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Jordan Peterson's 'Beyond Order' (with Joseph Minich)

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I was joined by my friend Joseph Minich for a discussion of Jordan Peterson's new book, 'Beyond Order' (<https://amzn.to/2QOGyLf>).

See more of Joseph's work over on the Pilgrim Faith podcast (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV68MyIL6gMc5ocrY2K7Cn4Jnqm8Z76>) and his Plausible Faith podcast series (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV68MyIL6gMfnCi0x-k-eRLSM2zYzTNgC>). He has also written the book 'Enduring Divine Absence: The Challenge of Modern Atheism' (<https://amzn.to/3vOpAv0>).

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Transcript

Hello and welcome. I'm joined today by my friend Joseph Minich to discuss the book, Beyond Order by Jordan Peterson. It's 12 more rules for life following his earlier book on the subject.

These are, if you've not had enough rules for life, you've got now 24. And so I thought we'd spend some time discussing the book and the Jordan Peterson phenomenon more generally. And so to kick it off, what were your impressions of the book initially? As an overview, what did you think of it? Yeah, yeah.

So I'm probably one of those rarer people reading this book who actually had not read

the previous book. So I've, you know, I've followed the Jordan Peterson phenomenon, read a bunch of articles and watched, you know, dozens and dozens and dozens of clips and listened to a lot of lectures and appreciated them very much. So I've received a lot from Jordan Peterson.

So it was actually kind of interesting for me to relate to him as a writer rather than a speaker. And I got, I had overall good impressions of the book. I mean, it seems like a notch, definitely a sort of substantive kick up from what I'd expect from your kind of typical, you know, we would think of this almost as sort of a self-help genre or something like that.

Your typical sort of psychological manifesto that you get, you know, so full of the wisdom and kind of the interesting asides and deeply thoughtful observations and reflections that I would come to expect of Jordan Peterson. But I do have to say that I was surprised to feel, I guess you could say, react to the source less compelling, less compelled, I guess, than I do respond to him as a speaker. I should say that without less garbling.

I was not as compelled by the writing as by the speaking. And I don't know if that's, I don't think that's necessarily a distinction in the substance of the ideas. That might have just, you know, something to do with me.

Nevertheless, as a writer, there's a little bit of a ponderous quality, even though, of course, again, it's a, again, full of very interesting asides. And yet somehow I, something about the discursive art, the public speaking art, I think connects with me a little bit more. So that was the surprising first impression, you know, other than there's lots of things in here that I think are quite interesting.

I mean, that's the other, that's, of course, the main impression I think I should give. But that's never sort of a surprising aside, I suppose. Well, I listened to the book on Audible, and I have a physical copy of the book, which I read parts of.

And then I had an extra Audible token. So I thought, okay, I'll listen to the book. I was doing a lot of walking around.

And it actually, it works when he's reading it to you. You have a sense of his communication as a speaker. And when you hear his voice along with it, it makes a lot more sense, I think.

And so I found it quite compelling, more compelling actually than his previous book. Just listening to it, I hadn't listened to the previous book, but this one I did. Interesting.

Yeah, that, I was wondering if that would be the case, because I think if I heard more, there's certain sections, you know, I'm probably reading at a speed that is not conducive to kind of the, his speaking style is very, I don't want to say slow, but it's very distinct. And it's very, there's a kind of, there's something methodical and almost melodious

about it in a certain kind of way. And yeah, I might have responded to the material differently if I listened to it.

And I was even thinking that as I was reading it, maybe I should actually listen to this book, because maybe that's how it's ideally, ideally given. But there's much that's, you know, some of it I had accessed before in lectures and such, but there's much in the book that I think is really fascinating. There's a couple of sections I thought were particularly interesting, but the one that really I found profound really is the first, it's really the first one.

It's the, his first rule in this particular book is, I'm going to make sure I read it correctly, but it's do not carelessly denigrate social institutions or creative achievement. This is, this is how he establishes the book. Peterson has talked in the past about how in a modern civilization, it's, it's crucial to have something that is roughly speaking what we call the right and roughly speaking what we call the left.

And he's kind of representing these by sort of a set of values that, a set of values that responds to the importance of institutions, tradition, you know, that sort of thing. And a set of values that is, has its eyeball on what needs to be improved. You know, and that, that's very highly, highly linked to the aesthetic world and to other dimensions of a civilization.

And just in the, just in the, the insight that a modern society is a kind of complex organism that needs actually fairly high, fairly differentiated roles, paying attention to, to, to these two structures, I think is in itself very insightful. And it's odd that Peterson has kind of been co-opted by sort of, sort of almost only associated with the right in a certain sort of way, because there's a way in which I think his, his principles at least are, are highly useful for actually having a mediating conversation among the forces in civilization. So again, it's very rare to hear somebody that is associated with the right actually saying out loud, we actually do as a civilization need something that is quote, quote, the left of a sort.

And I find that really interesting. And of course, he's, he's doing something much larger with that. That's that's a sort of civilizational element that has all sorts of, all sorts of implications, or also that structure, if you could say, you know, institution versus creative achievement is also a structure just as sort of Plato's Republic is a parody of the human soul.

So Jordan Peters' observations about how a civilization work are also observations about how a human individual works. You need as a human individual to be healthy, to have a certain deference to tradition, you need to have a certain humility about your ancestors who came before you and your, your position in receiving this, this, this set of this set of structures that you were born into and didn't choose. But a fully adult person, a fully thriving and flourishing individual, a living soul, if you will, is also the kind of organism

that creates and is also the kind of organism that looks at that structure and corrects and builds upon it.

