



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** You May Be the Only Bible Somebody Reads – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Matthew Maher

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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. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're bringing you a conversation featuring Matthew Maher, a man who grew up in a Christian home, excelled academically and athletically, and knew all the right answers, if you will, about faith. But head knowledge never made it to his heart. One night, a series of devastating choices led to a drunk driving accident that claimed the life of another man. Matthew was charged with aggravated manslaughter and sentenced to five and a half years in prison. But what happened in that courtroom and in that cold prison cell on his first night behind bars is a remarkable testimony of God's grace. Let's get into it now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: What you're about to hear is a very inspirational story, and I'm not even going to tell you more about it. I'm going to let them tell their own story. I'm speaking of Matthew and Sarah Maher. Matthew, I'm going to start with you, and I'm not going to give much of a background because I want you to go back to your childhood and kind of tell us where it all started. You had wonderful Christian parents and they are still alive. You still are very close to them, aren't you?
- Matthew Maher: Yes, sir. Dr. Dobson, first and foremost, thank you so much for having us out here. We are humbled and honored. And yeah, my upbringing was probably the picture perfect American Christian family, as you can imagine. The youngest of four boys, raised in a solid, biblically based household, watching my mother and father demonstrate faith, not always verbalizing it to us, but we watched their example. I often say that they didn't just raise us in church, they raised us in Christ. And just being part of that culture in my home, it carried outside of my home. So I was a young kid really understanding what it meant to be a Christian.
- Dr. James Dobson: And you were also kind of an overachiever, were you not?
- Matthew Maher: Again, yeah, being the youngest of four boys, watching my older brothers do certain things growing up, the good, the bad, the ugly. I followed them their footsteps in every regard. I excelled academically, excelled athletically, playing several years up at times for sports, basketball, soccer, baseball. So when I would drop down to my age group, I was mostly the better athlete on the team

because of playing up. And that fell into academics as well. Just being very studious, would get my homework done in time. I would get all A's on report cards. So again, just being in that type of household, nobody told me this, but I felt like that was just what I did. It was a guarantee.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were one of those kids who did things basically right?

Matthew Maher: Correct. It was more intellectual as a young teenager, leading Bible studies, knowing the truths of God's Word, being able to teach it, being able to lead people in prayer, reading my devotionals, going to church, being part of all types of Christian organizations as an athlete, but it never really sank into my heart. So I found myself as a young teen going into high school and eventually college in complacency, going through the motion spiritually, reading a tract or devotional my mom would send to me and then finding myself making these miniature compromises, small compromises that most people wouldn't even notice, nor would they point out. But the small compromise would take me further than I ever wanted to go. And you never realize that you've drifted so far, like being in the ocean until you look at the landmark or where your eyes were supposed to be fixed and you realize, "wow, I've drifted."

Dr. James Dobson: What were your parents doing in that regard at that time?

Matthew Maher: There would be spiritual checks or accountability remarks from my mother and father about, "Hey, where are you at with God? Where are you at with your faith? What are you doing for Jesus today?" And one of the lines my mom would say to me when I would leave the house as a young teen in high school was she would stop me in my tracks. I'd be flying out the door to go off on either my moped or run around with my friends and she would say, "Matthew." And I would stop and she would say, "You may be the only Bible somebody reads." And I would say, "I know mom." And I would just go out there and completely forget the testimony that I carried, the influence I had in that area as a star athlete. And I never used the platform the way that God intended me to use the platform.

Dr. James Dobson: You now have a published book by that title.

Matthew Maher: Yes. It just goes to show you how that phrase really affected me.

Dr. James Dobson: Say it again.

Matthew Maher: *U May B the only Bible Somebody Reads.*

Dr. James Dobson: So to look at it on the cover, it's a U.

Matthew Maher: A big U.

Dr. James Dobson: Not y-o-u, but a U.

Matthew Maher: Yep.

Dr. James Dobson: May B the Only Bible Somebody Will Read.

Matthew Maher: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And right below that, it's a little underlined that says. Tell us.

Matthew Maher: R U Legible?

Dr. James Dobson: R U Legible?

