



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Life After the Storm – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Jan Harrison

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Hello everyone, you're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson and thank you for joining us for this program.

**Roger Marsh:** Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, so very glad you've joined us today. Now last time here on the Family Talk broadcast, we began a powerful conversation with author, Bible study leader, podcaster and speaker, Jan Harrison who shared the heartbreaking moment when she and her husband Frank learned that their 27-year-old son, James, had unexpectedly passed away while serving in the mission field in Africa. Today here on Family Talk, we will conclude this moving two-part program as Jan reveals how her family found strength in Christ during their darkest hours. Jan and her husband Frank do have three grown daughters and make their home in Charlotte, North Carolina. Together they founded With Open Eyes, a ministry born from their son's mission work. Five years after losing James, Jan published her book called *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through* and in the past couple of weeks, Jan has released a newly expanded and updated edition of this classic work that you need to take a look at. To see how the story is going in terms of Jan and Frank and their family and how God has guided them through the grief process even still. For more information for how you can secure a copy of Jan Harrison's brand-new edition of *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*, go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

In today's conversation here on the Family Talk broadcast, Jan Harrison will offer practical wisdom about the grieving process. She'll also explain how suffering can actually expand our capacity for God's presence in our lives. She'll also share how the Lord has given her a "spacious place" as she calls it. A new purpose in using her journey to bring hope to others facing similar trials.

And now, let's join Dr. James Dobson and his special guest Jan Harrison for the conclusion of their conversation right here on Family Talk.

**Jan Harrison:** It is profound, but it was very simple. These were in the days immediately following James's death, and our pastor was there and he looked at me and he said, "We're not going to tell you how to grieve, because grief belongs to you. And this is your relationship and nobody knows but you and the Lord. All is involved here." But he said, "I want to say this. There is nothing you can do that is wrong."

And over those months, after the initial period of time, and we settled into now husband and wife and grieving and loss and dealing, we dealt very differently. Thankfully, because both of us were hanging on to eternal truth, though we comforted each other, neither one of us depended on the other one to be the comforter. We simply knew it was too big and too hard and too deep.

My relationship as a mom, I had to accept he could not understand some of my mother strings. And when if I got frustrated or if I would think ... Frank went into a male, or it seemed to me, a male response which was do more, go harder, give more. I went into more of a withdrawal and shutdown. We gave each other permission and freedom, and when I would get like, "You're just doing all these things," I would hear that, "Nothing he does is wrong. This is his grief and it is between him and the Lord." And so we cried together, we prayed together, we took space from each other, and God just protected us. That's really why we aren't a statistic.

Dr. James Dobson: Another way of describing that, Jan, is that you allowed each other to grieve in your own particular way, and didn't demand the same response from your spouse that you were feeling.

Jan Harrison: Right. And it didn't come at the same time. Sometimes if he would want to bring something up and I would think, "I'm feeling kind of okay right now, do you have to go there?" I would think, "But it's surfacing for him right now." And I think he did the same for me. God just gave us the grace to grieve, together but separate. And we still do. He has been gracious with me and I have been gracious with him.

Dr. James Dobson: It's now been five years. Have you turned a corner?

Jan Harrison: The summer right before the fourth year, we went on a family vacation. We take one, everybody in the whole family, children, their spouses, their children, and I remember when I came home it was just an especially sweet time. And when I came home and I was looking back thinking, "Wonder what was so good about that?" I realized for the first time I had come to peace with our new normal. And I say that, and then just last night for some reason, this time I said, "I wish James was coming."

Dr. James Dobson: It's still an empty place in your heart, isn't it?

Jan Harrison: It always will be, and it should be.

Dr. James Dobson: Empty chair.

Jan Harrison: It's okay.

Dr. James Dobson: When you have lost someone as you have, or when a woman is suddenly a widow, or a man is a widower, there's something called the attack. I don't know

if you've ever heard of that concept before, but you kind of come to a plateau where you feel like you're dealing with it and you feel like you're getting over the grief and then you're in a grocery store and you see something, or you run into somebody out in the business world, and it's suddenly back. It's the attack, because you really haven't totally conquered it yet, but the Lord understands those processes as well.

Now, when we started the program last time, I talked about your having broken this subject into three categories in your book that I think is good, but I want you to explain it and you called the first one, "Storms Will Gather." Elaborate on what you were saying.

