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HOUR OF POWER OF 01.02.2009

PROGRAM OPENING/TRUMPET FANFARE/V.O.

VO: Today on the Hour of Power: Dr. Robert H. Schuller welcomes the chairman of the great Carlson Corporation, Marilyn Carlson Nelson to share how she kept her faith alive after the tragic death of her daughter in an auto accident.

MCN: We decided that what we had to do, that what perhaps God wanted us to do, was to value every day that we had because it was a day she didn't have.

VO: Also the incredible voice of Anthony Evans.

ANTHONY: You are the one that we praise; You are the one we adore.

VO: Then Dr. Schuller welcomes as the guest speaker, Lee Strobel, former legal editor of the Chicago Tribune and best selling author of The Case for Christ, who as an atheist, tried to disprove the existence of God but instead found a very real faith in Christ.

LEE: And so I decided on that day to use my legal training and journalism training to systematically investigate is there any truth to Christianity or any other faith system? And I launched on what turned out to be a two year spiritual investigation.

VO: Join us today for the best hour on television, the Hour of Power from the Crystal Cathedral.

HYMN - "Joyful, Joyful.."

Joyful, joyful, we adore You, God of glory, Lord of love; Hearts unfold like flowers before You, opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day. Amen! Amen! Amen!

GOOD MORNING/OPENING SENTENCE/INVOCATION

RHS: Good morning! And to all of you who are listening in Hong Kong or Moscow or wherever you are, come in. Look, listen, we are one family of God and boy we always have good news, and I do today, thank you. Now turn around and shake hands with somebody behind you or on either side, shake hands and say God loves you and so do I.

This is the day that God has made! We're going to rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

HYMN - "Medley – Hand in Hand Now Walk with Jesus"

Hand in hand now walk with Jesus, He will take your fears away; From the dark of error's shadow walk into the light of day! Like the bright warm rays of sunshine is our Lord who leads the way; He turns darkness into sunlight, for He is the Truth, the Way.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Your tender care. In Your pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Your folds prepare. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us, Yours we are. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us, Yours we are.

Early let us seek Your favor, early let us do Your will. Blessed Lord and only Savior, with Your love our lives now fill. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have

loved us, love us still; Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have loved us, love us still.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

SCRIPTURE – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 - RHS

RHS: Listen to the words of sacred scripture. I'm reading from St. Paul, as recorded in the second book of Corinthians, chapter nine verses 6-12. Paul is writing.

Remember this: remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but it is also overflowing and many expressions of thanks to God.

And this is the word of the Lord, Amen.

SOLO – ANTHONY EVANS - "The Way You Love Me"

This heart breaks slowly, tell me what are You doing to me? When I prayed do what it takes I didn't know I'd lose everything. Everything that meant anything to me is gone. Something right has to come from this wrong. It is the hurt that breaks me. It is this pain, it pulls me to my knees and the tears, they've changed me till what I couldn't see, it'd become so clear to me. And this is the way, the way that You love me.

My way destroyed me I couldn't see, I was my worst enemy. So You took away till my soul ached and I knew it was no mistake that everything that meant anything to me was gone. Something right has to come from this wrong. It is the hurt that breaks me and all this pain it pulls me to my knees and the tears, they've changed me until what I couldn't see, it'd become so clear to me and this is the way.

You love me so much that You let me, You let me fall knowing that I would lose it all and hear You call. You loved me so much that You chased me when I ran away, You captured me by letting me run to the end, the end of myself, to the end of myself. And this is the way that You love me. The way that You love me.

INTERVIEW – MARILYN CARLSON NELSON

RHS: ROBERT H. SCHULLER MCN: MARILYN CARLSON NELSON

RHS: My guest today Marilyn Carlson Nelson is something else. She's been here before and her dad and I were friends. He started with nothing and built one of the great capitol empires of the world. She is the chairman, the former CEO of Carlson, the parent company of Radisson Country Inn and Suites Regent Carlson Wagonlit travel, the popular restaurant chain TGI Friday's. Carlson employs over one hundred sixty thousand employees in more than a hundred and fifty countries. On top of that, Marilyn is listed in Forbes magazine as among the worlds' one hundred most powerful women. She's a friend of many years, is a beautiful Christian and she's been married to her husband Dr. Glen Nelson for almost fifty

years. She's written a new book titled, How We Lead Matters. We have it in the bookstore. She knows how to lead and that makes the difference. So welcome with me Marilyn Carlson Nelson.

