

OpenTheo

Lessons Learned with Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

The band gets back together to talk about lessons learned from the two biggest events of the past two years: Covid and the war in Ukraine. Without pretending to be experts in infectious diseases or in international affairs, the three amigos explore what we can learn about humility, evil, tradeoffs, and prayer. The episode concludes with an update on what everyone has been reading over the past couple months.

Timestamps:

Intro and Sponsor [0:00-3:13]

Lessons After (?) the Pandemic [3:14-22:58]

Lessons (So Far?) From Ukraine [22:59-36:28]

Lessons (Right Now) From Books We're Reading [36:27-47:51]

Transcript

(upbeat music) - Readings and salutations. Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

You can see, well, you can't see if you're listening to this, but if you are listening, no doubt your spidey sense can tell you that I'm joined here by Justin and Colin. Welcome. Good to have you guys here.

And we're gonna keep this issue short because we have so many pressing issues ahead of us for this day, but really the reason is many technological difficulties. And usually it is one of us, and today it's not that one person, way to go, Justin, but it was me, something with the firewall here at the church receives some new signature update or something or other. And it decided that every kind of platform like squad cast needs to be dismantled.

- Tell people more, Kevin, I'm sure they're very interested in the network conditions of your church. - I know, well, I just, - So the leader on fire, right? - Yeah, people will wanna

know because in order to make this possible, we had to shut it down. So right now is the moment for all cyber attacks.

Although by the time you're listening to this, the moment has passed, sorry hackers. All right, now we have only 30 minutes left after that wonderful update on network connectivity and firewalls, which I don't really understand. So we are glad to have Crossway sponsoring this episode, probably one of the best episodes ever, already off to a great start.

- Easily in the top 30, I would think. - Easily, easily. It will be right up there with the John Piper or the Tim Keller episode.

And I'm really excited about this book by Carl Truman. I imagine many of our listeners have read the big book that came out. Now this is a, but it's not just a, it's not in a bridge, it's a newly written book called "Strange New World", how thinkers and activists redefined identity and sparked this sexual revolution.

So the big book, "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self", which has been widely read and deservedly so, this is a more concise presentation and application of that same material. So it's not just taking three chapters and republishing it, but Carl reworked this and this is really gonna be helpful for churches, for book stalls, for people who said, maybe 400 plus pages of these philosophers is too much, but I can do something more digestible. So please do check that out and also releasing this week.

There's a study guide in a video study featuring video from Carl who is just a handsome Brit, isn't he? - He is a Brit. - I'm not sure I'm sure I'm sure I'll answer this question. - He has a Brit.

He has a handsome hairdo, increasingly so. All right, from the ridiculous to the sublime, we're gonna talk about books in just a bit, but okay, where do we start? Something just not controversial. Let's talk about COVID for a few minutes.

Maybe, maybe we are coming back to normal. I think most parts of the country here in the US are very coming back to normal, although just yesterday I read some article that said, the new Almond Grand 2.0 variant Mason, yet a sixth wave to the United States. So I anticipate we will be hearing about COVID for many moons yet to come.

But if perhaps we're moving into some normalcy, two years on, what lessons can we draw? And not in particular lessons about epidemiology, though one of the lessons might be that we could all pretend a little bit less to be experts in epidemiology. And not just the lessons that we can get from hindsight, ah, we should have thought this two years ago. But I'm thinking more, what are some spiritual lessons? What are some leadership lessons? What should we be thinking about that may help us moving forward, not just with pandemics, but just leadership or as Christians or in the church? What are some

reflections we have two years on thinking about COVID? What have we learned? Colin, give us some wisdom.

- Yeah, so I guess this is not gonna be a surprise to the people listening to the podcast. Of course, this was a COVID podcast two years ago, and when we started it. And also to people who've read and rediscover church, but I have been struck by the importance of the weekly gathering.

And not just the weekly gathering, but all the other gatherings as well. And you don't, when you've been doing something, your whole life and Christians have been doing it for as long as anybody can remember and a couple thousand years beyond that, you just, you don't know how important that thing is because it's just part of the furniture of life. But I've seen so many things that suffered, leadership that suffered, relationships that suffered, connections, spiritual life, Bible reading.

