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Conspiracy Theories, Parallels Between COVID-19 and 2004, Expertise and Authority, and Favorite Biographies

August 10, 2020



Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Originally released on May 20th, 2020, Kevin DeYoung, Collin Hansen, and Justin Taylor cover the following in the 5th episode of 'Life and Books and Everything': an airing of gratitude, conspiracy theories, parallels between COVID-19 and 2004, expertise and authority, our favorite biographies, and which biographies we'd like to write.

Transcript

This is Life and Books and Everything hosted by Kevin DeYoung, Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen Greetings and salutations, our fearless nurse, welcome to Life and Books and Everything glad to be joined with my good friends Justin Taylor and Collin Hansen We're going to jump right in and I'm sure everyone is binge listening to the podcast serially and so they're caught up and they may recall that last week we began rather uplifting fashion with some airing of grievances, pet peeves and I didn't give Justin and Collin ample time to prepare, we'll have to revisit that perhaps that can be a, you know we can return to that as just a look forward to feature of the program. An anniversary episode someday. Yeah, sort of a best of greatest hits but I thought we would do in the opposite direction and let's call it the airing of gratitude, we did grievances, let's do gratitude and just to set the parameters, not looking for anything to other worldly, there's certainly if we were really, you know, talking about the things we're most grateful for, we talk about theological concepts and the Lord and what's that? Jesus, we're grateful.

We would, we would want to say that so we're not making light of any of those things, our family and salvation but I want to go down to some smaller things so sort of the opposite of pet peeves, what are some things small but big to you, it could be food, it could be little blessings in life that you're realizing you missed now that we've been some parts of the country and lockdown still give me your list of the airing of Collin Hansen gratitude. You don't have to start with me and Justin, we'll just take that as a give. Well, I know you guys will be with me on this one, fat guy touchdowns.

How amazing are fat guy touchdowns? Oh, I hope we can see those again sooner than later. Yes, hand fat guy celebrations, one face score. They tend to go hand in hand.

They tend to go with a fat guy celebration. They're just something like watching that tiny little football in that big man's hands. And they're eyeballs if the camera can get in, zoom in on their eyeballs as they're approaching the end zone.

They all have that like Mike Singletary look about the crazy eyes. I'm going to kill someone or I'm going to score. Did you ever touch down Colin in your high school? No, no, no.

It's the offensive lineman. Well, and defensive lineman. Am I talking to two offensive linemen here? I was tight end, so it's kind of more of a receiver.

You are the groan of your era, no doubt. One play that they would do for me for a two point conversion was called tight end dump. And I'd just literally go out like two yards and catch it.

I believe it may be aptly named. Yeah, I played offensive center and then defensive tackle at all of 195 pounds or so nine man football in South Dakota. So no, I didn't.

I mean, there was like a practice once where I caught one before they switched me to the offensive line. I'm derailing this, but out of curiosity, did you ever get hit in the head while practicing football with anything other than a football helmet? No, I can't think of anything. Why do you ask? You told me one time you got hit by a stock of corn flying through.

Well, what I was telling you about, he doesn't remember that just. When you're playing in the cornfields of South Dakota, the wind is sweeping down that plane. And in the playoffs, it's just cornstalk are flying everywhere.

It's like negative whatever 10 degrees with a 40 mile an hour wind. And all the corn has been combined. So you get the cornstalk flying everywhere.

So yes, you are referring to the last game of my sophomore year, at which point we had cornstalk. Had the corn been detasselled. That's one of the great regrets of my life, Kevin.

I never got to detassele corn. But let's get back to gratitude, remember? Don't regret that. We're talking about gratitude.

Okay, give us the list. Keep going. I love peaches.

I mean, that is a southern thing that is hard to... I mean, and there's peaches everywhere. You can get them, but it's kind of like they say there's pineapple and you're thinking, "Well, yeah, I mean, I grew up with that from the can and everything." Like, no,

no, no. You ever had pineapple in Hawaii? That's the... Okay, well, that's like peaches in Alabama and Georgia.

So love that. We're in that peach season now as well. And this is a little bit more serious, but it's relevant to the podcast.

Books. My goodness. The amount of books, the accessibility of books, historic and present, the making of books, of which I'm grateful there is no end, the cost of them and the ability to be able to access them.

Access them. I mean, I know that... I mean, I think back to the little bookstore in the town of 5,000 near where I grew up in South Dakota, and I regret that that place closed like 15 years ago. But then I think my whole world was pretty much limited to what I could find in the library, the Carnegie Library there, and then also at that little bookstore.

But now I can get whatever book I want, shipped for a pretty reasonable cost in most cases, almost immediately to my house. How amazing is that? So a lot of reasons for gratitude. Okay, I have a longer list and then we'll get to Justin.

And once I started making this, I saw some themes that have to do with either sports or the very short list of foods that I can eat, or I'm willing to eat. As people may know, I've been very picky, selective, you know, maybe a disorder. Probably should get a scholarship or something.

But then I was diagnosed with celiac. So now I have an excuse for all sorts of things that I can't eat. So let me give you my list.

Okay, I like, I really like Mountain Dew. Isn't that horrible? Straight up Mountain Dew? Straight up Mountain Dew. And I never really had pop, as we call it.

Soda down here. Yeah, they don't call here. Pop.

I didn't have, and then I think when I got celiac, I started craving empty calories and Mountain Dew does the trick for empty calories. So in fact, I have a little, okay, this is moving into my airing of grievances. When you're with people in the light company and you can have any pastor, any author, any speaker can get a Diet Coke and of course, you very civilized, you say, ma'am, do you have a Mountain Dew? And it's shock and guffa.

Like I just came in there on my skateboard. And then when they sell only Coke products and I asked for a mellow yellow, then it's just bonkers. Kevin, this happened to me last week.

I had a friend come over. I cracked open a mellow yellow zero and he said, "Is that a mellow yellow that you're drinking?" And I said, "Only the greatest drink ever invented."

Okay. I was supposed to have been truly embarrassed about this, but I'm saying that now I'm going to... I'm going to... All dozens of listeners.

So... Leah bought some generic Mountain Dew the other day from Hy-Vee and it was a Diet Mountain Holler. So if you really want to feel like a hillbilly crack open a Mountain Holler... There is nobody cool though in public like driving on the road with a big gulp of Mountain Dew. Like not your guy who's on the fast track to become a partner of the law firm.

