



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Legacy of Faith: The Harrison Family – Part 3

Guest(s): Frank and Jan Harrison

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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 to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we are sharing a deeply moving conversation about faith, loss, and God's unfailing faithfulness even in life's darkest valleys. Today, Dr. Dobson's in-studio guests are Frank and Jan Harrison and they're going to walk us through their journey of losing their 27-year old son, James, while he was serving as a missionary in Sudan. Though James's death was sudden and devastating, the Harrisons share how God's tender mercy carried them through their grief and brought unexpected beauty from ashes as Scripture would tell us. Their ministry, Open Eyes, which began with James's work in Sudan has now grown to support over 2000 pastors across 18 countries since his passing.

Now on our last edition of Family Talk, Dr. Dobson was talking with Frank and Jan Harrison about how their son James devoted his life to ministry work in Africa. Today the Harrisons will be opening up about receiving the heartbreaking news of his passing and they'll also share how God's faithful presence helped them navigate their deepest grief while continuing James's legacy of reaching the unreached. Whether you're walking through your own season of loss or maybe you're supporting someone else who is, today's conversation will offer hope and practical wisdom for the journey. Most importantly, it reminds us that even in our deepest pain, God remains faithful. Well, let's pick up where the story left off on our last edition of Family Talk as Dr. Dobson was talking with Frank and Jan, and they had just heard from the U.S. Embassy that their son, James, had passed away while ministering in Sudan.

Frank Harrison: Jan tell that story. I mean, I got the call and I knew I had to go home and tell Jan. But Jan, our three daughters, you'll do a better job of doing that than me.

Jan Harrison: Well, Frank was at work and I was at home preparing for my Bible study class the next day. The house was quiet and I knew his schedule, so it sounded strange to me that he was coming in. I knew his footfall. And I say this because when these things happen in your life, just like you were describing last night when the Lord called your name, when this happened, I remember his shoes, hard sole shoes on the hardwood floor. I heard that sound and I was like, "Why

is he here now?" And he came to the door of my office and he just said, "Jan, come back here with me." And I'm not even sure why, but I followed him because I just knew something was odd. And he turned around and all I had to do was look at his face and I knew something was terribly, terribly wrong.

And he just said very gently and very quietly, "Jan, we've lost James today." And you can't really even take that in, totally. You start trying to respond to like, "Wait, what are you telling me?" I think I may have said something like, "No, wait. What?" He was like, "Jan, he's gone. He died."

Dr. James Dobson: Was he in the hospital?

Jan Harrison: No, he was not in the hospital. So he would not go to a hospital. He didn't even tell anybody he wanted to...he needed to go to the doctor. It's just that I call it being a 27-year-old stubborn male, that's on his own, and probably didn't want to spend the money to go do what you had to do, or tell anybody that he needed help. That would be very true to his personality.

Yeah, it was shocking, obviously. His sisters were all in college or not in town. I mean that's the hardest thing. I think that's one of the hardest things we've ever, ever had to do, was to call his sisters and tell them and start the process of them coming home. It was a life-altering life-

Dr. James Dobson: Toughest moment of your life.

Jan Harrison: Yes, for sure. No question. I've lost other people I love, but nothing. It's so unnatural. It's unnatural to stand by your son's grave.

Frank Harrison: To add a little something. My mother died about a year after James. Loved my mother. Led me to Christ. Raised me. Awesome. Wonderful. Terrible to lose your mother. Somebody asked not long after that, "Frank, how would you compare the loss of your mother to James?" And I immediately said 10,000 times 10,000 worse. So as we know, all of us people who've lost children, they say it's the worst deal. So I guess it is, but it is so much worse. I mean it's so much worse than you realize. I don't know why or how, but God just-

Dr. James Dobson: That puts it in perspective though.

Frank Harrison: I mean just like this. I mean I love my... but no comparison to the grief. And over time, God heals. But I can be talking about James right now with a group and just cry like a baby, or do just like I'm doing now and be totally fine.

