

OpenTheo

One or All of the Three

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Originally released on April 27th, 2020, this is episode 2 of the first season of 'Life and Books and Everything,' with Kevin DeYoung, Collin Hansen, and Justin Taylor.

Transcript

[Music] This is Life and Books and Everything hosted by Kevin DeYoung, Justin Taylor, and Collin Hansen. Welcome back. Glad to have you with us for week 2 of Who Knows How To Be? How many on our podcast? I'm joined with Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen.

Good to have you guys back on our podcast, which is called Life and Books and Everything. We're going to talk about one of those three things or all. You're so good with names.

I mean, you're finally paying me back after I named your book. It's true. I've been trying to find an excuse to use this title from Act 17, which I've loved.

We're just subbing out 'Breath for Books' because I think that's accurate of things we love and things we like to talk about. But finally, I found an excuse with you guys. Thanks.

I think it works. We are going to talk about some coronavirus stuff and some book stuff. But before we get there, I'm wondering, all of us are like sports.

I was going to say into sports, but that could give the illusion that we are great athletes. As Justin put on Facebook, we have Faces for Podcasts. We also have Athletic prowess for it as well.

Let's be realistic, though, Kevin. Only one of us is doing triathlons. Well, I didn't want to go there, but I have been running often in this quarantine.

What else am I going to do? But sports. So have you guys been watching the last dance, the Jordan documentary? And here's my little 30 second rant on that. Everybody's a

Jordan fan.

I'm a real Bulls fan. I was born in Chicago. I grew up in Michigan.

I hated the bad boys. I had to suffer through lots of ignominious defeats. And when they finally broke through and won, I still have it somewhere in the attic.

I had a brilliant shirt. Only a junior high school student would wear that said, "Had the Bulls logo?" And I said, "How do you like us now?" And it was epic as I wore that to band class in middle school, carrying my French horn. Don't mess with me.

Did you guys play for a chorn? Yes, I did. I played the French. Okay.

Trombone for me, Justin. I'm thinking of a percussion. Oh, you guys can guess which one? A big... No, trombone, baritone, something low, low brass.

If it were percussion, it'd have to be bass drum or timpani. One of the two. All wrong.

The tuba. Well, yeah, it was just assumed. It was just great.

And it was normally designed so that you would have one at home for practice and one at school, but they only had one. So I had to carry from Lincoln Elementary School back home to my house. A very large tuba, which... It's not that heavy, but it's very awkward to carry down the street.

And it sounds absolutely horrible as a creator playing solo in your room. Sure it does. You didn't even have veggie tails to sort of boom, boom, boom.

My brother's never going to listen to this, so I can tell the story. He played the trombone and he had one of those cool sort of like, not quite a varsity jacket, a school windbreaker sort of and it had his name and then it had marching band on the back and on the front. It had his instrument, so it said Peter and right underneath it said trombone.

So all through high school, he was Peter trombone. And that's what you're looking for to make it through high school. Back to the Bulls.

Okay, the Bulls. Why do people... What's it with Jordan? I mean, this was the highest rated documentary. So, okay, we understand the times.

There's no sports on and I mean, my son is telling me, "Hey Dad, look, the women's handball championship is on from last year." "Hey, the Berlin Marathon from 28, that really happened. The Berlin Marathon from 2018, should I hit record?" Of course you should. Okay, so the competition's down, but what is it about Jordan and are you guys legit Jordan fans? I am.

Yeah, I'm with Kevin and you really rooted for him growing up. Absolutely. I watched

every game that I could.

He's just such a transcendent figure. What I think is really interesting watching the footage now is that he seems no less transcendent going back 30 years in time. Maybe it's not 30 years, but it seems like most figures that you watch the old reels and they just seem like they diminish over time.

Like, "Oh, that guy playing today, he would just get totally smoked." You go back and you look at Jordan and I'm kind of glad for a new generation to see this in full and in context because it's one thing to see some great dunk from him or some great fadeaway shot, but to see him actually in the context of the games and in the context of '90s basketball, I think somebody who's just seen some dunk footage from him and then compare him to LeBron or others who we get to see in context in the context of a full game and with his competition, Jordan has aged pretty well, I think, in terms of the footage. He didn't really have the superstars with him. I mean, Rodman and Pippa weren't great players, but they're all kind of from like, mid-America colleges and they weren't superstars apart from him.

So it's almost like this misfit crew that gets assembled and Tony Cucoch. Tony Cucoch, hello. Yeah, right.

I thought you were going to say, you're saying Jordan aged well, but I said, but not as well as his mother apparently has aged. How would he ask? I looked it up. Is that what's that footage taken 20 years ago? No, I have no idea.

I mean, obviously of his dad, the tragic end right there, but I had the same thoughts like, wow, that's amazing. I'm not a Jordan. Well, I'm not a Bulls fan, but I will say I am a Birmingham Barons fan.

So that makes me a Jordan fan in that sense. No, I was a Penny Hardaway Shkiil O'Neill fan. So Nick Anderson broke my heart now while Jordan was down here in Birmingham playing baseball.

But I mean, I think we're in a period of quarantine, stay at home or whatever, where we're seeking some sort of comfort. And I mean, Brett McCracken, who does arts and culture for us at TGC, and talked about how he's listening to a bunch of 90s music right now. And he's about our age, a little bit younger.

And I noticed, huh, I've been listening to the wallflowers lately. Like, why am I listening to Jacob Dylan all of a sudden? Why am I reaching back to hoodie and the blowfish? That was the first band that I knew of those three you just mentioned. There you go.

So well, a lot of people don't remember the wallflowers, but they were great. Short lived. But I'm just reaching back to something that's familiar, something that brings positive indoor fans.