He's not on the conference circuit. What? Well, a little known fact, there's a man in our church who used to work for an ad agency and he tells me that he came up with the name mellow yellow. His boss said, "What should we call this?" And he said, "Well, it's mellow.

It's yellow." Or at least he confirmed it to his boss that it was a good name. I can either confirm or deny. I have more.

"Fruity pebbles are gluten free." That is a great blessing to me in life. Lucky charms are gluten free. What do they have in them? Just sugar? I mean, what? I don't know.

Rice? It's a rice. Yeah. I mean, yeah.

Fruity pebbles are rice where you find where they grow colorful rice. I am grateful the short-term parking at the Charlotte airport is like \$5 more than the long-term parking. So I just park there and there's spaces and I just walk right off.

Someone gave me that great tip. Even if you're gone for five days, park the short-term parking costs you just a few bucks more. All right.

I love people don't know this about. I love bluegrass. I don't play that some, but I like bluegrass music.

I like mowing my lawn, straight lines, order. If I don't have, you know, if I need a break on a Saturday afternoon, I like grape juice. In fact, when I go to a breakfast place, I'm just chagrined.

I think grape juice should be second or third juice. And it's usually you get down five, six juices. And I don't know how many times I say do you have a grape juice grapefruit? Do I look like I'm 80 years old? No, I don't want grapefruit juice.

I want grape juice, but no, they don't carry grape juice. Okay. Last one.

And I'm sad that we're not going to have this this summer. Not just the Olympics. That's obvious, but my family for several years that we watch American Ninja Warrior.

And it's a good thing for the whole family to watch. And we've been watching this past

week. They're replaying on the Olympic channel, the 2017 and 2019 Track and Field World Championships.

And that, let me tell you, that has been just as good the second time around. So I'm thankful anytime I can watch a track meet on TV. Justin, what are you thankful for? Thankful for gluten? Yeah, I bet you are.

It does make the world go round. Sorry. Pizza Ranch would be high on our list.

Yes. Sorry. Kevin, these are not very encouraging.

You actually didn't tell us like come up with funny gratitude things. So all of mine are like good and all kindness of strangers. I still have not read it.

Yeah, on the lighter side, the Nebraska Cornhuskers, I hope that we have college football this fall. But it is truly something I enjoy. And there are roots to it beyond just kind of sports idolatry of going back to memories with my dad going to games and watching the 90s.

The 90s when we used to win national championships, just like the Bulls would every year. You were spoiled. Yeah, growing up like the Bulls win.

Nebraska Cornhuskers win. But it even goes back to my grandfather. So there's just a special place in my heart that comes Saturday mornings and Saturday afternoons, Saturday evenings in the fall.

It's something to look forward to. I do love pizza. I don't like Mountain Dew, but I like diet Mountain Dew.

Yeah, those two are very different. I used to like Mountain Dew. I can't handle it anymore.

Diet Mountain Dew don't like. But again, tip to the wise, Meliello, Meliello Zero, both good. Colin, you know a lot about Meliello and Mountain Dew.

How many insights does this guy have? That was a classic, good moment there. I like that. But just the genuine thing of, you know, I'm grateful for sleep.

I've known people who cannot get a good night of sleep or struggle with insomnia and 98% of the time I'm going to sleep before I want to go to sleep. You know, falling asleep. I stay asleep other than if one of her children wakes us up.

But just the joy of family that God has given each of us wives and children. That is a great blessing. I don't take for granted.

Grateful for new morning mercies. Again, I'm going more serious than you guys. Thanks

for really moving us in a fine direction.

No, we can go back to Meliello if you had that guy touched out. That's what I had. That was number one on your list.

New morning mercies. #CrosswayBestseller. True.

Thank you to our sponsor. Yes. No, I was thinking about this the other day just that, I mean, God could have very easily created it so that we don't sleep.

Right? We just, you know, the sun doesn't go down and we, maybe we only live 50 years, but we are twice as productive and put in 90 hour work weeks. There's something about the rhythm of every day, no matter how much you mess up and you fail and feel unproductive. It's the sun comes up and there are new mercies from the Lord in the morning.

And I'm really grateful for that. Especially grateful in this kind of pandemic season for employment. Heart really goes out for those who are underemployed or unemployed.

Everybody on Twitter talks about working from home and, you know, if you're in the trades, you're not working from home if we're in lockdown. And not just to be employed, but to work in a place like Crossway where I really believe in what we're doing and love the sort of books we're producing. So, and then you have to piggyback on Collins.

Books are just such a great gift. It really struck me reading Alice from Grass Biography of J.I. Packer that 1945 virtually no Puritan books are in print. Like, yeah, you're interested in John Owen.

You're interested in Baxter. You want to get the Funyons stuff like too bad unless you go to Oxford University Library, you're not going to be reading Puritan books. And if you are, you're going to be reading them in these big dusty tones, but to have all of that wisdom now just available at our fingertips.

There's a lot to be grateful for. And Millie Yellow. You've prompted me to maybe say something slightly more edifying.

And that's just to think of how easily the things that I might want to harumpf about or feel stressed about are the very things that almost anyone in the world would trade places with or so many people. I mean, oh, my house has a mess and I got to clean a house. Well, I have a house and there's a lot of things in the house, which is why it needs to be cleaned.

Or all these kids need to be put to bed and fed and bathed. Well, you have a house full of children. You've been given that gift.

You feel overwhelmed, stressed at work. You have a job. You're busy.

You have lots of things to do. And I know it's, I'm sure I've been insensitive at times in rattling through struggles and they're real struggles at times and not thinking of how many people might be listening and think, wow, I trade some of my blessings for some of your problems. So thank you, Justin, for being more spiritual than my question allowed.

Let's, we didn't talk so much last time and we don't have to spend a lot of time, but just as states one by one and sometimes region by region move out of the stay at home orders and we continue to see. Although the number of deaths has decreased yet it's largely a plateau and so the total number is still increasing and it does seem like as we now move out of the, we're all together in this too. We're all apart in this meaning we've fallen into our, or maybe not fallen, we've decided to move into our familiar postures.

