

# OpenTheo

## "Lament for a Father," with Marvin Olasky

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### **Life and Books and Everything** - Clearly Reformed

In his new book, *Lament for a Father: The Journey to Understanding and Forgiveness*, Marvin Olasky, editor of *WORLD Magazine*, puts all his journalistic expertise and experience into uncovering the story of his father.

*Life and Books and Everything* is sponsored by Crossway, publisher of *Recovering the Lost Art of Reading: A Quest for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful* by Leland Ryken, Glenda Faye Mathes.

Reading has become a lost art. With smartphones offering us endless information with the tap of a finger, it's hard to view reading as anything less than a tedious and outdated endeavor. This is particularly problematic for Christians, as many find it difficult to read even the Bible consistently and attentively. Reading is in desperate need of recovery.

*Recovering the Lost Art of Reading* addresses these issues by exploring the importance of reading in general as well as studying the Bible as literature, offering practical suggestions along the way. Leland Ryken and Glenda Faye Mathes inspire a new generation to overcome the notion that reading is a duty and instead discover it as a delight.

For 30% off this book and all other books and Bibles at Crossway, sign up for a free Crossway+ account at [crossway.org/LBE](https://www.crossway.org/LBE).

Timestamps:

Do you want to hear about Abraham Lincoln? [0:00 - 1:13]

The Perfect Sponsor Book for LBE [1:13 - 1:53]

Marvin Olasky [1:53 - 5:05]

*WORLD Magazine* [5:05 - 8:10]

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From Success to Failure [13:34 - 18:52]

The Turning Point [18:52 - 24:08]

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Iron-Clad Chain, Daisy Chain [35:49 - 41:52]

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Books and Everything:

Messages from My Father: A Memoir, by Calvin Trillin

## **Transcript**

[music] Greetings and salutations. Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung, joined with Justin Taylor and Colin Hanson.

Good to have you with us. As we come to, as sad as it may sound, the completion of this season of Life and Books and Everything. Lord willing, we'll be back with more.

Perhaps after a break over some of the summer, maybe we'll come back with special episodes in the summer. We've had such a resounding reply to our question about, "Should we do a special episode on Abraham Lincoln books?" I'm just thinking, "I'm both of you." Yeah, both of you, only one related to us. Maybe that would be a spellbinding episode come 4th of July to talk about Lincoln books.

I mean, who actually goes out of their way to say, "Hey, I heard you guys talking about Abraham Lincoln. Please don't do a podcast on that. I have no interest in that." Who says that? Well, so we'll see.

But glad to have you with us. And glad, as always, they have crossway as a sponsor. We're grateful for all of the great books that they put out.

We've mentioned many of them over this season. We want to highlight today recovering the Lost Art of Reading by Leland Reichen and Glinda Faye Mathis. And what other sort of book would be nearer and nearer to our hearts, life and books and everything, a book on the Lost Art of Reading? We want to do whatever we can to encourage people to be

good readers and to read good books.

And as this book says, "To help us pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful." So check out that new book from crossway. And speaking of new books, we are joined with our special guest today, Marvin Olasky. And we are joined by the director of World Magazine Renown.

Marvin, good to have you with us. How long have you been at the helm of World? Oh, about 29 years. Just 29 years.

I should know my history of the magazine. I think I've subscribed to it for all of those years. But are you the first of the editors, the only? No, Joel Bell started the magazine in 1986.

And then I got involved first as a member of the board. And then when the board decided it couldn't have me, it didn't want me. They made me editor because that's the way to get me off the board.

And we live happily ever after. Yeah, well, I remember Joel started. I didn't know what the titles were.

And we'll get to your book in just a moment. But you announced some time ago that you're in a longish runway towards retirement, or maybe that's not the word you're using, but a transition. How is that going? What are the plans for you and for world? Oh, it's going well.

Yeah, we have the right people in place. So I plan on July 1, 2022 to no longer be editor in chief, no longer be involved in editing. Still, I hope, as long as they'll have me writing a column and book reviews and so forth.

But I'll out of the process. And yeah, the right people are on the right seats on the bus at this point. So it's going to good transition.

What I'm curious, what has been your one of your favorite parts about this job? And what's one element? We all have parts in our job that we say, I won't miss that when I'm done. What's that part for you? Well, favorite part has probably been developing young talent. We tend to have a very young group of writers.

We have a world journalism institute that trains them and then we have interns. They live in our house with us for a couple of months. So we get to know them and then usually we end up hiring them.

And that's been a lot of fun just seeing the development of the rookies. And, you know, some of them now for have been with us for 10 years and you can just see how much they have progressed as writers, as people, as Christians. So that has been enormously

pleasurable.

