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Conversations in a Crisis: Part II: Improving Our Deliberation (with Rev Benjamin Miller)

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Faced with our challenge of remaining faithful within and addressing our various contemporary societal crises with wisdom, Christians and churches are fracturing over our differing approaches and postures. My friend Ben Miller suggested that we have a series of conversations, to help us to pursue greater clarity on the principles, virtues, duties, and practices that can equip Christians to meet such difficult times with prudence, insight, and courage.

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Transcript

The following is one of a series of conversations that I'm having with my friend, the Reverend Ben Miller. Ben is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Long Island, and he suggested in the context of current divisions within the church over political and other issues, that we have a wide-ranging series of conversations about issues of Christian ethical reflection, epistemology, charity, obedience, trust, community, and conscience in this context. While our conversations are occasioned by issues such as COVID, on which Ben and I have different opinions, our conversations will not be narrowly about it, but will be a broader exploration of issues of Christian faithfulness in any sort of crisis, some of the principles that should guide us, and some of the practices and virtues that we need to pursue.

Through our conversations, we're hoping to arrive at more accurate and charitable understandings of each other, a better grasp of responsible processes of Christian

reasoning and deliberation, and a clearer apprehension of principles that we hold in common. We invite you to join us for these conversations, to listen to our discussions, and then to share your own thoughts in the comments and elsewhere. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

I would be curious to hear more of your thoughts about, you spoke as a pastor, you're someone who has a very specific vocation, and a very specific way in which you can speak to things. How do you think of the balance between the sort of speech that you have from the pulpit, with the thus says the Lord authority, and speaking to these sorts of issues? Because it seems to me that if we're not speaking to some of the live issues of our time, in some way or other, that thus says the Lord can just be floating in the ether and not actually connect. On the other hand, if we don't have some distinction between those things, it's very easy to end up with sort of legalism and all sorts of ways of binding people's consciences that are just not healthy.

Yes, that is perhaps one of the central problems of my craft. I have thought a lot about that, especially in the last couple of years, because I have people who would like me to say quite a lot more with more specificity than I do. But I guess where I've landed as I've worked on that recently is that the Bible, what is clearly God's word, does have quite a lot to say about the good.

I mean, it really, starting with Jesus' breakdown of the law into love God and love your neighbor, God is our chief and highest good, to serve him, to glorify him, to walk with him, to all that's tied up in that, to be reconciled to him through Christ and all of that. And there's this gigantic overarching good of the neighbor and loving our neighbor well. And it's sort of like when I counsel people in marriage.

I can really lean on things like husbands love your wives, for example. I think certainly there's a clear moral piece there that I can say, thus sayeth the Lord. God says love your wife this way.

I can speak with God's authority comes through in that, because that's his word. But of course, when you begin to move into, so what are the goods bundled in that good of my wife's well-being, let's say, you know, you begin to realize that now you are, the Bible does not necessarily specify all of that in great detail. Now there are definitely places where there's more specificity.

I mean, if my wife is not, doesn't have adequate food, clothing and shelter, that's an obvious failing. And I think that I can say that with good biblical backing. There might be other things about whether a man ought to take his wife out on a date every week.

Look, you know, quality time with your wife is a good but I can't really say thus sayeth the Lord but I can reflect as a pastor with my brother in Christ about, you know, the, that's, I think that's kind of a wisdom question and then when you get into even more.

And maybe I've already kind of bled over into the question of what is right, like what ought to be a man's personal practices in working out love for his wife. I actually think a pastor can really do his people disservice by saying too much.

Part of growth is struggling through that before the Lord on your own. I'm always away from COVID here but I think you can see maybe how I would say the same about many of the things that are going on our political realm, and I just, I've tried to resist, not that I would be a good one anyway but I've tried to resist. People are, someone said to me recently people are many people actually looking for a father.