Matthew Maher: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a mighty good question.

Matthew Maher: It's a mighty good question. It's a question I try to ask myself every day.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. You were a great soccer player. You actually were drafted into the professional ranks as a soccer player.

Matthew Maher: Correct. Full scholarship recipient to Temple University in Philadelphia, continued that cycle of excelling academically, athletically. Entered into my senior year, knew I was going to follow in the footsteps of one of my other older brothers, Anthony, who was already playing professional soccer at the time. So it would have been a dream come true in that regard that I put my mind to this particular task and I knew I was going to step into it.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, you began partying.

Matthew Maher: Began going out more than I've ever had. Pride cometh before a fall. We know that's what the Bible says and believing my own hype, I find myself in scenes or environments I shouldn't have been in the first place and only for that very reason to be seen, to be known. And I believed it that I was somebody and going to bars and nightclubs, partaking in alcohol way, way, way, way more than a professional athlete should, and that would be the entry into my demise.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Isn't it amazing that Satan is described in the scripture as being like a roaring lion who walks around seeking who he might devour. And if he can't get you one way, he'll get you another, especially when you're given early accolades and people admire you. Even that is dangerous. The opposite is true too, where you have low self-esteem and you just feel like a wreck and nobody would ever care. Well, the other side of that can be dangerous too, can't it?

Matthew Maher: Correct. Yeah. You just explained it pretty well, Dr. Dobson, having both ways, whether it's low self-esteem and struggling with who you are, your worth, or thinking too much of yourself. And that I call the blindness of pride. I couldn't

see straight, wasn't making the right decisions. And all along the way, even as a young professional athlete, still doing AIA, athletes in action, still being a part of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, still praying before the game, praying after the game, going to church on Sundays, but nothing was ever in my heart. I was never moved spiritually or emotionally based on what Jesus did for me.

Dr. James Dobson: And something was changing.

Matthew Maher: Something was.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, you lost your brother about this time.

Matthew Maher: I lost my brother in my junior year of college. That was one of those moments where I moved from complacency as a student athlete in college to conviction, back to the things of God, back to the things of eternity, and it was a sudden passing of my brother. That has a whole different story to it as well. But I think the takeaway as the youngest of four boys was me watching mom and dad navigate tragedy. Me watching my father bury his namesake, John Jr., and coming home from college at Christmas break, a time where a college student looks forward to spending time with family, friends, you get 30 days off, and I'm going home to plan a funeral. And another part of that story is he just had a baby girl. His first daughter was born in August of 2005. So it would have been a first for everybody. My first time as an uncle, my parents' first time as grandparents, my brother's first time as a father. Now here we are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ and we're planning a funeral around the death of my older brother.

Dr. James Dobson: Now this had an impact on you. It kind of brought you back to your senses and yet a little while later you made a tragic mistake.

Matthew Maher: Very, very true. Came back to school, knocked out of complacency, back to conviction, but didn't stay there long. Failed to feed the spirit the way I should have, began to feed the flesh again, became a professional athlete, tore my ACL and my meniscus on March 1st, 2009. For a soccer player specifically, that could be a career ending injury. That week, I struggled with the thought of, will I ever put a jersey back on? Will I do what I've been doing my entire life? And the MRI confirmed that it was indeed a torn ACL meniscus. Surgery would be scheduled the following week to repair it. And instead of falling back on this foundation of faith that my parents had instilled into me, knowing better, instead of trusting God, I submitted to the world. I submitted to the way of the world. I went out on a Friday evening, went to several bar scenes in Philadelphia, had alcoholic beverages with friends, and at the end of the night, thought that I ... Actually, I used the word thought wrongly.

I was not thinking. Got into my vehicle, tried to make it to my next location. And that night for me, March 7th, 2009, has not yet ended because I was responsible

for an at-fault drunk driving collision which resulted in the death of the other driver in the other vehicle.

Dr. James Dobson: So you were driving under the influence and not really handling the car well.

