

# OpenTheo

## The Heart of the Cross with Phil Ryken

May 17, 2022



### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Kevin welcomes Phil Ryken, President at Wheaton College, to the podcast to talk about “The Heart of the Cross,” a newly reissued book comprised of sermons from Dr. Ryken and James Montgomery Boice. But before they get to the book, Kevin and Phil talk about preaching, the challenges of higher education, Tenth Presbyterian Church, the ministry of James Boice, and a little bit about pickup basketball.

Timestamps:

Intro and Sponsor [0:00-1:39]

Guest: Phil Ryken [1:40-10:43]

The Merits of Guest Preaching [10:44-13:50]

What Makes for Good Preaching? [13:51-20:50]

Reading When Busy [20:51-22:55]

Issues with Higher Education [22:56-28:38]

Who was James M. Boice? [28:39-38:40]

The Heart of the Cross [38:41-43:32]

The Simplicity and Profundity of the Cross [43:33-52:43]

The Merits of Provocative Advertisements [52:44-56:15]

The Merits of Expository Preaching [56:16-58:41]

The Lack of True Discipleship [58:42-1:01:12]

Why Continually Focus on the Cross? [1:01:13-1:06:52]

Books and Everything:

Freakonomics Podcast Episode on Higher Ed

The Heart of the Cross

The Cross of Christ

## **Transcript**

[Music] Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung and I am joined today with our special guest Phil Ryken.

I'll say more about him. He probably doesn't need introduction but introduce him in just a moment. As we get started, as always I want to thank Crossway for sponsoring the podcast.

What Crossway does at the beginning of a season is they give me a printout of books that they encourage me to mention on each week that I do a podcast. This is just what they gave me. They said today could you mention the Lord's Prayer by Kevin DeYoung.

That's what's on the list of the books. The Lord's Prayer, Learning from Jesus on what, why, and how to pray. That's awkward.

Kevin DeYoung, me, has a new book with Crossway. I had the Jesus storybook Bible come out a couple of months ago, end of March, and then this book is short book. There's lots of books on the Lord's Prayer.

So here's another one. You can always use good books on the Lord's Prayer. Hopefully this is a halfway decent one, but it's about a hundred pages long.

So if you're looking for a good resource to read in your own devotional time or maybe with a small group or a group of folks in your church or in your school, you can check that out on the Lord's Prayer. I've done a book with Crossway and the Ten Commandments on the Lord's Prayer and Lord willing, one of these years ahead, I'll complete the triumvirate and do one on the Apostles Creed. So the Lord's Prayer, you can check that out.

Today we have Phil Reichen. Phil, glad to have you with us. Welcome.

I've got to say I'm totally confused because you said the Lord's Prayer is by Kevin DeYoung, and I thought it was by Jesus. Oh yeah, that's right. That's right.

Good clarification. Let me just say though, people that are listening in, they should definitely, when they see Kevin DeYoung's name on a book, they should check it out. And I really enjoy the children's story Bible that you've done.

I haven't taken a deep dive into it yet just to skim through, but boy, there is really a place for children's Bibles, not only for children, but actually for people that are totally new to Christianity. I often recommend to somebody that really doesn't have a biblical background at all. And I just heard a story just this week about a woman in Afghanistan, her husband had come to Christ, and he said here, start with this.

She loved the children's story Bible. Those stories wanted to take a deeper dive. So that's what I'm hoping will happen with my granddaughter and other people that read Kevin DeYoung's children's story Bible.

Well, thank you for that. So Phil is the President of Wheaton. He's been there since 2010, already more than a decade.

Yeah, 12 years. Yeah, a graduate of Wheaton in 88 if memory serves correct. And then Westminster and kind of doctorate university of Oxford.

Five kids, you have grandkids now? I grand kid. Just one. But it's okay.

So yeah, and is being a grandparent as amazing. I mean, everyone, I know we got a few more years, I hope, but is grandparenting as amazing as it sounds? No, it's great. And part of it is just seeing your children enter into life as parents.

As you and I both know, it's hugely life shaping to learn how to love each new child that God brings into your life. You become, I think, an enlarged person through that process. It's super exciting to see that happen in the lives of your kids.

And you know, it's been a while since you've parented. You forget how quickly little kids learn stuff and how much joy they bring to life. And you, most of the hard stuff the parents have to do.

So it's all good. Yeah, well, it's good. You have five kids.

What are the other kids doing? So I've got two that are out of college and married. One in job training ministry, one on our way to law school. I've got a couple of students at Wheaton right now.

And I've got a high school junior right soon to be a high school senior. So we're semi-empty nesters. Usually one reason or another, some of the bigger kids have a reason to be with us for a little while or we've got some nieces and nephews living with us or college students.

But it's a great season of life. And are you still, are you still a baller? You still play in hoops? I don't know if I can call myself a baller actually. But no, I still am still, I'm going to do at least one more season of college intermural athletic.

My son's, I am staff and I'm definitely going to do his senior year. But I did have a bad

shoulder injury this last year to put me out for the spring semester. So I'm not quitting yet, but it's definitely slowed.

Around the corner, well, you may remember and listeners will not want to picture a bunch of TGC council members playing basketball. But this was years ago, I think we were at Southern and at the boys gym, different boys than we're going to talk about. And for some reason, people said, "Kevin, you guard Phil.

Maybe you're fairly tall." And so I just remember you made everything. You made all your outside shots. You made me look really bad.

I don't remember that at all. That sounds kind of generous, but I'll take it for today. Well, I just remember, I don't want to say you had old man game because you're not that much older than me.

But it was like, he's not going to drive. He's just going to pull up here and shoot and stroke it. It was good.

If I hear the phrase, the lost start of the mid range jumper one more time for one of my students, I'm going to go off on somebody. Yeah, you are the 17, 18 foot jumper guy. Absolutely.

Well, Phil is currently on the board at TGC, among many other things that he's done. And we're going to talk about a book called The Heart of the Cross, which is being reissued by PNR. And it's a book, a collection of sermons from Phil and from James Montgomery Boy.

So before we get to the book, I think it's a great opportunity to talk a little bit about history in your own history. And I want to ask about Jim Boyce, but first go back. So you were at 10th for what the better over 10 years 1995 to 2010.

