

Interview with Lee Strobel

July 2004

SERVANT: Hi! Where are you now?

Lee: Down in California. We've been here about four years now and doing real well. How about you?

S: We're doing well too. I got your new book a few weeks ago and I've just started reading it. It's looking great. Things are going well, then?

L: Yes, I've just signed to do a weekly prime-time television show on the PAX network—I don't think you have that in Canada, do you?

S: I think we get it on satellite.

L: It's called *Faith Under Fire*, dealing with hot faith topics. We're going to have people from a variety of faith perspectives debating hot issues. So it's kind of a big deal and I've been working for two years to get it on the air.

S: Great! Now will you do that from California?

L: Yes, we're opening offices in Hollywood on June 14 and go into production in August, go on the air the last week in September.

S: So how are you able to find all the time?

L: It's a good question. I'm ok as long as it doesn't get renewed. Then I'm in trouble.

S: I'm sure it will go well. We've got something a bit similar in Canada, but I don't think the host is a believer at all. They seem to stack the odds against whoever is the token Christian on the show.

L: We're going to do the opposite. We'll have good people and hear different viewpoints including the Christian viewpoint.

S: We appreciate you taking the time to do this. We'll do a cover story on the book and the topic and offer the book to our readers. We've had such tremendous response to your other titles and I know this is a hot topic. Where exactly are you?

L: Trabuco Canyon.

S: Your wife is doing ok?

L: Yeah. We're actually waiting for some test results that could be serious, but so far we're praying that everything works out.

S: You had emailed me awhile back and told me that and my wife and I have been praying for you.

L: Thanks. The first time it turned out to be more of a scare—they actually mixed up some test results and gave her the wrong findings. These now are different issues that actually look a little more ominous, but, you know, we'll see what happens. We'd appreciate your prayers.

S: What about your kids?

L: My daughter is married and teaches in a Christian school. She's also a novelist. She sold two novels to Random House and those will be coming out in the next year. And my son Kyle has finished his first Master's degree in Philosophy of Religion and he's getting a second one in New Testament. I think he wants to be involved in a local church and teach in a seminary or college—maybe Prairie.

S: Are you on staff at a church any longer?

L: No, I'm writing full-time, although I still speak occasionally.

S: Let me ask you some questions about the book. Have you been doing a lot of interviews on it?

L: Yes, we've had a lot of good response. Unbelievably, the book has actually made the *Times* best-seller list—number 30.

S: Oh, it did? Congratulations!

L: I've never had a book do that. It was very exciting.

S: Why do you think that is?

L: I think there's a lot of curiosity about this topic right now. There are a lot of school districts debating what to teach in the local schools. Two states, Minnesota and Ohio, have now passed laws requiring schools to teach their students how to critically analyze Darwinism, which means the pros and the cons. A lot of people think this kind of opens the door to looking at intelligent design, so it's kind of a hot issue around the country.

S: Tell us about being an atheist and an intelligent evolutionist. What more than anything else convinced you about the reality of a Creator, if you had to boil it down?

L: Well, I looked at evidence from a wide range of scientific disciplines: cosmology, physics, astronomy, biochemistry, biological information, cognitive science or consciousness. And it's hard, but I think if I had to boil it down to one finding, I think one of the most compelling arguments in favor of a Creator ironically goes back to a Muslim philosopher almost a thousand years ago and that's what's known as the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, which is simply that whatever begins to exist has a cause. Scientists now concede that the universe did begin to exist and therefore the universe must have had a cause. That's a hard argument to escape and it's convinced a lot of people that not only is there a cause behind the universe, but the logical implications are that this must be an uncaused, beginning-less, timeless, immaterial personal being endowed with freedom of the will and enormous power. And that, of course, is a good starting definition for God.

S: Let me ask you this, how much did people have a role in your journey? You put forward many excellent and intelligent theories but how much did people have to do with your journey toward faith?

L: My wife was really pivotal. It was really the positive changes in her character and values that prompted me to begin investigating whether or not Christianity was credible. So I always think of her because of the transforming power of faith in her life and her deep, authentic, passionate commitment to Christ really was the beacon that drew me to Him and prompted me to use my journalistic and legal background to investigate the evidence. So she was critically important. There were a lot of others along the way, because when I did my original investigation and began calling experts out of the blue and doing research in libraries and studying archaeology and ancient history and science in all its various facets, there were lots of people along the way who each contributed either a piece of information or a bit of encouragement or one way or the other pointed toward God. So I call it a cumulative case for God in that my conclusion as to what the evidence points toward really is the product of piling on fact after fact after fact until you realize that the most logical and rational conclusion is that God exists and that Jesus is His Son. There isn't one piece of evidence that proves it all, but when we look at the cumulative case, then I think the most reasonable hypothesis is that the universe and life

were created by God and that the evidence of history really supports Jesus as being His Son and He proved it by rising from the dead.