Dr. James Dobson: You're talking to a lot of people who know exactly what you mean.

Frank Harrison: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: I hear it.

Frank Harrison: And then over time, like Romans 8:28, when James died, you're going like, "Wait a minute, God, that's going to work together for good? How in the world?" But over time you realize it has.

And I had a guy tell me this years ago, lost his son, said that he would not bring his son back. And I remember thinking, "Wow, how could he say that?" We say that it's hard, but we say that today. I say that almost questioning myself a little bit there, Jan, but we would not bring James back. God has done so much.

Dr. James Dobson: Explain that, because as a father-

Frank Harrison: Yeah, I know it sounds so odd.

Well, one, you just build trust in God over time. You know He's almighty and He knows what He's doing and the things that you've seen and learned since James's death, but there's just no telling what else is out there too.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you begin to write your thoughts about how God walked you through that. Some people would not understand that. They've never experienced it. But what did the Lord do in those dark hours?

Jan Harrison: He's so tender and He's so close. And I think this is the testimony that you hear from people often when they go through really hard things, not just the loss of a child, but relationships, marriages, so many, many other things that are life storms.

But when you're in it, it's like He just begins to minister grace, at a level that you can't imagine. I think when I look at you and say, "I miss him so much." And I wonder all the time, "What would it be like now?" He would be almost 42 years old. There's a big difference in a 27-year-old young man and a 42-year-old man, and I just wonder what that would be like.

But God has been faithful every day. When you're heartbroken, He doesn't turn away your questions. He doesn't turn away the "why's." He doesn't reject the tears. He doesn't call me faithless because I sit there a few nights ago and there's several people that I knew, with him in high school together, and I think, "Lord, why? Why couldn't this be part of our lives?"

And then I wrote a chapter in the book called, "Crucify the Why." And I just really know that that's what, there are parts of life that will always remain murky. He doesn't owe us an answer. He just says, "You can trust me." And there are things.

Dr. James Dobson: Does He ever say to you, "You're going to see him again?"

Jan Harrison: Oh yes. Absolutely. Now that is a very good question because there's so much hope. I mean, I said when you stand by the side of your son's grave, it's so out of

order. But when you know that he's with the Lord, and when you know and all the things that you thought were important when you were raising them, nothing matters but that they knew Jesus and that they knew Him personally and that they have life eternal. All of the things of the world fall away. And you stand there in the midst of devastation, but there's hope. And that's who Jesus is. He's hope in the midst of the most hopeless-

Dr. James Dobson: Jan, that says it all.

Jan Harrison: Darkest circumstances.

Dr. James Dobson: The reason for the hope, is that this is not the end.

Jan Harrison: No. No. And I am so sure of that. I'm positive. And that's just the spirit witnessing to your spirit. And He just confirms over and over and affirms that His plans are good and perfect, and that even if this feels like it was done to you, that God is for you and you can just believe it.

Dr. James Dobson: When our son and daughter, Danae and Ryan, were young, I had a passion to get them in the hands of Jesus. They were normal kids and they didn't do anything that really upset me a great deal, and they were making it all right. But I had this lump in my throat that if I lose them, it will be the greatest loss of my life and I cannot make that mistake.

And so Shirley and I would walk. We'd go out in the neighborhood, just the two of us, and we'd say, "Lord, when you look at me and Shirley, and all the things that we could pray about and making a living doing well in whatever endeavor I was into or anything else, even my own health, nothing comes close to getting my kids to Heaven and don't let me lose it there. Give us the wisdom to know how to bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord because that I care about."

So man, do I understand what you were going through and what you were talking about.

Jan Harrison: I think often about the people out there that they gave it their all. They prayed and they feel like somehow the picture is not coming through. First of all, I say don't ever give up. Don't ever, ever give up on praying for your children. And also to just remember, God was the perfect parent and Adam and Eve decided that that had a better idea than His.

So the guilt, so often that particularly what I hear that women take on, their children aren't doing right and their children aren't to just do not give up. Believe in prayer. It's not your efforts.