And I think that's probably something to do, at least that documentary. But I remember seeing our friend Matt Smithers say right away early on in the lockdown ESPN bring this documentary up, you know, rush it to. And America, America cried out for it and ESPN delivered and we're all benefiting from it and it gives us something to look forward to.

I mean, we're coming off the draft and I just, I was texting or, you know, talking with a friend last night, late into the night about the draft. And I realized this was like a little oasis of normalcy of what my life used to be like. And hopefully we'll be again, but I don't know when.

That's how it felt to me, at least. You just felt something was normal again when they booed Roger Goodell. That was fun.

I did appreciate the way he at least owns it. The country is united again. Yeah.

Staying with sports for a minute. How do you guys assess. And I guess it could go either way, but with everything shut down.

I've heard some people say this really shows the Lord is stripping away our idolatry and how many of us just were living for sports. You know, I saw one person tweet at one point. Apparently the only things I ever did for fun were go to restaurants, shop and touch my face.

And I can't do any of those. So there's one sort of this shows how much of an idolatry we've made of sports that we're all, you know, I put me missing it so much. And it provides for a lot of us the rhythm of what I have to look forward to this weekend and what's coming up in the seasons are marked by sports.

So I'll let you weigh in if you want to go the idolatry route, but I just push back a little bit. And I understand I'm saying this because I am a sports fan and so I can't claim to be unbiased. I see it as a lot of common grace.

Good. And of course there's idolatry huge amounts of it. You know, we see that every time we, especially if you live in the south and you come to college football season.

But I think the it's something that people can relatively peacefully come together can watch can root for, can cheer about. And I think sometimes we can hyper spiritualize the idolatry spiritual adultery kind of conversation so that we're not allowed to have anything that we like. And just just one anecdote here and then I'll let you guys chime in.

But you may have heard this line from Piper, which I think is a very good line. I've used it in my sermons number of times. And it really is a powerful point.

People say, and I've used it, if you could be in heaven with all the chocolate you want, all the food, none of the pounds, you know, sex, sports, everything in Jesus isn't there. Do

you still want to be there? Now, and I've talked to John about this. I think it's a great question to really help people see.

Why am I into Jesus? And at the same time, I want to say, when the Bible talks about all the covenant blessings, they don't imagine them. And I know this is not what Piper was imagining either, but they don't imagine them as in some hermetically sealed space, you and God sitting there. I mean, it's you have your own vine and your own fig tree and there's no more tears and there's a lush garden that God describes his covenant blessing.

In terms that we can understand of material prosperity, not in the here and now, but in the life to come. And so I just, I want to make sure that we're not de facto Buddhists who act like the way to really have peace in this world is to do away with cravings, do away with desires. When Jesus seems to say, yeah, I can give those to you even better.

So disagree with me or give the other side. How do you think of this? Is this showing us our idols or just taking away gifts that we should have been more thankful for? You go first, Justin, to also disagree with Piper. Go.

Not disagreeing, just saying that whenever I use that line, I use it in people in the congregation. I can tell they're, I mean, that hits them and it should. And then I'm quick to say, and yet, I give a little caveat and I've talked to John about that.

I don't think he disagrees. Yeah, and it's one thing to agree or disagree sort of in theory, and then it's another thing kind of in practice and in reality is as you kind of watch your own heart and life and time and that sort of thing. So I think I agree, Kevin, with everything that you're saying there.

I think we'd all agree like it certainly can be an idolatry and not just theoretically, but for many people, it is almost by definition idolatry. I mean, when your emotions and sense of spiritual being are so tied up with the performance of 18, 19, 20 year old athletes and you find incredible amounts of anger. Somebody who's made a decision on fourth and one that you would disagree with.

It really can easily become imbalanced. And yet I think, along the lines of what you were saying, if you go to the other extreme and just say godliness is refraining from any form of communal activity that is not Jesus centered. I think there's a way that we can bring and should bring a Jesus shaped piety towards watching sports, but Kevin, you and I have only been to, I think, two professional games together one white socks cubs game, if I remember correctly.

And one in Nebraska, Michigan game, and we were both on opposite sides there, but it was a thrilling Nebraska comeback. And we had left the game early and watched it in win Michigan State one, but they almost came back. Three touchdowns in the fourth

quarter and and could have tied the game.

I was really sad that night going to bed at your house, but I think it's the sort of thing like, if they had lingered on like the next day I'm just kind of, I can't get out of a funk because Nebraska lost that game and it lingers on. I just think we need to be asking ourselves that question of regularly, is this getting out of proportion are my affections in proportion to such a way that that I get so excited and energized by college football that I never really do about corporate worship or about reading my Bible and about praying and the things of the Lord. So I agree, it's kind of a both and I think it's very easy to go off on letting the pendulum swing too far to either direction.

I do think there's a danger in saying, yeah, it's a both and and therefore I'm never going to ask myself any hard questions about whether I would be falling into my dollar trail. I hope my kids grow up loving sports. I hope they love playing sports.

That's one angle that we haven't quite looked at here of the idolatry of pursuing that athletic glory yourself. And I just was never good enough to be able to have to worry about that terribly much God was kind in that regard. But I hope my kids grow up in love sports in part because Kevin it's one of those common graces I've noticed that it's almost just like there's something missing now that I would love to be sharing with my son.

I would love to be I was supposed to be his coach for his little league team, which of course didn't happen would be love and watching Royals games with him right now and haven't been able to do that and it makes me sad more sad that it makes him he's five so it's not that big of a deal but I hope we are able to share that in the future and I don't generally cheer for the same teams as my own dad because I for some reason decided I wanted to rebel in that way. It's a lot less fun. That way I wish my dad and I were always cheering for the same teams and could share that in common same with my uncles and all the chairs are like the South Dakota Warriors or the.