S: You said it this way: “My road to atheism was paved by science, but so was my later journey to God.” How would you say science paved your way to God?

L: When I recall my initial journey into atheism, I can go back in my mind to the exact place I was sitting in Prospect High School, 1966, the biology classroom overlooking the parking lot. I can remember where I was and how I felt at that very moment when my teacher told me about the 1953 experiment by Stanley Miller at the University of Chicago where he recreated the atmosphere of the early earth and shot sparks through it and created amino acids which are the building blocks of life. And I remember a light bulb going off and I thought, God’s out of a job. If you can explain the origins of life without the need for a supernatural creator, then there’s no need to believe in God. As someone who didn’t want to be held accountable for my life, I gravitated toward Darwinism as being an intellectually defensible way of embracing atheism. And so that moment more than anything else crystallized my atheism. My journey toward God, ironically, came when I responded to my wife’s conversion and began to look at science in a new way. And that is, instead of ruling out the possibility of a Creator at the outset as so many Darwinists do, I decided to go wherever the evidence points. In other words, most evolutionists will say science should confine itself to only trying to understand the natural processes of the world and explain everything in terms of natural process without resorting to the idea of a supernatural creator. I think that limits science. Linus Pauling, who won the Nobel Prize twice, said science ought to be the search for truth. So I think it’s much more logical and reasonable to follow the evidence, the scientific data wherever it points and if it points toward an intelligent designer, if it points toward the Creator of the universe and an author of life, we ought to be willing to go there and to consider that possibility. So as I began to investigate science anew that was my attitude. And when I took off the restrictions of ruling out God at the outset, I could just let the evidence take me wherever it went. By doing that, I began to see cosmology and physics and astronomy and all these areas in a new way. I was given the elbowroom and the freedom to consider the possibility that there is a supernatural Creator, an intelligent designer, who’s responsible for the universe.

S: I can remember sitting in high school and being told to leave the room—that’s about all.

L: You remember that girl in the second hair, with the long blond hair—I know you.

S: Yeah. I’ m sure you saw the fairly recent cover story in *TIME* magazine on the Big Bang. For the most part it was put forth as proof of evolution. Do the latest findings actually offer more proof of evolution or do you say, no, let’s talk about it, the Big Bang offers more proof of creation?

L: I think the Big Bang theory is powerful evidence for the existence of a Creator. It used to be that the secular scientists maintained that the universe was eternal and it was the Christians who said, no, based on what the Bible tells us, the universe had a beginning. And the Christians were arguing against the scientists for a long time. Now in the last 50 years the evidence of cosmology shows us that there was a beginning to the universe. We can argue about when that was, but Stephen Hawking said not long ago that, “virtually every scientist now concedes the universe had a beginning.” That takes us back to that powerful argument that whatever begins to exist has a cause. The universe

began to exist; therefore the universe has a cause. That's a very persuasive argument. I don't think Christians should shy away from the Big Bang or think that it somehow disproves the existence of a Creator. I think quite the opposite is true; it helps us to have confidence that there is a Creator who brought the universe into being. One of the biggest failures of naturalism is to come up with any logical alternative to the Big Bang that's supported by evidence. There's a great quote by Robert Jastrow who was an agnostic astronomer: "The chain of events leading to man commence suddenly and sharply at a definite moment of time in a flash of light and energy." That's a description from science of what happened and certainly it's consistent with what we're told in the Scripture.

S: Are there any other fairly recent scientific findings that give your faith a boost?

