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The Religious Fervor of American Politics

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin, Collin, and Justin discuss the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her vacant seat on the Supreme Court, Classic liberalism and its critics, which books were most formative in their youth, and what career they each would have chosen if not for the ones they are in now.

This episode of Life and Books and Everything is brought to you by Crossway. The Crossway title we want to highlight in this episode is the ESV Every Day Bible: 365 Readings through the Whole Bible. This bible was designed from the ground up to be an inviting daily-reading Bible, to help readers achieve their goal of reading through the Bible in a year. Formative books in our youth:

Kevin:

Know What You Believe by Paul Little

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin

The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors by Martin Lloyd-Jones

God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams by David Wells

No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? by David Wells

Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision by David Wells

Collin:

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine by Wayne Grudem

Jonathan Edwards: A Life by George Marsden

The Cost of Discipleship by Bonhoeffer

The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoevsky

The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism by Carl Henry

Justin:

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations, welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I'm very glad to be here with Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen. As we are recording this on Monday, September 21st, you'll probably hear this, uh, a couple of days after, but good to be with you again and happy to also mention our sponsor Crossway.

And in particular, the ESV Every Day Bible, 365 readings through the whole Bible. This Bible is designed from the ground up to be inviting daily reading Bible. Health readers achieve their goal of reading through the Bible.

In a year each daily reading presents a passage from the Old Testament, New Testament solves and Proverbs in a helpful accessible, attractive way that's aimed to get people to read through their Bible, the whole Bible in the year. And I know Justin, you must hear from time to time people sort of grimace or groan about, oh, we have so many study Bibles or so many specialty Bibles and there are, there are extremes, the horse lover's Bible or whatnot, but these sort of Bibles, they're helpful. I mean, if there's a Bible that can get people and make it more easier for people to read through the whole Bible in a year, and that's a Bible we ought to be grateful for.

So I'm thankful for all the ways that Crossway tries to bring the Bible to us to help us learn good theology, get good commentary, apply the gospel to our lives, get us through the Bible in a year. And I say, if those little tweaks get more people reading and understanding the Bible, I'm grateful for it. So thank you to Crossway.

Well, the big news in the not just the political world, but cultural world, especially here in the United States, is the death of Supreme Court justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg on Friday night, the news broke and now there's been lots of conversation about what to do next. We did not start this podcast to be political pundits, so you can look elsewhere for the commentary on what you think will happen or what you think should happen and what is fair or right or wise or good or strategic and lots of people have an opinion on that. But I thought it would be worth the three of us perhaps just using the occasion to think about what this says and especially the immediate foment, not surprisingly, what this says about our religious culture, our political culture, how the two have become almost one.

What does this reveal about where we are in this cultural moment, which at least the people I'm talking to find to be very, I don't think frightening is too strong a word as we thought 2020 couldn't get any more cantankerous. It's like your apocalyptic bingo card just punched out another number and you know, we're just waiting for worst case scenarios to unfold where the election is thrown to the Supreme Court, which is

considered illegitimate and evolves into even worse violence. We genuinely pray that does not happen.

So Colin, how are you seeing the situation and how do you think we ought to respond as Christians? Seems that the response is out of proportion to perhaps what the Supreme Court ought to be. I think we all know that at this point with the presidency being so incredibly powerful, but then also Congress seeming to devolve a lot of its authority because it really can't reach any conclusions that between the executive branch and its nominations and then the Senate with their confirmations, the Supreme Court has a really remarkable measure of power and we've talked about this before of how even as the founders had intended the government to be balanced, it's become unbalanced in a number of different ways. And so I guess what concerns me is what you said, Kevin, the religious significance and the merging of the cultural and the political and the religious in the Supreme Court where I don't know if you guys saw the images of outside of Supreme Court building over the weekend, a group gathering and singing John Lennon's Imagine, which apparently is has become the kind of secularist anthem.

And so it shows that there is this incredible religious impulse to turn toward the collective and the transcendent and toward the ritual. And I don't know that it would be too much of a stretch to think of the Supreme Court as almost a almost like a high priesthood. And so the death of a high priest, somebody who was interceded between the people and their transcendent ideals in this case is a moment of tremendous import and visceral pain.

Now I think it would be it'd be remiss to imagine or it'd be incorrect to imagine that this suddenly emerged with Democrats or liberals with the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I think many conservatives were very worried and I would put myself in that category when Antonin Scalia had died. Precisely because we know the significance of the court and being able to dictate the terms of everyday life, including and especially perhaps our religious practice and the interpretation thereof from the Bill of Rights.

So Justin, I don't know how you interpreted that or what you responded with. I mean, the initial response even between us is just speculating about the politics behind it. But would you, I mean, help me with the history here, Justin, was it first in the 1980s with Robert Bork, which ironically was a major effort from Senator Joe Biden at the time to be able to spike that nomination from President Reagan.

Is that the beginning of the sort of just weightiness of the Supreme Court where now nominations instead of being a kind of formality and a deference to the executive now become almost what Kevin's alluding to the potential for civil war? Yeah, I'm certainly not an expert on the history of the Supreme Court and I think they'll be fascinating to read a relatively objective retelling of all of it. But it does seem like prior to Bork, you had even the opposition party was voting unanimously for the other justice of the president

nominated. And so, yeah, when President Reagan nominated Judge Bork and Ted Kennedy, learns of it and goes to the floor and essentially says that we're going to have an apocalypse if this man is confirmed and he will do everything in his power and women are going to be having back alley abortions and all every civil rights.

Accomplishment would be derailed and turned back. I mean, that introduced a new level of partisanship and ugliness into the battles and we've never really turned back from that. So, yeah, add to that then we just continue to get increasingly partisan and rancorous.

You know that whoever's nominated, no matter how much integrity they have, no matter how good of a judge they were, they will be painted as the embodiment of Satan himself sitting on the Supreme Court. And I think this almost goes without saying, but it's the only position that has a lifetime appointment. So, Amy Coney Barrett, who is one of the leading candidates, supposedly, what is she, 47 years old? Oliver went to home served until he was 90 and he retired.