Well we are both of course we are both South Dakota state Jack rabbits fans and Western Wildcats fans but the key distinction is he's a big Minnesota twins fan and of course I went otherwise to the Royals and also the Vikings and basically the Minnesota teams there but so I would so I hope I hope they care about sports but I hope they care a little less than I do or did at one point. I think I owe Iowa quarterback Ricky Stansy an apology so Ricky you're out there listening. Now I said some pretty bad things about you while watching Northwestern defeat you when you were undefeated and yeah I just I've got some regrets related to some things that I've thought and I've felt and also have said about that which I think are in keeping with sort of the fruit of idolatry there as well and I know Kevin you were gloating at the time but I've never seen such a wide scale repentance of idolatry then living on the North side of Chicago in 2003.

That was pretty remarkable there Bartman brought a lot of people in the rest of the Cubs brought a lot of repentance to a lot of Christian friends of mine then who had a lot of

hopes invested in the Cubs and of course you know when you lose that painfully it's pretty brutal but yeah so I hope it's a good thing but it clearly goes wrong for me personally. Well I hope that we can go back to sports from time to time because I think it's really important it's something that most, well I'll say a whole lot of Americans, a whole lot of people around the world care about and there's a way to care about it in a way that honors God and a way that dishonors him and so I appreciate you guys challenging me on that and being willing to talk about it but let's talk a little bit about coronavirus. Okay there was an article it wasn't widely read and it wasn't a major piece but in a leading evangelical periodical and website and it had something like the title you know is coronavirus gods judgment and it was just a short piece but the answer was clearly no this is not God's judgment and I think that's certainly a defensible position but here's where I want to dabble in perhaps danger just a bit.

I don't know if this is God's judgment upon the world. I certainly would not say pastorally you got coronavirus it's a judgment upon you but that's not how God's people understood judgments they understood them often groups and nations. So I understand the pastoral dilemma but I think we are too quick to pass by this category that God might be judging us in some way and we've talked outside of this podcast about the book God's judgments by Stephen Keeler did you say this is Garrison Keeler's brother.

It is. I did not know that may make sense PhD University of Minnesota God's judgments interpreting history and the Christian faith. It's a it's a serious book it's an academic book by a trained historian and Mark Noel writes the forward and Mark Noel basically says you haven't quite convinced me but you've sure given me a lot to think about and all of us have been trained as a Christian in kind of academic historiography in different ways and so we know that this is off limits you can't do generally respectable history and say the cause here is God you can understand that as a Christian but you sort of bracket that and that's another discussion is that wise I think it can be appropriate to do that but Keeler is arguing no we see in the New and Old Testament and the New Testament that God judges nations and while I agree with his basic argument that we shouldn't be quick to dismiss current events as God's judgment.

The problem always is and I find the same thing in his book when he gets to it you think well I'm not so sure that's convincing. So he has what specific judgment 9/11 was and throughout history the burning of the White House by the British what judgment that was. And then you have to scratch your head and say I think you could probably make six or seven arguments.

So I don't I would not want to claim I know why God might be judging us but I would say this from church history it is absolutely the case that if we were back two centuries maybe even a century and a half certainly longer than that we would be having many many leading pastors and preachers preaching sermons about how this plague is God's judgment. Just to give you one example all roads lead to John Witherspoon this is from a

fast day sermon in Scotland in 1758 part of the context is the seven years war known as the French and Indian War in North America but it really was some ways the first world war I mean it involved all of these major powers in Europe and I won't read all this but he says coming to the end of his sermon and applying these different scripture passages. He says we have of late suffered under a variety of public strokes we have not only had for some time passed repeated threatenings of scarcity and dearth but vast multitudes have been afflicted with famine which is one of God's sword judgments.

Has this not been the providence of God sensibly frowning upon us. And we have visibly frustrated or he has frustrated almost every one of our attempts we have turned our backs faint hearted before our enemies and almost every encounter the greater and more formidable our preparations for enterprise the more pitiful. The issue the more shameful our defeat and disappointment is obstructed our trade we have loss of territory loss of honor expensive treasure and on and on he goes for pages.

Clearly and this would not have been controversial he's saying the reason we're losing this war the reason we have famine the reason we're hungry. God's judging us and we're not listening we're not really repenting so why is it that we seem and I have ambivalence here I admit but why is it that this seems to be a category for almost no one as we reflect on the current predicament. Yeah I think you're totally right in terms of the mainstream historical guild and not just talking about the secular historians but Christian mainstream historians.

The overton window you know the range of acceptable options that can be proposed it has so narrowed that it's almost not even possible for debate. Keeler is one of the few who's written on it and he is not he doesn't have a major teaching post isn't doing a ton of publishing even with mainstream presses so it is a very minority view David Bevington. I don't recall if he's actually talked about God's judgments per se but in terms of providentialism which is the broader category that you're talking about you know can we say leave aside God's judgment can we say that God did this or that God is sovereign over this or that he was the cause of this even Christian historians seem to want to focus almost entirely on secondary causation.

So I do think it's problematic that it's not even sort of up for debate in his oftentimes in books on the topic dismissed in a paragraph or two. And I think some of the dismissals have legitimate points or there's legitimate arguments to consider it you know Carl Truman says that if I ask you why the the planes hit the twin towers and you say God's providence you may have said something that's not actually true but you're not actually telling me much it's like saying that the towers fell because of gravity. Interesting point legitimate point but historians tend to be more caught up in secondary causation and something that can be analyzed and debated.

And I'll ask you Kevin in it seems incontrovertible to me that God would still issue

judgments and yet our confidence or certainty about specifics in terms of what God is actually doing through it or why he has done it I suppose one biblical parallel would be that we have biblical judgments in redemptive history and then we have God authoritatively interpreting those judgments. We don't have him authoritative, intuitively interpreting every natural phenomenon that took place outside of the redemptive historical storyline. So if there is some earthquake in Asia in 1000 BC you know is that a judgment from God.

