

OpenTheo

A Lifetime of Books and Ministry with D.A. Carson

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

With more than 50 books and hundreds of articles, not to mention scores of edited works, Don Carson has written a lot. In this retrospective on life and books and everything, Kevin asks Dr. Carson about his father, how he sees the state of the church, and what books he especially enjoyed (or didn't enjoy) writing. From Bible commentaries to books on current events to a grammar on Greek accents, Kevin explores the why, what, and how of Don's remarkable writing career.

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Books:

Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson

For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word, Volume 1

For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word, Volume 2

The Gospel according to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC))

The Gagging of God

Praying with Paul

Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures

Exegetical Fallacies

Christ and Culture Revisited

An Introduction to the New Testament

Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon

Collected Writings on Scripture

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations, welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung and glad to have you with us. Grateful for our sponsor Crossway and want to mention a new book by Johnny Eric Sintada.

I'm sure most of you are interested in reading this book. I'm sure most of the listeners know of Johnny, Johnny and friends, ministry, really one of the great leaders. If there's someone to look up to in life, Johnny Eric Sintada fits the bill along with her wonderful husband.

This is a new book, Songs of Suffering, 25 Hymns and Devotions for Weary Souls. If you know Johnny at all, you know that she's had a life that the Lord has given her of more suffering than most and yet has acquitted herself so well and you know that she loves hymns. This is a collection of hymns and devotions where she guides the reader through

her own experiences, painful seasons, but also praise to God.

So 25 hymns with sheet music, devotions, photography, so it's a really unique book, would be a great gift and helpful for those who are hurting. So pick up a copy, Songs of Suffering, wherever you get books or you can visit crossway.org and if you sign up for a Crossway Plus account, you get 30% off this book. My guest today is none other than Dr. D. A. Carson.

If I may, I will call him Don, although many have called him the Don. And we are going to walk through many, we don't have time for all, but many of his books. And one of the things that Don is to be commended for is he is not eager to talk about himself.

And so this is humble of him to come on and talk about his books, a little bit about himself, but about his books and himself through these books. So Don, thank you so much for taking time to be with us. My privilege.

Give us a little update. You're, of course, taught at Trinity for decades and founded president of the gospel coalition, traveled internationally in almost astronomical. If you added them all up together, the miles would probably be astronomical the number of times you've traveled.

And now what are you doing in this season of life in your 70s. What are you doing? What are you working on? Well, I'm no longer a faculty member at Trinity. I still have one or two folks that I'm trying to shepherd through the last stages of a PhD program.

And I am working part time still for the gospel coalition. Right. On the right in front, we're in the final stages of completing the manuscript for the dictionary of the New Testament, using the Old Testament.

A number of years ago, Greg Biel and I did a comment here on the New Testament, using the Old Testament. Now there are four of us who have put together a dictionary. And that should be off to the press by the end of this year and come out next year.

Other things are harder down the pike. It's great. So maybe I just asked this is a very general question as we get into your books.

How did you become a Christian? I'm one of those people brought up in a strong Christian home who cannot place conversion at a definite time. I made a public confession of faith when I was five. But I suspect I was really trying to catch up with blessings that were showered on my older sister.

I struggled with a lot of these things more personally when I was in second year university. So one of the things I have a mental checklist of things to ask God someday. And one of them is when did you save me? And I suspect he will say from before the foundation of the earth, my son.

I don't remember not knowing the gospel. My father was a church planter in French Canada. My earliest memories are sitting in the bathtub being told Bible stories.

Naaman in the Jordan River is very effective in the bathtub. I have to remember that. So you could have asked me for a definition of the gospel it would have passed muster when I was five or six.

It didn't reflect any of the funding on my part. It reflected the fact that I had a family that loved the Lord and we had family devotions together and learned to pray that our parents need and so on. But I suspect that somewhere between the age of five and second year university, the Lord did a transforming thing in my life.

But just when it was I have no idea. So that's a good segue to talk about certainly not your first book and not your longest book. One of your shorter books and that's the book you wrote about your father and his ministry, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor*.

And I've had occasion to tell you this before dawn and I'll just repeat it here publicly that that book. So I assign that book when I teach pastoral ministry at RTS Charlotte and inevitably and then they have to write a short reflection paper on it and inevitably many of the students say not only is that their favorite book in that course, many of them will say that is the favorite book they had to read in all of seminary. And, you know, I've read now scores of these short reflection papers and so many of them will write about I read this book in tears, or this reminds me of my father who was a minister, or if only I could be like dawn's father, I would be so pleased.

I read the book and I had to have my wife read the book and we now reading it together out loud it has had a profound effect I want you to know that, and people find it very realistic and inspiring so thank you for writing the book what, when did you know you wanted to write a book about your father and what was the experience like to write about someone that you've known your whole life. It was not my plan to do so I was not waiting for dad to die thinking now I'm going to get his manuscript so I just wasn't thinking in those terms. And for various reasons my my brother became the executor of my dad's papers, partly because I was 800 miles away, and he was relatively nearby.

Dad had never talked about his journals, but Jim my brother and I came to the conclusion that if anything was to be done with these papers I was probably the one to do it. So when I got all of this stuff boxloads of journals covering years and years and years, I began to read through them just to see if there was anything that could be turned to spiritual use. And the best parts of the book *memoirs on ordinary pastor* are really transcriptions of his journals.

And once I read enough of them I saw that there was something here that was valuable, partly because in terms of Western evangelicalism today so much of it was countercultural. He just wasn't thinking in terms of being a big shot or being a hero, he

just didn't think in those terms. All of his categories were in terms of faithfulness and perseverance and most of his life he preached a vast congregations of between 15 and 45.