Yeah, 15 years I served in preaching ministry at 10th Presbyterian Church in Center City Philadelphia. Yeah, in the last 10 years as the senior minister, because we'll say more about it, but Jim died very young in 2000. So what, I always like to ask this, I've asked this of Ligon and other people have moved into different sorts of ministry from pastoral ministry.

What do you miss and what do you not miss about being a pastor? You still are a pastor. You think of that as your identity, I know, but a local church pastor weekend and week out. Now you've been the president of Wheaton for over 10 years.

What do you miss? What do you not miss? Yeah, so great question. So no, I definitely would not be doing what I'm doing at Wheaton, unless I saw it as a form of gospel ministry and I remain pretty active in the Chicago Metro Presbyterian of the PCA. I guess I make about half of our meetings.

So I think of that as pretty active. It is. Yeah.

The other members how active they think I am, but I try to stay involved in the life of those churches too. So the two things that I always say that I miss are ministry to young children. So I love ministering to college students.

I love that in Philadelphia. I love that at Wheaton. But there's a special bond a pastor can have with young children in the church.

I spoke to children in first through sixth grade every week, pretty much in addition to ministry to the children from the pulpit, which I think is important. So those are special relationships and I love connecting with those kids, you know, now that they've grown up in many cases. And then the other thing is just being week in week out in a particular book of the Bible for preaching.

So I'm chipping away on a long, long project on book five of the Psalms that that's very different from week after week after week after week being in that book with the same people sense of continuity. And that's probably of all the things I do. I just love teaching the Bible week in week out from a particular book of the Bible.

That's what I probably enjoy the most. So I get plenty of opportunities to teach and preach. I'm opening the Bible every week in one venue or another.

But it's a little different to have that continuity and particularly to have that continuity with the same congregation. And I also think my own self assessment is I'm a bit better suited to the week in week out. There are certain preachers we both know that, you know, on some special exceptional occasion, you'd love to hear them every now and then.

And they're just amazing for the occasion preacher. I'm not that preacher. But so those are two things.

Things that I that I don't miss, the biggest one actually is worshiping in church with my family. So that was the biggest benefit for me. You know, transitioning over something I really enjoyed.

And particularly when, you know, all or most of the kids were at home, you know, particularly during that season. I would say, you know, that's probably the biggest thing. A lot of the other problems you have in a church are all problems.

Yeah. And unfortunately, we have human beings at Wheaton College as well. So we whatever people problems, we've got those two.

So that's just a one for one swap pretty much. But those are two of the things, a few of the things that I think of. What church are you at in Wheaton? So we worship regularly at

college, church, and I will say during COVID, one of the things we enjoy doing is attending pretty regularly churches where our older children worship and serve and just kind of connecting with those congregations a bit.

And then Mrs. Reich and tunes in pretty much every week to 10th Presbyterian Church. So all often catch those messages. We visited 10th the fair amount during COVID as well.

Oh, that's good. We are having Liam preach at our church next Sunday. Great.

Yeah. So he's coming into town to do the RTS commencement for RTS Charlotte and then staying over another day or two and getting to preach here. So I tell people look forward to some good preaching for a change.

Yeah, right. Yeah. I always thought, boy, if you have a guest preacher, you just want to bring the best preachers in.

You know, just elevate people's expectations and hopes for preaching. And that's that's how I think every preacher ought to look at it. Well, I will say at my last church one time, we had Alistair Beggum, which was great.

And another Scottish Scotsman and a great preacher and someone said to me afterward. And I think he meant it as a compliment. But you know, sometimes people just say things.

They don't always have exactly the filter maybe. And he just said, wow, Kevin, how does it feel to to be the second best preacher who's ever preached from this pulpit? So Alistair, I said, well, it felt better until you said that. But no, it's good.

We want our people to get the best preaching they can get. Absolutely. And I just feel so strongly, we are not diminished, but in a way elevated when we honor other people with exceptional gifts.

And I love Alistair Begg as a preacher and just his natural ability to be funny and in ways that actually advance the gospel message, you know, which is not not everybody's gift. So we should all whoever we are in gospel ministry, we should be rooting for others. And I used to sometimes think, wouldn't it be amazing in this city if every preacher was just a lot better as a preacher than I was in all those churches? That would be awesome.

So that's a good way to pray into and think about it. And one of the things you said this about your preaching, and I put this in a good category as a real strong compliment, but there are maybe this is what you're getting at with some preachers who are great and they can come in and, you know, some preachers, they're good, they're amazing. And yet you can listen to them.

You think, I just couldn't do that. You know, their style, their personality. And so I think in

the best way, I think you're preaching, I think Alistair's preaching, it's so good, but it's also a sense of, oh, and I think Jim Boyce was like this too.

Of course, there are gifts that not everyone has, but here's a brother handling the text, walking through scripture, pulling out, applying, I think in a healthy way, and I would put Kent Hughes was very much like this, and probably Josh is too at college church. I haven't heard him as much, but a really good weekend and week out preacher that you listen to. And there's obviously pronounced gifts for preaching, but also a sense of, yeah, this is something that normal human beings can do by God's grace.

I think it's important to give those models to people. Well, I agree strongly with that. And I think there are a couple of things Kevin that make for really good weekend, week out preaching.

One is you have to be very committed to the biblical text, because you're quickly going to run out of the things that you know or can think of. But if you're like really getting into the biblical text, you're always finding something new, and there's an opportunity for that to be fresh for people. And you've got to, you know, it's hard work.

You've got to, you got to sacrifice and put in the time to get to that point. I also think that one of the things that wears well on a congregation is if people are experiencing fundamentally the same person in the pulpit as they are out of the pulpit. And if it, and if you're with so to pretty regular, like, yeah, that's not their kind of regular MO or their regular, not that there isn't a sense of, you know, in a way, an elevation of things and seriousness and gravity.

But, you know, I want to be in a place where my kids can say, yeah, if you've heard my dad preach, like, yeah, that's who he is. And there's a sense of, yeah, hopefully, normalcy or in a way, a matter of factness about, you know, preaching weekend and week out that makes a difference. I also think, another thing it takes is you just really love to do it.

You love to be in the Bible. Each new series is like, oh, this is the most exciting thing ever. I finally get to preach this book and preach it this way.

