



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Life After the Storm – Part 1

Guest(s): Jan Harrison

Air Date: May 14, 2025

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. You know life can change in an instant, can't it? Sometimes those changes bring unimaginable pain. Today here on the program, we're sharing a powerful conversation Dr. Dobson had with author Jan Harrison as Jan and her husband, Frank, experienced the sudden, devastating loss of their 27-year-old son, James, who was serving in the mission field in Africa.

Jan Harrison is an accomplished author, speaker, and a Bible study teacher who has inspired thousands of women through her ministry over the past two decades. She serves on the board of directors of the ministry called With Open Eyes. That's the ministry she co-founded with her husband, Frank, and their son, James, to accelerate the gospel in Africa.

Despite her deep faith, Jan's journey through grief really tested her in ways that she never imagined and she wrote a book about this amazing journey called *Life After the Storm*. In this work, Jan shares how she discovered that even in our darkest moments, God is still present. She found that while pain doesn't simply disappear, God's grace provides the strength to move forward one day at a time. Now Jan has recently updated and expanded the *Life After the Storm* book, and it just came out last week. We encourage you to go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk to learn more about the brand-new updated edition of Jan Harrison's powerful work on grief and survival. It's called *Life After the Storm*. You'll find that information at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now let's get into today's program with Dr. James Dobson and his guest and dear friend, Jan Harrison here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Our pastor a few years ago preached a sermon on this subject. He said that everyone, and he put the emphasis on everyone is either in pain or will eventually be in pain. There are no exceptions. This is the human condition, and I believe it's true. Jesus told His disciples right before His crucifixion, "In this world you will have tribulation." I mean, you can count on it, "But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world."

That is one of the strangest Scriptures in the Bible because tribulation and good cheer don't really go together. You don't think of them as experiences that would come along side by side, but that is what Jesus taught us. And the reason is because when you put your faith in God, you can deal with anything that life throws at you. Although it will not be easy because that is the, again, the experience that we can expect.

Well, our guest today has learned how to do just that. She's Jan Harrison. She's married to Frank Harrison. These are my good friends. I love these people. And Jan has been married to Frank for 38 years. You have had four children?

Jan Harrison: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have written a book called *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*. And given what we just said about tribulation, it's obvious that you're talking about this subject. Now you have actually grouped the content of this book into three categories that I want to talk about. We went to lunch recently and you said that when you talk about this matter of difficulty and tribulation and hardship and some sorrow, that people all come up to you because they've all gone through it, haven't they?

Jan Harrison: They have. There doesn't seem to be any exception to any human relationship or life where storms and difficulty have not been a part. What I want to tell people and encourage people and offer to people is that no matter what the storm is, no matter how dark or how difficult the experiences are that they are going through, that God has provided for them and He will take them through it.

He has already gone before. He knows the other side. He knows what we will need. He has forecast that we're going to have trouble. You shared that Scripture. It was the forecast. And He loves us and He has given us all that we will need to get through those troubles and we have to take advantage of those.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Let's make it personal here because this is something you and Frank have gone through. And you sometimes share this and in fact in this book, *Life After the Storm*, you talk about your low point, a time when you as a family went through what you felt at the time was the most difficult thing anybody could ever experience. Describe it.

Jan Harrison: In 2010, it was a beautiful October afternoon in North Carolina. Everything seemed to point to another regular day going about our business. And Frank received a phone call that was the phone call every parent tucks deep down in the recesses of their heart that they hope they will never ever receive. And it was the U.S. Embassy in Kenya calling to inform us that our 27-year-old son James had died. That was all the information that we had at that point.

And Frank came home, I was working in my office and I heard him walking through the kitchen at an odd time of day for him to be home. And he stood in

the doorway to my office and he looked at me and he said, "Jan, I need to tell you something. I want you to come back here." And so I followed him back to our bedroom. So I was walking behind him. And when we got back there and he had turned around to face me, he didn't say a word, but I looked at his face and I knew that something horrible had happened. And he-

Dr. James Dobson: Did you guess what it was?

Jan Harrison: I didn't. I looked at him and he said, "Jan, we've lost James today." And you can't process that kind of news. I said, "What? Are you sure?" It's too much.

Dr. James Dobson: He died of an illness?

Jan Harrison: He died-

Dr. James Dobson: It was not an accident.

Jan Harrison: Exactly. He got sick suddenly and in the course of just a few days he died. And we did not know that he was sick. We had spoken with him on a Friday and this was a Tuesday afternoon, so we had no idea. And you know that it's a compromised environment. It's dangerous to some degree, but you don't expect to be told that your 27-year-old son is dead.

Dr. James Dobson: Had he been healthy before?

Jan Harrison: Yes, he was basically healthy. He had been in Africa for off and on for five years. He had had malaria. He had had a pretty serious bout with blood poisoning from infected wound, but he was healthy.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Yeah. And then those other things weren't life-threatening-

Jan Harrison: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: ... at the time. So there was no reason to suspect that you might lose your son.

Jan Harrison: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. What was he doing in Africa?

Jan Harrison: James was living with a Kenyan pastor who was a mentor and a friend that he had met years earlier when he had gone to South Sudan and begun to just develop a love and a compassion and a kinship really with the indigenous people in South Sudan and then in Kenya. He was so touched by their faith, but they had such hope and such joy and...

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. What did you do during that time of sorrow? Going back to it today, what do you remember?

