



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Case for Heaven – Part 1

Guest(s): Lee Strobel

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Dr. James 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: Well, hello everyone, I'm Roger Marsh and today on Family Talk, we're kicking off our annual Best of Broadcast programming. Every day for the next few weeks, we'll be airing the most popular Family Talk programs from 2022. You'll hear interviews featuring Dr. William Lile, Christine Soule, Jon and Marylois Gibson and more. Now, if you'd like to have a copy of all eighteen programs in one six CD collection, we encourage you to visit us online at drjamesdobson.org/bestof2022. It's also available for streaming as well when you go to drjamesdobson.org/bestof2022. 18 interviews in all, and it's yours as our way of thanking you for a suggested donation of \$50 or more in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Now for our first Best of Broadcast for 2022, we're featuring a conversation with our own Dr. Tim Clinton and best-selling author and apologist, Lee Strobel. For 14 years, Lee Strobel was a journalist with the *Chicago Tribune*. But then, after seeking to dispute the evidence for Jesus Christ for nearly two years, and that was the result of his wife, Leslie, becoming a Christian. Lee, then became a follower of Jesus as well in 1981. Since then, he is the author of more than 40 books that have sold over 14 million copies all about apologetics, evangelism, and sharing the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, get comfortable, relax and enjoy this popular broadcast right now and right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As we get started today, on behalf of Dr. Dobson and the entire staff here at the Dobson Family Institute, I want to personally thank you for listening and for supporting our ministry and for making us a part of your day.

Also, I have a question for you, a big question. Do you ever wonder what Heaven will be like? Have you ever stayed up at night, maybe doubting your own faith, or having questions? Perhaps on one of those dark nights, dark periods in your life. Maybe when life gets your way down and you start to drift and you just wonder.

Well, if you've ever been there, relax. We've got an amazing antidote for your mind, and my guest has an antidote for your spirit. His name is Lee Strobel. He is highly regarded as an evangelist and apologist. His upbringing and his growth as a Christian have been fascinating, and we're going to learn more about him today by talking with him about his new book and his new movie, *The Case for Heaven*. Lee, such a delight to have you. Thank you for joining us here on Family Talk.

Lee Strobel: Well, thanks, Tim. We're great to be with you. I love what you and Dr. Dobson do at the program. I'm a regular listener. Always appreciate the insights that you have and the guests that you have in the program. So thanks for the opportunity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, as we get started, I guess everybody wants to live forever.

Lee Strobel: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're dieting. We're serious about exercise. Well, we're trying to be. Surgeries, you name it. Lee, it's interesting in the world of counseling and psychology, though the issue of death or dying, that fear of death. Freud called it Thanatos, and that it really was a motivator in life.

It's the thing we wrestle with the most. But what's interesting is in the midst of our wrestling, our mind goes places, and Lee, the most significant place is the thought of Heaven or of afterlife. Lee, how'd you get interested in all this? What anchored this new work that you did, *The Case for Heaven*?

Lee Strobel: Well, I almost died 10 years ago. My wife found me unconscious on the bedroom floor. She called an ambulance. I remember waking up in the emergency room and looking into the face of the doctor, and he looked down at me and said, "You're one step away from a coma, two steps away from dying." And then I fell unconscious again.

I had an unusual medical condition called hyponatremia, which is a severe drop in my blood sodium level, and I floated there between life and death for quite a while, until the doctors were able to save my life. I tell you what, it's a very clarifying experience to have a brush with death. Because at that moment, nothing is more important than what happens when you close your eyes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Nothing else much matters.

Lee Strobel: That's it. That's the ballgame. As a Christian, I believe what the Bible teaches about the afterlife, but I still got this skeptical gear. My background's in journalism and law. I wanted to find out, what does science and what do other disciplines say about the afterlife that either supports or contradicts what the Bible says?

That's what launched me on my investigation to travel around and interview leading scholars on these issues.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, I want our listeners to get to know you a little better, many already do, but you've got quite an interesting background. The word atheist is a part of it.

Lee Strobel: Yeah, that's right. I was an atheist for much of my life. My background, as I say, in journalism and law, so I tend to be a skeptic. My wife was, I'd say agnostic, didn't quite understand how to put the pieces together spiritually. She met a woman who became her best friend, who was a Christian who took her to church, answered her questions. Then my wife came up to me one day, gave me the worst news that I could get as an atheist. She said, I decided to become a follower of Jesus.

