



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Unbroken: The Louis Zamperini Story – Part 2

Guest(s): Luke and Lisa Zamperini

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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: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I have a question for you. Do you have someone in your life who inspires you? Perhaps a person who experienced almost unthinkable adversity and had to lean on God to ultimately overcome a major challenge or circumstance? Well, if you don't, I have a suggestion for you. His name is Louis Zamperini.

Today here on Family Talk, we're going to hear part two of a special three-part conversation about Louis Zamperini. He was a World War II veteran, had an unbelievable faith journey with incredible hardships and obstacles to overcome, from being stranded at sea, to surviving a POW camp that was operated by Japanese forces. Louis's story will open your heart to all that God is capable of, if you have faith in him.

Now, in 2014, Louis Zamperini went home to be with the Lord at the tender age of 97. On today's edition of Family Talk will hear part two of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Louis's son, Luke and Luke's wife Lisa Zamperini. Luke is the President and CEO of the Louis Zamperini Foundation. His wife Lisa, is the executive director. And together they have one son, his name is Clay. Now let's join Dr. James Dobson for part two of this classic conversation with Luke and Lisa Zamperini, right now on Family Talk.

Luke Zamperini: Pearl Harbor happened December 7th, 1941, and this was May, 1943, when he went on this reconnaissance mission. They were flying at just under a thousand feet below the cloud cover, looking to see if they could find any wreckage or any survivors of this B-25 that had ditched there, when the airplane that they were using this B-24 was a borrowed plane and it had engine problems. And first the number one engine on the left side of the plane went out, and then eventually the number two engine went out. And at under a thousand feet this plane just cartwheeled straight into the ocean, landing on its left side, and just blew to pieces.

Dr. James Dobson: Luke, when we finished the program last time, ran out of time, your father had been on the sea for, I think it was 47 days?

Luke Zamperini: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: 47 days. For water they were capturing rainwater.

Luke Zamperini: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And that's what kept them alive. And they were eating albatross, which is horrible unless you're starving to death, and they were. And so they were out there waiting, hoping against hope, and probably praying, even though your dad was not a believer, not a Christian at that time. So there they were for all this time on that sea.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. And on day 27, they did hear an airplane coming overhead and they saw what appeared to be a - 25 bomber. So they set the flares off, put dye in the water. And they had a little brass mirror that they would use the sun's light to reflect it at the plane. And, of course, that finally caught the pilot's attention. The plane came diving down on them.

Dr. James Dobson: They'd been rescued, they thought.

Luke Zamperini: That's what they were thinking, they're being rescued. And all of a sudden the sea is erupting around them. And this turned out to be a Japanese Sally bomber that decided to use these three men in a life raft for target practice. So my dad remembered when he was an Eagle Scout that bullets would lose their velocity in about three feet of water, so over the side they went.

The problem is they'd been followed by a couple of sharks for weeks now, and the sharks were there in the water beneath them, with them. So they dove down there, got underneath the raft, avoided the bullets that were going through the raft. And then they managed to, all three of them, get back into the raft after this plane passed, as the sharks came up around the raft.

Then the plane came back for another strafing run. This time, the other two guys were too weak to go into the water, my dad went in alone. And this is where he began his ballet with these sharks. The shark would come up and would turn sideways to kind of take a bite out of you. And he remembered from a survival class he took in Honolulu that the shark's nose is sensitive. So what he did is he straight arm the shark, he put his hand out and pushed against the shark's snout to keep himself from being bitten.

I said, "Well, Dad, did you slug the shark, did you take a swipe at him?" He goes, "No, because if I had missed and my hand had gone in his mouth, I'd have been done." So he just straight armed him like a running back, climbs back into the raft. The plane comes again.

This plane stayed over them for 30 minutes, strafing the raft. And so he was doing this constant dance with the sharks, and going back up and getting air and going back down, until finally the plane left. And he was convinced that his raft mates were now dead. But when he got in the raft, he realized that none of them had been hit. Later on when they were able to count the number of holes in the raft, they discovered there were 48 bullet holes in the raft, and not a single injury. This was just miraculous, another miracle at sea.

Dr. James Dobson: And they had the equipment to close up those bullet holes?

Luke Zamperini: They did have patching kits and they had a hand pump. And so they began to immediately start pumping up. There were two rafts to begin with. One raft is completely shredded from the strafing, and so the three of them got in the one remaining raft. And these guys were already emaciated and now they're pumping for their lives.

In the meantime, with this deflated raft being so low in the water, the sharks took to jumping over the raft and trying to snag the men out of the raft. And the tail gunner became very useful in this endeavor. He had picked up the aluminum oars that they had, and he was fighting the sharks off with the aluminum oars while my dad was continuing to try to patch the raft while the pilot was continuing to pump the raft full of air,

Dr. James Dobson: You would have to have had a tremendous will to live to have experienced this without giving up. In fact, one of the three did go a little berserk, and didn't survive?

