



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Al Cason: The Testimony of a Restored Life – Part 1

Guest(s): Al Cason

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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 thank you for joining us for this program.

Gary Bauer: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Institute. I'm Gary Bauer, senior vice president of public policy and culture here at the Dobson Policy and Culture Center. I'm also the host of the Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom podcast. Today, my guest on Family Talk is a true everyday hero in every sense of that word. His name is Al Cason, and I truly believe he may have one of the best jobs in the world. Al is the president and COO of Bud's Best Cookies, a company started by his father, Albert L. Bud Cason, back in 1992. In fact, Bud has been in the cookie business his whole life, so it would only make sense that his only son would follow the footsteps into the family business. The story you're going to hear Al tell today is not a story of just one success after another. It's a story of a man that grew up in a great family, but then as life went on, ran into a bunch of challenges, and I'm sure he'll tell us about the mistakes that were made. But it's also a story of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. So, Al, welcome to Family Talk. Dr. Dobson loved folks like you. He loved hearing stories about people that hit the bumps in the road that we all hit. but were redeemed by the love of Jesus. Tell us a little bit about the family that you grew up in, because it sounds like it was a great family.

Al Cason: I grew up with two older sisters. I'm the only son and the baby of the family. So I have a sister that's 10 years older than I am, or nine and a half, and then one that's about eight years older than I am. So I was the baby by a long shot and the only son, which I guess I came along in my family at a time that my father, he was a type A personality or is, and worked very, very hard. He's always given to the church, supported his church, supported church school. It's always been very important to him. And I grew up in the church schools up until my seventh grade year, where they put me into a college preparatory school. They were concerned about the surroundings that I might be there with, but they wanted me to have a good education. Some things had kind of happened to the church school that I was going to, and the enrollment was down, and so they were able to get me into this college prep school. Well, there, a lot of the kids came from money and very liberal values. I was exposed to drugs. Exposed to a lot of things, premarital sex, a lot of things that I had been sheltered from in church school.

Gary Bauer: So you did get that start that usually will really help a young man or a young woman. You're being raised in a Christian home, and you're in this Christian school all the way to the seventh grade. And did you feel good in the Christian school or were you, even at that young age, did you see some of the problems there that led your parents to make the switch?

Al Cason: You know, I felt sheltered. I really didn't know any better. I was very innocent. And, you know, up until that age, there were a lot of guardrails around me. And so when I got to that other school, it was... it really kind of, I had never been exposed to anything like that before. Like I said, you know, in a college prep school here in Birmingham, you know, all the kids that went there came from money. So money was not an issue. A lot of entitlement. And, you know, I didn't recognize it for that at the time, but, you know, they were slipping off drinking. They were, you know, they were experimenting with drugs. And by the grace of God, I held strong to my beliefs.

I grew up Seventh-day Adventist, so it was a little bit odd that I was on the basketball team, but I couldn't play on a Friday or Saturday game. And so, you know, I was kind of an outsider to that regard, I guess. And also when I would go through the school lunch line, they'd have to have a special menu if they were serving pork. And so I guess that goes back to being raised Seventh-day Adventist. I joke that it's kind of between the Jewish religion and Southern Baptist. It's kind of a different kind of belief that you follow the Old Testament guidelines and what you eat as to have scales and fins. And as far as seafood, you don't eat pork from sundown to sundown. You don't do what you normally do during the week and that was the way I was raised. So you know not only was I exposed to the drugs, but I also, you know, you know wanted to play sports but I couldn't participate the way the other kids could and you know the peer pressure was building on me while I was there, and while I was there for the four years, I was able to stay strong. I really didn't want to go back each year, but they felt like it was best for me up until, you know, it kind of got to a breaking point where I really just begged them to go ahead and send me off to a Christian boarding school, an Adventist boarding school in Mississippi where I went for the last two years, my junior and senior year.

Gary Bauer: So did that make a real difference, the atmosphere there?

Al Cason: It did. It did. I was able to let my guard back down and enjoy the two years. The thing was, I'm very close to my parents. I still am. And I would call them every day from school there because I'd never been away from home. That was unusual to go away and especially five hours from home. But I did stay in very close contact with my parents while I was gone.

Gary Bauer: Well, so you're in this church boarding school, and this is good for you, but now you've got to make a decision about college. So did you pick this school, or did your parents say that this was the right place to go?