We don't have his authoritative interpretation of what he was doing, why he was doing it but I do think we have basic biblical principles of Jesus saying hey that tower fell over there. Let's not analyze why it fell let's analyze what your response is to this phenomenon and it's always a call to repentance it's always a call to return to Christ. It's always a call to examine our sin and it's always a call to walk in integrity not walk in the light and so yes I agree with everything I think you're saying and it's a really interesting discussion.

On one of the things historically I think you see in these pronouncements from an earlier century is they tend to focus on repenting of the church's sins now to be fair. You know Scotland was a Christian nation and so repenting of the nation or pending the church is the same thing but where we see mischief intentional or not in our own day is saying okay this is God's judgment and it's. It's conveniently a judgment on none of the things I do none of the people I'm with but it happens to be a judgment against all the things that I will already had been speaking against.

And it's that famous CS Lewis as say the danger of national repentance where you are claiming to repent but you're actually repenting of the sins of a whole lot of other people you're not including yourself in it. And I think they did more of a a maya colpa in some of these traditional fast sermons to say we have not called upon the Lord we have neglected prayer we have neglected the things of God rather than just pointing the fingers at a different class of people or different type of people doing sins that we're not doing. Colin you read history is much more than either of us how do you make sense of this.

I'm working on a book right now and actually we were talking this morning with my co author about it. And we were trying to work with your co author Colin Sarah e co author Zalstra. She's a teacher at TGC and work with me all the way back to 2004 at Christianity today but great Dutch name it is she's a great Dutch woman.

She's a she's a thoroughly thoroughly Dutch. And one of the one of the questions that we were talking about today is we went we went back to 911. And I remember what the Western interpretation was of why the towers were attacked on an 11.

Why do they hate us. Yeah why do they hate us what do you guys remember from that. I feel like Professor Hanson is really putting us on the spot.

I just want to make sure I mean I have my own interpretation but I'm interested to know what you guys think of when you. Remember reading lots on that and you get responses from the right and the left though that question why they hate us tended to be more of a question asked on the left. And it would often be accompanied with no small amount of American self recriminations well they hate us because of our debauchery that might be more on the right they they hate us because we have treated.

Well are we they hate us because of our anti Muslim rhetoric they hate us because we're warmongers. And then others maybe more of the writer they hate us because we've been successful because of our freedoms because of our wealth. Again I think they tended to be conveniently they hate us for things that I already dislike in other people.

That's my point Justin anything to add to that from your interpretation of that. No other than the Jerry Falwell comments that you know he went on pet rovers and then it's all because of the gays and that's why this happened. Right well you guys remember what are the replacements was the replacement for the twin towers called.

Freedom tower right. So it seems that from what I can recall I remember the kind of dominant view and it wasn't the only view the dominant view was they hate us because they hate our freedoms. They attacked our freedoms they hate that.

George W. Bush was very explicit. Exactly. So so so probably more than anybody else President Bush was responsible and nobody else had a similar kind of platform to be able to shape that response.

Okay. What evidence do we have that that was ever true. I could just be missing something but it was almost like that was just assumed.

So Kevin to your point it seems that the interpretation of events seems to tell us a lot more about ourself than it does about God. And that's what makes me concerned about it and that's what makes me fairly wary of making those conclusions and so I completely agree when it comes to all of the history of the history of the world. And there was some discussion recently about this online of somebody saying hey why are you talking about God in judgment just go to Jesus in the gospels.

It's like well you got some major canonical issues there along with a lot of other things. I mean what do you do you take the entire book of Jeremiah and you just toss it out. I mean not just Jeremiah but everywhere.

That tweet you're thinking of was actually responding to a passage I think from 1 Corinthians that talks about sickness and judgment and the respondent was just go to Jesus who cast out demons and that's all bad stuff. So it's like well what about Paul that's not just old numbers of New Testament. Right.

So you know like I said there's no end to the problems there and so the way I kind of

come down on it is that I want to use history to bring some accountability to us and I think that's necessary on this issue we are at a step with the dominant historical response of Christians for all time. And I think we're at a step with the basic biblical response. So I agree with that both individually and corporately.

I would also say that if we're going to be talking individually or corporately. I don't think we're going to run out anytime soon of perfectly legitimate reasons that God would want to judge us. So I don't have any problems on that front either.

Where I have the issue is where Justin talked about the where is God's authoritative interpretation there. Right. Yeah.

Right. So that's the danger and that's my ambivalence and that's why I appreciate what Stephen Keeler was trying to do. Well, let's turn a corner here and since this is least in part a podcast about books.

Let's talk about books. Several questions. Here's maybe a fun one to start and just so our esteemed listeners listeners understand.

We do not talk about these subjects beforehand. I have a list that I'm keeping now. I have 24 questions on here and we get to three or four of them each time.

But I don't tell Justin or Colin. It's just sort of a fun grab bag for them. I like it that way.

Yeah. But here's a here's a fun question. Okay.

People might think you guys are talking about books and all these books you read. Yeah. Okay.

We all like to read. But we get to talk about the books that we've read. That's what we're talking about.

We don't read everything. So I want to know what are a book or three or 10 or authors that you have not read. Now, that's an infinite list almost.

What I mean is not. Oh, I never read Anna Karenina, which has gotten. I haven't read it either, but it's often the answer on it for the jeopardy question.

I mean, in our circles, you're with your with our friends. You're with these Christian leaders and they're throwing out these books and you nod like, yeah, yeah, I'm with you. And really, you've never, you've never read it.