So, I mean, you're looking at four decades potentially if she were to become the next Associate Justice. We don't have anything like that. You might hate Trump and yet you can think, well, in four years, we're going to have a new president or we can elect a new president or you might hate your senator or representative.

We don't have anything else that's an appointment. So, you add the combination of the longevity and then how much power the Supreme Court has to determine basic things as an unelected official. That's really significant.

And three appointments in four years, I don't think there are three openings in four years with three appointments. That's quite a few. I'd have to go back to see exactly how many George W. Bush had in eight years and Obama had in eight years.

You guys could probably remember off the top of your head, but three and four years, two and two. That's what I thought. I just wasn't sure.

Kagan, Senator Myor and Alito and Roberts. I googled that because I was curious, like who, which president has appointed the most and it was George Washington. Very helpful.

Really, really, I mean, do you guys think, Kevin, if you play out the history, it wouldn't be a surprise if we connected the decline of the Supreme Court or the increasing ranker around the Supreme Court to Roe v. Wade, because you had Roe v. Wade, but then the aftermath, people are still kind of confused in '73. The Democrats take over in '76. Both parties are still a little bit divided or quite a bit divided on abortion.

Then Reagan comes in 1980, but he starts with Sandra Day O'Connor, if I remember correctly. So, first woman to the Supreme Court. And so, that doesn't, that gonna

transcends boundaries.

So, unless I'm wrong in my history, which I definitely could be, could you draw then a direct line between what happened in 1973 to what happened with Bork and then what we've been dealing with ever since and why the Supreme Court has taken on this deeply religious significance? Do you think I'm, think I'm right there, Amal, off? Well, you could make the case, again, we don't know the mind of God, but you could, you could almost make the case that almost all of the political turmoil. Now, you're gonna have political turmoil no matter what. That's always been the case.

But so much of the intensity, the rancor, you can almost say it's the Lord's judgment upon us for *Roe v. Wade*. I mean, think *Roe v. Wade* has made racial relations more difficult, because it's made political polarization more intense. It's made the Supreme Court fights.

It has made everything in the political sphere because of the immorality of *Roe v. Wade* and also the illegitimacy of it. And even many people on the left recognize that as a piece of jurisprudence, it was built upon feathers upon feathers. So, you know, it's not our place on this podcast to say what should or shouldn't happen.

But I think the one of the things that's so fearful is any of our institutions are only palatable or only serve their purpose in so long as the people do grant them legitimacy. And certainly the Constitution is meant to do that and the rule of law. But whether people are right to do so or not, when they begin to doubt that there is legitimacy in the institutions and people feel like it is something is profoundly unfair, whether it may be legal or not.

So that may be conservatives feeling like, "Look, this is what the Democrats do. Now what we do, you did it to Bork, you did it to Clarence Thomas, you did it to Brett Kavanaugh. So that's why we're going to go ahead and get this while we can, because we know what you do to justices." Or the Democrats feeling like, "Wait a minute, you said with Merritt Garland, you don't do this in an election year, and now you're going to do this." And people go back, "Well, but Joe Biden said that you do do it." Or we meant you don't do it when you hold the opposite seat of power.

Okay, all of those points can be made politically and not arguing which one is the best strategy to take or that there's necessarily a Christian position on that. But it is the case that you see the whole legitimacy and the Supreme Court, even though its numbers have gone down, still ranks higher than the presidency and the Congress and many of our other institutions in basic trust that people have for it. And because they have become, to use Ben Sasse's phrase, "super legislators" so often, and really, you go back and find that 10-minute civics lesson that Ben Sasse did during the Kavanaugh hearings, which, you know, why they wear black robes because they're supposed to be not super legislators, they're supposed to be deciding the law.

And the fact that the Supreme Court nominations tear apart the fabric of friendships and relationships and the whole country and heaven forbid, descendant of violence tells us this is not the way, not only that the founders envisioned the Supreme Court to function, it was not supposed to have this much power or have this much import infused into it. But it also says something to your point, Colin, about the way in which we are incurably religious and we will find religious transcendence somewhere or anywhere. And it's like, you know, Tim Keller's line about idols, her idols always let us down.

And we can tell that when they're idols because when they let us down or when somebody is poking them, we'll go to any links to defend them. One of the things I seem to pick up on both sides is that the left fears that the Supreme Court can roll back their founding mythology. I'm using that in that idolatry terminology there, which is the sexual revolution, the liberation of women in particular from the shackles of tradition.

And I think traditionalists and Christians included believe that the Supreme Court can roll back their founding myth in America, the basic freedoms of religion that are afforded by an even required and afforded by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. And if that's how both sides see it, then no wonder they're so scared. No wonder they're so motivated.

And I just think it would be a mistake to see it as only one side or the other sees it in those kinds of apocalyptic terms because you can, and I'm more sympathetic to the right-wing view, of course, but when you look at the left wing, it's just what, I mean, again, we see it with John Lennon thing. And it's really believed that they're going to lose everything that matters to them. And I think that's crazy.

And I disagree with that. But that's how Ruth Bader Ginsburg went from being a black robe to being the notorious RBG. Well, and that's a big part of it too, is the pop cultural icon that she was, whether many people on our Facebook feeds could really say more than one sentence about her, yet people are posting, you've meant everything to me, and one popular Christian personality was saying, well done, good and faithful servant.

You've entered into your rest. Even though she's a non-observant, she was a non-observant Jew. It seems she was hardworking.

She was decent. So, yes, all sympathy and condolences to friends and family. And many of us have heard about her unique and very real friendship with Scalia across political and jurisprudence divides.

And we take some comfort in that. So, I'm all for honor to whom honors do and respecting people even when I may disagree with some of their views. But certainly that plays a big part.

If you see that this is your dashboard saint, and now the evil one is going to replace your

saint with a devil. Well, yeah, then, as people are already saying, all bets are off. All bets are off.