And so you need both of those as well to be a sort of a full individual. And I think he's really insightful about, you know, sort of the principles by which that operates, which fits his to the last thing I'll say before I pass it along, which fits kind of a, you know, this is, this is, there's 12 rules for life. And this is another 12 rules.

One is sort of like, you know, an antidote to chaos. And this one is called beyond order. In reality, I'm not sure the rules neatly map onto the sort of the order and the non-order rules.

In reality, it seems to me that they all kind of fit together as sort of a one kind of unified project where part of what he's emphasizing is there's a dimension of reality that is very much a dimension or that's ordered by law, by rule, mediated by tradition, etc. And then there's this other whole dimension of reality that you, and he says this in the introduction to this book, that you really don't want to get rid of, actually, that is, that, that, that is, does not functioning all, all of those registers. And actually life and reality and wisdom is found in mediating kind of the, what is orderly about the world you've received and what is, what is a dimension of kind of the unordered, but not necessarily, not necessarily bad.

And you can think maybe of the garden there, that there's sort of the ordered garden and even before the fall, the unordered sort of, sort of land outside the garden. And there's a, you know, life is about mediating between those in some way. I find the relationship between themes of the right and the left that you mentioned in the work of Jordan Peterson is a very interesting matter.

I first came across Jordan Peterson back in, I think it was 2013, and it was linked on Metafilter of all places and Metafilter, I mean, extremely left-wing and its tendency is progressive. And I was reading the comments beneath the link to it said, this guy's amazing. He could start his own cult, which rather amusing looking back on that.

But I find the thing that really stands out for Peterson, I don't find the rules that prominent, the rules kind of fall away, the great categories. He's presenting a sort of moral field of vision and activity. It's charged with narrative and dramatic force.

And it's one in which it is the individual and the individual's responsibility that comes to the fore. Now, I think this is where many of the tensions between left and right start to appear. And I think it's between the idea of the individual primarily as a locus of meaning and responsibility, acting within a world that they're supposed to take agency within, not be embittered about, but do what they can, where they can and recognize just the cruelty and difficult difficulty of life.

And that sort of emphasis, I think, is what tends to align him with the right. The emphasis is not the exclusion in my understanding of him to issues like systemic injustice and matters that restrict your ability to act. But rather, this is about just taking responsibility for your own being.

If you don't act in this sort of way as a responsible individual, but act through that sense of bitterness or anger, it actually just leads to eating your way as a person. And so his emphasis upon being someone who is taking responsibility, taking charge of what you can, making, discovering meaning, coming to know things and acting in a way that is meaningful and driven by a healthy narrative framework within which you play a sort of heroic role. That makes a lot of sense when you think about it from the individual perspective.

If you think about this as a scaled up version for the whole of society and an account that does away with accounts that deal with the systems and structures and social forces and dynamics, then there are problems. But that's not what he's offering really. And I think what he gives is something that's a very helpful antidote and counterbalance to what is very foregrounded within our discourse more generally.

It's one of the reasons why he mentions going to all these different audiences and he will speak and there's one word, one particular notion that just causes people to be silent. They respond to it. And that's the word responsibility that people just click with that.

There's something about it. They've not really heard this from anyone else in quite the same way. And I found that listening to him, there's something bracing about, first of all, the epic scale of his vision of the individual moral journey and the heroic quest.

But then also this sense of just the stakes of a normal human life. You're dealing with life and death. You're dealing with ordering chaos.

You're dealing with meaning and nihilism. You're dealing with all these different forces that can cause you to come shipwreck. You can be that person that is the source of order and security and balance and the sort of person that other people can rely on around you.

You can be that island of stability in a sea of chaos. And these sorts of visions, I think, they're attractive if you want to be someone that makes a difference where you are, recognizing your limits, recognizing the difficulties and struggles of the world, not downplaying them, but also saying, what can we do to stand up to these and find meaning within the difficulties and just the fortune of life? Yeah, I think that's really fascinating. His, I mean, I was raised in Dallas, Texas in the 90s, sort of at the center of a, you might say, a sort of culture war movement, a sort of homeschooler movement.

And responsibility, it was quite a bit of actually a rhetorical emphasis. So responsibility,

sort of we were sort of the kids learning responsibility, as opposed to the ones who weren't learning responsibility. And there's some truth to that.

What was interesting in confronting Jordan Peterson is he was one of the very few people I have heard talk about responsibility in a way that not always, but was sometimes rhetorically directed in such a way that could actually encourage a weak person. And I think this is really key because very often what the way responsibility is rhetorically functioning is sort of the, it's the sort of cipher, distinguish the men from the boys. There's very much a kind of identity grouping going on, and you actually kind of need the losers to sort of feel good about yourself, that sort of thing.

That's very, it's a flaw, it's a sin that the world of men especially can tend toward. But Peterson is the sort of guy who can look at the guy who can't get out of bed and say, it makes sense that you can't get out of bed. Like life actually out that door.

It's not just that you're a wuss, life is actually hard. Like if you get out of bed, it's hard. And really what he's doing in a sense, I think in his project, and this is where the individual isn't just go sort of be a man as opposed to all the wussies over there.

There's actually a sort of compassionate paternal invocation here, which is, it would make sense that you just let it all burn down, because it's risky and it's hard to do otherwise. And yet the only possibility of it being better, the only possibility of it actually going anywhere is to get out of bed. And it's not that there are not systemic issues.

