

# OpenTheo

## A Very Merry Midwestern Christmas

December 20, 2023



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

Even though only Justin still lives in the Midwest, this episode has a distinctly Midwestern flare as the three amigos reminisce about favorite Christmas presents, Christmas places, and Christmas foods. You'll also hear about favorite books from the past year, some football banter, and a special section on the airing of grievances (note: Kevin had twice as many as the other two put together).

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Lord Jesus Christ

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Ask Pastor John: 750 Bible Answers to Life's Most Important Questions

## **Transcript**

Greetings and salutations. This is Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung, senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina today.

I am joined by the very special guests, live from an undisclosed bunker in Sioux City, Iowa. It's Justin Taylor. Somewhere in the anticipating in Alabama victory in the somewhat deserved college football playoff, in Birmingham is Colin Hanson.

Good to have you too. Joining LBE for our annual Christmas special. All right, so I hear from people and it's rather mixed.

It's about 50-50. People who come up to me and say, uh, you're right. I do skip the sports banter and please include some sports banter.

I don't even care about sports, but I just love listening to the three of you banter about. So in honor of that second sentiment, why do I don't want to talk about any of my football teams, Michigan State, Chicago Bears, uh, the Bears, but I really wanted to talk about that. Hail Mary yesterday.

I was kind of expecting Justin to send you. This is why they should have Jordan Western camp on the roster just for these occasions. I expected that Justin Taylor tweet.

That's a great point. I said to my son last night, who was just beside himself about that, I said, you have to have a little bit of sympathy for the guy. And he said he's paid millions of dollars to do one thing to catch a football, even if he's sitting on the ground holding it like a little baby and kicking it off.

All right. Why, why do, why do Americans, not all, but many men, but also women, why do Americans like football so much? I mean, I like almost any sport. Uh, I can watch almost any sport, but I mean, I will watch meaningless bowl games.

Most of them are between six and six teams with hardly anybody in the stands, a watch NFL game. Now, when I say watch, I mean, it's on in the background. I rarely am sitting

down to watch for a great length of time.

Fantasy football does make a difference. I know my wife does not understand why you and our sons care about fantasy football, but that does help, uh, you know, games matter. But I mean, I love watching other sports, but I don't care about the NBA right now.

Maybe when it gets to the playoffs, uh, baseball is a little different. That's a, you know, sort of a summertime companion for every single night. But what is it? Is it that football, they only play once a week? The season is shorter.

Uh, what is it that so many of us can't turn away from football? If you look at the end of any given year in American television ratings, the top, what 10, 20 most watched programs in a year, almost all of them. Now I don't know about the bachelor or the golden bachelor or the nearly dead bachelor or whatever they're doing with that franchise these days, but they're almost all football games. Colin, what is the reason? Why do we like football? Well, I'm kind of interested to hear from Justin on this because, you know, college and professional are a little bit different here.

And so I'm wondering, Justin, is there anything unique about football when it comes to, say, Nebraska or is it just about regional or local loyalty? It's just a vehicle for that. So, for example, Nebraska, you guys just lost a heartbreaking national championship and volleyball, but it's a really big deal. Is there a difference between the sports or they both just vehicles to be able to express your solidarity with a certain place? Yeah, I'm more interested in hearing from you because you guys think about such things more than I do.

I just lament Nebraska's demise and hope for their resurrection. Yeah. But yeah, I think there's something regional.

Certainly if you're in the Midwest or if you're a Nebraska fan, there's sort of one sport to consolidate your interest around and it's not spread out across. You know, if you live in Chicago, there's a lot of different things that can have your attention. I don't know.

Is it something about the, there's a gladiatorial nature to it? It's a violent sport, which I think appeals to us at some deep level as guys, not to get too psychological or sociological about it, but I think we like something that is not just all finesse. I think there's something about the fact that you can have six foot six, 310 pound guys on the same team as somebody who's five foot eight and 185 pounds, the skill players and the guys in the trenches that there's something a little bit for everyone. And it's a team sport that it doesn't matter if you have the most amazing receivers.

If you don't have an offensive line that can block, they're not going to get the ball. Maybe there's something about the fact the simplicity of every time down you get four tries to just get 10 yards. I mean, there's something deceptively simplistic about the

game.

All you need to do is get 10 yards, get 10 more yards. And as long as you get to the end zone, you get points. I know people who don't watch football find it confusing, but for those of us who grew up watching it, there's something very just basic about the idea that all you need to do is move this oblong football 10 yards ahead and you keep playing until you can get a touchdown.

So I don't know, you've thought about it more probably guys. I got thoughts. Yeah, I think I think one element you you did touch on.

If you look at a whole series of behaviors, Americans do tolerate a lot more violence and risk than most other countries do, certainly other other western countries that have an angle phone history. So that's I think that's definitely definitely a part of it. And it's similar to basketball in terms of the physicality, but the diversity of body types that you mentioned in there Justin means a lot other different kinds of people who can play it.

I mean, I think about soccer and basketball, there's a lot more running involved. So for some of us bigger guys, that's a lot more difficult to be able to pull off, we just couldn't really do that. But again, there's a ton of running involved if you're a wide receiver, but not if you're an offensive lineman.

So it can tolerate those different types. And I think most basically, Kevin, it's just a really compelling combination of strength and strength, skill, intellect, and broader athleticism. Probably more than any other sport, it brings all of those different elements together on the coaching side, as well as on the playing side.

So I don't know quite why it hasn't caught on in other places, but you know, what makes it uniquely American in that regard, as opposed to say basketball or baseball, which are much more global sports with American backgrounds. So I don't have any thoughts on that, but football is unique in that regard. You know, soccer or football as the rest of the world calls it is the beautiful game.

And that is simplicity. I mean, I know there's lots of strategy in it, but it is you just you got to put and you kick a ball, you can't touch it with your hands, you kick it and you got to get into this goal. Of course, the the knock that Americans give it is it's it's so boring.

You score one goal and then you hunker down on your side. But I'm sure once you know what's going on, there's lots of things happening. But I think it, American football is something that really helps if you grow up around it.

So even, you know, my my wife's dad and brothers watch football all the time. So she's been around football her whole life. And yet she will ask about, you know, my sons, you know, my son, whose nine will know an offensive holding call before my wife, my wife was still how many people are on the team.