I think those are some of the things that wear well for a congregation. Yeah, I've told this story before, it's a story on me, but, you know, I know when I was first in ministry, I was a very, very, very, how many varies can I put out there? Poor man's John Piper. In the sense that I was listening to so much of John's preaching and John is really inimitable in so many ways.

I think of him as sort of like Lloyd Jones from an earlier generation that just brings so much of the force of his own personality along with his insights and scripture. But it took me a while and I tell guys, sometimes it's encouraging, sometimes it's discouraging.

They'll say, how many sermons do you think you preached before you sort of found your voice? And I'll say, maybe 250, which is one of the reasons why I reintroduced an evening service when at my first church, I was a senior pastor.

I thought, I'm going to be working 50, 60 hours anyways. I might as well be working on two sermons. And I tried, I told my congregation, I'll get better twice as fast if I'm preaching some evening sermons.

But it took me a while to realize, you know what, there's a lot of things I can learn from Tim Keller or from John Piper, but I'm not them. And I'm just not, I'm not as, I don't have the same personality. And it would be an affectation if in the pulpit, that's what it was like every time.

So I tell our, you know, students at RTS, if you're not funny in real life, don't try to be funny in the pulpit. And if you are funny, just, you know, like Spurgeon pray that the Lord puts a governor on it. So, you know, what was the famous line when someone didn't like Spurgeon's jokes and said, if, man, if you knew all the things I don't say that I think about saying.

So it is true through personality and is becoming comfortable with your own self without allowing that to override. When you were, when you were in Oxford, did you find, because I've had this conversation with a lot of British friends of mine, because I think there's some strengths and weaknesses of British and American preaching, and they're often the inverse that I feel like you go to, you go to England, and I feel like in evangelical circles, I'm more confident than I am in evangelical circles in America, that I'll have someone plainly, faithfully handle the text, because I think that's what they've in a lot of those circles and proctor trust and all that they've done really well. What I think in American circles, we tend to allow a man's personality to come out a bit more, and that's very American.

So I think there's some pluses to that, and there's also some dangers. Did you experience some of the same things and just different preaching? No, so great questions, Kevin, I really agree with you. I mean, you have to find your own voice for preaching.

One of the takeaways, I think, of your point on John Piper's preaching is it's awesome to listen to John Piper, but it's good to listen to a bit of a variety of different preachers, so you're not sort of locked in on one particular one. It does take a while to find your voice. However many hundred sermons it takes.

And what I would say is your own voice, you're going to be more effective with your own voice than as a second or third, or maybe fourth rate voice imitating somebody else. So I probably agree with you about England as well. Our situation was a little unique in that we were involved in a church plant that was pastored by Ian Dugut.



So we had just exceptional, redemptive historical framework, really rich in application. I mean, he's a terrific preacher. I also listened pretty regularly to von Roberts at St. Abbs in Oxford, and he's terrific.

And then we were there three years. My last year, I traveled down to London once a week to listen to Dick Lucas's lectures on preachers. So whatever Dick Lucas does, whatever, you know, Simeon Trust does, and I did go to some of the Proclamation Trust events.

I just, I mean, I just think it kind of takes a village to make a preacher. So if you can listen to a lot of really good preachers and take away things from them, all of that said, I would probably say the single biggest influence on my preaching is still the pastor I had growing up. So, and I was very fortunate with Bob Harvey, he was a terrific preacher and graded application, really get it, redemptive historical, how the Old Testament connects with the new.

So, yeah, I love the, try to love the preacher you have. Yeah, that's great. And it is really important in today's world where the digital world, it's a blessing, gives us access to so many preachers and pastors.

That's great. But the most important pastor in your life is the one that you have at your local church, and that brother needs to be encouraged. Yeah, for sure.

And, you know, that's a slightly different topic, which is used to be people didn't know what great preachers were out there quite so much, because they couldn't, you know, download them every week and so forth. And I think, you know, I don't know of a preacher that's better than the preacher that your congregation member loves downloading, like you're never going to be able to kind of measure up to that. But you've got a different relationship and it's an intimate relationship and you are the shepherd for the person that's a member of your church.

And God blesses that unique special relationship. Yeah, that's great. I'm going to get to the book here.

Let me ask you a couple other education questions. First, your own education. So, you did a D Phil, is that the same thing as a PhD or just you wanted something named after you? Yeah, so, yeah, we who knows, we may not get to the book today, Kevin.

It's always fun to talk. Yes, Doctor of Philosophy, which is it's just, it's kind of the Oxford Cambridge style to refer to it as a D period, Phil period, but it is a, it's an academic doctoral degree. And do you keep up on your work at all? And I ask, because when I did my work on Witherspoon, I read some of your work on Boston and just in general on Scottish background and Scottish and scholasticism, all those things.

So, there's some, some P period right in footnotes in my dissertation. So, thank you for

that. Do you have opportunity to keep up on any of that literature? Not so much.

So, and I mean, one of the big frustrations of my life, honestly, is all the things I want to read that I don't have time to read. Right. And, you know, I do a huge quantity of reading just in my regular day job, just reports, application files for faculty members is just a huge amount of reading.

You just never have enough time to read what you need to read for preaching, read what you need to read in higher education, read what you need to read on cultural issues and trends. So, I've, I've pretty much let go of that. And what I do is, if I've got a scholarly assignment, I get back into enough of what I need to get into for that particular topic.

And I'm, you know, a lot of what I do is not scholarship at the highest level, it's at a more popular level. So, I try to be responsible and knowledgeable enough on what I'm writing about and not overclaim. There are people that are true experts and I always like to honor the work that they do.

I have a little bit different role and a little bit more of a popularizer. But that's a long way of saying, do I keep up in my academic field? No, I do not. Yeah, well, hardly anybody except the full-time scholars can.

Last question before we get to the book. So, I'm, I listened to a bunch of different podcasts, maybe you do too. Sometimes, I don't listen to it every week, but I'll get on a trip or in the car.

And so, I've listened to in the last few weeks, three or four of the Freakonomics podcast. I don't know if you ever listen to these guys. So, they've been doing a series on higher education.