So he viewed his own life in many ways as a failure. That's not how others saw him, but that's how he saw himself pretty frequently. And therefore he also fought discouragement.

And then his best moments in some ways came to the top when my mother contracted her final years of mental problems and challenges and so on. So starting about the age of 72 she began to lose it and died at 81. And his handling of his wife during those years was immeasurably Christian.

It was faithful, happy, thankful, non bitter, gracious for the privilege of service. And that's a heritage that don't let stamps the rest of our family without it being preachy. It was just the way Christians do things.

And so all of those things together prompted me eventually to sit down and write it because so much of it was there. It didn't take me more than three or four months once I set my mind to it and the rest you know. It's such a wonderful book and you know, a great paragraph.

It's really poignant at the end which you described so well. The oxygen vainly venting and there was no public parade. There was no front page newspaper articles.

The world didn't take note of your father's final breaths, but the only audience that mattered, the Lord Jesus knew and there was rejoicing in heaven. I read that in my class and it's very moving. One of the things that comes out in the book and you just alluded to it is that at various times in your dad's ordinary ministry, he experienced the things that all of us experience at times feeling betrayed perhaps more than an average amount of self-recrimination.

In fact, you sort of elude that maybe he would have been better not to be so hard on himself. Were you aware of that as either a child or as a young adult? Were you aware that your father was often so discouraged and felt like a failure when to you? It probably seemed like this is my dad. He's so faithful.

He's preaching the gospel each Sunday. Did you know what he was wrestling with inside? Not when I was young. By the time I was a student myself, I began to catch on a bit and later on we could talk about these things man to man.

But my parents adopted the practice of shielding us, us kids, from the worst things. One of the stories I told in the book occurred when I was in second year seminary myself. It was a course on Baptist history in Canada.

Dad played a part in that he had been pretty badly treated by one person who was magisterial in his abilities, and was influential, powerful, and so on. The lecturer finished telling the account and giving the dates and providing documents and all the rest. He said, "One of the first things I want to see when I get to heaven is Tom Carcisses Crown." I had never thought of my father that way.

The next time I got home, 300 miles away, I said, "Dad, I've been learning some things about what happened in 1948-49. You figure predominantly in them. Is that what happened?" He said, "Well, what did they tell you?" I said, "I've been told." He said, "Well, it's pretty close." I said, "How come you never told me? I don't think any of us kids has heard this before." He said, "You must understand that your mom and I have made of how a long time ago with respect to this particular magisterial preacher that caused so much of the trouble.

We would never ever say anything negative about that man in public that we have kept our power." That sort of thing reveals an enormous sense of self-discipline and self-awareness and concern for eternal things. It's really commendable. How do you reflect? Don, you're not telling secrets here.

You're a generation older than me, but now I'm in my 40s and there's fully a generation younger than me just starting out into ministry. I'm sure every generation looks back and sees some things that are good and bad about the generation to come. One of the things that does seem so objectively different is your parents' generation, the silent generation, the greatest generation.

Perhaps there was a danger sometimes of just stiff upper lip and not letting out some of their own struggles, but there was also something wonderfully refreshing. You see this as the world is noting the passing of the Queen in the last couple of weeks. This sort of reserve that I don't have to turn my insides inside out for everyone to always know.

The whole world is a platform. The whole world is my YouTube channel. How do you reflect on that because you've been connected to younger generations' students' training for years and years? I've heard you many times say how encouraged you are by the new crop of students.

You're certainly not looking wistfully. Everything was better in the past. How do you compare your father's generation with younger generations who have opportunities for self-expression and platforming that older generations couldn't use their own skills? How do you compare your generation with your generation with your generation? Let me back off one stage.

It's not just a generational thing. There's also a cultural thing. My mother was born in London.

My father was born in Northern Ireland. They're British. They're not Canadian, not by background.

They spend most of their lives in Canada. And it's certainly not American. Part of it is a cultural thing.

To let it all hang out is much more likely to take place in Spanish parts of the world, let's say, than in East London. Part of it is generational, as you say, and it's worth asking those questions. But part of it is cultural.

The very thing that seems like a disciplined reserve in one party is seen in other parties as too private, too stowical, not candid enough. On the negative side, you hear almost every interviewer on radio or television refer to some event in the interviewees past. And the question is, how do you feel about that? Or you've just put down the winning shot at the Labour Cup.

How do you feel about that? Not how do you think about it? Or what do you make of it? Or how do you feel about it? As if the most important thing is how you feel, not what you think or the disciplines that have gone into it or whatever. It seems to me that is a formula that encourages too much self-focus. So, Raz, I can appreciate the honesty and the candor, not least of Adjone, whom you mentioned.

She does so in a way that is simultaneously revealing and self-effacing. It's a part of a question. But we've got the self-revealing part down in the culture.

We haven't got the self-effacing part down very well. And so, I'm forced to side with my parents on this one. The privacy thing can be a form of idolatry.

But it can be a form of disciplined determination to have the focus of me. Right. And on the Christ who brought me here.

Right. So, let's talk about some of your books. So, we started with this one.

For the love of God. So, you've written a couple of books and Lord willing, you'll get to, I think there's some others to finish off the McShane readings. But I have so many times recommended to people when they say, "I want a daily devotional and I want something that I can read in a few minutes, but I want something with some depth to it, some meat to it." It's not to say that the other kinds don't have their purpose, but many of the devotional genre is a little story, a little hook into a Bible verse at the end, where your books on scripture are really meaty but accessible reflections on the Bible chapter for the day.