I mean, she's never sat down to sort of imbibe it all like my sons have. So there are you're right, Justin, on one level, it's simple. You get three or four, you know, technically four tries to get 10 yards.

But it's also I think this is the other part of it. You guys talk about the kind of gladiatorial nature of it. And at least for me personally, I'm I'm more recoiled by that than I was when I was a kid.

Now when I see a wide receiver go across the middle and get absolutely hammered, I just sort of wins. Like, I hope that guy's okay. I don't know if that's just getting old or being a dad or realizing that people really get seriously hurt and it affects them their whole life.

But the other aspect, which maybe is very American, it's the most technical technological sport that we have, not only with, you know, Connor stallions and what he does with his technology. But, you know, it is it is highly sophisticated with the plays and no, unless you play football, and I didn't really play football, you guys maybe did, but I've watched enough football to know. I mean, there is incredible mental work that goes on.

And the coach is, you know, some coaches are the great, you know, inspirational guys, and but others are just really good at knowing how to draw plays, knowing how to exploit the week. So there's all of that side of it, which, you know, the complaint that others make outside of America is what are you doing? You play for nine seconds at a time, and then you all huddle up and you take another 40 seconds and you could condense this whole game. But I think when you understand the game and you've watched it now that there's replays, of course, you realize, you know, there's a lot happening and they're getting a play in and they're lining up and there's seeing certain formations and they're making calls based on where the safety is.

And every time they snap the ball, you think, here it comes, something really exciting might just happen. And it might be, you know, a run up the gut for a yard and a half, or it could be some amazing crazy football play. But I don't know fully the answer to it.

And I grew up with it and my dad watched it. And now, you know, my sons watch it and they're, you know, they will say, Dad, why, why are we rooting for the bears again? I've never lived in Chicago. We've never lived in Illinois.

You, I was born there, it was passed on, and I'm sorry, I'm passing it on to you. So they're all, you know, distraught with the game yesterday. So it is, it wasn't Charlie Cook in at National Review had a piece recently, of course, he's British, but how he finally came to understand and appreciate American football.

And it was, yeah, it was touching any last football banter questions. Are you watching the portal? I think there has to be something about the unique nature of the quarterback

to, of course, in basketball, you have a point guard and things usually go through a point guard who distributes the ball to other people. But 99.9% of the time, the game, the play starts with the quarterback.

It's getting hiked to the quarterback. Sometimes they're, you can hike it to the running back or wild cat or something like that. But it all goes through the quarterback.

And so you have an opportunity for somebody to be a hero or the zero on every play. So I wonder if there's something about that individual that appeals to us as guys, as Americans. I don't know, there's probably more sophisticated analysis of that.

Well, Americans, I think it's a transcendental, I mean, you can become the greatest guy in your high school. If you're the star quarterback, you can change a franchise. If you're an amazing quarterback, you can change a whole college program is Nebraska fans refresh every few minutes to see if Dylan is committing to the Huskers today.

Well, I think you both you guys raised some really good points and Americans love stars. They love to build them up and then tear them down. And I don't think in sports, there's any position that's more important than the quarterback is in in football, which is very hard to succeed if you don't have a good quarterback at really any level.

And I think Kevin, you pointing out that it's the most technological sport. That makes a lot of sense as well, because Americans, that's the other thing that makes us stand out is that we're we tend to solve problems through technology. So when you look at all the replays and you look at all the all the things that are done to be able to help with concussions and you look with all the different things that just getting plays and and studying plays and things like that, it definitely leans a lot more on technology.

I mean, compared to baseball, which now uses a lot of analytics and things like that, but is much more similar to what it would have looked like 80 years ago, football looks totally different than it did that. And you talk about the the enculturation. So the Friday Night Lights phenomenon, which exists in most places in the country.

And yeah, people get excited about, you know, their high school basketball team. But it's it's still in most places, nothing like the the high school Friday Night football game, which is a combination of a lot of things. It's being outside instead of inside.

And generally, in most parts of the country, you're getting, it's good weather in a fall evening. It's not too hot. It's not snowing yet.

It's not too cold. And there's just, I mean, here we have a, you know, our little Christian school started a football team a number of years ago. And, you know, it's a huge social thing that people, we don't even have a stadium.

People are just milling around on the sideline. But it's a big deal. Unlike any other sport,

everybody's coming out.

It's a social thing. They're hanging out. They're outside on a Friday night.

So you build that up over years and years and years. And because it happens once a week, make it so football never goes away. But oh, oh, it's it's over.

And you got to wait more than than half the year, unlike the NBA, which their perpetual problem is, how can you keep people interested for 82 games when everybody knows that it doesn't really matter until you get into the playoffs. And players are taking games off and they're not playing defense. So there we go.

There's our football banter. Welcome back to everybody else. So for this special Christmas edition, we are going to do some airing of grievances.

And so I would like some, you know, this is not the place to really throw a haymaker at someone. But I want to know Colin and Justin, what are those things that have been pet peeves of yours that in the the spirit of Festivus, you would like to offer a complaint. Now I told you ahead of time, why don't you think of one or two when I have to tell you gentlemen, when I started writing these down, they just started flowing.

I got up to 12 like the 12 days of anti Christmas or something. So I don't know, but which one of you wants to go first? I want to get some some good Christmas bahumbug. Justin? Well, let Colin go first because I'm just filled with gratitude.

It's hard for me to think of things that annoy me. So give me some time to think about it. I like Colin go because I know perpetual hot evens machine perpetual potholes in Sioux City, Iowa.

I think any South Dakota would have would have that grievance. Now I'll give you my first one because it's connected. The decline of college football regionalism.

Yeah, you just mentioned Kevin the way that you have the Friday night lights. But of course for Americans is the Friday night lights followed by the Saturday afternoon, followed by the Sunday. Now we've got a lot of conflicted feelings about Sundays and the way they dominate America in a way that the church used to in a lot of ways and really should.

But it's that kind of that kind of pattern. Well, college football, such an important ritual on Saturdays, very much tied to history, more so than more so than the NFL is tied to history. But we're losing so much of it.

I mean, I love the Big Ten, but starting next year, I just effectively, it doesn't really exist. And there's always been a Midwestern conference. And yes, didn't you get the problem with the East Coast, with Rutgers and Maryland? But now that you've added the West

Coast, there's no identity to it anymore.