It's almost like as a country, our coping mechanism with all the unknowns. What we know how to do is form very regimented sides and is reading one person right in the past week. The culture war is necessary at times, but there comes a point where it's almost like you, unless you're doing culture war stuff you don't know what to do with yourself and with your, your life.

You and I, the three of us were talking about that little back of the envelope chart that somebody put out on Twitter that shows things were bad. Now they're worse and if you do what I say they all get better. If you don't do what I say, everything continues to get worse and that's sort of what my Twitter feed looks at times.

So I don't know if I want to ask you guys if you venture any predictions because whatever predictions we might make about the coming weeks and months or years will probably prove to be inaccurate but Colin perhaps I'll start with you. Why is it so difficult to really know what's happening? We have the smartest people in the world looking at this, trying to solve it, trying to give an analysis of it. And why is it so difficult to really know what's happening and what to do and yet why are we still so prone to want to make very bold pronouncements about it? It seems like as I continue to get closer to 40 years old I find more and more and more occasions to realize how old I am and because I come across the 40.

It's just it starts falling apart. You won't be like that. It's not just that I'll have a quote from Seinfeld or from Anchorman or something like that that just, you know, somebody has no clue about.

But it's bigger events that form our mental architecture to be able to think through situations like this. And so everybody has the big category in their mind, even if they're pretty young at the time they have a pretty big category for 9/11 in their mind. And I think that's created a lot of discouragement for people because they think, well gosh, I don't see the unity that I remember from 9/11.

I don't see the purpose. I don't see the recovery. I don't see the patriotism.

I don't see any of that. And I agree. I think that's been frustrating.

It's been discouraging. I was talking with our staff at the Gospel Coalition today and was mentioning to them that of all the things we needed in this world, it did not include a lot more time at home by ourselves in front of our computers on social media. And yet, of course, that's exactly what's happened.

So part of it's just this is one of the first major crises that we've dealt with. This is a reason why social media has been such a major theme on this podcast. But people have that category of disappointment from 9/11, but I'm telling you guys, I don't know what you guys think of this, but I think this feels to me more like 2004.

And 2004 was a presidential election year, of course, as we're dealing with right now. 9/11 was right after a very contentious presidential election through Florida, Florida recount and everything like that. But it was early on in President Bush's tenure and he was going to be there for another three years.

And 2004 though, presidential election. And you started to have, there was a lot of unity early on with the Iraq War. Not universal unity by any means.

But of course, you famously had people like Senator Biden, Senator Clinton who had voted to authorize the Iraq invasion. And so there was a lot of unity there, especially around the presentation. Remember the famous presentation at the United Nations about the weapons of mass destruction.

Then as 2004 approached, the war was not necessarily going, elected on quite as well as everybody hoped it was going to go. They didn't quite welcome the American troops like Dick Cheney had said that they would. There was still a lot of violence.

And then there was the search for weapons of mass destruction. Where were they? That was the reason we did this. That's the reason with the United Nations.

That was the authorization from Congress, all that kind of stuff. And you had this fork in the road moment of either were going to discover these weapons of mass destruction. And then perhaps it'll be a justified decision.

Because everybody agreed, of course, that Saddam Hussein was a bad guy and that the world would be better off without him. That wasn't the issue. Then the other option was maybe we don't ever find these weapons of mass destruction.

And it turns out it was a horrible decision and we never would have done this before. But you had this kind of fork in the road. And so what I feel like right now is that there was a lot of unity early on in the coronavirus of we've got to lock down.

And it wasn't a lot of talk of necessarily what's the rebuild going to look like? What's the

reopen going to look like? Just like with Iraq, there was no discussion about, okay, what government replaces. So I'm saying the Bathurst regime. So there was a discussion about that.

And then you get into it and you're like, okay, it's going and going. Well, it's not quite going as we expected it to. It's still bad, but it's very confusing.

And I feel like we're waiting now on a smoking gun or the lack of a smoking gun. To say, was that an overreaction? Should we have not done that? Or, yeah, actually it was horrible. And yeah, we had to take these drastic measures.

And so that's what it feels like to me. That's why I don't feel like the unity of 9/11 is there because I don't think it's analogous. I think it's more analogous to the 2004 situation.

And we're in a waiting process. Who's going to turn out to be right? What does it mean? What do you guys think about that? Am I totally off, Justin? Sure. Sure, you are totally off.

Sure you are totally off. I think one of the differences, and I think it is enlightening to think back to 2004. And I may take it a little bit of a different direction.

But one of the things that's different about this is that there's no way to falsify whatever you believe. Right. So if you think like, we're going to have a million deaths unless we do a lockdown.

Like your view is essentially unfalsifiable because you can never run like an experiment where you have a control group where with the Iraqi invasion, the invasion of Iraq, you had something like either there are weapons of mass destruction or there are not. And therefore, either you were correct in terms of your justification or you weren't. But this is a situation where like essentially you can't be proven wrong because you can just always point back to, well, if we had done what I thought we should have done, then this terrible outcome wouldn't have happened.

When you talk about 2004, for me, I think back to my own awareness that I don't have all of the answers. I don't have all of the facts. But based upon what I know now, am I justified in believing this? I really did wrestle with that question because I think back then I blogged more about politics and made my views known and people would push back.

I was thinking I could be wrong, but I think looking back based upon what I know at the time based on the evidence available to me, I do think it was a warranted decision to support the invasion. Even though in retrospect you look back, you see how facts have changed and you might change your mind. But like I don't think that George Bush lied.

I think he was incorrect. So I think there are some parallels in terms of public

epistemology and what do we have access to. We talked about this, I think in the first episode, none of us are experts.

Even if you have studied infectious disease your entire life, you're still not an expert on all sorts of other things related to this. I think that's one of the things that makes this so tricky. It's tempting to say just trust the scientists, but science can tell you what an enzyme is.

It can give you some results of studies, but there's all sorts of other factors that play here like wisdom issues and social issues and predictive issues that even the experts don't really have a corner on all the different aspects of the debate. And then you throw in the partisanship. I mean people who just deeply, deeply want President Trump to fail and others who deeply want him to always be right about everything.

Throw that into the mix and it's really a difficult thing I think to sort through what's true and what's false and what's wise and what's unwise. Another example, Justin, that's a difference. Kevin, you can jump in here.

