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Is All the Talk of Mental Health Bad for Our Mental Health?

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

The three amigos are back to kick off a new season of LBE. From college football to dropping kids off at college to the rise of mental health issues on college campuses (and everywhere else!), this episode has a back-to-school vibe you won't want to miss. Stick around for one summer book recommendation from each of the fellas at the very end.

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Transcript

Greetings and salutations. Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung, Senior Pastor at Christ Given and Church in Matthews, North Carolina, outside of Charlotte.

And I am joined by my two guests today, no strangers to LBE, the esteemed Justin Taylor, and the right honorable Collin Hansen, Esquire. You are now a square, my young liege. Good to have you guys back on Life and Books and Everything.

We're going to do some of each of those. I know this is a fan favorite, but I want to say a little college football. College football, more realignment.

The Big Ten started this. This is the Big Ten to blame. Colleges, those uninitiated, far off.

Thousands of miles away in California and the West Coast. More of them joined the Big Ten and the Pac-12 is soon to be no more as its demise already become official. Basically, sorry, Pac-12, you didn't have the TV ratings to continue as a conference, even though you've existed for what? 100 years.

So all of this realignment is happening. It does seem like one of those things that I do not know a fit. The fan of college football that likes all of this.

Now, some of the parts, Nebraska coming to the Big Ten, sad for it, but made some geographic sense. So there's certain moves that make sense. But as a whole, I don't know anyone, any pundit, any personal fan that likes it.

And yet, there's just so much money to be had that they keep doing it. Collin, can this be fixed? Or does anyone really care to fix it? Because everyone's going to still watch college football and forget about it and the money will still be there. Well, I think Kevin, part of the answer is embedded in the way that you talked about it right there.

You talked about geography and it doesn't make any sense. People wouldn't talk that way about the National Football League because geography doesn't really matter. It is a national football league.

It's a national football league. It's a national football league. And we watch the Bears play the Panthers.

And it doesn't really matter where they are because the fact is most people are watching because of their fantasy football teams or their gambling interests or things like that. So it's really national in that sense. It's about the TV matchup.

It's not about who's watching in Chicago or Charlotte. It's about who's watching in Phoenix or rural South Dakota or whatever there. College football has historically been very different.

It's tied up with geography. It's tied up with conferences. It's tied up with those historic rivalries.

It's tied up with you into this college. Your uncle went to this college. Your kids go to this college.

And they all kind of play each other every other year. It hasn't been primarily about those, about the experience of the tailgating things like that. Not primarily about those national ratings.

But I think what you're seeing is money take over everything else. And then with the priority on national matchups, not even, not even cable sets anymore because that's kind of disappeared. So national matchups.

And so it's a kind of consolidation to ensure that there are as many big name matchups every week as they can get. So I do think it's eroding part of what a lot of us have always loved, which is exactly the regionalism, the localism of it. But that's the difficulty when you have a continental nation, which is driven by entertainment.

And also there's always, there's a never any pursuit for more money and more people that have to get paid. Do people care about this in Iowa, Justin? Yeah, I think they do. I was listening to a podcast that made a point that really stood out to me and it would challenge maybe your point of people are just going to continue to watch no matter what.

And one of the guys said, I don't want to happen to football, what's happened to basketball. And it made me realize I don't really watch college basketball anymore. I used to love college basketball.

I mean, the Duke, Kentucky, rivalry and that sort of thing now and just kind of bored with college basketball. And could that happen to college football as well? Probably hard for the three of us to imagine not being interested in college football. But if they keep going, potentially that could happen.

And the only reason to bring it up, well, one reason is we like talking about it. Sorry listeners. But another reason is it is symptomatic of bigger cultural trends with politics isn't local anymore.

All politics is become national. And we can overlook the regional dynamics. I remember this article several years ago.

So I don't know if some of the numbers have changed, but you know, people often talk about the demise of baseballs, America's past time. And certainly if you just look at national ratings, they're not much. But there still are around those cities, every city now has its own cable channel that shows all of the Pirates game or all the Tigers games or all the White Sox game.

And there still is a loyal fan base around those cities. You know, somebody said, tongue in cheek talking about the big 10. Well, why don't if the big 10, I know they can just take in Stanford and Cal and how about the rest of the teams out there? And it'll be like a conference of like 20 teams and we'll have one that will call an Eastern division and one will call a Western division.

And every year those two will play a championship game and we'll call it the Rose Bowl. Okay. Yeah, let's go back and do that.

But it doesn't seem that I mean, it just seems that one of those things that a lot of people would say, can somebody, a politician, even somebody make this back the way it was? And yet there's no real incentive to do that unless the money stops. And if you get the NCAA out of the equation, then academics perhaps become backseat. You know, do you need to even academically qualify to play? And are we paying players directly? I mean, there's all the worst case scenarios you can imagine are really not that far fetched.

And should we just call it what it is, NFL minor leagues or yeah, an NIL is name image likeness is just the Wild Wild West right now that seems like. Hey, here's an open door. Everyone knew something needed to change, but is this the answer that any amount of money can be funneled into your name image likeness campaign? One point here that I just think of locally as an Alabama fan was talking to my wife about this and she said, I kind of wish we could go back to the way it was in the 80s and 90s.

And I'm thinking when we met compete, Nebraska was good. Like when we didn't compete for national championship every year, she said, well, but back then I would show up. We show up in our RV and we'd park across from the stadium and we'd tailgate and all the players were recruited from Alabama.

