



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Losing Cooper – Part 1

Guest(s): J.J. and Melanie Jasper

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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.

Melanie Jasper: All the way home. All I could say was, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Breathe life into my baby." I just screamed that all the way home.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. And you know the loss of someone you love really is difficult, especially if that loss involves a child. There is such a huge gaping hole in the heart of that mom or dad as they have to lay their precious son or daughter to rest. In Matthew chapter 19, verse 14, we know Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." If you're a parent who may have lost a child, I pray that you find comfort in the love that God has for you, knowing that your son or daughter who has gone too soon is certainly with the Lord.

Now on today's edition of Family Talk we'll be hearing a heartbreaking conversation that Dr. Dobson had several years ago with J.J. and Melanie Jasper. They'll be sharing the tragic story of losing their five-year-old son Cooper in an ATV accident. During our time in studio, the Jaspers relived for Dr. Dobson literally the worst day of their lives, and they'll share with us how God comforted them through these dark days that followed their son's death. Let's join Dr. Dobson now, along with his guests J.J. and Melanie Jasper right here on this special edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: My guests are J.J. and Melanie Jasper. They live in Mississippi, the name of the town.

J.J. Jasper: Tupelo.

Dr. James Dobson: And I came down there and visited. That's where the American Family Radio is located.

J.J. Jasper: Yes sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, J.J., you know a lot about radio because you do the morning show there at the American Family Radio. How long have you done that?

J.J. Jasper: I was actually the very first voice on the very first day when they flipped the switch. That was way-

Dr. James Dobson: You're kidding.

J.J. Jasper: ... Back in 1991, and so I've been there ever since. And Dr. Dobson, we had you on the radio. I was at the control board and I would listen to the broadcast as you moved from California to Colorado Springs, all of the growth, all of the things that have happened many years ago, the conversation in the lobby of church after church service, everybody would say, "Did you hear Dr. Dobson's program today?" And so you've influenced more people than you can even count exceeding, abundantly more than we can ask or imagine. That's how God has blessed you in your ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's about time that you came to be a guest on our program and Melanie, I'm delighted to have you. You're a full-time mom.

Melanie Jasper: Full-time mom. And it is an honor to be here and to meet you.

Dr. James Dobson: And you've been married 18 years.

Melanie Jasper: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: You do not look like the mother of seven children.

Melanie Jasper: Well, I am.

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson. Melanie is a Proverbs 31 woman and any of her friends at church will tell you that that's so. She's an amazing woman.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, J.J., you and I have several things in common. Another one in addition to doing radio programs is that you fell off a horse and so did I.

J.J. Jasper: We both had near-fatal horseback riding accidents. And what was interesting about that, I was in the hospital for...

Melanie Jasper: 49 days.

J.J. Jasper: Well, and I travel a lot. I'm a speaker. And so six months after the accident, the number one question asked people said, "What did you do with the horse?" They didn't ask if I walked with a limp or how I recovered. They said, "What did you do with the horse?" Because they knew after that kind of accident, no way I was going to sell it much less, give it away. And Dr. Dobson, would you believe that two men were bidding against each other to buy that horse?

Melanie Jasper: You're kidding me.

J.J. Jasper: They wanted to give it to their mother-in-law.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a joke.

J.J. Jasper: I am kidding about that.

Dr. James Dobson: You sucked me into that one. But your accident was really worse than mine. You and I both grew up riding horses. That's the amazing thing. We have a Super 8 color film of me riding a horse at four years of age, and I never had a problem with a horse. And I was just standing still, the horse was not even moving. And I had big tennis shoes on. I couldn't get them in the stirrups and the wind blew my hat off and I reached for it and I just went on down and I landed on top of a gun and it just destroyed my shoulder. Yours was a whole lot worse than that.

J.J. Jasper: Our story starts with us having four children. We had a one-year-old, a two-year-old, a three-year-old and an eight-year-old. We discovered diapers spelled backwards is repaid.

Dr. James Dobson: Are you kidding?

J.J. Jasper: Those are children in close ages.

