

# OpenTheo

## Whom Am I Risking For?

August 19, 2020



### **Life and Books and Everything** - Clearly Reformed

Season 2 of Life and Books and Everything is here! Kevin DeYoung, Justin Taylor, and Collin Hansen sit down together to discuss their summer reading lists, how to balance the need for safety and the need to trust God's sovereignty in the pandemic, Grace Community Church and their choice to gather indoors for services in California, and should the Big 10 have canceled? This episode is brought to you by Crossway. As Kevin says on this episode, "There are lots of Christian publishers, but with Crossway, you know that you have men and women working there who care very much about the content about the truth of God's word, not just selling books—every book publisher has to sell some books but—more importantly, they want to edify and build up the church."

In particular, we want to highlight the book by Dane Ortlund, 'Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers.' Some say that, "this book is like J. I. Packer's Knowing God," others say, "this is the best book I've read in a decade." There is lots of high praise for Gentle and Lowly, by Dane Ortlund, so please check it out.

Timestamps:

Introduction + Book Giveaway Announcement with Crossway [0:00 - 4:50]

Summer Reading [4:50 - 29:47]

Collin's summer reading: The Future of Christian Marriage by Mark Regnerus

Spying on the South: An Odyssey Across the American Divide by Tony Horwitz

The Minutemen and Their World by Robert A. Gross

Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church by Paull David Tripp

Justin's summer reading:

Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War by Tony Horwitz

Redeeming the Great Emancipator by Allen C. Guelzo

Reconstruction: A Very Short Introduction by Allen C. Guelzo  
Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War by Tony Horwitz

The Panic Virus: The True Story Behind the Vaccine-Autism Controversy by Seth Mnookin

Kevin's summer reading:

Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World by Laura Spinney

## **Transcript**

[Music] Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. Hope you had a great summer.

I'm joined as always with Nolan Hanson and our patient resonator. As his name says on my screen, Justin Taylor, we have some fun things in store for you with this season two as we're calling it. We have several interviews lined up over the next few months and we're taking things up a notch.

We have a producer so he is going to produce things and help us. Hi Caleb. Hey Caleb.

We are going to look good as we said before. We got three faces for podcast radio right here but he's going to at least make us sound good and making this all possible. We have a sponsor for today's program which we are very grateful for none other than Crossway.

All of us have worked with Crossway. Some of us work for Crossway. We are very grateful to have their support.

We love their books. We love working with them and we love benefiting from the resources that they put out. There are lots of Christian publishers but with Crossway, you know that you have men and women working there who care very much about the content, about the truth of God's word, about not just selling books.

Every book publisher has to sell some books but more importantly they want to edify and build up the church. I love Crossway and I'm glad to have them. For our sponsor today's program in particular, we want to highlight the book by Dane Orton Gintle and Loli.

When I look at a new book, I do look at the blurbs, not so much to see who blurbed it though that can matter but the level of excitement. Is this a standard just mail it in? Hey, warmly recommended or does this seem like a uniquely excellent book and with the blurbs for Dane's book and the reviews that it's been getting. People are saying really amazing things.

This is like J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*. This is the best book I've read in a decade so lots of very high praise Dane Orton *Gintle* and *Loli*. Check it out and for our loyal L.B.E. listeners, that's *Life in Books and Everything*.

We have a bundle of three books to give away. So in addition to Dane's book, we have another Orton *Gaven Orton* finding the right hills to die on and then not an Orton but also a fine person in her own right, Nancy Guthrie, *Saints and Scoundrels* in the story of Jesus. So you get those three books.

How can you get an opportunity to win these three books? You need to subscribe to *Life in Books and Everything* on Apple Podcasts or whatever podcast streaming service you use. Leave, of course, a five star review. If they have more stars, leave all the stars you can and then contact us L.B.E. as in *Life in Books and Everything*.

L.B.E. Producer at gmail.com and we're going to take your word for it when you say that you subscribed and you gave a scintillating five star review and then you'll be entered in and if you win, we will let you know and mail out those three books. Thank you, Crossway. Find yourself a sponsor that you don't have to cross your fingers about when you're talking about.

One that you can genuinely, genuinely appreciate and so thank you, Crossway. And thank you for our listeners. We really appreciate you and a publisher who doesn't believe in crossing fingers either.

Yeah, well, thank you for that and even the poverty of God. I'm not only an ad man, I'm also a client. So we are very grateful for Crossway.

So welcome back from your summer. We're going to jump right in. We often save the books for the end.

Here's what we're going to do. We're going to talk about some books. We're going to talk about safety and sovereignty.

And then we're going to tie that into, I don't know, some things happening around the world like the, uh, Sissification of Big Ten football, the John MacArthur versus L.A. County, perhaps, maybe even say something about the upcoming presidential election just to keep you listening to the end. Colin, you read 13,000 books this summer. How did you read so many books? You had all day off to read books.

Tell us a little bit about that. And then I'm going to make you just pick maybe three that you found particularly interesting or worthwhile. You know, as a podcast for readers, lovers of books, people will often want to know from us just how do you read books? And one of the ways you do is simply you need time.

There is simply no substitute for just having time to read books. And part of that comes

in finding every little nook and cranny to be able to read in and knocking out 10 pages here, 10 pages there. Sometimes it looks like being able to concentrate for the better part of a month on reading books.

So that was one of the things I was blessed to do through my job at the gospel coalition in addition to hanging out with you find fellows. I also host my own podcast gospel bound, which is an author podcast in large part. So I have to read up on that podcast.

So I was able to read a number of books, exciting books coming out this fall especially. So let me just focus on three of them. The first one cross promotion is with Mark Reganaris, the future of Christian marriage.

Actually, I have an interview out with him now on gospel bound. Some of you may know, Kevin and Justin, I assume you guys are familiar with Mark's work. Yep.

Over the years, a you could say controversial sociologist, but what makes him controversial is probably what would make him pretty well mainstream on this podcast, meaning that he's willing to follow sociology when it leads, when it guides into God's truth about family and sex and things like that instead of sharing what is the current sort of politically correct conclusions. So that, I'm recommending that book for all Christian leaders because the institution of marriage and the trends related to marriage have profound implications for church leaders and simply for all of our lives. And so, happy to talk about that one further if you guys have any interest.