And I think that it's going to lose a lot of what college football loves. So there's my first loss of college football regionalism. It's my first grievance.

Very good. Justin, people ending sentences with the word right question mark? Oh, yes, that's on my list. Sorry, I took one of your notes in advance, right? Well done.

No, I want you to keep going on that because that was very near the top of my list. Grown people inserting the word like in their sentences and ending their sentences with right, right? And I think both of those are legitimate. If you do it, let's say once a month, correct, do it multiple times in a verbal paragraph, you have a verbal tick that you're unaware of and that is highly annoying.

Here, here, here, I stand, right? Yes. Okay, I'm going to shoot through my list. And then we'll come back to you guys.

We get to do the others. Okay. All right.

I like this. Okay. Okay.

So I'll be quick. Some of these are going to be very unpopular with our listeners. All right.

Number one, the near ubiquitous choice of restaurants to serve coke products. Oh, no. Yeah.

Now, I don't particularly like cola, but Justin knows this and you may as well, Colin, when they serve coke, my next question is, do you have mellow yellow and the response, which is I don't mellow yellow is just a Mountain Dew substitute. It's the conversion. It's amazing.

Yeah. And everyone in everyone in little parentheses here, there's a man in my church who worked for an ad agency in New York City. And he tells me that he came up with the name mellow yellow.

So there you go. Give that guy a presidential medal of freedom. I know.

And for listeners at home, we don't get together. The three of us in person very much, but we work together in Texas. And so we got to witness Kevin at a restaurant repeatedly asking waiters and waitresses for mellow yellow, them responding in the negative and Kevin being trust following.

Yes, I will sometimes, I will sometimes preface say, I'm going to ask you a question and I'm prepared to be disappointed. Do you have and that it's usually not just no, it's, I've never even heard of that. I haven't heard anybody mention that.



Do you want to, you want a pub or a tab or something? So yes, the ubiquity of coke products and not having mellow yellow. Number two, when announcers reference, he's going to attempt the potential game winning field goal. No, he's attempting the game winning field goal or it is the game.

It's not, you know, there's no potentiality. It's a potential, you know, in the timeout, but he's kicking it. Okay, you know, it's not a potential grow as a transitive verb.

I'm losing this one, but you know, you, unless you're using it to grow crops, I was taught that something grows or it can cause to grow, but grow as a transitive verb, just ever we're going to grow our church. I just, I, I don't care for it at all. Grown people saying like and write Justin, thank you, we got that one.

Here's this, this one's at the top. And because we just experienced this in our household. And I know there's some doctors out there, you're going to have a good reason for this.

But why can't we buy antibiotics over the counter? Is this a racket? I might, I mean, I will take a test. I will go into an agency like I had to be TSA pre. I will do what it takes.

There's got to be a test that I can figure out if my kids have strep and then I can go to the two, you know, CVS and get them a Moxacillin. Can we cut out two or three middlemen? Same thing with an inhaler. I have asthma.

I've had inhaler for 30 years, 35 years. And I appreciate my doctors, but I still have to go set up an appointment, get in there, get a prescription go. Can, can we trust? Can you trust me to give now? I know that, well, but if you, you might get on a Moxacillin, you might give that to your kids for 800 days in a row.

Well, yeah, you could also give them 50 ibuprofen. We also sell alcohol. People want to legalize marijuana in every state.

So give me a Moxacillin or give me death. Okay, there's one music on the iPhone splitting albums in your little music app there with the new iOS. It's been doing this for years.

It's very frustrating. Okay, I'm almost done not being able to find the old fashion light bulbs in the store. I mean, that that's that one's been, I just want the old fashion no led.

I just want the regular in Canada, you know, that has like the little filament hanging inside there. Just like this would have wanted. Just like they had on the arc people asking for tips everywhere.

That's one that's got yeah, just just turning around the like, okay, you stood there and took my order. Now I'm just going to turn this around. And you have to, of course, and it says, do you want 51020 or the little button that says, or do you hate people? Yes, I'd

like to click on that.

And then finally, why do they make gas cans without a little hole in the back of it? Because you know, when you have a gas can and you got to fill up your lawnmower, if they don't have a hole in the back, no air can get through and the whole gas can just is like, you know, it's contracting and it won't come out. It's just simple physics. So I have to get a knife and I have to cut an air.

My, you know, my kids are like, what are you doing? Look, this is, this is what's wrong with our world right now. Okay, I limited myself. There's several.

Justin, let's come back to you. Okay, well, you inspire me, Kevin, with your presence. I think at the top of my list, and I don't have many more than this, but going to the doctor's office, checking in, it's 1015 appointment, get there 1015, and they make you fill out the form.

Now it's off and on iPad. This is the same information that I have filled out every visit. And I'm not moving multiple times a year.

I would understand if you make me fill it out. Once a year, even three years would be better. Or just say, has any information changed? The same, I have the same emergency contact.

I live at the same address. People have the same profile. My family history has not changed every time sitting there.

And they're actually like, what is your great, great grandfather die of? I don't know, but it hasn't changed. And I still, yes, I give you permission to talk to other doctors about my ailments. Please stop making me fill this out.

Like, was it Nate Bergazzi who said, you know, do you guys have like a office fire here? I could keep track of this paperwork better than you can. But so that is a major dravance. Well, fine.

Over to you. So that's it. Well, and then, yeah, you, and every time you also have to fill it out electronically, and then you have to go fill it out on paper.

I don't think we even do iPads in Alabama. We're still doing paper after the electronic version you had to complete. It doesn't make, it doesn't make any sense.

The other thing, Kevin, I found myself having a different attitude about tips. I'm not talking about normal service. Yeah, right.

You're sitting down at a restaurant. I'm talking about when you're just going to the counter for something. I just done with with inflation.

My attitude has gotten worse about that. It's like inflation way up. And at the same time, I'm being asked for tips for everything.

And I just, it is very frustrating. Okay, the two, I was really on a football theme. So I suppose that was appropriate how we started, Kevin.

Stubborn coaches are a pet peeve of mine, a grievance of mine stubborn coaches. Sometimes having more information actually makes you dumber. It means we can all see that these guys have a lot of degrees to prove that statement.

