



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: You May Be the Only Bible Somebody Reads – Part 2

Guest(s): Matthew and Sarah Maher

Air Date: April 10, 2026

- 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 featuring psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're going to hear the conclusion of a powerful conversation featuring Matthew Maher, a former professional soccer player who drove drunk, took a man's life, and served nearly five years in prison. But what happened inside those walls is a story of faith spreading in the darkest of places. We're also going to hear from Matthew's wife, Sarah, whose journey to find him began with a dream she just couldn't shake. Here now is their conversation with Dr. James Dobson on today's edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: You went from this idol. You know sports heroes become idols to people, and you went from that lofty position to a convict.
- Matthew Maher: Correct. Inmate of the state, 314525E is my state SBI number. I entered into the facility and there was immediate attention given to me because of who I was. They watched it on the news. They saw the forgiveness scene unfold before their very eyes. So there were a lot of people coming up to me, embracing me, giving me favor immediately, especially from the inmate population. A lot of soccer fans. So that idolization did not stop, but I chose not to use it the way I did in the past. I chose to use it as influence and influence these men based on what God has done in my life. And it was so early on that I grasped that. And then there was favor from corrections officers, but there was also animosity and hate from both parties alike. Inmates, envious.
- Dr. James Dobson: Did you start trying to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Matthew Maher: It took a while. I got my bearings and I went to all the church services. I would start each day in the Word of God. And I learned quick that the lights in the dormitory would flood the entire environment by 6:00 AM. 6:00 AM, these lights would shoot on like a spotlight. And I learned that if you waited until those lights woke you up, then you were playing catch up because Hell woke up when those lights clicked on. So people were rubbing the darkness out of their eyes and then they're walking in misery, they're walking in bitterness, they're walking in anger. All the fights would happen in the morning over a sink, over spit, over brushing your teeth, over the chow line. And I learned quick that if I

wait to get up when they are getting up, then I'm going to lose in this environment.

So I began to wake up before the lights and began to start my day in the Word of God, and I allowed him to renew my spirit. So I'd start each day, and it was a funny story, Dr. Dobson. Each day I would start at this table at the front of the housing unit, and I'd be reading God's Word. And over a while, I'm thinking, I'm reading the good book of God's Word. He is good. Why don't I open this book up to my peers? So every day I'd say good morning to every single person that would walk by this table. So the first person that they're hearing from in the morning is this crazy young kid at this front table reading the Bible. And I'd turn to them and I would say, "Good morning." And the first several guys would walk by and they would curse me and many of them would get hostile.

And over a while, the men in the beginning that were fighting it, they're now over my shoulder. I feel somebody over my shoulder as I'm reading the Word of God and I would turn around and look at them and the guy would be smiling and he'd be waiting for me to say good morning to them. And I would say, "Good morning." He'd be like, "Good morning, Matt." And I realized that those two simple words were showing the light of Jesus Christ in an otherwise dark environment. And before long, the entire environment now, all of my tiermates are saying good morning to one another. The guard would come in, we'd be saying good morning to the guard. So we were slowly flipping the culture around. And I say we, because it was another inmate that I spent the first 14 months of my time with and he had a lot of notoriety to himself.

He was a former NBA all-star. His name's Jason Williams and he was a New Jersey Net in the 90s. So he ended up in the same facility as me and we kind of linked up with one another and began a Bible study. So it turned into opening the Word every morning, to linking up with Jason Williams, to open up the Bible with him, to inviting our tiermates, four of them showing up for a Bible study, eight of them, 16 of them, 24. Then over 30 out of 38 guys on a housing unit gathering to pray, hold hands, and learn the word of God. But here's the reality. When you're doing things like that in that type of place, it's not looked upon favorably, especially from those in authority. You would think that that type of influence would make their job easier and it did, but it also exposes the fact that certain people aren't doing their job and they did not like the influence that Jason and I had together. So one particular supervisor found it necessary to split us up and she went to the warden and told him that these two inmates have too much influence together amongst the general population. And we did. And they wound up moving me to the worst housing unit in the entire prison and it was upstairs. Seven East was the tier. And the reason why that's a big deal is because every fight, every code, every negative thing you heard about something in prison was happening upstairs.