You knew them as high school players and things like that. And I thought, well, I mean, that's part of the trade off here. You, you have a much better team.

There's a lot more money involved. You keep getting pushed and pushed and pushed and pushed and pushed further away unless you give more and more and more and more money. And now it becomes more about the spectacle and it's not about you in person.

It's about somebody watching out in Seattle or New York or wherever, not the person that's local. And so I think that's just as you said earlier, Kevin, it's symptomatic of broader changes of just what it means in a media landscape is dominated by money. It always is to a certain extent, but it erodes a lot of those things that actually make you fall in love with that in the first place.

And, and then you'd wonder when when do you wake up as Justin said right there and realize, I don't ever watch college basketball anymore. Are you going to tune in for the 10 p.m. central tip off between Nebraska and Oregon and basketball? It just doesn't make much sense. Why would you? It's not that interesting.

So transitioning, still thinking about college. A bittersweet topic for those of us old enough to send our kids to college. Justin, you, you sent your son off to Iowa State.

Iowa State is a cyclone and first day of classes today. How was that? We sent our oldest last year to NC State. So we sent him this year, second year there.

And I'm not a prolific crier. I'm not, I'm not renowned for my, my Dutch emotionalism. Breaking news.

Breaking news. And yet this whole graduating from high school, sending your kid to college. I mean, it hit me again this year.

I just, who invented this? Can't we just, I mean, talk about going back to the past. Can we just live in small villages and you just stay and you, you work on the farm and we all just live in the same town together? How was this for you, Justin? You should, you could have just sent your kid to boarding school in first grade and then gotten used to it earlier. That's true.

The Brits were really on to something. No, it was, it was hard for us. We, I don't know.

I think most people maybe do the drop off and go home the same day, but we spent the night in a hotel. And so we were able to help them get moved in and then set our goodbyes the next morning. I think that helped us a little bit, you know, just get him settled and get our emotions settled.

But we have a, a younger son with special needs and our older son is quite close to him. So, and see those two saying goodbye is, is, is hard, but you also don't want them to, to stay in the house forever. So, you know that there's that chapter of their life.

Yeah. And we're excited, but sad at the same time. And it, you know, it, the things you experience as a parent, you realize as a child, you had no idea.

I mean, I was a little, I went to school and I could maybe see it was hard in my, I didn't think anything of it. I mean, not much. And then I spent all the next summers doing one thing or another, you know, working a job somewhere else.

And I never spent another summer at home. Sorry, mom and dad. I mean, I was so glad that my son came out.

It's just these things that we don't think of. And I guess you, you don't need to as a, as a child. But when you're a parent and you get all of the comments, well meaning, and I appreciate them.

But like, you know, these 18 years go so fast and the days are long, but the years fly by, give every, you know, last hug you can. And well, you can do all of that. And it, it doesn't change the time doesn't actually stop.

You can't go back. And this is what I think is, maybe I'll write about this sometime. But I think unique about parents with their children, you know, we love, we love our, our wives and we've loved them at every stage we've been with them.

But we probably don't just pine for like, oh, if only I could be with 31 year old wife. Okay,

that was great. But you know, we just, we keep living together and doing life.

But there's something with kids, you grow up, they change so much that you don't want them to, you don't want to lose 18 year old, 20 year old, 15 year old son or daughter. You just want to be able to, once in a while just, can I just go back for a couple hours and have the five year old, the 14 year old, and it's just, it's a real, it's a real sadness that they, you know, you can't understand until you get there. So Colin, I'm just glad for this encouraging talk with you.

You have a few more years. How old you're old? Eight. So enjoy these years Colin.

Well, I do. He's 18. The rest of your life is terrible.

Well, I do. You just look back on photos, like you said, right there of even when your child is, your eight, your old is five and you just say that person's gone. You know, like I loved that person and that person was great.

We had a great relationship, but it's constantly evolving. It's amazing how many times at the end of the night, Lauren and I, my wife and I are just talking about the unique challenges that always evolve. And we've got a lot of that, a lot of that ahead.

I was going to ask you guys if there were something that you were really glad that you did. Leading, you know, before that, was there something that stands out to you guys? I could ask the negative of something you wish you'd done, but it was just a positive thing. Well, I was talking Tricia about this last night and I was saying, you know, do you have somebody asked, do you have regrets? Well, of course, if you're a sinner, you have regrets, you all would, you know, you wish you hadn't sinned or yelled on this occasion.

But I think by God's grace that, you know, I don't look back and think, oh, I just, I was so committed to my career. I never went to any ball games or I never, you know, wrestled on the ground or I never laughed with them. So all of those things you could guess.

I'm a firm believer and maybe this is just, could be totally self justifying in quantity time, even more than quality time. I think the quantity leads to the quality. I remember somebody, I think it was maybe even Al Moller who gave me this advice years ago.

I said, when you have to spend money and kids are expensive, spend money on the things you can experience together more than on the things that you buy for them. And that's true. You know, a trip, very thankful for like last year I took my two older boys.

When the oldest had graduated, we went to the World Track and Field Championships in Eugene, Oregon. So that'll always be a memory we have. So to spend money on some of those experiences and especially when you have so many, like we do, to try to at least peel them off with one or two or three or four at a time.

