



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Losing Cooper – Part 2

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.

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, God is holy and our tragedy doesn't change who He is. He's a just God, He's a good God, and for those of you that have just lost a loved one, please don't be mad and angry at God. Don't keep Him at arm's length.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and on today's program, we're going to hear part two of a discussion that we began yesterday featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guests, J.J. And Melanie Jasper. Now, the program was recorded several years ago, but the heart of the message is still powerful and will bring comfort to parents who might be struggling with a loss of their own, even today.

The Jaspers are going to be sharing how God taught them how to praise Him in the midst of their pain after losing their five-year-old son Cooper in an ATV accident. They're also going to share how He brought them encouragement to carry on their lives amidst the flood of emotions that they were navigating each and every day. Now, let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guests J.J. and Melanie Jasper, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I said at the end of the program last time that we're going to pick up right where we left off. But actually, J.J., I'd like to go to your childhood. You grew up in a dysfunctional family, didn't you?

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir. When we're talking about my only son passing away, and it was my idea to buy the dune buggy, it was my idea to drive, so a lot of guilt and regret. And my grandfather was an alcoholic in a barroom brawler. My father, his son, an alcoholic, a barroom, brawler, my only brother, drug and alcohol addictions, and I started on that road until the Lord rescued me. So Dr. Dobson, I know a different way to grieve, and it's only by the grace of God that I'm standing and sober and that our marriage is strong. We're not bitter or angry at God, and God gets all the glory for that.

Dr. James Dobson: How old were you when you found the Lord?

J.J. Jasper: I was 19 years old, and people ask, "How do you make it when you lose a loved one, especially a child?" The starting place is to realize your need for God, repent of your sins, and receive Jesus Christ into your heart and life. You become born again, just like it says in the third chapter of John. He's amazing. We could not have made it without God's help. His grace really is sufficient.

Dr. James Dobson: Melanie, how did the two of you meet? You grew up in a Christian home.

Melanie Jasper: I did, a godly home. We were at church every time the doors were open and sometimes even when they weren't.

Dr. James Dobson: Did J.J. know the Lord when you got acquainted?

Melanie Jasper: Yes sir, he did.

Dr. James Dobson: You wouldn't have messed with him if-

Melanie Jasper: No, I would not.

Dr. James Dobson: ... And when did you first meet the Lord?

Melanie Jasper: When I first met the Lord, I said a prayer beside my mother's bedside when I was probably around seven years old. I may have been saved, I believe that I was, but I nailed it down August of 1997. I was at one of the lowest points in my life. I was 23 years old, and I just said, "Lord, I'm sorry I've tried to do it without you this long." I knew Him. I even stayed in the Word, but it just, something was missing. I hadn't 100% surrendered my life to Him.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, your book is called *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*. Melanie, I'm going to ask you as a place to start on this story, did you ever get angry at God?

Melanie Jasper: I did not. I did not get angry at God. Like I said...

Dr. James Dobson: There's no other plan. There's no other savior.

Melanie Jasper: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: You can't afford to write Him off.

Melanie Jasper: That's right. That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: You stay faithful and He will be there for you.

Melanie Jasper: And He is faithful. That is true. I did ask, "Oh, why couldn't you have chosen a different way to do this?" Because I know He could, I know He could have. He's God. So, I sure as a mama hate that that's the way He planned for us. But for

some reason He did and He chose to use our little boy to draw a lot of people into Him.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you ever become angry at J.J.? I don't mean anger, anger. I mean, over this.

Melanie Jasper: I did not. I really did not. He was angry with himself and had a lot of guilt, and I saw a man having fun with his son. I appreciated the fact that he wanted Cooper to have an adventurous life and do manly things, and he was just playing with his little boy. He loved that baby.

Dr. James Dobson: He wouldn't have hurt him for anything.

Melanie Jasper: He wouldn't have hurt a hair on his head. And so, I was not mad at him for one moment.

Dr. James Dobson: J.J., how'd you deal with guilt?