Al Cason: It was kind of what was assumed. It was an Adventist college, and that's typically where you would go coming out of the Adventist high school. It was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, or College Still, Tennessee, rather. And so that's where I went to college. And when I got there here comes the, you know, not with everyone. I mean, there were still, you know, ones that chose the right path. But the ones that I was friends with or had more in common with were drinking again. And there were, you know, living back like what I had seen at Altamont at this other school that I went to.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Al Cason: And at that point, Gary, the peer pressure was so much. I felt it for so long while I was there at Altamont, back where I went for four years in high school, that I just couldn't take it anymore. And I just thought, you know what? I'm gonna start doing these things like everyone else. And it was my decision. I can't blame it on any one person. I mean, anything that I did, you know, it was ultimately my decision. But what you don't realize along the way is how you hurt the ones you love by this behavior. You know, I thought, you know, along the way that I was only hurting myself. You know, I wasn't doing this to them. But everyone you love is impacted by these things that you do and the decisions that you make.

Gary Bauer: You know Al, I grew up in a family where my father was an alcoholic. He was a functioning alcoholic. I mean, I don't remember him ever missing work, but he clearly was physically addicted to alcohol, so on times that he couldn't have any because of surgery or something like that, he would go through the whole withdrawal and all the rest of it. And so it made me very cautious about going down that road because I saw what the impact was in our family. But your family, as I understand it, your mom and dad did not drink. Is that right?

Al Cason: No, sir, they did not. My father, his father was a functioning alcoholic as well. You know, we use that word functioning. The counselors that I've had at all the rehabs that I've been to over the years, they're like, hey, an alcoholic's an alcoholic. You know, how were they after hours? You know, how were we with the family? Did they miss any family things? You know, they said, you're trying to rationalize an alcoholic's an alcoholic. And, you know, my father still says the same about his father.

But, you know, it was one of those things that I kind of thought this was just what we didn't do because of our religion. You know, I did not understand. That was the secret that was kept about my grandfather's alcoholism. That was my dad's dad and he and I were very close. You know, I didn't question what was in his glass when he was sitting there watching TV with me. You know, I loved him for who he was to me. And my father loved him, you know, no matter what, because he's his dad. And, you know, you always have that love no matter what, because it's your father or whoever it is that is going through this.

You know, they're in the throes of something that they really can't control. I mean, this is something that you truly have to really surrender to God in a deep

way for Him to remove this obsession. But, you know, seeing that or not really knowing about that when, you know, this came up in school, it was just something that I felt like, well, this is another thing, like we didn't go to movies or we didn't wear jewelry or we didn't dance or we didn't do something else. You know, there really wasn't anything wrong with it. You know, I just wanted to be, I wanted to fit in.

And, you know, what I didn't understand was all this genetics and, you know, how far back alcoholism went on my father's side. You know, my grandfather was an alcoholic. My uncle was an alcoholic. My great, great grandfather, great grandfather. I mean, all the way back, as far as we know, alcoholism ran deep. And like you, my father abstained from what he saw with his dad. And he wanted to be different. You know, he saw what he did to my grandmother and how he left he and his brother and my grandmother and started another family and you know the nights that he said that he would sit out on the curb waiting for him to come visit that he never showed up. That that that hurts him to this day but on the flip side you know, he loved him deeply and, you know, he forgave him for that, which is, you know, much like Christ does us. You know, all the things that I'll go through that that I went through in my life, you know, to be forgiven and given another opportunity and with my parents as well.

And through all of this in school, I think I need to mention I did everything I could. When I would go out or we'd go to a restaurant or a bar or whatever, I'd always try to hide, you know, where no one would see me because at this school that you went to, they would drive around and see if they saw your car at a bar or, you know, and they'd kick you out.

Gary Bauer: Oh it was serious.

Al Cason: It was serious stuff. So I really did everything I could to try and hide this from my parents. And so, you know, I did for a number of years, was able to kind of conceal this because I didn't want to hurt them. It wasn't that I was doing it. It wasn't that I realized I was developing a problem. I didn't want to hurt them because I loved them so much.

Gary Bauer: Of course.