How did you go about writing those? And I ask somewhat selfishly, I'm working on a, it's kind of a mini systematic theology, kind of a devotional thing that's going to be sort of like yours, but with systematic topics rather than exegetical. And on the one hand, it's

easier to write because you can go in and out of it, you can put it on the shelf for a while and then come and you do the next chapters. But on the other hand, it's very difficult, it requires a lot of discipline.

And it's not like other writing projects where you can get on a roll and you look at the clock and five hours went by and you just cranked out 3,000 words. These devotional things, if you do them well, are really challenging. Each one has to have its own arc, its own structure to it.

Did you enjoy the process of writing those and what was your research that went into doing 365 of those for two volumes? Well, the topics chosen were determined by the machine reading list. Right. It's in four columns and I've done two of the columns.

I've started working on the other two eventually, if God gives me strength, I'll finish volumes three and four. And that way, it will be a meditation on every chapter in the Bible and double meditation on all the New Testament chapters and Psalms. And there have been times when I've been doing those pieces while I've been doing other things.

So I've just squeezed an hour out of the day or two hours out of the day and done another one. But there have been times when I made them part of my own devotional life. So I extended that period and the passage was chosen by the chart.

But I thought through, prayed through, worked through what it meant in its own context, what I thought I should be getting out of it and wrote it up as part of the discipline of the day. So yes, I did enjoy it. But as you can say, it can be quite time consuming.

And so I, with illnesses I've had in recent years, I haven't finished off volumes three and four yet. I've got to march in both volumes. And I hope to get to December eventually.

Well, we're praying for good strength and health because those books have, we have them in our home and I've read them and my wife's reading them, my oldest son just went off to college and one of the gifts I gave him when he left was those two volumes and said, be a great discipline to read one of these pages a day. I can't, I can't claim whether he is or isn't yet but we're trying to put that in front of him. Don did when you sat down to write those.

Did you pull up sermons and research or just from your knowledge of things you more or less looked at the text and had things to say. I've heard you do a lot of short devotionals before TGC meetings, council meetings, board meetings, other things. And I'm probably unspiritual in that often when I hear people do a little five minute, ten minute devotional.

It's not all that interesting. Yours are always interesting. You always have a new thought, a new idea, or something said in a profound ways.

Did you do a lot of research to write each of those chapters or you just sat down and

looked at the text and stuff started to flow. It varied. There are times when I purposely set aside preparatory time in terms of commentary reading and theological reflection, pulling of systematics, volume off the shelf or whatever.

But very often it's a function of my broader reading in any case. I do read widely. And so it's part of the overflow.

Moreover, my first call in some ways is not to being a professor but to being a pastor preacher. I planted two or three churches. I've been preaching since I was about twenty.

So my mind happily runs into lines that a pastor might well trace out himself. I didn't have a set way of doing things. It's not as if in every case I spent a few hours looking things up in a commentary.

In some cases it flowed right out of the text. But in other cases I did quite a lot of work in advance. It varied enormously.

If you're going through Zechariah, probably you have to do more preparation time than if you're going through John. That sort of thing. So you mentioned John and people can't see this because you're listening to a podcast but I'm holding up the gospel according to John, the pillar New Testament commentary.

One of Don's most well-known books in an almost any commentary list when they list the best commentaries on John. They'll rightfully list this one. How long did it take you to write this commentary on John? So I'm not a, I did my doctorate in history.

I didn't do it in New Testament. I love commentaries. I read them every week for sermons.

The idea of sitting down to write a commentary feels tedious to me. How long did it take you to do this really magisterial work on John and did it ever feel tedious when you were going through it? In some ways that one's irregular in that I did a PhD that focused on Johannine studies and Jewish background and so on. So I had a pretty good grasp of the relevant literature in the case of John.

Different is Matthew. I had not done a significant work on Matthew before I came up with Matthew commentary. So the pattern of preparation was quite different in the two cases.

Both of them took me, I should say rather, each of them took me about a year and a half. But it's a year and a half after spending years and years and years in the John case in the Matthew was a year and a half after spending about another year, another year and a half doing background, studying, so on. I learned from F.F. Bruce, when I asked him once how he went about writing a commentary.

He said he started off by taking notes on whatever book he was going to work on,

infusions or whatever. And when he had pages and pages and pages and notes, as he put it, when I have a stack that high, then I start writing. Now I haven't done that for everything, but I've done it for quite a few things.

That is do enough work on the exegesis that I would begin with one full-scat page per verse. And that could become two pages, three pages, six pages, ten pages of more technical background, Greek stuff. I had a code in the margins so the very sections could be put together.

And so I have hundreds of pages of notes on the John E.D. pistols, for example, and I'm about half finished that commentary. But I didn't start writing the commentary until the research was basically done. And in that case, it got delayed for all kinds of reasons.

I've got to update the research. But you don't start a commentary by picking up a pen and getting the first word. At least I don't.

So I'm a firm believer in getting a lot of work done first before you actually start the actual writing up of the final draft. In this series, there are a few series, you know, sometimes you get a series and there's a few good commentators in them. And then there are some series like this pillar one, which are almost across the board.

Maybe I'd have to look. It might be everyone, but just a very strong commentary series. And one of the things that I love about, well, I'll give you two things.

So this is 700 pages, so it's not a small book. But considering how long some of the John commentaries are, you really restrain yourself to come in at, you know, 600 pages of text. Two things that I appreciated and it's because I find them rare in commentaries.

One, you weren't afraid to talk theology. You didn't let system, it wasn't a systematic theology book, but you weren't afraid to move from exegesis to theology and look at it. And in John in particular, you need to be able to do that and talk about how does this intersect with the later Trinitarian and Christological formulas to come.