And, you know, why is it so expensive? Why is it so hard to get into certain schools and the push and pull of, well, if it's hard to get into the elite schools, that keeps them elite. But should they expand and welcome more people in? And is the high price of education worth it? It's just been an interesting conversation. So, big general question, what do you see the state of higher education? Is it as dire as people say it is in the next 10, 20 years? Yeah, so that is a big, big topic.

So, and I, somebody just sent me some of the Freakonomics podcast. So, I'll, I'll get up to speed on those when I'm cycling or something like that. But I haven't, I haven't listened to them yet.

I'll just make a general comment. Higher education is hugely complex. And often, even a question that seems really simple, like, why does this cost so much? Or why does it cost what it does? Or why do colleges and universities do that? It's never a simple answer.

There's always complex dynamics to it. What I will say is that we are extraordinarily

blessed in the United States of America with many, many, many great places to get higher education, which is extremely valuable for leadership over a lifetime. The people have got valued liberal arts learning going back to Antioch and Alexandria and then on through the Middle Ages.

Thoughtful devout Christian believers, you talk to, you know, Luther and Calvin, they said, go get a liberal arts education at a university because those are the kinds of leaders we need for society. So, here's something extremely valuable and extremely expensive. In, in one sense, it always has been actually the net price of college adjusted for inflation has increased very little over the last 20 years, partly because so much more scholarship aid is available.

Universities are raising tons of money. College has been a philanthropy. It's not a consumer good.

It's a philanthropy that consumers do contribute to the cost of it, but it can't be sustained simply on that basis. And that's why, you know, at Wheaton College, we've been raising endowment funds for over 150 years just because that's what it takes. But when you bring people together to learn, live, worship, study, play in the same community, then you've got to figure out housing and you've got to figure out landscaping and you've got to figure out human resources and you've got to figure out how to pay your people.

I mean, it just, it is an expensive form of education, but it is a life-on-life discipleship and the resources and treasures that are brought together at any good college or university are exceptional. So, I continue to think it's an extraordinary, extraordinarily beneficial investment. And what I think a college like Wheaton does is it puts a young Christian person on a leadership trajectory and that'll bear fruit over time.

Not necessarily in the first year or two or three years, you'll see it more and more as time goes on. So, I am, I continue to be bullish on higher education, on Christ-centered higher education and on its future, even though we're in extraordinarily difficult financial times. That's been true since 2008.

So, have you felt, I'm breaking my promise. I said, "That was going to be the last question," but even if you're in the president there for 12 years, if this is too personal, you don't have to answer it. But have there been times in those, I'm sure you've been discouraged, but if there have been times in those 12 years, you thought, "Why in the world did I leave 10th to be here?" Or even in the hard times, has it been a real solid sense all along? Absolutely.

I'm called to this as the expression in my pastoral ministry to this school, unwaveringly, no matter how difficult this circumstances. Yeah. Well, I can honestly say I've never had any second thoughts as painful as it was.

I mean, it was heartbreaking for members of our family to leave Philadelphia, leave that congregation, leave those people. There's only one reason you would do it if it was really clear that God was calling you to another place. And we've never had, and Mrs. Reichen has never had, I've never had, any second thoughts about that, God's calling was super clear.

What I do think about is, okay, when is the time for the next transition? Originally, I would have said, "Yeah, if we do this 15 years, that's a long time." In the average 10 year of college presidents is drifting down towards five years now. If we do 15 years, I'll be 57. Lord willing, I could go plan to church in a city or do something in local church ministry.

I do think there's a next season for us at some point. It takes tremendous stamina, even more so than senior pastor of a large church, frankly, to do this. So that's a little bit of a different question.

I'm also, I feel so strongly you stay where God calls you until He makes it really clear that He's calling you to another place. So you can think about it and you can pray about it and you can be sensitive to whatever restlessness there is in your spirit. But if God wants you to do a different place, He'll put you in a different place.

That's what I believe. So that's how I try to approach my day-to-day work. Well, thanks for that.

So this book, *The Heart of the Cross*, which is a collection of sermons, James Montgomery Boyce, Philip Graham Reichen. Let's talk about Jim Boyce for a few minutes because there may be a lot of people younger than me who maybe they've seen his books but don't know Jim Boyce. I didn't have the opportunity to meet him.

I was familiar with 10th, of course. I was familiar with his ministry, his sermons. Boy, he had a malefilist, not malevolent, malefilist voice.

I wish I had his baritone preaching voice and of course his commentaries and books and work with the Alliance. So I remember when I was at Gordon Conwell and I was in a Bible study that met once a week at Walt Kaiser's house. He lived on campus and so it was great.

In March, his wife was there and she'd make these wonderful sticky buns. And there's like 20 of us there and Walt would just walk through a text and he was so funny and it was just really good. But I remember him a very grieved one morning and he just mentioned to us that he had just heard that Jim Boyce and Bede diagnosed with cancer and it was aggressive and he likely wasn't going to last very long and he didn't.

Tell us about Jim Boyce, the man and what it was like to work with him and what people who've just kind of seen his name on the spine of a book need to know about him. Yeah.

Well, we're getting close to talking about the book, Kevin.

We're talking about one of the authors. So we're almost there. I know we're almost there.

We're circling in on it. I love talking about James Boyce. So it was a huge privilege for me to spend five years in ministry with Dr. Boyce and to have a close ongoing relationship with Linda Boyce, his beloved spouse and now widow and also to have some role in ongoing in some of his publications and just being sure that yeah, the most we make the most of the materials that he has left for the church.

So James Boyce was a very gifted scholar, truly a scholar pastor, grew up in kind of gritty eastern Pennsylvania, was very well educated, super smart, did his M. Div. at Princeton, then went on to doctoral studies in Germany and really felt called to expository preaching ministry and his family had been very influenced by Donald Gray Barnhouse. Now there's another name people should know he was really one of the pioneer voices in broadcast ministry in the United States as soon as the federal what is it FCC federal communications commission. As soon as they opened up radio broadcasting for religious programming, Dr. Barnhouse was in on the ground floor and James Boyce's father was a board member, a medical doctor was a board member of Donald Barnhouse.