The first word that went through my mind was divorce. I was going to walk out, but I stuck around and thought, maybe I could rescue her from this cult that she's gotten involved in, if I could just disprove the Christian faith. That's what launched me on a two year investigation of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, which I realized even as an atheist is really the linchpin of Christianity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, a lot of what you've done in this new work, *The Case for Heaven*, is anchored in what's called near death experiences. You go back, obviously you almost died. By the way, Lee, do you remember anything about in those moments of what was happening?

Lee Strobel: Oh yes. I remember the whole thing. It was frightening because what happens in hyponatremia is your brain cells take in moisture and your brain expands in your head. Well, there's no room for your brain to expand in your head. I had hallucinations, I developed paranoia. My personality changed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Really?

Lee Strobel: And then boom, I fell unconscious, and the next step would've been coma and then death. In fact, my number for any physicians or nurses listening was 112, which you cannot survive at that. Actually raising the blood sodium level is a very delicate process because about 25% of people end up either physically disabled or mentally disabled, when they try to raise it. It's very delicate, and it took a couple of days to get it back up to normal.

But I remember the whole thing. It was frightening for me, but also for my wife who was wondering, is she going to lose her husband?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Near death experiences. A lot of people have heard about them. Some people are skeptical about them. Lee, you decided to jump in with both feet and start doing a little digging. Take us into that world for a moment, and what you found. Start out with, there's a lot of scientific studies out there on NDEs, right?

Lee Strobel: There really are. There are about 900 scholarly articles have been published in peer reviewed medical and scientific journals over the last 50 years. It's a very well researched area. In fact, *The Lancet*, which is the famous medical journal in England, carried an analysis that showed that none of the alternative explanations can explain the phenomena.

In other words, some people say, well, that's just oxygen deprivation to the brain and its hallucinations. No. No alternative explanation can really account for the fullness of this phenomena.

So, it's a very well researched area of science. Of course, there's still much to learn. I went in skeptical because if someone says, oh yeah, I died. I met Jesus, he's five foot 10. He's a nice guy. I don't know. I can't confirm that. There have been some people who've committed fraud, who've actually published books, making claims along those lines that they later admitted were made up.

I looked at only those cases where there was corroboration, where people saw things or experienced things during their out-of-body experience, that would be otherwise impossible for them to see or hear, unless they really did have an out-of-body experience.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, in the midst of your digging, you mentioned a name, John Burke, researcher, pastor. Tell us a little bit about how he influenced your work.

Lee Strobel: John Burke. I've known John for, I don't know, 30 years or so. We used to be pastors together at a church in Chicago many years ago. John is a pastor of a great church in Austin, Texas, but he's also a researcher in near death experiences. He studied a thousand near death experiences over the last 30 years.

His conclusion, and this is a breakthrough, his conclusion, which he backs up verse by verse, is that when you look at what actually takes place in a typical near death experience, not how people interpret what happens, because you can interpret things through your own cultural lens or your own religious lens. Forget that. Just look at what actually takes place. It is consistent with Christian theology. That was a huge breakthrough for me to be able to see that the near death experiences are consistent with what the Bible tells us about the afterlife.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, were there some other stories that you worked through, that you read about that really maybe were favorites of yours that just said, wow, this is undeniable?

Lee Strobel: Well, I'll give you a couple real quick ones. They did a study of 21 blind people, many of them blind since birth, and yet during their near death experience, they had some degree of vision.

Like Vicki Umipeg, who was a 26 year old woman, blind virtually since birth, was in a car accident, was in a coma, was clinically dead. Yet, she later described, I was conscious the whole time. I watched for the first time. I saw people trying to resuscitate my body. I saw plants for the first time. I saw birds for the first time.

When she revived, her blindness had returned. One medical researcher said, well, that's medically impossible, and yet here we have a case of someone being able to see during their near death experience that would not have otherwise been possible.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

Lee Strobel: Another one that amazes me is a seven year old girl named Katie who died in a drowning incident at a YMCA swimming pool. She had massive brain swelling. She had zero brainwaves. She had no breathing. She had no heartbeat for 20 minutes. She was clinically dead. They bring her to the hospital. She's clinically dead, but they keep her body mechanically alive while they decide what to do.

Well, she ultimately was revived, believe it or not, a couple days later. She said, I was conscious the whole time, and the doctors were skeptical. They said, wait a minute. They gave her a crayon. She's only seven. They gave her a crayon and a piece of paper and say, "Why don't you draw the emergency room where you were taken when you were clinically dead?"

So, she picks up the crayon. She draws the emergency room exactly as it appears, where everything is placed, where it was. But then she said, one night after my parents visited me, I followed them home and she was able to describe what they were wearing that evening. She would describe the song her sister was singing to her Barbie doll that night. She described which toys her brother was playing with on the floor of his bedroom. She described what her mom made for dinner that night and where her father was sitting that night.