And it's one thing to say, all bets are off politically, because that's how politics work. One side does one thing, another side does another, you overreach, or the voters think it's overreach, and you push back in the other direction within the rule of law. That's how politics work.

It's another if all bets are off means "Burn it all down." "Burn it all down." Yeah. Yep, because that's how you play the game. And you don't play, and you hear this on both sides.

Look, they don't play the game by the rules, and it's about time we keep getting steamrolled. And so, we have to play the game not according to the rules, or we're not going to get anything that we want. Just in any thoughts before we move on.

Do you guys think if you were left-wing progressives, you would still hate the song, "Imagine"? I sure hope so. I hope if I had some intellectual coherence to my basic worldview. It's hard to know.

I mean, I don't think I picked up on it as being particularly offensive or problematic until I began to see so much of its religious iconographer usage. And then I just began to say, "What exactly is this?" Then you give more scrutiny to it and realize why it's not hated that song. Kevin gets the award.

I'm thinking like elementary school, Kevin. Shut up! This song is terrible! That's quite possible. Not perhaps what Greg Gilbert might have done, but... That's true.

Well, I mean, there's also a martyrdom aspect to Lenin as well, which, of course, ratchets up that religious significance as well. And even a pilgrimage aspect of it within Central Park with the imagined location as well. So all those trappings, you don't have to be a Jamie Smith or Tim Keller or whatever to be able to pick up on that.

It's a drug component too. Well, yeah, it's also true. Yeah, ritual partaking, I suppose.

Perhaps, perhaps. Okay, so somewhat related to talking about politics. I've wanted to talk about this for several months on the podcast, and I think the two of you are willing to politely let me talk about it and bring you into the conversation.

It gets into things that I'm interested in, things that I've studied. But you do see this. This is a conversation that's been going on for well over a year.

What is the Christian way to evaluate classical liberalism? We use liberalism as left-wing, left-wing theologically, left-wing politically, but I'm putting classical liberalism to mean enlightenment philosophy in one sense. But even more of that, you might say the fusion

of enlightenment principles with classic republicanism and at the founding, basic Protestant virtue and worldview. So those three streams come together at the founding.

The perennial question is America a Christian country or was the founding Christian? Well, it all depends on what you mean by Christian, what you mean by the founders. But I think it's undeniable that there were certainly enlightenment themes and many of those came from people who are not Christians or certainly not evangelical Christians. And at the same time, they were tied together for good or bad.

We'll talk about that with a number of Christian and even sometimes reformed ideas about the depravity of man and why we need checks and balances. So how are we to understand the role of liberalism, classic liberalism, and a Christian response to it? And just to flesh out a definition, then I'll ask you guys a question. I was listening, I listened to these great courses.

I've listened to probably a dozen of them over the years on my commute and listened to one. I think this was on modern political tradition or political philosophy or something. And at the very end, the professor asked the question of his class, why is it that even with all of our differences, you still inhabit many of the same assumptions, whether you realize it or not.

Now, I don't know how many years ago this was. I think this actually is getting less and less true. But he said, I'm quoting here, do you believe in fascism, communism, aristocracy, royalism, or theocracy? That is, do you think we should have a one-party state with no free elections or rule by those who inherit wealth or rule by the family of whoever ruled last or rule by the unelected clerics of somebody's church? Do you believe that the power of government and the majority should not be limited? Should there be no individual rights as in the Bill of Rights? He goes on and asks these questions and he's asking them thinking, well, yeah, you don't want one party state with no free elections.

You don't believe that whoever has wealth should be the next rulers. You're not into aristocracy. You don't believe that the rulers should just come like royalism from whoever the last family.

You don't believe in unelected clerics. All of those things, you could add communism in the mix, I mean, these have been ways that societies have organized and governed themselves, and most everyone, though maybe it's a changing, would say, no, that's not. So there has typically been a broad sort of classic liberalism, free elections, rule of law, justice is blind, democratic norms, checks and balances, protection of liberty, government is there to make sure that people don't intrude upon the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

And in recent years, this has been under attack from both the left and the right, religious and irreligious. So Colin, before asking you what you think and asking Justin, what do you

think, Colin, where have you seen this sort of classic liberal American republicanism, not the party, but the ideology? Where have you seen this devalued on both the left and the right? The question, Kevin, I think we see on the left, especially the push toward communism or the push toward socialism or the push toward. We don't want to work through politics as we know it in the West of checks and balances and things like that, if it doesn't produce the desired end.

So the end ultimately justifies the means. If the end is a vision for equality, whether that be in terms of race or class or gender or ethnicity or whatever you want to say there or historic, well, I guess class in their money, then we just, we have to do what we have to do to be able to get there. So that's the basic push on the left.

The push from the right might be a little bit more surprising. And it's also a push toward the ends saying, what is the point of liberty if it doesn't produce virtue? If it doesn't produce something worth valuing? So the belief is, look at liberty gone to seed in this country. It's lost its telos.

It's lost its purpose. There's no vision, no collective vision for the good life. So what we need to do is to re-institute a commonly shared goal of what we're trying to accomplish, what we're trying to inculcate here.

And there's a belief that liberty has become or liberalism, classic liberalism has become itself an end that is destructive toward tradition. So a good example of this would be often conversations about public school education versus especially classical Christian education and the differences. Well, if public school education is a kind of marketplace of ideas where our culture can come together, moving towards certain common norms, then Protestantism or Christianity or traditional Christianity can be a part of that.

But a lot of people don't believe that's what's happening anymore with public education. They believe that it is actually trying to push an alternate vision of the good life that is threatening to traditional Christianity. Therefore, we need to produce other institutions that will push people toward a better, more God-honoring goal.

So I think what you're seeing from the right is simply a basic breakdown of trust that as Christianity recedes in this culture, liberty becomes an end to itself and therefore becomes deeply damaging to people, including Christians. And I can definitely say when I can read some of the people on this on this side of things, especially Patrick Denine, I have a lot of sympathy with what they're saying. I don't in the end typically agree with them.

