



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Case for Grace – Part 1

Guest(s): Lee Strobel

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Dr. James Dobson: It is not the quantity of time that you spend with your children, it's the quality that counts. Or is it?

Roger Marsh: Dr. James Dobson for Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Maybe you've heard that argument that it doesn't matter how much time you spend with your children, as long as your few moments together are of high quality, whatever that means. But the logic of that concept seems rather suspect to me.

The question is why do we have to choose between those virtues of quantity versus quality? We won't accept that forced choice in any other area of our lives. So why is it relevant only to our children?

Let me give you an example. Let's suppose you've looked forward all day to go into one of the finest restaurants in town, and when you get there, the waiter brings you a menu and you order the most expensive steak dinner in the house. But when the meal arrives, you see this tiny little piece of meat in the center of the plate about one inch square. When you complain about the size of the steak, the waiter says, "Sir, I recognize that the portion is small, but that's the finest corn-fed beef money can buy. And after all, it's not the quantity that matters, it's the quality that counts."

Well, you would certainly object, and for good reason, both quantity and quality are important in many areas of our lives, including how we relate to children. In fact, the quantity versus quality argument might be a rationalization for giving our children neither.

Roger Marsh: Hear more at drjamesdobson.org.

Lee Strobel: It is like being pulled over by a cop and you're speeding. And you know what? Justice would be you get a speeding ticket and you pay a fine, but he doesn't give you justice and he doesn't give you mercy, which is just to say, "Hey, look, you deserve a ticket but I'm going to let you go." That's mercy.

Dr. James Dobson: And you want to get out and kiss his hand.

Lee Strobel: Exactly. But grace is Him saying, "You know what? I'm not going to give you a ticket and here's a cupcake." That's right, you didn't deserve that at all. And it's outlandish, grace colors outside the lines.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. You've been listening to Lee Strobel, today's guest on the Family Talk broadcast. We'll hear more from Lee in just a moment.

God certainly gives us grace and asks us to give grace to others as well. You may recall the song, *Amazing Grace* written back in 1772 by British poet and clergyman John Newton. His legendary song is still sung now over 250 years later. And take a listen to the opening lines of this classic hymn, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

What heartfelt words that still minister to people's hearts all these years later, and how humbling it is to know that God's love for us is so great that He freely gives us His unmerited favor.

Well, on today's classic conversation here on Family Talk, we'll hear our own Dr. James Dobson and his guest Lee Strobel as Lee shares his personal testimony and how he has learned to give grace to others in his own life. Lee, of course, is a New York Times best-selling author and a well-respected Christian apologist. He will also delve with Dr. Dobson into a discussion about his book called *The Case for Grace*. So without further ado, let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest Lee Strobel, right now on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me introduce Lee Strobel to our listeners, at least those who aren't familiar with his work, he has a master of studies in law, a law degree from Yale Law School. He has spoken all over the world and he's also been a pastor. He is most known for his books, *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, and *The Case for a Creator*, all of which are award-winning publications. *The Case for Grace* is an excellent read and it's what we're going to talk about today. Lee, I'm so glad to have you back.

Lee Strobel: Thank you, Jim, and I appreciate it. It's wonderful to be on your program.

Dr. James Dobson: Lee, we can't take the time to go through your entire resume, but spend about three or four minutes telling people about how you became a Christian. Sure. Because you were grown-

Lee Strobel: Yes. Oh yes, very much-

Dr. James Dobson: And you were involved in journalism, and not in a Christian setting. How'd that come about?

Lee Strobel: Right. I was an atheist for much of my life and my wife was agnostic and we had a fairly happy marriage until one day she came to me and said that she decided to become a Christian because she had met a Christian friend who had brought her along, answered her questions and loved her and brought her to faith.

And I thought this was the worst possible news I could get. But I saw positive changes in her character and values over time, and that encouraged me to take my legal training and journalism training, I was a legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, and investigated Christianity. Does it make sense? Does it stand up to scrutiny?

And so I investigated the evidence for science that I ultimately concluded points powerfully toward the existence of a creator who looks an awful lot like the God of the Bible, and the evidence of history, which shows that Jesus not only claimed to be the son of God, but He did literally rise from the dead and thus authenticate His claim to being divine.

And so I came to faith on November the eighth of 1981 because the evidence I found to be compelling. And of course I felt then convicted of my sin, repented of my sin, received forgiveness through Christ, intended to stay in journalism. I love journalism. I love the Chicago Tribune, but God had other plans and it's been an adventure ever since.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you tell a lot of stories in this book, which is what makes it so interesting, and you're really trying to explain what it means to become a Christian. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to impress God. You have to give yourself to him unreservedly.