Luke Zamperini: Yeah, on day 33, the tail gunner, Francis McNamara finally succumbed to starvation. He was the least fit of the three. My dad was an athlete, and was always working out and staying fit. McNamara was a party boy, and he just was unable to survive any longer. So he passed away on the night of the 33rd day, and they let him go. I asked him, I said, Dad, did you ever think about eating McNamara? And he said, "No, no, we never thought about it. We said what prayers we knew how to say, and then we just put him overboard and let him sink."

And then they went on another, well, another couple of weeks before they were finally rescued.

Dr. James Dobson: Rescued by whom?

Luke Zamperini: Well, that's the rub in the story. They had finally spotted land during a storm at sea. And it turned out this storm was a terrible typhoon that had hit that part of the Pacific, and the seas were like 40 foot seas. When they went to the top of the breakers, they could see land some miles to the west. The very next day, they were starting to paddle towards these islands, when before they could reach the lagoon of this first island, a Japanese patrol boat had come around the

other side of the island, spotted them, and picked them up. So they were rescued by the Japanese Imperial Navy.

Dr. James Dobson: If you could call that being rescued.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. So this began 27 months of Japanese prison camp system for my dad.

Dr. James Dobson: They were sent to an island that's called?

Luke Zamperini: Kwajalein Island was nicknamed Execution Island. Every prisoner that the Japanese captured in the Pacific that was brought to Kwajalein Island was executed by beheading. And this was to be the fate of my father and his raft mate Phillips. What had happened instead was one of the officers there had recognized that my dad was this famous American athlete. Apparently the Japanese were big fans of American sports and movies, so they recognize American actors, American athletes. And this officer suggested that they not execute these two prisoners and send them to Tokyo for potential propaganda purposes. So his life was spared there, on Execution Island, and then he was sent on to Tokyo.

Dr. James Dobson: And to another prison camp.

Luke Zamperini: Yes, of course-

Dr. James Dobson: What did your dad weigh when he got there?

Luke Zamperini: When the Japanese pulled him out of the water, they weighed him. And this was a man who, in his first class Olympic shape, weighed 155 pounds at five foot 10. The Japanese weighed him and he weighed in at 66 pounds. So he'd lost all this body mass in his ordeal at sea. And the Japanese, at that point, also had counted the number of bullet holes in the raft.

Dr. James Dobson: That's more than 80 pounds he lost.

Luke Zamperini: Pretty amazing. And he's the only person that you'll ever have heard about that actually gained weight in a Japanese prison camp system.

Dr. James Dobson: You were starting to say the number of bullet holes?

Luke Zamperini: Yeah. The Japanese had, they were astonished when they saw these two men, and they pulled them on board. Once they pulled the raft up, the raft became their center of attention because it had 48 bullet holes in it. The raft itself was beginning to deteriorate. The patches were beginning to blow up. The yellow rubber dye had been leached away by the ocean water. As a matter of fact, my dad and Phillips were stained yellow because of it.

So when the Japanese saw the raft and started counting up the bullet holes, they became very inquisitive. So my dad explained to them that a Japanese Sally bomber had used them for target practice. And, of course, they didn't want to believe that could be true. They didn't think that their, or at least they said, they didn't think that the Japanese pilots would stoop so low, but they did.

Dr. James Dobson: But they had also executed others that came to that island.

Luke Zamperini: That's right. So being sent to Japan, they thought, of course, they were going to be in a Red Cross supervised prisoner of war camp, and life would be much better than it was on the Island of Kwajalein, which was quite brutal for them.

Dr. James Dobson: In what way?

Luke Zamperini: Well, imagine if you will, seven weeks on the open ocean. And then when the Japanese get you, they put you in a cell that is three foot wide, six foot long and seven foot high. They stayed in those cells for 43 days. So it was a complete environmental change that had profound effects on the prisoners.

Of course, they were treated roughly. They were thrown rice balls to eat. They thought they were going to be decapitated. And so the idea of moving on to a regular prison camp, it was really appealing to them. So they put them on a ship, and the ship took a couple of weeks to get to a prison camp called Ofuna, which was a secret prison camp that the Red Cross didn't know about. And it's where the Japanese would put prisoners that had fresh intelligence, and they would treat them roughly and torture them there, and get them to talk.

Now, my dad couldn't figure out why he was there because he'd already been a couple of months away from Hawaii. He had no intelligence to give them. The B-24 that he was flying in was no longer the current model. So he had no idea why they kept him in a secret camp.

