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Week four: WFL

James and Betty Robison

Lee Strobel #3

JAMES: I want to welcome you back to *LIFE Today*. You've been watching this week. I hope to win with Lee Strobel. What a writer Lee Strobel is! What a communicator, what a teacher.

Betty and I, I'm James; we welcome you to *LIFE Today*. *The Case For Heaven* is the book that's out right now, and one of the things that he answers in here that you may want to be sure you get the book is misconceptions about heaven. So do you want to name one or two of them to give this idea of misconceptions?

LEE: Yeah! I think the big one is that heaven is an ethereal place. That we're just disembodied souls floating around on a cloud someplace. Heaven is very earthy; it is very real. The Bible does not say that God is going to wipe out everything that's out there and create this ethereal place. It doesn't say he's going to make all new things. It says he's going to make all things new, which is a new heaven and a new earth. So it's going to resemble our current planet but without the effects of sin. There will be streams, there will be mountains, and so forth.

JAMES: I believe we can fish in those streams. And we will catch and release. I don't know that we'll eat fish there but whatever we have to do. But, Lord, I want to catch some fish up there in that water of life.

LEE: Exactly. It will be a very real, very physical place. And a lot of people don't know this, but every single year the Chicago Cubs will win the World Series.

[Laughter]

JAMES: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!

LEE: All right! That's not biblical.

JAMES: This is a fabulous book, and I want to encourage you to get it. I'm asking Lee in this program to go back to take us on the journey to the first book, the multi-million-seller, movie made out of it, *The Case For Christ*. He set out to prove Jesus is not who you're told that he is, who it is said that he is. It is simply not who he is. What gave you that skepticism that made you want to go prove Jesus is not real?

LEE: Well, I kind of have skepticism in my D.N.A. My background is in journalism and law. I was legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, so I was taught to question everything, to doubt everything. And frankly, as an atheist, I thought if there is no God, if there is no heaven, if there is no hell, if there is no judgment, if there is no ultimate accountability, then the most logical way for me to live my life would be as a hedonist. So I'm just going to pursue pleasure, and that's what I did. So I lived a very immoral and drunken...

JAMES: Now your wife, was she a Christian?

LEE: No. She was agnostic.

JAMES: Did she then become a Christian, and did that set you on this journey?

LEE: Several years after our marriage, she met a Christian who was a nurse, shared Jesus with her, took her to church, and then she gave me the worst news an atheist husband could get. She said I've decided to become a follower of Jesus. I thought, oh no! She's turned into some holy roller or something! So really, the first word that went through my mind was divorce. I was going to walk out.

But I stuck around. A couple of things shocked me. First of all, there were a lot of positive changes in her character and her values, and the way she related to me and the kids. It was winsome, and it was attractive. It sort of pulled me toward faith. But the other side was I didn't want to believe. I was an atheist! Don't try to sell me this stuff. So I thought, if I could just disprove the resurrection of Jesus, I could rescue her from this cult that she's gotten involved in. Because I realized that the resurrection is the basis of everything.

Jesus clearly claimed to be the Son of God. He made Messianic and divine transcendent claims about himself. At one point, he got up before a group, and he said, "I and the Father are one." And the Greek word for one there is not masculine; it's neuter. This means Jesus was not saying I and the Father are the same person, he was saying, "I and the Father are the same thing. We're one in nature; we're one in essence." The audience got it. They said, you? You're just a man claiming to be God. So Jesus claimed to be God. So I could claim to be God. Anybody could claim to be God.

But if Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, died and three days later rose from the dead, that's pretty good evidence that he's telling the truth. Why the Apostle Paul says if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you're still in your sins. So even as an atheist, I recognized the resurrection is the ball game. I was a journalist. I've seen a lot of dead bodies. I've never seen any of them come back to life after three days. I thought I could disprove it in a weekend.

Well, it took me two years. I took my legal training, I have a law degree from Yale Law School, I took my journalism training, I have a degree from the University of Missouri in journalism, and I dove into the historical data for the resurrection of Jesus for two years of my life. I was shocked because I expected I could disprove it.

No. The evidence is so strong -- it's so overwhelming. In fact, one of my heroes, when I was in law school, was the greatest lawyer in the world, Sir Lionel Luckhoo. He was in

the Guinness book of world records for winning more murder cases than any lawyer. Greatest lawyer in the world. He was a skeptic about the resurrection, too. But he took his monumental legal skills and applied them to the historical data. I'll recite to you one sentence he wrote to summarize his conclusion.