And certainly there are much more extreme versions of this. We've talked about this going full-blown into ordaining God's law, which you could talk about, I guess, if we want to. But the versions that Denine and others will push, I mean, I have a lot of just natural sympathy toward even if in the end I don't agree with all their conclusions.

Justin, are you for or against David Frenchism? I'm sure you followed that. Yeah, you followed that debate from a year or so ago. Yeah, I didn't follow all of the ins and outs.

But I think I'm more inclined towards David French than his opponent there. And yet, you know, wouldn't say everything the way that David would or would have some fears that David wouldn't. I think Patrick Denine's book, what is it? Why liberals have failed? Yeah.

It is really worth reading and really worth thinking through. As I read it, I thought, I think these are plausible arguments and classical liberalism is open to these critiques, or vulnerable to these critiques. And yet, I don't think it's ever sufficient for us to be able to poke holes in all of the things potentially wrong with a side without thinking of what is the alternative because there may not be a better alternative.

We don't have utopianism. This is not having an earth. So I do think classical liberalism has its faults and its foibles, and perhaps there are inherent and irredeemable.

But I have not yet seen something that seems more compelling or has less problems than it. You know, one thing that I think would be great is if we had a rediscovery of the Socratic dialogues. Perhaps that's not what you were anticipating that I would say.

But reading Plato, Plato is wrong on so many things, especially politically. But he gets you thinking in a creative way about why you think that he's wrong. And can you show that he's wrong? I think that's a tried and true way of exercising our mind and trying to come to grips with what we believe and why we believe and how to argue and how to think through various things.

So that would be my recommendation. I think Justin, a lot of that is a function of internet culture, because it's very easy to be able to criticize and to poke holes, but rather that's not be constructive on that. So I'm open to all kinds of different alternatives to what that would look like.

Kevin, do you think there's some overlap here into how we approach capitalism almost as if it's been so normative for so long that we really can't even understand the world without it. And so we take advantage of classic liberalism to talk about how terrible it is, but like Justin's point, we don't know what the alternative or we don't even remember we don't have living memory of what the alternative is. Even though plenty of people fought in World War II on behalf of classic liberalism, essentially against, well, thankfully we didn't fight against communism in that case, but certainly against fascism and against sort of well, obviously the Japanese emperor and that totalitarian government as well.

So it's not like you could even assume in our lifetime, I mean, our lifetime, yes, but in everybody's lifetime today that classic liberalism was a given, but I just I see something similar with capitalism where you don't remember what it's really like without capitalism. Well, people don't understand what the alternatives are and that the things that we

enjoy are precarious. Civilization is precarious.

I think we're seeing that more and more each day. And the things that we enjoy and the freedoms that we enjoy are not the case for most of human history. So when we talk about classic liberalism and this fusion of at the founding of Protestant principles and classic republicanism and Lockean liberalism yes, I think there's always open for critique and liberalism at its best welcomes that critique.

But as you guys have been saying, you have it both from the left now quite explicitly. This is from Richard Delgado, Jean's, Stefancik, in critical race theory and introduction. They say unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment, rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.

So the very upfront saying, no, we're not a part of this program. And then you have from the right, so Amari Sorib, Amari, I think that's how you say his name here at all the time. He was the one who wrote the piece a year ago against David Frenchism and for those of you who don't know, which is probably most normal people.

David French is a conservative reform evangelical writer and they were arguing about what was that drag queen story hour at a library out in California and David French was basically saying, yeah, I think that's horrible. And I think in our liberal order and society, you know, people are going to have freedom to choose that. We need to persuade people to do otherwise and show why it's not the good and the true and the beautiful.

And Amari, who is part of those who are sometimes called Catholic integralists, wanting to see a stronger fusion between Catholicism and the state, said, well, no, we need to impose the highest good in virtue upon this. And then from the Reformed right, I read a piece not too long ago called the heresy of liberal democracy. I don't know if the author was theologian, but certainly kind of leaning in that direction that he said liberalism was not neutral and it was a different kind of religion and true Christianity and biblical Christianity would not just simply be respected, but in some ways would be privileged.

Now it was privileged for most of our country's history, but that many of the beliefs that are inherent in classic liberalism are not supported by biblical Christianity. So I'm going to need to adjudicate all of that, but I do think it's instructive because underneath a number of the debates and now particularly thinking of those on the right who are kind of on the same team in a lot of other areas are arguing about whether or not it still can be salvaged or without the same virtue that the country used to have that the system doesn't work. And at some point we'll have our good friend Jonathan Lehman on here because Jonathan I have a long standing, he's much more negative about John Locke than I am.

The beef, it's like a legitimate beef. It's a legitimate John Locke beef. I'll bring in Greg Forster and he'll really come on my side.

He'll help you out on the John Locke thing. What do you guys think about this? I'll throw it back to you guys and it has to do with this same subject. One of the reasons why I think history and the founding is so uniquely important in America.

Every country cares about their history and they have pride in certain people and events and patriotism, but it really is the case that America uniquely was founded on an idea and on an ideal. Alan Gelsso makes this case too. A huge part of what makes us Americans is not, at least, not ideals.

It's not what you look like. America hasn't been blood and soil. That's not what makes an American.

Of course you have patriotism to your land and all, but it's not been blood or so. It's been you can come from anywhere, legal channels, do a profit, but you can come and you can be an American. But there is something to being an American and in large part it's agreeing to celebrating, loving, and lauding these ideals.

Yes, we're always going to argue about history and what to emphasize and what not. Historians will get into the minutiae of what happened. All of that's proper and legitimate.

But I do think as Americans we face a unique threat when we have lose any sort of agreed upon history. We don't even know when our founding was. We don't know the nature of our founding because that is what makes Americans Americans.

Now this is where Christians and that's far more important than our nationality and being Americans. But for a nation state to hold together that's not bound by ethnicity. It's not bound by religion.