I have your book in my hand now, it's called *The Case for Grace: A Journalist Explores the Evidence of Transformed Lives*. And you of course are a New York Times best-selling author. This is a good read because there's so many interesting things in it. I want you to start with your story, a fairly recent one. You almost went on to heaven, didn't you?

Lee Strobel: I did. My wife found me unconscious on the floor of our bedroom one night, called an ambulance. And when I woke up in the emergency room, the doctor looked at me and said, "You're one step away from a coma. Two steps away from dying."

Dr. James Dobson: He told you that?

Lee Strobel: Yeah, he told me. And then I went unconscious again. I had a weird confluence of medical complications that hit me. And the net result was I had what's called hyponitremia, which is a severe lowering of my blood sodium level. And you know what that causes? It causes your cells to take in water, and as a result, your brain expands and you become mentally confused. You have seizures, you have hallucinations, then you go into a coma and then you die.

Dr. James Dobson: It's related to a kidney problem, isn't it?

Lee Strobel: Exactly. And I lost a kidney during this process.

So here I am over a couple of days as I was getting worse and worse, I was mentally confused and I hallucinated. I hallucinated that I was in hell. I saw demons. I felt what it was like to be in a situation, even though I was hallucinating this, I wasn't really there, but I felt what it's like to be in a hopeless place and face eternity because I'm experiencing the horrors of what hell would be like with demons and fear. And there's a clock on my wall. And I went through about an hour of this hallucination and I looked, and the clock had actually gone backwards on my wall. And what that registered in me was, "This is eternity."

People have no idea that when we talk about hell, to be without hope for-

Dr. James Dobson: Forever, forever, forever.

Lee Strobel: ... ever, where days could be go by and it isn't even a down payment on what is to come.

Dr. James Dobson: Lee, that must have been terrifying.

Lee Strobel: It was absolutely terrifying. My wife came home and I came out of the hallucination at that point and she said, "You look terrible. What's wrong?"

And I said, "Honey, do think there'll be many people in Hell?"

And she said, "Well, why you ask?"

And I was so burdened by the fact that people who don't know Christ are facing something they cannot conceive. And you know what? It's done for me. I thank God for this experience, as horrifying as it was, Romans 8:28 said, God will use it for good. And He has in my life. He used it to make me more passionate about bringing the gospel to people to say, "There is hope."

Dr. James Dobson: You've come out of all that-

Lee Strobel: Come out of all that. It will never recur.

Dr. James Dobson: ... and there's no residual.

Lee Strobel: No residual. The doctor said, "This will never happen again. It was just a weird confluence of medical complications."

But in addition to those hallucinations, I was convinced in my mental confusion that I had lost everything, that my wife was going to walk out of me. My

children were going to abandon me, that I lost all my money, my house, my freedom. I was going to go to prison for some unspecified crime, and that God had walked away from me. And that is a horrifying thing to imagine.

And my son, who's a Ph.D. in theology came up to me and said, "Dad, I think we need to pray." And he took me through a prayer exercise, took about an hour, where we talked to God and stripped away all the identities I have. And we told God, "I'm not coming as a father, I'm not coming as a grandfather, I'm not coming as an author or a pastor or any of these other identities I have."

And we just kind of, through this prayer, stripped away all of that until all there was was God and me as His son, and getting to the root of that identity, I realized, "Well, wait a minute. What if I did lose everything? What if I lost every dime I have? What if I lost my house? What if I was convicted of some crime and sent to prison and lost my freedom?" It wouldn't matter because I have a relationship with God.

Dr. James Dobson: That changed your approach to the book you were writing, right?

Lee Strobel: It did.

Dr. James Dobson: Because to the emphasis on grace.

Lee Strobel: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Explain The linkage between...

Lee Strobel: Well, I started on a journey to find grace and discover grace, sort of put together the riddle of grace. I did not have a good relationship with my dad. And we had an argument one night on the eve of my graduation from high school, and he glared at me and he looked at me and he said, "Lee, I don't have enough love for you to fill my little finger."

Dr. James Dobson: You're kidding.

Lee Strobel: No. And I didn't know what to say. And I turned around and I stormed out of the house, never intending to return home, lived in a boarding house.

Dr. James Dobson: How old were you?

Lee Strobel: I was 18 years old. Now. My dad and I, because of my mom's intervention, eventually reached a sort of a detente, but we never really reconciled until he died. And so we never reconciled.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk and I'm Roger Marsh. Just jumping in here for a brief moment to remind you that we're listening to a classic conversation with Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Lee Strobel.

Now, if today's program and the wisdom Dr. Dobson is sharing is touching your heart today, please consider signing up to receive his free monthly newsletter. It's easy to do. Just visit drjamesdobson.org/newsletters. You'll be glad you did.