And what if anything will you be glad to no longer have to do? Good question. Probably no longer having to engage in some extensive copy editing at the last minute just before that was. Is that true for you, Justin and Colin? Although I think Justin, man, whenever I send him something, he seems to have great joy in copy editing.

Including text messages. Yeah, he's not above correcting text messages. Right.

Finding false is one of my spiritual gifts in other people, not myself. Someone's got to do it. So.

For those who might not be familiar with world, just could you give a very quick overview of what the magazine tries to do, who it tries to reach, what its goals and missions are? Sure. I mean, right now we have three platforms. We have a biweekly magazine that tries to assess what's going on and report really emphasize street level reporting, not just sitting in our offices and sucking our thumbs but going out and seeing the stuff for ourselves and then telling stories about it.

So that's the magazine. We have a website that basically functions as our daily newspaper, and then we have a podcast, a daily podcast, which is lots of fun and that's the one that's been that's been growing exponentially the past few years. So, yeah, three things and the emphasis on all of them is what we call biblical objectivity, namely God created the world.

He's the one who knows how the world really works and so we are only truly objective when we try to follow what the Bible says. And we try to do it in a way not to overuse the Bible and say it gives us a clear message about everything politics and everything else, but also not to underuse it and say it's all up to ourselves because there's no king in Israel. So, yeah, it's an interesting process of trying to avoid the underuse avoid the overuse and practice biblical objectivity which which very few other people in the journalistic world do.

So it's been fun developing that and training people in it. Yeah, well, thank you for doing that and thank you for trying to walk that fine line I'm sure it. It's always easier to do one or the other and write as if whatever our own convictions are equal biblical faithfulness or act as if the Bible is basically good for telling us that Jesus rose from the dead and obey the 10 commandments and after that, we really can't say anything.

I'm sure none of us do it perfectly and world has to straddle that line but we really appreciate how the magazine has tried to do that faithfully and really weighing in Christian worldview is sort of overuse but but doing that. I'm not pretending that, you know, a conservative political take automatically has biblical warrant in every instance. Yeah, exactly we try to avoid polarizing as much as possible and avoid tribalism as much

as possible.

And, since your, your words are very kind let me just say, you know, Justin and Colin I appreciate your writing and Kevin. I'm walking my dog. I listened to sermons from from from Tim and from you.

Tim Keller and you and you know that's a pretty that's a pretty good league. Well, yeah if I'm in if I'm in there with Tim I won't ask how the dog is behaving or what the dog is doing when I'm preaching versus Tim but I'm just glad that I get to be in such company. I don't go there with what the dog is doing since I'm sure this is for families to be listening to very good.

Well, I'm excited to talk about your new book published by PNR coming out soon and it's called lament for a father, the journey to understanding and forgiveness. It's a short book, little over 100 pages, and this is a bit of a cliché but it was a page turner and it went by very quickly. And I'm really interested in in asking you several things about this book but I first wanted to ask is the title a play off of the short book that Nicholas Walter store wrote years ago lament for a son.

Well, not in my mind but it was actually PNR that suggested that title. I had a title something like, you know, honoring my father or something and they brought that in and I suspect it wasn't their minds. Well I certainly made the connection I don't know how many readers would but it it it fit together nicely.

Not many books will give you a kind of purpose statement from reading the dedication but this book did. And so I want to start there. You say here's a dictionary definition a book dedication is a way for an author to honor a person or a group of people end quote.

And then you say so in one sense I'm dedicating this book to my father, who's the main character in it but I'm also taking the unusual step of dedicating it to you the reader. You may be looking at this page right now because you have unresolved conflicts with a parent living or dead. You deserve more than to go through the rest of your life feeling either guilty or angry.

I wrote this to blaze a trail through my own forest and to encourage you to do likewise. I can't remember ever reading a book dedication that maybe want to go on and read the rest of the book so start from there and we'll be able to ask specifics about the story but tell us your aim in this book and how the Lord brought you to a point that you wanted to blaze through your own forest as you said. Well two things about a year and a half ago.

I wrote a column for world in which I told about never playing catch with my father and told that story about one time we lived in an urban area, no backyard or anything like that but one time I begged him to come out to the street and just throw me some ground balls. He came out reluctantly and did it and threw a ground ball to me that I should

have stopped but I did not. And as you can imagine on cement it just went rolling and rolling and rolling and when I finally caught up to it and I yelled back at him why didn't you throw it straight, namely I was trying to get him rather than my own error and not getting it and as I got the ball finally and turned around he was walking back to the house.

So that was our total amount of time playing catch. And I just wrote that column as something explaining about relations of fathers and sons and so forth and just got a tremendous amount of letters from readers guys saying, telling me the stories about their own interactions with their fathers. And I thought this was something more than more than a personal story was something that resonated with with lots of people and that really got me cranking on it.