Is that in 2004, other than maybe how you might vote in the presidential election, it didn't matter what your view of the Iraq War was or weapons of mass destruction. It wasn't an actionable point unless you were going to sign up for the military and you were going to join. That was a minority of people who were in that position and most people's partisan views were already formed and so they weren't necessarily making those decisions.

In this situation, every single family, even husbands and wives disagreeing about what to do, every single church, every single city, every business, every state, everybody has to make a decision on the information that's available to them. No wonder it's so contentious. You had said earlier, Colin, that it does seem to be shaping up to a winner take all.

It's just human nature and part of the problem of our politics as well is we don't allow other people to change and we certainly don't allow our own minds to be changed. Once you are on record in a strong way for one outcome, I think we talked about this in earlier podcasts. In a perverse way, you start rooting for unemployment to go up or death tolls to go up or somebody to be proven wrong in a way that's catastrophic and yet it makes your side seem right.

It does seem like although we know that whatever happens, people will be able to spin it whatever way they want that if you would have done what I said, this bad thing wouldn't have happened. Like we are setting ourselves up for a winner take all and especially in an election year, that's just going to be ramped up even more. I want to take it in a related direction and that's to think about the role that authority and trust for authorities play.

There's been a lot in the past couple of months in particular about conspiracy theories. One person's conspiracy theory is another person's speaking truth to power. That's what's difficult about conspiracy theories.

There was a long article in The Atlantic, was it over the weekend about Q Anon, this anonymous source and some of these fever swamps of online communities that gets mixed in with a super-penicostal evangelical Christianity at times. It was bizarre and frightening and I admit all of that was new to me. What's not new to me is the penchant that we have for believing conspiracies.

But it's a hard conversation and I want you guys to jump in because the three of us could easily talk about why do people believe conspiracy theories about whatever it is, Bill Gates trying to form a one-world government and make a billion dollars off of vaccines. The fact of the matter is, at times our government was doing shady things. Some of the examples which seem and I would say are really silly, what makes them so hard to disprove again to your point, Justin, is almost the wilder the accusation, the harder it is to falsify.

And reading someone who made this point, we're going to, I don't want to talk about vaccines, but just use that as a test case. Many of us, and I think Aleister Roberts made this point, that any of us, you get about two articles into the vaccine debate, it's beyond the head of 99% of us. We don't really know the science.

So you're trusting an authority and it's not so much that people believe in different theories because they don't trust authorities. They trust different authorities. So if you, four years ago, were a big follower of Jen Hatmaker and she said, "I really looked into the issue of homosexuality and she changed her mind.

I'm going to change her mind." We can say, "Have you read all of these evangelical biblical scholars?" Well, no. We might lament that they're not listening to authorities, but actually they're listening to a different authority. In that case, they're believing that a home renovation blogger has the authority that they're looking for.

So it becomes very difficult because at the end of the day, to use the tired cliché, the reason we don't believe certain conspiracy theories is, at least in some measure, because we trust that mainstream science has something reliable to say, or we know people who know people in certain positions and we aren't inclined to believe the bizarre scenarios that are out there. What do you guys say to people? Let's not think of those with ill motives who are looking to harm people or just eager for strange theories. Let's talk about people that are genuinely reading things online or hearing things from their friends or finding some pastor out there who says something.

And without any ill motives, they believe one of these conspiracy theories. What do we say to mitigate against this very real danger? I think it is a pastoral issue and I think that

it's probably only going to increase in the years ahead. I think you guys are on the same page as me and thinking these things aren't going back.

The genie's not going back in the bottle and things are not going to go into the easier. There's so many dynamics that tend towards this. And Kevin, you alluded to the QAnon article in the Atlantic and I would just, for any listener out there who hasn't read it, it's worth Googling it and reading it.

It's really long but it is something probably that we should know about. It happened to be just before I read the article that one of my wife's friends sent a message and just said I've got a close friend who's really into QAnon and I don't know what to say and nothing that I say seems to make any difference and doesn't resonate. So do you have any resources on this? So it's going to get worse, I think.

I think the most striking thing to me in that article is the line where the reporter asked the woman, "What evidence do you have that this is true?" And her response was, "What evidence do you have that it's not true?" And that's a very frightening mindset and proposition and I think it can lead to just downright cultish thinking. But I think evidence is a significant thing to get back to your question, Kevin, of, "So what do you do? How do you work through issues?" There's no clear cut easy answer but I think to ask, "What is the evidence and is it publicly verifiable evidence?" I don't think that by and large we are great at thinking logically, spotting fallacies. Kevin, you've probably done more reading than the two of us on not only logical fallacies but fallacies in terms of numbers and statistics.

That's a significant area that I would encourage Christians to bone up on your logic, bone up on statistical mistakes and inferences that people can make. So if things seem sketchy, if things are putting two and two together, if it feels like there's a lot of guesswork, I think we should all just be aware that with a well-produced documentary or a presentation, you could pretty much convince most people that any bizarre thing is plausible. So just to go into things not being wooed and awed by presentation, by high level vocabulary, the sighting of experts, we need to look for evidence, we need to think through things logically.

We also need to ask, "Okay, this person maybe has a PhD from UCLA. What are the things do they believe? What are the things do they say? What are some of their other claims?" I think that Christians should be able to sniff out truth. And there may be things where we say, "I don't know how to answer that," or, "That's a good question.

I'd have to look into it more." But we don't want to be gullible and naive. There's nothing virtuous about that. So at least we would be a starting point.

And that's really good. And I wonder if it's helpful to just realize that some of the basic contours of some conspiracy theories are recycled from generation to generation, and

the culprits just get swapped out. So a basic storyline is there is a small group of people somewhere who are all in cahoots to overthrow, and they're really pulling all of the strings and calling all the shots behind the scenes.

And it's this small group of... So in an earlier century, that would have been the Jews, or the elders of Zion. That's right. Or it could have... or the Illuminati, or from the Simpsons, the Stone Cutters, which makes Steve Gutenberg a star.

Or now it's the billionaires, or a class of national... not nationalism, but globalists. And it's the same sort of meta-narrative, as it were. There's a small group of people there out to get us.

And again, because by definition, these are groups working in clandestine, whatever you say is just further proof that they're probably doing it. Because you don't see it, you don't know it. Of course, there's not evidence to it.

And you would hope that Christians would be able to at least sniff that out. We believe in total depravity. So we believe, yeah, people are capable of really bad, rotten things.

