



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Softening a Crusty Heart

**Guest(s):** Don Coble

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Dr. Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I have a recorded message for you today that will make you laugh, and it'll also inspire you with this personal account. The speaker's name is Don Coble. He spent many years in the US Army. He became a crusty old Lieutenant Colonel who was invited to attend a church service for the first time in his life. I'd like you today to just lean back and enjoy this personal presentation from the heart of a man who shares his journey of faith. I have heard this message many times. It's been in my library for more than 20 years, but it's still relevant, it's still powerful. And I think you're going to enjoy it too.

Don Coble: There was 12 of us kids in our family. My dad usually called the roll when we'd come to supper. But we had a lot of fun down there as I was growing as a youngster. And we didn't have a whole lot as far as material things, but I really loved my dad. And my dad always took time for me, always. And he taught me a lot of things. When I was 13 years old, my dad dropped dead of a heart attack. And we'd made a lot of plans together and that wasn't in it. My dad had taught me a lot of things. He taught me how to skin a rabbit and drive a nail, saw a board, a lot of things.

And I really loved that man. And I didn't have him anymore. And it took me about six months before I could come to grips with that. It just absolutely destroyed me. And I felt cheated. I got angry at the world. And so I struck out in rebellion. Nobody led me into sin. There wasn't any wrong crowd that come and got me. I built the wrong crowd and went and got others. And I really went into some bad things and really broke my mother's heart and just struck out at the world. And I got caught up in it. And we had a little home brew project down in the gym. And principal didn't think a lot of that. And so I got expelled. So then I got into a group that was even worse than that and things really got bad. And

finally, I got old enough, a good friend of mine decided that maybe I ought to try the service. He was the deputy sheriff.

He alleged how that probably was a good plan. And after he got through talking with me, I thought it was probably a good plan. And I thought, "Well, I'll teach him something." Because I knew pretty much everything, I'd done about everything. And those things I hadn't done, I had told it that I'd done it. I believed it myself. And so I went in the service, got on the Greyhound bus, and I was sizing everybody up to see what was going on. We got on down there to a place where they was going to do basic training on us. And I was sizing guys up and there was a fellow out there hollering at everybody, "Line up and fall in," and all that. And we was horsing around, I was playing the role as the big gunner. And this fellow come over and said, "Young man, you hear me?" I said, "Fall in over there." I said, "I'll be there in a minute." He hit me, I hit the ground.

I was looking up at that fellow, and he was a good sized fellow, about an 18 and a half inch neck. And he picked me up and put me in the line there. And he got in front of us and he said, "Men, I want to tell you something." He said, "I'll be your mother, your father, your girlfriend, your chaplain, I'm everything to you." And I believed him. And the thought crossed my mind at that time that maybe there was one or two things I hadn't learned yet. So I tried to pay attention. And I went on about my business there in the Army, but it really took a hold of me. And it was the dynamic that I needed, discipline. My father was a disciplinarian. My dad never begged us or coerced or anything. He just spoke once. And if we didn't respond, we was usually in a heap over at the side somewhere. And you don't have to roll across the living room more than about twice. You can train a monkey.

And I had missed a lot of that. And so I appreciated this Sergeant that became my DI. And he taught me a lot of things, a lot of things. And one thing he taught me was shut my mouth. And he taught me how to make a bed and to peel potatoes and scrub pots. I never so glad to leave a man in my life. So I worked hard and tried to pay attention, finally got out of basic without dying and got on into the service and really tried to make something of myself. And after my first hitch, I thought, "Well, that's it. I've taught them about all I can here and I guess I better go on back." So I went on back home.

And when I got off the bus, there was my dear friend. And so me and the deputy got in his car and we went down and had some coffee. And he said, "We cleaned up a lot of places around here in them three years." And he went on to tell me a lot of things and convinced me that I really wasn't needed there any longer. And I ought to go out and further the education of other communities. So I decided the best thing for me to do was get back in the service. So I did. And I hadn't been back in long and I was a Sergeant then. And the company commander called me in and said, "We're sending you to OCS." I said, "No, I don't want to go." He said, "I didn't ask you that. You're going to OCS." It's pretty difficult to argue when you stand at attention. So I went on to OCS, and I wouldn't go to that school again for Brigadier General.

