



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Unbroken: The Louis Zamperini Story – Part 3

**Guest(s):** Luke and Lisa Zamperini

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, welcome back to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh.

It's finally Friday, and if you've been listening over the past couple of days, you know that today we're going to hear part three, the conclusion of an inspiring conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guests, Luke and Lisa Zamperini. Now, if that last name sounds familiar, it should. Luke Zamperini is the son of Louie Zamperini, one of the greatest runners in the history of track and field, who competed in the 1936 Summer Olympics. The beginning of World War II took shape and changed the course of Louie's life, of course, as it did for many at that time. He joined the Army Air Corps, and became a bombardier on a B-24 aircraft. That's where we ended our conversation with Luke Zamperini yesterday.

Today, we're going to pick it up at that point, and hear about what Louie's life was like after he survived living in a POW camp for nearly two years. So now, let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guests Luke and Lisa Zamperini, on this classic edition of Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, Luke, you were in the midst of a story when I had to stop you, and it had to do with the end of the war. And there was a kill order issued by the Japanese military, that if the Americans were to invade the homelands, Japanese homelands, that every prisoner would be killed. And that was even known by the prisoners. They knew they were living with the Sword of Damocles hanging over them, and yet they were not killed. Why?

**Luke Zamperini:** Well, something happened. And one of the prison guards came to my dad and said, "Oh, there's been a cholera outbreak in a city called Hiroshima.", very bad business. And so, that was the propaganda that was going out. Instead, what had happened was the, United States-

**Dr. James Dobson:** Atomic bomb.

Luke Zamperini: ... military dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Followed up by another bomb a few days later on Nagasaki. This brought an abrupt end of the war. This preempted an American invasion. The invasion was no longer necessary. And so, the Japanese guards didn't know what to do, because there was this kill order that they were supposed to execute, but they hadn't got word to execute it. They also hadn't got word not to execute it, so they didn't really know what to do.

Dr. James Dobson: Did they not know the war had ended?

Luke Zamperini: Eventually, they did. So they knew that there was a declaration of cessation of hostilities, it was still several more days before Japan formally surrendered. And at this point, the prison guards just began to walk away. So my father's life, and the lives of the thousands of other allied prisoners in the Japanese prison camp system, was spared because of the atomic bomb. We look at the atomic bomb today, and people talk about it being really a bad bit of history in the American experience, but it actually saved millions of lives. Not only did it save the American GI prisoners of war, but it also saved untold millions of Japanese who would've fought to the last man to stop the American invasion.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's been estimated that perhaps a million American lives would be lost if they had to invade the Japanese home islands.

Luke Zamperini: Yes, that's correct. And so, here the war is over, and now the men are just waiting at the prison camps. They don't know what to do. And all of a sudden, B-29s are flying overhead, dropping supplies. And so, here they finally had food. And so, what did these GIs do with it? They turned around and shared it with their former captors, who were themselves starving at this point of the war. They gave it to the villagers that were surrounding their prison camps. This was just the way that the GIs were. They were appreciative of finding having food, and they knew these other people were starving, and they shared it with them.

Eventually, a train showed up to pick them all up and take them to Yokohama to be repatriated. And so, they get on the train. The train goes through Japan and goes through Tokyo, and they could witness the total devastation of Tokyo from the American bombing campaign.

So they get to Yokohama. The officers tell the men, "Get up and go into that building over there. There'll be plenty of coffee, donuts, and chocolates. Anything you want to eat is going to be inside there." And so, everyone's making a mad dash for that building. And then there's a man standing outside going, "Anybody got a good story?" And so, one of my dad's fellow prison guards says, "Well, yeah. He does right there." So the guy grabs him and stops him, and says, "Well, tell me your story." He said, "What's your name?" "Well, my name is Louie Zamperini." "Well, that can't be possible. He was declared dead over a year ago. Do you have any ID?" And all he had was his lifetime pass for USC sporting events, a little silver plate.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Luke Zamperini: And so, he showed him that, and he goes, "Well, that's good enough for me."

Now, it turns out, that the Japanese never had recorded him as a prisoner of war, so he was not on the prisoner of war lists that the United States government had. So he'd get to these places where they're going to feed them and clothe them, and they'd say, "I'm sorry, sir, this is only for prisoners of war." "But I am a prisoner of war." "Well, you're not on my list." And so, he couldn't get fed, he couldn't get clothed.