We know here come the chief. Just coming out of you. Yes, exactly.

We know they can't catch the ball. We know this. We don't need more evidence of this.

But sometimes being close to a situation makes you make bad decisions. And so sometimes my lovely wife will say, Colin, don't you think the coaches know more than you do about the situation? They'll say, of course they do. But it actually makes them worse.

So when they make a decision in week 17, that any of you could have predicted they needed to make in week two is very frustrating in there. My last step because your receiver lined up in Kansas for that last part. Yeah, I was clearly across the river.

Yeah. And then the next week, he dropped a pass that was right into his hands that became an interception. And in week one, he also dropped three passes in there.

Yes, we get it. Kadarius Tony is not a good wide receiver. Why we can tell you this is Kadarius is listening.

Before you get to last one, as a chief's fan, are you pro or con the the Taylor Swift every every game? I mean, I said this at the dinner table last night. Any of us watching Travis Kelsey, he looks like a shell of his former self. He looks like he should you should be retiring.

I love Travis Kelsey. He's been so great. You know, he looks like he is in love.

And he looks like he just doesn't care on the football field anymore. Oh, girlfriend is the most famous woman on the planet. He might not care.

Exactly. And he's he's got two Super Bowl titles and he's older than Rob Gronkowski. I mean, Gronkowski has been retired for a while.

He's older than Rob. If I remember correctly, somebody can correct me on that. But I think that's the case.

And I mean, what else? And he's he's really good with media as well. His podcast with his

brother is one of the best out there for sports. I'm not a regular listener or anything, but it's very popular.

So he's got a career afterward. But my last one is maybe a little bit obscure. But I'm frustrated with Netflix making cartoon versions of shows.

And I don't mean cartoon versions in actual animation. I mean, all quite on the Western Front and all the light we cannot see. These are already you're dealing with Nazis or you're dealing with World War One.

It's really gruesome. You don't have to go above and beyond to make it seem even worse than it was. It just feels cartoonish.

And the characters is like everyone's either totally good or they're totally bad. I don't know if it's like the comic book effect or the superhero effect on historical films. Of course, a lot of people loved all quite on the Western Front.

But to me, it just felt like it was turning the whole thing into a into a cartoon. And then when all quite on the Western Front came out, I mean, excuse me, when when when all the light we cannot see came out, that was widely panned. And I think deservedly so they just didn't do a good job with it.

Both of which you are amazing books. When you started that comment, I thought you were saying they were literally doing those as cartoon. So that was yeah, I did too.

That was also the problem. No, that's why I tried to that's why I tried to clarify in there. It's not actually turning them.

It's the way that they I should say comic book. Yeah, cartoonish or comic book. Yes, the way it's it's almost grotesque in the way that it's it's not real.

Also like characters, no round characters. Yeah, that's that's that's what I mean. So that's ends my grievances.

All right, that was good. I'm glad we limited ourselves. I just looked and Taylor Swift, Travis Kelsey and Rob Gronkowski, we're all born in 1989.

Okay, so I didn't look at you. You may be right that that what what a year. Justin, what were you doing in 1989? Were you were you lightening it up in middle school basketball somewhere? I was.

Yeah, 13 years old. So I think my math is correct. Trying to live the dream in Sioux City going to get it right.

Herbert Hoover Middle School, not a lot of Hoover Middle Schools around anymore, but putting the one in Sioux City. No, they should be. All right, we are life and books and

everything.

Oh, wow, we I am overdue for a thanks to our sponsor. Crossway is Justin Cross will be very pleased with this episode so far, but not agree this not agree this crossways not agree this. Thankful for Crossway.

The surprising genius of Jesus by Peter Williams, Pete Williams, who is this something of a genius himself. He's a very smart guy, but writes books that are also very accessible. So this is a new grateful for Crossway sponsoring this.

Pete examines the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to show the genius, creativity and wisdom of Jesus is teaching and looks at in you know, often overlooked aspect. Of course, that's not always say about Jesus is that he was a great teacher or a genius in his communication, but Peter Williams uses that as an entree to look at Christ and his teaching and his work. So thank you to Crossway and look at that book, the surprising genius of Jesus speaking of books here on life and books and everything.

I want you guys to give me a favorite. Maybe it's not it's hard to say the number one, but a favorite book published in 2023 that you read. And if we have time then give me a second book that you read in this past year published from any year.

So I'm favorite books one published in the past year and one just that you read in the past year. All right, who wants to start? Let's start with you Colin. Give us both.

So book published in 2023. I'm showing it here. Andrew Wilson's remaking the world.

Just a great book, very entertaining. I mean, if you love history, you love Christianity, you're gonna love the book. So just been about this book for many years.

Yeah, so the basic idea here from our friend Andrew Wilson in in the UK is that 1970 or 7076, excuse me, changed everything with all sorts of different developments. And I remember working with Andrew on this book and I pointed out to him that, hey, you know, a lot of Americans are going to read your book and we think of a certain thing in 1776, but doesn't really emerge in your book until about page 300 or so you might want to change this up a little bit. But that's the point is that that book shows how many other different technological exploration philosophical political religious phenomena can be traced back to that era of 1776 and how many of them set the stage for how our world would change, including in ways that have led us to become increasingly post Christendom.

And so great book publishing and also from our friends at Cross Wayne has won many awards this year, deservedly so, remaking the world, Andrew Wilson. 1776 is when America and SEC began, I think, both of them at the same time. Something like that.

Something like that. All right, what's your other book that you read in the book? So my

other book is yeah, so shout out to our friend Ivan Mesa here. Robert Caro is the passage of power.

Was my favorite book that I that I read this year that was published this year. Now, where is that in the in the in the sequence? It's the most recent one, so it's the assassination. I mean, I think even look, as somebody who writes history, people don't know about Robert Caro.

Amazing. Journalist by background. Yeah.

Yeah, so I tend to I tend to appreciate journalists or novelists who write history. Probably that's just because of of my own bias there, but they tend to be really good with narratives. And if you're like Caro, I mean, he's probably known as being the most like obsessive reporter ever.

I mean, it'd be hard to top him. And so his exhaustive treatment of multiple subjects, but for decades of his life, Lyndon Johnson in particular. So he's he's he's chronicled all these different eras of Lyndon Johnson's life.