I finally got down and got my commission. And then I went on back home on furlough and spied this little girl that I'd tried to date. In fact, she was a church person. And she, her family was church people. They weren't saved, but they had a lot of religion. A lot of ritual, but nothing real. And she thought, "Well, I'll go ahead and marry this fellow. I'll change him, get him squared straight away." And so we got married and she made the tactful mistake of thinking that she was going to change me. I was a heavy drinker by then, and I was really a workaholic. I worked very hard. I was very serious about my job, serious about what I was doing. And I'd been raised to believe that anything you do, you give it everything you've got. And if it's not worth doing that, then just go on and lay down. And so that was the way I was raised and that's the way I was working in the service. And it became my god and I worked very hard.

One day, I was at the Command and General Staff College, I'd gone to Vietnam and had survived that and came back and was promoted again and went to Command General Staff College. And I was there working very hard and wanting to make very good and the commandant's list and the top 10% of the class. And didn't have time at all for my family, I just kind of used them. I didn't really have time. I hadn't told my wife I loved her since I conned the preacher into marrying us. And I didn't love her. I had affection for her. I had lust after her. She met the part of my life that I needed companionship in, but I didn't love her. I didn't know how to love because I wore a great big mask.

You see, I loved my dad desperately. And as a result of that, when I lost him, I couldn't get hurt again. And so I put on a big mask and a big front. And I went back to Vietnam again. And this time, I had a little more rank. And she, before I had gone to Vietnam this last time, she tried to commit suicide. Praise God she was unsuccessful. And the neighbor then, a few days after the trauma wore off, came over and presented Jesus Christ in a real way and she got saved. And she tried to tell me about her faith and her Lord and I didn't want to hear it. I didn't have time for Jesus. One day she said, "Don't you think maybe you ought to get your kids to Sunday school?" [inaudible 00:09:17] "I probably ought to do that. And it's probably good for the career. I'm getting close to General and I ought to have everything squared away."

A lot of people say, "Well, that's an ego thing, Don. You shouldn't share things like that." That's what went through my mind. My god was the Army. And it would have been that way if I was a welder or a ditch digger or whatever. Because I was from the 110% crowd. Everything I did. When we used to go out and get drunk, I was the first one there, cops were the last one to bring home. Whatever it was, I was 110%. So I thought, "Okay, well we'll really do this."

So we went downtown in a little bitty church and got down there and went in and something scared me right away. There was some men in the church. Now, I'd been in and out of churches quite a bit. I used to date young girls. Their folks had never told them about guys like me. Going to church is real easy, no problem. And I'd see a lot of women. See a man up there behind the thing and a lot of women, some retired fellow maybe giving out bulletins and real nice

fellow. But I didn't see the ruggedness of manhood that I had been trained was a man. I didn't see any men standing for their faith.

And so when I walked in this little church and here was two big dudes, reminded me of that DI that had put me through it, and they said, "Welcome. How are you?" One almost broke my hand, the other dislocated my shoulder. And it really bothered me. Well, these guys are men. What are they doing in a church? So I went over and sat down with my family and everybody there. And in came this choir and this fellow with white hair, crew cut, with a great big Bible in his hand. They come in and the choir did their thing, and he opened the book and got up and started to preach. And he said, "Open up to John." And everybody's rustling. I looked around and every one of them men had a Bible. I'd never seen that before. And pretty soon, I was sitting there and one of these fellows come over and, plop, there was a Bible in my hand now.

I was about halfway through the service before my son said, "Turn it over, turn it over." I was sweating, miserable, that guy's talking about Jesus Christ paying the price for my sin. And all my phoniness and all my rottenness already paid for, all of that debt already canceled. And it scared me. And it made me miserable. And I got up and left. And after awhile, I was out there smoking, I looked like Kaiser Steel. Just miserable. Thought I'd have to get better to die. And finally, she came out, everybody come out. I got in the car, laid some rubber out, went back to the fort. I said, "That man's crazy. Don't ever ask me to go back down here again." In the past, she would have been on me like ugly on an ape. She just said, "Yes, dear. Fine." That made me madder and I just commenced cussing and ranting and raving. And I finally shut up when my children started crying.

I was miserable that week. I was sick. That guy was crazy. He kept saying something about Pilate, a fellow by the name of Pilate. And they was hanging Jesus on the cross. And he told the crowd, "What are you going to do with this Jesus who is called Christ?" And that kept- waked me up at night. I couldn't get that out of my mind, what you do with Jesus who is called Christ? And all week long, it just bugged me and just tore my guts out. And I was miserable. Finally, I woke up Sunday morning just clear as a bell. Went in and started fixing breakfast. The family come in. Said, "What are you doing, dad?" I said, "I'm getting breakfast." Said, "How come?" I said, "We're going to church." I looked around. Man, I didn't want to go to church. That was the last place I wanted to go. I couldn't help myself. My wife didn't say, "Well, I told you so. I knew we'd get you." She never said any of that. She just said, "Hey, that's fine, honey, if that's what you'd like to do." And that made me angry.

