



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage – Part 2

Guest(s): Lee and Leslie Strobel

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome once again to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. So glad you've joined us today. In just a moment, you're going to hear part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with best-selling author and apologist Lee Strobel and his wife, Leslie. They'll be discussing the challenges of a spiritually mismatched marriage. On our last edition of Family Talk, the Strobels shared how Leslie's decision to follow Christ put a real strain on her relationship with Lee. Lee was an atheist at the time, and he wrestled with anger and resentment as he watched his wife's faith grow. On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, they'll explain how their marriage not only survived, but was actually transformed. Lee describes the journey that softened his heart, and Leslie reminds us why finding community and support is so important for a believing spouse when his or her spouse is not a believer yet. And now, here's Dr. James Dobson and his guests, Lee and Leslie Strobel, to discuss surviving a spiritual mismatch in marriage on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: And we're so glad that the Strobels came to share their story with us so openly, as they've done in their book, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. Lee, as most of our listeners know, is one of the premier apologists for the Christian faith, and he's written a number of best-selling books, including *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ*. He's a graduate of Yale Law School and the former award-winning legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. He and his wife, Leslie, have been married for over 30 years. So, Lee and Leslie, thank you again for being with us once more, because this is such an important topic. And being unequally yoked in a marriage can be extremely challenging and frustrating, as we heard last time. Marriage is difficult enough by just having two imperfect human beings trying to make it work, trying to live together. And to have such a fundamental difference at the very core of your belief system, which affects everything else, how you spend your money. And your time

and how you raise your children, that can cause extreme difficulty. And that's why we want to deal with it again today. But before we get to that topic, there's something else I want to ask you about. When you arrived at my office today, you handed me a new book that was written by your daughter Allison and her husband Dan Morrow. And it's called *That's Where God Is*. And it's beautifully illustrated. by an artist named Corey Godby. But it's really for three-and four-year-olds, isn't it?

Lee Strobel: Yeah. You know, we talk about being unequally yoked and the stress that was in our marriage and having come to faith and then seeing our children come to faith and then watching them raise, you know, get married to believers and watching them flourish in their relationship with Christ has been the biggest joy of our life. And our daughter and her husband just wrote their first children's book called *That's Where God Is*. And it's really trying to communicate to youngsters, to toddlers, where is the evidence for God? How do you know God is really there? And how can we know him personally? What I like about the book is it's about a grandfather and his grandson. And the grandson is asking, where is God? And the grandfather says, well, why don't you look for him this week? And I bet you see evidence for Him. And it's about how he sees evidence for God. But the only thing I don't like is I kind of see myself as the grandfather there because I am the grandfather to their children. But this guy's bald. It really bugs me that the guy in the book is bald.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I resent the hair you have, I might say. Let's get to the topic that I was trying to introduce earlier. The title of your book that you wrote together is *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. You put in marriage at the bottom, and I don't see it until it's too late. But this is about your own relationship and the fact that you were not believers, neither of you, when you got married. And a couple of years later, Leslie, you had a neighbor who led you to the Lord. And you expected Lee to get with the program.

Leslie Strobel: I sure did. I thought it was a no-brainer.

Dr. James Dobson: And he didn't.

Lee Strobel: It's because I had no brain.

Dr. James Dobson: That created some pretty significant marital problems between you, which is really interesting. You come to Christ, give your life to him, and things like that. And it sometimes happens that way.

Leslie Strobel: Well, as a new believer, you don't expect that. You kind of think everything's going to work out.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we brought it up last time to the point that you had made a commitment to Christ. Lee, you were not on board and you resented it and you were angry. At times you kicked the wall and made a hole in it. I mean, you really were not taking this well. You were threatened by it. I think I read that at one point actually felt jealous of Jesus.