Dr. James Dobson: I told you last night, my grandmother was very dedicated to the Lord and had this same attitude toward Heaven. Obviously I got it from her, picked up that

same idea. But she would get her children together in the morning and they'd have a prayer together. She had six children and she would say to them routinely, "If I lose one of you, it would have been better that I had never been born." And that was her value system and that was mine and Shirley's.

Jan Harrison: And when you say lose them, you mean lose them eternally.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. That's what I mean. I'm not talking about-

Jan Harrison: Right. The things that-

Dr. James Dobson: Those that drift away because yours did that too, you said.

Jan Harrison: But God is faithful. God is faithful when you pray and he brings them and it doesn't always look like you think it would look. And He surprises you. He does better than. And even though James is not here with us physically, I mean God answered all my prayers. They don't look the way I thought, but I can see over and over again by faith. By faith.

Frank Harrison: And James left it. I saw your book out there, Legacy. I've got to read that. But James left-

Dr. James Dobson: I'll give you one.

Frank Harrison: A powerful legacy. Powerful legacy. And I'm going to hush up, but just while Jan was talking just a couple of maybe help somebody early on after they've had a great loss. Just God's Word, like Psalm 107. I just memorized a number of verses right after James died. But Psalm 107:20, "He sent forth His word and He healed them. He rescued them from the grave."

In those early days, the only thing they could give me any relief, it didn't matter where I read, I'd just read God's Word. Isaiah 57:1-2, "Good people pass away. The godly often die before their time and no one seems to understand God is protecting them from the evil to come." I'm not so sure there wasn't something there for James.

And then Ecclesiastes 7:1. "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth."

Dr. James Dobson: I don't get that one.

Frank Harrison: I don't either. That one, especially right at the beginning, how does somebody? But X years later, you get it, but it doesn't mean it doesn't still hurt and then just a handful of others. But God's Word is so it's the only thing you've got during that time when you're just in great grief. But I could just, that's the only place I'd get relief.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Frank, we came into this program today thinking we're going to talk about your business because I really-

Frank Harrison: I'm glad we didn't. Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: I really admire the Coca-Cola Bottling Company for that culture that you're talking about. And my family is also involved with the Coca-Cola Company. My grandfather was very much involved in Coca-Cola, and we may talk about that next time because I'd like some of your thoughts but that's nothing compared to what you all have said, and you've helped a lot of people today.

And let me say it, in my words, nothing out there matters, but that you get this right. And the Lord will answer that prayer. He may not make them the person you want them to be, but if they make it to Heaven, they'll be all right.

Frank Harrison: Oh yeah. I don't know where this applies, if anywhere. But I just remember when James died, two thoughts entered my mind pretty quick. Other thoughts too. But now this sounds really selfish almost. But the Harrison name; three daughters, one son, been around a long time. The Harrison name goes no further, and that's fine. But it hit me.

And then this was a time, 2010, I thought, "Wow, we've been around a long time. I'm fourth generation. James would've been fifth. I don't know what the future of the business is." I mentioned earlier 5% of family companies sell their business after a hundred years, so I thought for the first time ever, I thought, "Well, maybe we'll have to sell this business someday because there's no one coming along."

And of course, since that time, our daughter Morgan's got deeply involved in the business. And we have our youngest daughter, Carter, married a wonderful guy named Ellison, about a year after James died. He's been in our business a good 10 years now, doing an incredible job. So we have people in place now for the future if that's what God wants. But those two thoughts hit me early on along with many other thoughts.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to tell you a story. You told me one. I'm going to tell you one.

Frank Harrison: Yeah. Good.

Dr. James Dobson: My grandfather was co-owner of a Coca-Cola bottling company, and it did very well. He didn't own it like you did, but he owned stock in it and things went well with him. And he owned five parts of five companies and so on. But he wouldn't allow his wife to lead him to Christ. He'd said, "Take the kids. Take them to church. I don't want anything to do with church." And he was a good man. He was one of the finest men. All of the people around him knew his word was his bond and so on.