But they kept him there for 13 months because they knew that anyone declared missing in action, after a year and a month, the War Department would put out a declaration of their death. And so the Japanese were waiting for that declaration to come out. And then they tipped their hand to what they wanted to do with him. They offered to take him to Radio Tokyo to do a broadcast. They told him he could write his own script and he could say hello to his parents so that they would know what he's alive.

And, of course, the broadcast was preceded by them working up the idea that the American government had given up on him and erroneously listed him as killed in action but, in fact, he was safe and sound with the Japanese. And so he read his prepared statement to his parents, letting him know that he was alive. And he wrote it in such a way that they would understand it was really him.

Now, the Japanese said, "Yeah, you did a great job with that. Now we'd like you to read this on the next broadcast," which was propaganda, anti-American propaganda. And he refused to do it. He said, "I can't say this, it's not true. I will not be unfaithful to my country."

So this began another year and a half of hell for him, because they, at this point, had assigned a brutally sadistic guard named Mutsuhiro Watanabe to break him and try to get him to want to go back to Radio Tokyo and do the broadcast. Because the idea was that they'd put him up in a hotel and they'd feed him American food and he'd have a nice cushy life.

Instead, he opted to go back to prison camp, and this is where Watanabe also known as The Bird, began to make his life miserable. And so he endured daily beatings from this man for the remaining 17 months of the war. And Watanabe could not break my father. And, of course, that's why the book is called *Unbroken*.

Dr. James Dobson: And the movie.

Luke Zamperini: And the movie. And, I mean, every day he would single him out for a beating. Whether it was with a Kendo stick, or one of his favorite things was, he had a nice one inch wide belt with a big iron belt buckle on it, about two inches in diameter. And he would swing that and hit him in the side of the head.

One night he came in and hit him in the side of the head with that buckle and just blood everywhere. The Bird pulls out some toilet paper and says, "Oh, here." And so my dad's staunching the bleeding with the toilet paper and thinking, I guess the guy can't be all that bad, he's actually being nice to me now. And as soon as he pulled the tissue away to look at it, he hit him again in the same place with the belt buckle and knocked him out completely. And this was just typical of the things he did to him.

Dr. James Dobson: And he was singled out for some of this torture for a reason.

Luke Zamperini: The reason he was singled out was to break him, to make him want to go back and do the propaganda broadcast that he refused to do.

Dr. James Dobson: And so all of that terrible oppression that he went through and the physical beatings and difficulties he experienced was done for a purpose. In fact, that guard you're talking about was told to do this.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. Yes, he was. And, of course, this particular guard already had a reputation before my father met him and routinely beat the prisoners for almost no reason at all.

Dr. James Dobson: So he was sadistic in addition to the mission?

Luke Zamperini: Yeah, he was sadistic, and I think they picked their best boy for the project and assigned him to break Zamperini.

Dr. James Dobson: And he couldn't break him.

Luke Zamperini: Couldn't break him. We had mentioned last time that my dad was a very defiant individual as a child. He channeled that defiance into sports and became this incredible athlete. And it was his defiance in prison camp that really kept him alive. And every time he was beaten by The Bird, what he wanted to do was strike back and kill him. He just knew that if he did that they would end his life on the spot. But it was his defiance that was able to keep him from being unbroken.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, we've been kind of teasing for a couple of days about the fact that you've brought your wife Lisa with us. She's sitting here beside you, if we can paint the picture for our listeners. And she said she's not going to talk. And I said, "You will." So Watanabe was trying to get your dad to talk, and I'm trying to get Lisa to talk.

Lisa Zamperini: My family will love this.

Dr. James Dobson: You know these stories, you have lived with this. You've been married now for?

Lisa Zamperini: 31 years.

Dr. James Dobson: 31 years.

Lisa Zamperini: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Is there anything that you want to elaborate on from what you've heard to this point, about your father-in-law? And you got to know him and to love him too, didn't you?

Lisa Zamperini: Oh, absolutely. I could not have loved him anymore. I mean, he was not just a remarkable dad and father-in-law, but the most incredible grandfather. Our son, Clay, is his only grandchild. So Luke has one sister and she did not have children. So we have the one and only to carry on the Louis legacy. And he was just everything and more, really.

Dr. James Dobson: He lived to be 97.

Lisa Zamperini: 97. And he was out doing speaking engagements up until just the day before we took him to the hospital. Now, I'm listening to the story again, and every time I hear it, I still marvel. And I'm always impacted by the number of miracles that it took to get his life to this point. And, as Luke was speaking about defiance, I was actually sitting here anxiously thinking, okay, now let's talk about how that defiance ended up working in his Christian life, and how things turned around.

Dr. James Dobson: He wasn't a Christian, but he did pray during this time. He was asking the Lord to spare him. He also made promises to the Lord.