MCN: It's wonderful to be here. It's so inspiring in this space and hearing your voice and the music that makes you feel like you want to fall on your knees with thanksgiving and shout out with praise. It's wonderful.

RHS: Oh that's great. Well you have a new book.

MCN: I do, I do.

RHS: How did that come about?

MCN: Right here. Look at this, my favorite color yellow.

RHS: Yellow.

MCN: Well let me tell you how it came about. Actually I feel like an accidental author, but being here and being with you and realizing that something has pulled me into this authorship. I really didn't have time as a CEO to be writing a book, but my grandson at age twelve, Jamie, looked up at me one day and said, Mame were you alive during segregation? Now I thought did he mean the civil war? And then I realized that he was honestly asking a question about must have been studying 1965 the civil rights movement. And I was so grateful that he was even thinking about being inclusive and drawing the circle larger, but I also worried that perhaps my children and my children's children would see me as a CEO, would hear these words about power and might never really know what I fought for and what I stood for and what I believed in.

So I decided to combine my love for scripture and my love for poetry and little stories about my life. Stories about my life as a CEO, stories about my life in for some of your friends in China and Russia there's a story about from when I traveled to Russia, there's a story about my partner in China. There's a story about my children and grandchildren so that I've shared the vulnerabilities, the joys, the humor of a lifetime that perhaps was guided without doubt by a fundamental faith.

RHS: But you went to church every Sunday?

MCN: That's a funny story. Went to church every Sunday, but that's how I learned about accountability. My father insisted that we go down town, we would have no doubt come here. We lived in the country, he wanted to go down town because he wanted us to know that God was big so we should go to a big church. And we did. And when I was thirteen in middle school we went to church and the boys were throwing spitballs, I was at Sunday school and it was total chaos. And I thought this is awful, I don't like this, I'm not learning a thing. And on the way home I was very proud of myself and my little sister was sitting next to me and my parents were in the front and they were talking about how wonderful the sermon was and I said well Sunday School was terrible and I've decided I'm not going to go anymore. I thought they'd be very proud of me. Think oh she is really growing up. But instead my dad pulled the car over, turned around, looked at me. He had kind of fat fingers, I remember he pointed his finger at me and he said, you what? And I said I'm not going to go to Sunday school anymore. They've lost control, it's chaotic, I don't learn anything. And he said you're going to quite Sunday school? I said well I was thinking of it. And he said if you don't like it fix it.

RHS: Wow!

MCN: I started to cry. Fix it? My mom started to intervene and then she started to cry and we had a scene. You know one of those family scenes. And then I got home, he asked me to go to my room, I had to make a list of all the reasons, ways that we could fix Sunday school. And my mother for her intervention had to take

me to church on Tuesday to see the superintendent of the church and to explain what was wrong and how I thought we could fix it. It was my very first message about change management. Because we brought together some of the other Sunday school members and we fixed Sunday School, but what I learned from that and what I've heard echoing in my head so many times since is the power of each and every one of us to make a difference.

RHS: You know that spirit, I get around a lot, have often stayed in the management facilities for overnight hotels and suites, that kind of thing, and that spirit has really come down from you; a hundred and fifty thousand people in the world.

MCN: I'm so proud of being in business right now, because the best philanthropy in the world is a job.

RHS: Yes! Absolutely! Absolutely!

MCN: But there's another piece. It's not just a job, we must plan careers for people and we need to be more inclusive. I learned when I was first a young woman out of college and was looking for a job and the fact is that women weren't included in those days and I had to convince an employer to give me a role and he insisted that I sign my name MC Nelson because he said no one would buy stock from a woman. And I knew in that moment what it must be like for anybody whether it's based on gender or your nationality or your faith or the color of your skin to be left out and I promised myself that wherever I went in the world, whatever opportunities I had that I would draw the circle bigger. And I decided I wanted to live by a very special piece of poetry by Edwin Marcum. And it goes like this: He drew a circle and left me out; Heretic rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win. We drew a bigger circle and drew him in.