He said, "I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof, which leads absolutely no room for doubt." This is from the greatest lawyer in the world.

So I began to investigate, and I found four things that I couldn't refute. First of all, and they all began with the letter E, the execution of Jesus. Every scholar virtually in the world can see Jesus was dead after being crucified. Even the journal of the American Medical Association, a secular, scientific, peer-reviewed medical journal, carried an investigation into his death. They said, "Clearly, the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates Jesus was dead even before the wound to his side was inflicted." So first, Jesus was dead.

Second, the early accounts we've got. I thought the resurrection was a legend, and I knew it took a long time for a legend to develop, so I thought, 100, 200 years after the life of Jesus, legends were invented about the resurrection. No! I found out we have a report of the resurrection of Jesus that includes the names of eyewitnesses and groups of eyewitnesses that's been preserved for us by the Apostle Paul; it has been dated back by scholars to within months of the death of Jesus. You can find it in First Corinthians 15, starting at verse three. That creed of the earliest church reported the resurrection has been dated back to within months of the death of -- that's far too quick to write it off as a legend.

Third, the empty tomb, and I found that even the enemies of Jesus implicitly admitted the tomb was empty. Everybody admitted the tomb was empty.

And fourth, eyewitnesses. Most of what we know about the ancient world, when we look

at a fact we believe about the ancient world, it's based on one source or maybe two sources of information. But for the conviction of the disciples that encountered the resurrected Jesus, we have no fewer than nine ancient sources, inside and outside the New Testament, that confirm and corroborate the conviction of the disciples that encountered the risen Jesus.

That is an avalanche of historical data. So I got to the point on November the 8th of 1981 where I said, you know what? A good juror reaches a verdict. The evidence is in; I've got to reach a verdict. So I gathered all the evidence I'd collected, books and documents, and all this stuff and I kind of reviewed it all one last time, and I sat back. I said, "Wait a second! In light of this avalanche of evidence that points so powerfully toward the truth of Christianity, I realized it would take more faith to maintain my atheism than to become a Christian." So the scales went like that.

And that's when I reached my verdict that Jesus not only claimed to be the Son of God, he backed up that claim by returning from the dead.

JAMES: Can you honestly say to everybody watching that this Jesus that is alive, I've experienced, and he's alive in me?

LEE: Absolutely! Absolutely! Here's the key I think that a lot of people don't understand. John 1:12 says: But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God; even to those who believe in his name. That forms an equation of what it means to become a child of God. Believe plus receive equals become. So when I did my investigation, I believed Jesus is who he claimed to be based on the data of history.

But that was not enough. Even the demons believe, but they shudder. So just believing is not enough; I had to receive. Receive what? Receive this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus purchased for me on the cross when he died as my substitute to pay for my sin. When I received that free gift in a prayer of repentance and faith, God came into my life, he forgave my sins, he opened the doors of heaven for me. He transformed

my values, my character, my morality, my attitudes, my relationships, my parenting, my marriage. Everything, over time, began to change for the good.

And so what changed it for me was when I got on my knees that day, and I confessed a lifetime of immorality that would absolutely curl your hair. And at that moment, I received, I turned from that, I confessed it, I received forgiveness through Christ. I asked him to come into my life, to change my life, and at that moment, I became a child of God. And over time, God transformed me from the inside out. I look back, and I say, I shudder to think where I would have ended up if I had not humbled myself and received this free gift of God's grace. I shudder to think what would happen.

JAMES: When you experienced this, you've talked about how you could tell your wife was different. Could she tell?

LEE: Well, I'll tell you a story that kind of explains that. My daughter was five years old when I came to faith. All she had known the first five years of her life was a dad who was absent, angry, kicking holes in walls because he would explode in rage, profane, coming home drunk -- that's all she knew the first five years. Can you imagine? First five years of her life.

But starting on that Sunday afternoon when I put my trust in Christ, you know what she did? She started to watch. Something is changing with my dad; something is different with my dad. It took about four or five months, but then one Sunday morning, she came up to my wife, and she said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy."

So did God change my life? Even my five-year-old saw it, and she came to faith that day. And today, she is married to a seminary graduate and loves God. We're the best of friends. My son came to faith at a young age because he saw the difference God was making in his sister and his mom and his dad. He is now a Ph.D. in theology and a professor at a seminary. I like to say God rescued our family through this. My son, eight

years ago, his wife gave birth to our first grandson, and he named him after me.