Since I knew I was going to ask that, I got a couple of suggestions or answers for me. The first Colin probably knows about and will make him disappointed. I tried reading Wendell Berry for, you know, J.B.R. Crow for I think a chapter.

I'm not anti Wendell Berry. I don't think it was one chapter before giving up. Yeah, I know.

I know. I know. It's not.

You also hate Marilyn Robinson is that was my second one. I knew it. That was my second one.

I knew it. I knew it. It's because they go together.

It's because it's there's too many stylistic similarities between. Yeah, I don't know. So people talk about it.

And I know I feel like I'm not a real think person. I haven't read the whole Marilyn Robinson. Or ever you say that French word and I haven't done the whole.

I think Ivan Mason reads Gilead every week. I know. So those two come to mind that when people talk about it, I just say, yeah, that's really deep.

Oh, man. And I just know, hadn't done anything for me. Also, don't read any Russian literature.

Is that also true? Yeah, but I feel like I'm more excused. Yeah, I just I haven't read, you know, Billy Bud either or massive American pieces of American literature. So Justin little known secret.

You actually don't read books. You just published them and blog about them. So easy question for you.

Yeah, I'd say probably my top three would be that people would be surprised about knowing God by Packer. What? Whoa. Papers, desiring God.

Okay, no, this is not even legit. Okay, okay. We realize what's happened here.

Okay. You know, one that comes to mind is Oliver O'Donovan's work. I've actually purchased it.

It's also good in purchasing books better than reading books. Yeah. Hopefully my wife does not listen to the spot.

I don't know. She knows I'm recording this podcast right now. I think O'Donovan would be one that a lot of people talk about and you sound intelligent if you have read him and I have purchased him, but I have not yet made my way through it and would like to and I'm a little bit intimidated too.

But he'd be one that comes to mind. That's that was like saying that my biggest weakness is that I work too hard. Yeah, I know.

I just read everything. It's a soul. It's an eats and yet.

Yeah, exactly. I've just only three fourths of the way through a Gulag archipelago. Okay, Colin, give us a better answer.

Like, oh, man, I've read the Chronicles of Narnia. This is you. Oh my.

That's not right. This is this is like the game show. I always knew that no one would ever invite me to be on and then I didn't ever want to participate in.

So mine's way worse than yours, Kevin. I don't read much CS Lewis or Charles Spurgeon. And I think it's I think it's because what I said last week, I am a foolish snob.

And basically, it's just because here for some. Everyone agrees on this. We're all united, not just booing Roger Goodell, but then I'm a foolish snob.

I mean, I have read I've read like parts of problem of pain. I have read the Chronicles of Narnia series, but I was in third grade. So, oh, by the way, you mean watch the movies.

Yeah. I actually did read those. Oh, man, this is even worse.

No Tolkien never even cracked a book. That is a Tolkien's. So, and same thing, Harry Potter.

I mean, that's never read any of it. I have no clue what anybody's talking about on that. So, but the main issues there with with Lewis and Spurgeon.

I mean, I've got my Spurgeon volumes. I have read some of Lewis's lectures and they are great. None of this has anything to do.

I mean, I guess I may be me foolish here, but at least in a snob. But at least I still appreciate what I haven't read, unlike you Kevin. And what you said about Wendell Berry in Maryland Robinson.

By the way, my wife is with you on Maryland Robinson can't stand it, but loves Wendell Berry. I'm not sure what the difference is. But I do think maybe this would be helpful to discuss.

I think that fiction takes a long time to get into. And maybe maybe it's always been that way. Maybe it's just that way for me.

Maybe it's that way. I feel like I have to enter that world. And sometimes if it's a long novel, 1000 pages, 700 pages, it feels like it takes me 200, 300 pages.

We're still meeting people. Yeah. So I don't think, I mean, maybe you would still hate it, Kevin, if you kept going.

I hate. I didn't say hate. Well, I usually a fiction book.

I usually say I'm going to give it 50 pages. Maybe I need to give it more. I just I just don't think that's the way fiction is written.

So I'm just not sure it works that way. Because with nonfiction, and this is going to be a good segment nonfiction. You got payoff on the first five pages, because if it's a good nonfiction book, the freezes are there.

You got it. In fact, a lot of nonfiction books. You can read the introduction and you got the main gist enough to talk about it and footnote it in a dissertation.

Where fiction books don't work that way, but it's a great segue because none of us are reading fiction like we read nonfiction, nor as we probably, you know, want to, or at least feel like we ought to. But give give me some fiction books that you've really enjoyed and here's some qualifications. You can't go back into high school.

Yeah, you can't say, oh, the merchant of Venice is really powerful. When I was in high school, my honors English class, we had to read 800 pages of free reading in American literature. I was like, well, I don't want to be going to the library and finding all these books.

So I just look for the biggest book I could. That was 800 pages. The collect that the complete works of Edgar Allan Poe.

It was a dark semester. Nothing but Edgar Allan Poe, which is actually kind of fun. So you can't do that.

You can't mention Tolkien. You can't mention Louis. You can't even do Andrew Peterson stuff.

Okay, so I'm just setting those aside. They don't have to be Christian authors. What are some fiction books in the last ten years even that you've read that you benefited from either just for enjoyment or more aesthetic reasons? Chris, you want to go first? I knew I was going to ask.

I can go first. I just always go first. Okay, I'll jump in.

Go ahead, Kevin. Well, first of all, I've read almost all the Jeeves and Wooster. I mean, P.G. Woodhouse is, I mean, he really is brilliant and funny.

And the Hugh, what, the Laurie, Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry did episodes of it. But I like everything. The book is just a thousand times better, even though those are clever.