But let me tell you the lesson I had. When my youngest grandson, my first grandson, not my youngest, my very first. I was so excited. This baby was going to come home to my house and like any grandma, I had the cradle ready and I asked my daughter, can I take him out of the crib first thing in the morning, and she said of course, and his room was facing the east, and I went up and I leaned into the cradle and I took out this little bundle of joy. And I had the most extraordinary rush of love that I'd ever felt, I thought, in my life. And I lifted him up and the sun was coming behind him and it just felt like he had a halo, he was fresh from God. And I held him close and you know that little head feels right in the crook of your neck there, and then I know, and I've never forgotten that God spoke to me at that moment and said you cannot protect this baby. No matter how powerful you are, no matter what your role, you cannot protect this baby. If you don't care for those who have no one to take them out of the cradle, if you don't care for those who have no grandmother to love them, if you don't give voice to those who have no voice; and it changed my life forever because a part of every decision I make is how can I draw that circle bigger in order to protect him because if I don't, their lives will meet somewhere in a tower in New York or on a playground, or on a battlefield. And we can't let that happen.

RHS: Then you suffered the greatest loss a mother could suffer. Can you share that in a minute with us?

MCN: In October, quite a long time ago now, but every fall it feels as if it were yesterday, I'm reminded that we had a call that every parent dreads. And that was a call to tell us that our beautiful nineteen-year-old Juliet who'd just gone off to college, had died in an automobile accident. And I think you know the story, but it's true to this day that at first, I had had such a personal God. I couldn't believe that God could let this happen. And I felt angry and then I thought well why do I even have faith? I can't have her back. And then even though I left God, God

didn't leave me. And slowly but surely, as Glen and I began to try to make any kind of sense of this senseless loss, and anyone who's lost someone knows that you make a decision every day to get up, to go on or just to pull the covers up. And then finally we decided that what we had to do, that what perhaps God wanted us to do was to value every day that we had because it was a day she didn't have. And so I've played a little game with myself and at the end of each day, I ask myself did I live this day in such a way that I could sign my name to it. If this was my last day, because I learned when we lost her that we don't know, no know knows, she didn't know how long she had, I don't know, you don't know. What we do know is that the time we have is today. And so each night, and I recommend that each of you try this little exercise, because some days you just can't sign your name to. You just don't live up to your own potential. But then other days, you say today is the day. If this day had to stand for all time, to define me and my love of my fellow man and my faith, could I sign my name to the day? So for each of you, may you have so many days that you can sign your name to.
RHS: Let's tell Marilyn thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

SOLO – ANTHONY EVANS – “Wonderful, Merciful Savior”
Wonderful, merciful Savior, precious Redeemer and Friend. Who would've thought that a Lamb could rescue the souls of men. Oh, You rescue the souls of men.

You are the One that we praise, You are the one we adore. You give the healing and grace our hearts always hunger for. Oh, our hearts always hunger for.

Counselor, Comforter, Keeper, Spirit we long to embrace. You offer hope when our hearts have hopelessly lost their way. Oh, we've hopelessly lost the way.

You are the One that we praise, You are the one we adore. You give the healing and grace our hearts always hunger for. Oh, our hearts always hunger for.

Almighty, Infinite Father, faithfully loving Your own, here in our weakness You find us, falling before Your throne. Oh, we're falling before Your throne.

You are the One that we praise, You are the one we adore. You give the healing and grace our hearts always hunger for. Oh, our hearts always hunger for. You are the One that we praise, and You are the one we adore. You give the healing and grace that our hearts always hunger for. Oh, our hearts always hunger for, oh our hearts always hunger for, our hearts always hunger for.

RHS THANK YOU TO ANTHONY EVANS
RHS: Thank you Anthony!

