



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Being Jesus to Your Neighbors – Part 2

Guest(s): Lee Strobel

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Dr. Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Hello everyone. And welcome back to Family Talk. The listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, thanking you for listening today, for inviting us into your homes or cars or wherever you take us throughout the course of your day. And if you like what you hear, be sure to tell a friend and please know how much we appreciate your prayers and financial support. Today you're going to hear the balance of a presentation that author and speaker, Lee Strobel gave at a conference recently on the topic of being Jesus to your neighbors. Now, you may already know Lee's story. He was an award-winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune and a hard-hearted atheist with an alcohol problem. When his wife, Leslie, became a Christian, Lee set out to win his wife back to prove that her new faith was actually false.

He studied the Bible. He interviewed experts and eventually came to the same realization that Leslie did: Christianity is in fact, true. Lee then gave his life to Jesus Christ and has been serving the Lord ever since. By the way, you can read more about Lee Strobel's conversion in his best-selling book called *The Case for Christ*. Lee is a good friend of Dr. Dobson's and today he will continue to encourage Christians to ask the question, "What would Jesus do if he lived in my house?" We may not think about this very often, but we represent Christ to our non-Christian friends and family. They look at us and see a picture of Jesus. So the question is, is it a good picture? Is it accurate? Well, Lee Strobel has some encouragement for us today. Let's listen now to part two of his presentation here on Family Talk.

Lee Strobel: I have a friend who's an atheist, one of the most famous atheists in America. He used to be the spokesperson for Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the big atheist. And he's also the most hated person in Chicago. That's what the newspaper said. His name is Rob Sherman. They said he is the most hated individual in the city of

Chicago, because he was always filing these lawsuits against nativity scenes in parks and things like that. Everybody hates this guy, but he's a friend of mine from my atheist days. So those are the kind of company I used to keep.

So one day he said, "Lee, I'll tell you the problem with you, pastors." I said, "What?" He said, "The problem is you only tell one side of the story." He said, "I'd like to see an atheist get up in your church and tell the atheism side, and then let a Christian give the Christian side and then just let people decide for themselves." I said, "Rob, that's a great idea." He said, "You're kidding." I said, "No." I said, "You find the smartest atheist in the world, the best debating atheist on the planet. And I will fly him to Chicago. And I will allow him to present the case for atheism in our church, but I'm going to get a Christian.

And he's going to present the case for Christianity. And then he's going to debate your atheist. And then we'll just let people make up their own mind based on the evidence." He said, "You'd do that?" I said, "Absolutely." We shook hands on it. And the next thought into my mind was, I probably should have asked the elders about this. Oh, well, too late. So we started publicizing this debate. Well, the news media went crazy. They called it the Great Debates. All anybody could talk about, that a church was willing to present both sides and let people make up their own mind. I started getting calls from radio stations. They said, "Hey, we hear you're doing this debate." Yeah. "Can we broadcast it live?" Okay. Sure. Why not?

Pretty soon we had 117 stations coast to coast broadcast. That's like one network sent commentators like it was a prize fight. [inaudible 00:03:57] Good job by the atheist. I think the Christians on the roads... when he's coming, it was unbelievable, it's unbelievable. The tension built in the community. The day of the debate traffic was gridlock within two miles of our church. I remember one of the elders came up to me and said, "So we are going to win this, aren't we?" I was pretty sure we were going to. So we opened the doors. People flooded in, we had almost 8,000 people there live, plus coast to coast radio. But we hid one fact from the atheist.

We didn't tell him one thing. And that is that underneath our stage is a room and that room during the entire two and a half hours of that debate was filled with Christians who were praying. Praying, God, let the gospel go out, in all of it's power. And let the case for atheism be recognized for what it is, bankrupt. And I tell you what, God answered that prayer unbelievable. I remember I was supposed to be neutral because I was a moderator. So, we had Dr. William Lane Craig, defending Christianity. If you've ever heard of him, he's unbelievable. He gets up and he gives the best 20 minute opening statement in the debate on Christianity I've ever heard. It's unbelievable. I want to go, yes. But I didn't. I said, "Thank you, Dr. Craig, for that." And now professor as in Luu the atheist.

The power of the truth of Christianity, rocked that place that night. In fact, we did a survey among the people who came and among those who walked in as an atheist or agnostic or whatever they were, they were not a Christian, among the

non-Christians. After hearing both sides over 82% said, the case for Christianity is by far the most compelling, 47 people came in as atheist heard both sides and walked out as born again, followers of Jesus Christ. And not one person became an atheist. But we can believe this stuff is true and we don't have to hold our breath and hope. We can know it's true. So I wrote this book, The Case for Christ. It chronicles my journey as an atheist, into the evidence that I found convincing.