Al Cason: And, you know, and this thing was just spiraling out of control. And it started with alcohol and then marijuana was introduced, you know. And so, you know, here comes a little marijuana, here comes, you know, the alcohol. And the alcohol only built Gary. It, you know, I started off and it didn't start like a normal person. You know, the first time I got drunk, I literally got sick and threw up half the night, but I got up and wanted to do it again. And, you know, that's unusual. That's not a normal person. You know, that's the voice and the mindset of someone that, you know, that's an alcoholic. And I didn't understand it. And, you know, and I was out there with the people that I wanted to hang out with. And, you know, it continued to get worse.

And, you know, I got married right out of college. And, you know, the alcohol and the drugs, I mean, it had evolved at that point. And the marriage got destroyed because of all those things. And my parents found out. And I remember when I went and I had to tell my parents that the marriage was over and that, you know, as a parent, you want to find somebody else to blame for your children's problem. And they said, you know, they were blaming who I was married to at the time. And I said, no. I have a raging cocaine problem. And I said, this was all on me. She had nothing to do with it. It was devastating to them, Gary. I mean, absolutely devastating. They didn't even understand it.

Gary Bauer: It's hard for me to imagine what that must have been like. So I want to make sure I've got this straight. You're developing these problems in college, and then you graduate, and then you went to work for your father upon graduating and getting married. And at that early part of that time, they weren't aware of this, is that right? And then as it went on a little bit further in your job and in your marriage, you told them what was going on?

Al Cason: I had an old friend that saw me out somewhere, and he mentioned it to one of my sisters, and they told my parents that I was drinking and doing drugs and things. And so my father confronted me about it, and, you know, that was the first time I'd ever really lied to him. You know, he asked me about it, and I could tell how it would hurt him if I told him the truth, you know, when I had to lie to him. And, you know, and that's where the lies really began with my family and myself. And that really, that hurt me to another level as well, is having the lie to someone that I was always so close to and, you know, really was kind of veering off the path the way I was raised and what I really believed in.

Gary Bauer: So as you're dealing with all this, my understanding is that things eventually got so bad that that your own father had to fire you a couple of times from the company. Is that right?

Al Cason: He did over the course of my addiction as things progressed over a 12-year period. You know, he fired me over 12 times. But after the divorce, when I went and told them that I had a really raging cocaine problem, which I did, they sent me to a rehab in California and I went there for four weeks and came back. I might have made it 30 days, Gary, but, you know, I didn't really want it. I was doing what I thought I needed to do. And, you know, the addiction is such a powerful thing that, you know, I really didn't realize I had the problem that I did. And so I came back and in 30 days, you know, I started working again. And in 30 days, I was using again. And, you know, and it had really evolved at this point. You know, I was by myself and, you know, I was just, I would work and I would get home. And I mean, I would come out as soon as I would leave work. I mean, I would have I would be shaking almost by the time I'd leave. And my father would wonder why I had to leave at five o'clock straight up. You know, that's how bad it had gotten. And I was 22, 23 at the time. And so that's where it really evolved to. Then I'd get home and I'd drink, you know, and used cocaine and, you know, of course, smoked pot. And, you know, this happened right after the rehab. So I was 30 days after that.

And so, you know, this behavior and this type of thing, you know, continued on for the next couple of years. And so, you know, I was working and, you know, I'd gotten remarried. The woman that I was seeing had gotten pregnant. So I tried to do the right thing and marry her and have a baby. But, you know, I certainly wasn't the father that I needed to be when my son Buddy was born. And that's one of the greatest regrets that I have, hurting my parents and not being there for my son as he was little. I would leave work, go by this convenience store. Then I had a friend that had an automotive shop, and I would go by his place and would do cocaine till 12, 1 o'clock. And, you know, I'd go dragging in at 2 o'clock, barely able to drive, and wouldn't even see my son in the evenings because, you know, my disease was foremost in my life. And then I'd get up, come to work, and do the exact same thing the next day. And this went on and, you know, for a couple of years like this.

Gary Bauer:

My goodness. Yeah, we were talking briefly before we started our official talk here on the show. And you mentioned that Dr. Dobson actually played a role in providing strength to your parents because they were regular listeners of his show. And Jim would often talk about people struggling with all sorts of things, whether it was addiction or infidelity or struggling with whether to abort a baby that they hadn't planned. And as I said earlier, he hated to hear about all that suffering, but he loved hearing about how Christ can heal it all, no matter what it is. But tell us a little bit about the role that Dr. Dobson played with your mom and dad.

