

1/17/22

Week four: WFL

James and Betty Robison

Lee Strobel #1

JAMES: I want to welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison; Betty is here, and Lee Strobel is with us. But I just felt impressed, Betty to pick up the latest bronze. This is Jesus and two beautiful children with the most magnificent expression of love. I want you to know this. That when you watch *LIFE Today*, and then you decide to express *LIFE Today* and share *LIFE Today*, you put the arms of Jesus around people that never knew they'd be noticed. I've just got to thank you.

We're really thrilled to have Lee Strobel with us. He's been here several times, and as far as I'm concerned, Lee, you can come back every time you've got a day or two. So I want to thank you for coming to be with us.

LEE: My pleasure, love coming back.

JAMES: I'm going to talk to you; we're going to spend the week with Lee. My goodness, he's got enough books we could spend a month with Lee because they all have so much to offer. Later in the week, we'll talk about *The Case For Christ*. But here's *The Case for Heaven*.

I want to throw something at you that is not a curveball, but I know we have Heaven. Some people question it. Some people don't understand it. You're just gifted to help people understand things that may be a little bit challenging. But one thing that concerns me, and I'd like you to address it, I feel that when trouble increases, a lot of times, Christians want an escape hatch; that maybe they think that Heaven or that Jesus is

coming to get us out of here. But if I remember correctly, he left us here with kingdom purpose and a commission and a divine godly assignment that we should be focused on fulfilling. Is that realistic?

LEE: Yeah, absolutely! I love the way you put it. I'm going to help people so that God can put his arms around more of them. He told us to be salt and light, influencers in our culture, and share his message of hope and grace and love and redemption and eternal life. This is the greatest adventure of the Christian life.

In fact, I did a book once called *The Unexpected Adventure*. It is about the adventure of being salt and light, of sharing your faith because you never know what is going to happen. God left us here because there are a lot of folks who don't yet know the gospel, never received Jesus as their forgiver and leader, and who have no confidence that they're going to go to Heaven. Somebody asked me once, "What do you want on your tombstone?" I said, "He dragged as many people to heaven with him as he could."

[Laughter]

And so I think you're right. God has given us the assignment to spread his message far and wide so that people can know him, love him, and then ultimately, they can spend eternity with him.

JAMES: You know about, not quite ten years ago now we said good-bye to our beautiful, miracle baby daughter that lived 40 years; and a great mother, teenagers when she left us. Betty really became very interested and focused on understanding Heaven, where our daughter was. Randy Alcorn made a great contribution there. But do you think it is important for people like Lee to be helping people to understand Heaven?

BETTY: Absolutely! Since I became a Christian, I knew there was Heaven. Still, to know someone you love so dearly, and unexpectedly, your child is already there, you look toward Heaven more. You have a closer connection with it. And you're excited

about that one day, that being reunited again.

But like James, I feel like we need to show people a part of Heaven here on earth. We have that opportunity as his children to be that light that shines so that people are excited about Heaven. Not giving up and saying, just take me. But God, when you're ready, I'm ready. [Laughing]

JAMES: You made a clear explanation of why you ended up writing *A Case For Christ* because you really didn't believe. You really wanted to disprove, even to your believing wife, that there was Christ, and he was not real. So you said I'll do that, and everything reversed, and you found Christ. We're going to talk about that in-depth later in the week. But why did you go off on this particular journey?

LEE: Because I almost died. Ten years ago, my wife found me unconscious on the bedroom floor. She called the paramedics. I woke up in the emergency room, and the doctor was looking down at me. He said, "You're one step away from a coma. Two steps away from dying." And then I fell unconscious again. I had an unusual condition called hyponatremia, which is a severe drop in your blood sodium level. So I hovered between life and death for quite a while. I lost my kidneys, part of it; one of my kidneys. The doctors finally were able to save me.

But I tell you, it is a very clarifying experience to almost die, to hover over that fuzzy border between life and death, and not knowing where you're going to end up. It's clarifying. Because I was a Christian at the time and believe what the Bible teaches. I believe if I close my eyes for the last time in this world, I will open them in God's presence. I believed that, and yet, when you're faced with the reality of dying, I have a bit of skepticism in me. How do I know for sure? What evidence is there that the Bible's teachings are true? And so you begin to wonder. You begin to ask questions and so forth.

I talked to Luis Palau, the famous evangelist right before he died. I did the last interview with him before he went to be with the Lord. He said, "Satan whispers in your ears at

those moments. Oh, Luis, you've told the gospel to a billion people, but you're not heading for Heaven." And so, these doubts tend to come in.

So based on that, I decided, it was kind of the seed that ultimately resulted in this book, *The Case For Heaven*. So I interviewed experts and scholars, neuroscientists, theologians, historians, philosophers to try and see...