In the meantime, my grandmother was going crazy, and she was writing the local general in Southern California, "Where's my son? Where's my son? Where's my son?" So finally, that general sends a red order letter to my dad saying, "Get your rear end back here with every available dispatch." So he finally makes his way back to-

Dr. James Dobson: I doubt if that's a direct quote, probably worse than that.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. Well, we've had to spell that word out in public. So he comes home to a hero's welcome, and this is the point where the movie essentially ends, but the story continues. And so, now my father comes back, famous American athlete, returned from the dead. Got the keys to every city he wants to go to. And people inviting him to parties, the movie studios that he's got carte blanche to, come to any of their things. But what he's brought home with them is post-traumatic stress disorder, which they didn't know what it was then.

For the entire year that he had been exposed to Watanabe, "The Bird", he began to have these nightmares about murdering that guard. And in these nightmares he had almost every night, this guard would attack him with his belt buckle or with a kendo stick, and it would end up with him trying to choke the life out of the guard. And that he'd wake up in a cold sweat. So this went on for a few years.

A year after being home, he met my mother, they got married, and they had a nice life together, but the nightmares kind of diminished a little bit, but then they started to come back as he found other challenges in life.

Dr. James Dobson: Many of our listeners have no idea the intensity PTSD, and what it does. In World War I, they called it shell-shock. And through the various wars, they had a different name for it. But it was essentially the same thing, which was the horror of what they'd seen and been through comes back, and it is a continuing struggle for survival.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. For Louie Zamperini, the war wasn't over. It was still raging on in his soul, in his mind. Even after being married, the nightmares continued. One night, he woke up from his dream with his hands around "The Bird's" neck, only to

discover that he was straddling my mother, and had her by the throat instead. Well, that really scared her, and of course, it scared him too.

And so, they went to the VA hospital. They didn't know what to tell them. They didn't know what it was. Life was spiraling down. He was self-medicating with alcohol. He was getting more and more irritable. He would get into fistfights at the drop of a hat. He was drinking to the point of oblivion. And it got to the point where my mother had then filed for divorce. And so, everything he's tried has failed. He's just been a total failure at everything he's tried to do to earn money, or to try to rehabilitate himself. It's just all spiraling out of control.

Then, a young couple moves into the apartment house that they were living in, in Hollywood, California, and they said, "We'd like to take you to hear this preacher in a tent meeting in downtown Los Angeles." And my dad, of course, wanted nothing to do with it. And they were able to talk my mom into going,

Dr. James Dobson: Let me give some clues to our listeners.

Luke Zamperini: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: It's 1949.

Luke Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: It's in the summertime.

Luke Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: It is in Los Angeles.

Luke Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: It is a young preacher.

Luke Zamperini: A young preacher.

Dr. James Dobson: Guess who?

Luke Zamperini: Okay. The facility that they had was a big tent called the Canvas Cathedral. And this young preacher was scheduled to be there for three weeks. He ended up being there for eight weeks. Good thing, because it took all that time to get my dad to finally go to hear him speak.

So he goes to this tent meeting downtown, and he sees this guy that he was not the vision he had of a revival preacher. This was a tall, handsome, athletic looking guy named Billy Graham. And so, he goes in and he listens to the message. And when it gets to the point of the sermon where Reverend Graham

is saying that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, my dad's furious. "I don't need this guy telling me I'm a sinner. I'm out of here." So he grabs my mom and heads out the door and goes home. "Don't ever take me back to that place again."

They get home. And my mom had said, well, because of her newfound faith in Jesus Christ that she had gotten several days earlier at the Billy Graham tent meeting, she goes, "Because of that, I'm not going to divorce you. And so, you've got to go back with me at least one more time."

So he does. He goes back the next night, and it gets to the point in the sermon where he's getting uncomfortable and wants to leave. And as he grabs my mom, says, "We're out of here." They start working their way to the aisle, and then Reverend Graham is talking about, something to the effect that when people reach the end of their rope and have nowhere else to turn, they turn to God. And that made my dad think about the time on the life raft where he was making promises to God, "If you'll save me from this and get me home alive, I'll seek you and serve you."

And he realized that God had taken care of his part of the bargain, but Louie Zamperini had not. And he said, "I felt like such a heel." So instead of turning to the left and leaving the tent, he just turned to the right and went down to the stage, and went to the prayer area behind the stage, and found a young counselor to help him through the prayer. And he told me that when he got up off his knees, he realized he was done getting drunk. That he was done fighting. He realized at that moment that he'd forgiven his prison guards, including "The Bird." And up to this point, all he ever wanted to do was go back to Japan and find this guy and finish him off. And here, he realized that he had forgiven him in that very instant.