J.J. Jasper: It's interesting that you talk about the forgiveness aspect. One chapter in the book is forgiveness. Melanie was the judge and the jury on whether or not I would be whole and be healed, because if she had held it over my head, I suppose that's why a lot of marriages don't make it. And from the very beginning, Melanie said it was an accident and she's never thrown it up in my face, and she gave me complete unconditional forgiveness. God's forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and being able to forgive yourself. That was something I really struggled about.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me pray a hypothetical prayer and tell me if you ever prayed it or something like it. Lord, here I am again. This is J.J. and I'm hurting. "I have an ache in my heart that I will never get over and I don't have answers to my why questions, but I've come to You again and ask You to put Your arms around me, and be with my family and be with Melanie, and help us deal with what is inexpressible." Do you ever pray that kind of prayer?

J.J. Jasper: Over and over, yes sir. And He's promised to never leave us or forsake us. The very word, Holy Spirit is comforter, and He would put His big strong arms around us and He would comfort us. And it feels like early in the grieving stages, you feel like you have a band around your chest and you feel like you're standing in the surf and a wave knocks you down, rolls you in the sand, and you come up gasping and another wave hits and another, and you're just sure you're not going to make it. You feel so hopeless and so helpless, but it really is by the grace of God, we stayed in the Word and read the Psalms.

People were praying for us when we weren't strong enough to pray for ourselves. Prayer is the difference maker. But you talked about guilt and regret. We had our friend who spoke at our graveside service, and it was just the immediate family. And he said, "In the coming days and weeks, people with good intentions will say, in time you'll get over this." But he said, "The truth is

you're never going to get over it. This is not a wound that will heal. This is an amputation, and just like someone who's lost a hand or a foot, an arm or a leg, you're going to have to find a new normal. You're going to have to find a new way to do life, so you're never going to get over it, but you will get through it with God's help."

Dr. James Dobson: Someone wrote a book some years ago. In fact, the author was on my program and I can't even remember her name. It was in the early 1980s, but the book was about what she called the attack, that when you've lost somebody and you're grieving, you're deeply wounded and hurt, you finally began to get to the point that you have a few minutes when you don't think about it, or you have an afternoon when you don't think about it. And then, you're just walking along. You're in a grocery store, and bang, there it is again.

J.J. Jasper: We called it being ambushed by grief.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

J.J. Jasper: You're just going along and you hear a song or we'd see a little blonde-haired boy, and you'd be reduced to shoulder shaking sobs.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you fall in each other's arms?

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir. Something I did early, Dr. Dobson, I think people will relate with this. I said, "Well, if the lawnmower hadn't quit, we wouldn't have got on the dune buggy." Or, "If I had not bought the dune buggy or decided to ride that day, then-

Dr. James Dobson: Those are dead end streets.

J.J. Jasper: ... Yes. Then I would try to, what I called trying to fix the timeline. I wanted to see where on the timeline it broke down so I could assign blame. And then I said, "Oh, here's the problem. If I'd never bought the farm." Then I said, "Well, if Melanie and I had never met and married, we wouldn't be in this awful, and had children, we wouldn't be in this awful place of suffering." Then you say, "Well, if my parents hadn't met." So, if I'm the one that obsessed over that, I know others are saying, "If I hadn't gone back in the house and got my purse, we wouldn't have gotten to that intersection and had that fatal accident. If I hadn't given my permission for my child to go to that event, then they wouldn't have drowned." And if I struggled with that, so I know there are others that are struggling with that, and you can't fix the timeline. You can't unring a bell. You can't change five minutes ago or 50 years ago.

Dr. James Dobson: It's usually seconds.

J.J. Jasper: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: An accident is usually a matter of half seconds.

J.J. Jasper: And I know people are thinking, "If I'd only chosen a different route that day, my loved one would still be here." You can't shoulder that guilt. You can't carry that blame because God is sovereign. He's in charge of eternity. You're not. And He's God and you're just a person. So, He's in charge of life and death and he really is sovereign. I don't have all the answers to the question, but I know for people, please don't shoulder that guilt and think that if you'd only done this little thing or that little thing, your loved one would still be here.

Dr. James Dobson: Have you read that Scripture that said, "Blessed in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints?"

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that's a hard one to understand, isn't it? There's truth there. We just have to figure out as best we can what God means.