And so that was really good. And two, you're obviously well conversant with the literature, but here's my pet peeve, a complaint I have as a busy pastor looking at commentary. Is I get very tired of the commentaries that are really nothing but commentaries on the other commentaries.

And an exhaustive word study on this word and on the next word. And then you need to interact with every single person who's ever commented on this verse. And I sometimes say tongue in cheek that many commentaries could be one third shorter.

If you just you just agreed at the front end, the person that we think wrote the book, that the history of the church said wrote the book, actually wrote the book. And the version that we have is more or less the version that he wrote because so much of the

commentaries get filled up with redaction criticism. And can we really trust that this was this a later interpolation.

You studied, you did your PhD on this, was it hard to restrain yourself and do something at a reasonable length, or did you find yourself tempted to want to clear the field of everyone who ever came into the Johanine neighborhood. In large part I agree, I sympathize with your feelings in this area. If you want a commentary on John or Matthew or two Peter or whatever, then it needs to be first and foremost a commentary on that document.

Depending on the level at which the material is being written, something is to be said for giving some representative examples of how you would go about answering this sort of question or this sort of doubt. And the trick is to make a judgment call on what to include and what to exclude. And that will depend on the nature of the series and how many pages you've been given, who you're envisaged readership is and so on.

In the case of the pillar series I wrote the specs for the publisher let me get away with that helps. And what I say to the contributors to that series is I wanted to be accessible and readable. I wanted to focus on the text so that you self consciously place yourself under the text, not as a judge over the text.

I wanted to be edifying. I wanted to be obvious that you're writing as a confessing Christian. And so I specified all of those things and within certain parameters of length and so on.

So as it turned out I probably wasn't the only one who felt that way because the series has done fairly well. I mean people still tell me that they pick up the pillar commentaries among the first commentaries they get when they start to work on another book. So another chap and I have started a pillar Old Testament commentary series now.

And most of the contracts have gone out and the first volumes will be coming in the next year or two. So I hope that I'll pass this off eventually. I won't live long enough to see the end of it.

But it's coming. And as we're saying in passing that couldn't have been done in my father's generation. There weren't enough writers around who had a combination of exegetical training theological noose.

And we speak of the decline of Christendom and the decline of Christian faith in the West. But in some ways it's stronger than it was 50 or 60 years ago. If you judge by the number and quality of books that have been written in the last 20 years compared with, let's say 1930 to 1950.

And so we're reaping the harvest of those who have gone before and on whose shoulders we stand. So I don't have a formula, but we purposely aimed the pillar series

to be a mixture of exegetical rigor, contemporaneity, theological noose, some interaction with historical theology and systematic theology, certainly an interaction with biblical theology where it fits in the Bible for a long time. And yet make it edifying so that ordinary people are being brought close to God by meditating on the text in a reverential and knowledgeable way.

Well, you certainly did that with the John one. And so the Lord gave you strength to write even more commentaries. I want to piggyback on something you just said, Don, about the state of the church.

In some ways it's easy to multiply bad news, the rise of the nuns in O.N.E.S., any number of scandals or problems in the church. And yet there are other sorts of indicators that ought to be encouraging to us. I think I've gotten this right.

I've heard you say before many years ago that you were extremely encouraged by the up and coming generation of students that you had in the classroom, that men and women training for Christian ministry, eager to learn from the past, eager to be orthodox, to have good theology, not an act to grind, committed to the local church, that by and large, and I've certainly found that with the students that I have at RTS. You have, I want to go to this book, which is the first big, well, and it is one of your biggest books. But I remember reading this when I was in college, *The Gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism*.

And you have a section in here where you're commenting on Mark Knoll's scandal of the evangelical mind. I'll just read a few sentences. So you talk about how Knoll rightly excoriates the anti-intellectualism that characterizes a wide swath of contemporary evangelicalism.

So you say, Yes, Mark, you're on to something. There is certainly in many parts a scandal of the evangelical mind. But then you say, I worry less about the anti-intellectualism of the less educated sections of evangelicalism than I do about the biblical and theological illiteracy or astonishing intellectual compromise among its leading intellectuals.

Later in that paragraph, in the main, they think like secularists and bless their insights with the odd text or biblical cliché. And then the next paragraph, you say, the fault is not their own. Above all, the problem lies in the pulpit.

Too few preachers have married content and passion that they have taught their people to think biblically and love and honor God passionately. The books on many church book stalls are a disgrace, thousands of pages of this is great, Carson, sentimental twaddle laced with the occasional biblical gem. So I think this came out in 1996.

Have things gotten better on either front? Or do you think that assessment is still largely true of both intellectuals, scholars, and the average pulpit in Pew in 2022 for the first

year? In 2022 versus 1996. In some ways it's both. There are several things that have come along, just restricting ourselves to the western world, to North America for the time being.

The impact of T4G and TGC and other movements has emboldened a rising generation of young preachers to handle the text expositively to try to think synthetically. To hold a flag to be full of the joy of the Lord, the impact of John Piper, for example, holding up a model of joy in Christian service and so on. All of these things have left a mark in terms of thousands, probably tens of thousands of young pastors in the Acts 29 church planting movement.

We all know that these things are really significant and their long-term impact, we won't probably be able to discern accurately for another 50 or 60 years. We need to get some historical perspective on it. On the other hand, people today are debating whether evangelical is even a useful term today.

As far as I can see, one of the reasons why people doubt it is because the matrix in which evangelicalism is discussed varies from person to person. Some definitions of evangelical come out of church history. You try to follow what groups have generated, what groups which have generated, what groups which have generated contemporary evangelicalism.

