



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Being Jesus to Your Neighbors – Part 1

Guest(s): Lee Strobel

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Dr. 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, hello everyone. And welcome to Family Talk, the broadcasting division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. And I want to thank you for listening. As you may know, we are a listener-supported broadcast. So, thanks for being part of that support. Now, Dr. Dobson is still currently in California working on his new book. He and his wife, Shirley, are enjoying some time together as well, but today's show is very, very dear to Dr. Dobson, as we're about to hear. Our guest today is Lee Strobel. And before he found the Lord, he was a diehard atheist. Many of you may know his story either from reading his book, *The Case for Christ*, or perhaps you saw the movie version that came out about four years ago.

Lee Strobel was a reporter who worked for the Chicago Tribune. During that time, his wife, Leslie, found the Lord. Lee decided that he would apply his best journalistic skills to disprove Christianity in order to show her that she was believing a lie. Of course, as he dove into scripture and all the proof that surrounds our faith, he eventually admitted that Christianity is true and he himself has accepted Jesus Christ as well. Lee Strobel went on to become a pastor for many years at Willow Creek Church in the Chicago area. He now devotes most of his time to writing and speaking. Today, we wanted to share with you the first half of a message that Lee gave at a conference on the topic of evangelism. He'll be sharing the excitement of sharing our faith, and also the importance of putting 1 Peter 3:15 into practice where Peter writes, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, with gentleness and respect." Let's listen now to Lee Strobel here on this special edition of Family Talk.

Lee Strobel: I have one overriding passion in my life, and that is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people who don't know Him. I'm an evangelist at the depth of my heart. And I see evangelism not as just something that people gifted in

evangelism do, but something we're all called upon to do. We're all called upon to share our faith. And what I've found is if four things are true of you: if you are motivated to share your faith because of the love of Jesus Christ in you, if you are available to share your faith - if you make time in your day to interact with non-believers - if you are prepared to share your faith in a simple and natural way, and if you are prayerful about opportunities, then God will lead people your way who you can in a very simple way, talk about Jesus Christ to. I call it the unexpected adventure because you never know what's going to happen. What starts out in an average day that God might open up a chance to share the life-changing and the eternity altering message of Jesus Christ with someone else.

I remember a few years ago, I was in downtown Chicago with a couple of leaders in my church, and we're in an office building. And I ran into a journalist who used to be a competitor of mine back in the days when I was an atheist at the Chicago Tribune. Now, he hadn't seen me for 20 years. So, he hadn't seen me since those days when I was the atheistic journalist. So, I'll call him John. And he's a really tough reporter in Chicago. He got a cigar, talks like this, porkpie hat. So, I saw him and he said, "Strobel, how the blank are ya? Ya old son of a blankety, blankety, blankety blank?" I said, "John, I'm doing really well." He said, "So, you're still working at that blankety, blankety, Chicago Tribune, that blankety, blankety piece of blankety, blank?" I said, "Well, John, I've had a big change in my life. I've become a Christian. And I'm a pastor now." It was like the cigar almost fell out of his mouth. And he looked at me and all he could say was, "Well, I'll be damned." And I said, "Well, John, you don't have to be."

And I got an opportunity. I mean in the average day, who knew what was going to happen that day? God gave me an opportunity to talk about my faith. I got a friend named John and he was down in Atlanta, Georgia on a business trip. And so, he got to the airport on the way to come back a little early. So, I went into the little sunglasses shop at the airport to buy some sunglasses. He goes in, he buys some sunglasses. He walks out of the shop and then he just has this sense from God, "Go back into that shop and tell the cashier about Jesus." Well, John's thinking, "How do I do this? I already bought the stupid sunglasses. I've already left the shop. How can I possibly go back into the shop, get into a spiritual conversation with this guy I've never met before in my life other than to buy these sunglasses a minute ago? How can I do that?" But he felt very strongly. He needed to do it.

So he said, "I went back in." And I said, "Well, what did you say?" And he said, "I didn't know what to say." The guy is standing there at the cashier's thing reading the newspaper. And so John said, "I went over and I picked up a pair of sunglasses. And I said, 'So, sunglasses, huh?'" Guy's reading a paper. "Yeah." And so John's thinking, "[inaudible 00:05:23]. How do I get into a spiritual conversation?" He said, "Lee, I came up with the very worst transition into a spiritual conversation in the history of evangelism." I said, "What did you say?" He said, "Well, I held up these sunglasses and I said, 'Isn't it great that these sunglasses can protect our eyes from the brightness of the flames of the sun?'"

The guys goes, "Yeah." And John said, "Well, wouldn't it be great if there were something that could protect us from the flames of hell?"