Al Cason:

As I grew up, hearing him on in our home was a regular thing. I mean, daily. Even, you know, some of the tapes that she might get, if we missed it, you know, we'd hear them on the weekends. I mean, she would make sure that we got to hear this. And as a child, it might go in one ear and out the other, but what it really did was help my parents and help them and prepare them for what they would go through. Because all the things you mentioned and more, my life, it would get thrown at them over the years. The infidelity, the drugs, the immorality, all the things that you can possibly imagine that go along with that kind of lifestyle happened. And they had to hear about it. And, you know, and it caused them to struggle, you know, in their marriage because, you know, he wanted to believe me and believe that I was okay and wasn't using again. And my mother didn't. And, you know, so that caused friction between them. But the bond that they had, you know, they've been married 65 years now and by the grace of God. And, you know, I certainly didn't help the situation, but, you know, they held firm to their beliefs and they kept praying and they kept praying and they kept praying.

I ended up having to go to a rehab again. I've been to four inpatient rehabs. The last one I was at was 14 months in New Jersey. And I mean, it was something and I guess we'll get to that. But, you know, the disease of alcoholism, drug addiction is a progression and it continues to progress. And like I said, you know, I didn't want to hurt anyone in my family. I didn't realize the impact it has on others. And, you know, not until I really got clean enough to, I mean, really had, you know, six months of, you know of clean time in that last long-term rehab I

was at that I really realized how it impacted and how it hurt, you know, my parents mainly. Because they were just devastated, absolutely devastated and even questioned God. Why would you allow this to happen to me? And my father was like, you know, I went through this with my dad. You know, how can I, you know, Lord, why would I have to go through it, you know, on both ends of my life with my father and now my son? And, you know, but he never gave up hope. He never quit the faith. I mean, that strong rootedness that they got from, you know, all the Dr. Dobson's teachings and all the things that they heard day in and day out, you know, really helped them. And it developed a tough love in my mother that would come out later, right towards the end, I mean, where this story really gets crazy, that she had to really use the tough love that she learned.

But they continued to pray for me and never gave up. He even had friends of his, Gary, that told him that he just needed to let me die. That's how bad it had gotten. And he's like, that's my son. I'll never quit praying. I'll never give up on him. And thank God they didn't.

Gary Bauer: Al, what a story you're sharing with our listeners. And my goodness, there's so many more questions I want to ask. And we need to hear the end of this story because there's a lot of great things that God's going to do. Is there a chance you can come back and be with us again?

Al Cason: Absolutely. I'd love to come back.

Gary Bauer: Fantastic.

Roger Marsh: Addiction rarely destroys only one life. As Al Cason has shared with us today here on Family Talk, the choices that he made affected his marriages, his son, his career, and the parents who loved him deeply and refused to stop praying for him. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We just heard part one of Gary Bauer's conversation with Al Cason, President and COO of Bud's Best Cookies. And by the way, they are delicious. If you missed any part of today's conversation, you can listen again or share it with someone who may need to hear Al's testimony when you go to drjamesdobson.org. You can also go to jdfi.org and you'll find the information there as well.

And by the way, once you're on our website, be sure you also sign up to start receiving Gary Bauer's weekly blog from the Dr. James Dobson Policy and Culture Center. Gary is our senior vice president of policy and culture here at the JDPI, and he produces a weekly blog as well as a bi-monthly podcast, Defending Faith, Family, and Freedom. You can sign up to receive both when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

At the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we want families facing difficult seasons to know that they don't have to walk through them without biblical encouragement and hope. Family Talk is one way we continue providing that support each and every day, and your financial gifts make this ministry possible.

Today, we invite you to partner with us as we preserve and promote God's design for the family, introducing people to the gospel of Jesus Christ and defending the sanctity of human life and righteousness in our culture. Your generosity helps keep this trusted voice on the air, and it carries Dr. Dobson's dynamic legacy forward for a new generation of families. To make a tax-deductible donation, visit jdfi.org. You can also call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in again next time right here for part two of Gary Bauer's fascinating conversation with Al Cason, the president and COO of Bud's Best Cookies, a man who has a remarkable story of God's lasting love and legacy. And Dr. Dobson played a huge role in that upbringing. That's coming up on the next 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.