I don't know what do you say Justin? Yeah, I was thinking very similarly, like it feels like we spent a lot of money not doing extravagant trips this summer, but just being together and I would rather spend my money trying to, you know, spend money on the things that you're doing. And to get to see our kids spend time with our kids. And to try to do one on one time is probably not as easy for you Kevin with all of your kids, but to make some time just to hang out, not as the whole family, but peel off.

And I think you're exactly right. The quality time. Yeah, you'd want to just, I just want to have quality time all the time, but the quality time surprisingly comes sometimes within the quantity time.

And if you don't have the quantity time, sometimes those quality moments don't actually come around. Colin, judging from some of your, your Twitter pictures, you were somewhere incomparably beautiful this summer. Was it Sloan Iowa? Was it Vermillion? Where, where were you? What did you do? I got to meet a lot of loyal life and books and everything listeners all around the continent of Europe and and Great Britain.

So, in fact, it was, it was funny as soon as I got there in Cambridge, there was a student there who met me. Actually, it was a faculty member at Southern Seminary who met me and was like, I just heard you were going to be here. That's why I was, I came to look for you.

So, I mean, I'm glad of what you guys just said there about the experiences because that was what I was going for. It was actually, I can't remember which of Ben Sasse's books it was where he talks about this where, you know, travel when you think it's going to be hard, travel, light, spend money, such as you have it on experiences, not on stuff. So, I actually had a lot of those things in mind and a lot of people looked at us crazy like, you did what? With three kids, ages five and eight and two.

Yeah, I mean, that was, it was a different kind of experience, but it's something that we, I mean, certainly Lauren and I will never, never forget our oldest. He's such a, he's such a history buff, especially military history. So being able to go to Normandy, Bastone, follow through all sorts of the band of brothers things over there in Belgium and Luxembourg, visit London, Lauren loves Paris, you know, the most.

So, it was a, it was a great time, but I, one of the things that was just so encouraging is that everywhere we went, especially around England up to Edinburgh, London, we did an event there in London that was just really wonderful as a chance to be able to remember Tim Keller with all sorts of people coming together across the city, which was, which was just really special, but in the time in Cambridge, it was just to meet Christians. You know, all the cool things I got to do, I remember the last week we went to, went to one of the churches in Cambridge and just met a number of PhD students and one student who's just wrapping up, she has a top scholarship at Cambridge, she's writing on Calvin's Theology of Hope, another student from Canada who was just talking about all sorts of

amazing things and giving me tours around and all the evangelism that they do with, with younger and older students. It was just, that was the special part that stood out to me being hosted by my friend Neil Powell there in London who had a London project.

Yeah. So, good. Yeah.

We support Neil and he's a good brother. Well, what a, what a cool thing to be able to do. So, you know, he deliberately hosts things, but I mean, it's the things you don't expect.

It's when you look out and Neil's son is playing with my two-year-old son and they're just having such a fun time and you're thinking, that's not what I thought my trip to London would be, but when you're with God's people, that's the part that actually really stands out. It's the people that you get to see are sitting up with James Eglinton and his wife, because it doesn't get dark until 11.30 p.m. and just talking about life and culture and the... and books and everything. And books and every answer Colin.

It's, it's, it's, I should have stayed on brand. It was, it was special. Thanks for asking Kevin.

Yeah, it is great. And, and I've found this in traveling, especially like you said, traveling with, with my kids sometime and we did one of those crazy excursions years ago with, we had six kids at the time to the UK for 50 days. But there really is a Christian culture.

Of course, it's infused with its own embedded national or ethnic culture, but it really is the case that you can be all over the world. And if you're with genuine Christians in a healthy, good gospel church, all of a sudden there's a connection and you, I like these people. You, you really do find something in common that transcends those cultural differences.

That's, that's a really sweet gift when you travel and good for our kids when we're able to do those things to be able to see them and experience them. I want to move on to a different topic and to segue, I'm going to talk about a book and think crossway. One of our sponsors and I want to mention today, a new book by Samuel James.

This is out. Isn't it Justin? Digital liturgies, Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an online age. You can go back to the last seasons podcast.

I talked with Tony Ranky, his book on technology and Samuel James about this upcoming book that's now out. So that's a worthwhile conversation. Samuel would be called a tech realist.

And he in this book examines the connections between patterns and technology and human desires. And some of the inherent dangers of digital technologies. I said in that podcast interview several months ago, sort of simplifying it that Tony would be

something of a tech optimist and Samuel a little bit more of a tech pessimist or here a tech realist.

But Samuel is one of the most thoughtful guys out there who is writing and thinking about these things and not just on a level of, hey, the internet's distracting you. You're on it too much. But how is it reshaping our brains, our discourse, what matters.

So check that out from crossway digital liturgies. And I want to use that to segue to a conversation that some of us have had offline and Samuel was a part of that. And to cue that up, here's a tweet.

I don't know who this person is, but it was sent to me last week. And this person says, can't remember the last time I had a conversation with a young person that wasn't filled with therapy language. People have become incredibly fluent in the language of trauma and anxiety, et cetera.

But it's done nothing to improve their emotional awareness or maturity. Mental health awareness has created mental health ubiquity. It's not helping.

There's a lot in there. Justin, start with you. Agree, disagree.

What do you want to nuance about that statement? Well, I think it would be really difficult to agree, no matter where you're at on the spectrum of these issues to deny the ubiquity part of it. I mean, who would say, no, I don't really hear much about therapy, therapeutic language these days. It does seem to be everywhere.