It was darker, colder, gang clientele upstairs, a lot of violent inmates upstairs. And I moved into my bunk bed and I wrestled with God and I heard God saying, "Take root wherever I've planted you." So I woke up and I began what was

known as the Seven East Bible Study and slowly but surely Dr. Dobson, the Word of God could not return void. One would come, four would come, seven would come, 15 would come, 20 some would come. And now we have this new Bible study that was responsible for changing the culture of an otherwise contrary housing unit.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what a story. Let's now go to your introduction to Sarah, who is here with us. She has been sitting very quietly while you've told your story. Sarah, you have heard this story many times, haven't you? Does it still move you to hear it?

Sarah Maher: Absolutely. And I'm more on the back end of things; Matt and I were brought together while he was still incarcerated.

Dr. James Dobson: How did that come about? How do you get acquainted with somebody who is later to be your husband when you can't even go see him?

Sarah Maher: Well, okay. There was a relationship established beforehand just through our mothers. So when Matt went away to prison, my mom kept encouraging me and my sisters, write Matt Maher kind of like, she really just felt bad for him and wanted to be a voice of encouragement. I would every now and then and just get good, godly advice.

Dr. James Dobson: You went on to be with Youth With a Mission.

Sarah Maher: I was at University of Memphis and I remember coming into my winter break there, God was really putting it on my heart that I was supposed to leave and go do mission work with Youth With a Mission. And about the time I was getting ready to leave, I'm really searching, what's my purpose? So during the season, getting ready to go on the mission field, I remember waking up from this crazy dream and I was coming home off the airplane from my mission trip and I was entering a wedding and I was marrying that guy in prison, Matt Maher, that my mom talks about all the time.

Dr. James Dobson: Whom you didn't even know.

Sarah Maher: Whom I really didn't. So I say that and I'm not the type that would have dreams about stuff like that or I wouldn't. So I kind of brushed it off and laughed about it. I said, "Hey mom, isn't that crazy? Isn't funny? I was marrying Matt Maher my dream." And my whole season overseas was a season of God really speaking into my heart, "you're called to be this man's wife," which for a young lady, I feel like we live in a society that's very, "Be an independent woman, be this and that." God was putting it on my heart that you are called to walk with this man. You're called to do ministry with him. So the next two years was kind of a season of me fighting it, but I mean, here I sit with him.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you wrote him a letter.

Sarah Maher: Yeah. So we started writing back and forth while I was overseas, just getting to know each other's hearts. I think it's really rare that you're able to take away the physical aspect of things and just get to know each other on paper, which was really beautiful because all the rest when we sat down, when I went to visit him in prison, everything else just kind of melted together, like all the quirky things that make him Matt, but it was beautiful to get to know his heart.

Matthew Maher: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And what'd you say to him when you wrote him?

Sarah Maher: Oh, I wasn't like, "Hey, I'm this crazy girl that had a dream. I'm going to marry you." I tried to be as low key as I could.

Dr. James Dobson: You would've scared him to death if you even said that.

Matthew Maher: Dr. Dobson, if this sounds crazy, that's because it is crazy.

Dr. James Dobson: And you wrote back.

Matthew Maher: I would write back. I would encourage her. And I was receiving 20 to 25 letters a day in prison and people from all over the world were writing me and encouraging me or asking me for counsel and they only came to know my story via online. My website was active, my story was on there. I was writing a daily blog and that's why her mother said, write him. He's got good advice because she was reading my thoughts from prison online. So when the letter from her came in, my response was just exactly that. Just minister to these people. And to be dead honest, she was just another letter that came in until I heard of this dream. And my mother was the one that told me about the dream. So I'm calling home and she goes, "Yeah, do you know Sarah Peterson?" And I'm like, "Yeah, is everything okay?" "Yeah, she had this dream and in the dream, she's marrying you."

And my response was, "Yeah, that's real cute, mom. What else do you have for me?" Because in that position, that just didn't land well. I mean, come on. I had shut down everything that was going on outside of those walls and I was focused on what God was doing with me there. And that was the unique part was I knew that I was there for a season and I wanted to get everything out of it. So anything else extracurricular, I just didn't want nothing to do with it.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, Sarah, how did you get to China from there? How does that fit into the story?