And this guy looks at him and he puts down his newspaper and he says, "I've been thinking a lot about that lately." He said, "You have?" He said, "Yeah." So, John started praying. "God, don't let anybody else come into the shop for five minutes." And he shares the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. And the guy starts to weep right there and he receives Christ. And John said to me, "Lee, it started out as an average routine day. Who could have foreseen that the eternal destiny of this man would be rewritten and that God would use me on that day? It's the unexpected adventure when we are living on the evangelistic edge. And I want to tell you something, your prayer life gets more fragrant when you're on the evangelistic edge because you're praying, "God, I need your help in sharing my faith with my lost friend or my lost neighbor, my lost brother or sister." It's when your worship is at its most heartfelt because you're worshipping the God of the second chance who says, "I will forgive your lost and sinful friend."

It is when your Bible study becomes the most intense because you're not just studying for some theoretical, theological information. You're studying because there might be answers that you could bring to your lost friends. It is when your dependence on God is at its greatest because you realize: in and of myself, I can't do anything without the Holy Spirit working in this person's life to draw them to the kingdom. So, God use me as your ambassador, as your tool. It is the greatest adventure of a lifetime.

My daughter found that out. My daughter went away to the University of Illinois a few years ago. And her roommate was a young girl named Jennifer from a small town in Illinois. And she was far from God, far from God. And so my daughter's full of faith and it was very natural for her to share her faith in the course of building a friendship. Jennifer wasn't interested, didn't care, but they still became excellent friends. So much so that sophomore year they decided they would be roommates again. So, very natural from time to time for Alison to bring up her faith, no response, until about this time of year, their sophomore year. It was a Friday night about 2:00 in the morning, they had bunk beds, Alison was already in bed. She was on the lower bunk and the door creaks open. And Jennifer creeps into the room and she climbs up in the upper bunk and she waits a minute and then she says, "Alison, are you awake?" And Alison said, "Yeah." And Jennifer said, "I did it tonight."

Now, Alison's thinking this could be a very good thing, a very bad thing, could be... I did it. What does that... So she said, "What did you do exactly?" She said, "I gave my life to Jesus." And Alison said, "Dad." She said, "I was so excited. I was so... I wanted to shout. I was so excited, but I was afraid I would scare her." So, I just sort of peeped, "That's nice." But she said, "Dad, I was so full of excitement and joy and thanksgiving for what God had done." She said, "Dad, there is nothing like God using you to reach another human being with the gospel." I said, "Honey, you're right. That is the unexpected adventure." When

you're motivated, when you make yourself available, when you're prayerful, when you're prepared, God will use you.

Well, how can we align our lives in such a way that we might have more and more of these evangelistic opportunities? I was talking to my friend, John, the guy who went to the sunglasses shop, about this, and he wrote a little poem. And in this poem, he imagined, how would Jesus behave if Jesus lived in my house? In other words, if Jesus lived in my house, how would he reach out to the neighbors who live there? Or if Jesus worked at your office place, how would Jesus interact with your associates at work at the job site or in the office? Or if you're a student, how would Jesus react to the people if he lived in your dormitory? How would he react to the other students around him?

And it started me thinking, "What if Jesus lived in my house? How would he reach out to my neighbors?" Because he would certainly see them in a different light, wouldn't he? He would see them through Heaven's eyes. There would be a love. I mean this Jesus, the friend of sinners, right? Jesus would have a love for these lost people in the neighborhood that would far outstrip my own. He would see them through Heaven's eyes and it would change them, just being seen that way. And if I could ever say, "God, let me get a glimpse of lost people how much you love them. Just a little glimpse. It would change me forever."

Jack Sternberg was a Jewish doctor, a cancer doctor in Little Rock, Arkansas. Far from God, far from God. I want to read you what he wrote about one of his patients. It's a terrible situation. "A woman with terminal breast cancer was in her early 30s with a husband and a young child whom she would soon leave widowed and motherless." You got this terrible situation. A young woman in her 30s dying of breast cancer, terminal. Can you imagine what was going through her mind? Well, listen to what he said. "Yet, she seemed more concerned about my spiritual welfare - in my knowing Jesus - that in the fact that she was dying." Listen to this. "She saw my lostness. My separation from God as a greater tragedy than her own illness. She trusted this Jesus then and for eternity. God had allowed illnesses to ravage her yet she still loved and worshiped and followed him. She seemed confident her eternal future, and she seemed genuinely concerned about mine." And he said, "That overwhelmed me."