And there is a kind of fatherliness and pastoral ministry but you have to be very careful not to be that clear authoritative benevolent voice that sort of can put everything at peace in people's minds and lives. And you can, I think we need to be extremely careful about doing that and pretending that we are just straightforwardly speaking God's Word. That's a long answer to your question but.

So you mentioned, leaving people to make these things decisions for themselves. And seems to me that you can actually be part of that process, and they can bounce ideas off you and ask for your input and and counsel and ask for your thoughts on some of their thoughts, and that process, it needn't be something that they're going through by themselves that deliberation, but yet at the same time, you're not going to settle the question for them, and they're going to be given insight and a sense of some of the processes by which they will deliberate and without necessarily being given the conclusion that's for them to determine, which really is just a function of Christian friendship really right I mean that friends, friends in Christ do that for each other it's not, it's not that I'm as a pastor sort of abandoning them to the struggle on their own. I think it's enormously helpful.

I actually long for this as a pastor to be able to bounce things off of, you know, wiser friends, you know, older older men of God who just have more experience I think we do need that's part of bearing each other's burdens. But yeah, there's there's something there. I think we all kind of would love a guru sometimes when life gets really crazy and it feels out of control.

And I think those of us who are in any kind of mentoring or teaching or even authoritative capacity in the church. It's important to to help our people realize the value of that patient slow work of understanding the good and the right, and we do it together. But there's no like, open the manual to this page and the.

So, when we're actually trying to go through these processes of deliberation. What are some of the practices that you think might help us to do that in a better way. I think that it is important for Christians to be in local contexts, preferably.

I know I know many saints maybe have difficult church situations but I do think that just

in homes in kind of informal settings, being able to sit and converse with one another and really prayerfully doing that praying together I mean really getting on our knees before God together and acknowledging we lack wisdom. I think I think it's easy for churches sometimes I know different churches have such different situations but in my context here in Long Island, it's very easy for church to be a Sunday thing, and you kind of show up do worship and go your separate ways. These have been very lonely times for people and I think just being together informally.

And I think there are there are ways that pastors and other Christian leaders can learn how to kind of moderate conversations to keep them from getting fractious, but there's something there's something that kind of diffuses our view of each other when we're in the You know, having a bit of bread and breaking bread together and just talking, and even emoting, but you're with flesh and blood and I just think informal fellowship is a very, very big thing. And the other, the other thing I speak here as a father of four I mean, I do believe parents, Alistair young people today are just so beset. I can't believe the things that my kids have experienced from other, you know, young people their age and and and they've just been sort of bewildered by how to respond and I think it's important for parents to build those kind of trust relationships relationships with your kids where you can just sit and really hear what they're struggling with and talk through those wisdom questions with them and these are obvious answers but conversation developing a culture of conversation in the church and maybe maybe less of the big public stuff and just get together and talk, pray, study, and that process even of speaking to someone about the decisions that we're making, and just having another pair of ears.

Yes, even if you're the only one that speaking can actually help you to clarify your own thinking, very much. And I think another thing that I found important, along with the lines that you mentioned about in person context flesh and blood is, you need to mediate that interaction somehow, yes. If you are not going to get, if you disagree, caught up in some sort of antagonism.

Very much. And so, for instance, when I've disagreed with people on social media. I've tried to focus, not focus on the person if they're being antagonistic towards me, don't focus on them, focus upon someone who's calm and listening to what you're saying, so respond to them, but don't focus upon them, focus upon the person who's listening and when other times when there's that sort of conflict, pray for that person and try and mediate your relationship with them by God's relationship with them.

And so you're not getting into these direct antagonisms and mirroring each other. So always you're either providing a grounding context of flesh and blood and friendship, whatever it is, or you're providing some sort of mediating third party that helps you to avoid antagonism with them. That is great.

I want to ask you a quick question about another practice see what you think of it, this is more of a negative practice. I've had to practice less awareness of what's going on in the world. Now that sounds irresponsible for a pastor.