JAMES: Isn't that great?

LEE: That never would have happened if God had not changed our family. Oh my goodness! We would have splintered off into all sorts of immorality. And God knit us together through Jesus Christ. I would have grandchildren who were coming to faith one by one. There is nothing better than going to a baptism of a grandchild! To watch them with such joy confess their faith in Jesus Christ and see them come out of the water with this expression of love and appreciation and salvation.

JAMES: I want everybody watching to know that you've got this life. We want you to have not just *A Case For Heaven* but a place in heaven. We want you to understand that when a skeptic and an atheist find Christ to the point that it becomes a well-made great movie to point people to Christ, that the reality of Jesus is so essential for people to see this Jesus. And he really didn't even see Jesus to start with; he was just all against him. But all of the sudden, he begins to really discover him everywhere. And then, when Christ changed him, people could see the change.

Betty was in our church, the Baptist church, when my alcoholic father had tried to kill my mother and said he was going to kill me, and I came close to killing him. I believe it was only the prayers of people praying for a little boy they knew was the product of a rape and was away. I think that's all that held him still because if he had moved, I would have killed him.

When I left home, and he went to prison, I went back to the pastor and his wife that had kept me when I was a little boy and met this girl. She was the sweetest girl, precious! I went home and cried the night after we had our first date. Just said, God, I met a pure girl because I'd grown up in very horrible, impoverished areas of just hate and anger and no God. But I met him, and he was real to me. And when I saw her as a pure girl, I knew I'd met somebody different. And I knelt and prayed, God, thank you for her.

But I got to talking to her when we dated about how real Jesus was to me. So here's this boy without a father, mother was raped; I'm a product of a rape. And the doctor wouldn't abort me, so I was born, a miracle birth that's changed millions of lives. So because of the miracle of my new birth, this changed boy talked to this church girl about how real Jesus is. And what happened to you?

BETTY: Wow! I'm the other side of the coin from you in that I worked really hard to be a good person. But just works without the relationship won't work. And I'd strive, and I'd still feel I wasn't good enough. Yet I saw a young man that had come from the challenging background that he did, tragic in many ways, and I saw how God turned him around. And I saw a relationship with the Heavenly Father that I had heard of, I knew about, I'd studied about, but I didn't know. And you say, how do you know that? It's just like when we fell in love, James; you can't put it into words. You just know that you know. And when Jesus, when I saw him in that relationship with James, and then I received him. I went to church, and I said church is not good enough. I have to have God. I have to have Jesus. And I fell on my knees, and I said Jesus, please save me! This good girl, but without Jesus, please come into my heart! And I saw that difference, and I just thank God for him showing me Jesus.

LEE: What a story! That's awesome!

JAMES: I've looked at Jesus, Lee in her life for more than the 58 years we've been married, because we went together several years and she's just a beautiful person. Here's the reason we're referring to this. What about your life? God's talking to you right now. Would you just like Lee did, Betty did, I did, would you say, Jesus, I do believe you love me. I do believe you died for me. Please forgive me. Please give me a new life. Please save me. And you don't have to beg. It's just like asking for water from a Father who loves you so much, asking him for life.

If you prayed that prayer, thank him for giving you life through Christ. You may want to

call the number there on the screen today and say, I gave my life to Christ. We have a book that I wrote that's a Bible study. It's called *Knowing God As Father*. How I came to know God as my Father when I didn't have a father. We'll be happy to send it to you. Just call and say, would you send me that? I want him to be my Father, and I ask him to be. Somebody will pray with you and thank God with you.

Lee, we really want to thank you for being with us. Thank you for *The Case For Christ*, your testimony, all the great books you've written, the one *The Case For Heaven*. We're literally going to give this book to you along with *Bible Promises For Life* and other beautiful gifts if you help us give, perhaps, the greatest gift. Would you help us give Water for LIFE because of the water of life? And we will lead the people whose lives we touch and save to life in Christ because they will have seen it expressed through you.

I want you to watch closely, listen prayerfully, and then I want you to reach out and become the miracle someone longs for. And we'll send you the blessings that we mentioned, but you're going to be given the greatest blessing; you're going to be giving life. Watch prayerfully.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Water! Earth's most abundant natural resource: yet out of this abundance only a tiny fraction of it is suitable for drinking. And suitable is a loose definition.