Dr. James Dobson: Is this another joke?

J.J. Jasper: No, no. That's back in 2008. Dr. Dobson, our family was marked by travel and adventure and ministry and we never had a hiccup in terms of difficulties or trials. And then in 2008, Melanie's dad died in March and he was larger than life and she's a daddy's girl and found out he was sick. And just a few weeks later-

Melanie Jasper: Three and a half weeks later, he went home to be with Jesus.

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

J.J. Jasper: Then one week after the funeral, Melanie had a miscarriage. And so our entire family suffered through that. And you wonder about trying to sort things out. She had a miscarriage while we were in church on Easter Sunday morning. And so you think, well, the drug dealers and the bank robbers, they're having healthy kids. We're a Christian family sitting in church on Sunday morning and have a miscarriage. This just doesn't seem equitable. Well her dad died, one week later she had a miscarriage. And that same year on Labor Day is when I had that terrible horseback riding accident, 49 days in the hospital, near fatal, Melanie, trying to manage the home, coordinating with doctors and nurses.

And so 2008 was a very rough year for us because we'd never really had any difficulty to speak of. And at the end of that year, we huddled together as a

family and we said, "This has just been an incredibly difficult year." But our consolation was, well, the worst is behind us. There's no way we'll ever face anything that could compare with this year. And little did we know the very next year we would lose our only son.

Dr. James Dobson: Little Cooper. How old was Cooper?

J.J. Jasper: Five years old, blonde hair, blue eyes, athletic. So much fun. Always smiling.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, tell us about how that tragedy occurred.

J.J. Jasper: We'd bought a small farm and we had horses and cattle and I was on a trip to Denver and I'd come home so excited to see my wife and children and Melanie had been there with the children for four days. So I insisted she go to the store. She had some shopping to do, and so Cooper and I were mowing. He was sitting in my lap and we were on the riding mower and it suddenly stopped. And so we swang on the swing for a while. He was riding his bicycle. And then I suggested we ride in the dune buggy and we rode down our gravel drive and then we turned down a dirt lane. We were riding up and down the dirt lane and Dr. Dobson, it was Friday, the sun was shining, the wind was in our hair. Just a father and a son having fun, a boy and his daddy making memories.

And we rode up and down this dirt lane. And then when we finished riding, I was going to do what we always called a donut. I was going to turn the wheel and floor it and spin around and head back to the house. I turned the wheel and floored it and the dune buggy spun around and then something went terribly wrong and the dune buggy rolled over. Cooper was buckled in and I was not. I hit the ground and as soon as I hit the ground, I remember it like it happened yesterday. My very first thought, I thought if I put a scratch on my little buddy, I'll never be able to forgive myself. If I broke his little arm. I just wouldn't be able to live with that. And so I raced over. The dune buggy was laying on its side. Cooper was still buckled in and in that rollover just a freak accident, it broke his little neck and-

Dr. James Dobson: Oh.

J.J. Jasper: ... Dr. Dobson. On July the 17th, 2009, our only son died in my arms.

Dr. James Dobson: I can't even imagine something like that happen. What'd you do?

J.J. Jasper: The shock, the horror, all the words that you hear about it being surreal. You just think there's no way something this catastrophic can happen in the blink of an eye. And I would race him. I was trying to race him to the house and I would stop and I would do CPR and I was begging for God to take my life instead of his. And for the next few hours and days, you're just in a fog.

Dr. James Dobson: Was he gone?

J.J. Jasper: Yes, he died in my arms. But the ambulance came and they took him and they worked on him furiously for just a few moments in the emergency room. And then they looked up and called the time of his death and the shock, the disbelief, the horror... To put it in perspective on Friday afternoon we were laughing and having fun. And Saturday mid-morning, we were at the funeral home and the funeral director was saying, "Which casket do you want for your little boy?"

Dr. James Dobson: Melanie, how did you find out about it?

Melanie Jasper: I was actually at Walmart and I was in the checkout aisle, aisle 11. I can't ever go through that aisle without thinking of this day. And I get a phone call from J.J. and he says, "Honey, there's been an accident and I don't think Cooper's going to make it."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh my.