Matthew Maher: Correct. Was speeding, was on a four lane highway and passed one vehicle, got out of my lane, passed one vehicle, and was getting back into that lane that I was cruising in, kind of blindly, looked over my shoulder. And as I was going back into that lane, another car, a minivan, a Town and Country, was coming into my lane, doing the speed limit with their turn signal on. And because I was going too fast, my front right struck their back left and he spun out, hit the guardrail. The accident reconstruction would tell us exactly what happened. In the moment, I only knew I was in a car accident. Our vehicle, me and a passenger spun. We hit the guardrail. We slid the guardrail, in fact. And instead of going into the woods and flipping at a high speed in an SUV, we came to rest on all four wheels, and that's kind of when panic set in and confusion set in.

I exited my vehicle, debris, smoke, cars on a four lane highway. It's 2:50 AM in the morning are pulling over. And I noticed the vehicle I struck about 30 yards back in the opposite lane. And I also noticed in the moment four individuals standing outside of their vehicle. And I thought in the moment, Dr. Dobson, that this is going to be fine. Everybody's fine here. The passenger, the driver in the other vehicle, they're fine. I'm fine. My passenger's fine. And I retired to the guardrail and I just sat there and the police responded within minutes. The state police barracks was a mile up the road, literally. They got there, they ran me through field sobriety tests. They took me into custody. And it was in this small jail cell where I'm trying to gain my composure, confusion setting in. I'm trying to go over the surface facts, what I saw at the accident scene, what I thought I knew.

And almost chronologically, I went through this thought process of, "okay, I was just in a motor vehicle collision. I'm fine. My passenger's fine. We're fine. I remember thinking about the other people that I saw across the street, they're fine." Then I started to go to the legal process. Being a legal studies major at Temple University, I knew certain things. I'm going to get a DUI. I'm going to lose my license. My insurance is going to go up. I'm going to have to pay for all the damage here. I began to think about my parents, my father specifically in law enforcement and saying they're going to kill me. They're going to be so upset. I remember thinking about my knee in that moment and how this has been a bad week. I got to get surgery for my knee next week. Here I am with a DUI. And I often say that's as far as I took the consequences. Everything was good at this point.

Dr. James Dobson: Did anybody tell you that there was a fatality?

Matthew Maher: Not yet. It was when I'm sitting in this jail cell and I couldn't see too much outside of the walls. It was a glass front and I could see a lot of police walking

back and forth and looking in at me. And over time, this happened more frequently, probably an hour or two went by. And because it was so strange that they kept looking in at me and shaking their head, some of them were looking with disgust and you could tell they were looking at me with a certain set of eyes. Some would look in almost with sympathy. And I tell my story, I say it's like they looked at me like I was their son and they would just be so moved at this young man in this jail cell. But I became curious. I became attentive and then I overheard a conversation about 10 yards away at a dispatch center and I couldn't see them, but I could hear them through a muffled radio sound.

And this is exactly what I heard. "Accident on the Atlantic City Expressway is currently being cleaned up." So I listened in. "The driver in the black Escalade they said is in custody. The driver in the Town and Country is deceased." And I heard that word and I actually repeated that word over and over in this jail cell saying, "What does deceased even mean? What does deceased even mean?" I convinced myself that what they just said was not applied to my situation because I was there, I saw and everything was fine, but the deeper the night got and the more that I thought about what happened and what I just heard over the dispatch, the more it became a reality, a surreal reality. And I often say my life imploded and recently somebody corrected me and said, "Why didn't you say exploded? Because that's more outward." I said, "No, imploded because I knew better." So from the inside out, things crumbled. My decision from the inside out affected everybody. It affected my family. It affected this innocent man's family.

Dr. James Dobson: From a psychological point of view, the human mind is really fascinating. It frequently will not allow you to acknowledge something that it can't handle.

Matthew Maher: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: So it will hold out proper interpretation of facts until you get to the place that you can deal with it. It's really amazing how the facts, I mean, you heard it and yet you didn't accept it because your mind would not allow you to accept the fact you just killed a man.

Matthew Maher: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: And it turned out that he had three children?

Matthew Maher: Six children.

Dr. James Dobson: Six children.