And what may have been in the past, a bit of a stigma, to say in the 1990s, I'm actually going through therapy right now, would have seemed awkward to admit where now it's almost a badge of honor that you're a little bit of an outlier if you've never gotten therapy or going through therapy. So I think there's probably two related issues. Number one, people actually doing quote unquote therapy and related, but distinct, the adoption of therapeutic language and categories as a means by which to kind of process hurts that I've received the past that I've experienced ways in which I want to change.

I think one thing that's going on here is the elasticity of terms. So what do we mean by therapy? I imagine that some people are seeing a counselor in calling that therapy. So I don't know that everybody who is seeing a therapist is actually having psychoanalysis done or something like that.

You know, they may be just getting good kind of common sense counsel, but you have to think that in many cases, God is absent, sin is downplayed, repentance is not called for. Of course, there's non-Christian therapists and there's Christian therapists. There's those that are operating purely from a secular standpoint.

And then those who are sort of trying to look at from a Christian perspective, is there is

there common wisdom that we can take and use and utilize without buying into all of the secular and problematic assumptions? I got a lot of thoughts and those are very good, Justin. I'll let you go next, Colin. We've talked a little bit about this just over email.

But how do you size that up? What's going on in our broader culture? Well, it does seem that something is significantly shifted, but the way things work in an internet age is that things have already shifted again. So now almost everything that you see in mainstream media, we're talking about the New York Times, the New Yorker, the Atlantic, places like that is fairly negative about therapy. It's asking these questions of, have we gone too far with calling everything toxic? What about trigger warnings? Were they always a huge mistake? And so you're actually starting to see some of that mainstream, not Christian backlash there.

We're talking about a lot of different things when you're talking about therapy. So interestingly, one of the people who's most opposed to what we're seeing today with this way therapy is taken over everything is the social psychologist, Jonathan Hite, who I cite all the time. He's one of the leading critics of this.

At the same time, he's one of the leading proponents of CBT of cognitive behavioral therapy. But what he's commending there is the opposite of what everybody else seems to be discussing, or a lot of other people are discussing there. So with cognitive behavioral therapy, you're really just trying to speak truth to yourself.

As Christians, I mean, there's different ways to talk about it, but I mean, this is a lot of what we talk about often of preaching the gospel to yourself. It's just what is true, what's not true, what can be verified, what's not verified and taking agency and ownership. I think it's part of it.

Exactly. That's the big thing there. And so that what we're seeing with a lot of the more pop versions of therapy is something that actually puts you in a perpetual state of victimhood.

Even if it does not build sort of toward somebody who's, I mean, it's promoting a kind of fragility as opposed to making you more resilient. And so any kind of therapy that makes you more fragile, makes you less resilient, makes you more likely to assume the worst, not teach the truth, ultimately the gospel to yourself, is of course to go back to the tweet, it's not helping. That part is not helping.

So I want to be careful to say that there are, I think, a number of different ways that therapy can be helpful and has been personally helpful to me. But it's got to be done the way that actually promotes the way that God has made us, which is to buy his grace and buy his spirit to be able to overcome, not necessarily exactly in the same way in this world, but to, but to depend on the power of the spirit to be able to fight for sanctification and to fight for truth, even when that's really hard to believe. And so that's

the kind that we, I think should be and can be promoting, but unfortunately, it's not the main versions that we see a lot out there.

So what are your thoughts Kevin? Well, yeah, I agree with all of that. The elasticity of language and the power of suggestion. So to bring up a second article, that was a tweet.

This is from today as we're recording this on Monday, August 21st. This is from the Wall Street Journal. And it's the booming business of American anxiety.

And it talks about different entrepreneurs and apps and people who are, who are learning how to capitalize on Americans anxiety. Here's the, it's a long article, but here's just the one statistic that jumped out at me in a recent federal survey, 27% of respondents reported they had symptoms of an anxiety disorder. That's up from 8% in 2019, according to National Center for Health Statistics.

Okay, so you got a pandemic in there and maybe that's part of it, but we're, we're, for almost everyone well on the other side of that. Anytime you have something that goes up in the span of four years from 8% saying they have it to 27% fully more than a quarter. I says a federal survey.

I assume this is a national survey of Americans. If that's accurate, more than one in four. And I don't know exactly how it was worded, but would say I have an anxiety disorder.

Now, I've been in ministry for more than 20 years and I've always in our congregational prayer prayed for people who struggle with depression or anxiety. We've always had people who. You know, have panic attacks and other depressive kind of moods or seasons or sometimes clinical.

So it's not that these things in themselves are new, but it's the, it's the language of disorder. And as you said, Justin, that there's no stigma. And this is how I mean, stigmas are really tricky things because on the one hand with a lot of stigmas, you, you don't want the person itself to be stigmatized such that they don't get help.

And yet there's a benefit often in the behavior being stigmatized or something that directs you, you know, to use another example about, you know, having sex outside a marriage. You know, if somebody comes forward and admits that as Christians, we want to offer them to hope with the gospel and a way forward. So you don't want them to feel like their life is ruined.

And yet in that good impulse to not want the person to be stigmatized for all time. No, there's a good reason that behavior should receive a stigma. And so with mental health, I mean, all of us here, we're old enough that, I mean, is just something nobody talked like nobody talked.

Like this when we were in high school. You know, there were no mental health days. My

daughter has a little sticky note.