Melanie Jasper: And he said, "I need you to call 911 back because I want to make sure I told them the right way to get to the house and the directions. And so when I left them, he was riding the lawnmower with him. So I assumed it was a lawnmower accident. I called 911 and I explained to them that my husband had just called and they said, "Yes, we received that call." I said, can you please tell me what has happened because it must be a lawnmower accident.

And they said it was actually a dune buggy accident. I thought, oh my goodness, my daughter Sadie must have been driving because she was usually the one that drove. And so I began praying for Sadie and praying for Cooper and Dr. Dobson, we lived quite a ways from the store that I was at and all the way home, all I could say was, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Breathe life into my baby." I just screamed that all the way home. And I got home finally to see the paramedics working on Cooper. And then it dawned on me that J.J. was the one driving because he came to me and he said, "Honey, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." And I realized in that moment it had been him driving. And I thought, oh my goodness, it looks like I'm about to lose my son. And then here's this man I love with my whole heart who's so much fun.

We have such a fun family. And I thought, I'm going to lose him too because there's no way he's going to be able to be the same after this. And so I just began to pray, "Oh Lord, please don't let me lose both of them in one day." And so that's how I found out. Then we proceeded to the hospital. The sheriff took us to the hospital. And I remember vividly asking the sheriff, "Do you think he's already gone? Do you think it's time to pray?" I knew there was still time to pray. He said, "It's never too late to pray."

Dr. James Dobson: J.J., Cooper was your only boy, only son.

J.J. Jasper: He was our only son.

Dr. James Dobson: Five years old.

J.J. Jasper: Five years old. And if I can tell you a little bit about him, he was a remarkable little boy. When I say that, he was always smiling. He was nearly born with a smile and he was always happy. He was the most helpful child. Now, all of our children went through the terrible twos. Cooper did not. He never once stomped his foot and said no. He would wake up and ask Melanie, "How can I help you today?" When he was going to school, when he was in K4 around the table at the evening meal, I was asking how everybody's day went. And I said, "Cooper, did you get to play with your friends today?"

He said, "No." He said, "There was a new boy that transferred to our school and he looked lonely and he looked like he missed his parents." He said, "So I didn't stay with my friends. I spent the day following him and helping him." He would lay out his clothes for the next day. He would get up in the morning and fold his pajamas. We thought that we were raising a Tim Tebow or that we had young George Washington living on our home. He had the discipline of a Marine and the focus of a professional athlete. He was an amazing, amazing little boy.

Dr. James Dobson: How did you tell the girls that they lost their brother?

J.J. Jasper: They were actually there and they came out and they saw all of that.

Dr. James Dobson: You mean at the sight of the accident?

J.J. Jasper: Yes. Yes, sir. And during that time, of course we prayed and anyone that's lost a loved one or that's gone through something like that, especially a child, Dr. Dobson, a person who's lost their parents, they call an orphan and a woman whose husband has died, she's called a widow. The pain is so awful and it's so great, there's not even a word for someone who's lost a child.

Dr. James Dobson: There's not, there's not.

J.J. Jasper: And so all of those things that you think about that this is a parent's worst nightmare, and I'm convinced there's not even a category in your brain to allow you to think that you might lose a child. If you have elderly grandparents, you see that they're getting gray. So many of your listeners right now are taking care of their aging parents and you don't want to dwell on it, but you know you're going to cross that bridge. You're going to get that call. With a child, if you thought there was a day that you could be playing on Friday and Saturday, mid-morning, you'd be at the funeral home. They shouldn't make caskets that small. And so you would never let your child swim. You'd never let them jump on a trampoline. And so it was such a shock. That kind of tragedy always happens to other people, but we're still standing and it's by the grace of God.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you've written this book. Did you write it alone or did Melanie help you?