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, we had so many blessings early on in the raw stages of our grief. Two of our dear friends that have families of their own, they insisted on spending the night with us, Clay and Greg. And we said, "No, we're going to be wailing. This is very personal." We insisted they leave and they said, "You can't make us leave." Well, the next morning when we couldn't even get out of bed, they had fixed breakfast for our other children, and my friend Greg called the funeral home. I couldn't even focus to tie my shoes. You're in such a blur and you're in such a fog and you're stumbling forward. I started to go down the driveway and Clay said, "Well, where are you going?" I said, "I want to see where the wreck happened. I want to see if there's a hump that I missed or if there's a dip."

And while we were walking down the road, Clay said, "Do you think that God was watching yesterday when that accident happened?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you think He was paying attention and that He could have changed the outcome?" I said, "Yes." "So you don't think He wandered away from His post, that He was there watching and He could have reached down with His little finger and kept that doom buggy from rolling over?"

And he kept asking the same question in a slightly different way, and it was getting frustrating. I said, "Clay, I don't know how else to ask. Yes, yes. He was on the job, He was watching. He had the strength to keep that from happening." And then, in a rare outbursts of boldness, he said, "Then how dare you shoulder this guilt and blame?" He said, "He is God and you're just a man. He's in charge of eternity. He's in charge of Heaven." And he said, "He has to share in this blame if there's going to be blame passed away."

Dr. James Dobson: What wisdom. What wisdom.

J.J. Jasper: It surged me forward in terms of the guilt, and if there's somebody listening that feels guilt or regret, that's something I certainly know about. And I just pray that they would allow the Lord to heal their heart and be there for them.

Dr. James Dobson: You are on the air every morning. Were you able to continue to broadcast your program, and did you take calls from people during that time?

J.J. Jasper: I took several weeks off and when I got back on the air, it's interesting that you should say that, because we have such a fun family and we love to ride horses and water ski and snow ski, and when Melanie and I built a cabin on a lake and our life was charmed and our life was marked by travel and adventure and ministry, and when I got back on the air and continued sharing about the faithfulness of the Lord, I started to get emails from people that said, "You ragged on Jesus all these years, but you live a charmed life, and for you to experience this kind of tragedy and still say that God is good and God is holy."

Dr. James Dobson: That's kind of what happened with Job when Satan said, "He serves you because you're good to Him, and if you take those things away, He will curse you and die." It was a similar thought, was it not?

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, God is holy, and our tragedy doesn't change who He is. He's a just God, He's a good God, and for those of you that have just lost a loved one, please don't be mad and angry at God. Don't keep Him at arm's length. Even though we don't have the answers to the questions, please continue to trust him. Try to make it through one day and then get up and try to do it again. Read your Bible when you don't want to, pray when you don't feel like it, allow other people into your life, and you don't feel like you're going to make it, but you will make it by God's grace. Hope has a name. His name is Jesus, and we just want to encourage people to please not run from God, but run to God.

That little baby that was born in a manger who lived a sinless life, who died on a cruel cross to pay the penalty for our sins, there's good news. After three days, He rose from the dead, and there's resurrection power. You really will make it with God's help by His grace. But we just want to encourage you to please allow God to love you, to help you, to help your heart to heal as you're grieving. Grieving is not an event. It's a process, and there's no rule book. You grieve however is appropriate for you. Some people cry a whole lot, some people can't find tears. Some people go to the cemetery every day, others can't find the strength to go. As long as you're not harming yourself, as long as you're not hurting people, there's no standard way to grieve. But please, don't keep God at arm's length. Allow Him to help you as you grieve.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Melanie, how has the recovery gone for you?

Melanie Jasper: The second year was the hardest for me. You hear the first are always the hardest. For some reason, the second year was the hardest for me.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it starts to feel permanent.

Melanie Jasper: It does. That's what it is. That's what it is, and I realize, I'm not ever going to see him, not ever going to hold him again. This side of Heaven, this side of Heaven. I am going to get to see him again and oh, what a day. Oh, what a day that's going to be. But our girls were very resilient, amazing. If we could just all live life like children, live with that childlike faith. Our daughter Maddie, who happened to be Cooper's best friend, they were only 19 months apart in age. The day after, or maybe two days after the accident. She said, "Mama, Cooper had a great week, didn't he?" And I said, "Well, what?" Then she said, "Cooper had a great week. He got to go flying in the airplane with daddy. We went tubing on the boat with daddy. He got to ride the dune buggy and then he got to go to Heaven and be with Jesus."