JAMES: Were they happy to participate with you on that journey? Even though they might not have felt like they would answer questions adequately, they were happy to walk the journey with you?

LEE: James, it is interesting. I've done many books in this format where I use my journalism background to investigate something, whether it is science and faith or -- all different topics. I found that even non-believers are anxious to talk about this stuff. So my book, *The Case for Miracles*, starts out, first three chapters, an interview with an atheist. I find people are willing to talk about it.

In fact, in my book, *The Case For Christ*, one of the most famous scholars in the world in terms of the text of the New Testament, who didn't know me from anybody, said, "Of course! Come out to Princeton and sit down with me. I'll talk to you." The truth is a lot of these people who are Ph.D.'s who have a lot of knowledge about a very narrow area, nobody ever talks to them about it. They love to get together with people and talk about stuff.

JAMES: When you began to examine, and you expressed what happened to you, did you find yourself wanting to talk to people who had that near-death experience like you did and see if they actually learned or experienced something through that?

LEE: Yeah! Because one of the things about the Christian teaching about Heaven is there are really two phases to Heaven. There is the present Heaven, or what we call the intermediate state. Paul said, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Jesus told the repentant criminal on the cross, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise." So we know that there is a present heaven.

What that means is when we die, our spirit, our soul, separates from our physical body and goes either to be in paradise with God or in Hades to be separated from God. And then ultimately, at the end of history, when Jesus returns, we're united with our resurrected bodies, and we go through final judgment. And then we spend eternity in a very physical place, either Heaven or hell. So I needed to know, wait a minute, what evidence is there that our soul separates from our body at the time of death?

Now I was a skeptic about this thing of near-death experiences. I thought it was kind of new-agey. I thought maybe it is explainable by oxygen deprivation in the brain, hallucinations, or whatever. But there have been 900 scholarly articles written in scientific and medical journals over the last 40 years on this phenomenon. This is a very well-researched phenomenon. I was only willing to believe those things I could corroborate. I wasn't going to believe someone who said, I died, and I met Jesus, and he's 5-foot 10, he's got brown eyes. A really nice guy; got a great sense of humor. I don't know if that is true or not; I can't tell. There have been people who have made up stories and published books about things that they later admitted weren't true. So unless I can corroborate it, I'm not interested.

Well, what I found, and I document this in my book, there are many cases that are corroborated. I'll give you an example. Maria, a young woman, dies of a heart attack in the hospital. She's dead. She is clinically dead, and yet, her spirit, her soul, or consciousness is separated from her body. She watched the resuscitation efforts. Her spirit floated out of the hospital. And then, when she was ultimately revived, her spirit returned to her body. And she said, "By the way, there is a tennis shoe on the roof of the hospital, on the third story ledge. It's a man's shoe; it is dark blue. It is left-footed; there's a little wear over the little toe. And the shoelaces are tucked under the heel." So they go up and look, and sure enough! It's exactly what she said. But I think what it is, James, is its corroboration; it is confirmation that this is true. You can't deny that something is

going on there.

Another woman, 34 years old from Atlanta, Georgia, had bleeding in her brain, a brain aneurism. They had to do very radical surgery. They cooled her body to 60 degrees; they drained every drop of blood from her head. Three clinical tests showed no brain activity -- zero brain activity. Her heart stopped beating, her breathing stopped. She was clinically dead. They put earplugs in her ear with 100 decibels of noise, which is the equivalent of a subway train going next to you. They taped her eyes shut. And yet, during the surgery, she said, "I was alive the whole time. So I watched the surgery, and then I went off. I went through a tunnel, and I met some relatives who were deceased. I was in the very presence of the light of God. And then I returned to the body." And she said, "By the way, there's a dent in one of the surgical tools they were using on me." She was able to describe these highly unusual, you wouldn't expect...

JAMES: She had to look in at it.

LEE: Exactly. So she was able to describe the actual surgical instruments that were used. She had no way of seeing those. She recalled the conversation in the room where the nurse said, "We have a problem; the artery is too small." And a male nurse said, "Try the other leg." She even recalled the song "Hotel California" was playing during the surgery. Now how do you explain this stuff unless, indeed, it is true? At the moment of death, our spirit and our soul separates from our body.

So I have maybe more than a dozen examples of people seeing things and hearing things that they would not normally be able to hear because of it. In fact, get this: One guy studied 21 cases of blind people; most of them had been blind since birth. And yet, during their near-death experience, they were able to see many for the first time. One woman was in a car accident; she was in a coma. She was clinically dead, and yet, she described watching the resuscitation. She described seeing flowers and birds and people for the first time. And then, when her spirit returned to her body, she was blind again. And this one medical doctor said, "This is medically impossible."