Lisa Zamperini: He did, and I know they show that in the film. The one scene during the typhoon where he says, "God, if you spare me, spare my life, I will seek you and serve you." And that was the very thing that he later realized he had gone back on, that he had come back... And I don't want to jump ahead too far, but yes, he did absolutely make good on that promise.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, the well-known perspective on your father-in-law was that he was a national hero. In fact, the Congress has called him that. Behind the scenes, did you see him that way?

Lisa Zamperini: Oh, definitely. I mean, look, we're all human. So there are funny things about him that, of course, as the family, we know little idiosyncrasies and things that were just classic to us, endearing. But honestly, the integrity of this man was stellar, and I was so blessed to be part of his life and family. We had traveled together. He and I did a couple of cruises together. He would speak on this one particular cruise ship, Crystal Cruises, and was consistently funny, entertaining. People around always were completely caught off guard by his wit. He was very funny, very dry. As far as his Christian perspective, I would say that what stood out to me so much was that, we were talking about this earlier, is that he was not one to proselytize, that he would live by example.

Dr. James Dobson: Luke, let me jump in here with you to tell me how his time in that prison camp ended, and how in the world did he manage to get home?

Luke Zamperini: He had to survive 27 months in the Japanese prison camp system in three different camps. The second camp is the one where he met The Bird in, and then The Bird was transferred away.

Dr. James Dobson: He was in the camp where the sadistic Japanese soldier in charge was determined to break him and determined to just make him not even want to live, really trying to get him to talk for propaganda purposes. Now, that went on and on, day by day by day, he went through this.

Luke Zamperini: Yes. And then one day The Bird was transferred. And he came and said goodbye to what he called his friends, which were the prisoners. But they were all relieved to see him go. But a couple of weeks later, the prisoners were transferred from that prison Camp Omori to another prison camp in Nagano, Japan, up in the very cold northern part of the country.

And when the prisoners arrived at Camp 4B in Naoetsu, they were called to stand at attention, and they stood there and they stood there and stood there, and then out of the building stepped The Bird. And so there was Watanabe again.

Dr. James Dobson: Their hearts must have absolutely sunk.

Luke Zamperini: My dad said it was the lowest ebb of his life, and that he actually got dizzy and started to faint, and the other prisoners had propped him up. And so there was another several months of The Bird in this Camp 4B. And what these guys were tasked with doing was unloading the coal barges that were coming in and fueling the Japanese war machine.

But then something miraculously happened. Whereas the Japanese were preparing for the Americans to invade their home islands, they had set up a kill all order to say that when that happened, the Japanese prison guard system was going to then execute all the prisoners of war. And so the prisoners knew this was coming. It was set for late in August, 1944, and instead something happened.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to have to stop again here, because the story's not over. And we're going to pick up right at this point to find out what happened at that point, because it really resulted in your father's life being spared. And I won't tell our listeners any more about that now. You can be with us tomorrow again, right?

Luke Zamperini: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: This story touches me deeply. I just can hardly believe that prisoners eating very little, weighing at one point 66 pounds, and going through horrors that you can't really reproduce in a conversation like this. And, in fact, if you tried to tell it, people would be so disturbed that they wouldn't listen. And yet, we need to know the price that these men paid for our liberty, especially today when there's so much hostility to this great nation. So we're going to hear the rest of the story next time, right at this point. Thank you guys for being with us.

Luke Zamperini: It's a pleasure.

Lisa Zamperini: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, that was Luke and Lisa Zamperini's conversation with our own Dr. James Dobson today here on this classic edition of Family Talk, as they've been discussing stories about the late iconic war hero, who is also Luke's dad, and that would be Louis Zamperini. Be sure to join us again tomorrow as we'll hear more stories about Louis's life after being a POW. That's as we hear the conclusion of this three-part conversation.

And by the way, if you missed any of the first two parts of this conversation, I encourage you to listen in on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

When it comes to marriage, we should never underestimate the power of prayer. I pray that you and your husband or wife are praying together every day.

And if you haven't been, I encourage you to start doing so even today. Perhaps start just with a little prayer over dinner tonight, for example.

And if you and your spouse would like a closer relationship with God and each other, we encourage you to sign up for our 10 day marriage series. All you have to do is go to drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries. Then input your email address, click on the signup button, and we'll take it from there.

From the day you sign up, for the next 10 days in a row, you'll receive an encouraging email from Dr. James Dobson about how to strengthen your marriage. Each email includes some words of wisdom from Dr. Dobson and some questions for you and your spouse to answer, as well as a concluding prayer you can say together. Again, to sign up for free, go to drjamesdobson.org/10daymarriageseries. I'm Roger Marsh thanking you for making Family Talk a part of your day. Join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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