And then the more the most recent book that he's produced the passage of power is about his time when he when the Kennedy administration has is is looking to usher him out of office in preparation for the reelection campaign in 1964. And how just down and out he was after having been this lion of the Senate, this person who was in charge and had accomplished so much and risen from such low low heights to such, you know, low levels to such high heights. And then but this is about his experience in the assassination, how rapidly things changed, how well in a lot of ways he hailed the situation that we could take for granted.

And then what it was like for him to navigate immediately going into reelection as president and how incredibly complicated that was, especially with Robert Kennedy, who just hated Johnson's guts. And so this is just one of the most impressive feats ever of political journalism or of history. And the fascinating aspect here is that Carol is is aged and still working obsessively on this project.

But we're running out of time because if he does not finish, we'll never see the most recent work, which carries us through Lyndon Johnson's experience through Vietnam and his decision not to run for reelection, which of course is massive in American history. So hope he gets there but passage of power amazing book by Robert Caro. All right, well, I will use that as a segue to my two books before we get to Justin.

So I put out my top 10 book list last week. And one of the ones I really have enjoyed published in 2023 came out in the spring is the biography of Gerald R. Ford. So we'll stick in the same time period and political genre.

Now, yes, it helps if you're going to read and I admit, I put out my list and I haven't quite

finished it yet. But you know, it's 800 pages. So I gave myself, okay, it's basically I can put it on the list.

It does help to be from Grand Rapids, if you're going to have an 800 page biography of Gerald Ford. So it does help to say, Oh, I know that street. I know that part of town.

I understand something about this district that he represented was the fifth district now the third district. And did you know, Justin that he was born in Nebraska? Norfolk? Omaha, Omaha, born in Omaha, Nebraska. So I should say Gerald Ford was definitely more of a Republican moderate.

You know, he sparred with Reagan over that and on some social issues, his wife more so than than Ford, but his wife was pro choice. You know, the lines were drawn differently. So I'm not I'm not a, you know, loving the book doesn't mean I'm agreeing with everything about Ford's political philosophy.

He was definitely a moderate. And yet, it is really remarkable that I mean, when he was vice president and then president, he had, you know, a month honeymoon as president where his approval rating went from 71% to, you know, 40 something percent literally overnight because of the pardon of Nixon. And of course, there's a lot in the book about why he pardoned Nixon and, you know, lots of hard facts and then some speculation or psychology.

But what what is remarkable is he was, you know, the word decent gets thrown around, you know, it seems like kind of damning with faint praise, but he was a really decent person. And it was that, you know, kind of era where you worked across the aisle. And some of what made him maybe less effective as a president is his whole, you know, political career had been as the minority leader.

He always wanted to be the major, the speaker of the house, but that never was going to happen. The Republicans were in the minority, a decided minority. So his own personality and his own skill set was to work across the aisle.

He, you know, to have integrity to, but so many things that are really refreshing because we don't find them in many leaders. And that's like he was happy to, you know, he received criticism. Well, he didn't hold grudges against people.

People could hardly find scandals against him, even though he went to, you know, Episcopal churches, he did have a very devout faith. They talk about the Bible study went to every Friday about he and his wife praying every night. And it does seem like he genuinely believed that he was duty bound in his conscience to pardon Nixon, even though he understood this was going to be certainly in the short term.

And people questioned the timing of it for sure, but was going to be politically just absolute kryptonite. You know, in historians still debate that. But I think by and large

historians have come around to say at his own personal expense, he did something that was in the better interest of the country long term.

But it's just a, it's a, it's a well written book. It's sympathetic to, to Ford. Sometimes there's a little, I think, liberal slant to what they're sim, what the author is sympathetic to.

But it, it gives some insight into him without being too speculative. So Gerald Ford biography. And the book that I not published this year, that I read this year way back in, in January is thoughts on preaching by James Alexander.

So this is Archibald Alexander's son. So old Princeton. So this is 19th century.

And it is, I think you can get it at the Reformation Heritage books, though, I don't think they're the ones who published it. I have it just back here. But it's a very different kind of preaching book.

It's almost like, it's like Pascal's Poiseis, where he just gives little thoughts. So the bulk of the book are, you know, more than 100 little thoughts, some of them are a couple sentences and sort of aphorisms. And some of them go on for a page or two.

But I found it very challenging, refreshing. It's the sort of book preachers out there. It's not going to help you put a sermon together.

It's not a how to book. And we need those kinds of manuals on what does an exegetical sermon look like. But I would say in particular, if you're already very reformed, very theological, and you need a book from a smart, reformed theological guy, like the Princetonians were, who's going to kind of jar you a little bit to say, are you leaving room for some spontaneity? Are you preaching in a way that ordinary people can understand? Are you more concerned about being politically or intellectually savvy than you are with having, you know, fire and function in your preaching? All of that was really good and challenging.

So James Alexander thoughts on preaching. Justin, your books. Yeah, so I'm going to mention two history books, which won't be surprising.

I feel a little bit badly that I'm not mentioning a Christian book. If I, just to give a tip of the hat, two books came out last month, both with the exact same title, called Lord Jesus Christ, one by Dan trier in the Zondervan series, and one by branding Crow in the Lexum series. Both on Christology, both by Reformed theologians, both know how to do exegesis and do it, and are sensitive to biblical theology, come down in a couple different places.

But I haven't finished either of those and I'm dipping into them now. So if I had to include a Christian book that would maybe be a tie for those two, but the first one, this is not



going to shock you guys, but Edward Ayers, A-Y-R-E-S, American Visions, the United States from 1800 to 1860. So Ayers is a well-known historian specializing Civil War 19th century, and this is a fascinating book.

I didn't know quite what to expect when I picked it up, but he's basically looking at those first 60 years of the 19th century, and not just focusing upon the political, but looking at what was happening in terms of literature, what was happening in terms of scientific inventions, what was happening in terms of abolition, and just profiling in space of three or four pages, Herman Melville, who was he, how did he go about writing or Edward, Edgar Allan Poe, those sort of figures. It's really like a beautiful little compilation book. Ayers is a great writer, a great thinker, a great synthesizer.