One guy studied 92 cases of people who made verifiable observations when they were out of their body: 93% of those were absolutely accurate, another 6% were almost totally accurate. So something is going on here. Because of the corroboration, I think it is safe to say that our body and our soul do separate at death.

Now here's what's really important. I know you know John Burke, who wrote the book, *Imagine Heaven*. John's a friend of mine; we were pastors together at a church probably 30 years ago. He studied 1,000 near-death experiences over 35 years. His conclusion -- this is so important -- is that when you look at the core of what actually happens in a near-death experience, not how people interpret it, but what actually takes place, it is consistent with Christian theology. That's very, very important to me. I base my theology on the Bible; I don't base it on near-death experiences. But near-death experiences corroborate what the Bible tells us about the present Heaven.

BETTY: And what about little children? Because children, children tell you what they see.

LEE: A seven-year-old girl died in a YMCA swimming pool in Idaho. She was found face down. She was dead; she had no heartbeat for 20 minutes. No brain activity.

They were able, after several days, to save her. But she said, "This whole time, I was fully alive."

And they said, "Wait a minute! You were dead when we brought you into the emergency room. Why don't you draw the emergency room for us?"

So she took a crayon, she is seven years old, drew everything, put everything where it was. And she said, "By the way, one night when you were keeping my body alive on machines, I followed my family home. I watched as my mom made chicken and rice for dinner. My sister played with her Barbie doll and sang a specific song. And my brother

played with his GI Joe Jeep on the floor. And my dad just sat on the couch, and he was so sad looking off into space."

She described what they were wearing, and everything checked out 100%. As you said, seven years old. She is not going to make this stuff up.

So I think this is powerful corroboration that the Bible's teachings are true.

JAMES: And so as you saw this, what effect was it having on you personally? Because you weren't just going to try to prove something wrong, you were going to investigate it from a journalist's approach. So what effect did it have on you?

LEE: Well, for one thing, it deepened my faith. I always believed I had a strong faith, but it made my faith more robust. It made me anticipate Heaven more.

Like you, the idea of seeing people who we love, my father-in-law was an atheist. I led him to the Lord in the last conversation of his life before he died, 87 years old. And I believe he is in Heaven. And I loved this man. And I've never gotten to talk to him about Jesus again because I shared the gospel and prayed with him, and then he had a stroke, and he died. So I just want to be in Heaven.

And my own father, I had a difficult relationship with my dad. Yet, he was a believer. A lot of the difficult relationship was because of me. I was a rebellious, snotty-nosed-brat kid, and I pushed every button he had. And so I can't wait to see him again and say, "Dad, I'm so sorry for those things that I did that was a wedge between us."

And I know he's going to say the same thing. He's going to say, "You know what? I want to fully reconcile." We're going to spend eternity in the father-son relationship that we never really had in this world. So it's made me long for the afterlife.

JAMES: Without the deception and the dissension and the animosity. You know when I

see what Lee's doing, I know you have a lot of questions. I just want to tell you something, you are in a little family room setting now with three people here who just love you. A lot of people behind the scenes just love you. All the people that make this telecast possible love you, too. They're trying to embrace you. I'm holding up this book by a man that we all honor and respect because as he searches and finds, he shares. And what he finds impacts our lives in a very positive way.

Lee, I can't help but believe that people seeing Heaven for the right reason, not just because someone's there like our daughter and others that we know, but wondering about it for themselves. And you're going to find here how to be certain you don't miss Heaven. I want you to get it. What do you think might happen to people who are seeking if they get this book?

LEE: Well, if they're believers, I hope that they have a longing someday for Heaven -- not to escape this world but to know that at the end of their life, when they close their eyes for the last time in this world, they'll open them in the eyes of God. And Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher, said the greatest thing about Heaven is not only are we going to be able to fall on our knees before Jesus, and see him and thank him but to feel the kisses of his mouth as he welcomes us to dwell with him forever.

JAMES: Wow! We really want that for you. Let me just tell you this, we are doing what you viewers tell us is one of the highlights of your life every year, and that's to give people water that never had it. We're giving them Water for LIFE because we love them because of the water of life, and invariably they come to know the water of life. If you will help us share water, and with all my heart, I want to believe every one of you watching will give a cup of water in Jesus' name. If you'd like to have this book, along with the other gifts that we have that will bless you, we will send it to you because it will bless you. I want you to look in on a very, let's say, heart-touching moment. But you really are the needed miracle. Yes, you are! Watch and see how.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: A mother's love for her children can be seen in many ways as she cares for them. When they run and play, it brings a smile to her face. But for Hanh Mun, there are no smiles, only fading memories like these clothes that once belonged to her five children who died because of waterborne illnesses.