Where did evangelicalism go in the southern Baptists, for example, and so on? Others have a definition of evangelicalism that is based on social science studies. How many of you are evangelicals put up your hands? Now we know how many people call themselves evangelicals, what do you think about? Take off the box, take off the box. It's a social studies group.

Others are trying to get a definition in terms of politics. When I've talked to secular media people and we just start to talk theology, they all want to know what I think about Trump. I don't think any of that is useful because there are lots of people who can put up a hand and say, "I'm an evangelical" and not be constrained by theological conviction.

Others who are theologically evangelicals who never use the term because they have bad associations with it. Lots of conservative Lutherans are evangelical, but they don't call themselves that. Some reform people would never call themselves evangelical.

When you remember that gospel is another term for evangelical, Tim Keller likes to say that in New York City, any evangelical is a Protestant jihadist. That's not exactly what I mean. It seems to me that although it's worthwhile taking into account all of these possible backgrounds to generate our definition, you've got to have a definition of evangelicalism that begins by asking, what does the Bible say the "evangel" is? That at least gets you back to the text.

There might be some disagreements about the interpretation of the text, but it gets you back to the text. That is the place to begin. That's why I am not eager to lose the term.

In his last years, Carl Henry kept debating whether or not evangelical was a term that was worth maintaining, but he used to come back in discussions we had to the fact that at the end of the day, unlike the term fundamentalism, for example, evangelicalism is a biblical word, and you don't want to lose biblical words. You want to see how they work in Scripture. So in that sense, I think we've lost something.

We've broadened our possible basis for defining evangelicalism. I think that's got worse. I think there is a widening number of so-called evangelicals, who don't know what the evangelism is in any biblical sense.

That's confusing. It's hard to cope. How do we respond to it all? There are some different parts of the country.

You asked me, are we losing? Are we gaining ground? The answer is yes. It's confusing, but I think that's the truth. So this book, "Gagging of God," Christianity Confronts Pluralism, came out in the mid-90s and won various awards and was well received.

It has a wonderful picture of Don here with a very nice mustache, which has the mustache has come back into usage with, I see now young men in my seminary class with the same sort of little pencil-thin mustache, so it all comes around. But it seems to me, Don, that this book was speaking to a particular time. And for, it seemed like if you would have asked somebody ten years ago, they might have said, "Oh yeah, I read the "Gagging of God" 15 years ago.

That was a good book. Nobody really talks about postmodernism anymore and we're on to other things. And yet now with the rise of the various critical theories that trickle down and really have been there in the academy all along, but just about the time some of those, and you've said this before, we're getting passé, just about the time in the academy that people were maybe getting tired of talking about Foucault and Derrida, then all of a sudden it explodes in a popular level and even in the church.

So, for example, I won't read this whole paragraph that you have in here, but you describe a possible scene of a young woman going off to university, and there she is in one of her classes, and the professor doesn't deny any of the things she says are true about being a Christian, but he quickly relativizes all of them and says, "Well, you think that because you're Western or because you speak English or because of your upbringing or I don't know if you said because you're white, but various ways, he's never denied one of the things she said or intellectually tried to refute it, but she walks out of that class feeling like, "Wow, I guess I have no reason to believe this other than my own in cultururation, my own embeddedness." And that really is what you're confronting in this book on pluralism. As you think about this, do you feel like we went through a lull and

now in 2022, these issues seem very live again? Not so much a lull as a loss of ongoing debate about the foundation documents of the movement while accepting the ebb and flow of the cultural preferences. In other words, 40 years ago, 50 years ago, you couldn't study an English course or a sociology course or a psych course or a history course at most Western universities without becoming reasonably familiar with Juyad Edd and Michelle Foucault and Thaswalia Thaad and earlier than not the German authors and so on.

You just couldn't do it. Nowadays, they're just about unknown in our universities, except in specialist courses, but the effluent from the postmodern scholarship of 40 or 50 years ago is still in full tide so that people have bought into this changed worldview what Charles Taylor sees as an overthrow, an overturn of the givens, of two centuries back. And so it is counter-cultural, not only to be a Christian, it's counter-cultural to believe in a personal transcendent God.

Whereas 50 years, 150 years ago, 200 years ago, it wasn't counter-cultural to believe in God. You had to ask questions about who he is and whether you understand his revelation and what the Bible was about and all the rest, but it wasn't counter-cultural, just what anybody believed in God. And atheist was an odd thing.

Nowadays, to be a Christian who really does hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, that's an odd thing. And that was already turning with an quinary conner, for example. When she wrote, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." That's exactly right.

She was already on to something. 40 years ago. So we're a bit on the tail end of the tail stream, but the effluent is still strong.

Somewhere along the line, after I wrote the gagging of God, I wrote the book on intolerance, of tolerance. Yep. I got that here also, the intolerance of tolerance.

But if I were writing that today, I would tilt it another way. That book was tilted against the tendency to relativize everything. Right.

In the name of tolerance, to be extremely intolerant, and the tolerance was extremely characterized by usurpation. It's taking over everything. Whereas today, it seems to me that there's more subjectivity.

You still push tolerance, but tolerance for the things that I want you to be tolerant about. Meanwhile, the other things that I want you to be intolerant about, you need to be intolerant about them, or you're at fault. So there's the magnetism adjacent to the alleged tolerance that is basically incoherent.

We live in an extremely intellectually incoherent time. And it takes some work and evangelism and cultural commentary and so on, not to sound easily dismissable. You say

something, and another segment of the society says, "Well, yes, that's okay for that group, but over here, that's not where I'm standing." And so there's more confusion, more relativism in some ways, but it's against the background of more absolute dogmatic insistence on the non-negotiables of my perspective.