But I just have a certain saturation level where I realized this is doing nothing but winding me up now. So why should I keep watching and listening. Do you think that at least some of us maybe who are more prone to anxiety than others but that there's some value in just don't listen to as much.

Maybe you're the kind of person who just maybe shouldn't follow Twitter because it winds you up and it doesn't really doesn't whatever gain you're getting by way of information or insight, you're losing by you know blood pressure problems. Does that, is that just irresponsible. I'm always amused by the group of people who every Sunday get irritated by the latest thing that David French has written.

Do you really want to spend your Sunday doing this, I mean, you can just ignore the guy. Right, right, just turn it off. And yes, I think that the question is how much of the information that you're taking in is actually actionable, how much of it is actually just frustrating you and aggravating you, and actually making it more difficult for you to do those things that fall to you primarily as your personal vocation.

To be someone who's patient with others, who's thinking through the specific issues that face you and your family. To what extent are those things, helping on that front and to what extent is this just part of a grand spectacle that you're invested in, because that's the place where you're forging your identity with other people. And then the question is, is that really a healthy place to be forging your identity when you've got other people in the flesh around you that maybe you should be investing in those contexts.

Maybe that's where just some kind of sort of Sabbath ritual. Just there are, it's not that you can't listen at times but there have to be times of just, you just shut it off and you're with your people and you're with your God and you're in your place. Right, like actually observing those limits of the body.

I love Matthew Crawford's line about the every human body has a zone of relevance. Well of course we've shattered that zone of relevance now maybe we need to reinstate it. I think, along with those lines, maybe if we are reading and focusing upon the news.

What should our first instinct be, and this is speaking to myself as much as anyone else. Should it be to actually talk about it on social media and say how terrible it is, or should it be to go to God in prayer, because that's actually where we do have some agency. We have access to the throne of all and so we can bring those issues there.

And in that sort of approach, we're not primarily caught up in the antagonisms with our neighbors. We're actually rising above those to speak to one who cares about us. Amen.

Yeah, that's. I actually said that at one point in one of the sermons that maybe, maybe it's best to say nothing about something you've not yet prayed about. It's at least worth that just that pause.

Because as you say, the, the, these things are in the hand of the Lord, we really believe that. That's an article of faith for us then pray first. I wonder if as, as we're talking about these contexts where we can feel very much invested.

And how can we maybe get at some of the virtues of conversation that we think would help us to navigate these in a healthier way for ourselves and for other people, because I've certainly found having these conversations. It's not always predictable, and how things are going to come across and often you can end up hurting people you don't intend to hurt them, you get hurt, hurt in the wrong way or it. It's very difficult.

And so, how can we have these conversations in a healthier way. And what are some of the virtues that we should develop, how do we go about doing so. Well, that's a, that's a big question and it's such an important one, two things that immediately jumped to mind for me would be getting back to the empathy thing earlier I do think it is, it is good to try to hear.

Again, this does not work on social media but in a personal relationship to hear your interlocutors backstory. People arrive at positions through experience. Often, or at least their level of intensity of emotion about things is often shaped by their experience and sometimes when I've listened.

Someone will say something that sounds crazy to me but when I listened to how they got there like you know what I can I can I can empathize. The other, I have been trying to practice is when I'm about to say something. When I'm about to take a position.

I take a moment or two. I call it sort of fence posting and I often just preface what I'm about to say by saying, I'm what I'm trying to do here is just sort of establish some some broad fence posts within which we could think about this certain kind of points of reference or kind of a framework in which we can think because that I think is a little bit less. It comes off less as an immediate assertion or a challenge or just a dogmatic statement trying trying to just show that at least in my mind.

I have to find a place from which to begin to think, and I think it communicates that my thinking is still in process, even if I have reached a settled conviction about something right like even about things about which I think my thinking has settled quite a lot. These are all truth still has conversations around it. And I think there are ways to just sort of let the person you're speaking with know that while you're going to state what you think and you do think something.

