



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Crisis of Faith in the Millennial Generation

Guest(s): Lee Strobel

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Announcer: Today, on Family Talk:

Roger Marsh: Numerous reports from various religious organizations show an astoundingly low number of young people attending church these days. Now, most of that missing generation were in fact young people who were raised in godly homes by God fearing parents. So you might be asking, what went wrong? Well, in just a moment we're going to unpack the reason for the millennial's absence from the church today, through a presentation from Lee Strobel. He's a highly respected apologist and a highly sought after speaker, a New York Times bestselling author selling over 10 million books to date. Hello everyone. I'm Roger Marsh and this is Family Talk, a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. Recently, Lee Strobel spoke at a Family Talk event here in Colorado Springs and as always he had a great deal of wisdom and biblical knowledge to share. Here now is that presentation on this edition of Family Talk.

Lee Strobel: Thanks so much. What an honor and privilege to be here. I just admire Dr. Dobson and Shirley Dobson so much and so it's always a pleasure to, when he asks anything my immediate answer is, "Yes. What do you want me to do?" But as I thought about what to talk about tonight I'm going to bring this down to the family unit. I want to bring it down to what Jim and Shirley Dobson have dedicated their lives to and this ministry to, which is the family. And I want to talk about something that I've noticed over the past few years. It really bothers me.

I'll be doing a book signing at a Christian event. I do a lot of fundraising for crisis pregnancy centers and other ministries, and I'll do a book signing. And every third or fourth person who comes up for me to sign the book says something like this, "My son was very involved in high school, with the student ministry, and he made a profession of faith in Christ. And then he went away to college and he came home at Thanksgiving and he said, 'Mom, dad, I'm an atheist now.'" And then the next person, "My granddaughter, she was so devoted to Christ, we thought, when she was young, and she was part of the student ministry at church and she seemed to thrive in her faith, but now she says she's

lost it. Now she says she doesn't believe anymore and I don't know what to do." And they look at me and say, "What can I do? How can I reach them? What steps can I take?"

Friends, the truth is we have a crisis of faith among the next generations. We do. Just 56% of millennials consider themselves Christian. General indifference, we talked about apathy, general indifference to religion is rising as well. One out of three Americans under the age of 35 are now religiously unaffiliated. I did my own study. I hired a research firm to do a scientific poll of Americans and I found that only 62% of millennials are sure that God exists compared to 82% of baby boomers. That's a huge drop in a short period of time. Barely a quarter of millennials attend church on any kind of regular basis. Only four out of 10 millennials say that religion is important to their lives. That would be compared to two thirds of those born before 1946. Among younger Americans, teenagers are twice as likely as adults to call themselves atheists. And of course the effects of this on our culture, we see them all the time.

For instance, the suicide rate among young people has increased. It's jumped 56% between 2007 and 2016. 96% of teenagers say that anxiety and depression are a problem among people of their age group. 86% say the same thing about drug addiction. Let me read you what the dean of religious life at USC said recently. He said, "When I arrived at USC 11 years ago as dean of religious life my pastoral conversations with students mostly focused on their quest for meaning and purpose. But over the last several years these conversations have taken a devastating turn. Whereas students used to ask me, 'How should I live?' They are now more likely to ask, 'Why should I live?' Where they used to talk about hope and meaning, now they grapple with hopelessness and meaninglessness. Every year," he said, "It seems I encounter more stress, more anxiety, more depression, and more students in crisis on campus."

Friends, why are young people walking away from the faith? Why are so many abandoning the church? David Kinnaman did some research and he found that 64%, 64% of those who experienced Christianity under the age of 18 will lose their faith entirely or walk away from the church as an adult. In fact, one recent report said that 35 million young people raised in Christian families are projected to leave Christianity by the year 2050. Why? What's going on? Well, my friend Nancy Pearcey, a scholar and researcher, said this, "In studies asking why young people left their family religion their most frequent response was: unanswered doubts and questions. The researchers were surprised." She said, "They expected to hear stories of broken relationships and wounded feelings, but the top reason given by young adults was that they did not get answers to their questions."