Open Captions

>> I feel so sad because my children died, and I can't see them again.

ANNOUNCER: Hanh Mun had seven children in all. Her fifth child was just a baby when waterborne illness took its life. The pain is still with her.

Open Captions

>> My baby got sick very fast with fever and diarrhea and then died. I feel so hopeless. I lost something very important to me. I tried everything to help my baby.

ANNOUNCER: When asked what she hoped for in the future for her two remaining children, Hanh Mun had a very simple request.

Open Captions

>> If I had clean water, it would be a joy, and then my family might not get sick and die.

ANNOUNCER: We can help make Hanh Mun's plea become a reality by drilling a freshwater well. And by doing so, all the mothers in her village can experience the joy of having clean water for their children.

In the studio

JAMES: Love you, mom! I just can't help but pick up this beautiful bronze that I hope all of you get. It is Jesus holding beautiful children. What that mother was saying is, I really wish you might help me hold my two children -- five of them gone, Betty. We can

barely bear the loss of one beautiful daughter that we did enjoy watching for 40 years, and watching her rear her family and really make a kingdom impact the 40 years that she lived. But this woman lost five children.

And right now, as I'm talking to these beautiful people, I wish I could see them, I'm telling you, you don't have any idea how beautiful you are to God, especially when you become a channel through which he flows his love and his life freely. And also, when you help him put his arms around the overlooked, like those children.

Betty, I believe every person watching is going to give a cup of water or help drill a well or maybe drill a well of water.

BETTY: I know you will. You've always been faithful to help us feed those and to give those water that is thirsty and dying without it. I know as a mother what it's like to lose one child. I can't imagine losing more than one! But it is like at the moment, your heart is ripped out. That mother's heart has been ripped out over and over again. So let's please stop this sadness, this tragedy! Let's join together and simply drill water wells that can save the lives of so, so many children! I know you want to help us so please do.

JAMES: As I listen to your appeal as a mother, I just really did feel like the Lord was impressing on my heart to please help everybody understand that I want to put my arms not only around those two little children, but I want to put my arms around their mother. And I want to put my arms and all the mothers who are weeping over their children. You have been the most amazing miracles for us to watch because we have family that would come in the family room and hear the Father, and not only hear him but begin to express his heart and do his will.

So right now, we have targeted 20 nations and 350 water wells drilled. I don't know whether you could drill one. Many people say, James, I live to be able to drill a well. Sometimes they say, I prayed for years, but I did it! I did it! Many say I helped drill a well. The wells cost \$4800. There are some of you that God is going enable and give you

the grace and the ability to give a well. I believe you're going to do it. We're sending you that beautiful bronze to everyone who drills a well or gives \$1200 toward the well. Three people join you, we've got a well. Give \$2400, one person joins you we've got a well.

But keep this in mind, this is where most of the support comes. \$48 will give ten people water, basically, the rest of their life because you're giving a village their own well. \$48, 10 people water for the rest of their life. Where could you better invest? Whatever you give, we have a gift to send you just to say thanks. You're giving the greatest gift; you're giving the gift of life. And remember, we'll also send you The Case For Heaven if you'd like to have it because you're going to be helping many people experience Heaven and share it.

Would you go only right now or call that number? Take your bank card, use it like a check but make the gift God puts on your heart. If you want to mail a check, make it to *LIFE*, call us, tell us you're putting it in the mail because we count you. Thank you for doing it.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Waterborne illness is a killer that strikes the most vulnerable. For many impoverished families, the death of a child is the tragic result of having no choice but to drink contaminated water. But with your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission: Water for LIFE provides clean, fresh drinking water for thousands of children and their families, giving them a life free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift, we'll send you *Bible Promises For Life*, the ultimate handbook to everything God guarantees you in his word. A powerful resource that will give you the confidence to face life's troubles. With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "I Will Give You Rest" throw. It is a reminder of our Savior's promise of rest to those who trust in His grace and love.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. You may request our new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: I can't help believe, Betty, that maybe, I've said it many times, I'd like everyone watching to give and share life. Lee, we're going to bless a lot of people with your book.

LEE: Wow! Leslie and I would like to drill a well. Just hearing what you said, seeing that woman, my heart goes out to her. And to think the impact we can have as believers on people's lives, physically and spiritually, by drilling a well -- we're in! So sign us up!

JAMES: Thank you, Lee. I love you. We're going to be talking to Lee all week. And you don't have to drill a well every day. But look, we'll send you Lee's book, *The Case For Heaven*, if you'd like to have it. Tomorrow we're going to answer some of the specific questions that people are asking. Like one of them is, are there pets in Heaven? Ooooh! That could get sticky. Don't miss tomorrow. Thanks for watching. Thanks for sharing life.