We ate and I went down there and we even beat the preacher to the church. I was sitting there and that voice kept telling me, "Coble, you dumb guy. Get out of here, get out of here." It was about a foot or so from my hand to the keys, and I didn't have the power to turn the key on. I couldn't move my hand. I couldn't leave. I wanted to leave, I couldn't. Finally the preacher come. And I thought I was the only guy in there. And I was miserable. My tie got all tight and

I was sweating. I undid my tie. I did the best I could to get up and I couldn't do it. And he said that Jesus Christ was the bridge between me and God. And that all the religion in the world wouldn't get me right with God. And if I didn't have Christ, I was going to hell because the Bible said that you can't get into heaven unless you're holy.

I knew that ruled me out because I wasn't holy. I'd lived a lie so long I believed it myself. And he went on and preached, and I don't remember a lot of the other things he said, but then he went on and he said, "What are you going to do with this Jesus who is called the Christ?" And that triggered what had been inside my head for a week. And he said, "If you want to get your heart right with God, I ask you to come right now. Because if you're not serious enough about it to do it publicly, then it's another lie." I had a very prestigious job. I traveled all over the world. I was in and out of the Pentagon every two weeks, I went to NATO, SHAPE headquarters. And everybody knew me and knew who I was and I didn't care.

And I got up there, and there was this old fellow up there, he said, "What do you want, young man?" I said, "I want to do what you said." He said, "What is that?" He made it awful hard on me. I said, "I want to get right with God. I want to have Jesus." I didn't know what to say. He said, "You want to be saved?" I said, "Yes, sir. I do." He said, "Are you willing to put Jesus Christ in control of your life?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Then on that basis, let's go to Calvary. And we knelt right there while they was singing Amazing Grace. And I asked Christ into my heart. It was a fantastic experience.

Got home, ran, looked in the mirror. I looked the same. That guy sold me a bill of goods. And my wife asked me what the problem was. And I told her, I said, "I don't look any different." And she said it, "It's inside. Jesus is inside." And then she started sharing with me. And then I felt alright. So we got down to business. And first thing God did is take away my X-rated mouth. And I had to fish for words and everything. And it was kind of weird. I'd be in a little circle of people and everybody'd be talking that talk and I'd try not to talk that talk. And then pretty soon, they'd quiet down. And it was kind of weird because I wasn't talking that talk. Then they'd start stumbling around, we'd all be stumbling around trying to talk to one another.

And then God worked on the booze angle. I had a private bar in my home and about \$300 worth of booze, kept it stocked. And I thought, "Well, Lord, all right, I'll give that up and I'll give it to my neighbor." The Lord seemed to tell me, "Well, if it ain't good for you, it ain't good for him." So I started pouring it down the sink. And my wife come in from grocery shopping and seen me pouring all this booze down. We got happy in the Lord, commenced crying. We both just poured all that booze down, quart after quart of it. I know the garbage man next Monday said, "Well, he did it again."

But God delivered me. And then God did something fantastic, he gave me a love for my woman. I'd never experienced it before. It was fantastic. I loved her just

like she was. I was so thankful for that woman. And I couldn't tell her enough how much I loved her. It just was just overwhelming. And I loved my kids. But I didn't love my kids until I went through a deep water with them. I was one of them kind of guys that made a federal case out of most everything. And when I told my children to be home 9:00, it didn't mean one minute after. You could come in five minutes early, wouldn't be penalized too hard for that. But don't ever be late.

And I told my oldest son, "You be home 9:00." And he came in about 10 minutes after and I was out in the garage and he came in and he said, "I'm sorry I'm late, dad." And I reached over and backhanded that boy, knocked him off his bike and over into the wall. There's blood running down his mouth. And he said, "Daddy, I love you." And I fell to my knees and I asked forgiveness from God and of that boy. And through that, Jesus taught me to love. And I praise God for the love that he's given me. And then I started growing and I expected too much too soon. Pretty soon my life became a rollercoaster. Up, down, all around. And I was losing my peace, I was losing my joy. And then I noticed the old mask started coming and trying to get back on me. And I was comparing myself with other people.