So fascinating that we had so much more time to read the Bible. And yet there was less Bible reading happening. Why? Because it's our affections are stirred by the preaching of God's word.

Our motivation, we're motivated to study the Bible when we're in groups together. And so I'll go to my grave someday thinking that so much of the difficulties we faced in 2020, politically, spiritually, racially, on and on and on, related to the fact that we couldn't be together as a society without things like sports as an example that bring us together, concerts, things like that. But especially because churches could not or did not gather.

And that's not a, I'm not making up a political statement about what people should have done in light of that. I'm simply observing the difficulties of a pandemic that particularly seem to target indoor gatherings, like church for most of us. So that's what I go back thinking of.

Wow, I don't take that for granted at any level, spiritually, practically, and otherwise for the church. Yeah, that's really good. I'll just piggyback on that and add to that and then add one more.

But you're absolutely right. And I've reflected before, I think even offline with the three of us, that one of the reasons we've seen splintering in so many different places is the fact that we haven't been able to be together. Now, some of these things were already in place and some of the issues, political, racial, otherwise, were bound to be difficult.

So it's not one cause. But I've thought many times how different things might have been if in the last two years, just thinking even in church circles, in wider evangelicalism, if leaders who normally would have interacted with each other at conferences, would have been at gatherings. And you know what it's like? Sometimes you go to those and it's your close buddies and you're all, but sometimes you get invited things and you're sort

of a half step away from the other folks there.

And you just meet people and you have face-to-face conversations and it makes things so much different. And not to mention all the other things you said, just the cultural connection points that we were missing. And we always pray a few of us and some of the elders and pastors before the service.

And we're now praying, "Lord, may we not take for granted what we missed?" And now it doesn't take long before you feel again like, "Yeah, we just, yep, we go to church and we have this, and this is what we can always look forward to when you didn't have it, or you had it in a very limited capacity, boy, you missed it." And so, Lord, make that our prayer. Lord, give us a continuing sense of urgency and the grace that we have to gather together and to see believers and shake their hands and give them a hug and hear the preaching of the Word. And I remember the first time after more than a year of going to the back of the church to shake people's hands like a pastor does when they walk out.

And I even said to my people, "It's not always been my favorite thing to do. You're tired, you preach, you're ready to get a rest." And then you have 30 to 40 minutes of talking and conversation with people. But I told my congregation how much I missed that.

And I was almost in metaphorical, dutch tears in the back to shake people's hands, to actually see them and to give them a hug and to say, "How are you doing? How is your back? What's going on with your family? How is your grandson?" And for them to say, "Pastor, good word today." It was so meaningful, these things that we take for granted. I have one more thought, but Justin, I'll let you jump in. If you have a COVID lesson, then we'll maybe come back around the horn one time.

Yeah, I think two things come to my mind about looking back on COVID and what we've learned and haven't learned. You mentioned the cliché, hindsight's 20/20. We all throw that around.

But I do think that's an important thing to think about. When you're in the midst of it, you don't have the hindsight. And the three of us, one of the things that draws us together in terms of our friendship is our interest in history.

And we know that when you're in the middle of history, you can know a lot of things that are going on, but it's very difficult to interpret them from a big picture standpoint without the benefit of time. So what does that mean when you're actually in the war zone, in the fog of war? I think that it means, in part, you should just cultivate the virtues of humility and patience and not zigging and zagging and being tossed and turned, just realizing like it's going to take some time to figure this out. And there may be very strident voices to the right of you, to the left of you.

There may be experts warring and we're just in such a limited capacity as non-experts.

We mean we need to make decisions, but there's going to be so much that we don't know. So I want to just remind myself the next time I'm in the fog of war, whether it's a literal war, a metaphorical war, it's an outbreak or it's a crisis that I think that there's wisdom in cultivating in peacetime the sort of virtues that you'll need for wartime.

And so the people who probably were healthiest spiritually were people who were prepared spiritually, living lives that bore the fruit of the spirit. I think another lesson for me is that pastors need to be proactive in terms of their leadership. And by pastors, I don't just mean the people who preach, but the elders of local churches need to be moving towards people in terms of shepherding.