So James Boyce was felt strongly called to preaching, he had gone to Stony Brook school, had been raised in a family that took Christ centered life worship ministry very seriously. Funny, I mean there's so many great stories I could tell. So James Boyce, after his doctoral work, worked for a little while for Christianity today when it was in Washington DC and he was a column writer, he had one of the opening two op-ed columns at the front of the magazine in addition to other responsibilities.

But she thought it was great training for preaching by the way, even a short column you write 600 words, it's got to have a beginning, it's got to develop a point, it's got to have a conclusion and take the way you're working within a structure that brings a certain clarity. And James Boyce is a very clear precise thinker, you're never in any question where you were in a biblical texture, where you were in a homiletical outline. So anyway, so he was working for Christianity today and 10th Presbyterian Church was looking for its next senior pastor.

And they were a bit frustrated. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former surgeon general, was an elder in the church, he was the chair of that search committee. And so this doctor, Dr. Koop, not James Boyce, but his dad said, "Hey, you know my son's pretty good preacher, you got to check him out." And they're like, "Okay, like your son." So they went down to Washington DC and heard him at a Presbyterian church down there, might have been 4th pres.

Anyway, Dr. Koop listened for two or three minutes and then he closed his notebook, he said, "Here's our guy, he's the one." He could just tell, he's just so gifted, such a clear

communicator, really bringing people into God's word. When he was announced as the, when he told his mother that he was going to go to 10th Presbyterian Church, she said, "Well, I guess that congregation just isn't what it used to be, is it?" But it became, once again, what it had been under his ministry with thousands of people coming. I'll just say a couple things I really admire about Dr. Boyce.

I mean, I could go on and on. This is a great topic. One of them is his love for the city, and he was way ahead of his time as an evangelical saying, "We need to commit ourselves to the life of the city.

We need to pray for the city. We need to establish Christian education in the city. We need to care for people who are suffering and dying from AIDS." He was saying that when when evangelicals by and large wouldn't touch anything having to do with AIDS ministry.

He just had a deep part of compassion and care for the city of Philadelphia, and that made a huge difference in the life of that church still does, still does to this day. And the other thing I'll say is, for all of his giftedness, he was, for me, very encouraging. I'm not fault-finding like, "Oh, you got to do better.

You got to work on this." No, none of that. Just keep doing what you're doing. Keep reaching.

You'll figure it out even more. He was just a huge encourager. And he made a point I was preaching every Sunday evening.

He was typically there, weekend, and week out. And he was always smiling when I was preaching. Wow, that's great.

Anything gift that is to smile on the work of another proclaimer of the gospel. It is. And there was someone wrote an article online a couple of years ago, but they were reflecting about Mark Devere, of course, at Capitol Hill Baptist in DC.

And what an example he's been in sharing his platform. I know we don't like that word, but he's got a platform, but he just brings in guys and, "Hey, I'll share this platform with you, and I'm excited for you and for your ministry." And it really is a gift to give whatever age we're at. You don't have to live too long before there's guys younger than you.

And you can either be someone who's hoarding or suspicious or posturing or thankful for whatever that next generation is coming and encouraging them. And I know you and I both have stories of people who just- Well, I agree so strongly. And to go back to, we touched on basketball early on, just to give a basketball analogy, people heading into ministry in the gospel ministry, you should just assume from the beginning, you're not a star, you're a teammate.

And when you try to take on the burden of being a star, which is not what God is calling you to be, that's only going to lead to frustration for you. And it's probably going to be harmful for other people, honestly, because you're not going to meet your own expectations, you're not going to meet their expectations, and you're going to be angry about the expectations that are going to go unmet. But if you're a team member, then you're excited because other people on the team are excelling in a particular way.

You love it when they hit a shot. I mean, I think good analogy for us in ministry and our relationships with one another, just look at the bench during the NCAA tournament. The guys that probably aren't going to get in unless they they're rather excited.

I mean, they're going out of their minds. And just to hear the gospel proclaimed in a faithful way, that should be so exciting for us. And then if it's our turn, like 100%, you know, be ready to hit the big shot or whatever it is.

But I just think we need a strong sense of teamwork and support, mutual affection, elevating others, preferring others. Do you have the thought cross your mind at various points? So what would, how would things be different if James Boyce were still around? Or what sort of voice would he have had? And how would he have because he was, he was not even 62 years old, when that's seeming younger and younger all the time? That's an interesting, it's a really interesting question. I don't think about it too much, because I just believe in the sovereign God, this was God's sovereign purpose, right away when he was diagnosed, Jim Boyce said, I accept this, this is God's purpose, I see it.

I'm not going to worry about what comes after. I mean, he had a few affairs that he needed to put in place, but he was able to just let go in, you know, see what God would do. I will say, by the way, you were talking earlier about his voice, it was not uncommon for children in the church to call him Dr. Boyce.

Oh, really? Oh, wow. And eventually Dr. Boyce, but he was, you know, he was a very significant voice in their, in their childhood. You know, it's hard to say, I think Dr. Boyce liked to collaborate.

So I could imagine him getting involved in something like the Gospel Coalition, perhaps, and, you know, working towards that. But, you know, he had his season and his life in ministry, and he accepted it when it was time for him to have his promotion. So talk about this, this book, what's the, the genesis of the book, the sermons, and what's, why is this important for people to read? Yeah, so we are going to talk about the books.

Yeah, here we are. We got a few minutes later. I'm always even happier to talk about a book that I co-authored with somebody, so that makes it easier to talk about.

So this book initially was Dr. Boyce's idea, or at least the sermons that went into it were.

And I can't remember for sure whether the book was his idea probably was, but maybe not for a reason I'll explain. So there had been in the past an occasional tradition of 10th Presbyterian Church of having worship services in the weeks leading up to Easter.

We don't talk a lot about Lent in Presbyterian circles, but a lot of Christians in other evangelical traditions do so. And Dr. Boyce thought it would just be great if we offered Bible teaching for business people in the heart of Philadelphia, and we have these beautiful little services. They would run from 1215 to 1245.

Dr. One, many things Dr. Boyce measured in common. One was punctuality and a sense of like meeting people's expectations for what the time of a sermon will be. So that's important.

We have these little half hour services. People would come walk over from various businesses and they could squeeze it into a lunch hour because it was only half an hour. They could really keep it tight.