But otherwise, let me check it out. Go ahead. I sometimes get him confused, not actually confused, but in my mind, they're talking about some of the same ideas with Bradley Wilcox.

They're good friends, both Catholic, both committed Catholic sociologists at major public universities. So Brad's stuff, I just heard an interview with him is talking about why marriage matters. And he talks about how marriage is not only a personal good and all of the ways in which if you're married, it's a leading indicator for making more money, for being happier.

So it's not just good for you. It's a social good. It's a societal good.

And he's really good at talking about how marriage shapes, in particular, it shapes males, some of it may be selection bias, the males who are ready to get married are sort of mature. So I have that in my mind. And I'm really excited to read Mark's book.

I have it ordered, ready to come to me when it comes out. Is it the same sort of stuff? Is he taking a different angle? Is he looking just in particular at Christian trends and surveys? Yeah, it's the future of Christian marriage. So he's only talking to Christians.

He's talking to them in seven different countries. And his major argument is that

marriage is no longer a durable good that you enter into for improvement in life, but it is rather the capstone at the end of your sort of like early adulthood. So through your 20s.

And so he wants to explore how we reached that point. And then also, what are the implications of that? He's not very positive toward that trend for some reasons that he lays out. But his main observation is that Christians take for granted that that's the way marriage should be, which is a dramatic change in the matter of about two generations there.

So the capstone view of marriage he describes it as. And it reminds us that we tend to focus on what we can see, what the news tells us. Those are the most important things where often is the things that seem invisible to us.

They're moving underneath slowly, but massively. I mean, every church will be affected and has been already by these changes in marriage by delayed marriage, by fewer children in marriage, by this different view of what marriage is. So we tend to focus on the big flashy stories they get the headlines and the protests.

And we understand we need to do some of that. But these issues are really the strong currents underneath. And Christian views largely don't differ from the broader culture's views there.

And also, interestingly, from country to country, from Russia to Lebanon, to the United States, Mark does not find dramatically different views. Western norms prevail, and not just Western norms, but Western norms from the last couple generations. So that's the book that I remembered the most from summer.

And then like I said, you can go check out an interview that I did with Mark on gospel bound. A couple others. I think Justin, I think you're listening to Tony Horwitz's famous Confederates in the Attic book.

Correct. So I just decided to pick up. I started a bookstore in Franklin, Tennessee this summer.

And then the publisher was kind enough to send it to me. And I have to admit, I had forgotten that Tony had died. So I was thinking, I'll get this book and I'd love to talk with him.

But of course, Tony tragically passed too early, I think last year. So this book spying on the south is his last book. And the old premise of the book, very similar to the formula, Justin, you're the one who with crossway signed my first book, Young Rest is Reformed, brought me on board.

And you'll remember that that book, Confederacy and the Attic is really what gave me inspiration through the help of our friend Ted Olson at Christian today to write that book.

So the whole movement was inspired by the Confederacy. By Confederates and the Attic.

That is correct. Let's just make sure to take that out of context. So people understand that.

I mean, Justin, once you describe just kind of like what the premise is of what he does with his writing. He basically opens the book describing his own experiences, a kid growing up in the south and being fascinated with the Civil War and reenacting. And then he moves on as he becomes an adult, as most of us do putting away our childish obsessions, but then decides to basically embed himself like with Confederate reenactors and people who believe in the lost cause and those who don't care as much about it, but just glory in trying to go back in a time machine as it were.

So he's camping out in the woods and he's learning about a whole Southern culture and subculture that he didn't quite know existed. And so it's a really fascinating first person book that opens up historical things and also kind of contemporary social history. Yeah, I don't think he actually grew up in the south.

I think he grew up in the north, but he always had a fascination with the Civil War, which led him to want to learn about it. So I think the way he seems to do really well as a journalist where he's not writing, he's sympathetic to people. He really describes himself as a people person, but he's not necessarily sympathetic to any of the ideas.

So Spying on the South is an interesting book. I don't think it's kind of path breaking the way Confederate and the attic is. He's tracing Frederick Law Olmstead, designer of Central Park, his tours through the south before the Civil War, and just takes you into a lot of different Southern subcultures.

And I think that's probably my big takeaway from the book is that if anybody imagines the south to be one kind of place, it is a massive place with lots of people and seemingly infinite subcultures. And it was a book where I living as a Southern earth thought, I don't recognize any of myself or any of my culture in this book, which is fair because he was following Olmstead's travels. Olmstead didn't come through Alabama, at least he didn't have time to write about it.

And so I didn't expect it, but I just thought, wow, this stuff is as foreign to me as it would have been to him for the most part. So I was in DC. Okay, there you go, DC.

Yeah, so North and South. I mean, I get that. Yeah, technically that is the South historically speaking.

So the third one real quick that I thought to highlight, and I love to talk about these history books with you guys would be Robert Gross is the Minutemen in their world. Tommy Kid had recommended that. See, Kevin, did that come up in your graduate

studies, your doctoral studies at all? Yeah, I didn't get that into the revolutionary side of things.

Okay, all right. So, so I think what this book is considered groundbreaking in is social history. So it's a classic New England town study of Concord, Massachusetts.

And it tells you the story not merely of what happened on those shots heard around the world that inaugurated the American Revolution, but also the religious dynamics. I think that was part of what was so interesting to me, was how the old light new light revival dynamics had played out in this town and helped to shape its social future heading into the revolution. So that was really interesting.

But we just love history on this podcast, but I liked that especially as not only just interesting in of itself, but as somebody who loves historiography, reading a landmark work in that kind of town studies and social history. And the author has a, this is an anniversary edition. So he's got an end where he just describes kind of of how why he did history that way.

And there were some clear political motivations of why he did history that way. But those were interesting. But I'll sneak in one more, also from our, when did that book come out, the minute men book? I'm trying to remember the anniversary edition I read was like from 2000 or something like that.

So I think it was about a 25th anniversary edition. So I'm guessing 75. Yeah, something like that.

Yeah. And I mean, what you're talking about the historiography is important because it's gone in waves. And I don't think these are mutually exclusive, but you have sort of the history as big ideas that bounce through history.