Now she, she's younger and I think she said it jokingly, but there's a little sticky note here. You can't see it off to this side that says, Dad, can I stay at home? I need a mental health day. And I don't think she was really having a mental health breakdown, but it was just funny.

She is so familiar, even in a Christian school with that language. And there is when it's when something goes from 8% to 27%. There's something of a social contagion.

There's something of the power of suggestion. I mean, have you guys ever had this when some well-meaning person says to you, this happens more often than I like? Kevin, you're doing okay? Yeah, you seem pretty low. Wow.

I am pretty low. I guess you need to sit down. Have you been feeling well? You've not seen yourself.

And as far as you knew everything, but somebody says that and you think, well, something really was wrong with me. And I think a lot of these things, I wonder how you guys reacted this. Anxiety, trauma, even abuse, me too.

I think a lot of these cultural movements, they're certainly, they're on to something. They're on to something that says, you know what, there have been things, whether in the church or just in human life, that have taken place, that for a long time, we're minimized, we're overlooked, we're not really, you weren't supposed to think about how you were feeling. And all of those are sort of pointing to something.

You know what, there's some emotional mental, there's some things going on here that we ought not to ignore. And all of that is can be helpful. But then the elasticity and the dominance of all of those terms so swells that suddenly what terms used to be described for something that would seem very obvious and noticeable then become something that we just don't have a category for.

Yeah, you're sad. You're have today's the first day of school for a whole bunch of our kids. You're nervous with how you look.

That is a common human occurrence that has existed throughout all time. And we need to have the wisdom as Christians and as parents, pastors, leaders to help people and to have the discernment to know there's a wide, you know, standard deviation of normal, but still requiring our love and care and prayers. And there are things that are very unusual or rare and we've just lost the ability to even talk about those things with that kind of precision.

You mentioned something in there, Kevin, about well-meaning people making suggestions. And that's definitely true. But what if in our broader culture, our economy, a

lot of the people making these suggestions are not well-meaning? That's true.

So a lot of what you're seeing here with various social contagions, and this would be one of them that we're discussing here, is the influence of social media. And particularly on this issue, you're talking about TikTok. Now, just taking a step back, when something like that changes that much, usually there's something structural underneath.

And in our culture, there's usually, that usually means that somebody's trying to sell you something. And I quote this all the time, but I remember Jen Wilkin talking about parenting years ago saying, you're going to feel like a terrible parent, especially when you're not signing your kids up for everything. That's because a bunch of people are trying to sell you on the fact that if you don't buy their stuff, your kids are going to fail.

So you feel bad. See, then you sign up for everything. Then you're overwhelmed.

Let's take a step back, especially two generations ago. Our parents were not half involved, or our grandparents were not half as involved in their kids' lives as we are in ours as parents. So you have a couple different things happening there.

People are telling you, if you don't do this thing, your kids are going to fall behind. So you spend all this money and you spend all this time and you become miserable and your kids, you put a lot of pressure on your kids. And then they're out there on TikTok and they're looking at these different things.

It's not a surprise because there are entire industries that are trying to make money, whether it's the social media is TikTok, whether it's people selling you these services. I mean, you mentioned that it's appropriate that was in the Wall Street Journal, the booming business. That's what the article's about.

All the people who are trying, who know how to, and most of it probably doesn't work. And a lot of it is people, they're not well-meaning. They understand there is a huge market here.

I mean, it talks about vibrators you wear around your neck, gummies that you take, all sorts of things that are supposed to relieve you of your anxiety. And people will try anything. Go ahead, Justin.

I think we all know intuitively that there's a spectrum for all of these sort of things. Like I was talking to a guy who wanted to come to church who has a diagnosed anxiety disorder where he might physically not be able to sit for a full hour. I mean, there's a brokenness and we're not dismissing that.

We're not saying that's not real. That's just all in your head. There's a genuine clinical disordered brokenness of a combination of sin and brain chemistry and disorder and fallenness that's incapacitating people with depression who cannot rouse themselves out

of bed.

On the other end of the spectrum, there's people who just, they never have a down day in their life. They don't get nervous about anything. All of us fall somewhere, or most of us fall somewhere in between that.

But I think that one of the things that we've lost as a society is the ability to make distinctions. And where do I fall in that spectrum? Or if I'm somewhere in between those two, it's just all lumped in the same category of I have an anxiety disorder. So that elasticity of the concept really does end up, I think, creating problems.

But we're not dismissing. They really are problems. They're really incapacitated.

Absolutely. And just because something is new does not mean that it's wrong. So I've also seen somebody say, Hey, you remember how the greatest generation, they would never talk about their experiences.

They had a lot of problems with alcohol. And there was a lot of physical abuse of kids and of spouses. Yeah, I mean, that was trauma.

I mean, that's because they were not seeking, they were not getting help for the things that they had experienced before. Again, I'm not trying to, I'm not an expert to be able to say whether all of that is true. But the point is, just because we didn't see it in the past also doesn't mean it wouldn't have helped.

Some people in the past, if they'd known about that. So that's the kind of flexibility and elasticity that's necessary. But also to be precise because there's that quick definitional and experiential creep, especially when, as you say, Kevin, that becomes suggestive by people who ultimately are trying to sell you something.

And what, what is celebrated or valorized becomes emulated. So I think I don't know if it was an inflection point. It was just more emblematic.