You also are interested in an actual exchange. Yep. That makes sense just prefacing

things with what in something along those lines.

I think another thing I found helpful and I'm going to try and find the quotation here is Oliver O'Donovan on conversation and recognizing that we can break our differences down to size, and that conversation, even if we're not actually persuaded, can be fruitful, because we lose something of the threat of the other party. I've found this again and again, sort of arguments that people have when you actually get into it a bit more, you realize there aren't so many things at stake, as you might have originally thought, and this is one of the things that getting back to what we began with the discussion of principles and practices and policies. So often our differences on those can be relieved when we realize that, okay, people aren't necessarily abandoning these principles, they're interpreting the facts differently, or they're not necessarily disagreeing on the policies.

They're just wanting to go about this in a different way. Yes, want to get to the same end point, but they have a very different route in mind, or they share our convictions about the facts that they just think we should approach it differently on a policy level. And so all those sorts of differences, I think, once you recognize the shape of the other person's position, it can break those threats down to size.

I think for me one of the struggles I've found is that I'm naturally someone on social media, I'm not personally invested in it, really. I find it a good place for batting ideas around. And so I'm not really invested, I kind of decoupled from my positions in some way, so I'm putting them out there.

I want to have a debate about it, but I'm wanting to think, as you talk about epistemologically about how we're approaching these issues, and maybe tease apart what is motivating us. And that's not necessarily the way that others are approaching it. For many, these are vital issues of identity, these are not things that people can decouple from emotionally.

They're very fraught. Yeah, so that's so important. Because I realize now as I'm thinking about what I just said about epistemological framing, that's not necessarily the territory you find you're actually walking with someone in.

So I have teenagers and I have great, great teens, they're great kids, but something I've learned in talking with them and learned to be more sensitive to as a dad is when we're talking about something, we're often in emotional territory that's quite a distance away from the actual issue. Yeah. Whatever it is we're talking about has hit them emotionally differently than it's hit me.

And if I don't identify that up front, I want to talk about this issue over here. And I'm actually creating a lot of, I'm aggravating the emotional problem. And so, that's... And the other thing that you've pointed out there, which is so important and it relates to

everything, all things COVID, perception of what is, perception of the actual situation is often very different.

So I'm over here, having this principle conversation. But we haven't necessarily, maybe, you know, or even a conversation not just about the good but about the right, so I want to have a conversation about what ought to be. But I don't have a, we haven't reached agreement on what is.

Yep. So, you know, all of that, I think, in conversation, those are just sort of human dynamics we have to be awake to. And social media is always going to be hard on this because... Right.

I've commented on it before. If wisdom is giving a word in season, on social media, you're trying to speak into a dozen different contexts at once. And there's no way to give a word in season, because you're trying to address everything at the same time.

And as a result, you will be profoundly offending some people, because you're just not registering their emotional concerns, and you're being dispassionate and maybe challenging things that have an emotional salience for them. And their interpretation of the issue is probably not something that they're able to decouple from and deal with in a more epistemological way. That just seems grossly insensitive.

On the other hand, there are other people who want that sort of conversation. And you can't do both at the same time. It's very difficult.

Is the first case just collateral damage we sort of have to accept? I mean, is that just heartless? But I mean, it almost feels, at least on social media, just feels unavoidable. I have no way of knowing how this... I find this when I send an email to someone that I know. I don't know what kind of day they've had.

I know nothing about the context in which they're going to read this email. That just exponentially... that dynamic exponentially increases on social media. I don't know how someone's going to read this Facebook post 3,000 miles away from me.

This person who friended me 15 years ago and is still somehow my friend. You know what I'm saying? I found Michael Sarkasis's description of social media incredibly perceptive. He talks about the way that the word in print was inert for the most part.

You invite the word into your life. You pick up the book, you open it up and you read the page. And it was written probably decades ago.