You have people, right, you have the great man or great woman, who has created and defines a time, you have the really discredited, what's called Wiggish history, which is history perpetually evolving and telling history in a way that looks backward in all the ways that it becomes our now enlightened self. So, you know, I was taught really that I don't know, there's a school, but there is a Quentin Skinner school of history and saying from his, and there's been a book about it by this title, *Seeing Things Their Way*. So to do intellectual history, trying to see things their way, and that's coincided with a renewed interest and appreciation among secular historians, even for the place of religion, certainly Noel and Marston, you know, helped with that and the American scene, but trying to understand a person in history who they are.

And I really think this is important. It does have relevance for all the debates about statues and how we understand the American founding. As I said in one of my blog pieces, you know, we don't have to just look on, you know, an unrealistic sunny side, but

there's a difference between warts and all and warts and nothing else approach to history.

And so, I think it's a Christian part of loving our neighbor as ourselves, including our dead neighbor, is to try to see things their way, try to enter in sympathetically, which doesn't mean at the end, we will have sympathy with what everything they did or their positions. But I think it's really important role in this story. And then what you just described was in some ways a reaction against that great ideas, great man view of history to say.

Yeah, let's what about the price of fish at the marketplace and how that affected people since. So, you know, I did, there was a little bit of that in my training, but there was definitely a sense of there's some people that you might encounter or you might end up with on your committee who are going to want to see some of that. But that wasn't mainly what I was trying to do.

Well, if you want to see a really good example of how I think those two schools merge, it would be Marsden's biography of Edwards. Right. So it's very much, it's a sympathetic intellectual history, seeing things from his perspective, but it's not, it's not hagiographical at all in the sense that Edwards is definitely a figure who deserves some measure of criticism and his views were, his views were novel in some cases or certainly innovative, which invites that kind of criticism.

But part of what set that book apart from some other evangelical histories, including of Edwards was precisely because it was located within the dynamics of the town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Rather you had the mainly in the dynamics of theological ideas. Marsden's really good at that, but he's putting it in a town in a place.

Like I said, he fuses them together and that is appropriate in the case of Edwards because he's pastoring in the same town as his grandfather, same church taking over for him, and he changes his grandfather's views and then ultimately he's ousted by that church. So it helps to explain how those dynamics have come to play apart from merely, wait, I thought Jonathan Edwards was only writing these brilliant treatises and things like that. So I'll kick it to you, Justin, for any books you want to talk about, but in a transition there, I wanted to mention the fourth one, which is Paul Tripp's book lead coming out from Crossway soon.

And I think that's one we should devote a future episode to at least a segment in the future talking about because I think we can get pretty personal on that one with what we've experienced over the last decade, plus as friends, and also just what we've learned from the Lord during that time. So I don't want to spoil any more of that, but as I was going back preparing to do an interview with Paul, for gospel bound coming up, it was amazing how many lines I had underlined, either because there was something the Lord had had impressed upon me, or something that I'd seen tragically with a friend and some of our friends. So yeah, good month of reading.



And so Justin was here from you. Yeah, I definitely want to be Colin Hansen when I grow up and have those times, not only to have that time off, but then also to have that discipline and then able to read that amount. You can write or you can read, but you really can't do both unless you're Kevin DeYoung.

So Justin, when you're writing, it's not going to happen. The reading. Well, for my books, I think I listened to three finishing Confederates in the attic now, and then read a couple of short books.

And they're going to all sound similar in terms of themes, except for one kind of outlier, but two books by Ellen Gellzo, who's now at Princeton. And the first one was three lectures he gave at Harvard redeeming the great emancipator on Abraham Lincoln. So the unwanting of Abraham Lincoln, the anti-slavery world of Abraham Lincoln, and then Lincoln's God and emancipation.

So I admire scholars who can do massive monographs and stand in awe of them, but I also have a new appreciation for scholars, perhaps the latter quarter of their scholarship in life to be able to do short books. So I also picked up Ellen Gellzo's very short introduction in Oxford series on Reconstruction, 128 pages or something like that, to try to get 12 years plus with ongoing ramifications into 128 pages, I think takes a unique talent and ability. So then we've already talked about Confederates in the attic, and I also listened to Tony Horowitz's Midnight Rising.

So I guess maybe Tony Horowitz's publicist is the, the, the, the silent sponsor of this. Yes. And then I listened to the panic virus by science journalist at MIT.

I don't know how to say it's last name exactly. Steve Moonkin on the myth between autism and vaccines and science and public health and thinking that just have a feeling vaccines might be in the discussion coming up. Our culture.

So I want to start reading on that. And you can send all of your hate mail to Kevin.djung@gmail.gov. Oh, like I like I said, that's what for LBE producer at gmail.com for all of your vaccine related questions and complaints, please. Yeah.

But it's a fascinating discussion. Science and public trust and epistemology. And how do you know what you know and competing voices and how to sort through things and the role of instinct versus the role of experts.

And this is not unrelated to what's going on with COVID and thinking through all the different competing voices and the partisan way in which things tend to shake out. So that seems like a relevant book and want to do some more reading and thinking and learning on vaccines and science. That's great.

Yeah. My, my wife read that book and I, I want, I want to have read it, but it's one of those books. It's like 400 pages.

Isn't it 350 pages? Or I kind of wanted a, somebody give me like a 15 page long essay version, but he tells a lot of stories in there. If either of you read, you know, there's the big book on the 1918 virus, the name escapes me right this moment, but then there's a great influence. Yeah, the great influence.

But then there's the shorter one that's more global by Laura Spiny or Spiny called Pale Rider. I'm about halfway through that one. It's, it really is uncanny how many things sound familiar.

Really, even just 100 years ago. I mean, it actually sounds similar. Well, it sounds a lot worse than with the death tolls and the carnage, but the, the kind of protests over restrictions, the wearing of masks, the closing of churches, the refusing to do it, the, the way it's different towns would agree to or not agree to the, the protocols and the ramifications there of and how it, even the naming of it, you know, this, it's come to us as the Spanish flu, which is really a, you know, a misnomer, but it was named several other things named based on other parts of the world, depending on where you were.

Just so happened that, you know, at one point, we thought in America, that was a port of entry through Spain. So became the Spanish and flew into that. So that, that's a book.

I read several books. I did more writing, but I'll just mention three quickly. Shelby Steele, the content of our character, Justin, you've read that one before, maybe Colin has as well.