J.J. Jasper: She wrote a chapter and it's the most inspiring chapter in the book. It actually started with a documentary a couple of months after the accident. You've said nice things about brother Don Wildman and the Wildman family. They approached just two months after the accident and they said, "We've tried to find resources to help you, but we can't find any resources to help someone who's lost a child." And they said, "You haven't turned to drugs or alcohol. Your marriage is still strong." I did not realize some numbers indicate 89% of marriages fail if there's the death of a small child and they said, "You're not bitter or angry at God, you're still going to church. That's very rare and your story needs to be told." So they said, "With your permission, we'd like to make a movie and we want to, number one, offer it for free. And number two, we want to give hope to people on the other side of tragedy."

They weren't trying to exploit us. They said, "If and when you're ready to do this, we'd like to do this." We made the movie *Flame On* and you helped with that Dr. Dobson as well as Dr. David Jeremiah, the Kendrick Brothers. So after that movie, so many thousands have seen it. They said, "You need to write a book." So we wrote, *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*.

Dr. James Dobson: I tell you, I think it is the most moving and powerful cover I've ever seen on a book. *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*. And there is this gorgeous little blonde with a smile on his face and I wish I could have known him, but you're going to see him again.

J.J. Jasper: Yes sir. We're going to get to-

Melanie Jasper: Amen.

J.J. Jasper: Spend more time with him in Heaven than we did here on Earth.

Dr. James Dobson: Of course. Did the awesome why rise up in front of you and stay there? That often occurs, and it doesn't mean a lack of faith, but we live with the why. All of humanity lives with the why. Sooner or later, you're going to bump into a brick wall that you can't explain. You can't get through or around. And you have to come down to the fact, if you're going to follow Christ, to accept Him and trust Him.

Melanie Jasper: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what He tells you because He usually does not answer those whys. I don't know why, but He usually doesn't say, "Now let me tell you what's going on here." There's a reason, but you don't get it. And so you have to deal with it. And my heart goes out to people like you who have.

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, that was one of the things I struggled with the most was why. It's something that I just really tripped over. And I shared some wise words in the book. If you'll allow me just to share a paragraph, "You should not try to come

up with simplistic answers to profound questions that involve the very heart and motivation of God. Even though the why question has plagued every human being who has ever lived, we all ask that question. We have reason to ask it because we go through difficulties and moments when the pieces don't fit, when you can't make sense out of what is happening to you. So we all ask. I draw comfort from the fact that even Jesus asked when He was on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' God rarely answers the why question. In the Bible Job suffered terribly and asked the Lord deep and penetrating questions, brilliant questions, but he got no answers.

"Why not? Because God will not be accountable to man, period. You can put a thousand theologians in a church and keep them there for six months talking about the why question and they're not going to be able to come up with it. Our task in this life then is to keep trusting in God and His love for us. You can trust Him even when you can't track Him or understand His purposes." Matthew seven, Jesus talked about building your house on the rock or on the sand. Very familiar story we've known since we were children. And He said that one person heard the Word of God and either neglected it or rejected it. The other heard the word of God and obeyed it. The storms came, the floods rose, the wind blew. And the one house that was built on the rock was standing. The one that was built on the sand-

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's it.

J.J. Jasper: Was demolished. But if you'll notice in both parts of the story, the storms of life are inevitable. It's not a question of if it's going to happen, it's when. If you have aging grandparents, if you're caring for your elderly parents, you are going to get that call, that dreaded call. We're going to cross that bridge. So the subtitle of our book, *Finding Hope to Grieve Well*, a lot of people don't grieve well, they turn to drugs or alcohol or they sit on the curb and they're paralyzed by grief.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what is grieving well? It's important to say that.

J.J. Jasper: Well Melanie and I, immediately after the accident when our eyes would open, we'd hold each other and sob uncontrollably. And then we would simply pray, "Lord, help us grieve well, help us grieve well." We didn't even know what that looked like or what that meant, but we knew we didn't want our marriage to break up from the blame and the guilt and we didn't want to turn to anything that would be harmful. And so we offer practical-

Dr. James Dobson: Or faithless.