And I think one of my negative defaults as an elder has been, it looks like things are going well. It doesn't seem like we're in a crisis right now. Let's just kind of keep steady state.

And I think we just need to be moving towards people or people are going to be moving away or secretly struggling with bitterness or a divisive spirit. And just to be moving towards our people proactively with leadership, with guidance, bringing them back to the first things, the most important things, because all of us as fallen, sinful people are prone to wander and prone to wander in different ways with different temptations. So those are two things that come to my mind.

Yeah, let me just add those are really good to the first point, Justin, because I was going to say something similar. COVID has been both a symptom of and an accelerator of the lack of trust in experts. So that was already there.

And COVID just seemed to do everything to confirm why you don't trust experts and media and media and media. All right, you can look back. And again, you understand two years ago in the fog of war to use that metaphor, lots of things happening, but six months on a year, there were certain things that were known.

And now you're just seeing how much everywhere things were driven by agendas that were other than quote, the science. So that that's part of it. And what what what how I reflect on it as a pastor, and this may sound like a strange lesson.

But I think for pastors or other Christian leaders, we need to be okay with sometimes not bringing everything up to the highest spiritual plane. What I mean by that is, all along the way in the pandemic, if you say you're a pastor, okay, I'm pastor, you have to make decisions about how much you're going to enforce a mask mandate. Do you enforce a mask mandate? Do you meet? Do you not meet? What is what if your your municipality is telling you to not meet? Do you they're telling you to wear a mask? How do you understand these things? All of those determinations have multiple factors involved.

You are making some decision about how serious is COVID? You know, is it the sort of

thing that somebody breathes on you? And you're you're a corpse by the end of the day, like some of the stories you hear about, you know, the 1918 influenza. You're having to make some deliberation, adjudication about do these masks work? Are these masks saving people? So you have to make a lot of non spiritual determinations. Now there are certainly lots of spiritual considerations about the value of meeting together about seeing each other's faces, about singing, about worship.

And then on the other hand, people would say, well, the value of loving our neighbor as ourselves and being in convenience so that we can save another person's life. So I understand the impulse because, you know, pastors, everyone leading had to make hard decisions. Are we meeting or not? Are how vigorous are we going to be enforcing mask mandates or not? And so I think the instinct some of us have is either to just vacillate because we're used to being able to make decisions as Christians that more or less kind of you just work by consensus and they give a little they give a little and we all come to some sort of middle ground and just realize with COVID that wasn't going to happen in a lot of places in most places.

You weren't going to just give a little give a little here we go. We kind of all agree on it. No, they're very strong opinions.

And sometimes the worst, well, often the worst leadership is no leadership at all, just to think that we're going to I'm their leader and I follow them. But even when leaders did make those difficult decisions, I think sometimes there was an impulse, we need to bring this all the way up to the highest spiritual level. So for example, if you decided mask wearing was really important and you told your people, this is how you love your neighbor.

Or if you decided that mask wearing was was a big mistake and you told people, this is about defending our freedoms as Christians. Now, once you put those sort of decisions in such high spiritual language, it's very difficult for people who might disagree. You're telling people, if you don't wear mask, you don't love your neighbor.

Good Christians do it this way. And that happens all over the map. And so I think sometimes good leadership is to say, look, we understand there are very different opinions on this and we understand your reading different things and everyone's reading and everyone has it as best as we can figure this is what we're doing and why we're doing it and we're asking you to bear with us if you've come to a different conclusion.

Now, that's not going to make everyone happy, but I think acknowledging one, there are trade-offs. Sometimes you can just acknowledge, I know that this is burdensome for some people. I know that some of you disagree with this.

Some of you would have made a decision differently. At least you're acknowledging that rather than sort of pushing everyone away who might have come to a different decision

as not being as spiritual as you are. And I think that's an important lesson for pastors that sometimes you just have to say, it was a really hard decision.