And I found that that's wrong. And I searched the word of God. And the thing that kept coming into my mind was what shall I do with this Jesus who is called Christ? And I started searching the word of God. And I found out in these blessed scriptures that there is a plan to be God's man. Jesus said in John the 12th chapter, "I tell you the truth. Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it. While the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant also will be. And my father will honor the one who serves me."

What are you going to do with this Jesus who is called Christ, Don Coble? I had to die to self. I had to die to my own desires. You see, I'd used the Lord kind of like an overcoat. When things got bad and the weather turned foul, I put him on. But when the sunshine come out, I hung him back up on the peg and went on my way. I had to make a decision. If you're here today and you don't know him in a living, personal, real way, my dear friend, I don't believe that you're one of his. Because the Bible says you have to have fruit. Fruit. And Jesus said that there isn't any fruit that comes from a thorn bush. And I found in my own life that until he was Lord of all, he wasn't Lord at all.

What are you going to do with this Jesus who is called the Christ? Where do you stand with your wife, fellows? God's got the power to heal your marriage. I don't care what's wrong. We were headed for divorce court. My wife tried to kill herself. I don't care what it is. Jesus Christ has got the power if you've got the desire. But it has to start with you. The security of your whole family rests on you. What a glorious privilege that is. God wants all of us. That's all he wants. If you're here today and you don't know him as your personal savior, I'm going to ask you today, don't get caught up in some religion. You can have ritual running

out your ears, but unless you have the real thing, your life won't be changed. All of these dynamics of becoming God's man is simply getting our priorities together. The Lord Jesus Christ, my woman, my children, and everything else.

Dr. Dobson:

Well, that was Lieutenant Colonel Don Coble speaking some years ago about his introduction to Jesus Christ. And it busts my heart to hear it again. What an incredible story this is about a hard drinking, tough military guy on his way to hell and how God loved him and forgave his sins and made him a new creation in Jesus Christ. I've shared this message with you today because there may be others, I'm sure there are, who are in our listening audience and who haven't met this Lord. And I ask you the same question that Don Coble's pastor asked him. What are you going to do with Jesus who is the Christ? Now listen, folks, I am not a minister. I'm not a pastor. But I know if you open your heart to the Savior, he'll do the same thing for you that he did for Don Coble.

There may be a wife or a mother or a father out there who's been praying for you for many years. Your life may have run aground like it did for Don. Maybe your marriage has fallen apart, or you might be a heavy drinker or you're involved in other sinful activity. In fact, let's admit it. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. There's a better way of living and it begins with a prayer for forgiveness. That's all that is required to make you clean and whole again.

Let me tell you how that can happen. I was interviewing a very well-known minister named Luis Palau many years ago. I'm sure there are many people listening to us who know of him or know him. He's led many thousands of people to Christ. And I love him like a brother. I invited him to be a guest on my program. And at the end of that interview, I said, "Luis, there may be someone listening to us who is driving down a freeway, perhaps. And that person has been touched by your words today. That individual is wondering how to go about finding a relationship with Jesus Christ. The words that have been spoken today have touched the heart of that person and something resonated inside." And I asked Dr. Palau if he would tell that person and many others what to do specifically to establish a relationship with this Jesus.

Dr. Palau suggested that that person pull off the road and perhaps find a parking lot someplace where he or she could pray a simple prayer for forgiveness and to ask for reconciliation with Jesus. That's what Christians call it, that's what the Bible calls it. And that means this restoration that I've been talking about. That is all that's required. You don't have to do anything to earn this relationship. All you have to do is yield yourself to the love of the Savior.

Well, we found out later that there was indeed a man who was listening to us that day. He was driving down a freeway and what he heard touched him. And he pulled off the road at the next ramp and he prayed a sinner's prayer. And he became a believer in Christ on that day. And his name is Jim Talent. He became a United States Senator with major influence in Washington. And I was in the halls of Congress one day, this was years later, and he recognized me and he came up and told me what had happened that day after hearing Dr. Palau and

me. This story is recounted in Jim Talent's own bio in Wikipedia. And he says about it, "That was the day I passed from death unto life." This transformation that occurred in his life could also happen to others out there who have heard Don Coble on our program today. And if you're one of them, this could be the greatest day of your life.

Well, thanks for listening to our program today. We're calling it Softening a Crusty Heart. If you made a decision for Christ, I hope you'll write and tell me about it, and we'll rejoice together. You've been listening to Family Talk, and I'm Dr. James Dobson. I hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Announcer:

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