Dr. James Dobson: Bless her heart,

Melanie Jasper: And it opened my eyes, Dr. Dobson. I thought, my goodness, she's right. I wouldn't ask him to come back for a minute, but I miss him so and I wish God's plans were different, but I'm trusting Him.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've ministered not only to me today again, but to a lot of people out there. We're not the only ones. I mean, you're not the only ones that have been through a tragedy like this, but your life didn't stop at that time, and it's gone on from that time to this, and we need to catch up with you.

J.J. Jasper: We prayed about having another child and we were smart enough to know we can never replace Cooper, and we were hoping it wasn't a knee-jerk reaction, but Dr. Dobson, the Lord blessed us with an amazing little girl, Kasey James Jasper. She's six years old, she's still under warranty, and she is just amazing. She's just a wonderful girl in every regard. But then, we were convinced that we were through having children, and we just knew that that season was over. And Dr. Dobson, we weren't surprised. We were shocked to discover a year and a half ago, Melanie was pregnant with twins.

Melanie Jasper: That was my 40th birthday surprise, or shock.

J.J. Jasper: And when we have devotions where I work, American Family Association, American Family Radio, and when I said that Melanie was expecting after everyone had a jaw dropping experience, my boss said, "Well, I'm going to start calling you Jaybraham."

Dr. James Dobson: And tell us about the twins.

Melanie Jasper: Okay, they're a little boy and a little girl. Little boy's name's Bode and little girl's name's Tegan. And Bode, our son, actually has Down Syndrome, and he is just a blessing. He just lights up our life and brings so much joy, and so does Tegan.

And at the time when I found out I was expecting, I thought, what in the world? But God knows exactly what you need right when you need it.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us about that blessing.

Melanie Jasper: There have been so many times I've thanked the Lord for that extra chromosome. He has taught me so much already in his 21 months of life. It is amazing. I think that extra chromosome is a happy chromosome.

Dr. James Dobson: Happy chromosome.

Melanie Jasper: He's never sad. Even if he's got a fever and sick, he is just smiling ear to ear and he gives the best hugs and kisses, and he's just a joy. And for those parents out there that don't realize what they might be getting if they've been given that diagnosis of Down Syndrome, let me encourage you to love that baby. And man, I've heard on this video going viral right now, it's a mother with a child of Down Syndrome. And one of her friends came to her and said, "Man, you just hit the jackpot." And I said, "She is right." And I encourage any person right now that might be expecting and find out that hard diagnosis, to just trust God and love that baby, that baby will bring you so, so much joy.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you know they're disappearing, because with amniocentesis, you can often tell if you're carrying a child with Downs and they abort them.

Melanie Jasper: I do know that, and it breaks my heart. We didn't know until after Bode was born, but we chose not to have any of those early testings because we knew we wouldn't make that choice. But still, it was a hard diagnosis to receive. But then, even early on, it was just very, very easy to see this was going to be an easy, easy child to love and just an amazing boy.

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, if I can back up, because for the last couple of days we've been talking about grieving, you don't have to lose a loved one to grieve. People that have lost a job or their marriages failed, grieving comes in a lot of forms. And if I can be 100% transparent, when we found out we had twins on the way and one was going to be a boy, I got so excited about having a second chance. And so, I'm a pilot, I was going to get to teach them how to fly just

Dr. James Dobson: Just a reminder everybody that Cooper, whom you lost, was your only boy.

J.J. Jasper: Cooper was my only son. And I thought, I'm given a second chance. And so, I thought, he's going to excel in sports, we're going to hunt, we're going to fish, he's going to marry and have a family. And I had these high expectations. Well, one thing when I found out we had a boy and a girl, I thought, if I was God and if a family lost their only son, I would give them two sons. So here, it's okay. I've got a son on the way and I'm going to reveal some real selfishness. But when we found out that Bode had Down Syndrome, Dr. Dobson, that was another layer of

grieving. Melanie and the girls did well, and I was really struggling with the disappointment.