Lee Strobel: I did. And I think people don't understand this who haven't been in this position, but I felt jealous that here was this other man in our relationship. Who is this Jesus guy? And why is she all of a sudden expressing such love and adoration for this Jesus and following His teachings and so? And I thought, you know, this Jesus is meeting emotional needs in my wife. I felt like this was spiritual adultery. I felt like she's cheating on me, and I felt like I was losing her. I remember one day, I was sleeping off a hangover, and it was Sunday morning, and she said very gently to me, "Lee, would you like to go to church with me today?" And I was so mad. What I wanted to say was, A, I've got a hangover. B, I don't believe in God. C, it's raining outside. Draw your own conclusion. No, I don't want to go. But I didn't say that. I said, "Yeah, I'll go." And the reason I said I'll go is because I felt I was losing her. She was being drawn into this Christian subculture. She joined a small group. Her friends were Christians. The people she looked up to were spiritually mature people. Where does that leave me? So I felt like I was losing my wife. And so we got in the car, and I was so mad. I'm speeding along, and we got wet getting into the car. I'm angry and swearing, and she starts to cry. And she said, "Look, honey, if you don't want to go, you don't have to go." And I just threw up my hands. I'm sorry. I'm just... I didn't want to go. I was only going because I felt like if I didn't do something to try to grab my wife back, she was going to get torn or pulled into this subculture that I didn't belong in. I was an alien to.

And I thought these people must not like me because I'm not a Christian. Therefore, they probably don't like me and I'm not welcome in their midst, which wasn't true, but that's my perception. So all these emotions are going on, anger, frustration. We got into arguments over giving money to the church. And tell that story, hon, because I think that might be encouraging to people.

Leslie Strobel: There was a building fund going on at the time. They were going to expand. And I felt just so strongly that I was supposed to give to that. But I knew Lee wouldn't be interested in giving to it. I asked him if we could. He said, "No way. We're not giving the church any of our money." And so I prayed about it, and I talked to my friend Linda about it. And she said, God doesn't need your money. You need to honor your husband. You

need to do what he wants you to do. And God will take care of it. Let's just pray that God will somehow show you what to do. So we did. The next day, I'm looking at the paper, and I see a wanted ad for a job that you can do on the phone at home. And it was like two or three hours a day, and I thought, well, I can do that when the kids are napping. I applied. I got the job. So I started doing this, and I had a figure in my mind that I wanted to give to the church. And I thought, I'll make that amount of money, and then I'll stop the job. But I was kind of good at the job, and I started doing really well. And I asked Lee if I could give some of my money that I was earning to the church. Again, he said no. But then I prayed that Lee would change his mind, and a couple days later, he comes to me and says, "I don't quite understand why you want to do this, but I've been thinking about it, and it's okay. You go ahead and give money to church."

Dr. James Dobson: God was working on you, Lee.

Lee Strobel: Yeah, but listen to the punchline.

Leslie Strobel: But the punchline basically is I was thrilled, but then after we wrote that check and gave it to the church, the next day I get a call from the company I worked for, and they said we made a mistake. You've been filling out your pay stubs all wrong. I thought, oh, no, how much do I owe you? And they said, no, we owe you. And it was the exact amount that we had given to the church.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that right?

Leslie Strobel: I couldn't wait to tell Lee because I thought, thank you, God. This is an example for him to see how You are actively working in our lives. And he just thought it was interesting. I don't know exactly what you thought.

Lee Strobel: Coincidental

Dr. James Dobson: But bogus.

Lee Strobel: Well, you know, it was one of those little things along the way that kind of opened your eyes a little bit more. And you thought, hmm. Let me kind of think about that.

Dr. James Dobson: Lee, what happened at church that Sunday morning?