In fact, David Kinnaman found that one of the top reasons that 18 through 29 year olds are leaving the church is because they're saying the church is unfriendly to people who doubt. In other words it's not a safe place to get answers to their tough questions. Friends, this is why we need a resurgence of what's called Christian apologetics in our nation. Apologetics just refers not to

apologizing for anything, it refers to making the defense of the faith, giving answers, giving reasons for why we believe what we believe. It does two things. First of all, this kind of use of apologetics deepens the faith of Christians so that they're more willing to share their faith with other people, and it also reaches out to non-believers to help them understand our faith is not built on wishful thinking, fairy tales, mythology, or make believe, but it is based on a solid foundation of historical truth.

After interviewing 5,000 young people David Kinnaman said this, "This generation wants and needs truth, not spiritual soft serve." He said, "This is a generation hungry for substantive answers to life's biggest questions." Friends the truth is Jesus was not afraid of people who had sincere questions, was He? No. I can't think of any instance when a sincere question was asked of Jesus that He shut somebody down. In fact, my favorite example of this is John the Baptist. If anybody should have been totally convinced of the identity of Jesus being the son of God, it was John the Baptist. He once pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He baptized Jesus, he saw the heavens open up, he heard the voice of the father saying, "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased." John the Baptist once pointed to Jesus and said, "I have seen and I testify: this is the son of God."

But then what happens? He gets arrested. He gets thrown in prison. Question, what happens to a lot of us when tough times come? The doubts begin to creep in, don't they? And that's what happened to John. Now he's sitting in prison. Now he's got some hesitations, now he's not 100% convinced. Now dare I even say, he has some doubts. But what does he do? Does he stew in them? Does he let them erode his soul? No. He gets some friends together. He says, "Go track Jesus down and ask him point blank, are you the one we've been waiting for or are we to wait for somebody else?" So, his friends track down Jesus and they ask him, "John wants to know, we want to know, are you the one or are we to wait for somebody else?"

But here's the thing. How does Jesus react? Does Jesus get angry? Does Jesus say, "How dare John have a temerity of all people to dare express a hesitation for my identity?" No. Jesus says to those followers of John, "Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor." In other words, "Go back to John. Tell him about the evidence you've seen with your own eyes that convinces you that I am the one I claim to be." So, they go back and they tell John, but here's the deal. Has this now disqualified John from any role in the kingdom of God because he dared to ask a question? No. In fact, it's after this incident that Jesus gets up before a group and he says, "Among those born of women there's no one greater than John." John, the guy who dared to ask a question.

Friends, it is okay for us as followers of Jesus to ask questions. It's even okay for us to have some doubts, as long as we do what John did and we pursue answers. Because the good news is, we do have good answers to the toughest

questions of life and faith. I saw that as an atheist who spent two years of my life trying to disprove Christianity so I could rescue my wife from this cult that she'd gotten involved in. Only to find, as so many countless other people have before me, that the evidence for the truth of Christianity, for the reality of the resurrection, is so strong it would have taken more faith to maintain my atheism than to become a Christian after having seen the evidence.

Evangelism in the 21st century I think is spelled apologetics and we need to start with kids in Sunday School, the youngest kids. Why? Because their faith is going to be challenged one way or the other, I guarantee it. I saw recently online a Christian grandfather was talking about his granddaughter who was made fun of in kindergarten on the playground by atheist kids who were saying, "Oh, you still believe in fairy tales." So this is in kindergarten. Our kids and our grandkids are going to be challenged, I guarantee it, and if they don't know why they believe what they believe it's easy to erode their faith.