L: There are several. One is the fine-tuning of the universe and this is fascinating. One of the most striking discoveries of modern science is that the laws and the constants of physics unexpectedly conspire in an extraordinary way to make the universe habitable for life. The law of gravity, for example. If you had a ruler that went across the entire universe at one-inch increments that would plausibly represent the possible range at which the force of gravity could have been set. It's set at a certain position and we know that life can therefore exist on earth. If we were to move it from where it has been set along that continuum one inch compared to the entire width of the visible universe, all of a sudden life is snuffed out. Intelligent life can't exist. So that is the precision with which gravity is tuned. You look at other examples as well—the cosmological constant, which is the energy density of space. That sounds like a very technical thing and it is, but basically if this value were positive and large, it would mean the universe never would have coalesced into planets and people and stars and such. If it were negative and large, the universe would have collapsed upon itself and life could never have existed. But it's precisely set at the right place for life to be able to flourish. The precision would be like being in outer space, taking a dart and throwing it at earth and hitting a bull's eye that's one trillionth of a trillionth of an inch wide. That's the finely-tuned calibration for the cosmological constant. It defies the imagination. Put together those two examples of how finely-tuned the cosmos is along with dozens of other examples and you walk away saying there are only two explanations. One is that there's a Creator who set the dials just right for life to exist and for the universe to be in existence, or else there's an infinite number of universes and you sort of spin the dials of physics in each universe and we just happen to be in the lucky one that won the lottery and therefore we exist and are here to ask the questions about where we come from. The problem with that is, first of all there is no evidence that there are an infinite number of other universes and if there were it would demand some sort of intelligently designed mechanism to create them. So you go right back to the existence of an intelligent designer. I think physics points toward intelligent design very powerfully. I also think the recent discoveries in bio-chemistry have taken Darwin at his word when he said, "If it can be demonstrated that any complex organ has existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down." That's what Michael Behe has done. He's a biochemist from Lehigh University and he has shown the examples of molecular machines which could not have been built piece by piece by Darwinian processes because they have to be fully present in order to function. And these biological systems defy the ability of human beings to comprehend. One of them is a little outboard on the back of some bacteria. It's one one-hundred thousandth of an inch wide and it can

spin its little propeller at 10,000 rpm, stop in a quarter of a turn and spin just as fast the other way. Howard Burke of Harvard University said that this is the most efficient motor in the universe. So small and so efficient we don't even have the technology to replicate it. And yet the individual parts that make up this little outboard motor all have to be fully present in order for that motor to function. Therefore it could not have developed piece by piece as Darwin postulated. It must have been put together all at once by some sort of intelligent designer. The mathematics rule out the possibility that it came together by accident—that's just simply impossible. So you have these biological systems that Michael Behe says are "irreducibly complex." I think they are first of all powerful evidence against Darwinism and secondly, in favor of intelligent design. I'll mention one more that I find fascinating, and that's the area of biological information. Every one of our one hundred trillion cells has a six-foot length of DNA coiled up inside. The DNA contains a four-letter chemical alphabet that spells out the precise assembly instructions for every one of the proteins from which our body is made. Darwinists have absolutely no explanation for how this information got into the cells. Naturalistic processes can create patterns but they can't create information. Whenever we see information of this sort, whether in a book or a computer code, we know it came from an intelligent mind. Therefore when we see it in every living cell, I believe it's persuasive evidence that we came from an intelligent mind. It's almost as if God autographed every cell.

S: Let me ask you this: as you discuss these things with believers, do you believe Darwin's theories have become ingrained in the church?

L: Unfortunately, I think they have in a lot of different ways. Some people will explicitly say, "I'm a Darwinist and I'm a Christian. I think that God merely used evolution as his mechanism for creating the world." And they try to harmonize Darwinism and Christianity. I find that impossible personally because I was told that the evolutionary process is, by definition, undirected. So to me that automatically rules out the possibility of a supernatural deity behind the scenes who's pulling the strings. In fact, if you go to the textbooks themselves, many of them are explicit about that. I love this quote from one that says, "By coupling undirected, purposeless variation to the blind, uncaring process of natural selection Darwin made theological or spiritual explanations of life processes superfluous." I personally have a problem trying to reconcile Darwinism with Christianity. I think the evidence from science points much more compellingly to an intelligent designer.

S: When I spoke at a school teachers' conference and talked a little bit about this, I was absolutely shocked to have one of the teachers stand to his feet like a heckler and say, Hold on a minute, and basically deny much of what I would view as very scriptural principles straight from Genesis. Has that been your experience? Are there some Christians who are at least to some extent Darwinian in their beliefs and how do you handle that?

L: I think a lot of them do not understand that this is not an issue of faith versus science, but an issue of science versus science. I don't think that they would believe in evolution if they understood all the evidence that points against it. I think it's instructive that recently a hundred scientists with doctorates from leading institutions from around the world signed a full-page magazine ad that said, "We are skeptical of the claims of Darwinism." In effect they said the emperor of evolution has no clothes. These are scientists who are challenging evolution from a scientific perspective. Christians who sort

of blindly accept what they were told in school about evolution and try to reconcile it with their faith don't understand that the best evidence today does not support the claims of Darwinism, but it points the other way toward intelligent design.

