

"This book will end your fretting and fearing about life after death.

You'll gain the confidence and peace of mind that come from settling your eternal destiny."

—RICK WARREN, *The Purpose Driven Life* and the *Daily Hope* broadcast

THE CASE FOR Heaven

*A Journalist Investigates
Evidence for Life After Death*

LEE
STROBEL

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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The Case for Heaven

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Introduction

Can We Know There's a Heaven?

*Is this dying? Why, this is bliss . . . Earth is
receding; Heaven is opening; God is calling. I
must go.*

DWIGHT L. MOODY, JUST BEFORE HIS DEATH

My eyes fluttered. They opened and struggled to focus. My mind fought confusion. I was on my back, stretched out on a firm surface below a bright light. A face came into view, looking at me—a doctor, his surgical mask pulled down.

“You’re one step away from a coma,” he said. “Two steps away from dying.”

My eyelids sagged shut. I drifted back into unconsciousness—a welcomed relief from the grotesque hallucinations that had plagued me.

At times like this, hovering over the hazy border between life and death, the afterlife is no longer a mere academic topic to be researched, analyzed, and debated. Heaven and hell, our existence beyond the grave, become desperately relevant. They’re all that matter.

I know what you’re thinking: *Poor guy; he almost died.* But here’s what *I’m* thinking: *Just wait until it happens to you!*

Because it will. One way or another, next week or in decades, you’re going to creep up to the dividing line between now and

forever. When you slip from this world, what will you find? A void of nonexistence? A dark realm of regret and recrimination? Or a reality that's more vivid, more exhilarating, more rewarding, more *real* than anything you've ever known? At that moment, in the midst of that existential transition, nothing will be more important. And if it will matter so much then, isn't it worth investigating now?

When I was an atheist, I thought I knew what awaited me after my heart stopped pumping and my brain waves flattened. *Nothing*. My existence would cease. Activity in the world would continue unabated, but I would be absent. It was difficult—and disconcerting—to imagine.

After my wife announced that she had become a follower of Jesus, I used my journalism and legal training to investigate whether there was any credibility to Christianity or any other religion. I concluded after nearly two years that there's persuasive evidence that Jesus indeed is the unique Son of God. I ended up leaving my newspaper career to tell others what I had learned.

Of course, the Christian faith gave me a whole different picture of eternity. The Bible talks about a vivid postmortem realm. Though this is embedded in overall Christian theology, I never really studied whether there was specific evidence or compelling logic to support this heavenly vision. Essentially, I set much of the issue aside for a while. After all, I was young and healthy.

Then came that Thursday evening in the summer of 2011 when Leslie found me unconscious on our bedroom floor. The ambulance took me to a hospital in nearby Parker, Colorado, where the emergency room physician gave me the dire news that I was on the precipice of death.

It turned out I had a rare medical condition called *hyponatremia*, a frighteningly sharp drop in my blood sodium level that caused my brain to swell and threatened to snuff out my existence. Suddenly, it wasn't enough to have a few inchoate

suppositions about the world to come. It was insufficient to cling to some antiseptic-sounding doctrines that had never been adequately examined. I needed to know for sure what happens when I close my eyes for the final time in this world.

The Evidence for Eternity

After recovering from my medical trauma, I decided to embark on a quest to get answers about the afterlife to satisfy my heart and soul. I traveled to South Bend, Indiana, and Portland, Oregon, to San Antonio, Denver, Chicago, and beyond as I sat down with scholars to quiz them about how they know what they know about this all-important matter.

I discussed heaven with them, but so much more. Can neuroscience tell us whether we have a soul that can survive our body's demise? Might the intriguing accounts of near-death experiences reveal something about our future? What insights can physics, history, and philosophy provide about our existence beyond this world? And what about Jesus, the one who was dead and gone but then reportedly was encountered alive a few days later? What light might he shed on the subject?

I wanted to know whether spending forever in a blissful paradise makes rational sense. And who gets to go to heaven anyway? Some Christians believe everyone wins a ticket to paradise—even our pet dogs. And how about the awful reality of that “other place”—wouldn't it be more humane for God to quickly extinguish people who are headed for hell rather than consigning them to an eternity of suffering? More and more pastors are saying so.

I also explored alternatives to the Christian worldview—for instance, reincarnation. Shouldn't we listen to people who say they've lived in the past? Maybe life *is* cyclical, as Eastern religions teach—birth and death followed by more of the same until

we're ultimately absorbed into The Absolute. Millions of people believe that's true.

Let's face it, there's a lot of controversy about life after death—and sometimes religious leaders aren't much help. When Union Theological Seminary president Serene Jones was asked by a reporter what happens when we die, her first words were, "I don't know! There may be something, there may be nothing."¹

Ask a cross section of Americans the same question, and one out of six will shrug their shoulders. They have no idea what occurs after death. Only a slim majority (54 percent) believe they'll end up in heaven.²

As for atheists, I suspect many of them think about death more frequently than some of them admit. At least, I did when I was a spiritual skeptic, staring at the ceiling in the middle of the night and shuddering at the prospect of my ultimate demise.

"For me, the fear of death is far and away the most immediate and challenging aspect of my atheism," one humanist told *The Atlantic*. "Death affects me in a profound way."³ Even Bart Ehrman, the agnostic New Testament scholar, once conceded, "The fear of death gripped me for years, and there are still moments when I wake up at night in a cold sweat."⁴

Many people get to the closing moments of their life—often a time of angst and abject fear—without any certainty about what to expect next. One author tells of asking a thirty-one-year-old friend who was on his deathbed what dying was like. "I don't know," the man replied. "I don't really know. Sometimes it seems like some blackness coming toward me. And sometimes it doesn't feel like anything."⁵

That's not poetic, but it's honest. He sincerely had no idea what would transpire in those fateful moments to come. What is hidden inside that ominous approaching darkness? Will he feel anything after he breathes his last?

Truly, what's more important than answers to questions like

these? Wouldn't you rather investigate these issues now instead of being tormented by them on your deathbed? Think about how your life might change today—your priorities, decisions, and worldview—once you ascertain with confidence what awaits you at the conclusion of your time in this world. After all, if there really is an afterlife, you'll be spending a lot more time there than here.

So come with me on the path of discovery. Consider the evidence. Evaluate the logic. Pursue the truth with an open mind. Then reach your own informed verdict in the case for heaven.

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The Case for Heaven

A Journalist Investigates Evidence for Life After Death

Lee Strobel

Bestselling and award-winning author Lee Strobel interviews experts about the evidence for the afterlife and offers credible answers to the most provocative questions about what happens when we die, near-death experiences, heaven, and hell.

With a balanced approach, Strobel examines the alternative of Hell and the logic of damnation, and gives a careful look at reincarnation, universalism, the exclusivity claims of Christ, and other issues related to the topic of life after death. With vulnerability, Strobel shares the experience of how he nearly died years ago and how the reality of death can shape our lives and faith.

Looking at biblical accounts, Strobel unfolds what awaits us after we take our last breath and answers questions like:

- Is there an afterlife?
- What is heaven like?
- How will we spend our time there?
- And what does it mean to see God face to face?

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