So just for escapist literature and the use of the English language, it's sort of set in a high society of England in the earlier part of the 20th century. Just really funny. A book

that I had heard about for a long time, then I finally read and then I started having other people read it and they said, I didn't really get into that.

But was the Book of the Duncow by Walter Wingren, you know, kind of an animal fable. But I really, I don't know, I don't even have a dog, but the dog is a hero in there and don't want to spoil it for you. But I found that to be a fascinating read.

I really enjoyed reading that. I got others rattling through my brain. Justin Colin, what about you? Fiction books.

Just give two or three. For me, I haven't been reading a lot of fiction in terms of on the page, but have been doing more fiction through Audible. So John Williams, Stoner, somebody mentioned that they thought that was the great American novel.

And I listened to that. And it's about stoners? It is about a man named Stoner, who was a professor. Early 20th century from a Missouri farm and becomes a professor.

As with, you know, I don't know if you guys feel like this with fiction. There's a lot of times it contains things of sexual nature here and there that make somewhat, you know, when you recommend it, you have to do it with a little bit of a caveat. And I don't always remember, you know, if you're talking about going back last 10 years.

Charles Portis is true grit. I think that's one that is just a beautiful audio book because it's read in the narrator's voice. "Dog of the South" by Charles Portis is another one I've recently been doing.

And then I've picked up some books from that kind of high school English, AP English era, and returned to them like John Steinbeck's "Mason Men", "Old Man in the Sea" and to listen to them with different narration has been really fun to do. A more recent one, I don't tend to like fantasy sort of stuff. Maybe Station 11 isn't fantasy, kind of post-apocalyptic genre or whatever the right category is, but listen to that and enjoy it.

Colin? Yeah, I feel like I'm going to be Justin Taylor going through the Crossway book catalog here. We need to, I mean, if this podcast goes past like four or five episodes, we're going to have to come back to this topic. So, I am unashamedly, I read a lot of fiction, and so I like it.

I'm not always good at reading it, but I read a lot of it. And also, I've just learned that with my fiction though, I have to issue warnings when I talk about it because unless you want to spend a thousand pages in medieval Scandinavia, maybe don't listen to my recommendations. Well, it's not her.

Exactly, exactly by Unset. So, I, I mean, generally, I've gotten good feedback from other people who liked it. I really appreciated that one.

It would be especially a good pandemic read, spoiler alert on that one. The more recent book that I've recommended that that really enjoyed Reddit last year, I think, or year before, that Ray Orton responded and said he said it was the second greatest novel. So, that was his, that was his view.

That is a fortunate man by Henrik Pantepeden. It's an early 20th century Danish piece there. And again, it's, it's about all sorts of philosophy and interesting things there.

But I'll give some of the other ones I'll give will be there more. They're just more fun or just a little more accessible. I mean, I know a ton of people who've read all the light.

We cannot see Anthony do or that's a great book. I mean, especially I'm a sucker for World War II stuff. So, the, the two books, Life and Fate by Vasily Grossman and also Stalingrad.

Stalingrad came out last year in translation for the first time. So, if you love studying World War II and just are interested in that time period, it's another great one there. And then another one, yes, like I said, it's all fairly recent stuff, at least, definitely within the last 10 years or else the last year or whatever.

Andy Crouch is a really big fan of Soldier of the Great War by Mark Hoperin. I've read that one as well and I recommend it strongly. So, you're in my wheelhouse here, Kevin.

I love this stuff and I love to make book recommendations on fiction. And usually what I do, I mean, I don't read only fiction, but what I try to do is I try to pair one fiction book. Oh, I forgot to mention on there.

This will be a little bit off, off the norm, Homegoing by Yogg Yossi. And I have to admit, I don't know how to pronounce her name. So that's not fair.

But that is a story of two, two African women separated at basically birth. And then there are different narratives within West African slave trade and then also through American slavery. And it's just a remarkable book.

It is not light in terms of the subject matter there. And a lot of things like you said, Justin, you got to get a content warning on this one for sure. But when it comes to just learning about racial dynamics in the United States and history, even though it's a novel, I found it to be incredibly helpful and I'll give you just this promotion on the book or this blurb on the book.

There's something in this book to confirm pretty much anybody's thesis of what's wrong about race in America. And that's one thing I love about novels is that they're not the best ones are not just trying to advance some sort of base thesis. They are trying to kind of encapsulate experience.

And they're trying to again telling a story. And so if you cut no matter what angle you come in on the racial question. You're going to find something in here that's going to confirm your suspicions.

And you leave it in the end, and you think, I'm not exactly sure what this author was trying to accomplish, but you feel like you really understood and related in a way that you couldn't otherwise. That's my last one there. You know, there's a whole bunch of books in there I hadn't heard of.

Most I had maybe one or two I'd read so you're reading all sorts of things and you read a lot more fiction than I do what just off the top of your head guys if you had to put into some broad percentages, the books that you read. How would it fall like I would, this is completely off the top of my head. You know, I bet five or 10% of what I read is fiction.

I bet 50% is history, even more than the out maybe, and maybe 30% theology. And then whatever's left some combination of politics economics, those are just some big buckets of things I like to read. How do you guys break it down to add up to 100.

Are we counting pages? We're doing pages here. Are we just doing like books? Just kind of books. I know fiction books, they take up a lot of pages sometimes.

Just what do you, if you looked on your shelf, you know, like I'm anytime maybe reading through five or 10 different books. What are the types of books? Because I teach theology. And so I think I should, I would expect to have theology, but then I did.

Okay, I did my, my doctor degree in history and I guess that shows because I'm more often having history books and history books that have some, some tie into politics, theology, Christianity, church, I mean, it just makes sense. Those are the things I've always been interested in. Kevin, is there a kind of book that's easier for you to read? Our books that are making arguments are easier for me to read.