I'm not 100% sure that we're making the right decision, but for these three reasons, here's why we're doing what we're doing. And you may have two or three other reasons that we're asking you to bear with us as we move forward in the best way that we know how. So oddly enough, Kevin, one of the ways that you establish your leadership and credibility as a leader is by acknowledging that you can't know everything.

And that's one way to also not abuse our spiritual authority is by using those categories in ways that are not not clearly demonstrated. So an example would be, let's take the strong weak argument of Romans, and let's also do the love your neighbor. The problem is after two years of this pandemic, I still don't know who the strong and who the weakest most to be.

And I don't know what the loving your neighbor option is supposed to be. Because I'm sure one person would say, well, clearly, it's wearing a mask and having mask mandates. Okay, I understand that.

But no, no, no, it's ending mask mandates because they're not being effective because it's harming my neighbor who owns a restaurant. Right. I think that's what you're reading.

Yes, can't be mouths move. Or look at or even even the question, this is unjust. Okay, is it unjust because you're worried about kids contracting the disease at school and then carrying it back to their grandmothers and their grandmothers dying? Or you're worried about the fact that they're going to fall two years behind in their reading and never ever catch up.

And we're going to have a lost generation from that or at least a lost cohort from that. I don't two years in, I don't have answers to these questions. And I can see the perspective from from both sides.

And I will incline in one direction or another on either on all of them, especially as information has come, but I go back to Justin's point of if you could see all of that in March of 2020, then you know, congratulations. But it was a scary time and it was a confusing time. And I'm sure people can go back hopefully and parse our podcast from that time and show how we all know.

Right. Yeah, we didn't get everything right. And it would be interesting to go back and you know, way to prove this, but maybe the churches that spoke about masks and COVID the least did the best.

Now, pray for people, pray for people who are sick. But the more any one of these issues becomes the issue for your church, I think the more off central. And you know, whether

it's wear masks because that's a sign that you're a good person or this is the first step in totalitarianism.

Yeah, we have to talk about things that are being talked about. But if that became the focus of what your church is about. So we're just seeing it, you know, I think all over the board that COVID accelerated a lot of underlying issues in our culture and in the church, it accelerated.

I'm sure you guys are seeing this a desire for change. I mean, I think we're seeing people switch churches, we're seeing people switch jobs, we're seeing people move switch dates. Yeah, it's just happening.

You just, it's being cooped up. It's realizing life is short. And with a lot of things, it's you won't know, you know, until decades or generations later and some things that seem to be massive issues will prove to have, yeah, you know what, people thought the cruise industry would be dead forever.

No one would ever go to a sporting event again. And some things, and yet other things like you're talking about a cohort of people that maybe never learn to read as well as they should have, but had to keep moving on, those things will change. Go ahead.

Last word on this. I was just gonna say, I don't know if Justin, to your point about history, part of what I love so much about history are those turning points, those contingencies. What if imagine this way? I don't know if you guys ever sit and think about it.

And this would be too long for us to fit into the time that we have remaining. Maybe we'll do a future episode talking about what changed in your life. You know, how did your life change? Can you see now something that a different trajectory on something? But you're exactly right, Kevin.

I've seen I'm seeing that all over the place and in my own life of this will be a marker. This will be a marker in all of our lives. Now the question is, is it maybe this will lead into another point, but the question is, will this be the marker? Or will this be a footnote in a bigger change? That's one thing that Andy Crouch and others have argued is that this is just the beginning of much bigger changes and perhaps looking at the one thing that came across two years later that bumped this off the front pages, Ukraine were.

Right. Could be an example of that. So let's use that as a segue.

And again, we want to try to be mindful of what Justin just said and not pretending to be experts in here in the literal fog of war, even if it's a war on the other side of the world. I do think Christians need to be careful to, okay, what's pastor? Give me your take. What is geopolitically going on with Ukraine? So I don't want the three of us to do that.

But maybe we could just go around and each share one thing that you're taking from it.

Again, a lesson that you're learning, an insight, a biblical truth that's being reminded to you in a fresh way, not so much. Okay, here's what's going to happen.

And here's what NATO should have happened. So I'll give you one. And it's actually something that I'm going to paraphrase, something that Trump said oddly enough early on.