And Jack Sternberg, based on the witnesses, this dying woman who saw his lostness as a bigger tragedy in her own death, gave his life to Jesus Christ. And I started thinking, "What if I loved people that much? What if I saw the lostness of my next door neighbor as a greater tragedy than all the little busy things that keep me distracted from sharing the gospel with that person?" Because God sees you this way. Jesus saw your lostness. He saw your separation from God as a greater tragedy than his own torture and death on the cross. That's why he was willing to go to the cross and to die as your substitute that you might have eternal life. I thought, "Man, God, give me that kind of perspective. Help me God to see lost people through your eyes that I might be full of your love and be motivated to share the good news with them."

And I think that's something we need to do, but I think there's a few things that if Jesus lived in my house that I know would be true of Jesus in terms of reaching out to the neighbors. The first one would be this. Before Jesus talked to his lost neighbor about their Heavenly Father, he would talk to his Heavenly Father about the lost neighbor, right? Jesus would pray, wouldn't he? Before Jesus embarked in anything of importance, he went to the Father and he prayed, and we know he would be praying fervently and consistently for the lost people in his neighborhood.

In fact, it's very interesting. Jesus prayed for lost people right up until his death. If you study the Greek description, the Greek text of the crucifixion of Jesus and you look at the imperfect tense of the Greek verb, what it means is that Jesus kept praying. He kept repeating. He kept saying over and over as the nails were being driven through his hands, as the nails were being driven through his feet, as he's been hoisted on the cross, as he's been tortured to death, the text says, he kept saying, he kept praying, "Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He never stopped praying for the lost. And I know if Jesus lived in my house, he would be going to the father. And the question is, are we praying for the lost people in our families and in our neighborhoods and in our workplaces and in our school? Are we really? Because sometimes we want to give up.

We had a baptism service at Willow Creek and a woman came up to be baptized. We were baptizing hundreds and hundreds of people, so we didn't know them all by name. So, they had name tags on as they came up and we said, "If you'd like to bring someone with you for support, you can do that." So this woman comes up to be baptized and she walks over to me and she has a man with her and he looks like a real tough construction worker type. I mean, he probably didn't even use nails when he hammered in things. Just boom, boom with his fist. Tough guy.

So, I looked at her and I said, "You're here to be baptized." She said, "Yes, I am." I said, "Have you given your life whole heartedly to Jesus Christ?" And she said, "Yes, I have." And I was just about to baptize her when something inside of me caused me to look at her husband and I said to him, "Are you her spouse?" And he said, "Yes, I am." And I said, "Have you given your life to Jesus Christ?" And I'll tell you what, his face screwed up like... I didn't know what was going to happen. And then he burst into tears. This tough construction worker in front of thousands of people is sobbing and sobbing and said, "No, I haven't, but I want to right now." And I thought, "Wow. Okay. Time out." And so, I prayed with him in front of a huge... I prayed with him to receive Christ and then I baptized him and his wife together.

But then here's the key thing. Here's the key thing. After the service, I was walking down off the platform and a woman came running up to me and she threw her arms around me and she's weeping. And she's just saying, "Nine years, nine years, nine years," and she's crying. And I said, "Who are you? And what do you mean nine years?" She says, "That is my brother who just broke

down in tears and gave his life to Jesus Christ and you baptized. That is my sister-in-law that you baptized. We have been praying for him for nine years and we saw no spiritual interest whatsoever. Nothing. Zero. Zip. Nada for nine years and look what God did today." She said, "I'm so glad we never stopped praying."

Some of you listen to that and you say, "Psh. Nine years? I got a son I've been praying for 15 years." "I got a mother I've been praying for 20 years." "I got a friend from college I've been praying for 30 years." I mean, I have a brother who is an atheist to this day and I've been praying for him for 17 years, since I first became a Christian. I don't see any progress. I think he's as far from God today as he was 17 years ago. And you know what? I want to give up. I want to say, "I did the prayer thing. Now, give me an evangelistic trick."

God says, "Keep praying, keep praying." Jesus prayed right until the end. And if you have someone in your life who you love desperately, who is headed for a Christless eternity, keep praying, keep praying. Now, I don't want to just say that and not give you some practical help in doing that. I want to give you a suggestion to make that easier, an idea you can take back to your church. Something we try at Willow Creek. We got this idea from South Korea. We got all of our congregation together two months before Easter. And here's what we said. Let's all agree to identify one person in our sphere of influence, each one of us, who we believe God has put on our heart, a lost person. And let's all agree. We're going to pray for one person for one minute at one o'clock every day, call it the 1-1-1 Prayer movement from then until Easter. One person, one minute, one o'clock every day. And then let's make part of our prayer that they would come to the Easter service where an evangelist would present the message, and maybe they'd come across the line of faith.