Lee Strobel: Young guy at the time, wasn't even shaven yet, I don't think. And he gave a talk called Basic Christianity. And he just knocked down so many of my

misconceptions about the Christian faith. I didn't understand really what the faith was about. And he explained it. And that's what intrigued me. And I thought, you know what? I'm seeing these positive changes in my wife. And he's challenged me, this preacher, by knocking down a lot of my misconceptions. Maybe it's time I took it seriously. And that's when I said, you know what, I'm going to take my legal training, my journalism training, and just investigate this and devote the time to see whether or not it's true. And that launched me on what turned out to be a year and nine month investigation of the scientific evidence for God and the historical evidence for Jesus being His son. I became increasingly angry, increasingly enraged and frustrated because of the fact that when you are married to a Christian and you're an atheist, There is no part of your life that's not affected by this. You know, everything about the children, how you're going to spend your money, what are you going to do on the weekends? You know, I want to go up to Wisconsin and chill out. I want to go to church, giving money to the building fund. All of these things create conflict and stress. And at the same time, this mirror being held up to me and my sinfulness being exposed, it just created this anger. And I think, you know, people, you'll hear often people say, gosh, I know an atheist and he's so angry. Part of the process that led me to being so angry when I was an atheist was a sense of conviction. As I see godly people living godly lives, it accentuates the sinfulness in me, and it makes me mad. I don't want to face that. I don't want to acknowledge the fact that I am a sinful human being.

Well, it took me two years almost to investigate the evidence for the faith, and then on one Sunday afternoon, I went alone in my room. Took a yellow legal pad and just summarized all the evidence I had encountered for the existence of God and the truth of the Christian faith. And I realized that the most honest verdict I could reach is that God does exist, that Jesus is His son, and that He died for me. And that John 1:12 says, "As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in his name." So I realized that even though I intellectually believed at that moment, I needed to receive Christ as my Lord and Savior. I had to receive this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, and then I would become a child of God. And so I got on my knees next to my bed, and I confessed a lifetime of immorality and sin and received forgiveness through Christ. And I stood up, and I thought, Hey, I should probably tell Leslie about this. It was my first thought. And I remember I walked out of our bedroom and I looked into the kitchen. There was Leslie standing behind the kitchen sink. And our little daughter was standing in front of her. She was almost five. And Allison, my daughter, was reaching up. And for the first time, she was able to touch the faucet. And she saw me and said, "Daddy, Daddy, look, I

can touch it. I can reach it." I said, that's great. And she ran off. And I said to Les, I said, "That's how I feel." I said, "I feel like for two years I've been reaching out and reaching out and reaching out. I just touched Jesus. He's alive. He's real. He's the son of God. I just gave him my life."

Dr. James Dobson: Praise the Lord.

Lee Strobel: And she burst into tears, and she threw her arms around me. And I'll never forget, she said, "Honey, I want to give up on you a thousand times." She said, "But I met a woman at church, and I had told some women at church, I don't have any hope for my husband. He is the hard-headed, hard-hearted legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. He will never bend his knee to Jesus Christ. And this one elderly saint put her arm around her and said, 'Oh, honey. No one is beyond hope.' And she gave her a verse, Ezekiel 36:26, that says, 'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will remove from you your heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh.'" And Leslie prayed that prayer for me behind the scenes without me knowing during that two years and God, starting on that Sunday afternoon, began to answer that prayer because my values began to change and my character and my morality and my attitude and my worldview and my philosophy and my priorities and my parenting and my relationships and all these things began to change over time for the good.

Leslie Strobel: Well, I just don't see how I could have survived it if I had to go through the pain of disputes and that with Lee and not have someone to talk. Women process by talking. And so if you don't have someone to talk to, I could have talked to myself in the mirror, but it wouldn't have been nearly as helpful as without a godly woman to give me advice. And so Linda really was there to just answer questions and to pray with me and to give me a shoulder to cry on, but never to just sit and have a pity party. She was always very wise in counsel and able to tell me how to proceed. And I would pray for every woman out there or man that they would have a friend of the same gender that they would be able to go to and just release the burden and have someone to pray with them on these things because it's a tough thing to go through.

Lee Strobel: I think there's two, there's three relationships that are so important unless you just hit on the one, which is a mentor, someone who's spiritually mature, who you can go to have a relationship with, cry with, pray with, be encouraged by. And I think the other two key relationships. Number one is your relationship with Christ, because the only way you're going to really change in a way that's going to be attractive to your spouse is if you draw closer to Christ. So it's to build that relationship.