It's not that other people shouldn't do X. But generally, A, your understanding of what actually the big problems are is very limited. And he would say that in some ways about himself. Your understanding of what's really going on out there systemically is extremely limited.

And B, all you really have any ability to directly engage in control in this world for the most part is your own life. And so it's not that you don't have to focus on all those other things. It's not that there doesn't need to be in a civilization, people focusing on those social structures.

It's that if you sort of use that as your sort of portal to adulthood, if that kind of becomes the recipe by which you possess moral agency, you're bypassing actually the liberating thing. It's actually the thing in some ways that will help you feel like the world is more just, because you're actually fighting chaos in some way, in your own soul and in your own life, and then are an agent of betterment for yourself and for those around you. And I think there is something liberating about that message.

I think there's something that, especially for certain kinds of temperaments, I think Jordan Peterson perhaps is one of these characters that is especially appealing to people that are temperamentally kind of ordered in a particular way. And this is why we can say

young men, young men from 18 to 30, who feel like losers, which is good. And I mean, a lot of that influence has been very, very good.

In fact, I do think there's also, I think it'd be interesting, and maybe I'll turn it around and ask you, are there limitations to that rhetorical pitch? It is compelling. And yet I do wonder, there's something in Jordan Peterson, and maybe this is changing in him, maybe we're watching Jordan Peterson now for almost a decade, or it'll be a decade soon. I'm curious whether his relationship to weakness, I'd be curious to see how his rhetorical posture toward weakness is going to, and to the theme of divine grace.

I'm curious to see how those play out sort of overall in the system. Over the last couple of years, since he's sort of gone away and come back, I've noticed the language of grace more sort of randomly showing up. And I'll be curious to see over the next couple of years, especially in light of kind of his recent revelations about his relationship to Christian dogma, I'll be curious to see what role that plays in kind of the overall, in terms of his overall system.

Because one could say, I'd say from maybe an Orthodox Christian perspective, that the structure of moral insight that Peterson is tapping into is kind of the old Stoic tradition. There's a way in which there's something very similar, and there's a lot, you go read Marcus Aurelius, he's very compelling, like in very similar ways, Marcus Aurelius is sort of like, hey, you're going to die, and there's nothing you can do about it. And it's going to happen, and your memory is going to pass for man.

So you can whine about that and be sad, or you can actually live a meaningful existence in these ways. And yet Christianity, interestingly, it's not that there was an absolute disagreement with all of those structures, but the background against which Christianity emphasizes its own encouragement to godliness, for instance, is a background that's less dualistic, and I think more rooted in the virtue of hope, the, you know, we would call the theological virtue of hope, which is not just sort of, hey, what else are you going to do, effectively, but actually there's a kind of objective order. It's not just order in chaos, there is actually an reciprocity there.

And that reciprocity, the order of hope above fear and danger and whatever, is ontologically and metaphysically actually matters for the concrete human existence. And I'd love to see how, if that will become more weighted in his thinking and how that will play out. Yeah, so on the issue of responsibility, I think one of the things that comes across in his more, I think it's a more compassionate approach to responsibility, is that responsibility is not approached in the mode of blame, which is the way so often is experienced by people.

It's responsibility is a matter of the claims that are placed upon you by others that feel restrictive and in positions, they seem to diminish you. Whereas he presents responsibility as a means by which you can grow and become more fully yourself, you

can take on new weight, and as a result become stronger. And so I've mentioned this a number of times, the difference between the mother who tells her teenage son to clean his room and Jordan Peterson telling it, there is a difference that comes just by the fact of who's telling it.

And this is something we don't really think about enough. We think about the message is interchangeable, it doesn't matter who's saying something, provided that the words come across, the message is what matters. But who says something really does matter.

If a young man hears an older man who is someone he respects and looks up to, who exemplifies certain traits that he wants, and he tells him to do something, it is an apprenticeship into the strength and the character that he admires in that man. Now, if he's told just to do it in order to make life more convenient, as he sees it for the people around him, that does not feel as empowering. And so the question of who's saying this, I think, is important.

And Jordan Peterson just seems to be, in an almost lightning rod way, he seems to be this archetype of the father. And for some on the left, this can be something that just really evokes their ire, they get angry, he's patriarchal figure, he's someone to be struck out against, he's a representation of the oppressor, all these things that are wrong. Whereas on the right, a lot of young men just glom to him because he represents something that's good and the positive element of fatherhood that maybe they've lacked.

Now, I think another thing to pick up on your point of how he relates to Christianity, if I were writing some rules for life, I would probably focus on things like forgiveness and grace, as you mentioned. And those themes are present to some extent. He talks a lot about Thanksgiving, and that's important for him.

But Thanksgiving is almost the flip side of resentment. So it's not being resentful, it's appreciating what you have, that sort of thing. But the sense of really giving thanks to God, it isn't there in the same way.

Likewise, with forgiveness, again, not being resentful, things like that. But the deep sort of dramatic act of forgiveness seems to be lacking. It's a sort of pale imitation of what I think the Christian message has as integral to it.

Now, on the themes of weakness, I think he actually captures something that many people miss in their understandings of Christianity, which can often be a sort of weakness that is not just being meek, it's not just being humble, it's being just without strength. It's not being holding back what strength you have in a gracious, kind and a good way, or using that strength on behalf of others. It's just an absence of it.

And that strength can be almost pathologized. And I think that's one of the reasons why

his message really resonates with young men who feel alienated in society that doesn't really give them anything to do with their strength. It's treated as something that gets in the way, rather than something that this is something that really gives you dignity as a person.