Okay, let's return now for the conclusion of today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: He really didn't want you as a child, did he?

Lee Strobel: No. As it turned out, he had three children, a girl and two boys, and he was very involved in their lives, Cub Scouts and sports and all kinds of stuff. And then there was a gap of several years and he thought they were done having children. And then all of a sudden my mom got pregnant with me. Surprise.

And on my mom's deathbed, we had a very candid conversation, and she admitted to me that this was not a good surprise for my dad. And that explained a lot that maybe somehow my dad resented the fact that I had come along and he had other plans. He kind of did the father thing, he was wanting to go onto other things.

Dr. James Dobson: So he really rejected you as a child?

Lee Strobel: Well, I wouldn't say rejected as much as we had a very distant disconnected experience together. I can never recall ever going on a vacation, for instance with my dad.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't hunt together, fish together?

Lee Strobel: Didn't hunt together or fish or anything. He never came to my graduations or my speeches when I was in speech tournaments, and never came to my little league games. And so-

Dr. James Dobson: Were you aware that there was something unusual about your relationship?

Lee Strobel: You kind of blame yourself. And so it's interesting when you look through history, most of the famous atheists through history, Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche, Freud down the line, either had a father who they had a bad relationship with, or their father abandoned their family when they were young, or died when they were young.

And as Freud commented and others have observed, other psychologists, as you well know, doctor, that when a person has a disappointing relationship with their earthly father, they're not really keen on finding a heavenly Father because chances are he is going to hurt him even worse.

And I remember Josh McDowell telling me once, Josh had an alcoholic abusive father, and Josh became an agnostic, and Josh said, "People would tell me that

there's a heavenly Father. And to me that was bad news because my earthly father was a jerk. I didn't want that, that was bad news."

And for me, I think it was a factor in me becoming an atheist. And it started a lifelong quest. On that day, it was interesting, when I walked out of the house, never intending to come back and I'm trudging toward the train station with all my belongings in a duffel bag I thought I was on a quest of revenge. I was fueled by hate. I hated my father and I wanted to prove to him I didn't need him.

And I wanted someday to be a reporter at the Chicago Tribune and have him open up the newspaper and see my byline on a big exclusive. And I thought, "That'll show him I don't need him." And so I had this very ugly revenge-filled attitude. But what I didn't realize at the time was I was actually starting a very different journey. It was a journey to find grace.

I could imagine a perfect father. I knew my dad wasn't the perfect father, none of us is, but I could imagine what would a perfect father be like? He'd be loving and gracious, and he'd be kind and compassionate, and involved. And I would imagine that, and it wasn't until many years later that I realized, "Well, wait a second, there is a perfect father. You know what? He does exist." And so that experience with my own dad propelled me forward in this lifelong quest for grace.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go right forward here. There are a lot of people that know what grace is. There are a lot of people listening to us who do not; explain what that word means.

Lee Strobel: We can define it pretty easily. Grace is the unmerited and undeserved favor of God in our lives. It is His forgiveness, His gift of forgiveness and eternal life that He offers us, not because we deserve it, not because we've earned it, but because He loves us, and so much that Jesus Christ is His only son, goes to the cross, dies as our substitute to pay for all of our sins, and then offers forgiveness. And eternal life is a free gift of grace. That's what grace is.

But what I've discovered is we can talk about that and people go, "Okay, yeah, yeah, that's interesting." But what makes grace really come alive I think are stories. Because when Jesus wanted to talk about grace, what did He do? He talked about the prodigal son. He told the story.

And so my book is about stories. It's about people of all different backgrounds, drug addicts, homeless people, nice guys, killers, a pastor who cheated on his wife, the son of a famous evangelist who wandered from God. All these different people who in different ways experienced God's grace. And each story kind of shines a light on a different aspect of grace so that at the end I hope people will walk away saying, "Not only do I understand it better now, but now I realize how much I need it and that it's available through Christ as a free gift."

And I end the book with my dad's death. I was in law school and I always wondered would I cry when my dad died? I didn't know if I would or not. And a guy came to me in the law school library at Yale and looked at me and said, "Your dad just died." And I cried.

Announcer: Did you?

Lee Strobel: I did, uncontrollably. I went to his wake and I asked for the room to be cleared. And I stood in front of his casket, with just him and me. And the first thing I said is, "I'm sorry."

I was sorry for all the ways that I contributed to our bad relationship. I pushed a lot of his buttons. I did a lot of things that justifiably made him mad. And then I said, "I forgive you."

And that was a very releasing moment for me. But then something really weird happened. I sat alone at the wake in the corner and people started to come in, all his golf buddies and business partners and so forth. And a guy came up to me and said, "Are you Lee?"

And I said, "Yeah."