So I think if you read that single book, you would have a really robust engaging overview of those first 60 years of the 19th century. And then the second book that I read that was not published this year, but was published some years past, was by Gerald Postner, Case Closed, Lee Harvey Oswald, and the assassination of JFK. So we didn't coordinate this in advance, we'd be talking about John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Gerald Ford, but maybe that's why the three of us are friends.

So somebody mentioned on Twitter some TV producer that Posner's book would have made for one of the best movies, but they couldn't get funding for it because the conclusion is Lee Harvey Oswald was basically a loser nut who acted alone and killed Kennedy. And that's not the story that people want to hear. They're more hungry for the mafia or Cuba was involved or Russia was involved or the CIA or there's some theories, the LBJ himself assassinated him.

There's a theory that the driver turned around and shot him. There's alien theories. And Posner is sort of an investigative journalist, reporter, historian, I suppose you could say, who just looks at every single conspiracy theory that's ever been advocated and pretty decisively shuts them down.

And I think that you get to the end of the book, we think that's a title case closed. Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Nobody else was involved.

And none of the other conspiracy theories hold up. So it's it's satisfying to read a book about something that's so controversial and so multifaceted and feel like I don't really need to read another book on that subject because it's so definitive and so well done and so careful and so compelling. So those are my two 19th century book in the 20th century book.

Gerald Ford served on the Warren Commission. Good. I had forgotten about that.

And was commissioned there to write a biography of Lee Harvey Oswald, which was not a real bestseller. It kind of just said what was publicly already known. But actually, in this

biography, they say Ford was initially maybe the member most willing to consider alternative theories, Cuba involvement or others, but came around to defend the Commission's finding out.

I'm curious, Colin, what does Caro say in the book? About about the assassination? Yeah. I don't think he I mean the the the impression that Caro leaves in the book is that this was just utter complete total chaos shock. Really his focus I mean doesn't say anything about Johnson's involvement that I recall in that.

I mean just doesn't say anything besides that Lee Harvey Oswald did it. Not that not that I recall. I mean the the force of it is I will say this.

If you were looking for motivations for Johnson to participate in it, the book would supply you with a lot of motivations because the hatred levels and the like inactivity levels with Johnson and the Kennedy administration were severe, far more severe than anybody would have understood publicly at the time and probably much more so than even people have acknowledged before Caro. So if you're looking for motivations, he would have had a million different motivations, but considering the complexities of how to navigate the situation afterward with kicking out all the Kennedy administration handling Jackie, handling Bobby, you know, it just doesn't really add up that he would have been a genius beyond anybody's comprehension to pull it off. And in the end, it didn't really work, meaning that one of the reasons he was you know, step didn't go for re-elections because of Bobby, you know, or threats there.

Yeah. And his posture points out they would I mean LBJ would not have been involved with anything that would have had it happened in the state of Texas, which is a good point. Texas looked bad, made the Dallas police look bad, made them look like they've got a bunch of nuts running around.

So good point. One thing is we're talking about presidents here in this time period that we all know, but you just need to be reminded of it is impossible for any president to have all of the necessary attributes and skills. They think about I mean, you said LBJ, I mean, what he did, whether he liked his programs or not, I mean, as a senator, I mean, he was the master of the Senate.

And he had some qualities that translated, I mean, just set politics aside in policy, but he had some qualities that could have made him an effective president, kind of like Nixon was, you know, more of a dogged personality than Ford for sure, a more of a visionary in some ways. And yet, no one, especially by the end, wanted to work with Nixon. But even before that, he was paranoid, he didn't take criticism.

So, and then Ford was the sort of person you would love to have and play golf with and the sort of person you'd love to have work on a committee and bring people together. And yet the biography shows sometimes when he tried to find the middle of the road,

instead of making everyone happy, it made no one happy. So, it just there's there's a lot that goes into any career, but in particular, the president of the United States that I ever tell you guys my my Edgar Allan Poe story, I didn't meet him.

But when I was in, when I was in high school, I was in an American lit class. And one of the assignments was read 800 pages of American literature. And so, just not wanting to go to the library and look at how many pages here, I just thought, I'm just going to get this, I found a big, thick volume 800 pages that collected works of Edgar Allan Poe.

So it was a very dark, very dark semester. I read everything that Edgar Allan Poe has written. And I still think the rendition on The Simpsons of The Raven with James Earl Jones is quite well done.

So thank you for those books. We have one more segment before we finish, but I want to mention also Desiring God for sponsoring LBE. And I wrote a blur for this upcoming book, but I want to read the one from Sinclair Ferguson.

This is for a book that Tony Ranky has put together, our friend. Ask Pastor John Podcast. And this is pulled from APJ 750 Bible answers to life's most important questions.

This is a book that Tony has done an amazing labor to do these years and years and thousands of hours of John Piper dealing with nitty gritty pastoral practical questions in Tony pulling together. So here's what Sinclair Ferguson says, we owe a debt of grateful thanks to John Piper for the labor of love and devotion of time and pastoral care. This book reflects into his longtime colleague Tony Ranky, who from an archive of over two million words has expertly selected and edited these pages.

Here is one of those rare contemporary books that can be described as should be in every Christian home into which we can turn again and again for guidance from God's word, encouragement in Christ and challenge to walk according to the spirit. Thank you to DG. Last part here, I want us to quickly interview each other.

So I want a question from each of us to the other two. And I think we just have time for one and let's make it somewhat Christmas related. So here's my question for both of you.

We'll start with Colin. I want to know a favorite present you received as a child and as an adult, probably harder to come up with one as an adult, a favorite Christmas present. We did not know of these questions ahead of time, so we're just off the top of our head.

Colin, a favorite Christmas present as a child and as an adult. Yeah, shout out to my dad here. As a child, I remember, do you remember those slot car race cars? Oh, yeah.

Those little tracks you go around and get a little controller and you can go faster or slower. They worked 35% of the time. Exactly.

And part of you didn't really want them to work because you wanted them to fly off the side of the track or whatever. I don't remember how old I was, but I remember my dad putting together one of those and putting it on a board and writing something about my name on the racetrack or something like that. That was a great gift.

I remember that very much. As an adult, I might have to come back on this one, but interesting, the older I get, the more I just appreciate my wife buying me clothes. In part, it's because how should we say this politically, my body keeps changing with time in certain ways? Getting taller? Getting taller? I mean, I don't know how this is going to work, but you're getting swole.