Jan Harrison: Well, it's that reality that there will be storms, and I don't know why that shocks us. As we've already said, Jesus forecast them and predicted them and told us we would have them. He knows what's out there. So it seems to me if we know we're going to have a storm that we would get ready, we would store our provisions and we would become prepared. God loves us. He didn't put us here to go through trouble, but leave us without the tools necessary to survive. So it's hard to get supplied when you're in the storm, and so no day is better than today than to start to stock your supplies for survival.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you do that? How do you prepare for something you haven't yet experienced?

Jan Harrison: Well, the first thing you need to do is engage in that relationship, that personal relationship with the Lord. It's not going to carry you through to be a member of a church and to be on a church role, and it's not going to carry you through just to go and sit and listen to a sermon once a week. You need to become actively involved. Just like you do in your own interpersonal relationships, it takes two. And God is there for us, and so you need Him. You need Jesus. He said, "I have overcome the world. So in Me you have the power to do that." You need to know His word. That is a supply. That is a powerful supply. It is your guide. It will tell you where to go and what to do.

It's how I had that knowing that He was always there, even when He didn't speak, because I knew His Word and I knew He said He would never leave me or forsake me. He gave us His spirit, and His spirit gives us light and it witnesses to our inner being. This isn't crazy, this isn't just hoping for a better day. This is truth and I know it's truth.

He gives us the body of Christ. That's another supply. The people that stepped up and stepped in on our behalf when that storm struck, because of some of Frank's connections in Africa, there were some women there that were very well-connected Kenyan women. They were businesswomen and they happened to also be born-again believers. And one of them actually attended his autopsy just in order to witness its accuracy. She did that as just an act of love and of care. In fact, we have so many questions, things we don't know, but we know

that because she was there. I think Frank asked her when he saw her, "Have you ever done something like this before?" And she said no.

Another one of them went and shopped to buy clothes so that he would be properly dressed when his father arrived, and she bought a pair of khaki pants and a blue Oxford cloth shirt and a red tie for his body, so that when his father came he would be dressed like a western young man. When I went to Kenya myself about 10 months later, I had the opportunity to meet these women for breakfast to just tell them thank you. "Thank you for stepping in and thank you for gifting us in a way that we could never repay you," and that was her response. "It was my reasonable act of service unto the Lord." That's the body of Christ.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh jumping in here for a moment here on this Family Talk program to remind you that we are listening to a very reassuring interview featuring our own Dr. James Dobson and his special guest, Jan Harrison. Now if you're just tuning in, Jan is discussing how she and her family overcame the sudden loss of their son, James. He passed away in Africa while doing mission work. The following days, weeks and months were extremely difficult for Jan, and yet Jesus helped her through her grief and gave her hope.

And now let's rejoin Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Jan Harrison, for the conclusion of the special edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the first category is "Storms Will Gather." They're going to. Don't be surprised by them. They are inevitable. The second category is "Storms Strike." Explain that one.

Jan Harrison: They happen and you're in it. And if you're supplied, you will be far better able to weather it. They happen to everybody. It rains on the good and the evil. So as believers, it is our opportunity to test God's Word and we will find Him true. You will find Him true to who He says He is. I really hope that this book will be a reference tool for some people. There are parts that don't necessarily apply. So what they are finding, I'm told, is that they can use parts, but then it prepares them to walk with someone else. It equips them to be a stronger member of the body of Christ. It helps them to know how to pray.

Recently a group asked me, "Okay, tell us what to say and what not to say." I told our girls we were leaving to go to the memorial and I circle up and I said, "Okay y'all, just get ready, because people are going to say stupid things and they don't even mean it. It's not on purpose." So I said, "In Jesus name, we're not going to receive them as an offense." And after it was all over, we would just marvel. I think I shared in the book about a person probably a few months later who saw me in the grocery store, and she was so unsure of what to say that she did a U-turn with her grocery cart. I knew it wasn't ... And I thought, "Okay, don't take it as an offense. She simply does not know what to say."

Dr. James Dobson: Who helped you the most, Jan?

Jan Harrison: Our pastor was awesome. It's not like he lingered around a lot, but our church family was very much there for us. But another thing he said, and it was so clear, but he looked at us, eyeball to eyeball, and he said, "Okay, now listen. James was in London, James was in Charlotte, James was in Kenya, James is in Heaven. Heaven is as real as all of those other places. So you know where he is. So what's the problem?" And it just gave me such a-

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

Jan Harrison: ...an ability to place him. But these were the two things that the girls and I came away with after we downloaded on all of the crazy things people said and did. We said, "If you know them, you say, "I love you and I'm sorry."

Dr. James Dobson: And I'm praying for you.

Jan Harrison: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You have a phrase in your book that I think is good, but I want you to explain it. "You need to move from what-if thinking to even-if thinking."