Things that there's no way she could have known, unless she really did have an out-of-body experience and witnessed these things for herself. I mean, these are just amazing examples that I think show that indeed our consciousness does survive our physical death. There's so many others. I think of one woman in England, who died after a botched abortion. When she was revived, she said, "Oh, by the way, on the ceiling fan here in the hospital room, there's a red sticker on top of the fan blade" that was not visible from the floor and the bed. But on the top because she said her soul had separated from her body, she was floating near the ceiling, she saw this red sticker. They got a ladder and they went up there, and sure enough there it was exactly as she had described

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, on April 4, 5 and 6 of this year, you released a movie about *The Case for Heaven*. Fascinating. Inside that, I mean it's not just a documentary. It was a film, and you wanted to take people to a special place. No doubt, many listening

right now actually watched that movie, and I know you're going to release it on VOD probably and streaming, and we'll talk more about that in a moment. But Lee, what were you trying to accomplish in the movie as we talk about these scenarios?

Lee Strobel: Well, cinema is a language of young people, especially. I know some people love to read a book and they'll pick up a 300 page book and they'll devour it. But a lot of people are more visual learners and they want a fuller experience, where there's cinematography, where there's a narrative and so forth.

So, we said, why don't we take the contents of the investigation I did and translate it into a film, but make it a beautiful film that reflects some of the beauty of Heaven, so it's not just a talking head documentary, but really a breathtaking experience that people go through to get a taste of what the afterlife might be like.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember as a boy wrestling again with Heaven, sometimes my mind would go to that forever and ever, and ever, and ever thought. It would spin me a little bit. But I also remember the Scriptures like Jesus saying, "Let not your heart be troubled. If you believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself. That where I am, you may be also."

Paul said, I think it was in the book of Corinthians that, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Now Lee, it's a lot to think about that, but when you're flat on your back, when you're facing end of life days, when you think about this journey, your prayer is that Heaven really is real.

Lee, in your mind, here you are a great scholar, apologist of the faith and so much more. I just want you to talk to that kind of human side of all of us that continues to wrestle and wander. Are we to believe in a fairy tale, and your job again, you want to make sure people know undeniably that you can believe this.

Lee Strobel: You quoted Jesus, and when you think about it, if anybody is the ultimate authority on what heaven is like, it's Jesus. Because if He really died a violent death and then returned three days later, He not only is an eyewitness to the afterlife. So, He's a credible eyewitness and source about what it's really like. But it confirms His identity of being the Son of God who created the afterlife. So, we ought to listen to what He said.

What you quoted, Tim, is an important passage for me when He talks about Heaven as being a home. I don't know if you've ever been in a third world country for a long period of time and conditions are difficult. I remember as a new Christian, I went on a missions trip to India and things were hard. We're sleeping on the ground. We're living out of a knapsack. We're eating strange foods.

After a period of time, after weeks of this, you begin to long for home. It's a home sickness. When you finally do arrive home and you walk into your house and it's such a place of warmth and security and love and grace and you crawl into your own bed.

Jesus is saying, "That's the metaphor I want you to keep in mind when you think about Heaven." It's home. This is our real home. I think that is such a wonderful metaphor that makes me want to long for those experiences of being home in the presence of God forever.

The favorite quote I came across from my research is from Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher who said, and I'll paraphrase it, I don't have it in front of me, but he basically said, "The great glory of Heaven is that we shall see the one who died on Calvary's cross for us. And we will fall down and worship at His feet. Nay, more, that He shall kiss us with the kisses of His mouth and welcome us to dwell with Him forever." I've never thought about Jesus welcoming us with a hug and a kiss, welcoming us to dwell with Him forever. That's a great picture.

I think the other thing that Heaven does for us, it's sort of like having a vacation on the calendar. In other words, when you're at work and things are hard and your boss is breathing down your neck and you got some deadlines are facing you and things are difficult. If you know you've got a vacation coming up in six weeks, you're going to go to Maui for a couple of weeks vacation. It makes you able to deal better with the present difficulties that you're going through.

Heaven is like that. Yes, life is difficult. Life is hard. We have challenges. We have sorrow. We have pain in this life. Yet when we have Heaven on our calendar, we know someday we're going to go to Heaven. It helps us, I think, get a perspective for our present difficulties that can help us get through whatever we're facing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, I want to go back to the movie for a moment, and the core content of the book. Upfront, you wanted people to understand that there's a difference between your brain and your soul or your mind if you will. Lee, you also wanted people to know that your soul separates from your body as a part of this experience and that it lives on for eternity.