But a few years earlier, I just been thinking I had read one of these, one of these verses in the Bible that everyone skips over it's pretty much forgotten abandoned somewhere somewhere in, you know, and somewhere in the Bible there's a verse called honor your father and mother. And I just was thinking at that point, well, am I honoring my father and mother since I had some negative thoughts about my father because my mother had a hard childhood a hard young adulthood grew up very, was hoping that marriage would turn a right life around and when it didn't, she was very disappointed. And she took that out of my father and I somewhat internalized her criticism.

And so I thought ill of him. And then I thought ill of her for having nagged him and yelled at him and things like that. And that wasn't a good position as a Christian or really for anyone to be in.

And I thought, well, I need to look further into this to understand them better. And I think when we're children and young adults we, we tend to think of our parents as being of service to us. That's their, that's their job.

But we never stop or at least I didn't stop to ask well, what pains are they having what are they going through. How can I possibly be helpful to them. And so belatedly, I started thinking about this and then doing some research.

And then after their dad but started asking my cousins their perceptions and then going back in the records what I could find out about what their lives were like, and why they turned out as as they did. What pains they had what troubles they had rather than just thinking about myself. And so without making you repeat the whole story which is very well written and I notice in the book you you write the whole stories in the you're writing with the present tense, even though you're telling the past tense and I think that must be a, a journalistic decision or a way to to really bring the story and make sure that we feel it in the present I just it kept me moving along.

So you're your father's story and you talk at the end to about your mother's story, but

your father's story. In some ways and I hope this isn't putting it too negatively, but we might think of the American dream as moving from hard scrabble life and early failures and you recover and you keep pressing on and you push forward. And eventually you break through and there's a success and you move from success to success to glorious sunlit uplands.

And in some ways your father's story was from not failure to success but in a worldly sense almost from success to failure. Maybe I'm putting it too harshly but give us just a little bit of that backbone of your father's story, you know, from Harvard, World War II, a series of jobs that didn't seem to go anywhere after that. Sure.

My mother, her big complaint was that my father lacked ambition. And she said very explicitly, sometimes the top of her voice that he's lazy. And why doesn't he, why doesn't he make something of himself.

And I thought, okay, this is who he is. Then I belatedly finally asked Harvard College for his records, just as transcript. And after some nagging on my part, the folks there finally did it I had to produce a death certificate for him and information myself and so forth.

But they saw me and it wasn't just the transcript. It was his application material. It was all the correspondence that went on among the professors and administrators concerning his performance in Harvard.

And what I learned is that he had been an enormously ambitious person. He had graduated from Malden High School with Malden a suburb just north of Boston, working class, fairly poor at that point. Also heavily Jewish and Harvard at that point had a quota on Jewish students sometimes no more than 10%, sometimes no more than 15%.

But the Jewish students tend to be academically advanced and Harvard did not want to be overrun with Jews, a lot of anti semitism at that point in the Harvard administration. So he applied to Harvard in 1935 and was turned down, turned down flat. And his application materials fascinating it was from neighbors who said, oh he's a fine Jewish boy he's in the tradition of the rabbis and the sages.

That was exactly the wrong stuff to apply to Harvard with. He didn't give up at that point. He somehow finagled his way with the help I think of a mentor in Boston to a year, a supplementary year after I'll already graduate in my school a supplementary year at Boston Latin.

And he went there his grades were good enough, and the recommendations he attached to his application at that point, totally different, not always in the tradition of the rabbis but he's a very manly man. He has good character, which were all dog whistles in a way saying, he's one of us he's not like one of those Jews you don't like. He's a Boston Latin graduate at this point, and he's, he's he's proper he's a gentleman, a gentleman

and scholar at this point, and you got admitted.

His father wanted him to be a doctor, this is what you did when you really upwardly mobile. He did not do well in his pre medical courses, he switched to anthropology after a battle with his father. Just to keep the short he also in the process at Harvard switch theologies.

His father was Orthodox. He grew up believing in Adam and Eve as real people. He majors in anthropology and faces something that's totally antithetical to that.

It's all Darwinian evolution, and he has to decide whether he's going to accept that and fit in at Harvard, or he's going to stick with his with his father's beliefs, and he just totally throws over the Judaism. And that's something I didn't know I thought he had that had developed later in life, but it's right there I got his senior thesis. And in the senior thesis he says, nothing special about the Bible, nothing special about the the Israelites, just another ancient near Eastern tribe just another ancient near Eastern document.

And he had to fit in, he had totally thrown over the theology of his of his youth, and his and his and his father's beliefs. So that I didn't know I didn't think it came early I thought it developed slowly over time, but he really wanted to fit in, and that I found interesting and surprising he was very ambitious. And he wanted to do well at Harvard he wanted his professors to think well of him, and that been changing his beliefs about some very basic and important things.