Remember the Olympics a couple of years ago, when Simone Biles, who's back competing and she's amazing and hope she does well, but she, she pulled out of her events at the Olympics and I get, you know, you're tumbling in the air. And if you get the, the yips or something, you can really get hurt. So you have that component of it.

So she just, you know, said she wasn't mentally able to do it. And immediately you saw polarization around this young woman and, you know, should she just toughened it out or a lot of mainstream folks were absent. And perhaps this is more heroic than winning a gold medal.

And I guess, I guess I found myself somewhere in between wanting to say we can have sympathy. We ought to have sympathy for something to understand. Most of us have no

idea what kind of pressure these Olympic athletes are on, especially in something that requires flipping and tumbling and precision.

And, you know, Michael Phelps has been open about mental health, if you call it that other athletes have. So yes, there's an incredible strain. And we ought to be sympathetic to that.

And yet it seems like we've lost the ability, as you guys say, with distinctions to say, I sympathize, she shouldn't be pillorized for pulling out of it. And yet then we quick flip. It's like, this is the most heroic thing someone could do because, of course, in our culture, authenticity is heroic.

Now, that it's not really because there's certain kinds of authenticity as a Christian that you wouldn't, our culture wouldn't consider heroic, but to be true to yourself to acknowledge your own anxiety and worries is the most courageous thing you could do. And again, like you said, Colin, there are people from our grandparents, great grandparents generation, who probably suffered more than they needed to from, you know, being in World War II, never talking about it. How many of us have our age have grandfathers who got to the end of their life and suddenly, you know, those were the most vivid memories they have, and they would talk about it and they shaped them.

And yet they were so difficult to talk about. And we would today say they post traumatic stress, all sorts of things. So we've learned things.

And the answer is not just stuff, stuff, stuff. And yet, learning from that, it seems like the only solution we have is to then say, to come into most authentic ways. And to come into contact with whatever you're feeling is the most heroic thing when actually, to quote, you know, Jonathan Hight again, we're anti fragile.

We're making people more fragile by constantly reminding them or infusing them with this idea that they can't do things that life is very hard, and they need to be in contact with their own worst emotions. Any last thoughts, Justin? Well, yeah, and to also think that that fragility, which is maybe not the best word, but weakness is actually biblical. Like, we want people to acknowledge their weakness because we are weak, fallen people.

But I think that's where when you have a godless system, and again, there's other Christians who may be trying to integrate the two, but weakness only makes sense if you have a strong God. If you can acknowledge your weakness and lean upon his strength. But if we're creating fragile people who then have nothing truly to lean upon other than their own authentic self, then we're setting people up for failure.

So in the name of thinking that we're helping people and giving them therapy, we're actually creating something cruel when we encourage them to not have agency to

embrace fragility, but not to then lean upon the Lord who is mighty and can save their lives. And then we can give them and can help them and can sanctify them. And as you said, Colin, no doubt, you know, our generation, generation are spending more time with their kids than our parents did.

I mean, gobs of more time. Now, part of that is, most people are having fewer kids. Not us, but the fewer kids you have, the more you invest everything in those one or two children.

And all of that can unwittingly, even from a good parent who's just trying to, trying to love and soak up all the that they can, like we talked about earlier, can add to that fragility, where if you don't have time to attend to everyone's constant needs, some people might have to just figure things out. Or if you have a gaggle of siblings, you have to learn, you're always fighting and you have to learn how to deal with some things and what negative emotions feel like and all of these cultural trends, not all, but so many of them fit together and reinforce. And we're looking at just the, you know, sometimes the most obvious explanations when there's much deeper currents involved.

All right, life books, everything. Last part here, let's talk about the books. I admit, this was, this, I had a good summer with getting a big writing project done.

This book, Daily Doctrine, Baby Burkhoff, Tiny Turretin, Justin can crossway kind of mock up like some, like little cartoon figures on the side. That's what I'm, that's a shorthand of what I'm calling it. The overhead's are unordered.

Oh, good. But it was not a great summer for me getting lots of free reading done. So do you mean like this was not a great summer for Kevin DeYoung reading or this was not a great summer for like normal human being reading? I just read a few, I just read a few books.

Okay. So probably we're just, we're just going to get a list of like the most recent five massive political theology. No, no.

years ago that you read. I, I didn't get all I'm working through the light and synopsis. But so I want you guys to just do one book and say a little bit more.

To make you feel better. It is. It's all about making you feel better because I don't have five or six.

I have two or three. So just one, it's all about my mental health. And before you, while you're thinking of your book, I want to mention our second sponsor, Desiring God.

And if, if you haven't looked at this, you should. They have a new podcast, Light and Truth. And these are classic service.

So some of us had the, the Piper sermon app that had like 365 sermons won for each day of the week. Day of the year, that's gone. Now they have this light and truth.

They're classic sermons from Piper. I bet a lot of our listeners have listened to Piper sermons for a long time, but probably some of you haven't. You should.

These have been curated by Dan Kruger, who's also the host. New episodes each week. And they're about 20 or 25 minutes long.

So they've, they've paired them down, taken excerpts. And so good for, you know, quick workout, daily commute. So check out the Light and Truth podcast.

All right. Colin, you know, you're the one who reads, you know, you probably read, you know, some Dostoevsky work or something. What, so give us a book.

You read, it could be you completed. You're just halfway through. Tell us one book from this summer.

That was really interesting. I'm going to stay on theme here. Jean Twenge's book, Generations.