And during... I was writing this book and people told me people aren't going to read that stuff. And then I started getting letters. Got a letter from a 24 year old guy in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. His mother had given him the book. He said five days ago, I was an atheist. I read the evidence. I've given my life to Jesus Christ. And now we become friends and the letters coming in from all over the world now, because people recognize the evidence for Christianity is absolutely overwhelming. And any sober-minded rational, open-hearted individual who considers it, I believe, has got to come to conclusion that this is beyond a reasonable doubt true.

We can defend it as being true. And I know if Jesus lived in my house, he would. Third thing quickly. If Jesus lived in my house, then I believe would be true. I think if Jesus lived in my house, he wouldn't just share his faith. He would show his faith. He wouldn't just share it. He'd show it. In other words, talk is cheap. Jesus, didn't say, I love you only. He said that, but he backed it up with actions. He served people. He said what, "The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." He served the blind by renewing their sight. He served the lepers by cleansing them. He served the people at the wedding at Cana by turning the water into the wine. He served the hungry people on the hillside by feeding 5,000, with a few loaves of bread and a few fish.

He served the people on the hillside in Capernum by telling them about the kingdom of God, in the sermon on the Mount. And then the ultimate act of servanthood. He went to the cross and demonstrated his love for humankind. And I know if Jesus lived in my house, he would serve others because he told us in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men. That they may see what? Your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Now, when you study that particular verse, it says good deeds, but there are two words for good used in the Greek, in the new Testament. One means good as opposed to bad, that's not the word here. The word, here good means winsome, it means attractive. So Jesus is saying, serve other people in such a way that it's winsome, it's attractive. It causes their eyes to turn heavenward to the God who motivates you to serve them.

I tell you what, humble acts of servanthood crack open the hardest of hearts, so that the gospel might be implanted. It's an amazing thing. We have some auto mechanics at our church and they came up one day and they said, "Hey, we love God. And we'd love to share our faith with other people. We're not very articulate" We said, "Well, what do you do? What do you do well?" "Well, we

turn wrenches. We're mechanics. We're good with our hands." We said, "Okay, here, how about this? We have a barn on our property. Let's turn that into an auto shop. And the church will buy the parts and let's fix the cars of poor people for free.

So that if a single mom, needs a car to get to and from work and it breaks down, we'll just fix it for her, out of the love of Christ and let that be a way that we can crack open their hearts, that the gospel might be implanted." And they started to do that. And many people have been reached, but then they came back and they said, "That's not good enough." They said, "How about this? What if we said to the people in the church? When you buy a new car, instead of trading in your old car, give it to us, we'll fix any problem with it. And then we'll give it away to someone who needs a car." Last year, they gave away over a hundred cars to the poor of our community who need transportation.

And just picture this. A woman's married for 15 years. She's got three little kids, her husband, one day, boom, walks off. That's it, moves out of state. She's desperate. What does she do? He's taken everything. She doesn't have transportation. She needs to get a job yet. Her life is falling apart. She comes to the church for help. We have a food pantry to feed her children. We have a clothing center to give them clothing. We have career counseling to help get her skills, to get a job. But then the cars ministry comes to her and they say, here are the keys to a minivan. It's yours, take it, use it. What do you think her responses is. Her response... You're giving me a minivan? Why? And then that gives them the opportunity to say, well, you know what? Your husband walked out on you. But if you invite Jesus Christ into your life, he will never leave you

Come to Jesus. And they are so touched by the practical offering of a tangible thing, expression of love. That it just cracks open the hardest of hearts. I have a friend... Had a friend, he died a few years ago, named Bill McMillan. You know what he used to do? I love this. He took some money and he put it in his wallet, in a certain compartment. And every day when he got up, he would pray, "God lead me to someone who needs this money today. Just lead me to someone that I might tangibly express your love to them by giving them the money and hopefully having the opportunity to share the gospel." And he did that for many, many years. And when he died at his funeral, a young woman got up and she said, "I was married 18 years. And my husband walked out on me and I met Bill McMillan, and he took me to church and he shared the gospel with me. And he told me that God loved me. And I was skeptical about it all, cause my husband showed me that there is no such thing as love.