It's not bound by all having the same blood and soil. You're left with being bound by a shared ideal in history. And when you lose that, you lose any sense that you're anything like a cohesive nation.

Am I overstating the dangers here, Justin? No, I think you're exactly right. And Ben Sasse, who the three of us admire, whatever you think of him, I think he's exactly right that America, at least in the last 50 years, has undergone a civics 101 crisis that we don't catacchize in a sense our students, our children into the basics of civics. I heard him say recently that a significant portion, I can't remember the number of young people don't even believe in the First Amendment right now because to have unfettered liberty of speech, not only not threatening violence against somebody's physical person, but threatening violence against their expressive individualism is something that should be prohibited.

So when the next generation to overuse a cliché doesn't even believe in the First Amendment, then I think we're really entering into a cultural crisis. And I think you're right, Kevin, America is founded on an ideal and an idea. And once you lose that, even at the most basic level, it's not just the animist and Catholic integralists who are arguing at an intellectual level about this, but it's the rank and file high school student who thinks expressive individualism is a non-negotiable and anything that runs counter to that should be prohibited.

That's a dangerous spot for us to be. The other... Did you hear my phone ring? Yes. I'm hoping that was Tricia.

So I have just a few people are queued up with a with their own ringtone. So that was my wife. When it rings, it says "Pretty Woman".

I could show you that. I just don't want you to think that someone else gets that ringtone. Just keep that in a little real color.

I won't say which one of you gets the Darth Vader the heavy breathing. Actually, I don't know if you ever listened to that. I actually had that as my ringtone for Jason Halopolis for a time because when he was my associate pastor, I felt like when he was calling, he would have something bad to tell me.

Well, there was some crisis. That's got to be me then because when Justin calls you, it's probably to tell you you've sold a bunch more books. When I call you, it's because there's something wrong at TGC and you're the hard chairman.

So that's the problem. I want to be the Husker fight talk. Can I get that? Okay.

Anything left on with her liberalism, we didn't really get into the enemy. Maybe another time we'll do a proper deep dive on that and why all three of us would not call ourselves the onomists. Correct.

Anything Justin, you want to say about what do you predict the Huskers record is going to be? How much will they lose by to Ohio State? How much does Kevin Warren want them to lose by? I hope you did see Pat 40's response to say Nebraska's whining is just proof that Nebraska is not back. Sorry, Josh. What a terrible journalist.

Can I say that? He went to Mizzou, so I'm not offended. Yeah, I don't know if we'll be playing Clemson for the National Championship, but hopefully we'll at least get to the playoffs. That's my perpetually optimistic Husker fan.

That's good. It seems like everybody has Twitter, by the way. It's in the beginning of a season, whether it's NBA season NFL season, just raw raw.

My team is incredible. This is going to be the year and by the end of the year, they're

just we are we are terrible. This is not worth it.

I hate watching for like, if everybody doesn't accept if you want team, yeah, well, for Chiefs fans, it lasted all the way through the Super Bowl and the first game into the first half of this last week. And then it was, we're so terrible. What's anybody doing around here? I hate this.

And then of course, it's miraculous. And now it's again, Harrison Butker Pride Day. Exactly.

Exactly. Oh my goodness. Carrying my fantasy team last year.

I wish I had them here. Didn't get enough here. Oh, no, but the Bears won.

They're two and oh, surprisingly. Okay. We'll talk about books here.

We got 20 minutes left. All right. In our last minutes here, we want to talk about some books.

And I thought it'd be fun to explore with you men. What are some of the books that were really formative for you when you were a young Christian? We it's isn't it the case that books that we love, they have not only to do with what we read, but when we read them. And sometimes they may be the best books or maybe they were just the right books for us at the right time.

So what were some of those? Probably not when you were a kid though maybe you read some great books. Certainly the Heidelberg catechism was influential for me when I was growing up. But whenever you started getting really serious about your faith, maybe that's in the high school, maybe that's college, maybe that's early 20s.

What were some of the the formative Christian books for you Colin? What do you have on your list? Oddly enough Kevin, I actually do have a Heidelberg catechism question for you. We can come back to that in the end. I want to ask you our our church did three, I think was 27, 28, 29, something like that from the Heidelberg catechism this last week.

We recited them, which included the line about all of the evils God sends us. But love to have your response on that line from the Heidelberg catechism because we're going to discuss it in our home group. Okay, so while you're thinking about that, I know you've already written about this and teach on it.

So you can all just give me chapter and verse. Lord, say what? Lord, stay 10. Okay.

Question answer 27 and 28. What do we understand by the providence of God? That one? That's what you did. Yep, that's the one.

Y'all might even have a present power of God by which he holds as with his hand heaven

and earth and all creatures and so rules over them that leave him blade, rain and drought fruitful and lean years prosperity and poverty, health and sickness all things. In fact, come to us not by his not by chance from his fatherly hand. Yes, that's it.

And then and then yeah, the specific but specifically the sending of the evils. That's what I want to hear from you about later. Okay, so I believe it.

I believe it. I know I want to know how to just talk about it with our group. So biblically.

So, okay fine, we're just going to do it now. Give me the explanation now. How do we talk about it biblically? I was going to I was going to have people open up the Bibles and just do like a workshop where they talk through how would you build a consensus around this? So how would you guide us in that? Yeah, well, Piper's got his 700 page book on providence coming out.

You can read the good news we almost forgot or I basically posted that chapter on Providence. If you Google me in Providence, you'll you'll find it somewhere on my blog. But I mean, there's lots of if disaster.

What is it from Amos? Is it that disaster comes with city has a Lord not caused it and Isaiah that he sends good and evil. Have they not come from the Lord's hand? I think the evil there is is raw. Now it's you need to understand it's not the Lord is enacting moral evil.

I think it's a figure of speech meaning all things come from his hand. But we certainly see examples even evil spirits do his bidding. Yeah, I was thinking about soul.

Yeah, thinking about soul. Go back to Pharaoh. Pharaoh and hardening his heart and the devil needs to get permission before he can act and Job.