That is a very significant name. Okay, I did skim that. You read it more carefully.

So give us what we need to know about that. Well, essentially, if you're interested in what we're talking about here on this podcast with anxiety, that book is probably going to be the most, most helpful to you. So the way it walks between the walks to the differences between the silent generation, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z is, I think fairly helpful for a lot of different people in ministry, not because generations are determinative, but because they can be indicative of some of the, they can put language to some of the things that you're seeing.

So for example, in the workplace, you might wonder why are Gen X people, you might have a Gen X manager or something like that. You're millennial, Colin, right? Yeah, I'm learning. I'm the oldest millennial.

Yeah, you've always been a little bratty to me. Well, there is a significant difference between Gen X and Millennials. And the book talks about some of those, some of those reasons and Gen X was the last analog generation that really developed these kinds of expectations of resilience.

So there's a significant divide, especially between Gen X and then younger Millennials, and then especially with Gen Z. So you're talking there, Kevin, about the mental health days. That is something where if you're older, you just, you look at it like, wait, what? That's a thing. You can just say, I don't, I don't feel okay myself today.

And so I can't, I can't show up to church. I can't show up to work. I can't do this or that or

the thing that I expected of you.

I'll just say this. And I think this is probably keeping with themes that we've developed over the course of many years on this podcast. When you follow her narrative and you see, and she's, her narrative is just looking at these different surveys and then collating them.

So if you look at it. She's not any sort of faith Colin. I don't know.

Yeah. Actually, it doesn't come true. Right.

But she's very fair. Yeah. For 500 page book, what's helpful is, I mean, you might get 75 pages in each generation.

And if you're like me and you don't want to read all of that, you read the front and the end of each chapter. And she gives really nice summary kind of bullet points. But yeah, no, that is a very skimmable book in that sense.

And I'll be interviewing interviewing her for gospel. Okay. So I'll try to dig in on some of these things.

But one of my questions for her is to say, okay, so when you see that marriage is in decline and I'm really looking forward to Brad Wilcox's new book, Get Married, about how marriage in terms of happiness and life outcomes is way more important than career, which is the flip of what our culture does. But so marriage is is down. Religion is down.

And mental health is really bad. Suicide is bad. So now more than half of Gen Z does not think that there are only two genders.

I keep thinking, I mean, my religion tells me to expect this, that the way that we were created to love our creator and to love one another in covenant relationships. When possible marriage and having children, when those things all evaporate and you don't then have community, then all of a sudden, yes, when you're cast a drift thinking that career, money, freedom, lack of responsibility are the end goal of life. And that then you suddenly lack meaning and there's increase of despair and increase of mental, mental, unhealth.

That seems to be a pretty obvious causation and not a correlation in there, not just a correlation. So that's one of the things I want to talk to her about. But that's the book that stood out and essentially the, you could have a lot of interesting debates about this.

We could talk about this on LBE some other time. There's a lot of different ways to describe cultural change. Going back to your earlier accommodation of Samuel James book, which I also read and really loved this summer.

There is a significant role that technology plays and because of the rapid advance of

technology, it means that the generations are shorter and they have a harder time relating to one another because of these technological worlds that are segregated from each other that they inhabit. So that's why some people might be skeptical of generations, but that's one reason of kind of that study. So it's sort of like a combination of under here, there's these big ideas like what you write about with the Enlightenment, Kevin and things like that.

Those are still rippling themselves out. She talked about those with individualism in particular, but then up here that all these technological changes that create these significant departures over kind of overlaid on the broader, broader, kind of sort of just Western push toward individualism. So that's the book that's really stood with me.

And, but like Kevin said, you could get a summary somewhere, you could skim it or you could wait for my podcast. You'll probably cover a lot of the ground. Yeah.

And I think that that insight you just brought out was, did stand out to me as well, that the generations are getting shorter. Of course, it's all arbitrary, but with technology. So at least, I mean, I remember very distinctly went first getting on the Internet.

I remember the Vax system of email at college, which was just pixelated white letters and then develop and you had to go to the computer lab and you didn't even have a primitive mobile phone all of that. So we. You're a little younger, but you probably remember you're in between that where certainly our kids won't know any of that is just all strange, fascinating history somewhere.

And the generation stuff can be overblown, but, but there's truth to it. I mean, you think about if I'm listening to the 90s on nine in my car and like vintage, what are sort of the classic that would represent the mid 90s when I was in high school? It's Nirvana. It's Alanis Morissette.

It's this sort of vibe that's what matters and get off my back and we're just doing life and it's, it's meaningless. But here we go. That was the, you know, Douglas Kooplin Gen X book.

That whole vibe, it was not the millennials, not Gen Z. And I'm sure people have done just looking at the music and how that represents. But Justin, well, go ahead. Kevin, quick, quick.

What's going on in that song? It just came up on either pop rocks or 90s on nine with my kids coming home from church the other day. Deep, deep dive. What's going on in that song? Not the Justin Bieber peaches song.

No, 1995. The United States of America. Justin, anything to add on this before we go to the next book? No, generations.

Okay, I'll do my book. Justin, you'll get the last word. 200 pages separating church in state by Steven Green.

Not the Christian singer, but Steven Green, who's a professor at Willamette University. So just caveat. I don't know much about him and, you know, what I gather from looking him up online.