And so you're simultaneously trying to encourage people to admit they might be wrong. And at the same time, trying to insist that there is a right to be held to. And that's a combination that's hard and demanding for any preacher working on whether they're a university crowd today.

Yeah, I think I heard Tim Keller say this. I've repeated it since then, that people used to be very easygoing about the foods they ate and used to be very particular about sex. And now they're very easygoing about who you had a sex with.

And they're very, very particular about the foods that you ate. Yeah. And so the intolerance of, you're absolutely right.

It's still relevant, it's still there. But in some ways, the cry of moral relativism, you go on Twitter. There's not a lot of moral relativists.

There's a lot of absolute moral absolutists telling you not just that anything goes, but actually what you now believe as a Christian is not just benighted, but it's bigoted or worse. Yes, I agree entirely. Let me just, I got some lightning round questions for you.

I need to mention one other book by David Mathis, *Workers for Your Joy*. *Desiring God* is encouraging this and I would encourage you to look at it as well. You can get it online or Westminster Books always has great deals.

But this is a book that is directing our attention to Christian leaders, to cast a vision from scripture of Christ's appointed leaders being workers for the joy of their people. We live in a time where it's easy to look down on leaders and anyone holding authority. And this gives us the scriptural positive vision that we have leaders and ultimately they are to work for our joy.

So check that out by David Mathis. Don, let me ask, I know books can be sort of like children. You don't want to say you have a favorite or an unfavourite, but is there, is there one of your books that you really didn't enjoy writing the process was particularly laborious and you plowed through it.

But there were times you thought, man, I wish I didn't have to do this. I wouldn't put it quite as strongly as that. But both Doug and I, we co-wrote *Introduction to the New Testament*.

Yep. Got this wonderful green volume, Carson move. That's the second and second edition.

And we're in the third edition right now. Both of us agree that that was not the favorite thing that either of us have ever done. It needed to be done.

It needs to be done periodically. So I'm not sorry that we spent the time to write, but talking endlessly about the dating of documents and how you understand the Church Fathers and so on. It has to be done.

Students need to become aware of this. It seems to me questions of so-called New Testament intro are cast aside too easily today. You have to think these things through because biblical Christianity is embedded in history.

You cannot duck that. At least not responsibly. And yet I confess I would rather write a commentary.

Yeah. I remember working on what does the title of my book, what does the Bible really say about homosexuality? And that was a book I felt like needed to be written, cross way asked if I'd write it. I'd written so many blog posts and things over the years.

And I thought it would be an easy task of pulling together 10 things I had written. And then I got to it and this usually happens. If I try to pull something I've already written, I think not I just need to write it from scratch.

It's more work to try to repurpose it. And because of that topic in particular and getting into some of the Greek literature, which is so dark on that topic, there were many times I felt like, oh, I know this needs to be done and I hope it will serve the church. But I'm not enjoying this process.

Conversely, one of the books that of mine that hasn't been a great bestseller, but is near to my heart is the commentary I did on the Heidelberg catechism. I grew up with the Heidelberg and I love the Heidelberg. So to introduce people to that was a joy.

Do you have a book or two that maybe it hasn't been your bestseller or your most famous one, but was really near and dear to your heart to work on? Not just one, for better and for worse. I've written books on a wide variety of topics. So some of them are evangelistic, some of them are for pastors, some of them are scholarly volumes and so on.

So my reasons for enjoying this book or that book vary enormously and I can't rank them. Believe it or not, I enjoyed writing a little book on Greek accents. What can I think? Some people are odd.

No, that's one I don't have, but I should. Well, when I first was studying Greek, a lot of people were learning Greek without the accents made popular as an approach by John Wenham. And so this plugs that gap and all of our PhD students have to work through it and you don't want Greek professors who can't figure out where the accent goes on the

Greek word.

But believe it or not, I enjoyed that. I've got a little twist in my brain that would enjoy some techie stuff. But on the other hand, I suspect I've had more joy out of working through biblical texts either short ones like one on Christian leadership from one Christmas, one to four.

Yeah. Or long ones like the Matthew commentary. I've enjoyed working on material on the use of the Old Testament in the New.

I've devoted a lot of my life to that. Yeah, you have. I've got some big books on that.

And I've enjoyed that. And partly because I felt as if I were learning things that I hadn't got elsewhere. When I was writing the Matthew commentary, one of the better old commentaries I plowed through at the time was John Broughts, 19th century southern Baptist whose book on Matthew is still worth reading.

But many times he comes to the place where John quotes the Old Testament in an obscure fashion and says, I don't have a clue what this means, but we know it's the word of God. So we believe it to be true. That's right, which was an edifying, confessional way of approaching things.

But I still thought that we would be more than needed to be said. And so working on John's use of the Old Testament, Matthew's use of the Old Testament or more currently Hebrew's use of the Old Testament to me has been extremely challenging, but also edifying and instructive and stands behind in some ways directly or indirectly, stands behind the series, new studies and biblical theology. So yeah, I didn't even mention that that has been, I don't know how many dozens of those gray books I have 60 something right there in print now.

Yeah, it's been amazing. A couple of things that I really appreciate about these scripture books and just so our listeners know something across in Christian ministry, leadership lessons from first Corinthians would be an example showing the spirit theological exposition of first Corinthians 12 through 14, the book you did on Paul's prayers, more recently scandalous, the cross and resurrection of Jesus. You have five chapters, which I imagine started out as sermons from Matthew, Romans, Revelation, John 11, John 20.