So it was just fascinating to watch you put decades and decades and decades of journalistic skills into researching your own father's history, and watching that transform and to change you and to challenge you as this project progressed. And if you jump ahead to World War II, it sounds like you had to be a little bit speculative about what your father had because I think his records had burned is that correct right your service records there so tell us a little bit about how you reconstructed his World War II service because you seem to identify that perhaps as the very great turning point in his life. Right.

Well, the, he had gone he had been successful in that for Harvard to to gain admission to the Harvard Graduate School Anthropology. But after a year there, they kicked him out, and I have some surmises on that but let me move on to World War II. And his dad my grandfather worked at a place that was making boilers for submarines.

So he was able to get a deferment, and he could have sat out the war, which, which he would have liked doing, except he heard what the Nazis were doing to Jews. So he enlisted, he had a draft affirm, but he enlisted went to went to Europe was packing parachutes for flyers. And so he was first in England, then in France and Italy for a while, and then in France very close to Germany.



The war ends. There are all these refugees there are all these people in concentration camps the ones that the few who survived, but a lot of them given the extent of the German concentration camps. And then he grew up speaking Yiddish.

He knew German he actually got high honors in German from Harvard. He was in after the war he was not demobilized until the very end of 1945. What was he doing during that period from May through December.

Army had put out a call for any soldiers who know German who are fluent in German and can speak to the people in the camps and the refugees and so forth. I don't know this for sure, but on his when he was separated from the army, he received notices about all the various campaigns he had been in where he had been, and one of which was basically Central Europe Germany. What was he doing there.

The army would not have had him just sitting there for six months when you have someone who's fluent in German. My surmise, and again, he would never talk about this and the army records burned up so they can't tell me for sure. But my surmise with I think about 85% certainty, let's say, would be that he was sent to be a translator to the look to the nearby concentration camps in Germany.

And that may also explain why he would never talk to me about it, because he must have seen if you were there. Again, I think, you know, 85% certainty, he would have seen some actually incredibly horrible things. He just, they could body stacked up, you know, hands and feet and various bodily organs kept in special jars, all kinds of terrible stuff he never talked about it.

He came back quickly got married, but he changed his career at that point. Now Harvard had kicked him out, but he was allowed to go back to Harvard as a graduate school in graduate school in Semitic studies. He never did it.

He was interested in preserving Judaism as a culture. Here, six million Jews, a third of the worldwide tribe had been killed. He thought, okay, we are possibly going to go extinct because so many American Jews don't know anything about Judaism.

So I am going to do what I can do forget about anthropology forget about getting a doctoral degree. And I think that's the way that we work in Hebrew schools and convince people to stick with Judaism. The odd thing about that I think we can all recognize that is that he had missed he was missing at that point the essence of Judaism.

And the Bible as God's word, he didn't have that, but he still wanted people to as members of the tribe to stick with Jewish culture. And that left him I think in some ways in a very uncomfortable position. And the rest, the rest was just a series of failures in various ways, particularly from my mother, who married him thinking, aha, he's going to become a professor he's going to become it's going to be doctor and Mrs. Olasky.

I'll be able to travel around see the world, enjoy the esteem that he has, and she was very disappointed that none of that happened. So, and I tend to trace that again my surmise here to his experience at Harvard having gone all the way to accepting a different theology and ideology, and they kick him out. And then getting married with expectations of having a loving wife, and she turns out to be not so.

And then particularly just what he saw in the concentration camps and the effect that had him on wanting to keep Judaism culturally alive, because so many Jews have been killed. You just alluded to the fact that your father was very reticent to talk about his experiences and the horrors of what he saw. And I think in contemporary culture we think of that as a defect that someone is not willing to be candid about their own feelings and own experiences.

But as you reflect as a mature Christian in the book looking back you actually see this as something of a mercy. Can you explain how you came to that conclusion how you view that today? Well I do see it as mercy because I became a Christian at age 26 purely through God's grace. God all the way doing this not not my desire, not my attempt to learn things just just God intervening in my life and turning me around.

But the benefit I had because of my father was what many Jews, at least of the previous generation did not have, namely, they had a history of anti semitism. My father I suspect had experience of anti semitism in Boston, and then particularly seeing the most graphic anti semitism namely all those dead bodies stacked up. So he had that sense of hostility towards Christians.

I didn't have that sense. I think that was a real help in coming to Christ again God, God pushed me all the way God pursued me all the way, but I didn't have those barriers psychological barriers and my own experience telling me Christians are nasty people who beat me up. I never had that.

And if he had told me the stories of what he saw in Germany, perhaps even what he had experienced as a teenager in Boston. I would have, I would have had some of that I still and I just didn't. So I'm very thankful that he protected me from that.