This is something that can make you someone that other people will look up to and respect, that will now allow you to give things to your community. Now, that's something that I think a Christian message should have in it. But if I were going to criticize Peterson, I'd criticize him on the basis of the absence of themes of hope, as you mentioned, grace, and things like, I mean, faith.

He talks a lot about Christ as exemplar, but Christ is the object of faith. God is the object of faith. Yes, not there in the same way.

And faith is just so important. And there's something about the way that we live by faith, not by sight, that is at points something that comes across in his work, but nowhere near as much. And then if I were from Jordan Peterson's perspective, point pushing back, I would point out the fact that a lot of Christian approaches just do not, using his Jungian terminology, healthily incorporate the shadow side.

There's no strength. There's no sense of when to say no, and firmness and backbone. And Christianity can be this sort of pale niceness.

Yes, it can easily be walked over that lacks the strength to truly be heroically good. Yes, yes. I think that, yeah, that's absolutely correct.

Yeah. So when we contrast Peterson to Christianity, we're in some ways engaged in an abstraction, because if we contrast him, and this is in some ways God's judgment upon us, right? His pastoral advice is a lot better than a lot of what you find in popular pastoral literature. And so it's, yeah, the contrast.

So yeah, we were in a, and again, again, in a sense, speaking of an abstraction there. Yeah, I think that's right. Maybe one thing I'd add is, I would want to say that his treatment, if I were to try to abstract what is the goal of all of this from Peterson's writing, I think that might be another point of, maybe not contradiction, but differently weighted emphasis.

It seems like what Peterson is after, and this is also very appealing to young men, and rightly so, is a kind of self-possession. Like responsibility, you know, sort of self-authoring, right? You know, what responsibility gives to you is a sense of ordered self-possession, which is actually a life of meaning. And there's a sense in which the self-possessed life, not the overly self-controlled life, but the self-possessed life in a more holistic way, is the canvas upon which meaning exists.

And yet, one thing I'd want to say, and this comes back to the Christ, and I remember

this in Stephen R. L. Clark, the philosopher, who's one of the wiser philosophers out there, writes almost in sort of prophetic oracle style. But one of the things he said once that really struck me is, this is what it takes to be a wise man. And I'm butchering it, but he said something to the effect of, he ends a paragraph with, but we are not wise men.

And I think there's another way in which part of the dimension of the shadow and of reality, and I think nascently Peterson gets this, but I would love to see it centralized, which is, none of us are self-possessed men. There's a certain dimension of reality, in fact, a thick, tragic dimension of reality, if we're kind of moving with his own sense of tragedy, in which we are all very deeply non-self-possessed. And even the greatest of us in some ways is un-self-controlled, is lacking a kind of integration, and this is why we want to speak of Christ in some ways as the man.

There's one man in a certain kind of way, and so where would I go with that? I think part of the ordinary Christian life is a movement toward being possessed. It's a movement toward finding my identity in my possession in God's own care of me. And I think particularly for the weak soul, for that Christian who can't get out of bed and who barely can get it together and clean their room or whatever it is, this is an important, like the Peterson thing is important.

You actually do need to go through the motions of this. Nevertheless, there's a prior, and I think this is just kind of the gospel, right? There's a prior sense in which you're had by reality. There's a prior sense in which your story is already, your story and your narrative is already possessed by someone.

And actually resting in that, resting in the God who is sovereign over all of the events of your life and who is for you, even in your weakness, is I think experienced by most Christians is the very basis upon which you actually have the capacity to get out of bed. And then that self-possession, that kind of project of self-possession functions on a slightly different register. It's not itself, it's not ground zero of the antidote to chaos.

The antidote to chaos is prior to that. And you're kind of living joyfully then. And there's a gladness to it.

Actually, what's interesting on this side of things is there's a lightness, even though there is the shadow and there's a dark element to existence. And Christians, especially evangelical spirituality, can tend to kind of sentimentalize existence. There is a, maybe if I could put it this way, a more Lutheran approach to God's existence where you read the writings of Luther.

And there's a lot of laughter. There's a lot of self-slapping, but in a joyful and jolly way from a jolly heart that feels all the weakness of the human being, but also all of the strength of God to make up for that and his ordering, which then manifests in our own self-possession. And then manifests in those ways and is experienced in the same way

that self-possession is experienced in the same liberating way, but is also linked more deeply, I think, to God's own activity and story.

And really then when you think of it all that way, even Christ, what's so fascinating is to watch the story of the Christ, is to, here's the man, and yet his food and drink is to do the will of the father. His story is, it's to be the human in a sense is not about merely self-authoring. To be the human is about deeply sensing and deeply being tapped into the way in which I'm authored.

And I think that's a, I think that dimension of reality is, especially for some people, I think it's almost impossible for some messages perhaps to feel motivating apart from that dimension of reality, sort of being a part of the soup, if you will, if I can put it that way. Yeah, so I think that's important. And one of the things that really comes across in Peterson that you really don't find that much elsewhere is a profound sense of evil.

And a sense of the reality of death, the badness of death, the fact that we live in a world that I mean, he feels the fallenness of the world. He feels the depravity of man. And he has a sort of fascination with it, not in the sense of being drawn to it in actual practice, but it is something that captures his attention, because he realizes there's something about the nature of reality as good and the possibility of being heroic and true.