So he went home that night, and it was the first night in five years, he hadn't had that recurring nightmare about killing "The Bird", and he never had again the rest of his life, his PTSD was gone like that. Completely different man.

The next day, he takes his GI issued New Testament Bible, and walks down the street to a place called Barnsdall Park, and sits there and starts reading it. And for the first time in his life, it made sense to him.

So he got himself a flight to Tokyo. And he said, "This is going to be a real test of my faith. Because I know I've forgiven him in my heart, but can I look at them face to face and forgive my former captors?" And so, he got to Japan. He was able to get permission to go to Sugamo Prison, which is where the allies had imprisoned all the Japanese war criminals, including the prison camp guards, and a lot of them. And so, he was able to get in there, and tell his story to an assembly of them all, and tell them that he forgave them. And he could look in the audience and he could pick out the faces. I know their names by the nicknames that the prisoners gave them, so I can't repeat that. But he recognized them, and he went down in the audience and shook their hands and

looked them in the eyes and said, "I forgive you." And then he preached the gospel to them, and a number of them came to faith.

Dr. James Dobson: That is an incredible story. To think of all that he suffered at the hands of these soldiers, these guards, and to look them in the eye and say, "I no longer hold you accountable. I forgive you because of Jesus Christ."

Luke Zamperini: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: And that story has touched people from that day to this. Now, the film ends with him going back to Japan, and looking up those guards who had abused him, but not "The Bird". He couldn't find "The Bird". In fact, the implication is left in the movie, that all of the guards agreed to see him except "The Bird". But that's not quite true.

Luke Zamperini: Well, what had happened is, "The Bird" hid out in the mountains of Nagano Japan for seven years, until general amnesty was declared in an attempt for the American government to reconcile with the Japanese; which was necessary for them to be a united front against the spread of Communism in Asia.

So we didn't know that until 1998, when CBS Sports did a documentary on my father's life, and they'd gone back to Japan to film scenes in their actual locations. And the producer, by mistake, found out that "The Bird" was still alive, and he was a wealthy insurance salesman. And so, they got Bob Simon, who was the narrator of this documentary, and their cameras, and they went and they found "The Bird" and they interviewed him. And they asked him if he remembered Louie Zamperini? He go, "Oh, Zamperinica. Yeah, number one prisoner. Yeah, knew him well." "Well then, if he was such a good prisoner, why did you beat the tar of him every day?" "Oh, he told you that?" "Yes."

So they began to confront him with all of the atrocities that he committed in the prison camp system, and he was admitting to it. And he also said that he wanted to meet with my dad again, because what they wanted do was bring him back to Japan and meet with him. But what had happened was Watanabe's son and grandson had seen the cameras, and come out and were listening to their father talk. And they knew nothing of his past, and they were horrified at what he was admitting to have done on camera. They stopped the interview, and they refused to let their father meet with this American, Zamperini, because he'd be expected to grovel and ask for forgiveness. Of course, that was not what my father had in mind. He wanted to meet with him, put his arm around him, tell him that he didn't hold anything against him anymore, and he wanted to tell him about his new-found life in Jesus Christ. But that meeting never happened.

Dr. James Dobson: Louie spent the rest of his life telling this story, but the essence of it is that there's a reason why he chose forgiveness rather than revenge. And that reason is the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Luke Zamperini: Right. It's hard for people to realize it, but while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And so, the same love that God had for Louie Zamperini, when he went to the cross and died for Louie Zamperini's sins, that self-sacrificing agape love, that's the same love that my dad had to have for "The Bird" to forgive him.

Dr. James Dobson: I guess Hollywood can't express that part of the story, but I wish they would. Because that's the reason behind the story, and that's the reason for the life that was lived.

Luke Zamperini: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: So Luke, your father spent the rest of his life, until July of 2014, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, and doing everything he could to tell people that Jesus loved him. I mean, he lived quite a life, and he never turned his back on his faith again.

Luke Zamperini: This is true. He came back from Japan, and realized that he needed to continue to try to spread the good news, and that he wanted to give something back to society. So in 1953, he established Victory Boys Camp. It's a nonprofit charity that was Outward Bound before there was an Outward Bound.

Dr. James Dobson: It still exists today.

Luke Zamperini: It still exists today.

Dr. James Dobson: And in fact, your son helps to run it.

Luke Zamperini: Yes, he does. We were actually thinking of letting the charity go when dad would pass on, but something miraculous happened. We found another boy that needed some help and he came to us. I took him to meet my dad, and my dad said, "We got to give this kid a chance." He came from a good Christian family, but he'd gotten tied up in heroin, and that he was looking for a way out. He'd actually applied to Youth With A Mission. The only thing he needed to do was raise money to get there. So Victory Boys Camp footed the bill to get this kid down there.