And it's something that if it has the life that it has, is one that you give it as you're reading it out. Whereas if you're on social media, that word has a living force to it. This is someone speaking just a few moments ago.

And as a result, the word is seen more as an action. Whereas the words on the page, in the printed page, seems more a bearer of content. That's the way that we tend to see these things.

But then when you're on social media, the question is, what is this person doing with what they're saying? How are they signaling? What is they subtweeting? How are they aligning themselves? Whatever. How are they branding themselves? And as a result, you can end up people focusing far more upon what is the subtext than upon what is the actual text. And it makes it very difficult for people who are used to print media to actually come across well.

I mean, following some of Tim Keller's struggles on social media and talking about this with him just a few days ago on the Near Fidelity podcast. And it's just a very different medium. And people are always reading into everything that's said.

They're always trying to see what is this person trying to do with this? And they may not be trying to do anything at all. It may just be some quote from their book that they wrote a number of years back. And often that's the case.

And people are experiencing the word differently. And as a result, it's seen as a more personal action. Someone's doing something by saying something towards other people.

And it makes it very difficult to have the sorts of conversation that you'd have in a slower or a more inert medium. Yeah, because there's actually a feeling that there's some violence being done. And of course, that invites often, I've just been shocked at how quickly social media exchanges can descend into just outright mean spiritedness.

Whereas it's clear any sort of constructive agenda has long since gone by the boards. And this is now just purely personal. I'd never, I hadn't heard that from St. Cassius, but that clarifies a bunch of stuff I've seen.

My word. And there's something, what he's identifying there is something that's objectively a factor of the technology. And when people are reading in terms of sub tweets and sub texts, they're not necessarily misreading.

It's the way that the word tends to function in that environment. And as a result, communication just will be a lot harder. And so if we're going to have good conversations, we probably need to do so.

Maybe either have an understanding among ourselves that this is a certain type of speech or just have them in different contexts. And I find there are certain people I can have very fruitful conversations with in certain settings that I just could not have the same conversation on social media. Well, one thing that happens in real life conversations is you have opportunity to ask, what do you mean? Because often the thing that is most worrisome in a conversation is what has not been explicitly said.

Right? Yes. And there's no opportunity to interrogate that on Twitter. So you're just left with drawing your own conclusions.

I'm using Twitter as just an illustration of social media in general. But you have no real opportunity to clarify what is not explicitly spoken, especially if you have a medium where the idea of Twitter is to keep things brief. There's much you can't say.

But particularly when we're having these sorts of conversations, and we'll be getting into in future conversations, we'll be talking about issues of resistance to government. And I find, for instance, for me, the dominant note that I think scripture sounds is submission to government. But if you're saying that, you're heard as saying there's no resistance to government ever, or you maybe have the smallest chink of possibility for that.

And that's not what you're saying. But you don't have time to clarify because there are so many different people talking to you at once, and the conversation is moving. And it's like trying, you can't slow it down for long enough to actually make all those clarifications.

And that, I think, is always going to be a limitation of that sort of medium that you wouldn't have to the same extent on a series of blog posts, for instance, or this sort of conversation. Well, I even have this. I have some reluctance about having my sermons posted, the recordings posted online.

I'm just, I'm just, I might be a little bit unusually twitchy about this but I just have a real nervousness about speaking if I don't know what I'm saying to whom for what purpose. Not that I'm trying to be, you know, control the effect of my words, but I just, I just have seen how words go off into the ether and have all kinds of effects that I didn't, I didn't intend for them and I would just, I don't consider it particularly neighborly to be throwing verbal, you know, grenades out into the atmosphere, you know, I'm trying to build relationships through speaking so, you know, I think that last comment, maybe gets it something of the converse of it. That is the concern that you're looking in your congregations eyes that you're not just looking beyond them to some virtual audience that you don't actually know.