I suspect he also protected my mother from that. But in some ways that made his life harder, because he could not explain to her really why he was committed to these jobs teaching in Hebrew schools, teaching kids who really didn't want to be in the room and, and parents who didn't have much interest either. And that's a good thing for social reasons.

So yeah, this, this in a sense, and this is this is taking it a step too far. And it's a step he would, he would not like to be even configured or referred to in that way. But in a sense it was Christ like.

I mean, he was he was just keeping this on himself and not not sharing the misery with others even though it might have led others to be more compassionate towards him. At one point, you alluded to this earlier Marvin, all of us as fathers realized that our fathers had been sons at some point. And that realization made a big difference for you as well.

We also realized that as we age we become so much like our fathers, or at least that's what we worry about or have to deal with. You had such a dramatic conversion that you're talking about here. Is that the case with you? I mean, were there any of those areas where you saw yourself aging into your father? Was it just the break so definitive that you really saw no connection there? That's a very good question.

And I would like to, I would like to deny any any comparisons of that sort but no, I suspect in terms of psychologically liking to read a certain introspection or yeah, rather rather being being with. And being in my house rather than the new other things. So I see some I see some some of the areas there as I've gone older, but here's one big difference.

If if people people have asked me well where's the where's your favorite place of traveled a lot internationally, and people ask who is my favorite place and I've sometimes responded. It's the it's the next place. It's the place I haven't been to.

And that's my tendency. I mean, I do, I do like to like to go and see things I've never seen before. And so, I think the interesting left with my father, he had this big adventure, which which which is in some ways a very difficult adventure I mean first being in the army, and suddenly for a kid who would never eat in pork before, basically pork and beans and all that.

Being with a lot of people not having a lot of privacy. And then, along with the basic army stuff just seeing these, I mean, these these horrendous these horrendous sites in Germany. That was so traumatic for my imagine that he never went anywhere again unless he absolutely had to.

I mean the, the stories my mother told with some exasperation is they at one point took a trip to Washington DC to see the things and he just stayed in the hotel room for two days. And then he came once when I was working in Delaware. He, he went around on a tour of a place near Delaware with very beautiful plants and flowers, winter tour.

And he was walking along through the through the vegetation reading a paperback book carrying in his hand so there was something traumatic that he had I mean I knew that. And that way I am, I am not like him, but I see similarities I see differences but at least I, I, the strangeness that I saw at that point I think now there's there's a reason for it. And it's not something I blame him for.

It's, it's things that happened to him. And he reacted in a particular way with basically

PTSD, you know post traumatic stress disorder. And I never appreciated that as a child, or even as a young adult I just didn't understand it all about that.

Well, the story that you tell is, is really well told and Colin said you putting all your, your years of historical research journalistic expertise and you tell it really well. I want to transition a little bit and this touches on the biography obviously but talk about some of the psychology even the theology because that's sort of what's I think it's driving the book and the subtitle is the journey to understanding and forgiveness and you in the book talking about how Christ can heal even these difficult relationships. So I'll get to your relationship with your father in just a moment but before I do that, there's a lot about your mom and here too.

She has her own story coming from a very difficult background and her father, very difficult circumstances as a Jew and immigrating to this country her family. But talk about the relationship between your mom and your dad. One of the themes I see in the book is, it seems like your mom wanting a husband that she can respect and provide for her and look up to, but then that coming out in some unhealthy ways.

And then your father feeling somewhat constantly defeated by your your mom's anger and nagging I'm not trying to put words into your mouth but talk about the relationship between your mom and your dad, how that shaped each other in their disappointments and how that affected you. Yeah, that's a good summary you've given. Yes, my mother grew up with a hard and sometimes brutal father who had been brutalized himself in Russia before coming to the United States had worked very hard had achieved a lot economically, but was not kind at all to his children.

And she grew up as she told us never having a teddy bear, never having any any real love in the family, at least from the parents. Her mother my grandmother was was abused by her husband in lots of ways. So a miserable childhood.

And then she had to be working she was actually smart but never got a chance to go to college. And she is 28 at this point in 1946 and feeling her feeling miserable and she meets this guy who's just backed from the from the war, and he pays some attention to her. She respects him.

He's smart. He's going to go places. He's going to become again, you know, doctor and Mrs Olasky, and I will receive I will have reflected glory.

My miserable life is in the past from now on, we're going to have some money but even more than that we're going to have influence fame admiration. My my Prince charming in a way. And they got married and late in 1946, not all that long after meeting each other.

And, and he disappointed her. And, you know, I can I can blame my mother for for not

loving him, but she was desperate, and she was hopeful and all her hopes were were dashed at that point. I can blame my father.