I've read a lot of Shelby Steele and I've read his, his later stuff. This is his first book, or at least maybe his first book on this topic. So it's, it's quite, it's 25 years old now.

When was it first written 1990s? So it's even older than that. But remarkable, not, not a Christian that I'm aware of, but I find it hard to believe that there's someone who could not benefit from reading Shelby Steele, the content of our character. It is hard to just say, well, he's, he's, he's a conservative.

He's a liberal. I don't know that either label fits him. Probably, you know, liberals would think he was a conservative, but he's really, he's honest, he's reflective, he's personal, he's insightful, and it's not a long book.

I, I underlined as much in that book as I have in any book for a long time. It's about hundred and six pages. And poetic and lyrical in some senses, wouldn't you say? Yes, very, very much so.

I mean, there were, there were parts. Yeah, for a non-Christian book, I felt myself stirred to want to sit back and examine my own heart. And I really wish I, maybe sometime have an opportunity to, to read through that book.

If anyone is thinking of starting a reading group on white fragility, do Shelby Steele

instead? It'd be beneficial for you. I also read by Harvey Mansfield book published by Yale, amazingly called Manliness published in 2006. And he is a professor of government at Harvard University.

And he goes through, and it's, it's a, it's a defense of manliness, but it's not, he's not without, uh, do criticism. It's really a look at literature and history and how manliness has been conceived and trying to do which must seem impossible, especially for a Harvard professor, to try to put a good word in for manliness, which he defines as, uh, trying to find his exact wording, but it's assertiveness and aggressiveness in the face of risk. This is basic definition of manliness, which, you know, there's something to it.

So, um, that was a fascinating book. I think there's other books you would want to read on gender sort of issues, but that was good. And then the third book I'll mention by Amity Schleis.

She's written a number of good history books, one on Calvin Coolidge, one on the Forgotten Man about the Great Depression. And this one is called Great Society, a new history. And yeah, it's a 400 plus pages and then the, the appendices, but it's, it's more or less a political and economic history of the Great Society programs, really starting in 1964, LBJ's speech.

I forgot that that was at the University of Michigan, where he, uh, he unveiled the term Great Society. And then sort of culminating with the destruction of the Pruitt-Ego housing complex in St. Louis, which has come to be known as, you know, you'll have to go Google that if you're not familiar with it, but come to be known as sort of the example of failed government program, this massive housing complex, which made a bad situation a lot, lot worse, uh, and ended up destroying family networks and systems and putting, uh, people into this massive housing complex in St. Louis. And then some years later destroyed the whole monstrosity.

So, you know, Schles is, is more of a conservative, but she doesn't write with, uh, you know, it's not a, it's not a hit job, but there is sort of an underlying theme in the book that the Great Society for all of its good intentions and all of its massive outlay of resources did not really accumulate a long string of successes. So any last book before we move in the second half to some other topics, book that you wanted to mention. I think we, I think we got plenty to talk about.

Okay. All right. All right.

Changing gears. Um, I was talking recently with, with another Christian leader, someone, a little outside our circles, but I think you guys would know him. We had a, we had a nice 15, 20 minute conversation, talked about some corny Vince stuff.

And then we actually talked about a half hour, offline afterward, ended up talking about

some things related to politics and the elections, some things related to COVID. And at the very end, he said something that stuck with me because he's not reformed guy. And he said, would you reform people, do the rest of us a favor, and really remind us of God's sovereignty, which was a poignant coming from, you know, a friend who's not in the reform sort of world.

And so I'd love to get your thoughts. I'll start with you, Justin. You can take it in any direction you want, but how do we understand this interplay? I don't know if balance is the right word tension and tenomy.

What is the right word between the pursuit of safety, which there's biblical precedence for looking to the aunt who stores up and being wise with your resources. So safety on the one hand and an absolute rock solid confidence in God's sovereignty in the other because it strikes me and we'll talk at the general level first and maybe dip down into some specifics that so much of what's divisive right now for Christians has to do with, well, how much of a risk are you really at? coronavirus? What really is the risk? 2020 election? Is it another, you know, flight 93, 91 flight 93 election that's going to crash and we just need to take over the cockpit, even if we all crash and burn? And the risks could not be any higher or even looking at some racial unrest. Is it the case that there are constant threats and risk to people of color? Seems like a lot of the things that are dividing us is a sense of, well, how big is the risk? And then what do we do as Christians who ought to find confidence in the sovereignty of God and yet we do put on seat belts when we get into the car? Justin, untangle that Gordian knot for us.

How about I set it up for you guys to provide the real answer? I can play the foil. Yeah, I'm getting the bad answers out first and I'll just come back. And then Kevin will tell it like it really is.

Yeah, I think sometimes we get into this kind of teeter-totter mentality of you have to have a little bit of this and a little bit of that and you kind of balance the two out in your life. And I think that's one way to approach it, but I do think we need to have absolute 100% confidence in the sovereignty of God. And just full stop.

We don't need to say I need to lessen that a little bit or I need to balance that out. I need to believe that God is sovereign over all things. All things happen according to the counsel of his will that the stream is like the king's heart is like water going through the king's hand.

God is sovereign. He does whatever he pleases. He's in heaven.

And even the terrible things, calamity comes upon a city because the Lord has done it and the crucifixion being the greatest example of a human evil that was ultimately underneath God's design and foreordained. I don't think that that means that we can therefore, like you said, Kevin, we don't stop wearing seatbelts because I believe in the

sovereignty of God. The thing that I've been hearing, and I'm not going to say I hear it from everyone, but a couple of conversations stand out and both happen to be from older friends, perhaps in their 60s, which may not be relevant to the point saying I'm going to die anyway.

And I know where I'm going and therefore I need to be living when thinking about the COVID thing in particular. I need to live. I can't stop living my life.

I know I'm going to die. And so therefore, I'm not worried, which I think there's some merit to that position. I do think things are a little bit more complicated than that because we're not the only people on the planet.

It's not like we're living on a deserted island. And I'm just thinking about my own safety. Have to think about safety of my parents and on my children and those I come in contact with.

So at that level, I think there are competing interests at play. I think we need to have a robust confidence in the sovereignty of God. I think we also need to think about competing balances in our life with regard to we're not just individuals on an island, but we need to love one another and we need to think about their safety.