And when you're actually speaking those sermons and not thinking about publishing them, you end up having direct contact with them, and you are crafting your words for that specific congregation, not for a generic listener. I am, I'm deeply committed to that for all the reasons you've just stated it, it can play with your head a little bit though when you're wondering about who's going to listen to a recording and that's just something I have to as a pastor just resolutely refuse to think about whoever the Lord brings on Sunday. They are the, they're the main audience of God blesses someone else fine but, and that because of everything we're discussing here, because I don't have the opportunity to continue the relationship with someone whose face I can't see whose name I don't even know.

There I think it's also important just considering that as a pastor. The sermon is only part of the conversation that you're having with every member within your congregation. Yes, there are many different ways that you are relating to them, that you're forming a context of conversation, the context within which your speech will be heard, and also just encouraging them in a broader conversation that they're having among themselves.

Right, because it isn't just with the pastor that those dynamics occur I mean it is uniquely pastoral that that ongoing relationship but I think I would really like to see Christians committing themselves to that conversational life together. More generally, because one of the things that I have found actually tragic to the coven times has been how Christians have dis fellowship each other over disagreements. And the real sad thing about I mean, I suppose it might be in a time and a place when that is important to do on principle but what it totally robs us all of is the ongoing conversation.

I may be wrong. Yep. I if I lose you and I lose the relationship with you.

Well now we pretty much guaranteed tribalism, because you're now with the people that you already think like you do I guess you know and so I just, that is to me, I, far be it for me to. This is not a word from the Lord right but I just in general I really. I would really caution people against hasty departures from Christian fellowship, there might be times to step back let everything cool down.

But we need local communities of the saints. And sure, I mean, I know, I know there are good reasons why you just can't walk together if you're not agree I get that but I don't think the trends are encouraging. No.

The challenge I think is one worth taking up though, when there are situations where we are so much propelled to be at odds with each other. Yeah, to actually struggle to find some way to walk at peace to have these not to abandon the conversations, not to care, and stop caring about the issues, but to have those conversations in a way that is determined to keep faith with our brothers and sisters through it, and to learn from them, and to the extent that we can recognize just the degree to which we share the principles animating us even as we're going in different directions, and to share fellowship that's not always related to the issues either. I read years ago book by Tim you'll have to forget the exact name of it now but he pointed out another distinction between static and emphatic communication.

And one of the things that happens in conflicted relationships is that everything becomes emphatic everything is about making a point static communication is just kind of the everyday, you know chit chatty stuff that makes it just enjoyable to, you know, be together. And I think that I think that coven has hyper sober eyes, many of us, where we are so fixated on these all important issues sometimes maybe sometimes you just literally need to go out to a park and have a walk together and just enjoy the nature around you, like literally something just not every not our fellowship should not be

reduced to the issues. And I just worry sometimes that's beginning to happen in some circles, a lot.

We will probably get into this a lot more in future discussions but for me, just something for my own sanity. That has been so beneficial is just spending so much time in scripture over the last two years, yes, because it wasn't about any of the And in fact, what was striking is listening to preparing all the stuff and listening back through some of it at various points, the issues that were animating all the political debates, just do not register in the biblical text that much right and, and, and so they are important, but they're not the most important things. And so you can have the discussion, but also keep the discussion within a sense of bounds.

Well, and also for me it's the difference. I often give this illustration is the difference between living on solid food and living on medicine. We need to be built up with the solid food.

And again, this is one of the reasons why we try and study the principles and think through these things before they're ever called upon right practice. Right. Yeah.

Yeah, to your point about things almost seeming like they don't matter some of our things that were you know so exercise about almost like they don't matter in scripture I mean I, I often go back to why it is in Psalm two and the nation's rage God laughs. There's something, and I wouldn't want to push this too far. Obviously, matters of justice on the ground really do matter, and God, they matter because we're made in God's image, but it's interesting that he laughs, but so much of what we're all worked up about.