But he just said to my grandmother, "Don't bother me with that. I see hypocrites in the church and they don't impress me at all, and I don't want that kind of relationship with God. I'd just rather go my own way." And my grandmother prayed for him for 40 years and would not give up on him. She didn't harangue him about it. She just quietly prayed for him for all that time, and ached over it a lot.

And then when he was 69, he had a stroke, and it was the first time he'd been sick and it hit him hard. And then, he got well and had another stroke, and this one he didn't recover from. And he knew that it was not going to be good with him. He couldn't talk and had a lot of problems.

And he was upstairs on his bed and he had one of his kids was up there and he said, "Chidder, go get your mother." She ran down the stairs to get my grandmother, and she came up there and knelt down beside his bed and he said, "I know I'm going to die. That's okay. But it is so dark. Will you pray for me?"

And for the first time in 40 years, he asked her to pray for him, and he gave his heart to the Lord in a marvelous way and died two weeks later with a testimony on his lips. Don't give up on the people you're praying for. That's the point. Even if they don't seem to have any interest whatsoever. And that was my grandfather, and I'd like to have known him, he died before I was born.

So there's some messages here somebody might get some help out of. I wish they'd write me. I wish the folks that have listened today and have been going through some of these things and asking the same questions, where God is, because he didn't talk a lot. I've noticed that the Lord doesn't always come at the right moment and say the right things. If you don't believe that, look at the Book of Job.

You know that Job lost everything. He lost his children. He lost his money. Lost his house. Lost his friends. Everything that he had that he valued, he lost. And even his reputation because his friends came to tell him that he was a bad man. So all of those things he lost, were not what bothered him most.

Do you know what really bothered him? He asked Him to talk to him, and the Lord wouldn't talk to him. That's very strange to me. He's begging the Lord just to come and talk to him and tell him what's happening. And it says in the middle of the Book of Job that if he said, "If I could just find him, if I could find his throne, I'd go to Him and I'd explain myself, and He would tell me why this is happening." And the Lord didn't even answer him. In fact, He chastises him for saying, "This is not your business." He didn't say anything. And of course, He had a plan and it was a good plan, and he was one of the most respected men in the Bible.

But that's what I've found happens. The Lord doesn't often explain Himself. And the one word that He does not answer, you know what it is? Why. Why wouldn't He at least tell me why? I can take anything, if You'd just tell me. And the Lord usually doesn't answer. And He didn't even answer Jesus on the cross.

Jan Harrison: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Jesus asked the "why" question.

Jan Harrison: Forsaken

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Frank and Jan, this has been a wonderful series of three programs, things that you've been saying the last few days, but there's more I want to talk to you about. When you're available, could you come back and let's talk some more?

Jan Harrison: Thank you for the invitation. We would love to.

Frank Harrison: Thank you so much, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: Well what an amazing conversation today here on Family Talk featuring our host, psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson, and his dear friends, Frank and Jan Harrison. Their story about loss and faith and finding hope through life's darkest valleys has certainly been an inspiration. Their story of losing their only son, James, reminds us that even in our deepest grief, God remains faithful and He can bring unexpected purpose from pain.

Now if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or you want to share all three parts of this powerful message of hope with someone who is really walking through a season of grief right now, we encourage you to visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. There you'll find the complete program along with additional links and resources. Now earlier in the conversation Dr. Dobson mentioned that Frank Harrison is the author of the outstanding book called *The Transformation Factor: Leading Your Company for Good, for God and for Growth* and we are happy to make that book available to you online at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You'll find more information about this program as well as Frank Harrison's book called *The Transformation Factor*.

And if you're looking for more encouragement throughout your day, be sure to download the free James Dobson Family Institute app to access our complete broadcast library, read inspiring articles, and receive daily biblical wisdom for your family. It's available now both on Apple and Android devices. Just search for Dr. James Dobson to begin when you're looking through your device's store. Well I'm Roger Marsh and for all of us here at Family Talk, thanks so much for listening. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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