Walk over. We said, hey, if you need to bring a sandwich or something, you can eat in the sanctuary. And at 1215, there was a five-minute musical prelude, beautiful music by some of our gifted musicians.

And the service also ended with five minutes of music. And after that first five minutes of music was over, there was a reading of scripture and a prayer specifically of God's blessing on the city of Philadelphia. It was a civically focused prayer.

And then about a 15-minute message, less than half of what Dr. Boyce would love to do on another occasion, but a nice little format, a homily as it were. And the other thing we did is we handed people a little program that when they came in that had information about what was going to happen in that half hour. And it also had some very provocative or interesting thought provoking quotations related to the theme.

So there was something to think about, something to take with you, those kinds of things. And first year, this was Dr. Boyce's idea to do this series. Let's take the famous last words of Jesus, call it the last words of Jesus.

Let's advertise it and we advertise it in the city. Then the next year, we felt good about how it had gone and it was pretty well attended. It seemed like something useful, beneficial to people.

So then we took the seven quote unquote real last words of Jesus. Those are things he said after he was great. You know, in the Gospels, and there might have been a texture to from later on in the New Testament.

Then, so now we're extending it year by year and we've got a book in view. And the thought then was, what about things that are said about the cross? What is the witness



of the apostles to the cross? And this gave us an opportunity to explore the life and teaching of Jesus, but also to go deeper in a kind of kaleidoscope of teaching New Testament teaching on the cross. And so that's how that's how the book came to be.

That explains why I was reading these. And I think I know these are sermons. These seem so short.

Did they really preach this short? And that makes sense with these wheat. When I was in Orange City, Iowa, first place I served, I was the associate pastor, but they had a tradition on Good Friday of preaching through the seven last words. And they would pull from, there was like 10 churches in town.

And so you rotated a bit, but you would get, one church would get one of the seven words. And it was similar kind of format. I think they were maybe half hour service.

So some people would, very few people would sit through seven half hour services, but they'd come and go and sit there for one or two. So it was a good homiletical discipline to say, okay, I got a text here and I have 12 minutes or whatever we had to try to say something meaningful. And there was a little bit of a joke among the pastors that, you know, if you got assigned, behold, your mother, your son, that text, I was like, oh, what am I going to do with that one? Can I get, you know, why have you forsaken me or something? But they're all really rich and they're all worth meditating on.

And the number of churches or cities have had a kind of tradition like that. I like something that that boy said at the very beginning, he says that if the cross is the center of the Christian message, and it is, then we should expect that on the one hand, it'll be incredibly simple. And you know, you can explain this, my kids that, you know, once they can talk, they can just about understand Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.

That's what we deserved, he died. It's very simple. And yet, if it's the heart of the Christian message, it has profundities, the famous line that, you know, a child can wait in and an elephant can swim in.

I mean, it's deep. How do you think about that when you teach and talk about the cross, the simplicity and the profundity of it? Yeah, well, I totally agree with that. And I think actually communicating both of those things in most gospel preaching is really important.

On the simplicity, I mean, I remember when I was in kindergarten at Wheaton Christian Grammar School, with Miss Killup, who was a legendary kindergarten teacher, taught a generation of youngsters, the gospel. And she had her big picture book that walked you through the life of Christ, but particularly the crucifixion. And there was a sense that this was the most important thing in the world.

And also a sense that a sense of immediacy, like this had just happened for you. You

know, there was a sense of that. And it is a simple message that even a small child can understand, particularly leading of the Holy Spirit.

And I think a gospel minister has a responsibility pretty much anytime you're doing anything, certainly preaching a biblical text, but even a shorter devotional or pretty much, it's your responsibility to make the gospel clear and simple, so that that's the only gospel message anybody ever hears. There's like enough there for the Holy Spirit to work with. And the Spirit says like, okay, I can use that.

Like, clearly clear about the death of Jesus that it paid the price for sin. You were really clear about resurrection life. I mean, I think it's both of those things.

I don't think it's just the cross. I think it's always the cross and the empty tomb. That's what the gospel is.

Those are the gospel facts. On the other hand, particularly for people that hear a lot of preaching, grown up in the church or in the church weekend and week out. Some of the basic truths of Christianity can start to become very predictable.

Well, I don't know if I heard that before. I've actually heard that guy say it that way. Way before.

And so then what is our responsibilities, preachers? And I think it's something like this, to preach the gospel from the passage that you are in, in the way that that passage is designed to proclaim the gospel, which is a little different than any other passage. It highlights something different. It emphasizes something different.

It expresses it in a different way. Which kind of brings us back to something we were talking about earlier, Kevin, which is really getting into the specifics of the passage you're in, not glossing over the surface. Like, why does it say this? Why does it say it this way about the cross? And, oh, isn't that interesting? Like, this is the only place that says that.

Or this isn't the only place that says that. Look at all the other places that says this. But here's the context.

It's in here. I like a comment. This is Václav Havel, the poet and prime minister and Czechoslovakia, was it? And he's not specifically talking about expository preaching.

But he says, once you've noticed the detail, then notice the detail of the detail. And I think a lot of good expository preaching gets into those kinds of because you want people to see, I liken it to if you're in North Carolina and you go to the highest point in North Carolina, I think it's Mount Mitchell, I think it's 6,000 feet, I think it's the highest point east of the Mississippi. Well, that's cool.

If you think that's as high as the mountains go, then you're selling yourself short. You can go out west, you can go to the Rockies and you can see 14ers. And that's not as high as they go.

So part of what good teaching and preaching does, it's not that the Appalachian mountain vista isn't beautiful. It is. And it's rich and true.

But you keep bringing people further in and you keep showing, oh, there's another peak and there's another peak. And oh, the more you can have the specificity. So praise God, people get saved all the time knowing Jesus loves me this, I know, for the Bible tells me.

So Jesus died in the cross for my sins. And how much even more wonderful or not more at a different level of excellency to understand, oh, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, to understand how it connects with the Old Testament, to see how it's part of the worship of the Old Testament and the law court and the temple shrine and the redemption from Israel and all of these things. And you never exhaust all that we see in the cross without ever leaving.

I like how Stott says, there's a lot of things to say about the cross, but they all hold together at some point on the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Christ. So it's not that we say less than that, but we can say more than that. Christ is Victor, Christ trimes over evil powers.