But I also instinctively find it very hard to believe that in doing those bad, rotten things, they are invariably a group of super geniuses who keep it cloaked from ages to ages, which have accrued godlike powers to manipulate people on the globe. Colin, what do you say as we think about conspiracy theories in the church? Go ahead, Justin. What were you going to say? Well, yeah, just to jump in really quickly, because I know Colin's got a lot of thoughts and they're going to be much better thoughts than I have.

But what you said, Kevin, just reminds me of, I think, a really crucial point that a lot of people try to buttress conspiracy theories by defending the fact that conspiracies have existed in human history, which is not a good refutation of them. Of course, there are conspiracies. There's criminal conspiracies.

Conspiracies happen all the time. Watergate was a conspiracy. So when we speak against conspiracy theories, it's not denying that people have conspired together to do things.

It's more along the lines of which you're saying that it's this multi-generational, multi-national secret thing that there's no evidence. And everybody somehow is successfully keeping this as a lie until a YouTuber discovered putting a number of things together and broke the case open. That's more of the connotations, I think, conspiracy theory.

Go ahead, Colin. Sorry. Now Joe Carter had a really good, really good article on this topic for the gospel coalition.

And what stood out to me in that article was how he discussed the issue of slander as it relates to these conspiracy theories. And so, Justin, you had mentioned that you can't

verify this information. Well, that's a major problem for Christians to be sharing information about other people that they do not know to be true.

Just on the presumption that it could be true because of some sort of grudge against that person. That's actually a category of sin. That's a serious thing.

But I guess, where would we be in social media if there wasn't the sin of slander? What would we talk about on social media? So that's one thing that stood out there from Joe. Another is that the 9/11 attacks, which must be clear, this is not like the right has a market corner down this kind of stuff. I mean, look what happened with 9/11 and all the conspiracies that came from the left in the United States.

And that's what took me out to Washington, D.C. Originally, I was going to be working on a Homeland Security Committee that had just been created and working for the House Republican Conference instead. And Congressman J.C. Watts. But one of the things I walked away from, it was a really valuable lesson working in Washington, D.C. was if you ever have to choose between conspiracy and competence, or conspiracy and just sort of like incompetence, I should say, choose incompetence.

That's right. These are just, these are normal people. And I would say that whether or not your conspiracy is about Washington, D.C. or if your conspiracy is about the Gospel Coalition, I'm not, trust me.

Incompetence. Choose incompetence. That would be, I will gladly help you with that one.

Choose incompetence on that one. So that's one issue. Then the last thing, I just wonder if, I try to, I want to speak into areas that I have some measure of expertise in and try not to contribute to this problem.

So one of my areas that I do understand pretty well is media dynamics. And think about this, if you have a talk show for four hours every single day, do you think people are more likely to listen if you say, all right, well, today the experts are telling us to do X. I don't, I'm not an expert in these things. I'm an entertainer.

I just speak well on the radio. So I think you should do what the experts tell you to do because generally, you know, I think that's, that's who I trust in. Or the alternative being, it's been four of the days saying, forget those experts.

I'll tell you what's really going on here because I know how this really works. And you can have the inside information if you just listen to me. I don't know if anybody's ever read the, the novel, the plot against America, I fill up Roth.

HBO has done a series on it. And that is a major role. Actually, you can't quite tell if it's sympathetic or not, but there's a major role being played by a talk show host in there who's exposing a radio host who's exposing this plot against America in there.

And you just understand people, we need to, we need to be clear about the incentives that media have to be able to promulgate this and to sell it to us. Last point is that then what do you do? Okay, what, so are you left just helpless? Well, here's what I do. And I don't, you guys think of this, but this is the best I can come up with.

I try to find people who have incentives at cross purposes from each other. I'm not saying just like triangulate two different people. Think about individuals who have cross purposes inside themselves.

There's no clear incentive one way or another. Here's who I've come up with. And I'm going to connect it back to my, who are favorite things.

College football writers. Let me explain what I mean. You guys may have seen and you've probably tracked this before listeners have as well.

Sports media has gotten really liberal in the last 10 to 15 years. It's such a strange phenomenon. They used to be such a conservative field.

It's totally flipped now. But if we don't have college football, we don't have the NFL. If we don't get some sports real soon, all of these folks are going to get laid off.

You're not going to have a sports talk radio station anymore. The athletic website's going to go under ESPN is going to continue to have major problems. They've already done the last dance documentary.

Now what are they going to do? It's just going to be cornhole for the whole summer. If they could get MJ to do some cornhole. Exactly.

Then we would have it. So I'm looking at the camera. I'm doing a cornhole.

Then he can. I told you personally. Yeah.

He told me I couldn't be the best in the world at that. I laughed at him. So college football writers, they're very liberal generally, which inclines them toward believing the experts and lock down everything.

But they lose their jobs if that happens. Also, think about this. College campuses, it's a wonderful cross-purpose.

They need sports to be solvent. They need students to be solvent. But at the same time, they don't want to get in trouble.

So you can trust that at some level, they have every interest in getting things back up and running as soon as possible. But at the same time, instinctively, they're a little bit resistant to do that. I just find generally, I pay attention to what those folks are saying because they're trying to balance those things because they're working at cross-

purposes for each other.

They don't have an incentive to lie to you. I got to tell you guys, a lot of people have an incentive to lie to you. Yeah.

Let me just give two quick thoughts on what we might be able to do. One is a pastor very practically. Teach your people at some point.

I say this if you share my theological grid, I guess. Teach your people how to appropriately read Revelation, Daniel, apocalyptic literature. Now, you don't have to be an Amil like I am.

But so many people, this gets grafted on to a very bad hermeneutic of apocalyptic literature that the 666, then if anything, do with the Roman Empire, of course, Seven Hills, another new Roman Empire, the Mark of the Beast is a code, something that's going to be implanted. We need to help our people read those texts in a way that would have made sense to a first century Jewish audience, familiar with the Old Testament, thinking of Revelation, and under the heel of the Roman Empire. So that's one thing without doing a lecture on Revelation.