Jan Harrison: I think we get really hung up on all of the what-if problems. All of the scenarios and possibilities that could happen, whether it's from miscarriage, or whether you've been in an adulterous relationship. What if he does it again? What if my child drops out of college? What if all of those things? And they can hold us captive. And I loved the portion in Daniel where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...

Dr. James Dobson: I was going to tell you that just as soon as you stopped. That's one of my favorite verses.

Jan Harrison: And they say, but even if our God is able, and that just fans faith inside of me to just remember that the what-if, go ahead and run it out there because even if, our God is able.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me put flesh on that story, because there they are in the fiery furnace.

Jan Harrison: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Everybody knows what happens to a person who's put in a furnace, and yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, "Our God can take care of this. This is okay. But if not, we will serve Him anyway." You talk about faith; that's the best explanation of it I've seen.

Jan Harrison: And those are just the truths that when we have those, God calls them back to us.

Dr. James Dobson: The third category is "After the Storm." Are you in the post-storm era now with regard to your son?

Jan Harrison: Yes, I am in the post-storm era. It is a spacious place that God has enlarged my heart to allow Him to use me, and to use us, and to use the storm to encourage and offer hope to other people.

Dr. James Dobson: And what do you mean by a spacious place?

Jan Harrison: By a spacious place I mean that suffering stretches you. It stretches your spirit; it stretches your faith. I'm using the word stretches where sometimes people would say tries it, and it does try it, but in the trying, God enlarges our capacity to see Him work and to allow Him to fill us, and to allow Him to demonstrate His strength, where we know we are so weak. So the spacious place is when you come to that acceptance that God will use this and you are being asked to release it and surrender it and let Him take it.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And you also are able to have empathy for other people who are hurting in the same way that you have hurt.

Jan Harrison: Yes. Paul told us that we have been comforted so that we can comfort others in their affliction. And it even goes on at the end of that verse and it says, "Our comfort is abundant in Christ." So after the storm, I started to realize not only was I comforted, but I had an abundance of comfort. That means I had more than enough. I had an extra measure. I had enough for me, enough for my family, enough to give. Because He gives abundant comfort and if I would allow Him, it's almost like the more I was willing to give comfort, the more comforted I became.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. All right, let's close with this. We're almost out of time. Did you ever at any point along the way, especially early on, get angry at God and blame Him for the fact that this happened?

Jan Harrison: I never got angry. I did ask the questions, why?

Dr. James Dobson: Why?

Jan Harrison: And, "Where were you? What about all those prayers prayed? What about the deliberate act of surrendering James to you, Lord, and telling you we would trust you with all of our children. With our lives, we trust you Lord to do what is best." You don't just want good for them; you want best for them. And I love that God showed me you can ask Him the questions. He wants to minister to us in those places, but He also has shown me, and showed me as a result of all of that, that I can take your very worst news and I can use it to give good news to people every single day. That blesses me. That heals me until all things become clear one day.

Dr. James Dobson: The title of the book is *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*, by Jan Harrison, and it was published by Harvest House. And Jan, if I had to boil it all down to one phrase or one word, it would be peace. It is that you can have peace in the midst of the storm.

Jan Harrison: Absolutely. "I came to give you peace," is what Jesus said.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you for being our guest. You're continuing to write, aren't you?

Jan Harrison: I am. I am learning and growing and excited about the next project.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're speaking and you're available to speak.

Jan Harrison: I am. My heart is to just minister. To help people make those steps towards hope, to trust God, to know that He will carry them through, and that He will give them a spacious place.

Dr. James Dobson: God be with you.

Roger Marsh: Even in our most devastating losses, God offers not just comfort but transformation, turning our grief into a sacred space where we can minister to others who are hurting as well. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and we just heard the conclusion of a two-part conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and Jan Harrison and her moving testimony of finding hope after the sudden loss of her son, James. Now if you missed any part of today's conversation or if you'd like to go back and hear part one as well, you can do so on the Family Talk app or by visiting [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). While you're there, you can also learn more about the ministry With Open Eyes, it was founded by Jan and her husband, Frank, along with their son, James. And it continues the missions work her son began in Africa. It now extends to more than 18 countries. You'll also find a link for the newly updated and expanded edition of her book, *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through* which offers wisdom for anyone seeking God's presence in difficult seasons. Now the book was just released last week so you'll want to check out this new edition of Jan Harrison's book, *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*. And we've got a link for it up at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

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Well I'm Roger Marsh, and for all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for making us a part of your day. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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