So every so I would you could do a word not a word. So you do a verse study and look up lots of verses or dozens of them that show okay, wow, the Lord really does have sovereign control over all of this. And then at a theological philosophical level, I often try to go help people see.

However you look at you're really dealing with some greater good argument, some greater good Theodicy. People shy away from that, that strong language of God's sovereignty, sending evil because they want to fall back on the Theodicy, some kind of libertarian free will or somehow God was not the origination in his decree of these things. I want to help people see, no, a better Theodicy, a better greater good is not our free will, but God's glory.

Now both have their existential issues and problems. But I'd rather have the existential problem be, okay, I need help getting used to a God that's like this, for who works so for his glory than the existential problem being, well, why would God allow this kind of

libertarian free will when he knew that it was just going to run amok? Be my short answer. No, that's exactly what I was looking for.

And now you've done my job on Wednesday. Okay, good. So what books have been informative for you? All right, books for me.

So did not grow up in a particularly observant Christian home. When I was saved at age 15, did not was not really disciplined as a reader. So pretty much everything is from college on.

And I think it's easy for me to take for granted the fact that I was involved within a within a crew movement where we were reading through Wayne Groom systematic theology as a small group. So that's one that was influential for me. And also where I was in a church where I would ask the pastor, Hey, give me your recommendations on what, what biographies I should read.

So pretty much in those short years of college and then early adulthood while I was starting out in my career at Christianity today, this will be the list of books that were influential. Roland Baiton's biography on Martin Luther. Then later, I remember years, years later, my wife and I were married.

And at one point I said, do you ever wonder about this big biography of Jonathan Edwards that I'm reading George Marsden? And she's like, yeah, but I just didn't think ask. I mean, we just, we did not grow up in an environment where you would have talked a lot about Jonathan Edwards. So that biography was hugely influential.

Some of the college books that circulated a lot, and I don't know, there seem to be different books that become must reads within college ministries, I guess, in college churches. For us, it was Bonhoeffer's cost of discipleship. And then as a major in European history, I ended up writing a lot about Bonhoeffer and other kind of opponents of the Nazis from the Protestant perspective.

And then also, that's where I picked up Dostoevsky and his brother Scaramatsov in particular. So in the last one I'd mentioned, which was hugely influential in terms of my career. And then ultimately, even I keep going back to it today in books that I'm writing would be Carl Henry's uneasy conscience of modern fundamentalism.

So yeah, that was, it's just kind of amazing to me of how the Lord, well, I guess let me put it this way. I can go back and cite a lot of other books I read during this time that were not formative to me, which is interesting because in retrospect, I was not nearly as discerning as I thought I was at the time. There were still a lot of things, theologically, that were up in the air for me.

So these were the formative ones, meaning they're the ones that I still stand by today. That's good. A good list.

And I only have a few of those, most of those I know of, but not on my list. What about you, Justin? What were some of the formative Christian books in your early maturation years? Yeah, my back counts a bit similar to Collins and they grew up in a mainline church. I think one difference was that my mom is a very godly, active, evangelical Bible study leader sort of person.

So I kind of had both of those worlds, not a huge Christian reader, I don't think growing up that I can recall. I'm sure there were books that are formative that slip my mind now, but in high school, it was books more like "Cross of the Switchblade" by David Wilkerson. In his ministries, actually, how my mom came to the Lord in 1970s.

Christian sports biographies like Dave Trevecki, who was a major lead. Yeah, a booster of books that they weren't profound. Well, now they can say, yeah, we're about much more than winning, for sure.

Winning is not the only thing. You know, those books, I think that the Lord used them to, number one, say that God exists. God matters.

The gospel is real. The gospel can change your life, that you should dedicate yourself to the Lord. I think there was some undertone of you can be a successful, accomplished person and not be weird and still believe in the Lord and tell other people about him.

So, I mean, that sort of FCA world that I existed in in high school was formative for me and the literature that came along with it. I think in college, the first serious book that I read as a freshman is at a public university from an atheistic professor and Western Civ was reading Augustine's Confessions, which is part of the curriculum because of how formative it is and just fell in love with that book and have never lost my love for that book. Part of my story is being at a secular university and growing in my faith having to basically study apologetics on my own in order to know if I really did believe this and what are arguments that I can use.

So William Lane Craig's reasonable faith was really significant for me back then in the late 90s mid to late 90s. Of course, John Piper's books that the trilogy kind of is three biggest early on books, Future Grace, Pleasure's God, Desiring God, that opened up to me a whole new way of thinking, talking and also opened up other literature. Gritum's systematic theology, I think was similar that they're just categories I never thought through Christology before, never thought through what is my millennial position.

So Gritum's systematic theology was the first opportunity to really think through systematically the various doctrines of the faith, connect them in a doxological way. And then one of the things I appreciate about Wayne's work is that he also had recommended reading to go on and read Calvin's Institute or read Hodge or to read Boving. So a couple other names to be Jerry Bridges at a popular level just on what it means to be godly, what it means to be holy.

And John frames Dr. Nitha knowledge of God introduced me to thinking about epistemology and knowledge in a really interesting, typical way I thought. So those kind of divide the high school years and the college years. And then we could do another session on beyond college and seminary.

Yeah, we should do that next. Well, we, and we also need to do one on formative Christian music because apparently I'm thinking about this. That's how I spent my high school.

Wasn't being formed by books. I was being formed by music in a lot of good ways. Go ahead, Kevin.

We should do that. What Christian concerts have you been to? Oh, yeah. Have you ever been to a Rebecca St. James concert? Jeff Moore in the distance.

Oh, I love Jeff Moore in the distance. Yeah. Yeah.

I've been to jars of clay a couple of times. Okay, we'll say that for another time. So formative Christian books.

So I grew up in a RCH church, but evangelical church and good family. Though I wasn't reading Christian books. I mean, I think I started having a quiet time each day when I was maybe a junior or senior in high school and I picked up a devotional by campus life or something.