In other words, there's plenty of blame to go around but but helped by the Bible and and pastors, many, many good sermons. I understand something about original sin, and that manifests itself in lots of ways, including our tendency to to blame others when when our, our hopes don't come through and we realize that that yes we are not married to Prince charming or or any anyone else with charm we are married to the people God has given us, and our task and marriage sometimes happily. And in my situation I've been married for almost 45 years and I am hugely grateful to God for my wife.

But other situations the marriages are miserable is with my parents, but I give them credit for sticking together. Today, they would have gotten a divorce, I suspect, and that would have made life even harder for my brother and myself. So, I can blame them but I can also look at the things they did for us.

We had, I had a teddy bear, my mother never did. We always had food, which sometimes my mother did not. So, yeah, the they, I had a car to drive, I had this I had that so both materially they protected me I mean we weren't we weren't, we were lower middle class but we had enough.

So materially they protected me psychologically they protected me. They were actually good parents, despite all the other stuff that came along that I was blaming them for at the time in terms of the basic stuff. Having us having us physically and, you know, more or less psychologically whole.

They did their jobs and I didn't give them credit for that. At an age where it seems that every person is bling blaming their hang ups and their faults and their shortcomings upon something that can be traced to their parents. I think I would love people to read this book.

If for no other reason as a tribute to common grace, the way in which you are able to see God's grace through difficult circumstances. I want to commend that as a model for listeners it's it's a beautiful book that is really well told and, and does honor your mother and father, even when there were less than honorable things. Thanks.

Yeah, this to me towards the end, I'll read a couple paragraphs that you wrote so well Marvin this really gets, I think that the theological and the spiritual heartbeat of the book. We are naturally wretched passing on original sin in many ways that are sometimes creative but often repetitious. At first glance, an iron chain bonds together generation after generation.

And I'm part of that chain I've realized in the course of this research how self centered I was not only as a child but as an adult. Why did I have so little interest in seeing my

parents not primarily as people to meet my needs or not. But as individuals with their own struggles I never really cared to find out about them yet sometimes with God's grace and mercy that iron chain becomes a readily breakable daisy chain.

Those who see the miraculous transition cry out joyfully as Apostle Paul did wretched man that I am who will deliver me from the body of death thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Talk about how you I love that you put that iron clad chain in that daisy chain and that gets to what Justin is talking about. On the one hand and generations past I think we could say people often overlooked and didn't pay attention to the ways in which they might have been shaped by their past by their upbringing by hard circumstances it was stiff upper lip grin and bear it.

And we maybe didn't have sympathy for one another like we should have to understand how affected we are. And yet if the pendulum is swung to the other side it's to say that we're only the product of bad experiences bad people and perpetually at the mercy of those experiences. And how do you how did God help you Marvin and how can you or can we help others understand that yes there is a chain, but it can be a daisy chain what did you mean by this these two paragraphs here.

Well part of that comes out of some of the history writing I did concerning poverty in America and the history poverty in America. So back in the 90s spent a lot of time talking with homeless guys particularly some who were still in that in that situation of misery. And just about always there may have been some rare exceptions but just about always what changed them was coming to Christ.

Without that they they still with again with some exceptions they still had an iron chain around them they're still homeless they would still rather be drinking and drugging rather than getting their lives in order. So when I would talk with the people who run homeless centers and there was debate at that time and it's still going. Let's say you're offering a you're offering a dinner free dinner to people who come in.

Should you also with that dinner. Offer a sermon or a homily or at least some discussion of spiritual things. And there are some folks who say well now we don't want to intrude on their religious liberty.

So we're just going to give them food and let them go off. I think as Christians we understand that the spiritual food is at least as important as the material food in many ways more important if if a person is starving and he's the material food right away. But he also needs the spiritual food and so you're not being kind to people if in fact you don't try to explain a little about Jesus and what Jesus does for us.

And why we should try to glorify God and enjoy him forever. So, the definition we have of compassion of just kind of giving people stuff is not a good definition. It's not a good understanding.

And so I look at that history and I see that when Christian charities have been effective in fighting poverty is because they have had an understanding that the spiritual food and the material food are both necessary. And when I look more recently and see some some charities that haven't been effective it's usually for that as well. So I basically applied that understanding to my to my own life, and the lives of others, namely, what's the, what's the solution.

It's Jesus, it's Jesus and all the other stuff. Once in a while it may work to some extent but it doesn't over a long period of time, or for most people, Christ changes life. You know, J. I Packers great three words God safe centers and nothing else works.

So, yeah. It's so simple and yet we need to hear it over and over again. Those of us been in the church a long time sometimes we think we forget yet Jesus does still save people.

It's not just in the missionary biographies. It's not just in Marvin Olasky story he still does it he still safe centers he still changes lives. I have three last questions I'm going to ask the first one and then I'm going to let Justin and Colin see if they have a last question and then I'm going to give myself the last two.