You're again, I may be not shows that my lack of spirituality. There are a number of folks I can think of good people, but if I saw a new book going through three chapters of the Bible, I would think, yeah, I should probably like that, but I probably won't. It's probably going to be something I probably have thought of that.

I've read that. I don't know that I would do anything particularly insightful, but invariably you've written on these chapters in these little books or bigger books, interesting things, top notch scholarship of it, but also, Don, you're a very good writer and I'm not saying

that to flatter because I actually think most people are not very good writers and I think publishers would tell you the little secret that a lot of the people you read don't actually write very well until they come through a very heavy editing process, but you have a certain verb and turn of the phrase and I appreciate your economy of words like this book on scandalous. You start the chapter on Doubting Thomas.

Doubt can have so many causes. Number one, I appreciate that. We don't need a story about your dog unless it's going to fit.

You got something to say about doubt. Number one. How did you learn to write? Did you read books on writing? Did you have teachers who told you you're a good writer? I think it's one of the underdeveloped skills for scholars and even for ministers.

I grade my students. I'm very upfront. I'm going to grade you on writing because you look at the people who influence the church for better or worse.

It's because they can write. People still read C.S. Lewis because he was a great writer. Tom Wright with whom both of us would have some disagreements, he's a good writer and that's why people have read him.

How did you develop as a writer who helped you with that? You have any insights for us? Well, you're very kind. My writing has improved over the years in order to write that. I think the first thing to say is to be a good writer.

You have to be a good reader. Absolutely. That's the number one thing.

You just have to keep writing. You have to be reading to keep writing. I was brought up in a family of books.

So that's part of it. I still read "Pordigiously" today. I'm not just books for the next Sunday sermon, but history and sociology and literature and poetry and mathematics.

I read very widely. So that has itself helped me to be a little better. Then I've had two or three mentors who have been good.

My doctor father at Cambridge was Barnabas Lenders. We didn't see how to why and all kinds of theological and ex-insed medical things. He was angiopathic and he was a philologic background and very liberal in terms of his own personal feelings and all of that.

But he was merciless on extra words. He was a very good editor. And so he's sparkingly clear.

No sentence is too long. So I kept measuring myself against him. That was shaped by some extent.

I owe him a great debt of gratitude even though we never did come to see how to why I

have a lot of things. So there have been people like that, but I have really appreciated it. Then I've also found that rewriting is required for glib writing.

Even if your sentences are all complete, you can just split infinities and all of that. Nevertheless, you can polish things, make them better. And to have the determination to take the time to edit something not the same day but the next day or the next week.

Once or twice, inevitably improves things a great deal. And then partly because I have been an editor, I edited the Zondovan Study Bible and I edited three series. So that has forced me to look at other people's writing.

And so all of those things have had some play and shape in the air. I feel privileged to have had so many good influences imposed on them. Not always with gratitude at the time, but with gratitude.

Right. It really is worthwhile. And just to be clear, I don't think everyone has to write.

Many people won't have opportunities to be published. That's great. Most pastors.

Most pastors should not be blogging and tweeting in some do. I do, so I hope it's okay for some to do it. But the last thing I want is pastors to think they have an obligation to have a semi-professional writing career.

On the other hand, I always say, you're going to write. You're going to write a church newsletter. You're going to write emails.

You are going to write sermons and talks. And so why not learn how to write better? And one of the keys you said, Don, is almost no one is a good writer. There are just good re-writers.

Yeah, there are good people. And you can't do it right then. You wrote it.

You need to set it aside. Try to read it out loud. Have a friend who loves you enough to be merciless and tell you bad writing is at the heart trying to get the reader to doing the work that the writer should have done.

I've known of one or two people who've got on a pen, long hand in the past, and written down a paragraph, and that was it. And it was that the CH daughter was like that. Rewriting was not necessary, except just marginal.

But that is the exception. It's like saying, if you want to be a good teacher, just do exactly what more Jones did. There's some people that are unique, for one reason or another.

So I don't want to be absolutist on the rewriting bit. But for most of us who live on lesser planes, who is part of the discipline of learning to write better. A couple more questions

before any number of D. Young's bound in here from school.

I read this in seminary, and it was always a joke among us students, but serious that it was one book we never wanted to end up in. You know which one I'm talking about? The exegetical fallacies. This is the second edition.

There's probably been more editions since then. Why did you decide to write a book on exegetical fallacies? And did you make enemies, including examples from, I know some of these people and you knew them too. What was it like to pick examples of fallacies? John Woodbridge and I had become friends when I moved to Trinity.

And one of the books he was recommending at the time was a book titled Historians' Fallacies. And I read it, thought it was funny, insightful, recommended it to a lot of people. It's still in print.

But it made me think almost on the spot. Somebody needs to do that about exegetes. So I was asked to give a series of lectures at another seminary, and I decided that I would make that the topic.

And I was so pressed for time that I outlined a lot of stuff on scrappy paper. And then it took me actual four days to write four chapters, one chapter a day. And that would be that book.

And then I sat down and polished it and marched it a bit. And then eventually we put in a second edition and changed a lot of examples and so on. But that's how that book came about.

And I tried to make it humorous enough that it didn't bite in a rain way, but got the point across. And so I certainly didn't try and score points. But yeah, probably some people wish they hadn't appeared in it.

That's probably correct. Well, don't do any more editions now that I have written books. So you can just glad that came out before I had anything.

So there's a lot of books I wanted to mention. We're running out of time. Your Christ in culture revisited, I think repays reading, becoming conversant with the merging church.

I read that and then I wrote a book on the emerging church. And this was very helpful. You were really, for a time, nobody had written any sort of response except that you had done this.