Matthew Maher: Three older children and hardworking man from Cambodia, was 55 years old. And the days and the weeks and the months afterwards, you obviously discover more about this individual. And that was even the strangest part, not having a relationship with this family that you're now connected with.

Dr. James Dobson: I want you to tell us now about your dad and how he handled this disappointment in his son.

Matthew Maher: Right. I found myself hours after the decision I made to drink and drive resulted in the death of Mr. Hortkap, found myself in a side room. They took me into another interview room and I sat there with law enforcement officials, investigators, and they told me to take them through my entire day. And I did as fast as I could. I told them what I ate for breakfast to what I drank at night to here we sit today. I had already heard of the news that the person was dead. I had grabbed tissue and they kind of supported me through that. And the very next thing that happened was a secretary walked into the interview room and said, "His father's here, Chief John Maher." And all the law enforcement officials looked at me and they were almost like mad at me for not telling them who my dad was because they knew who he was. He turned-

Dr. James Dobson: Let's set the scene now. Your father is chief of police.

Matthew Maher: He's a retired chief of police.

Dr. James Dobson: You talk about embarrassment.

Matthew Maher: Huge embarrassment.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Matthew Maher: Here's his boy and he comes in and he turns to where I'm sitting down at the long table and he proceeds to come over to me and he kisses me on my head, Dr. Dobson, and he says, "We're going to get through this son." And it was such an undeserving example and display of our heavenly Father.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You saw within your dad an image of the heavenly Father.

Matthew Maher: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: Were you charged with manslaughter?

Matthew Maher: Upon the accident reconstruction, they came down with first degree aggravated manslaughter charges two weeks later.

Dr. James Dobson: What was the trial like?

Matthew Maher: Well, as early as two weeks after March 7th, 2009, again, coming home to my community, my family, my mother and father, they had mixed emotions, of course. They wanted to love me. I was their son. My mother, her first response, and she doesn't ever mind me sharing this because it just shows you the raw emotions that can come out of a person. My mother, I'm her youngest boy, and when I entered my house that very next day, she didn't know until about five

minutes beforehand that somebody had died. She thought I'd just got into an accident. I was drinking. She was going to flip out on me. She'd be disappointed. Her brother ran into the house before me, my uncle, and told her. And then he said, "And the driver didn't make it." She was in shock. I walked into my house and I looked her in the eye and I'm barely able to open my eyes from crying.

And she said, "It should have been you." And she says, "I rarely would ever wish that upon anybody." She said, "But losing a son already," she said it would have been easier to manage the loss of me than managing the loss of a complete stranger and this other family that has now affected negatively by a decision that her son made.

Dr. James Dobson: I understand that, don't you?

Matthew Maher: Yeah, I did. I did. I went upstairs in my bedroom.

Dr. James Dobson: There's some things worse than death.

Matthew Maher: Yeah. She was as imprisoned from that day forward as much as I was. But two weeks after that, I was called by a high school teacher if I would want to come share my story with the high school students who all knew who I was. And my mom was appalled at the request. It was so fresh. The wound was still oozing and they were friends, her and this man. His name's Don Chu. And she almost had an attitude like, "How could you ask Matthew to do something like this? This is so fresh." And when I heard about it, something stirred inside of me, Dr. Dobson. I remember thinking, "There's no other response except for owning up to this mistake. There's no covering this up. There's no hiding from this." And I told my mother, "I'm going to pray about this." And I went into my bedroom and I prayed, "If this Lord is of you and you want me to share this early, then I will. Your will be done."

And I had a sense of peace. I came downstairs, said, "Mom, I'm going to do it." And everybody was just completely shocked. And I went in about three weeks later after March 7th and I shared with about 300 students at my old high school. I had my player card in my hand, Athlete in Action, my testimony on the back and I ripped it up and I threw it on the ground. And I said, "You all here know exactly why I'm before you today and your future's wide open, mine's not" And I talked about how a decision can literally derail not just your life, but everybody that is attached to you. And it was from that day forward where I believe the redemption that God had and soar for me began. And from all those kids going home and sharing with their families, Matt Maher was here, this story was birthed and it had nothing to do with me and everything with God's grace.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't it amazing that the Lord was compassionate to you in a moment like that.