Lee Strobel: We'll be reunited with our resurrected body at the consummation of history.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes, and that also the resurrection of Christ becomes really significant in understanding this journey.

Lee Strobel: It does. You quoted earlier the Apostle Paul said, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Jesus said to the repentant criminal on the cross, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise." That does suggest that when our body dies, our spirit, our soul, our consciousness, our mind continues to live on, either in the presence of God or separated from Him.

Then at the consummation of history, that's called by the way, the intermediate state in Christian theology. Then in the consummation of history, when Jesus returns, we're united with our now resurrected bodies, we go through final judgment, and then we spend eternity in a very physical place, whether Heaven or hell.

So, the question of whether or not we do have a soul is relevant. The question whether our soul can survive our physical death is relevant. I think the answer to both those questions is a resounding yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, we're going to talk tomorrow on the broadcast about a special interview you did with Luis Palau, and it's just mesmerizing. Then I want to talk to you about your own personal walk and your relationship with your dad. Then we've got a lot more coming about Heaven.

But I thought today before we end the broadcast that maybe a good way to close up or button up this discussion was for you to address the best news about Heaven and the worst news about Hell, and why it's really important that we take this serious.

Lee Strobel: The best news about Heaven is it's real. The worst news about Hell is that it's real. But the greatest news of all is that Jesus paid the penalty that we deserve for the sins that we committed and offers eternal life in Heaven as a free gift of His grace. A gift that we need to receive in repentance and faith.

When we do that, we become a child of God forever and have assurance that we'll spend eternity with Him. He's already flung open the doors of Heaven to anyone, anywhere, at any time, of any culture that calls out to Him in repentance and faith, and receives this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. That's the greatest news of all, that it's nothing we can earn, nothing we merit, nothing we deserve. But it is offered as a gift out of the love of God.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It is. Lee, you got to sit down in a theater with some friends, and watch the movie. After you've poured your heart into this book, and you sat down and watched that movie, what happened in your own heart and in your own mind? What do you want to share with our listeners about your personal experience here?

Lee Strobel: Well, I cried at several points in seeing the film. I had tears when they talked about my wife and I, and how it's my wife's prayers, that when she was a new believer and I was an atheist that opened my heart to God. We're just about to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary, they asked me in the film, what would you do without her? And honestly, I was stymied. I have no idea what I would do without her.

We're the best of friends. We met when we were 14 years old. We got married so young, we couldn't have champagne at our wedding. We were too young to

drink alcohol, so we had champagne glasses filled with milk at our wedding. There were several points in the film and talking about my life and talking about the promise of Heaven. I'll tell you the other time I got tears in my eyes was when we heard the story of Howard Storm who had a hellish experience when he died. He was an atheist and how he had called out to God and was rescued and how this changed his life and he's now an ordained minister at a little church in Kentucky, as a result of his near death experience and experiencing a taste of what Hell is like.

I had tears to my eyes when I saw that. I thought God doesn't want any to perish, but all to come to repentance. I just felt the love of God spread all over the planet and this free offer of forgiveness and eternal life to anyone who comes to Him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The new book is called *The Case for Heaven*, authored by our friend, Lee Strobel. Movie that just came out. You want to make sure and watch that movie called *The Case for Heaven*, also.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Lee, such a delight to have you. I know Dr. Dobson wishes he could be on the broadcast with us here today, but he sends his regards, his love to you.

Lee Strobel: Oh, you guys are awesome. You guys are awesome. I just appreciate you so much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, thank you so much for joining us.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh. You've been listening to our host Dr. Tim Clinton and his conversation with Lee Strobel about *The Case for Heaven*. Now this program is the first in our 2022 Best of Broadcast series that we're featuring all throughout the month of December. If you'd like more information about the ministry of Family Talk, or this 2022 Best of Broadcast collection. It's available either on a six CD set or via streaming.

All you have to do is go to drjamesdobson.org/bestof2022 and you can make your request known there. Now before we go, I do have a special announcement. Thanks to the generosity of some special friends of our ministry, all throughout the month, we have a matching grant in place. This means that right now, your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will be doubled. If you'd like to donate online, go to drjamesdobson.org, that's drjamesdobson.org. Or give us a call, you can make a donation over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today and be sure to join us again tomorrow when we hear part 2 of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Lee Strobel about *The Case for Heaven*. This is the first in our Best of Broadcast collection as we celebrate the Christmas season together. God's richest blessings to you and your family as you give thanks to God for his gift, the gift of his only Son, for our salvation. On

behalf of everyone here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks for listening, have a wonderful day, and be sure to join us again tomorrow.

Announcer:

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