And I think we need to try to be as informed as possible on the real nature of risks. Everybody ends up having to make their own decision. That doesn't mean just sciences, what you feel, but we all need to weigh in our own minds and our own worldview, what the actual risks are because we all need to make a decision.

I mean, even deciding to stay home forever and not see anybody without a mask, that's a decision. So I think that all of this is very complicated, but I think that's a good word about believing in God's sovereignty because for all of the media attention that we hear, that's going to be one thing that is never mentioned. You're not going to hear that on Fox News, you're not going to hear that on MSNBC.

It's no consideration for them at all that we do have a Lord who is sovereign over these things. And if we trust him and if we know him and if we are called by him, he's not only in control, but he's working actively for a good. Yeah, that's very good.

That's good biblical framework to Colin. I'm just jotting down thoughts as Justin was talking prompts some things. But how do you assess safety and sovereignty? My initial instinct is to go to Philippians 4:13.

Folks know this passage. I'll explain what I mean. I can do all things through him who strengthens me from the apostle Paul.

One of the reasons I love that passage is because of its context. The verses that people don't usually quote 11 and 12, not that I am speaking of being in need for I've learned in

whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to be abundant in any and every circumstance I have learned at the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need.

Part of the broader context there of simply Paul's adaptability to different situations because I think of overall his trust in God's sovereignty. I think you see that through his many different messages in the book of Acts in particular about all the things that had happened to him. I think it's the thread that whether spoken or unspoken implicit or implicit in Paul's life that makes everything cohere.

That's how he understands himself and his calling. But I also think there's a way to discern this risk versus risk endurance or risk acceptance more broadly. That's to jump back further in Philippians 4 to consider what Paul says there about dwelling on what is true and pure and lovely.

Going back even further in chapter 4, his command for us to rejoice in the Lord and be prayerful in all things would not be anxious. What I get out of that is that when we're dwelling on the positive, when we're dwelling on God's work, when we're dwelling on God's sovereignty, it helps to put into context why we're risking. Because I think there's, it's not merely a risk versus prudence conversation, it's whom am I risking for? So when you, when you're dwelling on the true and the lovely and the pure, you know, rejoicing in the Lord when you're being prayerful and not anxious about these things, it helps you to understand that what risk you might be taking could be worth it because it's for God.

You're doing this out of a positive motivation. It's not that all risk is bad. Many risk, and this is a Piper-esque point here, but a lot of risk is actually mandated of Christians.

It's something we have to do. It's a worthy thing. But sometimes the risks that we take are absolutely selfish.

We might even say that they're for God, but actually they're simply for ourselves. They're, they're more about pursuing certain idols. And so I think during COVID, you see a lot of that.

And I think it can be hard to intermingle, kind of separate those out because somebody might be doing something that they say is for the Lord, but actually turns out to be pretty selfish instead. And I think it's in part because they're keeping a horizon on a political situation or interpersonal dynamics, but they're not thinking about sort of honoring the Lord in all those things. And I'm not trying to read anybody's mind there.

This is more about myself of just knowing that that's the grid that I want to try to run things through to say, "Risk is good, and I want to dwell on, dwell on the Lord so that I know when I'm taking these risks, I'm doing it for him and not merely for my own anger and dies meant." So that's how I think about it, Kevin. But how do you process it now

that you've had a chance to find the holes in all of our arguments? No, I don't have those holes, but thinking as a preacher perhaps, you've got three quick thoughts. One, and you guys hit on this too, safety can become an idol.

That's biblical, that's Luke chapter 12, the parable of the rich fool storing up bigger barns. See, there's a kind of greed that wants to acquire more, and then there's the kind of avarice that wants to save so much that you feel like you're no longer at risk. And so in that story, he says to himself, "Soul, self, be at ease." And Jesus said, "You're a fool.

You're a fool if you think you have mitigated all risk in your life. Certainly you have not stored up against the eternal judgment that is to come." So it is very, it is possible, say this to myself, for safety to become an idol, and related to that, I think it's true that the safer we become as a people, the more inclined we are to demand safety in every area of life. Now we kind of joke, we're children of the 80s or early 90s, and joke about it, and wear helmets on bikes and the crazy things that we did, and parents letting it just, "Yeah, go take your bike and ride to the grocery store dumpster and try to find cans because in Michigan it's 10 cents deposit on a can, and you find five of those, you can go in and buy some Johnny Apple treats.

They sound like from the 1950s or something. But yeah, and you just shove people into the back seat of your car and you don't have car seats and all the rest. "Yeah, I'm a parent.

I'm thankful. I think my kids should wear helmets. I've buckled them into their car seat." But it is the case that when we live basically, I mean, our lives are safer in this place at this time than in any place and time in the history of the world.

I don't know that that's an exaggeration, that we have even a lesser tolerance for risk or perceived risk. So that's one thing. Second is trade-offs.

Maybe we'll talk about this with some of the particular examples. The three of us have talked outside of this podcast before about just assessing the pandemic. And one of the real mistakes that I think has been made on a big national level is we don't have enough people willing to talk about trade-offs.

So I am really thankful for doctors in my family, doctors in my church. I rely on their expertise and doctors should give you the best medical advice to mitigate any contraction or spreading of the virus. That's what they do.

That's what they should do. As a leader of a church, of a school, of a state, of a city, you need to take that into account and you have to take into account other trade-offs. Mental well-being, spiritual health, economic.

It's not as simple as you want people to die because you made this other decision. There are going to be trade-offs. I don't remember if I said before on this podcast, but it's like if

you're in some kind of lawsuit and you ask your lawyer for advice, the lawyer is always going to give you advice that mitigates your chance of being sued or losing that lawsuit.

So if there's something you do that will lessen your chance by 5%. The lawyer is going to have you do that. That's what a good lawyer does.

You need to take that in and say, well, maybe that makes it 5% less likely that I lose the case, but maybe it makes it 25% more likely that my reputation gets destroyed on Twitter. You have to weigh that and not acquiesce automatically to the expert in the particular field. And then there's always going to be trade-offs.

And then the third thing, you guys did a nice job talking about the biblical parameters of this. I think we need to be realistic with each other and this helps us maybe deal with each other as we come, we have different personalities, different ways of assessing it, that we're all constantly making those prudential decisions about how serious is the risk. So I may seem or be able to suggest, well, I have such confidence in the sovereignty of God and I don't consider my life worth anything that I'm going to go out and I'm going to go to church or do this or that.