Matthew Maher: Too compassionate. Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: He didn't keep you from the consequences.

Matthew Maher: No, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: You were sentenced to how much time in prison?

Matthew Maher: I was sentenced to five and a half years. In New Jersey, they have what's called the NERA, No Early Release Act, which means you have to serve 85% of your sentencing. And I was served five and a half years, and I did four years and seven months on that sentencing in state prison.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me take you back to the courtroom when you were sentenced. Were the children of the dead man there?

Matthew Maher: Yes, they were. His children were present, his family, and their family got to speak. There was people speaking on my behalf, the South Jersey Traffic Safety Alliance. I was already speaking out publicly in schools and colleges. So they spoke on my behalf about this story, this impact. And then the eldest son got up and his name's Noon. And Noon begins to yell at the top of his lungs and he points to me and he starts to explain, "Do you have any idea how I heard about my daddy dying?" And he's pointing at me and he's getting louder and he's talking about, "You destroyed my world." And then there was a three second pause and the media picked up on this and that's the only ways that I know it because I watch it over and over and it's part of my presentation today to students.

And he said, "But I forgive you, my brother." And he came over to where I was sitting down and the bailiff told me to rise and we hugged right there in the courtroom and it felt like the weight of the world completely just melted off of my back. And I whispered into his ear and I said, "I am so sorry. I am so sorry." And he got done, we embraced and he sat down. And I always bring up the fact that they told me to hold my composure because the media would get the worst picture. And the very next day in all the news outlets was the picture of me and his son hugging and the story was about forgiveness, like undeserving forgiveness that came to me. So my first day incarcerated was the day that I literally, physically, spiritually, emotionally gave all of me to Jesus Christ and there was no holding back.

Dr. James Dobson: So that was the beginning of your sentence?

Matthew Maher: That was the beginning of my sentencing. They took me out in handcuffs. I started my five and a half year sentence on January 7th, 2010.

Dr. James Dobson: What'd you think sitting in a lonely prison cell?

Matthew Maher: That first night, the thoughts probably won't line up with most people's reality. I was at peace. I was praising God in a dark... It was wintertime. It was cold. There

was snow outside. I'm freezing. They didn't give me covers. And I'm praising God for how the courtroom scene unfolded. And I think that was the catalyst. The forgiveness from Mr. Hortcap's son to me was the catalyst of what God was going to do through me in this experience.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to make sure I understand. Did you not feel a condemnation to have done something so egregious as this, to drive under the influence and kill a man and deprive his entire family of his leadership and his love? You say you had such peace. I think I would be sitting there saying, "What have I done?"

Matthew Maher: Yeah, that question, I asked myself that randomly. Even this day, there was heavy condemnation against me, not only from the community, not only from deservingly from this man's family, but against myself, self-condemnation. And it wasn't until that courtroom scene, that that melted away. And the Bible that I knew became real and versus like there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And I would work all things together for good to those who love me. All these Scriptures came to life. They weren't just intellectual. It wasn't just knowledge. It became experience and wisdom. And I would wake up and I'd be in a cold dark cell and I would be in a uniform given by the state. And yeah, the wall would remind me, my face sheet would remind me what I did and the disaster that I caused, the destruction. I would think of this family and I would pray for them and I would hear God's-

Dr. James Dobson: The gravity of that did not escape you.

Matthew Maher: No way. Not even to this day. I'll break down randomly. My wife will be with me and I'll speak and it'll just flood me. And it's negative sometimes where I'm like, "How could I do this?" And then I hear that voice inside of me saying, "My son's sacrifice was greater than anything You will ever do against Me." And that is my liberty.

Roger Marsh: Matthew's story is a sobering reminder of how far we can drift when faith stays in our heads, but never reaches our hearts, but God's grace can meet us even in our darkest moments. Well, we need to pause at this point for today, but be sure to join us again next time for the conclusion of this powerful conversation featuring Matthew Maher. You can find out more about today's guest and share this program with a friend by visiting [jdfi.net](http://jdfi.net). I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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