And then the other relationship is the marriage relationship. The fact that, you know, she married me for a reason, because even though I was obnoxious and increasingly so during this mismatch era, she married me because she loved me. And we had common ground. There were things that we enjoyed doing together, and she would build on those things. to encourage us to grow closer. Whenever we would be tearing apart, she would reach out to me and she would suggest we do something that we enjoy doing together. Let's go out to dinner together tonight. Let's go up to Wisconsin for the weekend, go for a bike ride. It was the common ground. And so she, by building relationship with Christ, by having a spiritual mentor and by building on the common ground that we still had as a married couple, I think those were the three key relationships that made a difference.

It was so funny because right after I became a Christian, like literally a short time, I became a Christian on November 8th of 1981, and Leslie shortly thereafter said to me, "I was reading the Bible today, and it said that we should pray for the desires of our heart." I said, No. She said, yeah. I said, well, I can't believe God A, forgave me. He's opened Heaven to me. I can't believe he also is saying I want you to be happy. And I said, this is too much. And she said, no, we shouldn't. I said, okay. So I really wanted to run a newspaper, my own newspaper. And so we prayed about it, and God answered the prayer. Within 30 days, we moved on. I became editor of a newspaper in Missouri. And I came into that situation saying, you know, if I'm going to be editor of a newspaper, We're going to pursue God's values in this newspaper. So it changed my professional life. It changed our personal life, our marriage, of course. And the key thing that was the most fulfilling to me was the impact on the children. Because think about this for a second. When our little daughter, Allison, was growing up, first almost five years of her life, her dad was absent because I wouldn't come home some nights. I was angry. I was kicking holes in the wall. I was a heavy drinker. That was her whole experience. But after I came to Christ and she began to watch with her little five-year-old eyes as she would listen and she would observe that Daddy's walking a new path here. Daddy's changing. And she would observe. And she watched and listened. Finally, about five or six months after I became a Christian, she first came up to her Sunday school teacher at church and then to Leslie. And she said, "I want God to do for me what he's done for daddy."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my goodness.

Lee Strobel: And at age five, she became a follower of Jesus. And as I say, now she's writing Christian books and married to a seminary graduate

Dr. James Dobson: Can you imagine where she would be spiritually today if you hadn't accepted the call?

Lee Strobel: I know Leslie would have done everything she could. Almost like a single parent. When you're in an unequally yoked situation, it's almost like you're a single parent because you're the only godly influence in that child's life. And she would have done her best to have raised her that way. But you know what? I was undermining her at every turn. I didn't want them to go to church. I was afraid she would turn the kids against me. I was afraid the kids would become Christians, and then they'd look at poor old dad. Well, there's dad reading the newspaper and drinking a beer on Sunday morning instead of going to church. Oh, that poor guy is headed for Hell. And my kids were going to pity me and feel sorry for me. I didn't want that. I wanted their respect as their father. So I was worried about that.

Dr. James Dobson: Even though Leslie was not undermining you.

Lee Strobel: Not at all. She was not at all turning the kids against me. But, again, you manufacture these ideas in your mind because of the caricatures about Christians that you pick up through the media. And so it led to a lot of fear in me. And so I think Leslie would have done her best. I would have tried to resist it. But I would hope that there are people out there listening who may be parents who are married to a nonbeliever who are struggling to raise their children with godly values. And I would say, you know, don't give up. And don't give up on your spouse, but don't give up on your kids. Keep stoking them.

Dr. James Dobson: Time won't wait.

Lee Strobel: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: The years are going by. And you can't afford to sit around and say, maybe he'll get with the program.

Lee Strobel: And the other thing is, though, sometimes. You can say to your spouse, you know, we do want to raise our children with values. And, you know, so that's what they're learning. They're learning things like honesty and integrity at Sunday school. And what's wrong with that? And so some, fathers even though they're not believers, will allow their kids to have a Christian education under the idea that, well, they've got to learn something about morality somewhere somehow, so maybe that's a good

way. So sometimes that does open the door to opportunities that may not otherwise be there.