So, we all agreed to do this. One guy stood up and he said, "Excuse me, Lee. Can I pray for two people for two minutes at two o'clock?" I said, "No." It's always one overachiever in any group. "No, one person, one minute, one o'clock, we can all do this." And so, we all agreed. So, we knew all around Chicago. One o'clock every day. Everybody from Willow Creek would stop, and they would pray. And you know what? In a few short weeks, we started to hear stories. We gave people a little business card to put in their wallet with a little line. It just said 1-1-1 to remind them to pray every day. And we had a line on it and we said, "Put the name of the person on that line who you're going to pray for, just to remind you. By the way, don't show this to the person." Right?

Well, we had one young woman. She took it to her friend and showed it to her and said, "Look, I'm praying for you. One minute, one person, you, one o'clock every day because I love you, and I want you to find Jesus and know him like I do." And her friend say, "Yeah. Okay. Fine. I appreciate that." Within two weeks, that young unsaved woman who was being prayed for, she was in the shower getting ready to go to work when the Holy Spirit seized her soul and she got on her knees in the shower with the water cascading down and gave her life to Jesus Christ, isn't that great? My Baptist friends love this because they said, "Look, a conversion and a baptism at the same time. This is efficiency."

But look, this is an idea. Take this back to your church. Propose it to your pastor. What if everybody in your church identified one person? Everybody agreed to pray for one person for one minute at one o'clock every day between then and Christmas, and the one thing they'd be praying for, invite them to Christmas that they might hear the gospel. Who knows what God would do? But I know if Jesus lived in my house, he would be praying for his lost neighbors.

Second thing. If Jesus lived in my house, I know would be true of him. Jesus would let his neighbors know that his door would always be open for questions. Always be open for questions. Because I can't find one example in the Bible where Jesus spurred someone or embarrassed or humiliated or chased someone away when they came to him with legitimate questions about the faith. My favorite story about that is John the Baptist. Now, think about this. If anybody should have known the identity of Jesus Christ, it was John the Baptist. John the Baptist looked at Jesus once and he said, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John the Baptist baptized Jesus and the heavens opened up and he heard the voice of the Father say, "Behold, this is my son in whom I'm well pleased." It was John the Baptist who pointed to Jesus at one point and said, "I have seen and I testify that this is the son of God." And yet what happens? He gets arrested. He goes to jail. Now, he's not so sure. Is Jesus really who he claimed to be or not... He's scratching his head. So, he gets his disciples and he says, "Look, go find Jesus and ask him, 'Are you the one that we've been waiting for or should we wait for someone else?'"

So, they send them off. They come to Jesus and they said, "Hey, Jesus. You know John?" "Well, yeah. Of course I know John." "Well, he's got some doubts. He's got some questions. He wants to know, are you the one, the Messiah? Or are we to wait for someone else?" Now, a question. What was Jesus' response? Did he say, "Oh my goodness. If anybody should know who I am it's John the Baptist. What's wrong with that guy? That knucklehead. He's of no use to me if he's going to question me, if he's going to have doubts and questions like this." No, Jesus didn't say that. I'll quote you what Jesus said, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard, that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured. The deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is being preached to the poor." In other words, go back to John and show him the evidence that demonstrates my deity. And so, they did.

Now, did this poison Jesus' attitude toward John? Does it disqualify John from any place in the kingdom or in leadership because he had questions? No, it is after this instance that Jesus said these words, "I tell you among those born of women, there is no one greater than John." John, the doubter. John with questions. Jesus wants our questions. His door is open for anyone who wants to come with sincere questions or doubts.

And the Bible tells us in 1 Peter 3:15. It tells you, it tells all of us, we are always to be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. God has told us we need to be ready to defend the faith because you know what? If we can't, we will just give the non-believer one

more excuse to reject God. So, we need to be prepared to some degree to give some basic answers in terms of why we believe this book is true, but here's the good news. Here's the wonderful news. This book is true. This book is the one and only, inherent, inspired word of God. And it has answers and we can defend it because it's true. I was an atheist. I spent two years of my life trying to shoot it down and it brought me to my knees. So, this is true. That Jesus is the one and only son of God. And I gave my life to Him.

Roger Marsh:

You've been listening to a special presentation here on Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And if you have ever had any questions or even doubts about your faith, you're in good company. As we've been listening to Lee Strobel here on today's broadcast, and he's been encouraging us to know that God does in fact welcome our questions. He wants us to search his word for answers to our deepest questions and concerns. After all, the Bible is true. Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Now, if you want to learn more about Lee Strobel, his many, many books, including *The Case for Christ*, or more about his ministry, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. And by the way, if you missed any part of this program or if you'd like to share the audio with a friend, you can find that information there as well. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure you join us again for part two of Lee Strobel's presentation on being Jesus to your neighbors. That's coming your way tomorrow on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. From all of us here at the James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today.

Announcer:

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