It's not that it doesn't matter to God but it's already part of his purpose, and his purpose is sure. And I do think that can that that can there is a kind of sense of humor, really truly that comes and being able to see that things in history rise and fall. You know the wheel turns, and the truth of God and the kingdom of God remains absolutely constant I must say, a little plug in here for you.

That piece you did recently on how this sort of apologetical impulse and so much Christianity of you know everything's about apologetics about sort of defending the faith and arguing a position how that can actually keep us from being able to read the scripture as you put it on its own terms, and just absorb. If I can put it this way, the thought world of revelation and have that wash our minds. So when we come back to the all important questions and issues sometimes we realize, maybe we weren't even asking the right questions or potentially there's a whole dimension of reality that we just weren't connecting to and that stuff for me I would go so far as to say that it like almost restore sanity.

Yeah, I think, again, so much of it comes back to setting our hearts on Christ, and then

being at peace for that reason, that our minds are set at peace because we are not primarily caught up in the storm that's around us. And that is a real struggle, I think, the more that we create context for each other, not just for ourselves but context in friendship where we can deal with these differences, not pretending that they don't exist and we'll be getting into some of the, I mean But this sense of calm in the things that matter the most, I think, enables us to do those things without constantly being at odds with each other, being threatened by each other, or threatening each other. I have been so much helped by the story from Jesus trial, where he stands before pilot and the thing that just, I can never get over as I read that story is how composed.

Jesus is, you know, you everything about that story makes him appear to be the victim of what is obviously violence and injustice. But he just looks pilot in the eye and with complete composure he says you wouldn't even have power over me if it hadn't been given to you from above and he's just, he's just unmoved emotionally. I mean he's he's suffering in his soul and I, you know what I'm saying but like he's he's not discomposed in his faith and his confidence because there's an understanding that you know what is happening here is being orchestrated by the living God and I do think, even the fact that we spent this time, beginning with talking about talking, talking about how we think and speak about these issues, and we're not just rushing to the issues is kind of important because it reminds us that without a certain heart set toward God and toward our neighbor.

We're not ready to get to the issues because we're still running to what we need to, you know, figure out and determine in order to kind of win. Yeah, you know, to defeat the evil as opposed to. Or to protect ourselves.

I mean, this was one of the experiences I mentioned actually in my discussion of apologetics. It was a very formative experience for me of struggling with the beliefs of some cult group and just panicking. I mean how do I deal with this, and realizing at a certain point that I was spiraling, and I needed to step back from the issue because I just, my heart was not in the right place to think healthily about the issue, and then when I stood back from it and spent a while away from it and revisited it suddenly it was as if the clouds completely different dissipated and the issue made sense because it wasn't my fixation anymore.

Well, and I think that is a kind of micro version of some trust in chariots and some in horses and we trust the name of the Lord our God if God is not. And I, you know, as a pastor when I say these things. I can imagine my people are very gracious in the way they receive the word but I can imagine people being tempted sometimes to say you know that's just sort of that God talk thing that pastors to can do to kind of brush away people's real world concerns but it is, it is absolutely true that if our hearts are not resting in God, and in his truth and his power and his grace and you know what we call resting in Christ.

We are in no frame to respond fruitfully to anything in our circumstances. And, you know, like you I came out of a really cultish thing at one time in my life and that's the thing I remember about it most was just the fear, the fear of being pulled back in the fear of being enslaved again the fear of the fear that I didn't know how to answer these things that I knew were wrong somehow viscerally but had no idea, because they still actually sounded biblical to me and I was just all the confusion. And that fear.

I am so grateful to Lord for lifting that fear because now I'm able to address those issues and my heart is at peace. And that's what I want to see for God's people now in these times. This has been a really good start for our conversations and I'm very much looking forward to getting into some of the issues that we have lined up for discussion.

Thank you so much for listening. Thank you for joining me, man. Thanks for having me.

I look forward to continuing this. God bless and thank you for listening.