INTRODUCTION TO MINISTER - RHS
RHS: The Washington Post described our speaker this morning as in the Evangelical Community, he is the most popular Apologist. He was an atheist. He was an award winning legal editor of the Chicago Tribune. You can't get much higher than that. And he became a believer in Jesus Christ. A New York Times best selling author, he was educated undergraduate at the University of Missouri and then at Yale Law School. Based on his extensive writing and research,

Southern Evangelical Seminary honored him last year with a Doctor of Divinity Degree. Now he's been a teaching pastor at two of America's largest churches, Willow Creek Community Church, Bill Hybels whose going to be preaching here two Sunday's between now and Christmas, and the Saddleback Valley Community Church. Lee has also taught the first amendment law at Roosevelt University. Professor, author, lawyer, been married for thirty-six years, has two grown children and now lets give Lee Strobel a warm Crystal Cathedral welcome.

LS: Thank you.

RHS: The case for the real Jesus.

LS: Right.

RHS: Just out?

LS: Just out, yeah.

RHS: Wow, go buy it everybody! Thank you.

MESSAGE/PRAYER – LEE STROBEL - "A Skeptic's Surprise"

LS: Thank you for this opportunity to be here with you today, to be the first speaker in America's Television Church, to speak to you at the Crystal Cathedral, the C3 contemporary service, and people all over the world who are just tuning in and wondering what this is all about. And as I prayed about what to talk about today, I thought you know I want to build my message around a simple story. I just want to tell you a story. It's a true story. It's my story. And it's a story, as Dr. Schuller indicated, that began in atheism. You know I concluded at a young age that you know the idea of an all loving; all powerful, all knowing creator of the universe was just absurd on the surface of it. It wasn't even worth my time to check out. I thought that God didn't create people, but people created God. Why? Because they were afraid of death and so they manufactured this idea, this benevolent jelly bean in the sky and this idea of heaven to make themselves feel better when they die. That's what I thought.

And because I had no belief in God, I had no real moral framework for my life. I sort of made up my morality as I went. My number one value in life was to bring myself maximum pleasure. And so this is embarrassing to talk about, but I came here to tell you the truth. I lived a very immoral and drunken and profane and narcissistic and self destructive kind of a life. I mean that's who I was. I remember one day I had such rage in myself, I think because I was always looking for that perfect high. I was always looking for that ultimate experience of pleasure and nothing ever quite measured up, so I had a lot of anger. I remember one day I was in an argument with my wife and I just reared back and I kicked a hole in our living room wall, just out of raw rage. In fact I will tell you the ugliest truth about me. When my little girl was just a little toddler, if she was alone in the living room, you know, on the floor playing with some toys and she would hear me come home from work through the front door, she would just quietly gather her toys and go in her room and close the door. Is he going to be drunk again? Is he going to be kicking holes in walls and yelling and screaming, you know, at least it's nice and peaceful in here. Friends that is the ugliest truth about me.

I married a woman who was agnostic. And through a relationship with a friend, she went on a spiritual journey and came to the point of putting her trust and faith in Jesus Christ, which I thought was the worst possible thing that could happen. And yet I began to see positive changes in her character and in her values and the way she related to me and the children, and in the ensuing months, and it was winsome and attractive and so one day she invited me to go to church, I decided to go. I heard this young preacher, a guy by the name of Bill Hybels, who you're going to hear in a few weeks, give a message on basic Christianity and I

walked out saying number one I was still an atheist but number two if this is true, this has huge implications for my life. And so I decided on that day to use my legal training and journalism training to systematically investigate is there any truth to Christianity or any other faith system. And I launched on what turned out to be a two year spiritual investigation. And what I want to do in the next few minutes is just summarize for you the key element of that investigation, cause I determined very quickly everything revolves around whether or not the resurrection of Jesus Christ is actually true, because anybody can claim to be the Son of God. You could, I could, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. So what. But, if He not only claimed it but then He returned from the dead? That's pretty good evidence that He is telling the truth. That's why the apostle Paul says "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You're still in your sins."

And so for those of you who are like me, maybe you know like I was, sort of a spiritual skeptic or spiritual seeker, for those of you who are followers of Jesus and you're looking for kind of a framework to be able to talk to your friends about why you believe what you believe, let me summarize the evidence for the resurrection very quickly using four words that begin with the letter E.