But it may be really the case that I actually don't think there's much of a risk. Now, if the virus was hitting mainly children and praise God, it's not. Or if you knew that one out of 10 people who gather in church will die this week if you gather, then I think a lot of people would say, okay, I get why you're not gathering.

That's not a risk worth taking. That is a price too high in this moment. Not for worship, but for worshipping in this particular way.

So underneath a lot of these discussions are always, I say assumptions, but they might not be assumptions, they might be learned rational conclusions that people have reached or not about the level of risk. And so that doesn't mean that we just throw up our hands and say, yeah, nobody's more right or wrong than anybody else. But it means we may actually agree on the theological stratosphere, but we have to get down to what do you actually perceive the risk to be in this situation.

So what would you do? I'm going to frame it that way rather than making it a commentary on John MacArthur, Grace Community Church. But what would you do if you were the pastor in that situation in California? And let's just say, get all the caveats out there, at least for myself. I know John.

I like John. I'm appreciative of his ministry. I would say he's a friend.

John, then Lehman from Nine Marks is a friend. Appreciate Jonathan. He was critical of the statement from Grace Community Church.

And then the conversation, Ping back and forth, and all of us know people who wrote



either in favor of what MacArthur's Church was doing or opposed to it. So that sometimes needs to be stated because we hear people talking and you don't realize, there's almost always relationships behind and where you want to go and what you don't want to say. So that's just to put out there.

I have relationships with people on all sides of this. Colin, what would you have done? How would you have progressed knowing that the situation seems to be, as the point of the point of this recording, a very evolving situation that Grace won the first court and then the appeals court overturned that and sided with the county and we'll see where it goes from there? Yeah, I wish I had some kind of extreme views that would get a lot of attention and would come across as extremely confident. But my thoughts are all over the place on this because there are things, aspects that I agree with that I would want to, if I'm that pastor, I want to make those points.

And there's things that I have questions about that I wonder if I would if I had to pursue that exact path. So just to clear some things out there, I think we need to be clear that the questions right now have a lot of them have been revolving around whether or not churches should be treated worse than some other organizations. Now that was the case in Nevada specifically, California is a different situation, but I mean if an abortion clinic is open or if a casino is open or if a liquor store is open or things like that.

So part of it's just asking for fair treatment, but I would go further constitutionally and the law can say otherwise, but I would go further constitutionally to say that those other things are not singled out in the constitution, but the free exercise of religion is. So I want to be clear on constitutional grounds that I think churches ought to have far more leeway and not be treated just as equals, but the Constitution seems to allow that the government does not enter that sphere, at least in the same way. Now I want to be clear, there's a lot of nuances going on there, but I want to stand with them in the sense that at some level we have to resist the government's right that they see to be able to intrude on religion, which is not necessarily theirs according to the Constitution that brings us together, but then I balanced that at the same time with the voluntary calling that a church would assume, which is to be good neighbors.

And you guys brought this up earlier that if this is a matter of freedom or a matter of conscience, well, the Bible does push us in that regard to be thinking, but sometimes you need to be able to lay that aside for the sake of loving others and putting others first and considering others to be more important than yourselves going back to the book of Philippians there. So from the pastor I'm wanting to debate, not competing, but complementary principles that I'm trying to bring together of making a constitutional point about a right that belongs to us by God's grace through this Constitution, but at the same time saying that the Bible consistently calls us to lay down those rights for the sake of others. Now the other thing I want to just mention in terms of response, if I'm that pastor, I do want to ask the question, and this is not a vague notion, this is the same

debate that my own church has about this, and I'm often on the opposite side of my own church leaders on this point.

I'm just wondering why not smaller groups meeting. I think I have an aversion to a church that demands that they have to meet in a large group with one pastor preaching, not that I'm against that at all. I'm just saying I'm not sure if that's there's always going to be the best motivations ecclesiologically or otherwise to require that as if it's not really possible to be the church without that opportunity there.

But again, I want to balance that at the same time to say we have to meet some time. This can't go on forever. We're not going to be having this conversation in six months.

I just read, who is it, Chris Stockis, am I saying his name right from the New York Times? Chris Stock? No, Chris off, or are you talking about the Yale professor? I'm talking about the Yale professor. Yes, okay. Whatever his last name is.

Yeah, he just said he thinks we are in phase one of the pandemic, which is going to last to the beginning of 2022. Right. Yeah.

So the next phase is 2024. Yeah. So this is what I mean, and you can find learned, intelligent people, some of whom have been right thus far.

So you want to give them a little bit of credit, but them saying, okay, this is a long term thing. Well, this is long term thing. I can tell you one thing that is not going to be acceptable as an elder in my church for our church, not to me.

Now my church is meeting outside, distanced, and with masks as a congregation. I think we must have had must that 800 people doing that in a parking deck this last Sunday. So we're doing that, but I'm just, but still our senior pastor says, I think we've had 25% of our church leave already.

We've lost touch with them. You talked about trade offs, Kevin. That's just not a trade off I'm comfortable with.

And I'm afraid that 25 becomes 40 becomes 50 and beyond if this can't happen. And at that point, my risk assessment as a pastor begins to change and under those circumstances. So I just dumped a lot out there, but that's that's where I'm coming from.

Insert one quick thing and then we get to Justin and that's we've had some nice comments from people listening in other countries and UK and other places were really good. I'll just let you in. I think there's something emblematic in our response as Americans.

Yeah, that that speaks to maybe the best and worst of it. It's the same thing. I really do.

No, I don't know. You could tell me this is like this in a lot of other countries, but I do

think there is something quintessentially American that says, no, don't. I mean, we hear of how other countries beat it and they all lock down and contract contact tracing and follow all the rules down to the letter.

And that's how you beat it. There is a good big sense of the American spirit that says, if that's what it takes to beat it, we don't want to beat it. We don't tread on me, don't tell us what to do.

We're going to do our own thing. Ain't nobody going to be the boss of us, especially the people that think they're the bosses of us. We don't trust elites.

Now, I think there's something really dangerous about all that. And I'd be lying if I didn't say at times, I think there's something I'm kind of proud of. And that is kind of the American spirit in this.