Yeah, exactly. Swollen closer. Yeah.

I just appreciate, I just appreciate things that I wouldn't buy for myself because they might be a little bit more expensive, but they look nice because it's my wife buying them and she's a lot savvier than I am, but also that I use them. And so I remember them when I put them on, I remember, oh, that was kind of my wife to get me that. So very boring, not like a little race car when you're young, but I appreciate it.

Did you buy your seer sucker suits being from the sound? I don't have any seer sucker suits, but I do need a new suit. Okay. So maybe I'll go for this year's sucker.

Who knows? All right, Justin. And we have to answer our own questions. So I'll answer the question.

Oh, I thought this was just for Colin. So I wasn't thinking through on this spot. Yeah, when I was a kid, my, I used to wear a lot of costumes, so probably like a cowboy costumes.

Yeah, I'd like to dress up as Elvis or a cowboy or one time I dressed up as Jesus and kind of walked the neighborhood. I asked, you grew up Baptist Presbyterian Methodist. Oh, okay, even I get it.

Yeah, I kind of the neighborhood boy, Jesse, Larvick, if you're listening, Jesse, I think Jesse went into youth ministry, but I asked him if he'd nailed me to the house. I think I was wearing like a toga. So a strange childhood, but yeah, those were the oldest years and yeah, it explains a lot.

Probably as an adult, I mean, I'm just so boring now as an adult, I like restaurant gift cards and I like books. And I appreciate, I don't like to buy clothing for myself. So if my wife buys me clothes, I'm with Colin.

Lauren hasn't bought me clothes, but my own life. Hint, hint, Leah. Yeah.

And our kids will sometimes buy me diet, my own dude too. So that's always much

appreciated. Do instead of do zero or Mel yellow zero, which are both both are acceptable.

Okay, and are these gift cards to Olive Garden? Yeah, to Robba's. Yeah, I'll be a little Culver's in there. Got to be a little Culver's.

Yeah. Little Caesars. Little Caesars.

You've been generous. You can tell. Here's another here's another grief.

It's just a circle back. Now I can't eat Olive Garden because I'm celiac now and that's not a good celiac place. It turns out but yeah, when yeah, the the sort of you eat at Olive Garden.

Well, yeah, that was the fanciest place one might go to if Ponderosa was busy. You went to the Olive Garden. So the people for whom Outback or Olive Garden are just too hoy puloy.

I'm sorry. Well, that was that is one of the greatest Midwest versus everybody tweets. I think it was from their account.

It sounds like their account when they when they say to Midwesterners, you guys really used to go to Olive Garden is like, no, no, no, no, no, only for fancy occasions. I know. What's the use to? Yeah, exactly.

I will fight anybody who denigrates Olive Garden. I mean, last time I went there, it was like \$25 for a pasta plate. So in your cowboy in your cowboy costume, high noon, you will fight anybody in the neighborhood.

We had friends visiting. Shout out to Mark and Lisa. If you listen to this who are from our first church in Iowa in Orange City, and they were visiting, we had lunch with him yesterday, and they were talking about political season in Iowa, which Iowans actually, a lot of them enjoy.

It is the system we've devised. If you want to have the most powerful office in the world, first step, visit all 99 counties in Iowa. That is a prerequisite.

So anyways, they were talking about all of these candidates go to the pizza ranch. You have to go to the pizza ranch if you want to be president. So they're like, yeah, I had a wonderful time with Casey DeSantis at the pizza ranch or one of these places.

So good Midwestern flair. So my favorite, one of my favorites as a kid, I also got the racetrack. I like that.

I bought it for my son a couple years ago, and it seemed to work 3% of the time. So it didn't work. Yeah, it's going downhill.

But yeah, various transformers, I got some of the really big ones. Like, you know, I don't remember. They weren't the famous ones, but certainly some transformer Christmases.

And then more recently, you know, there's a painting, and I'm not an art guy, but there's a painting that I always had liked by a contemporary artist that's a painting of the 10 lepers. And it's really striking in its detail. And it has, you know, a picture of one of the lepers looking at his hands as the other nine are heading on their way.

And it's just striking to look at and, you know, the story that he's going to go back and thank Jesus while the other nine don't. So I like this painting. But I can never find it because you couldn't really find just a, you know, \$75 print of it.

So it's very expensive. And my wife and her mother surprised me two or three years ago and bought, I don't know if it's an original or what it is, but a big, you know, canvas and got it framed and it's hanging up in our dining room now. And that was, you know, my wife was spending the money that I make.

But nevertheless, it was a, it was a great present. And grateful for that surprise. I assume that Jesus isn't in the painting.

He is not good. He is not in the painting. It's a great conversation piece too.

And we have people over and look at, you know, what do you and hardly anyone, I don't know if anyone's guessed when they first look at it, what it is, but once you know it, it makes sense. And now as Joe can I say, I put my kids in a chair and when they're not grateful, you look at that painting. And you remember, you be grateful.

All right, Justin, what's your Christmas question for us? My Christmas question is, if you could have any homemade meal at Christmas time, what would it be? And I'm particularly interested, Kevin, in what you would say. So given we're not in the new heavens and the new earth, I have to abide by my gluten constraints. A homemade Christmas meal, I'm very, yeah, I'm very plain and boring.

I would love, this is what we have at Thanksgiving. I would love my wife to make a turkey. I would love mashed potatoes.

I would love gluten-free gravy. In my wife makes some gluten-free oatmeal butterscotch crumble cookies, which is delicious. I don't, here's it just, there's almost no end of the things I don't like when it comes to food.

I don't really like chocolate. So I don't like, I don't love chocolate chips, but I like butterscotch chips. So I would do all that and maybe, yeah, a tall glass of Mountain Dew.

Maybe if we're splurging some alcohol-free Welch's grape juice, we'd like to pass that around. It's got a little bit of a bite to it. And if, and then maybe a snicker salad.

Nice. I genuinely thought you were going to say Doritos and gummy bears. So that's interesting.

Well, okay, I was trying to show some minor class. I do enjoy. Yeah, people make fun, but there are so many varieties of tortilla chips.

