can't. And so it's so frustrating and so you see these things and then happen into the innocent and then you have friends that are lost.

And I remember we had 10 Afghans that worked for us that were captured and tortured and killed. And I was like, these are my family. It's the guys, I lived in their homes for three years and was with their families and ate with their families and played with their kids and they were killed because of working with me and then had a vehicle bomb driven in a house to try to kill me and my

friends. And all these things happen and there comes a point to where if you process all that with the emotion that you and I have while we're sitting here today, we would lose our minds. We can't process that kind of emotion right now.

So your body does something I think in your limbic system and your physiological effects of your body to shut down that emotion so that you could function in an environment and a numbness comes over you, which at the time, I don't believe this is a mistake or a disorder or anything like that, God is allowing this to happen so we could function in an environment and survive because if we've felt all this emotion and empathy and pain or anxiety and stress, we were just shut down, we wouldn't be able to take it. So there comes a moment to where you have to this thing shut off to be able to do your job and be safe and survive and help others. But there is a moment where you come home and those things don't just flip back on, you have to turn them back on and most of us don't know how, and I didn't know how.

And so, I carried that numbness, that lack of empathy, that lack of compassion, that rational reasonable emotion that we have when we see things that are sad or say something that we shouldn't say to our spouse or to our children that we should feel bad about, but we don't feel bad anymore. There comes a time to recognize that and I'd say that's like an X to recognize that and then to be able to move forward off that X and that's about to reprogram yourself and be able to turn those things back on because we're not meant to live that way forever. Unfortunately, many veterans that experience those things live that way forever.

And many of the people kind of compare our generation right now with World War II veterans and they're like, "Well, World War II guys, they came home and they just lived out their life and they never had any problems." No, they never turned back on and many of them never turned back on. And we don't see a lot of the suicides, if you look back at those until after they stop staying busy with work and things they preoccupied themselves with. They never turn those emotions back on and that's the sad reality for many veterans and many people who deal with PTSD outside of veteran community.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Somewhere Chad, you have to come back home and you got to figure out how to reintegrate. Can you talk to us a little bit about that journey, what it looks like when war comes home, because obviously a lot of the work you do with Mighty Oaks Foundation and more is to help because of your story, because of what happened in your life Chad. Do you mind sharing a little bit of that as we set up some of tomorrow's program?

Chad Robichaux: Yeah, obviously I eventually came home after eight deployments, I was diagnosed with PTSD. I came home dealing with debilitating panic attacks to the point to where I think a lot of people use the word panic attack loosely, where they say I was in traffic and had a panic attack the other day, not minimizing anyone's experience. But when I refer to panic attacks, it's the physiological

effect of where I feel like I'm a thousand percent convinced that I'm going to die at that moment. And the level people call 911 thinking they're having a heart attack, they're having that level of panic attack. And the only way I know how to describe it to people is imagine you were drowning in a swimming pool and handcuffed to the bottom and the level of desperation you would have to get one breath of air and that level of... But you never die, you never drown, you're that level of panic 24/7. That's where I was.

In addition, I didn't like the medicine that they were giving me, I felt like it made me worse. I felt like it made me worse, felt like either a zombie or I was going to die, felt like the medicine was poisoning me, the counseling and none of that worked for me. I went to jujitsu, which is a sport I've done since I was five years old and went into professional fighting and won a world title. And so I had professional accolades and success and financial success and none of those things changed my situation. And I went in about a three-year downward spiral, which ended with me separating from my family, into relationships with other women. On the surface I looked extremely successful as I transition to be an athlete, but I never got well.

And that ended with me being in my apartment at my home and making a decision that my family might be sad without me, but they would be better off. And I decided I was going to take my life and you and I both know that, that same hopeless heart finds a heart in the homes of over 20 veterans every day and I mean my family and my loved ones or friends would be sad without us, but they'd be better off. And so I would sit in my closet in my apartment, I had my family pictures, I'd put in the floor around me. And I tried to build up the courage to put the gun in my head and pull the trigger at a Glock 22 pistol, a 40 caliber pistol.

And something would happen, I believe it was divine. Every time I put that gun to my head to pull the trigger, I would have this thought that would come over me. And it was overwhelming of who is going to find me. Like, someone's going to hear the gunshot, you're going to be missing, someone's going to find you. And the only other person who had a key to my apartment at the time was my oldest son Hunter. And the thought of my son finding me that way was enough to pump the brakes in that moment, but I was in such a dark place, I'd be back at it trying to build the courage up again. And it was one of those mornings I was in that apartment, in that closet and I heard a knock on my door. And when I did, I wasn't going to answer it.

But when I heard my wife's voice announce herself, I panicked. I was ashamed of what I was doing, I hid that gun under a blanket even though she would've never come in my apartment or my closet to see it. I hid that gun under her blanket and I went to answer the door. And I was so irate that she was there interrupting me killing myself, which sounds twisted, but I was mad that she was interrupting that moment and I started yelling at her. And in the middle... She's not a very calm person, but in that moment she was extremely calm. And she asked me a question that radically changed my life.