My friend Natasha Crain is an expert on apologetics and children and she said this, listen to this. She said, "The sad truth is that many of our Sunday School programs are unintentionally teaching kids how to become secular humanists." In other words, we're creating nice kids who don't really need God. What are a lot of Sunday school classes doing? They're taking stories from the Bible and teaching values. So they look at the story of David and they teach about the value of courage. They talk about Moses and they talk about the value of leadership. Well, guess what? Secular humanists believe in courage and leadership too. They embrace those values as well. What many of our Sunday schools are not teaching kids is why Christianity is true, why it makes sense to believe in God, how we know that Jesus is the one and only son of God. They're telling kids stories from the Bible, but not educating kids on why we can trust the Bible. And so, the result is, we get nice kids who aren't grounded in the truth of Christianity.

I remember when I was interviewing a famous scholar for my book *Case For Christ* and he paused, I was changing the tape in the tape recorder, and during that pause he said to me, "Lee, nobody's going to read your book." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah, especially young people. Young people don't care about evidence for the faith. They don't care about historical data concerning Jesus." And I got all depressed, I went home and told my wife, "Nobody's going to read my book. I'm wasting my time." And yet when my book *The Case For Christ* came out, through the years the single biggest group of people who've let me know that they've come to faith in Jesus Christ have been young people, 16 through 24 year olds, the single biggest group! They do care, they do want to know, this is relevant. They want to know, "What am I investing my life in? Does it really make sense?"

And in this day and age where the Secular Student Alliance, which is an umbrella organization for atheist groups, is in 400 high schools and college campuses trying to lure your kids and your grandkids away from God. To send them into that environment without training, without equipping them, I think that's

parental malpractice. We need to help our kids. And the good news is, you know what? As I said, we've got this big advantage: what we believe is true.

I remember when I was at Yale law school and I was an atheist at the time, and I read about a guy Sir Lionel Luckhoo and he became my hero because he was the greatest, most successful attorney who ever lived. Sir Lionel Luckhoo as a defense attorney won 147 trials in a row, either before a jury or on appeal. He's in the Guinness Book of World Records: the most successful lawyer who ever lived. He knew what constituted reliable evidence. He knew how to take what looks like an airtight case against his client and find all the loopholes. He knew how to ferret out what was true and what was false.

And he was knighted twice by Queen Elizabeth, became a member of the highest court of his land, but he like me was a skeptic about the resurrection of Jesus. Until one day someone said to him, "Sir Lionel, you're the most successful lawyer who has ever lived. Have you ever really looked at the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, and come to an informed conclusion?" And he said, "No I haven't but I think I will." So, he spent several years investigating the evidence historically for the resurrection of Jesus. And I'll recite to you one sentence he wrote that summarizes his conclusion. He said, "I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt." This from the most successful lawyer who ever lived.

And I spent two years of my life trying to tear it apart, trying to disprove it, trying to find the loopholes, trying to find all the weaknesses in the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. And after that two years, coming to the conclusion that he's right, he's right. That the evidence is so strong, the avalanche of evidence for the empty tomb, for the appearances of Jesus, and so forth, is so overwhelming that I literally said to myself, "Now that I know it, it would take more faith to maintain my atheism than to become a Christian." And the scales went like this and I got on my knees and I repented of my sin, received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and he began to change my values, and my character, and my morality, and my worldview, and my philosophy, and my attitudes, and my parenting, and my priorities, all aspects of my life, over time, transformed by Jesus Christ.

So, friends we need to help our young people understand why they believe what they believe. We have to equip them so that they can be ambassadors, so that they can be salt and light in our culture. So that they can share why they believe what they believe to an increasingly skeptical and even hostile generation. The generation Z they say is going to be the first generation where their default position is skepticism spiritually. That's their default position, skepticism. That's what we're sending our kids and our grandkids into. They've got to be ready. We've got to equip them. And as I say, it's a different world. It's a different world. We know that some people use questions to just fend off faith. We know that. They're not sincere, we know that.