The first E stands for the word Execution. That Jesus was dead after He was crucified. Now I used to think that maybe Jesus survived the cross, maybe there was no resurrection because He lived through it. And yet as I travel the country and interviewed scholars and historians, I quickly learned that among historians in the field and this includes atheists, skeptics, agnostics, all of them believed that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is as solid of a fact as you are going to find from ancient history. There's no dispute on this among scholars in the field. Not only do we have multiple independent reports of the death of Jesus on the cross in the documents that make up the New Testament in the bible, reports that are based on eye witness testimony that go right back to the first century. But we also have five sources outside the bible that confirm the death of Jesus on the cross. We have Josephus, a first century Jewish historian who confirms in. Tacitus, another early historian. I mean you could ask an atheistic New Testament scholar like Gerd Ludemann or an agnostic New Testament scholar like Bart Ehrman and they will tell you that the death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion is an historically indisputable fact. To take a contrary position would get you laughed out of the academic world. And so the first E stands for Execution, Jesus was dead.

The second E stands for Early Accounts. We have early records about the resurrection. Why is that important? Because I thought the resurrection was merely a legend and it takes a long time for legend to develop. So I thought maybe a hundred, hundred and fifty years after the life of Jesus, people made up these stories, these legends about Him returning from the dead. That's what I thought until I did the research and interviewed the scholars. What I learned blew my mind! Because what I found is that we have preserved for us a creed that the earliest Christians would recite based on what they knew to be true. The apostle Paul preserves this creed in 1st Corinthians 15 verses 3 and following. This creed contains the essence of Christianity that Jesus died. Why? For our sins, that He was buried, that He was resurrected from the dead and then it mentions a specific names of eye witnesses, including skeptics whose lives were changed a hundred and eighty degrees because they encountered the resurrected Jesus. But get this: this creed has been dated back by scholars from a wide range of theological belief, to as early as two to eight years after the life of Jesus, and therefore the beliefs that make up that creed go back even earlier, virtually to the cross itself. So we don't have some huge time gap between the death of Jesus and some

legend developing a hundred years later that He returns from the dead. No, we've got a news flash from ancient history.

One of the greatest classical historians who ever lived was A.N. Sherwin-White of Oxford University. He studied the rate at which legend grew up in the ancient world and he determined that the passage of two generations of time is not even enough for legend to grow up and wipe out a solid core of historical truth. We don't have two generations of time passing here, we've got something that goes right back to the event itself. Friends, it would be absolutely unprecedented in the history of the world for legend to grow up that fast and wipe out a solid core of historical truth. So not only do we have an E for Execution, Jesus was dead, we have early reports that show this cannot merely be a legend.

Then the third E stands for the Empty Tomb. History tells us that Jesus' body was laid in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, it was sealed, it was placed under heavy guard and yet it was discovered empty on that first Easter morning. Now here I think the most powerful fact of all about the truth that the tomb of Jesus was empty, is that there was nobody in the first century who was claiming it was anything but empty. In other words, even the opponents of Jesus implicitly admitted that the tomb was empty. I mean they made up the stories. They tried to bribe the guards to say that the disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping which makes no sense. The disciples didn't have the motive or the means or the opportunity to steal the body. They weren't going to steal the body and what live a life of deprivation and be tortured to death for a lie? I don't think so. But get this: implicit in making up a cover story is that you're trying to cover something up. Why make up a cover story if the body is still in the tomb? Implicit in making up this cover story is the fact the tomb is empty and they tried to come up with some explanation that didn't hold water then and it doesn't hold water now. The question has never been is the tomb of Jesus empty; everybody can see that it was. The question is how did it get empty? The Romans weren't about to steal the body, they wanted Jesus dead. The religious leaders weren't about to steal the body, they want Jesus to stay dead. The disciples weren't about to steal the body, why, so they could knowingly and willingly be tortured to death for a lie? Friends, liars make bad martyrs. No, I think the evidence is that the tomb of Jesus was empty.