Second, sometimes it really is quantity over quality, meaning if you read your Bible 10 minutes a day and you go to church, let's say you go to church twice, you get a Bible study for an hour and you get an hour worship service and a 40 minute message from your pastor, that would be considered a very serious Christian in our culture. And you add it up and you got about three hours of God's word or some sort of Christian Orthodox influence. And if you're listening to podcasts, okay, we're not against podcasts, not against radio, not against, you know, not saying you only can listen to sermons on the radar, nothing like that, but we just have to be mindful of what we're putting in.

And if you're putting in dozens of hours of input from some other source, whatever that is, that's going to have that can't but not shape you in some way, whether it's podcasts, talk radio, news, scrolling your social media feed, we just have to be mindful, we are being affected by this. I think if you had the person who's reading good books at night and they're having a Bible study and they're in the Word, and yes, they're aware of what's going on in the world. But the main thing that's coming in is not all of this other noise, there's a built in kind of self acquired filter that keeps out.

I mean, it's whatever is good and whatever is excellent was ever praised, worthy think on these things. Justin, last word before I turn us to books. Yeah, TGC colleague Brett McCracken has a book coming out, and you can find the TGC article on the wisdom pyramid that I think goes along Kevin with what you were saying there that just like there's the food pyramid that should have kind of a more foundational level.

The Bible becomes that for us and you go on up and I think he's got Twitter at the very

top. That's the junk food, you can have that once in a while. But if you try to make that the foundation of your diet, you're really asking for these sort of problems that I think that Kevin identifies.

Good. All right, books. Here's my question for you today.

We're talking biographies. Now we could just go on about the dozens of biographies you love, but let's just try to narrow it down. It's like picking your favorite child I know, but give a few about Christians or non-Christians a few biographies that have been especially enjoyable to you.

Now we'll put out the caveat. Maybe you read it 20 years ago and you can't vouch for everything that's in it now, but when you read it, it hits you, you loved it, and it's been one of your favorites. Colin, give us some of your favorite biographies.

Man, what a great question. This is fun. This is a question that I asked when I was really starting to become a serious reader, and I asked my pastor, "Hey, what are some biographies that you think I should read?" And it just made a huge difference in my life.

So in that vein, I start out with Roland Bainton's Martin Luther biography. I mean, simple, simple right there. I think just by anybody can read that one, Luther is going to be a pretty central figure.

Sticking within the reformation, Bruce Gordon's Calvin biography really appreciated. Sticking within our evangelical tradition, I know Kevin, you just talked about how you just read it. George Marsden, Jonathan Edwards is absolutely excellent.

And what a wonderful example of being able to combine social history and theological history. A few more here. I recommend this to all incoming seminary students, and that is Peter Brown's Augustin of Hippo.

That's been a little bit harder, but if you don't understand Augustine and his central role within the Western theological tradition, it's going to be hard for you to make sense of a lot of different things. And it really situates Augustine within his time. The last two that I would mention are kind of, they're a little bit different.

One might not think of as a biography, but unbroken by Lauren Hillenbrand about Louis Amperini is of course just, it's crazy to me that I still find people who have not read this book. So that's the recommendation, just absolutely one of the most gripping and food for a really interesting spiritual thought because the author in this case fundamentally misunderstands her character. But as a Christian, you'll be able to pick up why.

Last one I wanted to mention is Nic, but it's one that I know when I read it, I just gushed to you guys about, it's not a new one. It is Chaplain to the Confederacy about Basil Manley Sr. by James Fuller. It's been out by 20 years.

But I think if you are in the sort of reformed evangelical space, and you don't understand the antebellum period very well and the dynamics that relate to the Civil War and the division between North and South, you cannot do better, I don't think, than reading this biography to see just how connected Northern and Southern reformed evangelicals were and the role that the Civil War played in that. And I've got to give a shout out here to one of the best lines I have ever read in a biography and comes from an absolutely harrowing situation where Basil Manley Sr. is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina. There's a slave that slave member of his church.

She's sleeping with her owner, which is obviously as we look back now, you can clearly see that that's a rape situation. She's doing this against her will, but the church has to discipline her for sleeping with somebody who's not her husband. Well, the pastor realizes Basil Manley Sr. realizes the essential problem here.

And so what does he do? James Fuller has one of the best lines of ever read in a biography and says he bought her body to save her soul. He bought her. He bought a slave to save her from her master.

My goodness, that just grips me. And so remarkable one that probably, remarkable book that probably not many people have read. No, I haven't read it.

Justin, what's on your list? Yeah, there's some overlap there. Ian Murray's biography of Jonathan Edwards, I think was one of the first serious Christian biographies that I read. That would be an interesting one for somebody to pair with George Marsden's biography of Edwards.

Murray was groundbreaking in many ways and really introduced the evangelical, reformed world to a lot of great saints from the past through his publishing work and through his biography writing. But the way in which he did it and the way in which Marsden did are different and complementary in some ways and Marsden moves beyond him in some ways. And I think Mark Knoll may have put it best that he thinks that Edwards would have loved Ian Murray's biography.

Best of all the biographies that have been written of him. Knoll wrote that before Marsden came out. I think it would still probably be true that Edwards himself would prefer the Murray biography.

But Murray writing a biography of me if he liked me. That's true. If he didn't like you, no, that would not go well.

If you're an Arminian, you don't want that happening. Sorry Billy Graham. But I think what Marsden did is just such an interesting thing of being able to tell a story, to keep the narrative going, but also to do an intellectual biography and to have absorbed all of that high-level material that Edwards was able to produce.

One that I would recommend for people is now in one volume by John Piper, 21 Servants of Sovereign Joy, which is the Swans are not silent series. Seven volumes basically packed into one. Those are not your full-length biographies.

Those are not your critical historians' biographies. But I think they're just great launching points to get a life in brief and to use that as an entry way into somebody else's life and to go on and read the primary sources that Piper read. I really enjoyed reading Alistair McGrath's biography of J.I. Packer.

McGrath essentially says this is not only a biography of Packer, but it's a biography of 20th century evangelicalism. So I love thinking about that world. Another kind of dual pairing would be Grant Wackers.

Not a biography technically of Billy Graham, but a study of Graham's life and work paired with Ralph Martin's big biography of Billy Graham. To me, what Martin did there is. To me, it's almost an exemplar of Christian biography writing.

Incredibly well researched, a great narrative. I learned a lot from that biography. It kind of gives an inside glance while being critical at the same time.