Didn't somebody ask Trump, you know, what would you have done? Or what would you have been like if you were the president in this situation? Or would you be doing what Zelensky is doing? Didn't Trump say something like paraphrasing? But you don't really know what you would do in that situation until you're in that situation. It was it was a moment of some self awareness and self reflection sort of, you we both, you don't know now this is me talking. But what I took from it was sometimes we're surprised by our cowardice and sometimes we're surprised by our courage.

Yeah. And so there's been lots of pieces talking about Zelensky, who was not taken seriously and a comedian and a sort of rivaled one at that and not someone that you would have just pictured of all the world leaders, he's going to show this sort of resolve. And it's not just him.

I mean, it's the Ukrainian people around him and he's part of that and is adding to it. But it does, you know, and here's the Bible verse where Jesus said, don't worry about what you will say on that day when you're persecuted. And it's easy to think both on both sides.

It's easy to think surely I would be grabbing a gun and I would be fighting off the bad guys and defending my country, defending my family. You don't know. And we're not casting aspergents on those who for all sorts of reasons have, you know, the millions of people who are fleeing as refugees.

And at the same time, sometimes we can think, Oh, I would never face persecution. Well, I would never do that. Well, you don't know because God hasn't given you that grace, even if it's common grace in that day to know.

So I think it, it, it ought to again give us some measure of humility and to some of our earlier discussion. What sort of character are we cultivating now? I mean, we wouldn't, if World War II hadn't happened, I mean, Winston Churchill still read led a remarkable life. But all of those things that were there in Churchill's character ready to shine in World War II, in that sense, the moment made the man, even though the man was already made for that moment.

It's the same way. Yeah, the same way in that regard. Yeah.

So what do you want to add or subtract Justin? Yeah, I know I have any great geopolitical insights and don't want to pretend to be abundant. So I appreciate your setup there. I

think we need to return to first principles.

And one of the things that it's been a reminder to me of just how fragile the world is. And by that, I mean, we're always just one step away from something like a World War III. And it can happen very quickly.

And I think that one of the things about being an American is that we really can be lulled into a sense of security. That changed for a season with 9/11, where we felt like, you know, we're safe over here. I don't need to worry about Russian bombers coming over Illinois or Iowa or the Midwest.

You feel relatively safe. 9/11 changed that for a season. And then I think we got relatively complacent again.

But just to think, some actions by foreign agents outside of our control, one thing leads to another end. And you really can see how the entire world is drawn into a conflict. And so just to have again, going back to that humility of what can I do about this? What can I do to put down evil? What can I do to defend the innocent? And the reality is not much.

I can pray. And that is something significant. That's something that other world leaders don't even know that they have access.

They can talk to the living gods. I'm not trying to overly spiritualize it, but a call to pray to remember that there is a God who sits on the throne that puts down nations and raises up nations and gives common grace courage to men like Zelensky. And we can pray.

Now, I think we can pray in pre-catory Psalms towards tyrants like Putin. And for those of us wondering, how do the pre-catory Psalms actually work? When there is evil out there that is trying to destroy innocent life, I think we can turn to Psalms like that. So no great insights other than we can pray.

We can actually do something to help in this conflict, even though we might not sign up for war, might not be part of the political machinations. Yeah. Colin? Yeah, just brief reflections.

And I'll continue on my history theme in here. It struck us as very surprising because there has been, and this is this first major land war that we've seen in Europe going back to World War II to 45. But of course, that peace is the aberration.

That's right. Not the war. And so to imagine Europe as this, you know, wonderful place for everybody's skiing and drinking beer and having a good time.

Watching soccer together. Watching soccer together. It's like, well, hey, I'm so glad they're watching soccer together.

They're other than doing what they've normally done with each other, which is just to kill each other over and over and over and over and over again for century after century. So yeah, it's this is the return closer to normal, not a good normal, and I hope it goes back. Though this is a case where something's going to change.

Something dramatic is going to change here, either with Russia or with with NATO or both. And certainly something has already horrifically changed with Ukraine. So the one hand, I guess my attitude is a little bit more of a shrug of I mean, what do you what do you expect in Europe? This is what they do.