So here's my of my three. Marvin this is not kind of flatter but I think this is a remarkably wise and humble book. You you start with, you know, my dad only played catch with me one time and there's obviously real pain and there's real ways in which your dad failed and yet you come to the end realizing you needed to learn who he was as a person with all of his failings understand even God's common grace in that so it strikes me as very wise and humble.

And I kept thinking. Do you think is there a way for a son or a daughter to come to your sort of God given wisdom and humility at 70 I think you said in the book you're 70 years old now. Do we have to wait till where does it just come because you need to get to 70 can can can a child see this when they're 30 or 40.

I hope so. I think so. I can't I can't give you any any research results on that.

But my hope is the case and that's that's a large reason along with just working out my own understanding that's a large reason where I wrote this book, namely, while your parents are alive. I'm going to go with them try to learn their histories. Don't think of them as just feeding tubes for yourself.

What can you do for them and ask the questions while they're still alive. Do it. That's and don't wait.

I mean I kick myself now, you know some of the things that I have. I don't think I have a percent certainty about. I could have had 99% certainty about.

Again, I don't think my father would have told me very much, but I could have, I could

have talked with other people I could have looked earlier on for records that I would not have been destroyed by the fire the army record I could have if I had been interested, I could have gotten his background and then sat down with him and said, Hey, I have learned this about you. And, and I thank you for protecting me for not telling me about all this, but now I know it. So tell me now talk with me more about this.

Explain what you were thinking how what you were going through. And had I known had I asked more specific questions. Maybe he would have opened up.

But I didn't. And so my, the, the, the, this book is for readers who, and, and I suspect maybe older, there'll be older readers but if there are people in there in their 30s and 40s who read it. Or even, you know, teenagers, teenagers, teenagers.

Yeah, that's, that's the age in which I'm gifting it to all of my children. I was going to say buy some copies for your own family there. You know, it could be worse.

I know teenagers have a Trinity me myself and I mean that's at least that's the teenager I was. So, but yes, yes, give it, give it to who knows. That's right.

As parents start early and suggest to your kids. I am here to talk with you about my background. This is, this is an open mic talk.

Ask me. Well, but I do, I do love and I asked you the question because I want people to hear just what you said there and that is, you know, I don't want to psychologist everybody out there that they're all it's all about father wounds but you know he just wonders the way people are on social media and the pain they carry the way that they attack. I mean, all sorts of things.

We sometimes don't stop to really think, and especially as Christians and let the Lord deal with us speak to us through his word. How are we acting out of the various hurts and bitterness and pains that we have in our own lives and to read a book like this can at least help us ask those sort of questions and explore some of those avenues and try to come to a better gospel place before we're 70 or 80. Justin and then Colin and I have two quick questions to close.

One of my favorite lines in the book. You're right. I didn't honor him when he was alive, but I can tell his story now with appreciation for his sacrifices and sadness about his sadness.

And I think in that one line it captures a lot of the heartbeat of the book and your perspective. And there's there's an honor element. We are commanded to honor our parents.

There's a telling telling the story that something you can do now you can honor him now you can tell a story now you can have appreciation for the good. Nobody is pure evil.



There is common grace in every life.

And then there is sadness there's there's lament there's empathy there's identification. And so I love all four of those aspects of honoring telling appreciating and identifying with and I don't know if you intentionally thought of those in terms of a fourfold kind of schema but that again to me seems like a model that we can learn from you. And before it's too late of honoring our parents.

And we also tend to think of honoring our parents is when they're alive and that's that's the ideal but we can continue to honor their memory and I think you've done a wonderful job of that. Hey, I can I can see you're a good editor you've summarized it better than I that I have. So thanks.

Yes. That's great. Good summary Colin.

My question is actually not on not on the book so I think Marvin and I'd love to have you have love to have you as a guest on gospel bound and we could just talk journalism that whole time and the things that you've seen in the last 30 years and changes that you think is the prognosis going forward but I'll save that maybe for a different time if you're willing. Sure. But I would be interested to know we're actually recording this podcast when we've just got news that the Supreme Court is going to take up a direct challenge to Roe v. Wade.

Wow. Do you have any thoughts on thoughts on that the Mississippi band by the way is what they're taking up. Really.

Wow. Now that that is that is good news. I have a wrote a little book called called came out recently called abortion at the crossroads, which was looking for something like that and preparing for something like that so I'm very glad to hear that.

And as Justin knows I'm starting a longer book for for for crossway on the full history of abortion America wrote 130 years ago and thought I was done with it. Abortion still still haunts me as a as a it haunts all of you and I hope Hans Hans millions of Americans so yeah I can't leave it behind it is still. It is still the single with everything else going on.