Leslie Strobel: Leslie, I want to know what your reaction was when this man has made a journey from one side of the universe to the other. I mean, sometimes the decision to follow Christ is a relatively small step, even though we're all sinners. And if you have sinned in one way, you've sinned in all. But when he was so far from Christ or any understanding of it, all of a sudden, he's talking about the Lord and the Scripture and wanting to change. What was that doing to you?

Leslie Strobel: Yeah, I was pinching myself every morning. I couldn't believe it because honestly, I was in my greatest hope, it was maybe a deathbed conversion was as much as I could expect. I prayed that maybe a day would come. But when he actually accepted Christ, right when he told me when he had talked about that, he said, you know, I need to just go for a little ride. And he went out in the car by himself. I was on the phone so quick to Linda. I tell you, I just said, you're not going to believe what happened. And they just prayed with me over the phone and they were so excited. But it was wonderful. And it's not, you know, the other thing that was funny about this, and I would say this to women that are listening too, as a woman hoping that your husband comes to the Lord, you start having your own preconceived ideas of what it's like to be married to a Christian man and how perfect he is. And it was surprising to me that he wasn't. And that I actually, you know, there were some things that were still the same, but that he was trying and that he was working towards being who God wanted him to be. And that actually was enough. It was wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: And in fact, I think we ought to devote one more program to that subject. In fact, I'd like to talk next time about the husband who is a believer or could be a wife, but let's say a husband is a believer, but he's not a spiritual leader. And that frustrates his wife so very badly. I told you in my office that I have had that question asked of me more times when I'm out on the road speaking than any other subject, even about discipline and raising children. What do I do when my husband will not step up to the plate? And we must talk about that. We'll do it next time. The second thing is what about the never married person who is dating or considering marrying somebody who might not be a believer? We need talk about that. And we will get to it next time. Will you stay with us?

Lee Strobel: We'd love to.

Leslie Strobel: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. And we will let people hear what's about to occur right here next time.

Roger Marsh: Lee Strobel spent nearly two years investigating the evidence for the faith, but it was Leslie's quiet, patient love that he says drew him in long before the verdict came back on the evidence. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and our guests today have been apologist and best-selling author Lee Strobel and his wife and childhood sweetheart Leslie Strobel. If you'd like to hear this conversation again or pass it along to a couple who needs it, just visit JDFI.org. And while you're there, you can also look for the Strobel's book. It's called *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. And if you find yourself in a situation, whether it's a spiritual mismatch or not, you find yourself in a situation where conflict has become the order of the day. You know, it's perfectly natural to have conflicts in marriage. The question is, how do you handle those disagreements? That'll make all the difference in the health of your relationships. Over the years, Dr. Dobson wrote extensively on how to handle conflict in marriage, and we put together a four-part email series that addresses some of the most common and pressing questions about this subject. We'll get into topics like, are there differences that appear to be resolved, but they're actually still lingering beneath the surface? What underlying issues can lead to marital discord and can happily married couples live together without arguing? You'll find answers to questions like these and more when you go to drjamesdobson.org and search for that title, "Conflict in Marriage." All you have to do is put your first and last name and your email address in, sign up for the series, and we'll start sending it to you one lesson per day for the next four days. The "Conflict in Marriage" free email series is available at jdfi.org.

Well, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute exists to preserve and promote the family, to defend the sanctity of human life and religious freedom, and to introduce as many people as possible to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that mission depends on friends like you. Whatever amount God lays on your heart, your generosity has a real impact in reaching families with biblical truth and hope. So I invite you to partner with us today. Make your secure tax-deductible donation online at jdfi.org. Or you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. You can also speak with a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in again next time right here as Lee and Leslie Strobel will return to conclude their discussion about how couples can encourage one another's spiritual growth and how you can truly survive a spiritual mismatch in marriage. It's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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