Now fiction, I can get, if it's a good fiction book, I shouldn't say if it's good because there's lots of good fiction books that are hard to read, but you know, I read orphan X over the Christmas break, which caveats. There's a couple chapters you just skip because egregious sort of sensuality stuff, but that was a spy thriller. I don't usually read that.

And I just, I couldn't get away. I was, I was, that's easy to read. But mostly I'm reading nonfiction and books that are making arguments and arguments that I'm answering questions that I've had.

Either making arguments I'm going to agree with or not going to agree with. And that, that's true too. This is another podcast, but you guys are not preachers by trade, but I've talked to other preachers.

And for me, when I put together a sermon, the easiest sermons for me to put together are the sermons that are making an argument. I don't mean argumentative, but they're arguing for, you know, what Jesus meant in the Olivet discourse, or they're arguing for why we can trust the resurrect. And I think the most things, the harder ones are when it's a passage everybody knows about, and I have to think of a way to make it really feel and sink.

And I've talked to other pastors say they're just the opposite, and they love those passages. It's obvious on the face of it, and then they can kind of play with it. I like passages that are difficult.

And that probably says something about what I like to read. I got another one last book question from that, but I want to make sure you guys can answer what sort of percentages are you reading. The reason I was asking that, Kevin, is because as I've grown as a reader, well, first of all, it's just, I'm not the same reader that I was at 39, that I was at 29, and certainly not at 19.

And some of it is my interest of change, but also it's because now I've accumulated a lot of knowledge that helps me to be able to read books. And so I have a little bit different perspective now on like, how could Don Carson and J.I. Packer have done so many book blurbs? Well, in part because they kind of know what's being said in the books in many cases. And so that's just totally changed for me.

But the reason I ask Kevin is because there are certain kinds of philosophically oriented, systematic theology is extremely difficult for me. I know, that's what I'm saying. So like a thousand pages of that would just tax me in extraordinarily difficult ways.

A 500 page commentary is very hard for me. Not as hard as reading some sort of science text or something, but it's hard to admit, this is kind of like a podcast where I talk about all my things that should disqualify me, like not reading Spurgeon and Lewis. But I just, I don't know if there's somebody listening that needs to hear that we're not all gifted in the same ways as readers.

And what I've just noticed about myself is that I am a strongly narratival thinker. If you guys know it's the way I talk, it's the way I think. And so history works for me.

Biblical theology as a discipline works for me. Novels work for me. Tarritian doesn't work for you? No, does not work for me.

Oddly enough, Edwards is an exception. Edwards is fine. I love Edwards.

So I'm not sure where that kind of fits in, but just general percentages, Kevin. Roughly. I try to have four books at a time.

So sociology slash public affairs will be one about 20, 20%, whatever. 25% theology

Bible, there's always something there. Then history, which again, that's the easiest thing for me to be able to read.

It goes to quickest and then fiction. So that basically rounds out about about in quarters there. Justin.

I was spending this entire time trying to make my numbers. I was told there would be no math and not a mathematician, Justin Taylor. Yeah, it's hard to quantify, but you've had breakout theology and biblical studies like maybe theology, 20% biblical studies, including like commentaries, that sort of thing, maybe 25% history and culture together, maybe 30 to the practical Christian living.

15%, maybe fiction, 10%, although almost all of that now by audio. So last question as we think about books. I got a comment from one of our many myriad of listeners this week.

That said, it was good to hear you talk about books. I'd love to hear you in subsequent episodes. Talk not about just what you're reading, but give us some habits of how you retain what you read, how you learn from what you read, how you prepare in research.

So there's lots of things there and we'll get to that in another podcast, but this question I thought was good and it's maybe worth ending on. We've circled around it. How do you choose what to read? And part of I hope these last few minutes of conversation will, as you said, Colin, help set people free from false guilt.

I read sometimes at the end of your what Trevin Wax has read and I think, oh, man, I'm not reading any of that. Al Molar stuff is always books where people are killing people, you know, that usually generals and usually churchills involved some churchills involved. I think I don't know anything about military history compared to that.

And Russ Moore has a very different set of eclectic sort of Jimmy Buffett bios and which I actually that probably would be interesting. I went to a Jimmy Buffett concert one. That's how long ago.

I was in high school. Oh, okay, so long time ago. Yeah.

So how do we choose what we read? I've told other people before to follow your nose and what you're into. And I know earlier on, I thought I need to be well rounded. And so I need to make a list of the great books that I have to get through and that may work for some people.

It just didn't work for me to say I'm always going to be reading. Maybe you're more disciplined in a colony of fiction book and this kind of book. And I just realized there's seasons and they have to do with current events and they have to do with things that I'm interested in.

And so I'm reading three or four books on slavery right now. Maybe we'll talk about them sometime. And that's just, you know, something set off.

Oh, I got some questions. I want to learn more. And so I'm reading some of those books where if you had told me to read them three years ago, it might have said, I don't really want to read that.

You know, I love reading through systematic theology. Partly, I'm teaching it now. But I have so many more questions.

I'm more answered. If I have more questions than I did 10 years ago, I know how much more intricate these debates are. And so I can learn things that I didn't even know that I needed to learn.

I'm teaching a class in the Enlightenment. And so I've been reading a lot of philosophy and thinking, oh, there's actually interesting things to learn from Thomas Reid and Kant and whoever else. So I think you need to follow your nose.

And the most important thing is your reading and understand that not everyone has the sort of jobs that we do that lend themselves to reading and not to feel beating yourself up if you didn't reach the, you know, DA Carson. I don't want to say 500 books. I don't know how many ridiculous number of books he that he's written that he reads in a year.

Hundreds of books. But you remember George W. Bush and he, you know, had a contest with whoever about how many books and he was reading close to 100 books. You know, Carl Rove.