Sarah Maher: China was on the map before Matt came into the situation and well, it was after the dream because it wasn't like, okay, I had this dream I'm going to marry Matt. It was like me like a bucking stallion fighting God with this like, "Are you crazy, God?"

Dr. James Dobson: So you went to China at that time.

Sarah Maher: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: How long were you there?

Sarah Maher: My first trip was six months. Six months I was doing my discipleship training school and I ended up going back there for short term trips and continued to study with the University of the Nations getting ready.

Dr. James Dobson: When's the first time you met face to face?

Sarah Maher: I went to visit him as soon as I came home from...

Matthew Maher: June of 2012, she came in.

Dr. James Dobson: How soon after that did you get out of prison?

Matthew Maher: Well, I still had two years left to do, two full years. And obviously being in a small community and people finding out Sarah Peterson's talking to Matt Maher, wait, how did this happen? When did this happen? And then the rumor mill kicking up and then people saying some really negative and hateful things against her, against me, but we all believed it. Her family being Christ centered, my family, they supported us. And I think the turn of events was us calling it an agreement and then saying, "Do we believe that God has called us to this? And if so, we're going to be sensitive to it, but let's also honor it. Let's not turn around and say, wait, let's wait. You're here. I'm here. Let's wait." And we chose to actually get engaged, to go from an agreement.

Dr. James Dobson: So you guys fell in love in that odd situation.

Matthew Maher: Very odd situation.

Dr. James Dobson: You're in prison, and she's dreaming dreams.

Matthew Maher: Yes. Yes. That's exactly right.

Dr. James Dobson: A relationship developed.

Matthew Maher: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And then you got out of prison.

Matthew Maher: I got out August 3rd, 2014, and we were married November 8th, 2014. And that was against a lot of people's opinions of hold off, you guys don't know each other that well, but they didn't know how well we did know each other via pen

and paper and these visits, and I'm stripped of everything. I'm in, I call them grave clothes.

Sarah Maher: Those prison visits were the most vulnerable. When you go in as a visitor, you're not allowed to wear your little cute outfit. You got to wear stuff that looks like a potato sack and that might be irrelevant, but he's-

Dr. James Dobson: That's what they required you to do.

Sarah Maher: You got to wear really like-

Matthew Maher: You're stripped of everything. It's just, if you consider it going on a first date, everybody's on their best behavior, right? I'm wearing my best outfit. She is. We're making sure we don't trip over our words. We're not saying certain things that we don't want the other person to hear. I'm already in prison, Dr. Dobson. I've already been labeled a convict, a felon, and all that came with my story, the humiliation and just the shame. So there was no holding back from me. God had taken me through so much that this is what I was, this is who he's called me to be, this is what I'm going to do and be. And I think the same thing applied with her was I already spoke this dream out. God's already confirmed it and here we sit. So it was such genuine and authentic conversation back and forth and we were able to fall in love with each other's hearts.

Sarah Maher: I felt like in the beginning stages, I was a waitress coming home from mission trips and I would have all these crazy comments said to me. And when he first proposed to me, he proposed with this little string ring and it was made of prison garb or uniform and it was...

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, you couldn't get a ring for her.

Matthew Maher: Well, all right, you ready for this one, Dr. Dobson? Because she's wearing this string ring around town and she's flaunting it off to people. And people are looking...

Sarah Maher: Look at my ring. I'm engaged.

Matthew Maher: And everybody's like, "Is this girl crazy?" Well, one of my older brothers, Michael, he got wind of it and said, "There's no way that my brother's future bride is going to be walking around this town wearing a string ring." So he went out to our jeweler and bought this beautiful engagement ring. So this is an alleged story. I cannot be held accountable to the rest of this story, but my mom says this was the first crime she has ever committed in her entire life because her mother and my mother came in and her and they sat in a certain way and I asked to open up in prayer for the visit and my mother hands me the ring and-

Dr. James Dobson: She gave you that.

Matthew Maher: She gave me the ring and I pray and their eyes are closed and I say, "Amen." And then I give this speech. And I remember Sarah's looking at me like, "Why are you saying all this?" I talk about my mom's here, she gave me life and your mom's here and she gave you life and what a great witness to have before us.