That's certainly a theme in the New Testament. It's just not a theme over against Christ dying as a propitiatory sacrifice. There's so much to say about the cross and the attentive preacher or Bible study leader or mom teaching kids.

We'll look at this and I always say and think about this as a preacher myself, we need to get the meaning of the text and the mood of the text. And that's where I think a lot of preachers, we just instinctively go to our own personality and whether we think everyone needs to be an alarm clock because they're falling off the path or they're all hurting and struggling and they need a big hug. And we need to pay attention to these different texts about the cross.

They have different moods to them and we need to pay attention to that and that should come through in how we teach people. Yeah, I know I love all of that. I'll just prompt two reflections.

One is I like what you're saying about the coherence of the cross, but also that there's always more. So to give another analogy, imagine a video game of some kind where you enter into the world of the video game and it seems amazing. Like, wow, this is like, there's a lot of detail here, but then when you drive your car over to the edge, it like steers you back in like you can't go over there.

We didn't do that over there. You got to stay in this area. This area is amazing, but it's

kind of limited.

I just don't think you really get to that point with the created universe, with what's to be learned there. You do not get there with the character of God. And you don't get there with the central acts and facts of our salvation.

You don't get to that place where you're kind of at the boundary and there's no more. Actually, you're still exploring new worlds and new depths. The more it goes on.

I also really like what you say about the mood of the text too. And I have to think a little bit more about our own personality, but I was noticing this recently because I was preaching from the account in Mark of the woman with the Alabaster flask. I think it's Mark 14.

And even after I preached it, I was noticing so many things like, "Oh, I could have said something about that." And I didn't even notice about that. But just on the point of mood, you'll remember she breaks open her flask, she pours it on Jesus on his head. It's like dripping everywhere.

And there are critics there who have rapidly calculated value of that perfume. And they are making scornful, critical remarks about it. And just what really came through to me is Jesus said, "This is a beautiful thing that is so beautiful that it's going to be remembered to the end of the world." And there are people that are talking with Jesus, sitting down with Jesus, having table fellowship with Jesus, following Jesus as disciples.

And they can't even see that one of the most beautiful things in the world is beautiful in how it connects to Jesus, how it connects to his coming into fiction. Well, that's very important in terms of mood and how you think about the mood of that text, how Jesus is celebrating this, and how critical religious people can be. Getting into the mood of that is actually going to help you get into the application of the passage in a deeper way.

Yeah, that's really good. Let me ask a couple of specific things. So you mentioned earlier, when you first did this, you advertised around town.

At one point, you mentioned that there was some controversy in the Philadelphia Inquirer even asked because one of your advertisements was, "Jesus didn't want to die either." Now, give a good theological nuance. There's a way that that could be misinterpreted, and then there's a way that's abundantly true. What did you mean by that, and what was the controversy? Importantly, the print ads for this campaign had some subtext that explained it a little bit.

What do we mean when we say, "Jesus didn't want to die either"? Some Christian people were offended and didn't get the ads at all, secular people, which is the main audience that it was intended for. They got it right away. They understood, and they knew what it was driving at.

But that's really a reference to get seminary. Jesus says, "If it's possible, take this cup from me." So in that sense, at least, Jesus didn't want to die. I think in a sense, to actually want the experience of death in itself, it's the benefits of the death, the willingness of the sacrifice.

Those are the things that Jesus was willing to embrace. But there is a shrinking back in Gethsemane from the experience of death itself, and particularly what it would mean to die a god for sake and death. So I think there is a place, the provocative ad, if not something that's going to get into the theological nuance, but there was enough subtext there that people could, most Christians even, that initially had a church.

Another one was, "Jesus hated church too." So Christians would say, "No, you'd have to sell me on that one." Church is the gathering place of the holy ones of God. Jesus loved the church. He died for the church.

Church in the sense secular people made it, like religious duty, obligation, going through the motions, hypocrisy. Jesus was against all of that. He hated church in that conventional sense.

And again, the subtext spelled it out a little bit, but you can understand even, like, "Wow, okay." So that might not have been the right thing for every church in every context. It worked really well in a secular audience in Philadelphia for connecting with people that thought that the church was a bunch of hypocrites, or that Jesus couldn't relate to their lives, it connected with those people. Yeah, when people say the church is full of hypocrites, there's two responses I have.

The snarky response in me wants to say, "Oh, well, you'd probably fit right in." But of course, that's not a good thing to say. A better response is to think, "You know what? You don't even know the half of it." I mean, if you really, let me tell you that if you got to know who we really are in our hearts, we're probably worse than you think. Now, that's not to own every criticism someone would make of the church.

I think Christians can go overboard and think we have to apologize and own everything that the world... I mean, Jesus said, "The world hated me, it's going to hate you." So it's not always your fault. But I think a posture of humility that recognizes, "Yeah, if you're going to see sin in us, that's the point of why we need a Savior." I want to point out one other thing, and I have to look if this is your chapter or Boyce's chapter, but it's on the road to Emmaus and says, "We're inclined to say, well, it must have been the appearance of Jesus himself that convinced them and moved them." But then maybe this is James Boyce who does this. But then at the end, or he keeps moving and he says, "In actuality," says in other words, "They were moved, stirred, convicted, enlightened, and uplifted as Jesus taught the Bible." This is exactly what happens today, of course, and this is exactly why we must turn to the Bible for our instruction and comfort instead of looking for signs and wonders or trying to pump ourselves up emotionally by some other

kind of religious experience or entertainment.

And I think I preached on that text before, but I never quite put it that way, that here they are, of course, they don't quite realize who it is at first, but they're in the presence of Jesus. He's right there with them, and you might think that face to face with Jesus, His presence, that's all you need. But actually, in a way, they needed something more.

They needed His teaching, and it was His teaching that set their hearts a flame. That was such a good juxtaposition. I totally agree.

I mean, I love that point. And Jesus could have handled the conversation differently. He could have said, "Hey, look at these," and he could have held down the team.

Or in some way, he could have emphasized the resurrection of his body as a verifiable physical experience, which, of course, is inaccessible after his ascension. So when this story gets told and retold among the apostles, I think one of the things they're able to say is like, "Oh, we can do that. We spent 40 days having this amazing Old Testament seminar where we walked through Moses, and we walked through Jonah, and we walked through the suffering servant, and we walked through Zachariah chapter 3, and like, "Yeah, we get it now.