Lots of little biographies that I like. I actually don't tend to read big biographies, but Chadwick's little biography of Augustine or Martin Marty's little biography of Luther. I like theoretically the 800 page version of a life, but I also like to read the challenge of somebody trying to get a whole life into 150 pages.

I think Kevin, you've read Paul Johnson's biography of Churchill. It takes a special talent and I don't want to say it's harder, but it's a different kind of challenge to say get the whole incredible life of Churchill into a slim book versus an eight volume version. Justin, you've talked with Tommy Kid about his view on this, haven't you? In terms of biography writing? Well, he does not think there's almost ever an occasion for an 800.

So he's very much against the Ron turnout approach. And look at all the Tommy kids, amazing works. They're all shorter.

Yeah, pretty short. And that's definitely not a smart idea. Yeah, his argument is you can only read so many books and I only have time for so much.

Do I really want to devote this number of months of my life to working through this in a thousand- Alexander Hamilton. Yeah, right. Yeah.

Those are great. You mentioned some of some on my list. And I was actually going to say there is a real place for those shorter biographies and the Piper biographies or an older book that people used to read.

Warren Weir's "Be Walking with the Giants," which gave just different vignettes of

pastors. I was going to mention the Paul Johnson Churchill volume. But here's some on my list.

Go back to Ian Murray. And again, I know it's not academic history in the sense that you would want to do a critical biography. But the Lloyd Jones two volumes when I read them years ago before I was in ministry from Ian Murray were very moving to me and gave me such a thrill and a desire and an impetus to preach that I think Lloyd Jones and Ian Murray probably be very pleased that the biography would do that in a young man.

And so there's a place for that even if other historians have come along and said, well, you know, he didn't walk on water and let's try to look at Lloyd Jones from all these facets. But I love that two-volume biography. When I read last year called "God's Salesman" on Norman Vincent Peale, I really enjoyed maybe 300 pages or so.

Norman Vincent Peale is not how to hear of mine, of course. It helped that he was in the RCA. And so that was interesting to me as someone who was in the RCA most of my life.

But it really, I knew a little bit about him, but it helped me make sense of 20th century evangelicalism. And in doing so, it helped me make sense of 21st century evangelicalism. And it was well written, crisply paced.

I'm sure you guys have read Ellen Gelso's Redeemer president on Abraham Lincoln. There's so many biographies of Lincoln. I love that one.

He's one of my favorite authors and historian. And I got to the end and of course, I'm just hoping that he doesn't die. But I know he does.

I know. I know. And I want him to become a born-again Christian.

And I know there's a lot of debate about that. But certainly Gelso, who is a Christian, his take is there's not the evidence there that you might want to see for Lincoln's conversion. But I love that book.

Adam and I are juts into the Golden Shore. Great missionary biography. One that is a memoir.

So I guess more of an autobiography. But years ago, I read Clarence Thomas's memoir, my grandfather's son. I know people have different opinions of Clarence Thomas.

I have a lot of respect for him, but it was a very moving biography. What a great title. Yeah.

What a great title for a book. Yeah. David McCullough, of course, everything he writes is readable and good.

So John Adams. Peggy Noonan's book, When Character Was King on Reagan. That's a

good title.

Be good for people to remember that title when character was king. On Reagan, of course, is a very sympathetic view of Reagan and it's she's a writer. Great writer.

So lots of good biographies out there. So here's my fun question for you as we are nearing the close. If the Lord gave you the time and the opportunity, who would you like to write a biography on? Present company excluded.

So mine's easy and obvious. And I really do hope the Lord gives me the opportunity to do this in, let's say, five to 10 years. But there has not been a proper biography of John Witherspoon written since 1925.

There's been lots of little things and there's a lot of good scholarly work being done. But just a biography, people go back to the Asheville Green biography in the middle of the 19th century or the Barnum Lansing Collins biography, President Princeton, who wrote it in 1925. And after that, those are it.

So I would love to take what I learned and still have to learn about John Witherspoon. I don't know if it has bestseller written all over it. If you send me a copy, I'm not quite sure if it should be a critical biography in the academic sense or more of a readable or I guess I'd like to find that mythical space somewhere in between there.

But I would love to do that and go back to the archives and learn more about the second half of his career and write a proper John Witherspoon biography. Colin. Oh man, what a great question.

I love this question. First though, before I get that cliffhanger, I want to give a special shout out to terms of biographies. Fourth coming book from the Gospel Coalition, 12 Faithful Women edited by Melissa Kruger and Kristen Weatherall.

A lot of these shorter biographies, like we've been talking about there, reminiscent of Pipers biographies there. It's a companion to the 12 Faithful Men book that Jeff Robinson and I had done for Baker on a number of different pastors and what we can learn from how they suffered well. I tell you what, the women that are profiled, some famous ones, less famous ones in there, like Corey Tenboom and Amy Carmichael and folks like that, those stories are just going to, they're just, they're very moving and I think it's good timing for those.

Okay, so back to your question. I love that I didn't, I mean, I guess that Kevin, I could have guessed yours in that case. But if I'll work through this, my grandpa was my hero.

I would love to write a biography of him. It's just, you know, it's not going to happen for a lot of different reasons. But my grandmother wrote kind of her mother's memoir.

My grandfather actually wrote kind of a bit of a family history. I mean, for talking about just what would I love to do? I'd love to do that. But more likely, somebody is going to have to read right of a biography of Tim Keller.

It's probably not going to be me, but somebody is going to need to do that and now would be a good time for somebody to start doing that. But here's the last two that I think you guys will be interested in. Nobody ever did a boggart.

Wait, some, I heard something about this. Somebody's writing biography of Carl Henry. Is that right? Somebody, do you guys not know? Do you guys don't know? Probably it's a bad idea.

I heard that, but I thought I did too. But there's like, there's one little sort of like Guy Devangelical thinkers that was produced many years ago, other than that you've got an autobiography from Henry and it's... Oh, when it's written on... Yeah, you've definitely got like a, yeah, but he has like, essentially, a angelical is mostly about Akengay or, I think, in wrong title there. Anyway, there's like a bunch of multi-author contributions.

There's not the rise of neo-eventagicalism there in the history, but not a biography. Hmm, no, not that I've seen the autobiography is not great. I mean, it'd be good source material, but it's too bitter and it's too focused on other things.