The reason for it is He physically returned from the dead, especially when you couple that with the fourth word that begins with the letter E which is the word Eye Witnesses because not only was Jesus' tomb empty, but over a period of time Jesus appeared alive a dozen different occasions to more than 515 individuals, to skeptics and doubters as well as to believers. To men and to women, to groups, to individuals, indoors and outdoors, they touched Him, they talked with Him, they ate with Him, I mean think of this. I was legal editor of the Chicago Tribune; I never covered a trial where there are 515 eye witnesses. If we were to create a witness stand and call people to the witness stand who encountered the resurrected Jesus, and cross examine them and question them for just 15 minutes each and we sat here around the clock, we'd be sitting here for five straight days. How many of us, after listening to more than a 128 straight hours of eye witness testimony, would walk away saying, ah I don't believe it.

Now as a skeptic, I had to come up with a way around this and I thought I did, I thought well wait a minute, maybe these were just hallucinations. Maybe they hallucinated these appearances of Jesus. But you know what? I'm a journalist, I check things out. So I interviewed a scholar, a leading expert on the topic of hallucinations and I said wouldn't you agree that these people merely saw hallucinations? And he looked at me and he said Lee that would be impossible. I

said well why? He said Lee you have to understand that hallucinations are individual events. They don't spread like a cold virus. They're like dreams, you know, I can't say to you how did you like that dream I had last night. It's like a hallucination. They're individual experiences. It's like you can't wake up your spouse in the middle of the night and say honey, honey, I'm having a great dream about a vacation in Hawaii. Why don't we both go back to sleep, we'll have the same dream, we'll save all the airfare, it'll be great. We can't do that, unfortunately.

And then he said something I'll never forget. He said Lee 515 people had the same hallucination at the same time would be a bigger miracle than the resurrection itself. And then he said something else interesting, he said, by the way, if these were merely hallucinations, then the body is still in the tomb, right? Oops, the body is gone.

Friends these appearances of Jesus were not hallucinations, they weren't legends or mythology, they were real events of history that revolutionized the lives of the disciples who were despondent and depressed after the death of Jesus and yet history shows they proclaimed that Jesus proved He's the Son of God by returning from the dead, they proclaimed that even to their death, not because they just had faith that it was true, not because they just believed that it was true, they proclaimed to their death that Jesus returned from the dead and proved He's the son of God cause they were there, they saw it, they touched Him, they talked to Him, they knew it was the truth and knowing the truth, they were willing to die for it.

Friends, I spent two years of my life investigating this stuff. I've written you know nearly a thousand pages in various books about the evidence. I've just touched on it, but finally one day it was a Sunday afternoon and I began to look at all of this evidence I'd amassed and I realized that in light of this avalanche of evidence that point so powerfully toward the truth of Christianity, it would have required more faith to maintain my atheism than to become a Christian. Because I realized to maintain my atheism in the face of all of this evidence would be like swimming upstream against a torrent of evidence flowing in the other direction. I couldn't do that. I was trained in journalism and law to respond to truth. And so I believed based on the evidence on that day. I concluded Jesus did claim to be the Son of God. He proved it by returning from the dead.

And then I didn't know what to do. And then I remembered somebody had pointed out a verse to me in the bible earlier, so I looked it up. John 1:12 and it says "To as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God even to those who believed in His name." And I looked at that and I noticed that verse forms an equation that spells out with specificity what it means to become a child of God. Believe plus receive equals become. And I realized I do believe based on the evidence that Jesus proved He's the Son of God by returning from the dead but I realized that's not enough. According to that verse, I had to not just believe, I had to receive Jesus Christ. I had to receive this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus purchased by His death on the cross when He died as my substitute to pay for all of the wrong doing I'd ever committed. And when I received as a gift of His grace, this forgiveness and eternal life, I would become a child of God forever and so I got on my knees and I poured out a confession of a lifetime of immorality that would make your hair curl. And at that moment, I received complete and total forgiveness through Jesus Christ and I became a child of God.

And my very first thought was hey I should probably tell my wife Leslie, you know, she probably like to know about this so I went out and I told her the news

and she burst into tears and she threw her arms around me and she said you hard hearted son of Baptist, she said, I've been telling you this for two years, hello! But she said you know honestly Lee, I had no hope for you. I had no hope for you. And I told that to someone in church and this sweet lady pulled me aside and said Leslie, no one is beyond hope. And Leslie said she gave me a verse from the Old Testament, Ezekiel 36:26, it says "Moreover I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove from you this heart of stone and I will give you a heart of flesh." And my wife, unbeknownst to me, had prayed that prayer for me every single day during my two year investigation.