And I think that's why you see now, you look at our deaths per million. It's not like the United States is the worst of the civil, that's not the right term. You know what I mean? The worst of the rest of the world.

Justin, how do you see this? And in particular thinking about churches opening and in common on them, MacArthur saying or not. Yeah, I think it's a really difficult issue. And your original question, if I was John MacArthur, if I was an elder at Greece community, what exactly would I do? I don't know.

And because I'm not in that situation, I haven't had to think through it as deeply in all of the ins and outs and all of the risks. And what that means legally for the church as an entity, I think in general that I would try to make the constitutional case as best as possible about what the First Amendment allows and what the implications are. I think I would try to point out the hypocrisy.

You know, some people have made the argument, you know, why should a liquor store be considered essential and a church isn't? I don't know that that's always comparing apples to oranges. But the protests are one where you're talking about a large gathering of people. They are outside.

But when you can compare like and like and show that the state is not only has a compelling interest in public health, but seems to have some sort of animus towards people of faith and organized religion gathering, I think that's completely appropriate to point out. I think for myself, if I was convinced of all of the arguments that the elders of Greece community were convinced of and decided to exercise civil disobedience, I would have also tried to have gone extra mile and making accommodations within that context. So we are going to gather, but we are going to practice social distancing.

We are going to wear masks, you know, even if it's just apart from singing or just in the foyer, we will not gather unless we're outside for fellowship afterward. Everybody will

take a pump of hand sanitizer as they walk in. Any of those sort of things to give a good faith effort or gesture toward the fact that this is a serious issue.

It's not just a hoax. It's not just made up. It's not just the same as a flu season, which we have prominent people saying every day this is just the equivalent of a bad flu season.

You know, if they're convinced of that, that's one thing. But I think to give some sort of accommodation, I don't think that's a compromise of principles, but I think that might have put themselves in better stead. But it's a difficult situation.

And I do think it can be easy for us to debate online and somewhat abstractly about the principles and not to have appropriate empathy for them as a church that unable to gather in their sanctuary as they would desire to. And we can tell them to go gather outside, but in the California heat, that might create its own risks for elderly population and for others. Yeah.

And where might you be able to gather more safely, cramming into people's homes or in a large sanctuary? Now, that depends on whether you're going to try to social distance in either location. But yeah, I think I've been, I found myself sympathetic to what Grace is doing. Now, I think the distinction we'd all want to make is, is there a justification for what they're doing? I would say yes.

Does that mean that everyone ought to do the same thing? I would say no. And I think that's where, you know, Jonathan and nine marks the point they were trying to make and others like them, that if the emphasis is all good Christians will do what we're doing in practice civil disobedience and meet, then that becomes a question of Christian freedom. I didn't read their statement that way.

When I went back and read it several times, I could see a couple lines that lean that way. So that's, you know, an interpretive issue. I certainly agreed that I would not want to say if you don't do this, you are a bad Christian.

But I'm sympathetic as a pastor. Again, if I saw the Home Depot parking lot full in knowing that there's hundreds of people milling around in there and waiting in line a few feet apart from each other, and then all the church parking lots are empty. We've had a much better situation in North Carolina.

We've been meeting indoors since the end of May and we have social distancing. We have a big sanctuary. We can fit about 500 people in.

We're wearing masks. So I'm with you, Justin. I think if I had to make that decision in California, I think I could have been persuaded that, you know, after all of these months in some seeming, uh, Hippocrates, that there's a right to practice civil disobedience, I would have said, let's, let's show forth that we want to do this in the best way possible, even if we ourselves aren't convinced of the threat of the pandemic with masks, with

social distancing.

But I certainly think if they're going to physically bar the congregants from coming to church, um, find them a thousand dollars a day, uh, you know, I hope they don't put John MacArthur in jail. I hope at that point, even if there are Christians who disagree on some of the principles, that they, we will stand up and say, wait a second, that this is a massive government overreach. Um, it's not as if the streets are lined with corpses.

Uh, now, not to mitigate the, to lessen the sense of risk that there is. But I would think just as LA County, that at some point you don't want this, this look on your hands, you said, Colin, to me that, you know, when you make a martyr, hopefully we pray not a literal martyr, but a perceived media martyr out of something. I mean, that is not a good look.

And while LA County may feel like, hey, we don't have much of a price to pay politically for this, I would think somebody at the national level would say, Hey, this is not going to be the look that we want going into the 2020 election season. So I pray nothing but the best for, for grace and for Pastor John and hope that they stay safe and are able to continue to worship. Let's finish in his last two or three minutes with, I don't want to say it's the most important topic.

Something really, so let's talk about something actually, actually, actually, something very near and dear to our hearts. Big 10 football, has been canceled. Nebraska is going to find a way to play in their own cornfield of dreams against, you know, Hastings or Norfolk or Concordia or something.

But Justin, should the big 10 have canceled their season? Should they listen to Justin Fields in the quarter of a million signatures on the petition and reconsider having only time I'm going to cheer for Ohio State right there? Yeah. Let's say you, Justin. My cornhuskers were standing up for the right to play the game of football.

And yeah, what a what a fascinating, frustrating thing. And, you know, we've talked about a epistemology before and where your ad had motivated reasoning. And I've been more on the side of caution and believing the threats.

But when it comes to football, just think, oh, this is going to be sad to, I think, you know, Nebraska was no postseason last year. So if this all goes through, we can have 21 months of no football. So I think that they're on a more serious point.

I think one of the frustrating things and you guys have texted about this with us on our little thread multiple times, the lack of communication is really frustrating. So we can talk kind of joke about wanting to see football. But I think there's leadership lessons there.

If you're going to make a decision, explain why you decided and you're not going to win

everybody over. But if you actually give data of here's what we looked at. Here were the pros and the cons.

Here's what led us to make this decision. I think then you end up leading people better and, you know, seeing local school districts, our local school district, changed course two weeks before school started with a new plan, virtually no explanation. And, you know, I sent a note to the superintendent, which I'm sure he won't read, just saying if you could explain what led you to this position and what will be the triggers to change the position, that inspires confidence, but just arbitrarily kind of waving your hand and making a declaration is never confidence inspiring.