And the weight of truth is almost seen against the backdrop of the viciousness of lies. And that emphasis within his work, for instance, on telling the truth is something that I've never heard expressed with the same force anywhere else, not even in Christian work. It's just something that he has a very visceral sense of.

He profoundly feels the weight of words, telling the truth, acting true, truly in the way that you find yourself in society and elsewhere. And it seems to me that there is nonetheless a sense of underlying tragedy. There is brief flaring up of the light in people's expression of their responsibility and facing up to the chaos and these sorts of things.

But ultimately, does it prevail? Ultimately, something about the character of the world is inhospitable, and pushes back against that and quenches it. And his vision is heroic, and it's deeply attractive. And in many ways, if you are looking for someone to counsel you, you probably want to go to Jordan Peterson.

Yeah, oh, absolutely. Almost any pastor, because he just has a deep insight into human nature. But without that fundamental note of grace, forgiveness, hope, faith, and just the theological virtues as the case within which a life of virtue more generally is practiced, if you've lost that frame, I think a lot of other things start to fall away.

Although, that said, I do think that Peterson's... Peterson does have elements of that. And you can see definitely his attraction to Christian truth. And there's something about

Christian truth that won't let him go, and he can't let it go.

Yes, yes. He's being authored. Many of us have prayed for him and continue to for that reason.

Yeah. And I think the other thing... Go ahead. Oh, go ahead.

No, you go ahead. I'll follow up. I think the other thing you find with Peterson is just the sense of, I don't know, that your weakness is not the measure of you.

The fact you've been a victim, the fact that you struggle with the difficulties of life. There is a hope that is personally ministered by his work. That has been profoundly transformative for many people's lives.

And that is something that I wonder about. We have a message of hope that's far more profound and deep than his message in terms of its fundamental convictions. The way that he ministers it, I think, is very powerful.

And on that front, you talk about finding our identity within this broader reality of God's world and in Christ. And we can often talk about that in a way that doesn't quite bring it down to earth. What does it look like that in actual practice, how does this get you out of bed in the morning? How does this actually help you to face the difficulties of your day, the struggles of your family and the tensions within your workplace? How does it help you to resolve the antagonisms within your marriage? And the way that he has story at the heart of his vision, as an integrating factor, I think is something that we have a lot to learn from.

He's drawing on elements of the Christian faith that we just ignore. We have to re-story our imaginations in precisely the sense that you really are in your marriage. I've been married for 17 years and you have difficult spells.

And it has actually very much helped me in moments where this is a tempting world and there's a lot of forces against living a godly Christian marriage in the world. In the real world, marriage is often hard. It can be hard.

And Peterson writes very realistically about marriage in this book in a very helpful way that's better than most Christian writing on marriage, to be honest. Nevertheless, exactly. Some of the things that have helped me certainly in the past is quite literally seeing your marriage in a narrative sense, like really seeing it as a site where God is doing something and not just as a kind of projection upon marriage, but experiencing the very reality is charged with that story that you're living in and that you're part of.

You do have to capture that epic scale, I think. Life itself has to be lived in some ways in that epic scale. And yet one of the things, and I think you mentioned his kind of emphasis on telling the truth, I think the thing I have picked up the most from Jordan

Peterson and that I appreciate in him, in fact, I think it's one of the most fundamental things that has become part of my own kind of intellectual project, I guess, is his treatment of ideology and his diagnosis of ideology.

And so for Peterson, a big part of what he wants to emphasize, and it's very related to what you just said, is this sort of emphasis on don't ever lie. Don't ever say anything you don't know to be true. Is that what ideology does is it comes in, and this is relevant to your comment about how does knowing that we have an identity in Christ actually function all the way to the ground? Well, it can just be an ideology.

It can just be that set of formulas that you know and it's supposed to help you somehow, presumably, in the way that it actually functions for you, whether it be sort of knowing a set of Christian doctrines or whether it be being a leftist SJW ideologue or something like this. The way these things function for you is they give you a kind of in the world of actual chaos. Here's the real world is one that's full of chaos.

It's one where actually you don't know very much. It's one where actually if you're honest with yourself, you're confused a good bit of the time. You're trying to figure things out.

That's the real world. That's the actual world you lived in. What ideology does is comes in and it sort of functions as a way to, it's almost like a false story.

It gives you the narrative that actually you've arrived at an almost beatific vision level of self intellectual possession, but without the journey, without the actual living journey that would actually acquire that kind of certainty. So it's a surrogate certainty. And it's always pathological and always dangerous because it will be defended violently.

I mean, it will be defended violently because it's functioning for you. You need it for a certain, in a certain sense. And what's interesting about that critique also is that it deeply cuts just across all of modern civilization.

It's not a right or a left observation. Right and left ideology function in exactly the same way for people living in a very similar existential circumstance. And I think that observation is enormously, enormously helpful.

Just for us having a sense of what our own intellectual projects are doing and really getting back to what you just said, in as much as we talk fancy about, you see this all the time, right? There's lots of books you could find out there about how stories help the Christian imagination. And then you go read them and you're like, how does this actually get down to, and at some point you think this is, at the end of the day, this is just kind of emo child philosophical talk. And it doesn't really like, this doesn't mean anything to the plumber that I know.

If I talked this way to him, he would just think I was nuts. And so you just haven't gotten

to the ground. And at that point, it seems like you're still in ideology.

It's still a head trip of some kind. And I think, yeah, it's a judgment on us to whatever extent that this is the best non-ideology on offer. And Christians, I think there's a deep sense in which this is precisely what our project needs to be, is how does Christian truth really, really, really, how can it be said? How can the logos be appropriated through man in such a way that when we speak Christian truth, that's the manifest reality of the world.