Sheila: This is the water, this is the only water that is available to this village. You probably see it is absolutely filthy. There’s animal waste all around. All this into the same water. This is unspeakable agony to me. Because the thing that I’ve seen on this trip is these people are doing absolutely everything they can. They walk as many hours as they have to to find some water and it is not clean water. They cannot do anything else. I wouldn’t let my dogs drink this water and this is all these children have.

Announcer: While the problem here is serious, the solution is surprisingly simple, and it's already been implemented in this Central American village.

Betty: This is a time when I don't mind watching them stand here and pour water over their head because I know it is good water.

James: That's right! This is a place for which we give great praise to God in gratitude. But we need to drill hundreds of wells like this all over the world. And you can see, if you can't look at these children, look at their faces, look how happy they are, and understand the importance of clean water, it becomes the center of life; schools spring up. We want children to get an education and we want them to come and get healthy, clean drinking water. [Cheering]

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: I can’t begin to explain adequately how miraculous a gift of love and life is expressed by water. "You give a drink of water in my name, you don't lose your reward." What reward? Well, let God determine all of that, what that looks like to him. But what greater reward could we experience than to give a child life? Give them a chance at life? Give them hope in life? That's what you're doing; that's what water does.

You think about this. Betty, we saw those children playing in fresh, clean water. Our viewers drilled that well.

You did it! Maybe one person watching said, I can drill a well; it costs $4800. Do you realize people can do that and do it joyfully? Do you know that our viewers have begun to think of support, when we're doing stuff, in $4800 terms? That's amazing to me sometimes. We'll be talking about something totally unrelated to water, but these $4800 gifts come in.

I asked the Lord, what's going on here?

He said they have learned the power of $4800 changing everything in a community or a village. They see something that needs to be done, and they're able to do it because I've given them the ability to do it. I've given, really, the wealth of America to people that are over 60. And 50% of all the wealth in America is controlled by people over 70! And I have shown them, you can be overseers of what I entrusted to your watch care and do kingdom work with it for kingdom purpose and change everything for people. And you leap at it. Thank you.

We're asking you right now if you can drill a well, drill one. We have targeted 20 nations, 350 specific areas where we know there is water, but we need to drill the well. And we need your help to do it. Could you do that? Could you give toward a well? Maybe $2400, and some may join you? Pray, I'm making this gift, God. Give another person the ability to give the other $2400. Could you give $1200 and pray for three to join? I believe if you can, you will. I really do believe that.

Our viewers, Betty, amazingly seem to seek the mind and heart, and will of God. You're an amazing group of people. By the way, I want you to really join your hearts and start praying for the healing of our nation. For freedom as we've known it and experienced it to be spared a horrible death. Please, because if we come together, we can see people's lives changed and set free. And it's sharing God's life and love that literally draws people to the life and love of God.

Would you do what most people do who help us drill these wells? Let me give you an example. $48 gives ten people water for the rest of their life. Where could you better put $48 and change everything for ten people? At whatever level you can help, please do. We have some beautiful gifts to send you. We have beautiful throws about the rest that God gives us. We've got *Bible Promises For Life* -- the life that he offers. You're going to love this! This is one beautifully laid-out book on the promises of God. We just want to say

thanks. And also, Lee Strobel's book on heaven. You help us drill a well, you make a gift toward that, and you want Lee's book, we're going to send it to you.

Right now, go online or dial the number, get your bank card, use it like a check. Please do it! If you write a check, make it to *LIFE*, but we need to hear from you because we count on you to make it possible to give life in all these areas. Thank you for doing it. God bless you. And he is!

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

JAMES: You know we try to express as well as we can for all the mothers and the families and the children whose lives you change, who in so many instances literally say, you save them. Thank you so much for that.

We're going to send along with the other gifts we've mentioned; if you'd like to have *The Case For Heaven* and you just help us give a cup of water in Jesus' name, say would you send me that book? You better believe we will. I just want to say thanks to Lee Strobel. Check out all of the books that he's written; they're just great. But thank you for spending the week with us.

LEE: Oh, I've enjoyed it! You guys are awesome. I just love your story, I love your spirit, and I love your ministry. I love what you're doing in the world spiritually and reaching people with hope and water and life! It's awesome!

JAMES: Well, it is because of the people sitting out here that suddenly realized it is an awesome blessing to be an answer to someone's prayer or to provide the miracle their heart longs for. And that's what you do. You know we love you. If you gave your life to Jesus, tell others about it. Share him. Thanks for watching.