But then when we parted that day, we shook hands and he walked away and I noticed there was something in my hand, I opened it up and it was \$200." And she said, "I just started crying, that someone would care that much from me, that they would give me some money to get back on my feet." And it cracked, open her heart to the point where she, short time thereafter gave her life to Jesus. It's the power of servanthood. So here's the question. Who in your neighborhood, could you serve? Who in your neighborhood could you serve?

One of the great evangelistic tools that I have is a snowblower. You know Chicago snow, we just moved to another subdivision a while back, but we used to have a neighbor who was a widow and we would snow blow her driveway whenever it would snow.

And she'd "Can we pay...? Let me pay you for this". No, please. This is just... We care about you. We want to help you out. "Well, why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?" Well, then it offered an opportunity, an unexpected adventure to share our faith. Who is it in your neighborhood? Do you have a single mom in your neighborhood, who would love you just to take the kids one night a week, so that she could have a little time to herself? Or you have an elderly person who just needs you to visit them? Or a student who needs some help with homework, or you need a business person who could use your expertise? Whatever it is.

I think if Jesus lived in your house, his antenna would be up and he would be looking for opportunities, to tangibly express his love to lost people. Let me close with this. One last thing, Jesus, if he lived in my house. There would be a consistency between his beliefs and his behavior. In other words, Jesus would live with integrity. What he said would be what he would do. His creed and his character would be consistent. He would be real. He would be honest about who he is.

And the truth is, if your neighbors know that you're a Christian, their hypocrisy radar is scanning your life. Beep beep beep, they're looking for hypocrisy in your life. Why? They want another reason to reject you and to reject the church. And they want to know, are you just honest? Are you putting out a phony Christian happy face and pretending like life is always okay if you're a Christian. Is your church preaching reconciliation, but they walk into it and they can feel tension between this part of the church and this part of the church, there's a split and they can spot it like that. Do they see a church is putting on a slick program, trying to reach lost people, but it's not motivated by hearts that are broken for the loss.

What do they see? Well, I want to end this by reading you the words of a young woman, who had been very turned off to Christianity. She sort of represents the person who Jesus has told us to go out and to reach with the gospel. Her name is Maggie, 24 year old nurse. She said, "The Christianity I grew up with was so confusing to me. Even as a child, people said one thing, but they did another, they appeared very spiritual in public, but in private, they were abusive, what they said and what they did never fit. There was such a discrepancy. So listen, I came to hate Christianity and did not want to be associated with a church." That is the power of an inauthentic Christian to repel someone away from God. Well, Maggie heard about the great debate at our church. And she came because she wanted to see Christianity embarrassed.

Well, of course Christianity won. So she started asking questions. So I got her involved in an evangelistic Bible study, half a dozen non-believers with a

Christian couple who were leading the group. And this is what she said, "So when I came to my small group, I needed gentleness. I needed to be able to ask any question. I needed to have my questions taken seriously. I needed to be treated with respect and validated, but listen, most of all, I needed to see people whose actions match what they say. I'm not looking for perfect. But I am looking for real, integrity is the word that comes to mind. I need to hear real people talk about real life. And I need to know if God is or can be a part of real life. Does he care about the wounds I have? Does he care? I need a place to live.

Can I ever be a whole and a healthy person?" She said, "I've asked questions like these of the Christians who lead my group and I'm not been laughed at or ignored or invalidated. I've not been pushed or pressured in any way." She said, "In fact, I don't understand the caring that I've received. I don't understand that the leaders don't seem afraid of questions. They don't say things like, You just have to have faith. Just need to pray more. They don't seem to be afraid to tell who they really are." She said, "They just seen genuine." That is the heart cry of a lost person. Just give me a Christian who's honest and genuine.

And then Maggie ended her letter with a little poem. And I want to end my talk today with this poem. Because after I got this a couple of years ago, I've not gone anywhere in the world that I've not read this poem to Christians, because these are the words of a spiritual seeker. This is the heart cry of a person God has called us to reach, your neighbor, your friend. So here's what I want you to do for these last few minutes. Pretend it's not Lee Strobel reading you these words. Pretend it's a 24 year old nurse who'd been poisoned against the church. She wrote this poem for the Christians who lead her small group. Listen to her words.

"Do you know? You understand that you represent Jesus to me. Do you know? Do you understand that when you treat me with gentleness, it raises the question in my mind. Well, what if he is gentle too? Maybe he isn't someone who laughs when I get hurt. But do you know? Do you understand that when you listen to my questions and you don't laugh that I think, well, what if Jesus is interested in me too? Do you know, Do you understand that when I hear you talk honestly about arguments and conflict and scars from your past that I think, well, what if I am just a regular person instead of a bad, no good little girl who deserves abuse? If you care, then I think maybe he cares. And then there's this flame of hope that burns inside of me. And for a while, I'm afraid to breathe because it might go out.