I just had some readings and some quotes and I remember reading that. I couldn't tell you anything about it, but it was helpful at the time. And when I got into college, of course, I went to a Christian college and majored in religion.

So I was reading lots of things there. But outside of what I was assigned, I've told this story many times. I'll be very brief.

I was a freshman. I was talking with some guys on my floor one night, my roommate who was a nominal Christian. When I'm really serious about Jesus that I could tell, a guy who was a hedonist, not the good John Piper kind, but I want to have sex.

That's what my life is about. I did come into my room one time when he was in my roommate's bed with his girlfriend. So he was true to his principles.

And then a guy who was into crystals and Ricky Lake, you have to look up Ricky Lake if you're not of our Gen X age. So we were all up one night and they were kind of hounding me with typical questions. What about the tribesmen who never heard of Jesus and how can you believe in hell and all sorts of questions.

And I got done with that night and I thought I've been a Christian my whole life. And it's nobody's fault, but I feel like, boy, I'm not well equipped to answer these questions to

know what I believe and why I believe it. So I picked up those books.

IVP had those two classic books by Paul Little, *Know What You Believe, Know Why You Believe*. I read them, underlined them, outlined them. It was just really, and I haven't looked at them for 20 years.

So I don't know what's all in them, 25 years now, but was helped by them. And then this is not everyone's story, but I made a little bit of a jump from those to Calvin's Institute's. My dad had Calvin's Institute on the shelf.

And I got his copy and brought it to school. And I thought, well, there's 1500 pages, five pages a day, and you can miss one day a week, I can get through this in a year. And that was absolutely revolutionary for me, not only the content, but just the idea.

I can go back and read these old books for myself. And I can, you know, not understand half of it, but I can understand half of it. And so that's no exaggeration to say that changed my life.

I read that my freshman year. And then I got the battles translation. So I read the beverage translation.

Then I read the battles translation my next year, because I thought I used to go through this again. So certainly Calvin's Institutes were very formative for me. In college, I also, you know, a friend introduced me to *Banner of Truth*.

And so started reading some of the ones that that come to mind, certainly a lot of Lloyd Jones preaching in preachers. Well, that's his *Undervin* book, but his his lectures on the Puritans, his lectures on revival, some of his church history stuff, I just ate it up. Now I would look back now and say, yeah, Lloyd Jones was lacking in some ways as a historian.

But he also did something really powerful with history. And that is to inspire Christians with Christian history. So I love that book on the Puritans and loved reading Ian Murray's two volume biography of Lloyd Jones.

That was really, and I started reading some Edwards. Oh, then the other person to mention is David Wells. Some point in my college years, I first read *God in the Wasteland*, which I think was 1994.

In college. Yes. I read those in college.

I read those in college. And then I read *No Place for Truth*, which was the first one. Then I read *Losing Our Virtues*.

So I think those were the three that came out that were out before I went to seminary. And that's one of the reasons I went to Gordon Commonwealth's because David Wells was there. But those, I mean, that was just eye opening.

Oh, I cannot. This is true. This is right.

This is this analysis. Makes sense to me. I was later on the Piper game than you guys were because I saw Piper, not him personally.

I saw his books in a Christian bookstore. And my basic philosophy was if I could buy it in a local Christian bookstore, it was probably a bad book. Again, at what age? What age was this? That I had that philosophy.

Yeah. Yeah. When I was like a freshman in college, yeah.

That was my faith. And it wasn't a terrible philosophy to have. But when someone first said, hey, have you heard this John Piper book? And I saw Meditations of a Christian Hedonist.

I told this to John before. I mean, my first thought was, that's garbage. Obviously, it's in a Christian bookstore.

It's about being a hedonist. And so it wasn't until seminary that I read that and I read Future Grace, which and yeah, so it got on lots of Piper tapes and books. It was massively helped.

I noticed that none of us mentioned CS Lewis. Now we've read a lot of CS Lewis. I could have.

I could have mentioned Mary Crichanity in college. Okay. Yeah.

Me too. Oh, well, sorry. I was going to make a point there that, you know, the Piper Keller generation massively.

I mean, their Lewis is one of their top two or three guys. And I read all those books, but I wouldn't put him as formative, but helpful. Crichanity was one of those.

It was like Piper Lewis, Bonhoeffer, at least in the college ministry. I was in and so they were kind of the rite of passage in all of those. Kevin, have you spoken with Sarah Zalstra yet about David Wells for the profile? She's right now about him.

I've heard her. Okay. Well, she'll be in touch.

She's working on that now. Oh, good. I can give some some good stories and and my wife had his wife, I think, as a professor at Gordon College.

Oh, no idea. Okay. Awesome.

Yeah. Okay. Last question.

Fun question for you. So let me set this up. We are recently on a pastor's retreat and

whenever I lead our pastor's retreats and my philosophy of pastor's retreat is have fun, try not to do work and spend some time sharing and praying with each other.

So I'm always thinking each year because there's a lot of us who go on that. It's not just pastors. It's kind of other senior staff.

So there's like 14, 15 guys and I'm thinking of ways for us to share that isn't just, Hey, we'll all listen to you for 45 minutes as you share. That gets tedious. So I've done different things.

So this year I had everyone write five questions, put them in a hat. They could be serious questions. They could be fun questions and we pull them out and we go around the circle and we do it for an hour and then we do it later in the day and you take a minute or two to answer these questions.

Well, it was, I don't know what it says about our jobs, but the most common question that was in there was if you weren't a pastor, what would you be doing? So I, we, I don't know if we were all thinking about, huh, what else I could do? Middle of the pandemic. Yes. In the middle of our pastors retreat.

Oh, someone else wants to know what else you would do. But what, what would you men be doing and try to think outside the box, not just, well, I'd be an editor of something else, you know, put it in a different career. Could we guess each other? Oh, yeah.

Okay. Okay. Let's do that.

We're going to start Justin. What do you guess for Colin? Now let me give you this proviso. It has to be within the realm of possibility.