It's still like like slavery in the 1850s. It's it's still the the the single, the single biggest, of course the biggest flaw it all comes out of theology and bad theology but the biggest social problem we have right now I think much like slavery in the 1850s is is abortion in the 2020s. And I'm glad to hear the court will be dealing with it and and hope they actually are wise.

And I'm just saying I mean everyone knows that the history that Justice Black and put forth in Roe v. Wade is just full of holes. It's just terrible. It's the, it was the decision and I usually have great esteem for Supreme Court decisions just the way the logic of them, whether I agree with them or not.

And I just I'm thought I find them thoughtful and interesting to read. And that is just like a college paper that that a good professor which funk. So I hope the court right now, unlike in Casey in 1992.

I hope the court will say, hey, yes we understand the principles of stare decisis you know, believe it alone, but the history is so bad. And the judgment is so fallacious that we just can't let it stand. It's just a much like dread Scott decision to blow on the Supreme Court Roe v. Wade will go down that way.

And I hope the court justices at least the majority of them are ready to fix it. That's great. Amen.

So question, life books and everything. Are there any books in your writing of this book about your father that you want to recommend that deal with fatherhood fathers and sons, family, anything from the bibliography or anything fiction or nonfiction that you want to recommend on the subject. Alvin Trillan, who wrote for the New Yorker, wrote a an enjoyable book to read about about his dad and their relationship.

It's in the bibliography I don't remember the title offhand, but that was that was the the most the most enjoyable read a lot of other stuff was was painful. No, I mean, there's a lot of stuff written from from the viewpoint of, or one viewpoint of secular psychology, but it doesn't get at the real stuff. So, yeah, if there if there are listeners who know of a Christian book that really has good theology and examines father son relationships.

I'd be interested in it. Do you have any, do you have any suggestions or anything you've read. Well, I'm interested in reading on the subject I'm blessed with a good father and hopefully my kids will say they've been blessed with a good father but I think it's a, I think it often doesn't come out as much as it should in our social commentary or understanding of the age.

So, what was it. Mary Eberstad who had the article and first things last year the, the fury of the father list or something like that looking at the, the, some of the social unrest and riots and she was also connecting it to some of the major enlightenment figures in the West, many of whom either had very bad fathers or absent fathers or themselves were not fathers and so she's done in some of her books on family and understanding the relationships between family ideology and spiritual trends. I've read her stuff to helpful and that article was helpful.

Was it, that's Paul Vitz who had the book from several years ago that covered some of the same themes. So I'm making a note of that Calvin Trillan messages from my father. Though that's in the bibliography and maybe some of our other intrepid readers listeners rather will have other examples.

I wonder, last question. What would you say in just a few sentences hard to do, but to

someone who's listening to this right now, and they're listening to this whole thing and they feel like, wow, I have, or had a bad father. What counsel would you give them, and then what would you say to someone who says, well, by God's grace, I'm really, really thankful for my earthly father.

You have a word of council encouragement to both of those groups. Yeah, for the first person who has had a bad father or thinks of his father as a bad father. Try to be counseled for the defense, basically.

What would you think if you were, if this were a court and your father were sitting there as an accused perpetrator. What defense does he have? What would you want to, if you're the lawyer for your dad, what questions would you ask him? How would you try to understand where he's coming from, why he did what he did. I think that would be useful just to try to put yourself in this frame of mind, trying to be, trying to be generous to your father.

You owe your existence to him. So even if he was a bad father, at least you have your life. And yeah, what can you do? How can you learn? What can you learn to try to appreciate him's try to put yourself in that frame of mind.

If you have a good father, like every other blessing we have, this is from God. And we can ask, why does God in his majesty and wisdom and grace, why does he, in a sense, why does he choose some and not others, and we can get into all that. Why not this person, why not that person.

Well, why did God give you a good father. We don't know, but boy, thanks be to God. So I would just try to be in that frame of, and on the first person, try to be in a lawyerly or detective frame of mind.

In the second situation, just try to be grateful and thank God for his great blessing. It's a good word to end on. Thank you for joining us and for this book again Marvin Olasky's written the book lament for a father, the journey to understanding and forgiveness comes out by PNR.

Looks like it is due to come out the very first part of June, so it may be available at good retailers anytime in the next days or week or two. So thank you for being with us. Thank you for the good work that you're continuing to do with world and Justin and Colin.

I'm going to be with you for this season and we'll just tease it out there that maybe we'll try to get the band back together for a special episode sometime over the summer, but we are taking a bit of a break now. I'm going on four weeks of study leave to do some writing starting next week. So it's good to have been with you all.

We're grateful for all of our listeners for life and books and everything. So until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever and read a good book.

[Music]

(buzzing)

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