Sadly, in a fallen world, this is what happens. And at the same time, it's what humans do. Yeah, it's what humans do.

It's not just Europeans. It's just this is, I mean, Europeans have perfected the art of killing a lot of people quickly, you know, through the mechanized 20th century and now into the 21st. So, yeah, all that you could just see the evils of human ingenuity that's been produced through these civilizations and then, but they've always been turned on themselves, or each other, and then ultimately then turned on themselves.

And so it feels as though all that time I've spent reading about European history is setting up to, Oh, okay, so it's it's ongoing. At the same time, I feel a lot of concern for friends of mine who are really worried about World War three. And I don't know if that's just because in a nuclear age, we're always going to be sitting on that precipice, or because there are so many voices that cheer on war for strange reasons, or if there's media that's designed to make us feel anxious about these things.

I'm not sure what it is, but I have a lot of a lot of concern. But also, I think some of that's even died down since then as this is the new normal of just the meat grinder of death continuing there. And you know, we've kind of lost the shock and the novelty of that just realizing, wow, this is, this is real life, and it's life and death, and it's eternal.

And I hope maybe that goes back to Justin's point of maybe this gets us back to some first principles of life is sacred, life is insecure. Right. And that's a pastoral challenge just to help walk people through that.

So you want to be properly concerned about it because we live in a concerning world. You also want perspective spiritual and historical that says, this is also kind of always been the way things are in humanity. Yeah, I just think of two words contingency and control.

So control, what we don't have, obviously God does, we take unimaginable respite in that, but we don't have control. We'd like to think, see, I think that's why lots of people want to have a theory. Why is Putin doing this? Why is he acting so wickedly desperately? Is it is he a mad genius? Is he crazy? Is he ill? And lots of smart people

should be thinking about those geopolitical ramifications and what if we had done this step or that, but it's also the case that evil people do evil things.

And those mitigating forces can be used by God's common grace. And sometimes evil people do evil things. And they use all manner of pretense to justify and explain to others why they're doing evil things, but they're evil people wanting to do evil things.

And this is a geopolitical comment in that we will not have wise leadership and the Western world will not have wise leadership if it does not understand that human beings are fallen and they can do unimaginably wicked things. Of course, we can see wonderful examples of heroism as well, but we need to have some kind of real politic in that sense that you need, like you said, Colin, the norm is that human beings fight and kill and hate each other. And what are the civil, we call it civilization for a reason, because it civilizes what is inherent in us, which is to be at war and enmity with one another.

And then so that's one word and then contingency, meaning, of course, from God's view, it's not contingent. But humanly speaking, it is. And most of us, at least, I'll just, I think in the West or in America, have what academics call a a wiggish view of history, which means a sort of naive sense that things are always moving towards progress, always moving towards greater enlightenment.

And you can just look back in the 18th century and this movement, you know, or this thing from the 17th century with Locke and Tolera, all of that is just moving forward to democracy and to freedom of religion. And yet there are historical patterns. And yet I think a lot of us look at history.

And because it's fixed to us, we think it was fixed to them in that, well, of course, that the South was going to lose to the North. Of course, the allies were going to defeat the Axis powers. Of course, Germany was going to lose in World War One and World War Two.

Of course, there would be a Winston Churchill or FDR, of course, but no, these things aren't, of course, they are God's mind, but history is contingent. Things did not, from human perspective, have to turn out the way that they do. And we tend to even now live through thinking they're going to turn out.

And no, it takes a lot of leadership and it takes courage and it takes godly men and women in the moment or just people filled with common grace virtues in the moment. And so we're, whatever moment we're living in, and we won't know until later what it is, but now we're in it and we need to be faithful as best we can. And for most of us listening to this podcast, that means prayer, it means some giving, maybe it means some tangible support for churches, for missionaries, for seminaries, for good gospel work in other parts of the world.

And for a few people, it may mean really being in the seats of power to try to make the best decisions and we need to pray for them as well. All right, our time is short and I promise that we would not go much past 30 minutes or past 35. So let's just go around one time in life books and everything.