But when we found out, Melanie and I processed the news, then we got our girls together, we went through a drive-through, got some burgers, went to little park when we're eating our burgers, I said, "The reason we've had this impromptu picnic, I've got some bad news to tell you about the twins." Well, we had their full attention, their eyes widen. And I said, "Bode has Down syndrome." Our daughter, Maddie, who is 12 years old, she said, "Oh, Down's children are so loving, they're so kind." Our daughter, Sadie said, "Oh, I'm so glad he was born into our family. We'll love him unconditionally and he'll love us the same." And the next thing that Maddie said I was not ready for, she said, "But wait, daddy, you said you had bad news. What's the bad news?"

Dr. James Dobson: Oh man, you're caught.

J.J. Jasper: So, they get it. Every life is beautiful. The secular world says that children are a burden and a bother. I'd rather believe what God's word says in Psalm 1:27. He says that children are heritage. They're a reward, they're a blessing. And it took me a couple of weeks to get there through prayer, but Bode is one click below an angel. He is just so loving and all of our children are just so talented, and God has just blessed us richly even with the tragedies that we've experienced.

Dr. James Dobson: We started the program yesterday. I said that I had only met you an hour before, and that I fell in love with you. And I thought our listeners are going to fall in love with you too. You guys are just wonderful people, and I'd like to be your friend for the rest of our time on this earth. And I may come back to Tupelo sometime and I'd love to see you.

Melanie Jasper: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And you promised now, Melanie, to fix me a meal.

Melanie Jasper: I will try my best to fix a good meal for you.

Dr. James Dobson: What are you going to fix? I like fried chicken.

Melanie Jasper: Oh, goodness. How about a roast? Roast and potatoes? How about that?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I'll take it.

J.J. Jasper: And you and I can go horseback riding.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that'd be something to behold. I'll never get on one again, I'll tell you that. Oh my goodness. What a pleasure to have you here. I haven't been able to talk very clearly, but who cares, right? Who cares?

J.J. Jasper: Dr. Dobson, this is an honor and a privilege. As we mentioned yesterday, we've raised our families by your books and by your wise advice on the air, and I know I can speak for millions of people to say thank you for your dedication to the Lord and your commitment to the family. Thank you so much.

Dr. James Dobson: We're on the same team, right?

Melanie Jasper: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay.

J.J. Jasper: American Family Radio, we have almost 200 stations in 36 states. I'm on in the morning, and then your show Family Talk comes on at 9:30 Central.

Dr. James Dobson: They can find both of us on the same station.

J.J. Jasper: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't even have to change the dial, right?

J.J. Jasper: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Thank you all for being with us.

Melanie Jasper: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And we'll do it again.

J.J. Jasper: It's been a privilege, an honor.

Melanie Jasper: You're such a blessing.

J.J. Jasper: Thank you, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: Wow. It is really amazing to see how God worked in the lives of the Jasper family after the loss of their son, Cooper. Now, in spite of the difficult circumstances surrounding this reassuring testimony, we hope you've been encouraged by today's program here on Family Talk. That was the conclusion of part two and a two-part discussion featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guests, J.J. and Melanie Jasper. The Jasper shared how they learned to trust God with every aspect of their lives amidst a tragic loss. And by the way, if you missed any part of their compelling testimony, you'll find both parts one and two on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And if you'd like to learn more about the Jaspers and their book called *Losing Cooper: Finding Hope to Grieve Well*, just visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

As we conclude today's broadcast, I want to remind you that Family Talk is a listener supported broadcast ministry. It is so important that we hear from you with any of your comments, questions, and especially your prayers, and also your financial support. Without that, we are not able to bring you the daily programs that you enjoy that bring God's Word to the public square. Especially this time of year. It's been a rather lean summer for our ministry financially, and now it's more critical than ever that we hear from you. So, send your financial support to drjamesdobson.org. You can make a donation online through our secure website.

You can also make a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. And keep in mind, you can always send your tax-deductible donation through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Well, I'm Roger Marsh, thanking you for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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