So I do think there's some practical lessons for us as leaders, communicate, provide reasons, be transparent in so far as possible. And you might help at least a minority of the people who are listening and trying to trust in your decision. And boy, I, you know, I'm trying to heed all of our lessons of epistemic humility and all the things we've said before, because we're not college presidents, we weren't in the room.

And yet it does, it's hard to think that the overriding concern is the health of the student athletes when likely more people would be negatively affected long term by concussions in any given year than COVID. Now, I don't really know that. So that's just, it seems that way to me, but I don't know it.

So perhaps that's it. It's hard to not think that there's a, that the risk is higher with lawsuits, legal battles. That's not irrelevant.

But then if that's it, then say there's too many legal risks. And when I just wonder what the Big Ten commissioner is feeling when he looked behind him and he's got the Pac-12 and nobody else. And as we talked about, somebody's going to come out of this thing looking really smart and really dumb.

Because if three power five conferences play and two don't, you're either going to have, you know, a smattering of cases, but nobody really gets very sick. And it's going to look like, wow, that was silly. And you hurt your brand and your team for five years or having forbid people end up in the hospital or somebody dies.

And then the Big Ten and the Pac-12 look like they did the noble thing. So we do want to be chasing with what we know, though, as fans, it's hard not to be frustrated. Colin, what should the Big Ten do? I think Colin and everybody have an SEC team and the Big Ten team just now.

That's the genius there of hatching your bets with two conferences. That is the genius there. Oh, man, I thought Northwestern was going to have a good year this year.

I'm not even joking. I was really feeling good about this. I'm still also sadly holding out hope that they will change their minds.

Probably not likely to happen, but you never know. You guys, this podcast started out as a COVID-era podcast, and we're continuing it as COVID continues. And what's just discouraging is how we're basically asking the same questions that we were at the very beginning.

Which experts are we supposed to believe? Who are the stakeholders in these decisions? Who is supposed to benefit, who's supposed to not benefit, who needs to sacrifice? And how do the stakeholders making the decisions? How do they make those decisions? It still seems to me at every level, and just it's pretty similar with the schools. I don't know. Who are we? Who's making the decisions? How are they making the decisions? I mean, I tell you, I had a little bit of just discouragement within my own church because I was frustrated by the plan that our pastors were taking.

What was so helpful to me, and even in the end, where I continued to disagree, was them explaining what the alternatives were. And then explaining why they did not think those alternatives were better. And interestingly, Kevin, you already cited the main alternative, which is, is it more dangerous to have people all over the place in all kinds of different smaller groups and houses than to have them in one concentrated place where at least you know and can observe what they're doing? That was the decision of why my church went in that direction.

And when I walked away saying, I'm still not sure that's what I would have done because I think there were some different goals being reached. When I understood the goals, and then I could align those decisions with their goals, and then I could see how my goals were a little bit different, it was just, it just allowed me, even in my disagreement, to calm down and say, okay, we disagree, we have a little bit different goals here. And I think that's just in what you're calling for of, or Kevin, what you were calling for of, if it's about liability, just say that.

You know, we're losing a ton of money, but we actually think we'd lose a lot more money, potentially with lawsuits. And we're just being real conservative about this. And we know it stinks, but that's the legal atmosphere that we operate in.

I'm sorry. You could live with that, disagree with it. You can live with it.

It's not fun. But I don't know how I'm supposed to argue that because ultimately, I don't have proximity to that. I'm not a college president who has to make that decision.

And so I, which experts do you believe? Who are the stakeholders and how do they make their decisions? Justin, I think that email that you sent is a very respectful, reasonable email to simply say, what will help you to change that decision? And then it's suspicion that breeds a lot of contempt. And one thing I saw recently, our health official in Jefferson County, Alabama, said, I'm actually, I'm planning to keep the masks going all the through all the way through winter, because it'll also help with the flu. I just felt like

that was being facetious.

I felt that was, it was being unfair to say, we've been trying to get you for years to do this. We found an opportunity to finally force you to do this. And now we might as well just keep it going.

I thought, but you sold us on all these things as an extraordinary circumstance. It feels like you keep changing the rules here. And now I don't even know what the end is, because I don't have anybody's making decisions or for what goals.

So that's why to keep coming back to in the Big Ten is I keep looking at the loss for the players, for the coaches, for the employees, everything like that. And then I come back and then I'm just left with, maybe they canceled the season because they really just didn't want to deal with the union's question. My skepticism, my even my suspicion start to multiply.

And I think you're right that we have to think about all of those factors. And if people would tell us exactly what they're saying, and I get it, it's not always politically palatable, but to use the football metaphor, it's the moving of the goalposts that gets frustrating to people. It's confusing enough to know which experts to believe, but then if the goal becomes flat in the curve and then the goal becomes something else, or if it seems like these are extraordinary measures for a season, and then people feel like, you know what, this is pretty good.

And we think we'll just keep doing this in perpetuity. My plan, I don't know why this can't work. Any politician, you can feel free to just take this as your own, but you get some your smartest lawyers to have parents and student athletes sign.

I mean, Justin, you made the point if your kid goes you know, rock climbing somewhere, he basically signs his next of kin away. There must be some form you can sign that can remove you from legal liability, not the public perception. And then what about this? What if Congress, you get bipartisan support for this, Congress passes a one time for 2020 only that they're going to pay these players.

Okay, we're printing money like crazy. Okay, we pay these players, we give some sort of across the board stipend because they're doing this for themselves, but for the fans, it's not like the NFL, the NBA, they're gonna pay millions of dollars. So we pay them something.

And in this college football stimulus package, and you know what, we're just gonna bite the bullet and say we're not doing it for cross country in gymnastics. Okay, we're just doing it for college football. And you have in this stimulus package some sort of bubble in the cornfields of Nebraska, and they're gonna do, there's zoom classes anyways with their tutors.



So let them do it. They're gonna be healthier, they're gonna be safer, they're gonna get all the testing, all the, you know, it just seems like a win for everyone. Okay, we're gonna end with that.

Yeah, I want to see Alabama play outdoors in Nebraska in November and December. Now, that would be fun. That would be fun.

I hear here. All right, well, we have gone over time, but we've had a lot to say, and a little bit of it has been helpful. But Justin and Colin, good to be with you.

Lord willing, we'll be back again, and hope everyone has a great week until next time. Or if I got enjoying forever and read a good book. [ Silence ]