Sarah Maher: Why are you saying this in front of our moms?

Matthew Maher: And our moms are crying and she's like, "What is going on right now?" And as quickly as you can possibly imagine, I slipped the real ring on her finger as reaffirmation of the question I already asked her, the commitment we already made. And she puts her hand in the air and is not discreet about it whatsoever. And she's got this ring on her finger. She thinks it's fake. She's looking at it and I'm just sitting there like nothing happened. And we continued to visit. It was such a big-

Dr. James Dobson: Were the guards watching you?

Matthew Maher: One did, one saw and she came up to me afterward and said, "Maher, did you just get engaged in that visit?" And I said, "No, ma'am." She goes, "She did not come in with a ring on her finger." And I said, "You got me." And that was that, but that was not too long after the first several visits. I mean, everything happened so quick.

Sarah Maher: It did. And if I can be completely honest, I would say that the first year of us being engaged like that, it was cool. I felt like I was in the center of God's will for my life. And about a year into it, I started doubting this dream wasn't real and I went ... If I could go back to my old life, I would say I started to let go of Matt. We had to make that decision when he came home. Did we still want this? I just felt like I needed to throw this out there because there was a heavy season. It wasn't this peachy keen, "oh, God gave me a dream and we just floated down the aisle." It was very real and raw. And I remember there was nights where I would be wrestling with God and there would be nothing I could do.

I can't go see Matt and I can't go hold him. I would just drive an hour and a half to the prison and I would just sit out there and just wrestle with God. So that season, I look back at it now and I'm sitting across the table from Matt and I just think, wow, thank you Lord for reaffirming what you did. That dream was from you and it was real.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Matthew, you've now served your term and you're being released. What's God saying to you now?

Matthew Maher: There was a calling on my life. It was affirmed by so many men of God, so many people along the way just saying there's a calling on your life, son. And I know everybody's called as a Christian, but there was a specific calling on my life. So

teaching the Bible study, teaching in the church in prison and then coming out and just watching God open up doors that no man can shut nor man could open. September comes around, school starts. I'm back into the public schools, secular colleges, speaking about my story, talking about decisions, highlighting integrity, accountability, sharing where I was and the stories that were birthed in that time. And people were just amazed at being able to do this. And I think the story was birthed even before I went to prison when I spoke out. So there was people waiting for me to get out to see what's he going to do next?

Is he going to share from this experience? And God made it so clear, funded by State Farm Insurance, which was unheard of for them to go out on the line and fund somebody like me. And I go into schools all over the place and share my story at churches.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that what you're doing now?

Matthew Maher: Yeah, pretty much full time with a church in New Jersey. I'm the director of the student ministry. I oversee the entire student ministry. So I would always sum up the one word that God has really driven into my heart and it's influence, just influencing people with who he is and what he's able to do for the person who allows him.

Dr. James Dobson: Your athletic career's over.

Matthew Maher: Athletically done. It's been leveraged obviously. God has not thrown a single thing away from my parents.

Dr. James Dobson: And when did you start writing this book?

Matthew Maher: I wrote that book probably two years in. I wrote several manuscripts while I was away. This was the eighth and we decided to make it the first publication and there's a huge story behind that. One of the guys that I met in there upstairs in that ugly tier seven who was a Saul of Tarsus, hater of Christians, hater of Muslims, hater of faith, and he was a 330 pound man who could back up his verbalization of hate with the physical representation of it. And I was already on the tier for about four days when he hobbled on and he's a former mob enforcer for a Italian crime family in New York City. So everybody knew who he was. And I didn't know that all this time that I'm serving him and encouraging him, and he's listening to me teach the Bible study from a distance that he's watching me, Dr. Dobson, watching me with scrutiny, watching me and hoping, and he told me this, "I was hoping you would fail. I was hoping you would curse. I was hoping that you would do something that I could point at you and say, you're a hypocrite just like everybody else that carries that book." And he said to me with tears in his eyes, "But you didn't give me that opportunity." And that was kind of what drove *U May B the Only Bible Somebody Reads* home, because it wasn't me teaching the Bible study, that wasn't what he was impressed with. What he was impressed with, what was attractive was he saw Jesus in me

outside of the ministry moments and he gave his life to the Lord. So I say this was a guy that was a soldier for the godfather, literally is now a soldier for God the Father and his transformation and his radical redemption story is unbelievable. His name always comes out when I'm telling my story because I believe God put him in that bed. God moved me upstairs like chess to be an influence on this guy.