And there's almost a sense in which Christians, Peterson almost persuades me, we need to develop our language because a lot of what makes him effective is he's learned to say things very well. And on that, just the way he communicates rhetorically, it seems to me when he speaks, you can almost see him weighing his words as he's speaking. He's not speaking lightly because the words he is speaking are not light words.

And the levity of our words will lead to a certain way of speaking. There's a sort of facile, glib way of speech that comes with ideology. And he talks about ideological possession where you're not acting in a way that is genuinely engaged with the reality of your life, the world around you, things like that.

You're just acting out of an ideological script. And as a result, you actually end up being profoundly predictable. Everyone can tell exactly what you're going to say next, how you're going to react to a particular situation, because you're not actually acting yourself.

You become, it's almost as if this whole system of routine has taken you over. And that concern, I think, is very important to understand his political action more generally. So when he spoke up against compelled speech, people see that as, on the one hand, it's the one thing that defines him.

He's this transphobe, whatever it is. He's someone who's a right-wing provocateur, whatever people see him as, as a result of that political action. On the other hand, people can see that sort of thing as a means of a sort of ideology, that he's playing the reactionary game of the right.

And then others can see, okay, these are just two different things. On the one hand, he's a self-help teacher. On the other hand, he's got these political and social interests.

And none of those accounts are right. It seems to me that when you actually read him more carefully, he has a very strong emphasis upon the importance of speech. That if we cannot have candid speech within a society as a whole, this is not just provocative speech.

This is speech where people say what they truly believe and say it in a way that means that, and that gives the words the weight that they should. That's a sacred responsibility

for that. And he argues that unless we have that external practice of speech, we cannot internalize it in the process of thought.

So speech precedes thought for each individual, that we hear other people speaking about things. And then we internalize those voices. And we can talk about these things within our own minds.

But until you actually have a society where these voices are publicly articulated, you can't actually develop the depth of thought and the candor with yourself to be able to tell yourself the truth, which is of course paramount for him more than anything else. Do not tell yourself lies. Other people may tell you lies, but do not do that to yourself.

Yes, this is another way. And you're right, it's related to his treatment of ideology. This is another way in which he's helped me, I would say, I think maybe before Peterson, I was less concerned about the left than I am now.

And even though this exists on the right as well, nevertheless, I think he's identified the heart and the heart is the moment you see, the moment you see a policing of speech, you are on the way to becoming a demon because there's something primal about the human and especially the individual human's relationship to the words that come out of their mouth. That is, this is the logos. This is the most sacred site of creativity and freedom.

And really this is just the Protestant notion of the internal forum in some ways, being played with by a psychologist, but it's a deeply Christian and a deeply Jewish notion about the relationship between human beings and speech. And I think there's a way in which we've lost something of the sacredness of that compact. And I think he's, George Steiner also points this out in his book *Real Presences*.

Another thing I'd say, and maybe this is just adding to Peterson's critique of ideology is, and maybe, I don't want to be, yeah, but maybe he himself falls into ideology in this sense. But you tell me. But I think, especially in an age of mobility, where we're all, we all move away from each other, we don't live near our homes.

And you see this shape into church dynamics, you see it shape into political dynamics and into just communal dynamics. We live in an era where people's bonds with each other are more spectral. And they're chosen.

They're not the bonds you have with the people around you or the church you go to or whatever. For the average human being, especially in America, where civilization has been so deeply shaped by the experience of the frontier, the accessibility of land, and therefore everybody's gone everywhere, your actual contacts with people are very elective. And I think we maybe as a civilization have not quite grasped the extent, this is a conjecture I suppose, but I wonder if we've grasped the extent to which that kind of

social bonding has tended to tempt us to relate to human beings ideologically.

Even if we don't relate to the ideas themselves, or we don't relate to, or we're not ideologically in our own, ideological in our own soul, that even if we don't think we're supposed to relate to human beings this way, at just the level of kind of embodied living habit, the way you connect with others is through what they think. You go to church with the people that believe the same things you do. You connect with your social club with the things that they believe.

You have conversations on Facebook about ideas. And what that might be doing in all of its sinews is shaping you to be the kind of person that accidentally, maybe even non-intentionally, reduces people to ideological labels. And one of the things that I think I see happening in the culture wars is that even if you're kind of influenced by these Peter Peterson notions and whatever, as soon as somebody comes up and they start the SJW talking points, you get into this mode where you yourself then are fighting an ideology rather than talking to a person.

And I think that the final moral, in a sense, frontier of fighting ideology is actually not to code others ideologically. It's to say that you're actually more than the words that are coming out of your mouth. You're not just a, you know, an LGBTQIA whatever who says that stuff.

I think it would be really interesting, for instance, to talk to somebody, say in the LGBTQIA spectrum, or somebody talking about those issues and being ideological, and rather relate to them as somebody who's a son of Adam. And then the rhetorical posture becomes actually what I want to do is summon out of you a thing that is atrophied. Speak to something in you that nobody touches.