And I think this came out of some lectures. At least I listened to your lectures as well. If I had to pick a theme from your writing ministry done, and there's more than 50 books and there's scads of things you've edited and there's hundreds of articles.

So we've only hit on very few. But it seems to me that the bullseye for Don Carson is

commenting on scripture, but also the doctrine of scripture. So this book, "Collected Writings of Scripture," that crossway put out, this is an excellent book pulling together many of different chapters and things you've written on scripture.

I know you worked on this for a long time. Erdman's published it. The enduring authority of the Christian scriptures, you can't see because you're listening to this, but this is a massive scholarly book, over a thousand pages.

And the two volumes of yours that I think were the very first DA Carson things I ever read was with John Woodbridge, the scripture and truth book that you edited, and then Hermeneutics Authority in Canon, which I was in college and I was getting more of a liberal take on things at my college. And not a crisis of faith, but I was really wrestling with how do I make sense of the canon? How do I look at the way the New Testament uses the old? And both of these volumes were really, really helpful for me when I went through this. I could go on and on.

Did you set out consciously to make this a theme of your ministry? Do you think this is one of the big things you've done is pay attention to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture? It's something which in retrospect I see that I have done, but I claim no prescience. It's not as if at the age of 25, I said I'm going to become the dominant voice in my generation on the doctrine. I just never thought in those terms at all.

But I kept seeing the need for things and working with others and so on. John Woodbridge and I tended to spark off each other. That helped as well.

So in retrospect, I can see that it has, as you say, becomes something of a center point for me. And I could talk trinally, I could see that if you must that one up, a lot is going to go by the side very quickly. And it's not just a theoretical thing.

Do you theoretically hold to a theoretical doctrine called inerrancy? Right. It's how you handle Scripture is whether you tremble and fear at the Word of God. To this man will I look, he was of a contrite spirit and he trembles at my Word.

So that in recent years, I've tried to emphasize that aspect of things too. You're not going to have a good doctrine of Scripture if you're shocked after your secretary. Life is complex and it's interwoven.

And yeah, your intellectual ideas follow your moral life. Correct. They do.

Yeah. And people don't account for that. They sometimes were.

Why did this person, how did he end up in such a weird place intellectually? That's your second word. Do you have a last question of all these things you've written? This is an impossible question. But do you have a favorite, maybe isn't the right word? Is there a book that you think is when people think D.A. Carson, they think of a certain book,

whether it's your favorite or it's been the best seller, what's sort of the classic Carson text that's out there? I really can't answer that.

It's not only because of the disparity of kinds of things that I've written, but also because many students come and ask you, if I've got to read two books by Carson, what would they be? And I would say you need to ask that question of somebody who knows you as well as somebody who knows literature. The point is, I would say to such a student, I don't know you. I don't know what you've already read.

I don't know where your interests are. Are you given to theory and need some help with the practice? Are you given to practice and really don't understand the underlying theory? Are you a disciplined person? Are you not? And how much education have you already had? And so on. So I just don't know how to answer that.

I'm not trying to duck it. I just don't have a clue how to answer it. So okay.

I said that was my final question, but I'll try to give you a question that you can answer. What is just thinking of writing? It could be something you're writing or something that you're not going to write that someone else. Give me a book that you want to see somebody write to speak to.

It can be a scholarly issue, current issue. Maybe you're going to do it. Maybe somebody will do it when we're both long gone.

You got something out there that some erstwhile person, just the church needs this book or kind of book. I don't mean to duck, but when you say whether the church needs, sometimes the church needs things that the church doesn't know that it needs. Right.

And that generates one list. And at other times the church transparently needs some things that engage contemporary cultural slides from a confessional point of view. Some of the kind of thing that is the young chap writes or that Keller writes that are within the grounds of historic orthodoxy, but don't sound like yesteryear and are trying to address contemporary issues.

Most things are always needed, but most of them won't last all that long. That is the function well for two years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years, depending on what the book is, what the topic is. But the church also needs some things that will last God willing for three or four hundred years.

There's always a place for somebody to think through what does the next institute look like. But that's the sort of thing that a person, Calvin was 26 when his first edition came out. Most people try to... Yeah, that's hardly fair.

Most people thinking about writing an institute's volume today shouldn't even start thinking about it until the 50 or 60 and have a lifetime's reading and meditation and

reflection behind it, the kind of thing that Sinclair Ferguson can put forth today. It is really worth thinking in those categories. You think tweeting and such that you can do it in a netifying way.

I mean, a tweet is writing for the moment. I mean, really, it is gone. A blog article, an opinion piece, might be writing for the week, and you need some of that.

And then you can ramp up a Thamelios article or something that's maybe writing for the season or for the year. A book, yeah, if it's good, it maybe serves the Lord in five or ten years and some last longer. But we do need people.

I think we have a lot of people who are doing the... Right now, I'm going to say something to this today. I'm going to give a hot take on Twitter, on a podcast. And look, I do those things.

So I'm not against all those things. But we likely need more people, as you said, Don, thinking what kind of books might last by God's grace to serve the church decades and even beyond that. So I'm really grateful because only the Lord knows.

But in his kindness, I think some of yours will serve the church in that way. And we do pray that the Lord would give you years and health and strength to finish off some of these projects that you're working on for the love of God and the commentaries and some of the other things. So thank you for doing that.

And thank you for all the times that we've been able to be at events together and conferences. And it's a delight. Thank you for coming on life and books and everything.

And until next time, I hope all of our listeners out there will glorify God, enjoy Him forever, and read a good book. Thanks for having me. Blessings on you, brother.

Thank you. Thank you.

[music]

(dramatic music)

[buzzing]