Let's focus on the books. Give me one or two books you're reading right now and benefiting from Colin. All right, so I'll be quick on these with three ones that I've recently finished, but the theme of this time is books that I thought were interesting, but also I disagreed a lot with.

Okay, so first, I'm about the last person on earth to read Tara Westover's *Educated*. Just a fascinating book. Again, lots to chew on, lots to disagree with on a variety of levels on that.

Not the last person Justin hasn't read it. Oh, okay. All right.

Well, I haven't died before. Okay. I've read it.

Sorry, Kevin. You have. Okay, there you go.

All right. I'm the last person. Oh, egg on your face.

Okay. Another one lots to agree with. I mean, can't remember how many times I've underlined in many books with emphasis and then at other times I've disagreed that would be Edwin Freeman's *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership on the Age of the Quick Fix*.

And then the third is the brand new book, New York Times number one bestseller by Arthur Brooks from *Strength to Strength*. So sort of a kind of on his theme of happiness and a good life. Lots that I really agreed with, interesting to see how he brought his Roman Catholic faith to bear in at one point, but always an interesting character because he's always weaving it with his insights from the Dalai Lama and other things.

So lots to agree with. But a qualified recommendation was some things that I would certainly take issue with. All right, Justin.

Yeah, I'm sure you guys have both read that I never have gotten around to reading other than the introduction as Mark Knoll's *Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. And I've heard about that book for years and especially using that book to say clarity of scripture is a doctrine that's uploaded. And here is why because as Knoll shows, both sides in Civil War were appealing to the same scriptures.

And I'm finding it more actually about hermeneutics and intrigued by Knoll's observation that the Civil War era was a time that was not an era of a lot of theological profundity, even though there was a large quantity of sermons and people talking about the will of

God. So I'm playing catch up in reading that because I started reading James Bird's "Holy baptism of Fire and Blood" on the Bible in the Civil War. And he wrote a book on the Bible of American Revolution.

But I thought, before I read Bird, I should probably get Knoll's book down. So that's one, a different subject. Thomas Insel, who from 2002 to 2015, I believe, led the National Institute of Mental Health.

And he's written a book called "Healing One Path from Mental Illness to Mental Health" and basically saying the mental health industry has broken. And even in terms of what he thought was the best path towards getting people towards mental health, he's changed his mind on that. So it's interesting to have a secular psychiatrist, really one of America's top psychiatrists saying the way that we've practiced mental health is not sufficient.

And we need community and we need rehabilitation. So a lot of food for thought there, halfway through that. And then for fun listening to David Copperfield by Charles Dickens, just a little tip for anybody who likes to listen to audiobooks.

Find yourself an English actor who knows how to do different voices and knows how to act. So Richard Armitage does this one. But if you go and listen to Donald Sutherland reading "Hemingway's Old Man in the Sea" or any books by Kenneth Branagh, they're just a step above in terms of the narration.

So those are a few on my list. All right, I'll bring us home. I'll limit myself to three books.

One, I mentioned to you guys last week, interesting book "The Storm" before the calm by George Friedman. America's discord, "The Crisis of the 2020s and the Triumph Beyond." Again, as Colin said about his books, there's a lot of things in here. I'm not entirely convinced of.

Actually, when I got it, I thought it was going to be more of a crackpot sort of history. But it's an interesting telling of the American founding, in one sense. And then the second half of the book is a general kind of prognostication about the 2020s.

And his basic argument, which you can put a lot of holes into, but just as a conversation starter, as Eddie says, there's these two cycles in American history. There's an institutional cycle, which goes every 80 years, and then a socioeconomic cycle, which goes 50 years. And here in the latter, the second half of the 2020s, both of these cycles will be coming turning over at the same time for the first time in history.

I'm not sure about the... you can just count on those cycles, but he goes, "Okay, from the founding to the Civil War was 80 years, from the Civil War to World War II, is 80 years." And now from World War II to here is 80 years. And it's at least interesting to think about all that's happening in the 2020s. And like generic predictions, sorry, I offended Justin,

there he goes, he's leaving if you're watching this, he hates this book.