And I looked him in the eye and said, "Kyle, we're sending you down there as a scared kid on heroin. You're going to come back a man." And indeed, that's what happened. He'd gone down there, and in three months they had got him cleaned, they got him trained, and they sent him on a mission to Nepal and India for three months, and it really changed his life. He came back on fire. So because of that, we decided to continue to keep Victory Boys Camp alive as a legacy for my dad, and also just to continue on that good work.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I regret that we're out of time. I have thoroughly enjoyed these three days together and hearing this story. I knew it. I have the book *Unbroken*. I've been reading it. And now, there is another book, unbelievably written shortly before

Louie Zamperini died, and it's called *Don't Give Up, Don't Give In*, which fits with the title *Unbroken*. And this was published when?

Luke Zamperini: It was completed just two days before he died. And it is his experiences, and the lessons that he drew from those experiences. It's a great little work of wisdom from a 97-year-old man who lived an extraordinary life.

Dr. James Dobson: Where can they get this book?

Luke Zamperini: That book is available everywhere books are sold, whether it's Amazon, or a local bookstore.

Lisa Zamperini: Costco.

Luke Zamperini: Costco.

Dr. James Dobson: And there were two other books, in fact, that your dad was involved in.

Luke Zamperini: *The Devil at My Heels* was my father's autobiography. And then of course, *Don't Give Up, Don't Give in* was the project he wanted to start immediately thereafter, but then he got involved with Laura Hillenbrand, and got *Unbroken* off the ground.

Dr. James Dobson: You're proud of this man, aren't you?

Luke Zamperini: Oh, extremely. First and foremost, he was my dad, and he was my hero because of the father that he was.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I've written a book called *Your Legacy*, and in it I state that there's a difference between a legacy and a heritage. A heritage is something you give to someone. It usually has to do with money. A legacy is something you build in someone. He built something in you that is priceless. It was his legacy to you, and Lisa to you. And thank you for sharing this story with us. I mean, we covered 97 years of this man's life and he's waiting for you in heaven. And I think there's going to be a big hoard of people who are going to be clamoring to thank your dad for introducing them to Jesus Christ, despite all that he went through.

And as an American, I want to say thank you, sir. Thank you for helping to keep this country safe. And for those that are inclined to be disrespectful to this nation, that people in Washington and elsewhere, who are hostile and angry at this country, we are who we are as a nation because of good men like Louie Zamperini, who gave their life to that cause, and lived a consistent life after he found Jesus Christ.

Lisa Zamperini: That's wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: Lisa, now you're proud of this man too, aren't you?



Lisa Zamperini: Incredibly proud of him.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, God's blessings to you both.

Lisa Zamperini: God bless you.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being with us.

Luke Zamperini: Well, thank you. It's been an honor and a privilege to be here, and to talk to you about this incredible life story.

Dr. James Dobson: You read some of my books early on too, didn't you?

Lisa Zamperini: Oh, absolutely. I was a huge fan of your work. And you'll have to talk to our son sometime, and ask him how things worked out.

Dr. James Dobson: If that sounded like a self-serving question, there's a reason for it, because you both grew up in the middle of the 70s, and you were impacted by that cultural upheaval that was going on in the Western world. There was such confusion then. It involved drug abuse, and the sexual revolution, and the collapse of authority, and so many other aspects of the late 60s and early 70s, because there was chaos then. So you were caught up in all of that, and the Lord rescued you from it, didn't he?

Luke Zamperini: Yes, indeed.

Lisa Zamperini: Definitely.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're passing on that heritage to others now.

Luke Zamperini: Yes, and passing on our legacy too.

Lisa Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Ha ha.

Lisa Zamperini: Yes. Hopefully, a legacy.

Dr. James Dobson: I love you both.

Lisa Zamperini: I love you too.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being with us.

Luke Zamperini: It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

Lisa Zamperini: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: Well, that was Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Luke and Lisa Zamperini here on Family Talk. If you'd like to listen to it again, or share it with a friend or loved one, all you have to do is go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

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Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today, and have a great weekend. I pray that God will continue to richly bless you and your family, as you grow stronger in your relationship with Him. And be sure to join us again Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Well, thank you everyone for tuning into our program today. You may know that Family Talk is a listener supported program, and we remain on the air by your generosity, literally. If you can help us financially, we would certainly appreciate it. God's blessings to you all.

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