So for instance, it would be very interesting to say, I think, to somebody maybe who's a, not directly, you don't do this on the street, but it would be interesting to think perhaps, is it possible, and here I'm influenced by my good friend Jim in some ways, but is it possible, say, to say somebody who's struggling with transsexualism or something like this, actually, instead of saying, here's all my arguments against transsexualism and its ideology, what if instead I said, you know what, I actually think there's something in you that's starving to possess manhood, to possess masculinity, and I wonder if there's shame operative in a very primal space, and actually what you really can possess is something you're deeply craving, and have sort of constructed a narrative to just to get away from because it's such a site of pain for you. And I think that's exactly, interestingly, that is the Christian difference. So it's funny, as Jim, and this is his story, my good friend Jim, who's kind of a counselor, he's an elder at my church, you know, his story is sort of a person who struggled with gender identity issues and transsexualism and all this sort of thing, but as soon as God helped him learn how to grieve, and as soon as Christ, you know, sort of restored him to learning what it means to be a man in a

much more primal way, here's now this guy who's a former self-professed transsexual who sits down on a daily basis with person after person after person who's a man, you know, a typical John Wayne style man, and teaches them how to be a real man in some interesting way, and it's kind of a funny way in which God is sort of one-upping the trick of the devil there, and I find that structure fascinating.

So in summary, what I'm trying to say there is, I think a temptation that's even beyond just avoiding ideology in ourselves is relating to others as kind of walking ideologies, and I think there's something also liberating, and that helps us liberating in terms of our cultural moment, liberating in terms of what our mission is and what we need to be focused on, about seeing others as actually just walking sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and then speaking to that very, very, very directly and non-ideologically. And I think then what you might find that words, the Logos has the capacity to do, is actually summon what is asleep in people, to scratch what is in some ways numb. Yeah, and so that's maybe, yeah, I'm just putting together.

I think that's absolutely right. You're dealing with people on occasions who are ideologically possessed. Yes.

The possessing entity is not the person, and what you're trying to do is speak to the person, not the possessing entity, the egregore or the demonic force or the ideology, whatever it is. You're trying to speak to the person who's being captured by those things, and trying to elicit them, their actual authentic voice, and to help them to recognize that they are not the ideology, that to see the tension between them and that. And more generally, I think you're right.

I don't think that he does this as effectively as he ought to often. I think on occasions you can see him do it, but. Oh yeah.

I think the danger is the more that we're dealing with a broader framework when we're on the mass context of social media, that is the problem. Because it reminds me of a statement that Neil Postman quotes, I think it's in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, or maybe *Technopoly*, I think it's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He talks about Henry David Thoreau talking about what will happen when they establish telegraph between two different cities.

What will they talk about? What do they have in common? They'll end up talking about something like the princess's whooping cough, because that's something that they can have in common. Now we speak about big sporting events, we speak about politics, we speak about ideology, and we speak about big symbolic events, because those are the things that fit within that space by which we can have things in common. Now that's not the best way to deal with actual human beings.

You're dealing at a level of such abstraction, but the more that on social media we define

ourselves in terms of the abstraction, our identities are forged in terms of profiles, which are essentially self-representations that we look to, particularly as they're regarded by others, as a mirror for our own identities. So we talk about the internet very often can be, imagine a primitive village that has only running water, they've never actually seen their faces reflected truly. And then someone brings a mirror into the village, and suddenly they all start to relate to themselves differently.

They look at themselves and see themselves as others see them, and it's a traumatic experience. I mean, for all of us, it can be a traumatic experience seeing our face first thing in the morning. But there is something about the character of social media that is the introduction of a new mirror to our society.

And we become fixated upon how we self-represent to others and how others see that. And within that sort of context, where that vast space is defined by the abstractions of ideology and the spectacles of grand symbolism, it's very difficult to have a knowledge of the individual, to speak to them as a distinct son or daughter of God, or son and daughter of Adam and Eve, and speaking to them in a way that will elicit that in them that is distinct from all the ideological network and frames and other things that they can become entangled in, as those are given as the architecture by which they are to form their identity in that virtual space. Yeah, this relates very much in my mind to kind of a strategy of in a way to relate to people that way takes a certain kind of courage because we're all for it, we're all tempted toward this, we're all, you know, the architecture of the world we live in, the communicative architecture shapes each of us toward these tendencies and they need to be resisted, and there's a couple of ways in which they can be resisted because what we mostly need to, you know, I've used this example a billion times but I think of this guy Darrell Davis, this African-American jazz musician who persuaded over 200 members of the KKK to leave the KKK, and I always think to myself like, you know, first of all, like if you told your family, hey this is my project, like I mean how many people would think that that was worth the time, first of all.

Nevertheless, the courage and the fortitude and the endurance that it would take to do it would require thinking these are human beings at the end of the day, the reason these people are attracted to the thing they're attracted to is because they're human beings, and I can actually relate to them as a human being on a register that that is a little outside of that and incrementally as a strategy I can just honestly, even if it's just initially out of curiosity about why they think these things, but what you're doing is you're kind of gradually chipping away the layers of ideology where the real world is confounding and making harder and harder and harder for you to like deny the actual real human world that you're a part of. Nevertheless, what's interesting is I think there are two ways to, you know, if the way, the path towards some degree of leadership is to develop the capacity not to be triggered, if I could put it that way, I think there's two ways to do that and one of them is pathological. The godly way I think is actually to exist in vulnerable relationships where you can get hurt and learn to get hurt actually and to develop the

muscles, not where you're, you know, self-lacerating or whatever, but where you can be disappointed and hurt but nevertheless forgiving and strong precisely because you value real relationships and what it costs in terms of real human cost to achieve those relationships where you then have the ability to speak into life.