Like a lot of generic predictions, it's... a lot of predictions can make sense of our time. But his prediction that the next president elected in 2024 and probably in 2028 are going to be colossal failures, seems like not a bad... a bad guess. Well, yeah, just the Institute.

Yeah, that's pretty interesting. Yeah, so there's a book just... And then for fun, I've been reading some David McCullough and listening, again, his audiobooks, he reads them and he's a great narrator. He sounds a little older, which he is.

But I read the American spirit, which is a collection of mostly... speech... it's all speeches. Speech is he gave at commencement addresses, at landmarks, at various societies. And it's just wonderful, just wonderful vignettes of here about the Capitol, about the United States relationship to France, wonderful little essays and speeches in this book, The American Spirit.

And it's striking how... I mean, even these speeches from 20 years ago, 15 years ago, can sometimes seem like a different world. I mean, here's about as mainstream a guy as you get, who's speaking at all of these colleges, New York Times bestseller list, and he's unapologetically just loves America. Now, he never brushes over the bad spots, but he really... he always describes those as not living up to our own ideals.

So it's just fascinating. And then I had... He's the voice of Ken Burns also. He's the voice of Ken Burns, yeah, right, back in the 80s.

And then reading his book, The Right Brothers, which being here in North Carolina, I've not been to Kitty Hawk. I've not been to the Outer Banks, but he tells that story. It's a narrower story.

Have you read that one? Oh, man, that one's great. I love that. And I didn't know much.

I mean, no, I didn't either. As big of a thing that was, I just didn't know much. Maybe if I'd been in Ohio or North Carolina, I'd know more, but I know much.

I mean, it's on the license plates, First in flight or First in freedom. And then the last book I'll mention and maybe I'll try to get Bradley Burtzer here on the podcast because I loved this big, thick biography he wrote. He's a Hillsdale Proctor of Russell Kirk.

He's actually the Russell Amos Kirk chair of Professor of History at Hillsdale. And I didn't know a whole lot about Russell Kirk's life. And this is just this biography.

Russell Kirk, post-war founder of some ways of conservatism, at least post-war conservatism. And yet he believed in ghosts and was a ghostwriter, not a ghost writer, a writer of ghost stories. Glad you clarified that.

It clarified and got married when he was, you know, 20 some years older than his wife

and later in life and then had these daughters. And so a fascinating story, and it's really well written. And of course, there's a lot of things that connected.

He's from Michigan. And even he has some ties to North Carolina. So there's just a lot of things that I could track with.

But any biography, this is, I think, any biography that's well researched, well written, you learn something. You learn something about human beings. You learn something about yourself.

And I would really recommend anyone out there who thinks of themselves as a conservative or wants to learn about conservatism as a moral philosophy should read this biography of Russell Kirk. And you'll find things you go, "Oh, that's really wonderful. That makes sense." And wow, this conservative movement has been driven with huge divisions from the very beginning.

And this makes some sense of it. Russell Kirk very much did not want conservatism to become political. He wanted to be much more of a religious, political, intellectual outlook.

And so depending on who you ask, his alignment with Buckley and National Review was either the best or the worst thing that happened. It either brought conservatism mainstream and was influential on Goldwater, or this is where it really sold out and became something different. So a really well-done, well-written biography, I read that at my nightstand over the course of a couple of months.

All right, well, we have bored Justin to pieces. If you're watching one more thing, this is not life in movies and everything. Okay.

If you listen to this podcast, Justin brought up Kenneth Branagh. If you like Kenneth Branagh, check out Belfast. Okay, Belfast.

There's a lot of the awards. But if you like, if you listen to this podcast, there's a good chance you'll be interested in that movie. I haven't seen that.

I thought you're going to mention Death on the Nile, which I heard was really bad. Oh, no, Belfast, of course, autobiographical for him, but very, very, very, interest with Van Morrison's soundtrack, which is amazing. We're not movie critics on this one, but I just think, if you like this podcast, you'll probably like that movie.

That's all I got. All right, well, thank you all for joining us. Until next time, glorify God and Join Forever and Read a good book.

(buzzing)

[buzzing]