J.J. Jasper: Exactly. Yes sir. And so we just tried to offer a roadmap and offer practical and biblical tips in the book. But we couldn't have made it without our church friends. We couldn't have made it without all the people that pray. And you go back to the basics. You pray when you don't want to. You read your Bible when you don't feel like it. And we had a great support system. Our wonderful

listeners prayed for us. Our friends rallied around us. And even then it was the hardest thing that we've ever experienced. We wonder how do people move to a strange town and they don't have a church home and they get through. How do they get through something like that?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And how do people get through when they don't have the Lord to turn to? And even though He doesn't answer the why question, He says, "Come unto me." And He puts His arm around you. Did he do that for you Melanie?

Melanie Jasper: He sure did it for me. The Bible says "There's a peace that passes all understanding." And Dr. Dobson. Some days when I was just crying out in such pain, it felt like it was almost a warm blanket that you just took out of the dryer. And it just wrapped around me and His peace just fell all over me. And you asked about the why question. We don't know. His ways aren't our ways. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "His ways are not like ours. They're higher than ours." And He sees the big picture and He sees the finished puzzle, and our life is just one little piece of the jigsaw puzzle. But I'm so thankful that I grew up in a godly home and had a firm foundation just based on Scripture and based on the Lord. And so I would turn back to the Word and Romans 8:28 says, "For we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him and who have been called according to His purpose." That's a hard verse right after a tragic situation.

Dr. James Dobson: It is. It is.

Melanie Jasper: But it's true.

Dr. James Dobson: And sometimes they're thrown at grieving people.

Melanie Jasper: They are, but they're true. Just like John 16:33 says, "In this world we will have trouble." But it goes on to say, "But take heart. He has overcome the world." He's got a perfect plan for us. But it might not always be painless, but it's perfect and we have to trust in that.

Dr. James Dobson: We're out of time for today. We want to go on tomorrow to talk about your lives since losing Cooper. Again, that's the title of the book, *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*. It's written by J.J. Jasper. And it is published by...

J.J. Jasper: Brett Morgan Publishing

Dr. James Dobson: And it's available in bookstores or from Amazon and where else?

J.J. Jasper: jjasper.com might be one of the easiest places. It's on Kindle, a lot of the places where you get books. Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm so glad you all came to be with us. You've touched my heart and I know a lot of other people too, but there's more to your story than this. And you are going

to see Cooper again. And would you do me a favor? Let me be there when you meet, would you?

J.J. Jasper: That would be...

Dr. James Dobson: I would like to see that.

J.J. Jasper: That'd be a great reunion.

Dr. James Dobson: I'd like to see that little boy grab you around the neck.

J.J. Jasper: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And tell you that he loves you and I know you loved him.

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir. Well, Dr. Dobson, we know we're not the only family that suffered and our heart breaks for people that are in the very raw stages of grief. And we just want to say that there is help and hope in the Lord. And even though you don't feel like it, you are going to make it with God's help.

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to pick up right there next time.

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir.

Roger Marsh: Well, it is our prayer that God really spoke to you through this captivating conversation featuring our own Dr. James Dobson and his guests, J.J. and Melanie Jasper here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow and you'll hear the second half of this fascinating conversation. By the way, if you'd like to learn more about the Jaspers and their book entitled *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And as Dr. Dobson mentioned earlier in the broadcast, he did write a book called *When God Doesn't Make Sense* for times like the Jaspers experienced. When circumstances in life don't add up, when it seems like God really doesn't make any sense at all, that's when our faith can come crashing down and it can sometimes feel as though we no longer trust Him. The truth is that Christian life can be extremely difficult at times, and we may never understand the tragic circumstances that God allows, but there's always hope.

Now, if you'd like to receive a copy of Dr. Dobson's book called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, simply click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page when you go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And if you're looking for a bit more encouragement for a troubling time, we encourage you to sign up for our free 10-day email series from Dr. Dobson also called "When God Doesn't Make Sense." This compelling series explores the depths of hardship and examines its purpose. Simply go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and then click the link to sign up. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of the powerful conversation

featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guests J.J. and Melanie Jasper as they discuss losing Cooper right here on Family Talk.

Announcer:

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