She's like, "Chad, how could you do everything you did in the military?" We met when we were 17 and 18. So she's seen me go through all that training and deployments and all that stuff. And she's like, "How could you do all of that?" Everything she's seen me do as an athlete and fighting and how could you do all these things when it comes to your family, you'll quit. And there's no more soul cutting question to me than being called the quitter. And that really challenged me, she was absolutely right, I've been successful in professional things in my life. But when it came to the most important things, being a husband, being a father, being a young 17-year-old kid that raised his hand and made a commitment to do something important with his life, I quit in all those things, I quit my will to live.

And I made a pretty radical decision in that moment to get well. But the one thing I knew is that I couldn't do it with the people I surrounded myself by. And I couldn't do it with the people... I had pretty much systematically surrounded myself by people that told me everything I wanted to hear and not what I needed to hear. I didn't have any accountability. So my wife had been going to this church and I'm like, wasn't interested in our church or anything, but I'm like, I need someone outside of my circle, so there's some man at your church that could help hold me as accountable, this decision to put my life back on track.

And it led me to a meeting with a man named Steve Toth. And Steve and I met at a Starbucks coffee shop and Steve told me... I slid a plan over to him. I was going to fix my life and he looked at that plan, he slid it back over to me and didn't even read it. And he said, "If this plan, does it have anything to do with your relationship with God, I'm not going to waste your time and I'm not going to let you waste mine." And in that moment I knew that I had tried everything before, pills, counseling, VA programs, professional and financial success, but none of those things changed my situation. That led to us saying that we have in Mighty Oaks, if what you're doing isn't working, then why not try something different? And in that moment, I surrendered my life to Christ and beyond that decision, Steve mentored me for an entire year in biblical living and my life was radically changed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that is the story. It's an amazing story. If you haven't read Chad Robichaux show's story, you need to do it. But Chad, I want you to close us out on, just help us understand this is Natural Suicide Prevention month. Everyone knows that we've got a real problem with our veterans, not only on PTSD, we need to learn a lot more about PTSD and how it's impacting our soldiers, those who served and their families and so much more. Chad, we need to understand homelessness, why in the world it's really prevalent among our veterans and this suicidality issue. I mean why, what in the world's driving it and what are we going to do about it? Chad, closing word to you.

Chad Robichaux: Yeah, I mean this is a time. This month doesn't mean anything about more or less suicides. It's a month to be aware of it and I think one of the awareness things is to realize how big of a problem this is in the United States and around the world. I mean, just since COVID the national suicide hotline is up over a

thousand percent. People are dealing with a lot of hopelessness right now. It's okay to get news, but if you're a source of information and hope is in the news, if it's in politicians and in political leaders, your hope's always going to fall short. We're always going to be let down by man.

And so, in a time like this, it's a good time to reflect and realize that our hope needs to be in something bigger. And I believe there's no stronger hope than people that could step in their relationship with Christ and lead the lives they were created to live. I am an example of some that tried literally everything to skirt around and trying God. And what I realized is there is no substitute to fill that hole that I had in my heart. No matter how much success you throw into it and achievements and accolades, nothing feels that hole that God has that's made only for him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest again today has been Chad Robichaux. Chad is a former force recon Marine and department of defense contractor. Eight deployments to Afghanistan as part of a joint special operations command task force. He's also the founder of the Mighty Oaks Foundation and leading non-profit serving active duty military veteran and first responder communities around the world with highly successful faith-based combat trauma and resiliency programs. He's also co-founder of Save Our Allies. Chad, what an amazing story.

And I love the but God piece, how God just changed everything. And Chad, I'm so excited about the ministries that you're involved with and we so look forward to learning more about you and the amazing work God's doing in and through you tomorrow here on Family Talk. Thank you for joining us.

Chad Robichaux: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Roger Marsh here once again to remind you that Chad Robichaux will be joining the program once again on tomorrow's broadcast. So make sure you tune in then to hear part three of his riveting story. Till then if you'd like to learn more about Chad Robichaux, his amazing story and his ministries, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or you can email us at constituentcare@drjamesdobson.org.

Before we go, did you know that Dr. Dobson writes a free monthly newsletter? In it, he tackles news worthy topics and offers advice and encouragement for families in every stage of life. To sign up to receive Dr. Dobson's newsletter in the mail or via email, visit drjamesdobson.org or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Well, we're almost out of time for today, but I'd like to remind you that September is National Suicide Prevention and Awareness month. Here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute we know that sometimes life can seem too dark to bear, but the fact is there is help and there is hope.

If you or someone you know is in a mental health crisis, call 988. That's 988 to reach the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The lifeline provides 24/7 free and

confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you and your loved ones and best practices for professionals in the United States. Again, that National toll free number is 988. When you dial it, you'll reach a trained crisis worker who will listen to you, understand how your problem is affecting you, provide support, and get you the help you need.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, hoping you'll tune in again tomorrow to hear part three of Dr. Tim Clinton's fascinating conversation with Chad Robichaux. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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