And this book is he's more on the ACLU side of separation of church church and state is good. And so you got to read at points with some of that squint, but I would say overall, it's very strictly historical and balanced. And I can't think of anyone in our circles who's interested in these subjects who wouldn't be helped.

Again, you could, you know, by at least skim, he gives nice summaries at the end of his chapters. There's six chapters and then a conclusion of separating church and state, a history, a couple of things that were stood out to me and it'll be one is that the history is not static. Now we know that history is never static, but we might be tempted as Christians to think it's just been like this, like church and state were close and there was constitutional rights and privileges, but it's just been an ever decreasing bad for Christians.

And he shows, no, there's a lot of ebb and flow. And in fact, the 19th century, the first half of the 19th century is in many ways much more Christian than America was at the founding. And Fink and Stark have made this point to in the churching of America that the number, the church attended.

So after the second grade awakening. And the initially, so he says, there are two kinds of separationists. There's the religious separationist and the secular separationists.

So initially, those most adamant for separation were the religious. And he says in particular over two issues, Catholic school issue and over Mormonism. So it was in the end of the 19th century, beginning of 20th century, it was, it was a lot of the Protestant establishment.

That really wanted to emphasize separation of church and state because they were nervous about parochial Catholic schools and then nervous about Mormonism seemed to have its own state or its own part of the country where they could just run things. And then since the, you know, 50s and 60s and on, the, the separationist impulse has been secular. So that's a helpful history to remember again, read with discernment.

But for the most part, he's not trying to pick winners and losers. He's just saying, here's where these impulses have come from. And here's how it has waxed and weight.

Now, on his reading, he thinks separation of church and state. And I think he would see this as sort of disappointing in his mind, but he would see it reached its zenith probably in the late 60s with some of those court cases and school prayer. And he thinks since

then, there's been a closer alignment.

And the courts have cited more with the religious on the religious side of these questions. This is the very last line of the book. He says, perhaps Chief Justice Warren Berger was correct after all when he declared that quote, the line of separation, far from being a wall, Jefferson's famous phrase word is blurred, indistinct, and variable barrier depending on all the circumstances of a particular relationship.

So if there's a thesis in the book, it's that the wall of separation has always been indistinct blurred. And for example, the, you know, the religious test, I mean, he says, I think sort of with some chagrin in his own mind that, you know what, the Constitution is probably just meaning to forbid a federal religious test so that the federal government wouldn't pick one denominational winner. But at state and local levels, they were happening and most people didn't have a problem with him.

So it's a book that defies easy categorization because the history of separation of church and state in America does not have just a simple narrative. So history is complicated is what you're saying. I know.

Very tried. Okay. All right.

So is it up to me? It's up to you to come up with a real winner winner chicken dinner. So I can only do one. So I can't mention the Oppenheimer biography or impossible Christianity by Kevin DeYoung.

Oh, well, those are Samuel's Richard digital liturgies by Samuel. I can't mention any of those. So I'm going to go with East of Eden by John Steinbeck.

I'm growing a fiction book. I've heard a lot about East of Eden over the years and listen to the entire thing on audiobook. And is that the long one? Well, I read it.

Yep, it's long. Grapes of Rathys, more famously known for 1930s, but he wrote, he considered East of Eden his magnum opus. And from everything I can tell Steinbeck himself is not religious and really believe in an afterlife.

It's not God centered in a way that we would want a Christian book to be. But I have never seen a work of fiction that is so infused with biblical imagery and parallelism. Right.

East of Eden and a deep reading of Genesis for in particular in Cain and Abel. So he's got, he's tracing it to families and he's got Charles and Adam kind of Cain and Abel figures. And then another family of these two families end up being intertwined with Caleb and Aaron.

Truly believing God. He was a Piscopalian, but that doesn't mean that he necessarily

believed in God. He is a Piscopalian.

Sorry for all the Piscopalian LBE listeners out there. But it came, he came from a generation that perhaps didn't believe but still knew his Bible, probably better than a lot of contemporary believers. So fascinating book.

One of those books that there's more sexuality and some of these older books than you would expect. One of the key characters. Is a prostitute runs a prostitution house, but wonderful writing and a lot to think about.

So if you make me just choose one book, that was one and throw an affection book for you guys. When I preached through Genesis a year or two ago, of course, we know that phrase East of Eden and it really is striking how many times in Genesis, especially the first 11 chapters, there are some. I mean, the Kings from the East, I mean, to go to the East is to be outside of the presence of God.

And it's not just there in the garden, the flaming sword and the chair been blocking entrance into Eden, but several times after there is that. So yeah, it's interesting that that Steinbeck really, obviously he's in the title, but you're saying he explores some of that Genesis theology and metaphor. And if you work through the biblical theology of East, the temple is always facing East, the tabernacle is always facing East so that when you walk into, no matter where the tabernacle was, it was always facing directly East.

So that as you enter into the tabernacle, as the priest does, he's walking from the East back towards the West into the Holy of Holy, toward the Holy of Holies. So it's a whole biblical theology there. And somebody like Steinbeck cannot give you a beautiful picture of redemption, but can be very gifted at describing what life looks like quote unquote East of Eden.

Way to land the plane, Justin. Thank you guys for being here. We'll have you back again.

And I have a number of other guests lined up over the months ahead in this fall semester. So thank you for listening to life and books and everything. A ministry of clearly reformed.

You can get episodes like this and other resources at clearlyreformed.org. And so until next time, glorify God and join forever and read a good book.