I mean, that's amazing. So I do think if the president could read some books. Now he didn't have eight kids.

So come on. So, yeah, it's pretty eclectic. What I, what I may be interested in at the moment.

But I think there's something to just reading and continuing to learn. How do you guys go about deciding what to read. Well, first because Colin will have a much more thoughtful and careful answers to him and then a high note.

But yeah, I would echo what you said, Kevin. I think there's always a temptation, especially if you go kind of through the academic route to feel perpetually like your second class or you don't read as much as somebody else or you're not as smart as somebody else or you don't have any notches on your literary belt as somebody else. And just to free yourself from that that you don't have to read what everybody else reads.

And it is kind of miserable. I think to read something just because you feel like you have

to read it and not because you want to read it. That's why you have high school.

Exactly. And I know people disagree with me on this. I don't think you need to finish books.

And I think you can benefit from books, even if you've read three chapters out of it and jump off if you want to go into something. Not Wendell Berry's J.B. Crowe one chapter in that doesn't do you any good. Oh, thanks.

Yeah, I'll go back to that. Something else just to free up listeners who might be listening in both of you out there. Even if you read 500 books a year and you live 90 years, you have still read only a middle school amount of books out there.

And just to free yourself, hopefully, even if you're the best read person in the world, you're reading a very, very small percent of even just a typical public library. And then final comment is that like Kevin, I'd like to read books in batches. So, or at least apply them in batches.

So I pick up a book on slavery. I want to find the three best, four best books on slavery or on Abraham Lincoln or on something happening, happening culturally, so that I don't just get one perspective. And I think it kind of enriches all of the books when you look at more than one at once on the same topic.

That's helpful, Justin. I would say just overall, just make sure you are reading. That's why I do the different genres, not necessarily to push myself, but because I want to make sure I'm just always in the mood to read something and my moods change.

So part of it's just make sure you are reading and pick up what strikes your fancy at that moment. A lot of my choices come from recommendations. I think it's important though, to find recommendations that come from peers, i.e. people who are on your level, it wouldn't do you any good if you were 18 years old and had never read much fiction at all and you're listening to me talk through this and say, "Oh, okay, so I'm just going to start jumping in on that stuff.

That wouldn't make any sense. It wouldn't be a wise decision there. So find people who are generally on your level to be able to help introduce you to things and be able to understand how to make those choices and then do find somebody who is a step ahead of you who can tell you, "No, don't spend your time on that, but do spend your time on this over here." That's one thing I would recommend.

And then also, it was a life changing experience for me to study Russian literature in college. If I had set out to do that on my own, I would have failed. So, if you want to jump in on Brothers Karamatsov, you want to jump in on Dostoevsky's Canon, go for it.

But don't be afraid to ask for help, whether it be watching lectures or listening to do

them or buying an introductory copy or something like that or just telling yourself, "I'm going to have to ramp up to that and not just jump in on that." I think the importance is to see reading as a genuine delight and also as a chance for God to edify you and to be able to sanctify you and not as some kind of badge of declaring your righteousness before men. I'd be aware of that, especially if you're younger and you're listening on this podcast. I'd be very careful about that.

It's really wise and it can seem like a silly thing, but we've all been around and we've been those sort of people. I know I have used here people talking about books. I want to jump in and say something about Dostoevsky.

I maybe had to read something in high school. I don't remember. So, I'm not reading that.

You all know this and Justin better than both of us. Piper has been a real example of humility in this area because he's admitted all sorts of times publicly. He's not a fast reader.

I've been in lots of settings with lots of people that you all would know. Piper never puts on errors that he's read all these books. Yet, you can reliably assume that if he has read something, he's read it as carefully as anyone.

There's different ways to read. That's part of what I've had to learn too is, Justin's right. Sometimes you read three chapters and you've learned something from it and you know where the book is.

Maybe you go back and you know where to find something in the other chapters. Sometimes you pour through a book word for word, line by line. In other times you say, "I'm going to give this an hour to try to get some big ideas." It doesn't do us a lot of good to just be able to tell people we've read all these books that we have sitting on our shelves.

If we haven't been shaped by them, if we haven't been changed by them, if we haven't been challenged by the really good ones. There are lots of good examples of not only reading widely, but reading deeply and using it as an opportunity to give us wisdom and edification not to puff up. Thank you, men, for being here.

I have so many other things I wanted to get to. This podcast is not sponsored by anyone yet. If it were, it would be by the pizza ranch.

So if you are near in my gluten days, there were many, many joyous occasions, better than books, with cactus bread. Go to everybody's favorite pizza joint because they serve fried chicken. It is.

If you can do both. And that cactus bread is not onto lembus bread. I know you didn't

read Tolkien.

So that's escaping you. No idea what that means. I have sent both Kevin and Colin pictures to prove that in Minnesota there is a pizza ranch with a bowling alley inside.

That's just known as a dream come true. We have no sponsor. Is it cousins doing advertisements for pizza ranch? Of course.

Who would be better than Kirk cousins? Who would you go to our friend friend to the show Kirk cousins. Oh, he's a long time listener. I know the show.

But we don't have actual sponsors, but I do want to honor a good, good, good friend of ours, a real friend of ours. And that is a very close friend of mine just texted me and said, another he said, this has to win a book award this year. Dane Orton's gentle and lowly part of Christ for sinners and sufferers published by our good friends at Crossway.

Are you sending me a copy, Justin? They didn't send you a copy yet. I can't remember. I guess I'm the special one.

Oh, you can't remember. You get too many of them. Oh, it's true.

50% are pretty important people over here, Colin. All right, who enjoy the pizza ranch. Yes, okay.

Well, thank you all and hope to talk to you again next week.

[Music]

(buzzing)