Dr. James Dobson: So in essence, you're in full-time ministry.

Matthew Maher: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Your greatest purpose is to serve the Lord.

Matthew Maher: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: There's no looking back.

Matthew Maher: No, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: And the Lord has taken tragedy and turned it into triumph.

Matthew Maher: And He gets all the glory. Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Any last thing you want to say to the family who lost their father and husband?

Matthew Maher: Of course. What is often not told unless it's asked is there's this relationship between me and that family to this day. When they took me out of the courtroom, my family requested to see their family and they all held hands and prayed in a side room and they exchanged contact numbers. So my mother struck up a relationship with one of his daughters and her name's Somali. And they would email each other. They would Facebook each other and she would ask, "How's Matt doing?" And I would send letters to my mom to send to them. So there was this relationship that was birthed through this tragedy and it was maintained all throughout that incarceration. And they publicly said, "We support Matt Maher in his message. Our daddy would not want us to hold him back." And most recently, the son who forgave me in court, Noon, he got caught up in his own legal trouble and he found himself in a hard spot.

And he told his family, the only person that he could relate to, the only person that he would want to hear from is me. And most recently, my mother's been writing him and encouraging him and sending in my blog posts to him. He wrote my mother a letter and just thanking her for the encouragement, for the hope and planting the seeds that has led him to meet Jesus Christ. So you're seeing redemption at its truest miraculous form. Don't deserve it, but God is in the business of doing it. And I would say to them that as long as God has allowed me these platforms, their father's name will be honored. My father in Heaven's name will be honored.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you come into the public schools and are Christian schools and are you given the opportunity to tell your story?

Matthew Maher: Yes. Public schools, private schools, secular, organizational, churches, just telling my story with what God has done in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: What do kids say to you?

Matthew Maher: The impact of the story, even in a public school, it's a message that you leave saying, "Whoa." And a lot of the kids will say, "I could go down that same exact path and I thank you. I get a lot of people hugging me because they went through tragedy and they never had the person that's either the offender or the perpetrator ask for forgiveness. And a lot of parents give me these huge hugs with tears and say, "Thank you for offering the accountability because we didn't get that from the person that did this." And here I am receiving hugs in people's circumstances that I don't deserve nor know because of the simple fact that I stood up in it and said, God, have your way. Make much of yourself through me.

Roger Marsh: Matthew and Sarah Maher's story is proof that God doesn't waste anything. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring Dr. Dobson's conversation with Matthew Maher, author of the book, *U May B the Only Bible Somebody Reads*. And to hear today's program again or to go back and listen to part one of this broadcast, visit jdfi.net. Every day, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is working to strengthen families and preserve the biblical principles upon which they're built because we believe the family is worth fighting for. And now during America's 250th anniversary, we have an invitation for young people in middle school and high school age ranges to reflect on their faith and how it has influenced the founding and development of our nation and how they believe God is calling them to live with purpose, responsibility, and hope in the years to come. Dr. James Dobson Family Institute in partnership with the Herzog Foundation is inviting students across the nation to reflect on the powerful question, how has faith shaped our nation and how is God calling you to help shape what comes next?

The America's 250th anniversary essay contest is open to all middle school and high school students all across the country, and you'll be competing for cash prizes of up to \$2,500 in each category. Essay submission deadline is April 30th, 2026. That's coming up in a couple of weeks and winners will be announced by the end of May. So to register to receive more contest information, go to drjamesdobson.org/USA250. That's drjamesdobson.org/USA250. Your support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute makes it possible for us to bring truth and hope into the lives of families all across America. And your gift of any amount helps us reach families in crisis to strengthen marriages under pressure and to point people toward the hope that only comes through Jesus Christ. You can make a secure donation at jdfi.net. You can also make a contribution over the phone when you call a member of our constituent care team.

That number is 877-732-6825. That's 732-6825. Or to send your donation by mail, write to us at Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, or just use those initials JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949. Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the JDFI, thanks so much for spending time with us 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.