But do you know? Do you understand that your words are his words. That your face is his face to someone like me. Please, be who you say you are. Please God, don't let this be another trick, please God, please let it be real this time, please. But do you know? Do you understand that you and you and you and you and you, represent Jesus to someone like me?" That is the heart cry of the lost of this world. And I got that poem. And I read it, and I was just convicted to the core. And all the times came into my mind where nonbelievers have looked at me and they haven't seen Jesus. They've seen someone too busy doing the

ministry to be Jesus to them. And I said, never again. I will not let my ministry destroy the work of God in me.

And so I wanted to read this poem at Willow Creek that weekend. So I called Maggie up and I said, "Maggie, thank you for that poem. Very powerful." I said, "Can I get your permission to read?" It was a Friday, I called her. And she said, "Oh Lee we haven't, you heard?" And my heart sunk and I thought, Oh great, what inauthentic Christian has she run into this time. Who's repelled her away from God again? I said, "No, Maggie. I haven't heard tell me what happened." She said, "No Lee, it's a good thing." I said "What?" She said, "On Tuesday night, I gave my life to Jesus Christ". I said "Maggie for you, someone so far from God to come that far."

I said, "I'm just curious. What 10 facts did you come across to convince you the Bible is the word of God? What 12 bits of evidence convinced you that the resurrection was an actual historical event?" Cause that's the way I looked at things. She said, "No, it wasn't like that with me." I said, "Well, what was it then?" And it was like, she almost shrugged over the phone. She said, "Well, I just met a whole bunch of people who are like Jesus to me." Go figure. Friends we can do this. We can do this. We can be honest about our faith. We can be consistent with what we believe, in the way we act. We can pray for lost people. We can respond to their questions.

We can serve them with humility as Jesus first served us. And we can live, not of perfection, but of humble grace as sinners forgiven by Jesus Christ. And when we do that, God is going to use you as his ambassador to change lives for eternity. Let's pray, Father, I thank you for Maggie. I really do. Someone so far from you. So shattered in her psyche, by the abuse she suffered. And yet to see her humbly give her life to you. To see you cleans her of her sin. To see you piece together her psyche, so lovingly. To see how she now is such a whole and a healthy person. I thank you for the miracle that you did in her life. And I pray for all the lost people in our lives.

We each have someone we love, who is far from you. God use us as your ambassador to bring your message of hope and mercy and forgiveness and compassion and grace to them. Because we know if we open ourselves up to that assignment that you've given us, we will live a life of unexpected adventure in Jesus name. Amen.

Roger Marsh:

Amen. And amen. Lee's right. When Jesus gave the great commission, he gave it to all his believers, not just the disciples. We have all been tasked to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone, with whom we come in contact. And sometimes that means acting just like Jesus, with love, kindness, and integrity. The Lord wouldn't ask us to do something and then not equip us for that task. So with that in mind, let's go before the Lord right now. Heavenly father, thank you for this opportunity to hear the ministry and message of Lee Strobel. We know that if you can get a hold of a heart like his, you can get a hold of a heart like anyone's, matter of fact you've done that for each of us individually.

I pray father for everyone listening to this broadcast and podcast right now that we would be mindful of how our actions, how our words, how our responses to crises moments, they represent you. And we are literally Christ's ambassadors as if you were making his appeal directly through us. Help us to see the opportunities that you provide for us to evangelize and to share the good news in obedience to you, out of love and concern for people who are truly lost. We ask all these things in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord. Amen. Now, if you'd like to learn more about Lee Strobel, his ministry, or his many books visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

And by the way, since this is a two day presentation, you can hear part one and part two of Lee Strobel's talk at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Now, before we go, I want to tell you about a valuable resource that's available from the James Dobson Family Institute. It's our public policy summary emails. Our public policy team breaks down the public policy issues in our nation that affect the family and then wraps them in a biblical worldview just for you. Now, we want to equip you to think critically and biblically about what's going on in our nation so that you can understand the truth and get involved. To sign up for the policy emails, go to drjamesdobson.org/policy. That's drjamesdobson.org/policy. Well, that's all the time we have for today on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, and the entire team here at the JDFI, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening and join us again next time for another edition of Family Talk.

Speaker 4:

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