Here's something else we know. We know that we're seeing in our culture an increase in fatherless families. At the same time we're seeing an increase in spiritual skepticism. And if you don't think those two are related, they are, they are. Look at all the famous atheists of history, Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche, Freud, Voltaire, Wells, Feuerbach, O'Hare, every single one of them had a father who died when they were young, divorced their mother when they were young, or with whom they had a very difficult relationship. And the implication is: you don't want to know a heavenly father, you don't want to pursue a heavenly father, if your earthly father has disappointed or hurt you. You think he's just going to be worse.

I know in my case, I had a terrible relationship with my dad. I was an unwanted pregnancy. Now my dad looked at me on the eve of my high school graduation and he said, "I don't have enough love for you to fill my little finger." Was my atheism purely because I had a bunch of intellectual objections to God, or might there have been some psychological issues, some emotional issues too? I think there were. And you see this trend in our culture of fatherless families and this increase in skepticism. And we've got to help young people do what C.S. Lewis said they should do if they find themselves with a father who's disappointed them, or hurt them, or with whom they have a difficult relationship.

You know what C.S. Lewis said? "Imagine what a perfect father would be like." Just imagine. What would a perfect father would be like? Oh, he'd be loving, he'd be kind, he'd be gracious, he'd be accepting, he'd be your biggest cheerleader, he'd pull you up into his lap and he'd hug you. Well guess what? That's a picture of your heavenly father. And history tells us that Jesus is who He claimed to be. He proved it by returning from the dead.

And so, what I'd like to do, I want to pray for your children because I bet some of them have wandered from the faith. I know they have. I know how much you love your families. I know how much you love your grandkids and someday our great grandkids, right? I want to pray for them that they will not only come to faith in Jesus Christ, but they will have a strong and a vibrant faith and that they will be salt and light to an increasingly hostile generation.

So, let me pray. Bow your heads please.

Father right now we lift up each of our children to you, and each of our grandchildren to you and we even lift up to you the yet to be born, the great grandkids who will be coming, and the future generations. We lift them all right now up to you and it is our prayer that each and every one of them would come to faith in you through your son Jesus Christ. That they would find hope, and love, and grace through the gospel and that they would become so conversant with the Bible, with your word, that it would sink deep into their hearts. And we pray that they would come to understand how all of the world, science and history, undergird the truth of you. Who you are, who your Son is, the truth of the gospel, the truth of the Bible.

And we pray that our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren would become salt and light, salt that causes people to thirst for you, light that shines your message of hope, and grace, and love, and compassion, and eternal life, that shines that message into dark areas of despair. Oh may our children and grandchildren be great ambassadors for you. Send them wherever you send them because we know if you're with them, they're going to be safe and you're going to use them powerfully for your glory.

So Lord, you tell us to pray for the desires of our heart. It is a desire of our heart that each one of our children, and grandchildren, and beyond would come to you through your son Jesus, that you would use them to share your message of hope and grace, truth and love, far and wide. And as we look at this culture that we have that is now bearing the effects of sin and unraveling in so many ways, we pray that they might be the antidote that you use to turn this nation around, to bring us to revival, to bring us to an awakening spiritually. So that once again we will have a strong, vibrant land committed to you and your ways. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ who is our forgiver, and who is our leader, and who is our very, very, very best friend. Amen.

God bless you all. Good to be with you.

Roger Marsh:

You've been listening to apologist and author Lee Strobel here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I pray that you've been deeply impacted by Lee's words today. Now there's definitely a faith crisis going on in our culture. However, as Christians, we must make our light shine even brighter and bring more people into the kingdom of God. If you'd like to learn more about Lee Strobel, his ministry, or his many, many books, visit drjamesdobson.org. That's go to drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the broadcast page.

Now before we leave the air today I want to remind you that now is a great time to partner with us financially here at Family Talk. We currently have a \$325,000 matching grant in place so every donation we receive up to that amount will be doubled for greater impact for our ministry. Learn how you can take advantage of this special opportunity when you call 877-732-6825, that's 877-732-6825. Or you can go online to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. Thanks so much for your prayers, thanks so much for your financial support, and thank you for listening to our broadcast today. Be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Have a blessed day.

Announcer:

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