Jan Harrison: God is so good. As any listener would know, when something first happens, it's as if He just drops a veil of protection down over you, His protective grace, and you take care of the things that need to be taken care of. In our case, Frank had to go to Africa to get his body. I stayed home to receive our three daughters who were coming in from various places and college and living out of town.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. This is not just the loss of a son, as terrible as that is. It's a family affair, isn't it?

Jan Harrison: Yes. James was the only boy, so he was the only brother. And all of those interpersonal relationships are skewed on a dime. They change. And nobody knows how to prepare for that or anticipate that or what to do with it when it happens, but God just, He led us through those first days. But when everyone leaves and the services are done and all of the arrangements are taken care of and the numb starts to wear off a little bit, then you walk into that dark, dark season. You cannot absorb it. It takes a long time to accept fully that you will not see him again this side of Heaven.

Dr. James Dobson: When you speak on this subject, people come up to you and say, "I've gone through this too," or something on the same level as a loss of a child, loss of a spouse. I can think of many possibilities. And what do they say to you? What do they ask of you? What do they want from you?

Jan Harrison: They want hope, particularly if they are in that dark period. And there's no way to put a timeframe on that dark period and the dark goes from really deep pitch dark at so times and then it becomes grayer and it is just an up and down period of time. You don't know what to expect. So people just want to know that there is light and there is hope beyond this dark place because they don't feel it.

Dr. James Dobson: Jan, the subtitle to the book says, *God Will Carry You Through*. He doesn't always do that immediately, does He? I mean there is a moment there where He's not even talking to you sometimes. Did you go through that?

Jan Harrison: Oh, it gets very quiet and He carries you through and I think a lot of times until you look back, you realize you weren't even walking or moving. So for you to be where you are now, He had to have been carrying you.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I don't want it to sound trivial as though you go through something like this and you say, "Well, what do you know? God took away all the pain." And yeah, that's not what you're saying.

Jan Harrison: For me, it has most definitely been the darkest time. And yet I do want to say in the deepest, darkest place, I knew He was there. Not so much that I could feel it, but I knew He felt my pain and I knew He cared for me. I had the Word of God. I had the spirit of God. It's supernatural. It's not something that you can work up. You're not strong and you're not full of faith. It's what He is doing within you that is beyond yourself.

But He does allow the pain and in hindsight, I think He allows it in order to stretch us to see how desperately we need Him. As parents, we want to pick them out of the pain just as fast as we can. It's so painful to watch someone you love hurt. And I know our heavenly Father grieves when we hurt, but His love is so complete that He leaves us in that pain so that we can know Him in a much deeper and more precious and more powerful way.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really important to understand that because if you have not yet gone through something like this, you're often confused about the lack of response from the Lord. And I hope people understand my saying this, but just read the Book of Job and he uttered these incredible questions. I mean, they're so articulate and so intelligent you can hardly believe that a human being going through what he did was saying these things.

And the Lord never answered a single one of his questions. If I could find His throne, if I could just go find His throne, I'd explain myself and He would understand. But sometimes for reasons we don't understand, He lets us go through the valley. But He is always there. That's your message.

Jan Harrison: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: That even when it's the darkest, He is there and you were aware of it.

Jan Harrison: I was. I often recall "weeping lasts for the night." The night is the duration of that dark time.

Dr. James Dobson: But joy.

Jan Harrison: But joy.

Dr. James Dobson: Comes in the morning.

Jan Harrison: Joy would come because joy is Jesus and He would come and pick you up and wipe your tears and just that ever-so-subtle whisper, "You're not alone. You're not alone."

Dr. James Dobson: You drew comfort from knowing that James was a believer, didn't you?

Jan Harrison: Oh my goodness, yes. The marvelous hope of seeing him again, the reality that he has never been more alive than he is right now today, the understanding that I'm just waiting. Life is a waiting room. And so for God to give us grace to wait, but I know that I will see him again.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Can you imagine the reunion when that occurs with your three girls? My heart goes out to the parents who had a son or daughter who didn't know Christ, and that must be incredibly painful and difficult.

Jan Harrison: It is profound, but it was very simple. Frank was in Africa and I was at home. 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 what all is involved here." But he said, "I want to say this, there is nothing you can do that is wrong."

I was like, "Really?" And he said, "Nothing. This is between you and the Lord." So I filed that away in my heart and over those months after the initial period of time and we settled into now husband and wife and grieving and dealing, we dealt very differently. And thankfully because both of us were in the Word, 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 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 shut down.

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?" 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.

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

Jan Harrison: The summer of 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: There's still an empty place in your heart, isn't it?

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

Dr. James Dobson: An empty chair.

Jan Harrison: It's okay.

Dr. James Dobson: When you have lost someone, 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.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a raw and vulnerable discussion we've shared today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. And we've reached the midpoint of the conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Jan Harrison. You know, grief truly is a strange and unpredictable journey, isn't it? Each person walks through it differently and yet, Jan found her anchor knowing that Jesus remained faithfully present with her through every dark moment. Ultimately promising to transform her mourning into joy. Now if today's program touched your heart, maybe you know someone who is walking through their own season of loss, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. There you can listen to part one of this program again and learn more about Jan's book, *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*. Just this past week, Jan released an updated and expanded version of this resource that shares how God has been healing the hearts of Jan and her husband, Frank, and their family through the loss now of nearly a decade of James' passing to go to be with the Lord. I encourage you to look at this brand-new updated edition of Jan Harrison's book called *Life After the Storm: God Will Carry You Through*.

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Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for making us a part of your day. Please join us again

next time right here for part two of this moving conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and his dear friend Jan Harrison as she shares more about how God brings beauty from ashes and purpose from pain. That's coming up right here next time on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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