We can proclaim the same word." And there are other examples of this in the teaching ministry of Jesus, where it's Moses and the prophets. That should be enough for people when it's preached in a faithful way that points to Jesus. So I think it is affirming of the proclamation of the gospel in our own time.

So in the last chapter, this is again, Boyce's the Way of the Cross. He's talking about the chapter 21, "The lack of true discipleship," and there's two subpoints here. I thought we're good and just, this wasn't your chapter, but expound on how you see these today.

And I'm sure you with adults and with students at Wheaton and Justin, your ministry, you see both of these things. But he says, "One of the two reasons for lack of true discipleship," he says, "one defective theology and two lack of self-examination." And it does seem like they're not opposites, of course, but you could find one tribe that would gravitate toward one and another tribe toward the other. Why do you see those two as, they're not the only two, but as such important avenues for discipleship? Well, we could probably generate a longer list.

It's interesting the balance they bring those in it. So there are some Christians and a lot of them would be in churches like ours, Kevin, Reformed churches. They love their theology.

We do. And we love to get into it. But you know, our spiritual forebears among the Puritans put a huge emphasis on self-examination and partly just examining whether you really are trusting in Christ, but also looking at areas of your life where there's a need for

greater holiness, where there's a need for greater trust in Jesus.

And if we were only looking at ourselves, then we wouldn't get the knowledge that we have from the Scriptures. This is really, I mean, this critique lines up very nicely with how Calvin begins the Institutes when he says, "You've got to know God and you've got to know yourself, and how do you know God? You know God through creation, but you also know him through the written word." And theology can just kind of go in one ear and out the other if we're not thinking about how it actually applies to our lives. And I just think there's nothing more useful and powerful for actually living your life and making a difference in the world than really understanding theology and understanding how it applies to work, how it applies to the life of the family, how it applies to your relationships with neighbors and friends and just, you know, exploring that and then seeking to live it out.

So I think this is a nicely balanced critique that you get from Dr. Boyce at the end of the book. Yeah. Phil, I'll give you the last word.

Of course, we're talking about the heart of the cross, reissued coming up by PNR. Maybe it's out already, but grateful for the work that you and Dr. Boyce did on this. So you can take this in any direction.

You can say something about the cross, about the book, about another book on the cross, a hymn on the, but just lead us out thinking about why indeed we need to keep focusing on the cross. So we live in a day, obviously, there's lots of polarization. There's lots of people talking about lots of things.

I write about lots of things. It's not that this is the only thing Christians can talk about, but sometimes I think better than sometimes we can tell people you're talking about that too much, stop talking about that, stop that you're not talking about the most important thing. In some ways, the best way is to just talk more about the most important thing.

So it isn't, you shouldn't talk about politics, you shouldn't talk about art, you shouldn't talk about work, all of life connects to to to Christ, but especially for the the pulpit ministry, especially for Christian seeking discipleship, this is the very center of our faith. And I need to remind myself, and sometimes I want to remind other people, hey, do people know that what you're most excited about is the cross? Is that does your church sing about it, savor it? One of the things I will say as a compliment to the churches I've served, that the more central the sermon is to the heart of the gospel, the more I find my people love it. And that's a good thing.

What I don't want is, okay, here's a sermon and you know, some you had to talk about millennial views, and that's important, and I got millennial views, and I want to teach on them, but you wouldn't want that sermon to be the one that animates the whole congregation. Yes, that's give me that every week. You got to, you talk about it, you're

happy to talk about it.

I teach systematic theology, I believe in all that. But what I love in my church is Jesus, sin, gospel, good news, cross salvation, those things are what people explode out of their seat and want to sing about and savor. And with everything else we could talk about, especially any pastors listening to this, it would do our souls well and the souls of our people well to be reminded that we still are centrally people of the cross.

So take that last little quick comment about the book, and that is, I found it to be a good book to give to somebody that has some connection with Christianity, but you don't, you're not really sure they understand the gospel. Because of course, if you're Christian, like, yeah, the cross, you should be interested in this and you're part of it. So, you know, whatever part of Christendom you're from, this could be a good book for you.

Since you mentioned like another book, I'll just say John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* is just an incredible book and the cross that a lot of our listeners should be familiar with. If you haven't, you know, don't hear that, like go out and take a deep dive in that book. Let me answer your question this way.

So I think what you're really saying is let's keep the main thing, the main thing. That's what actually leads to vibrant worship and effective outreach, like everything flows from an understanding of the saving work of Jesus on the cross and out of the empty tomb. And what I will say about the other things that we may want to talk about.

So, yeah, okay, in times, views, that's maybe not quite so much the pressing thing, but people want to talk about what's happening in the country. They want to talk about what's happening in the world, all kinds of things to talk about. Whatever else we're talking about, let's see it in relationship to the gospel, because we're not going to understand those things if we just kind of talk about them, like floating out there, unconnected.

Actually, what our culture is passionate about and focused on gives us an opportunity to show how the gospel applies to that, whatever that is. So in addition, so I think part of what I'm saying is, yes, focus on the cross as a topic in its own right. But also, even if we are talking about other aspects of life and administering the work of the church, what's happening in the world, let's connect that to what the gospel says.

And that's what actually will give us a solid grounding and also help us those believers how to address those issues. So the way to keep the main thing, the main thing is partly by talking about the main thing, but also showing the connection, the main thing to all the other things. That's a good last word.

Thank you, Phil. You gave us an hour. I appreciate that.

So the book, *The Power of the Heart of the Cross* by Phil Reichen and James Montgomery



Boys, blessings on your work on your family, may your grandchildren quiver increase and blessings on your work leading and laboring at Wheaton, such an important place, important ministry. So hopefully our paths will cross before too long. I hope so.

I appreciate you, Kevin DeYoung, and it was nice to have a whole hour just to talk. I know. Well, very good.

So thank you to our listeners for sticking with us. I'll have one or two more episodes before I take a summer break. And Phil, thanks for being with us.

Until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever, and read a good book.

(buzzing)

[buzzing]