But there's another version of leadership where I think the kind of non-triggered person and first of all the sort of caveat here, I think everybody's very triggerable and there's often the sort of making fun of the snowflakes or whatever, but the truth is we're all made for the Garden of Eden and we're all snowflakes a little bit. But one way of sort of avoiding being a snowflake is actually to numb yourself actually to I think the social world in such a way that it's sort of like okay here's my bubble, here are my ideas, and now anybody that's outside of me that's, you know, sort of angry or they're speaking to me because my ideas make them upset or whatever, I'm actually going to constitutionally numb myself to having any reaction to that precisely so that I come off as sort of the cool calm collected one at the end of the day. And what that actually does is make you incapable of being corrected by the face of God through others in some ways.

You've actually cut off the painful path, you've cut off the path of pain that is actually also the path of your own maturity, and you sort of take your default structures as a rival in a certain sort of way and come off looking in a way like the leader because you're sort of collected and you're calm and you don't necessarily look like the triggered one, but in a subtle way it's because you're the consummately triggered one. It's because you're actually so triggerable that you can't handle it and so you actually have to compartmentalize in a certain kind of way. And so, yeah, in terms of, you know, sort of bringing it full circle into our larger conversation here, I think when you're relating to other people and when you actually learn to relate to others ideologically, it's costly.

What it actually looks like is getting into the kinds of relationships that take endurance in some way, that take good faith and that sort of thing. Yeah, so you mentioned Darrell Davis and I found one of the things that he highlights, I think, is the need to actually spend time with people, attend to their world, speak into their situation, humanize them, these sorts of things in order to give them the means by which to tell, to inhabit their world differently. And I think often we work at a very ideological level, this is something I just wrote an article on for Theopolis, that we tend to think at an ideological level, thinking almost in terms of the architecture of the world without actually dealing with the question of how do we make that world a home? And that is one of the things that I think Peterson is very good at.

He's giving people the means by which to tell a meaningful story in which they are a chief protagonist. Now, this is something that people have ways of telling the stories of their lives that they've not really given much thought to, but they have a profound sticking power. They've lived with this way of telling their story from the earliest years.

They've been taught this way by their parents, for instance, in the way that their parents talked about them or certain things that happened to them as a coping mechanism, they developed this way of telling their story. And his way, I think, of speaking into that situation, giving them means by which to consider this particular way of telling your narrative or what you're doing when you act in this particular way in terms of your narrative. Let's say the way that you act around your kids.

This is something that you're doing every single day for 18 years. And this is something that's just a small thing. It's something that maybe you're doing three or four times a day, but you're doing it every single day for that period of time.

And as a result, it's this huge thing that you think in any single occasion, it's a small thing, but it blows up into something great. Same with dynamics in a marriage, same with dynamics in just the way that you order your life more generally in terms of your habits. Now, that's just a skill of ordering your life to give it some sort of order narratively and in other respects.

And it seems to me that this particular concern to give people the means by which to tell their stories, to inhabit their world meaningfully, and not just the great symbolic or the rather the great sort of worldview or ideological architecture that they have to inhabit. Those stories are the things that are really powerful. And that's where I think Christians can really learn from him because we have all these riches within scripture and elsewhere that we just do not use.

God gave us a narrative and we tend to ignore it because we don't know what to do with it. We're looking to build some theological edifice of doctrine, but we don't actually consider we're given narrative for a reason. People make sense of their lives and themselves as protagonists in terms of narrative.

And if we actually learn proficiency with this narrative and speaking it into people's situation, we can bring a lot more healing and orientation than we would do otherwise. Right. And you need the one thing that that also underscores as a structure, but then as an instance in the Christian life is just the living need for exemplars.

I've just more and more as I live and I get older, you start to think like in one way, in one way, you learn wisdom and you learn principles and you internalize those and you can even do that non-ideologically, but real life, and this is again something Peterson captures well, real life is always particular. Circumstances are always full of their own particularities and it's what we need is to be the wise man. Very often the way you learn wisdom is apprenticeship almost.

It really is looking at the person who moves wisely in a circumstance that's very similar to your own and you see it and you say, aha, you know, that's what it is. And it's sort of Solomon with the, you know, the two women and the baby, right? There's no Mosaic law

to cover what to do here. You just have to be wise and Solomon is wise and what it is in principle, what it's supposed to be to have a church community, what it's supposed to be to have elders in a church is to be surrounded by a community where there are people, women, men, who help us see what it's like to live with a degree of precision in this way within a context that's relatively similar to our own.

And I think that's, yeah, so there's some sort of the stories of the Christian life, but it's also how the people around us are, there's the stories of scripture, scripture as story, and there's also how that story is lived out in the stories of the individual lives around us. And I think that's one of the ways in which it is brought right to the ground for us as well. Thank you very much for joining me for this discussion.

If people want to find out more about your work and to listen or read more of your work, where would they go? Yeah, so you can look up, I guess my book is *Enduring Divine Absence*. You can find that on Amazon, but you can find me, I frequently write for *Modern Reformation*. You can look up Joseph Minnick there, but online it's the *Pilgrim Faith Podcast*.

I do that with Dale Stenberg, and then probably my most distinctive little project is something called *A Plausible Faith*. You can just put in *A Plausible Faith* on YouTube, and you'll see a series of videos where I try to kind of walk doubters through a crisis of faith, influenced in some ways by listening to the way Jordan Peterson uses words. You'll see some of his influence there.

Fantastic. I'll put the links to those in the show notes as well for anyone who's interested. If you want to read the Jordan Peterson book, it is called *Beyond Order, 12 More Rules for Life*, and I will put the link in the show notes as well.

God bless, and thank you very much for listening.