And then last is, I think, Kevin, you might appreciate David Wells. Yeah, yeah. I said, you need to go.

I know, I know, I have every intent to do it. I know, but that would be, that would be fun. So that's my answer.

I give and give you one. I give you like five. And he's got a story growing up in Africa and in communist and then John Stott and it's got more interesting life than some of us.

Yeah. Justin Taylor, have you ever thought about writing a biography of anyone? I'm planning to do a memoir is probably my lifelong dream to do it. Yeah.

I want to be like, Colin, Colin breaks all the rules. So I want to go back to the biography one because there are two others that I didn't mention. My favorite genre is narrative nonfiction about people who've been assassinated.

I know that's a pretty mitchy topic, but James Swanson's manhunt. That's really that mark, ever. What's that? He lives next door to Mark, ever.

Yeah, does he still? To me, that was a revelation to read that book of just what somebody could do in terms of putting you into the scene and on the trail. I was just so mesmerized by his writing and his abilities there. He did one on the Kennedy assassination, which is not nearly as good.

And then Hellhound on his trail by Hampton signs, similar sort of cinematic feel to it with wonderful research and incredible writing. So we need a separate podcast on narrative nonfiction. That's all for now.

Assassinations or can we broaden it? Not to have the assassination. Just grisly assassinations. That's all.

Right. Two biographies that I've thought about writing, which I don't think I ever will. One is Jim Elliot and the other is Johnny Eric Sintada.

And the reason is that I don't know if anybody will actually write either of those because they've already had the official accounts. Johnny did her own autobiography and has done several of them. But I just think some of this overlaps with my interest in 20th century evangelicalism.

But she's lived such an incredible life. And it's so different in terms of a story. But we really just have her firsthand account.

But for somebody to do the full research of her full life and to do a critical biography. And then I think Jim Elliot was a similar thing with Elizabeth Elliot. She kind of said, here is the version of his life.

And nobody's actually gone back and done something more critical and tried to put it into wider context. So those are two that I think are interesting. The other one that comes to mind for me is Bob Jones Sr. who I think is just a fascinating figure.

And actually John Matsko, I think Paul Matsko's uncle, whose historian at Bob Jones University has actually written it but has not been able to get it published. But I think that's just a fascinating period in evangelical history is evangelicals and fundamentalists are kind of united. And then Billy Graham causes this separation or Bob Jones causes this separation.

I've thought a lot about that period in history and I think that's always fun to explore. All right. Last question coming full circle to Fat Man Touchdown Dances.

Secret question, you did not know I was asking this question. Here goes. But I'm sure you've dreamt of this.

If you could be exceptionally world-class good at one athletic endeavor, what would it be? What is your dream? Okay. So here's mine. I would love to be never, it was my dream.

Never was within anything close. I wanted to be a brilliant runner. And if you could give me one athletic moment in the sun, it would be the Olympics, the four by four, anchor leg, chasing down the other countries, running around.

I love what I've always thought that, okay, Mr. Spiking out with Austin. Like my narrative nonfiction and there's people shooting at you. Okay, I'll try to spice it up.

But running should be, well, yeah, running should be more popular. How can people not get into running? It's so simple. People go, who's the fastest? It's simple.

You should get into it. So some sort of drive. We don't need to run.

The hunters and gatherers. It is a sport you can do anywhere. I didn't say that anyone can do it, Justin, but you can do it anywhere.

You just need to shoot. So, it's a telegraph ended the marathon. We don't need it anymore.

We have the telegram feeling properly shamed. We're going to have a whole podcast on exercise books, okay, because I have read a lot of them. I have a whole shelf behind me of running books and swimming books.

Okay, so some sort of running, maybe the 5,000, maybe the 10,000 meters, not a sprint, 400 as long as short as I can go. That would be my athletic dream. Justin, I know that you have something much better.

Pole vaulting, cornhole. Yes. Yeah, I mean, it's hard not to think about Michael Jordan right now because I've watched many, many hours of my life.

It's hard not to think of Michael Jordan. I agree. I know.

It'd be fun to dunk from the free throw line. Yeah. I'm going to pick like returning a punt return for a touchdown to hear the, to get around the edge and to hear the crowd just going nuts and running so fast that even the fastest guy in the field cannot catch you.

You're the Devin Hester of podcasting. Yes. I remember one time ridiculous.

Thank you. For one time in high school, they let me like line up in the backfield and I ran as hard as I could and it felt like I was running in quick sand. I was so slow.

It was just immediately pummeled in the backfield. So to be able to do a polar Devin Hester, that would be great. Do you know I played one here in football.

I played eighth grade football and the thing I was undoubtedly best at was running the warm up lab. It's like, this is great. I'm going to be really good.

I'm beating everyone in the warm up lab. But then it turns out in football, people also hit you. And that was the one part of football on offense and defense.

I didn't enjoy my sure. I think you could have been a good punter. Well, thank you.

Yeah. Or maybe had the physique to be a decoy for the P.A.T. All right, Colin, bring us home with this outstanding end to an otherwise outstanding show. I think just the sound, the feeling of just being able to hit a home run of just being able to turn around and 98 mile an hour fastball in a clutch moment.

And just, yeah, I mean, I was probably better at baseball than any other sport, but obviously not good enough to actually really matter in any way. And so that's the one I can relate to. And just the the the atmosphere of a Major League ballpark, the the the wooden bat, the sound, the way that great hitters talk about when you hit it well, you don't even feel it.

I mean, that would be, that would be pretty cool. I mean, I can think of so many different things because I love sports, but that's that's the one that I can relate to in the smallest way. But also would just have the coolest power.

I have no idea. I mean, being a quarterback, that doesn't make any sense to me. At all, I could never do that.

I can't think of that like Patrick Mahomes or something else. Somebody else I'm grateful for. But I don't know what it's like to be able to run around, to be able to throw the ball left handed or being able to throw it without looking or being I mean, I guess that would be cool also to be Patrick Mahomes.

But other than that, just being able to hit a home run, you hit it so well, you don't even feel it. That'd be pretty cool. All right.

Well, thank you, man, for sharing your hopes and dreams and dashing mine. We will line up for a race at some time in the future. You can tackle me if you can catch me.

But until next time, I hope that our listeners out there will glorify God and enjoy him forever and read some good books. See you later.

[silence]