S: Many Christians view science as a barrier to God and scientists as enemies of faith. I don't hear that from you at all.

L: No, not at all. There's a nanoscientist, a guy who builds molecules for a living, his name is James Tour from Rice University, a brilliant, brilliant scientist who made a very interesting comment: "Only a rookie who knows nothing about science would say science takes away from faith. If you really study science, it will bring you closer to God." That's what I'm finding, that more and more scientists are opening their minds to the possibility of a creator without the restrictions that tell them to avoid that possibility. They are coming to the conclusion that the evidence from a wide range of scientific disciplines supports faith. It doesn't detract from faith, but it builds our faith stronger. Dick Rollman says it is through exploring our world that we understand the invisible qualities of God from what He has made, those things we can explore and see and touch.

S: So which requires more faith, evolution or faith?

L: I think there's no question it requires more faith to maintain a belief in Darwinian evolution today than it does to believe in a supernatural creator. I don't say that flippantly; I honestly believe that's true. I've studied this stuff both when I was doing my original investigation as a skeptic and then as I retraced it for this book. You come to the conclusion after looking at the claims at Darwinism that if you were going to embrace Darwinism and its underlying premise of naturalism you would have to believe, first of all, nothing produces everything, non-life produces life, randomness produces fine-tuning, chaos produces information, unconsciousness produces consciousness, and non-reason produces reason. I just don't have enough faith to believe that. Yes, there is a step of faith we must take. But I believe faith should be a step that we take in the same direction that the evidence is taking. And when the evidence of science points so powerfully and persuasively towards the existence of a creator, then I think it's logical and rational to take a step of faith in that same direction by embracing that creator as our personal God.

S: So it's possible to be an intellectually fulfilled creationist?

L: Yes, absolutely. A thinking person today, a thinking Christian can stand up straight and tall and say with confidence that the findings of science are fully consistent with the teachings of the Bible. This has never before happened in human history. At this point in time Christians are in a position like never before to be able to say that the evidence of science supports faith. For a long time Christians were arguing that the universe had a beginning which scientists said it never did. Now the evidence is in favor of Christianity and we're seeing more and more scientists, people like Allan Sandage, probably the greatest observational cosmologist on the planet, who has now become a theist, a believer in God because of the scientific evidence that he encountered. We're seeing more examples of that because people are willing to examine the evidence and have the courage to go wherever it points.

S: When you boil it all down, how much of evolutionism do you believe is simply a desire to remove God and replace Him with just about anything?

L: Well, all of us have motives and certainly when I was a young man, wanting to live my life the way I wanted to live it and not wanting there to be a God to whom I might be

accountable, I was looking for an escape hatch. I had a bias, I had a motive, and when I heard about evolution I grabbed it as being a justification for my rejection of God. I think honestly I was rejecting God out of moral issues. I wanted to live the kind of life that God would not have wanted me to live and I didn't want to be held accountable and I latched on to evolution as an intellectual pretense for rejecting God. So I think we all have a bias of one sort or the other and many of us have motivations for rejecting God. But I think when we sincerely seek Him, we're going to find Him. When we try to set aside those biases and prejudices and investigate the evidence with an open mind and allow it to take us wherever it points, I think the most rational and logical among us will come to the conclusion that God does exist and the evidence of science support that conclusion whole-heartedly.

S: I grew up in a rather conservative church and we used to have creationists come and put on some quite dazzling displays that were really fantastic. But I remember one thing that troubled me and that was simply that they really seemed to mock people who were not there, who believed in evolution. Is that something you would caution against?

L: I Peter 3:15 tells us to be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us about the hope that we have, but to do it with gentleness and respect. When we can be respectful and listen, when we can engage on the issues in a reasonable and non-emotional way, we're much more likely to influence people for Christ. We need to have an attitude of humility, not of condemnation but of encouragement, to kind of help nudge them down a direction toward God. I think so many people are turned off by those who seek to belittle skeptics or claim that they are intentionally suppressing evidence or whatever. I'd like to see us engage in healthy debate with Darwinists and let the evidence bubble to the surface and let people draw their own conclusions.

S: So to be an informed creationist, not an arrogant one?

L: That's a good way to put it. Someone who is willing to be a friend to people who believe otherwise.

S: So I have a friend who's not convinced. How can I share this book with him?