So I'm not going to say, oh, you don't want to do that. And just say what Colin's going to be in, you know, the Northwestern football coach. Could it be in the realm of possibility if you had taken a different course with us? He sure.

But I mean, just saying not you're not the center for the Lakers. Oh, yeah. Well, that, okay.

Yeah. I see what you're saying. A male model.

I mean, probably more likely. Any models for all sorts of understand. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay.

Justin. Yes for Colin. The color commentator for the Northwestern Wildcats.

Yeah, that's pretty, that's pretty fair. My mind would have been, would have started out as a baseball general manager or a sports writer or more recently understanding myself

the last 10 years definitely could have been a football coach. I was going to guess football coach.

Yeah. I definitely could have high school. My coach was going to be my second one.

Yeah. I can see that. So except I would never have had the size to be able to play any of those positions.

And what would you like about that? How would that fit? Football coaching? Yeah. Well, I don't think I realized until, and this is, I guess, the fun thing, but also the, it was not really a what if I, there's a combination of football coaching with strategy and people and motivation and leadership and quick thinking and that just, I love that mixture of things. And it's also an all-consuming kind of thing.

And I tend to gravitate toward work that's all-consuming. And my parents are that way as well. So I just wanted to done it because I could never have played at the college level.

And I didn't really have a sophisticated high school program. But I definitely thought in high school, yeah, I could be like a baseball general manager or something. Would you be a quote players coach if you're the football coach or would you be like old school throw you around? That's funny.

I think if you, so I don't want you guys are like when you think of your coaches or you think of your teachers and how that affects you today. But when I look back, I always gravitated toward the same profile, which is a person who was known for being really demanding, really hard. But if you submitted to that discipline, it would pay off.

And then you would develop a close personal relationship and you would see them behind the curtain that they really only ever wanted what was best for you. As basically my management style today for better or worse. And so yeah, I would have been, you would think not a players coach, but actually it would have been a players coach.

I think back in my high school coaches, I mainly think about profanity. So I didn't have to deal with that. So, okay, all right.

What would Justin be? Used car salesman. Nothing wrong with that. Let me, well, I don't know if this is far enough out of your field, but a history teacher, I was better.

I guess that I was going to guess that. Okay. What do you got for us, Justin? What do I think I would have been? Yeah, yeah.

Or just what would be your other career? I was at Desiring God in trying to think about, I knew I wasn't going to state Desiring God forever. I really was thinking about career paths and being a professor, maybe a seminary professor, a history professor would be

in the realm of possibility, or an associate pastor who was at a large church in charge of like a seminary level apprenticeship. Not the mean preaching pastor, but somebody in the pep.

Yeah. Or Tom Stover, Beth Lhem, that sort of field seemed like that could fit me, but I ended up going into publishing. Well, you're doing the, yeah, now you're doing it through books for millions of people.

I think if I take it out of the ministry realm altogether, I'd probably be a high school educator. Just got so many educators in my family, both of my parents were teachers and brothers and sisters were teachers. So that basketball coach as well.

I don't know if I could actually pull that off. I could see you being the history teacher slash basketball coach. You just, okay, guys, we're going to watch glory today, put in the BCR.

We did that a lot in high school. And I'm just going to send it back to the class and draw up plays for this afternoon. I think of one of my social studies teachers who was the swim coach.

And somehow he had a class, an elective class in high school on the 50s and the 60s, which was, and it was basically, yeah, it was like 50s, 60s, 70s. And it was about three weeks of the class, as I recall, was him bringing in his Beatles albums. Like looking at the Beatles, talking about the Beatles.

That's why you hate. And imagine that's where that came from. I don't know if I've ever told anyone this story, but I remember going to like the auditorium to see all the Beatles paraphernalia.

And I'm not sure how this got through whatever at my public school. But it was whatever that picture was. I don't know if that's an album or a picture of John and Yoko stark naked.

That was very scarring for me. I thought, how did this end up in my high school curriculum? So yeah, I have your uncovering a lot of issues, Colin. Okay, do I get to guess for you now? Yeah, okay.

We've already mentioned him and I'm going to times on the podcast, but I could have seen a Ben Sasse career for you, a political career, but would have an overlap with the education. So you definitely could have been a lawyer, like a witherspoon type. So lawyer, politician, academic, that row.

So I'm a conservative columnist for Los Angeles Times or something like that. And just so you know, our listeners, we did not share any of these ahead of time. We just must know each other well.

So yes, I was going to say a lawyer, very unspiritual. I did study political science in college. I worked on some campaigns.

What did me in was to kind of go that route, you had to basically go do a study semester in DC. And you worked with some your staffer and that whole thing just seemed really nothing about that seemed attractive to me. You know, being maybe the candidate might have seemed attractive.

But really, when I thought about it, it was the speaking, the teaching that that was the part that that I like being able to talk about these ideas and the things I believed. And you know, then the Lord just cemented, hey, there is a profession where you can do that. And you can do it about things much more important.

But yes, I've thought before, what's that? Make a lot less money. That's true. I have thought before that I don't know what type of lawyer, but I think I would have enjoyed law school and thinking through arguments, reading through minutiae, trying to find what's the needle in a haystack here, I would enjoy that and presenting arguments in front of a judge or a jury and that pressure and being on the spot.

I think all of that I could see enjoying. I would help support you in your various ministries as high school teachers and football coaches. So there we go.

You learned a little something new about us. Any last word for us? Nothing. I'm pretty impressed that we could all guess.

I did not think we were going to do that. That was inspired. Very inspired.

Okay. Well, next week, we will be recording at a different time. Of course, you listening won't know that, but I'll be interviewing Lord Willing James Eglinton on his new biography, "A Boving." Because of the time change across the ocean, Justin Conn may not be there, but I am about halfway through the book and finish it this week and looking forward to that.

And so we will all be together. Hopefully, very soon we have some other authors and great books to talk about and authors to interview later throughout this season. But Colin, Justin, wonderful to be with you all.

Thank you to our listeners. Glorify God and Join Forever. Go read a good book.

(buzzing)