You really can have various meals throughout the day with tortilla chips and cheddar cheese cubes or even cheese curds with a little Midwestern flair. Are they squeaking your mouth? I got to say, there's always a Midwestern flair to this show, but this has got to be the most Midwestern episode we've ever done. All right, what's your homemade meal, Colin, that someone's making for you? I mean, you know, in terms of all the Christmas things that you talked about there, the stuffing, turkey, gravy, mashed potatoes, all that sort of stuff.

The only thing I would add, I've got it. I mean, look, I got to add the Norwegian part in here. I got to add lefza in here.

So you take that, you know, that old potato pancake and you get the butter, you get the cinnamon, you get the sugar in there. That's a wonderful thing. You already brought up snicker salad.

I mean, that's a given in there, but a little taste of the old country. You got to have some lefza in there as well. That's good.

If you want to have a salad, put Snickers in it because it's basically what it's putting with Snickers in it. That was, I didn't grow up with that in Michigan. Cool.

Yeah, cool. Snickers, apples. I mean, there's some variations, of course.

Yeah. But when I came when I moved to Iowa, you know, would you like a salad? No, thanks. What about a Snicker salad? Well, I could try one of those, but we did grow up with Jello.

I should mention my mom 17 layer Jello. This is an all-day process. Layer after layer, you have to pour a new layer.

It's a work of art and also a fabulous side salad. Is it nice? Yeah, my late grandmother would always make a red and green Jello sort of pineapple kind of salad. Get the fruit out.

But it was subtle. It was mostly Jello. It was just sort of a compliment.

But anyway, yeah, that's a good one. Colin, I'm getting guessed that you have never read Larry Y. Woody's book for Crossway, called The Invention of Lefza. No, I haven't.

But I'm kind of shocked. I'm a little shocked that I haven't. Out of print, but I'll see if I can

get to come.

Oh, man. It goes to dig one up, dig one up, and the old archives there at Crossway. All right.

What's your meal, Justin? Yeah, I mean, the traditionals. But I think ham has replaced, I've never been. I've always tolerated Turkey.

It's good as long as it's covered with a lot of gravy. But this year at Thanksgiving we had, ham is the main with turkey as a little bit of a side. And I think the same would be great for Christmas.

And of course, an infinite amount of mashed potatoes and gravy and throw in some pecan pie with homemade whipped cream for dessert. You'd have a happy Midwestern boy. You know, the first time I saw, is it close encounters that movie, you know, with the famous mashed potato tower that you remember that in the movie, right? It's like, isn't he making Devil's Tower or something where the spaceship's going to come down? It's a very famous scene.

And I was just thinking, yeah, that's a lot of mashed potatoes. I hope he's wasting this chat was wasting those mashed potatoes. Somebody worked hard enough with your extraterrestrial visitors eat the mashed potatoes.

Okay, bring us home on a really strong note with your question. Strong, strong note. This is one of my favorite questions.

Christmas question. Christmas question. What is your Christmas place, past or present? Think about a location, think about a surroundings, think about the smells, the looks, who's there, all those sorts of things.

When you think about Christmas, what is that place? Again, it can be past or present. What's the location could be church, could be home, could be whatever. Well, I can start this off in a way that will make you happy, Colin, and that is in good old South Dakota.

Yes. In the little town of Redfield, where my paternal grandparents lived in a little house, and then we would wake up and head over to Hitchcock, South Dakota, to my aunts and uncles and cousins and open presents through the day on their farmhouse. So many South Dakota Christmas memories.

My mom's side of the family, they were in Littleton, Colorado, so it was harder to get out there for Christmas time. So virtually every Christmas of my growing up years till I was 16 was spent in the great state of South Dakota. All right, Kevin.

Oh boy, yeah, I've got lots of when we would drive, always seem like through the snow to, you know, backcountry roads to my grandparents' house for Christmas. But I will say



a table, both the table in the house I grew up in and the table that we have now, because the first thing we'd always do, you know, like a lot of people, a lot of set traditions. And the very first thing you do is the family is around the table and we do the advent wreath.

And so we did this in my family growing up. We now do it with our kids. We go around each child.

Now we have more children than candles. So we can't, they all have to, you know, the older ones do the fire thing, but each child goes around and they pick a verse they want to read from one of the traditional lessons, or they can pick a song from the hymnal that we want to sing some Christmas carols. And so we go around, it's usually earlier in the morning than the parents would like, because the kids are eager to get up.

So that that's a sweet memory from growing up. And now we do that before just the tornado of present opening. But we would always do that.

And then we'd go in my parents' house. I always remember they're still in that house in our living room, white carpet, you could never enter the living room, except on very special occasions. It was like the the holy of holies in there.

But there was the Christmas tree overflowing with presents and you sit there. So wonderful memories of that. And it's hard to have us make it back there very often now, let alone altogether, but still remember that fondly.

And then we try to do the same sorts of things. When we have, I mean, we have nine kids, and there's even if you get, you know, three or four presents, that multiplier goes quickly. So, you know, there are just a lot of presents and chaos.

But it's a glorious sweet time. Colin, I'll close this with with three options. Corn palace, corn palace, corn palace, not quite close enough, though.

I think either of my grandparents Lutheran Church candlelight service on Christmas Eve, Silent Night, or I think just a few blocks away. I think about my great grandparents, little house in Brookings, South Dakota, my grandfather was the oldest of nine born right after my great grandparents arrived in South Dakota from Denmark. And so for most of my childhood, all of the siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles would cram into this house or as many who could come.

We'd carol across the streets and things like that, a gift exchange, all that kind of stuff with my great grandparents family. So I think about that or right just down the road from where I grew up in on the farm outside of Madison, South Dakota, that's where we'd have Christmas with my mom's parents. And I just think about my aunts and uncles, my cousins, the Christmas tree, the food, the jello salad already mentioned, the fire, the music, and it's a special memory.

It's, you know, it's sad when you think about these places that you, you can't ever go back. But as you look back, it does make you long ultimately for a new heavens and a new earth and things that will never pass away and never fade and a joy that's even unmatched by the most joyous memories that we have on Christmas. So those are the places I think of.

Great way to end us thankful for you brothers and your friendship and a Merry Christmas to you and to all of our listeners. Thanks for listening to Life and Books and Everything, the Ministry of Clearly Reformed. You can get episodes like this and other resources at [clearlyreform.org](http://clearlyreform.org). So until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever and read a good book.