

# Strobel encourages Texas Baptists to ‘make people thirst for God’

November 16, 2016

WACO—Lee Strobel invited Texas Baptists to “live on the evangelistic edge,” where ordinary days can take extraordinary twists as Christians allow God to ambush them with opportunities to share their faith.

Strobel, a teaching pastor at Woodlands Church in Houston and professor of Christian thought at Houston Baptist University, preached at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

## **Be salt and light**

He cited the passage from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus calls Christians to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

“What did Jesus mean by those metaphors of salt and light?” Strobel asked. “I think he was saying: ‘If you’re a follower of mine, I want you to live lives that are like salt, that make people thirst for God. I want you to live lives that are like light, that shine my message of hope and grace and love and compassion and forgiveness and eternal life, to shine my message of hope into dark areas of despair.’”

Living on the evangelistic edge requires Christ’s followers to engage lost people as Jesus would, Strobel said. When Christians study Jesus’ life, they see many ways he does this, but Strobel honed in on two—prayer and openness to questions.

## **Pray for the spiritually lost**

"I can't think of anything Jesus embarked upon of significance that he didn't first bring it to the Father in prayer. In fact, have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus' prayers for spiritually lost people continued right up until his final gasps on the cross?" he asked.

"In light of that, how can we justify not praying consistently and fervently and expectantly for lost people in our lives? What if tonight you're alone in your room and Jesus physically appears to you. And what if he looks at you and says, 'I am going to answer every single prayer that you prayed last week.' If Jesus said that to you tonight, would there be anybody new in the kingdom of God tomorrow?"

Strobel challenged ministers to apply this principle by asking each member of their congregation to pray for one lost person for one minute at 1 p.m. every day.

### **Be open to questions**

He also urged Texas Baptists to be open to questions. Strobel pointed to John the Baptist, who had been sure of who Jesus was and proclaimed it on many occasions. But even John had doubts and questions after he was thrown in prison. He recruited a few of his followers to find Jesus and ask him point-blank whether he was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

"It's OK for us, as followers of Jesus, to have questions," Strobel said. "It's even OK to have certain doubts, as long as we pursue answers. The problem is too many people get squelched by their church when they ask a question, when they express a doubt.

"We need to create safe places in our churches, in our homes, in our communities, where believers feel free to express honest questions about the faith. And we in our churches need to be ready, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, to help our spiritually confused friends, our lost friends, get answers to the spiritual sticking points that are holding them up in their journey toward

God."

## **On the evangelistic edge**

Living on the evangelistic edge is exciting, Strobel said. It's always an adventure to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Christians try to reach lost people.

He told the story of one of his evangelism attempts as a new Christian when he was still working as a newspaper editor in Chicago. Easter was coming soon, and he felt led by God to invite his atheist coworker to church.

"I thought: 'This is great! If God is prompting me to do this, something wonderful is probably going to happen. He's probably going to repent right there.' I had a lot of confidence," Strobel said.

Strobel tried several invitational approaches, but his friend swiftly shut him down each time, finally saying, "I don't want to go to your stupid church."

He left the office confused. Why had he felt so compelled to invite his friend, only to be shut down? Strobel said it bothered him for years, because to this day, his friend still is an atheist.

## **The rest of the story**

But the story does not end there.

"Several years after that, I was a pastor of Willow Creek Church, and I just preached, and I went down off the platform and a guy came up to me and said, 'I need to shake your hand and thank you for the spiritual influence you've had on my life,'" Strobel recalled.

The man said several years earlier he'd lost his job. He had no money and was in danger of losing his home and car. He called up a friend who had a

newspaper and asked if there were any odd jobs he could do.

“One day, not long before Easter, I was in the business office of the newspaper,” the man told Strobel. “I was on my hands and knees behind a big desk on the floor working on some tile, and you walked in the room, and I don’t even think you knew I was there.

“You started talking to this guy about God, and you started inviting him to your church, and you gave the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, and this guy was shutting you down. I’m on my hands and knees working on this tile, listening to all this, and I’m thinking, ‘I need God.’ As soon as you left, I picked up the phone and called my wife and said, ‘We’re going to church this Easter.’”

“It’s a new form of evangelism—ricochet evangelism,” Strobel said. “You share your faith, it bounces off a hard heart, and you don’t know where it’s going to go! This is the unexpected adventure of the Christian life. You don’t want to miss this.”

*Lauren Sturdy works for Buckner International.*