And he said, "Oh." And he shook my hand and he said, "I'm so glad to meet you. Your dad could never stop talking about you. He was so proud of you when you got accepted to Yale Law School, his buttons were popping. And when you'd have a byline in the Chicago Tribune, he'd cut it out. He would show everybody in the office and he'd talk about your children. And he just... I'm so glad to meet you because I've heard so many great things about you from your dad."

Dr. James Dobson: And isn't it amazing that he couldn't say it?

Lee Strobel: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: He couldn't put it into words.

Lee Strobel: How would that have changed my life and his life if he had said it? It doesn't matter what we think about people, we got to tell them, you got to let them know. And my life would've been totally different if that had happened.

Dr. James Dobson: Lee, we're out of time. But we want to do another program if it's all right with you.

Lee Strobel: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's see if this phrase or two parts to a phrase makes sense to you. I've heard it's, it's not original to me. I wish I could claim it, but this is it. Mercy is not

getting what you deserve. You're guilty. Mercy is not being punished. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve.

Lee Strobel: That's exactly right. Justice is getting what you do deserve. Mercy is not getting what you deserve, but grace is getting what you don't deserve.

It's like being pulled over by a cop and you're speeding. And you know what justice would be? You get a speeding ticket and you pay a fine. But He doesn't give you justice and He doesn't give you mercy, which is just to say, "Hey, look, you deserve a ticket, but I'm going to let you go." That's mercy.

Dr. James Dobson: And you want to get out and kiss his hand.

Lee Strobel: Exactly. But grace is Him saying, "You know what? I'm not going to give you a ticket and here's a cupcake." That's grace, you didn't deserve that at all. And it's outlandish, grace colors outside the lines.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, there are many other stories in this book that will explain it, and let's talk about it next time.

Lee Strobel: Great.

Dr. James Dobson: Lee, I appreciate your ministry-

Lee Strobel: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: ... and what you're doing. It's a real heartwarming thing to me to find somebody like you who was an atheist, who was committed to the fact that there is no God, "No one cares for me, there is no eternal truth out there," and then to have your eyes open and to realize that he's been there all the time. That is-

Lee Strobel: The power of God to change lives. To me, it's the most inspiring thing of all.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about grace. That's grace.

Lee Strobel: Yeah, for sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, we'll talk some more about it next time.

Lee Strobel: Great.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an uplifting conversation. And that was just part one of this touching discussion about grace here on Family Talk.

Be sure to join Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Lee Strobel right here again tomorrow for part two of this conversation. They will continue their dialogue about Lee's book entitled *The Case for Grace*.

In the meantime, be sure to visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk to learn more about Lee Strobel and his work. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And while you're there, feel free to share this encouraging program with a friend or maybe one of your parents or a sibling.

Speaking of reaching others, I've got to share some great news about a brand new resource that we've developed that is designed to reach the next generation for Christ. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we've been remastering Dr. Dobson's sound, biblically based transforming truths into 60-second audio messages. And the response has been phenomenal. We like to call these short features the Dr. Dobson Minute, and we pray that they will encourage young families and provide them with practical insights to strengthen marriages and help them be the best parents they can.

Now, if you'd like to listen in right now to a Dr. Dobson minute, go to drdobsonminute.org. That's drdobsonminute.org. You'll be glad you did.

In recent years, some of the most simple God-given truths have become more and more difficult for people to understand. The question of gender ideology, for example, comes to mind. Have you ever thought about the answer to the question, "What is a Woman According to God? Well, in a brand new PDF file with that title, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute has partnered with Dr. Owen Strachan to encourage moms, wives, sisters and daughters and affirm them of what God's design for women really is.

When you go to our website at drjamesdobson.org, you'll find an icon that says, "What is a Woman According to God?" Just click on that box, follow the prompts, and you can get that download absolutely free. That's, "What is a woman according to God," at drjamesdobbson.org.

And finally, this reminder that Family Talk is a listener-supported Christian radio outreach. It's because of you, your prayers and your faithful financial support that we are able to bring quality content to you and your family each and every day. Now, you can support the JDFI online when you go to drjamesdobbson.org. You can also make your donation over the phone when you call 877-732-6825.

And by the way, when you do call, ask a member of our customer care team about resources that we might have available to you, especially those that are available free. Also, if you'd like someone to pray with and for you, we'll be happy to do that over the phone as well.

And finally, if you'd like to reach us through the mail, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, or you can just write to JDFI for the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of everyone here at the JDFl, thank you so much for making us a part of your day. May God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow deeper in relationship with Him.

And be sure to tune in again next time for part two of Dr. Dobson's fascinating conversation with Lee Strobel, right here on Family Talk.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, this is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk.

Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife, we want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?