And can I tell you what happened? Starting on that Sunday afternoon, not overnight, but over time, as I opened myself up to Jesus Christ and to His spirit, my life began to change. My priorities began to change, my morality began to change, my character began to change, my values began to change, my relationships began to change, my parenting began to change, all of these things began to change for the good. So much so that my little girl Allison, you know you think about her. At that time she was almost five years old. And all she had known the first five years of her life was a dad who was angry and absent and kicking holes in walls and coming home drunk. That was her entire world. That's all she knew but for the first five or six months after I opened my life to Jesus Christ, she would watch from her little five year old perspective, as God was changing her dad in front of her eyes and she watched and she watched and she watched and about five or six months later, she went up to her Sunday school teacher and then later to my wife and she said, "I want God to do for me what He's done for daddy." And at age five, my little girl gave her life to Jesus Christ. And today she's my very, very best friend.

Friends, God changed my life, He changed my wife, He changed my whole family, He changed our futures, He changed our eternities. And that's my story. So what do you do with it? What do you do? Let me just end very quickly by applying it to two groups of people here. Some of you may not yet believe, maybe this is kind of new to you, maybe a friend of you encouraged to listen today and so forth. But you're not quite there yet. Can I tell you something? That's okay. It's all right. But do what I did. Check it out. Investigate it yourself. The bible says in Hebrews 11 verse 6, "God rewards those who sincerely seek Him." So seek Him with sincerity. If my book, The Case for the Real Jesus would be helpful, great. There's a lot of other resources there. But check it out. But finally let me end with this. Some of you believe but you've never received and you wonder why has my life not changed? Why would my kids not have seen a transformation in me? Could it be because you're in intellectual agreement with the tenants of Christianity but there's not been a moment in time where you have received this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life from Jesus Christ? You've not received Jesus as your forgiver and leader?

Friends, let me encourage you; let me implore you for your sake, for your families sake, don't let your head hit the pillow tonight without doing what I did. And just say in a simple prayer: Lord Jesus, I do believe, I do believe that You are the Son of God as You claim to be. And I've not lived the kind of life that You've wanted me to live. I know that I haven't lived up to my own standards of morality, much less Yours Jesus, which are so much higher. I understand that. And so I want to turn, I want to repent, I want to stop walking my path and turn and walk Your path and receive Your love and Your grace and Your forgiveness and Your gift of eternal life. I can't earn it, I can't merit it, but You offer it as a gift of Your grace. And I accept it, I receive it, Lord Jesus, lead my life because from this moment on, I am Yours. Friends if you take that step today, even in this very moment, God

will change your life, He'll change your eternity, He will adopt you as a son or as His daughter forever.

Now let's pray. Father, I thank You for those who are spiritually seeking. May they find the truth about who You are. May they come to faith. May it change them. Father, for those of us who've been Your children for a long time, help us to explain to others why it is we believe what we believe. Thank You that we can be intelligent thinking people and be followers of Yours. You gave us minds. We thank You in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

ANTHEM - "How Glorious is Your Name"

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name through all the earth! O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name throughout the earth!

Your glory adorns the heavens above, displayed in the dawn as it breaks through the clouds. The voices of children chanting proclaim Your glory and Your splendor, and silence Your foes, and silence Your foes.

When I behold (the heavens), the work of Your hands, the moon and the stars You have set in place; Who are we.. who are we.. who are we that You are mindful of us, and our children, that You take care of them?

You have made us a little lower than the angels; And adorned us with glory and honor. You have given us dominion over Your handiwork. You have laid the world at our feet.

All the animals that roam the earth, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the ways of the water, all are gifts, all are gifts, all are gifts from You.

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your Name throughout the earth! O Lord, our Lord, how glorious, how glorious is Your Name throughout the earth! O Lord!

BENEDICTION - RHS

RHS: And now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you and may God give you peace in your going out, in your coming in, in your lying down, in your rising up, in your labor and in your leisure, in your laughter and in your tears until you come to stand before Jesus in which there will be no sunrise, no sunset, only eternal life forevermore.