L: You can tell him about a guy who was an atheist, who believed that evolution disproved the existence of God. Then he began to investigate the evidence in a more open-minded way and came to a far different conclusion that the data of science supports the existence of a creator. Use something like that as a point of curiosity and see if that might encourage your friend to want to read the book together and talk about it. There are lots of footnotes so you can explore other sources as well and make it a journey together that's full of discovery and adventure, one that you can go on with him. I think people are curious: where do we come from? Where are we going? And these are issues that science does touch on so I think there is a latent curiosity in a lot of people. If we can encourage that sense of curiosity, God can use it to walk them down a path toward Him.

S: Critics of this book, and there will be lots of them, will ask why you only interview people who line up with your worldview for the most part. Shouldn't you talk to some who hold a position contrary to yours? How do you respond?

L: People need to understand the format of the book. I stood in the shoes that I wore as an atheist, having read the evolutionary literature and all the objections to the idea of an intelligent designer. From there I sought out doctorate level experts who are articulate in defending what they believe about science and I posed to them the tough questions I had.

And then I leave it to the reader to decide whether or not they present a persuasive case for a creator of the universe. The intelligent design movement is not an exclusively Christian movement. As I first mentioned, it was a Muslim who first came up with the argument from cosmology for the existence of God. There are agnostics who are prominent in the intelligent design movement, there are Jewish people, there are people from other sects that you would not consider Christian, so it has a wide base. Secondly, I wouldn't want to disqualify a scientist or philosopher from talking about the evidence from science just because they have personally become convinced by the evidence that God exists. Every scientist has a bias. He has a faith in God or in something else. So the fact that people are convinced by the evidence one way or another shouldn't disqualify them from being heard on the topic.

S: You've clearly done a lot of homework on this topic.

L: I traveled something like 26,000 miles to talk to these guys. I have a lot of frequent flyer miles.

S: Looking back, if you could sum it up or give me one thing that you've really taken away that underlines everything, something you haven't mentioned about God—what have your studies shown you?

L: You know, public opinion polls show that a lot of people intuitively reject Darwin's claim that all of life has a common ancestor and that natural selection acting on random variation explains the diversity of life that we see on our planet. There's something inside a lot of people that tells them that just doesn't square with reality. And it also rankles a lot of evolutionists. It makes them really angry that there are so many people who object to these grand claims of Darwinism. When I look up at the sky at night and see these dazzling stars, having now studied cosmology and astronomy and knowing more than I ever did about what's going on out there in space, or I look at a leaf or the intricacies of the human eye, there's something inside of me that says nature or "the heavens declare the glory of the Lord." It's pointing us toward something else. Science can help us understand a lot of natural processes and a lot of facts about the cosmos. But we ought not to stop there. We should look beyond that to where the evidence is ultimately pointing, toward the creator of everything and the author of life. He's reaching out to us and is available for us to know both now and for eternity. I think my faith has been deepened by interviewing these experts and sitting sometimes with my mouth hanging open over the creativity and ingenuity of creating life. It is absolutely staggering. I was talking to one of the physicists I interviewed, Robin Collins, and he said the same thing. He said, "The more I learn about physics, the more amazed I become at how ingenious God is. The more we probe the complexity of life, of the cell we find more and more complexity. It doesn't get simpler as we delve deeper into the cell, it becomes more complex. Every time we go another layer deeper, to me it's just another reminder that we have a God who is unlike us. He is not only able to conceive of these mind-blowing biological contraptions inside of our bodies and in nature, but he's able to create them. I walk away from that in wonder and in awe of who God is and the fact the He has allowed us through science to encounter Him. He has created a habitat so that we can explore it and through exploration come face to face with the Creator Himself.

S: Well, I've run out of questions. Is there anything I've missed?

L: I think you've covered the waterfront. We're coming out with a student edition, by the way. It should be out in the fall. I think of so many kids like me who come into science

class, they're wide-eyed and interested, science is fascinating and they want to learn. They do but they're only taught certain things about evolution. I think the impetus in these schools in the States is to teach them to think critically. People will sometimes say, you just don't want evolution taught in schools. On the contrary, I want more Darwinism to be taught because I don't want just the arguments in favor of it to be taught; I want the other side to be told as well because I honestly believe when you assess the entire scope of the evidence, it just does not support the grandest claims of Darwin, it clearly doesn't. So I want more of Darwinism to be taught and I want the door to be opened up for students to consider any conclusion that is supported by the data. I think the clear conclusion is the existence of God.