

# OpenTheo

## We Are in the Time of Judges, Not Revival

September 16, 2020



### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin, Collin, and Justin discuss the writing process, how things have exponentially changed in the online Christian writing space, what books have most recently moved them, which pastor biographies are their favorite, and what message the church needs to hear most in 2020. And if nuanced discussions on culture, books, and theology don't quite do it for you, be sure to tune in to hear the guys give their best Chris Farley impressions.

This episode of Life and Books and Everything is brought to you by Crossway, a publisher whose goal is to publish gospel-centered, Bible-centered content that will honor our Savior and serve his Church. The Crossway title we want to highlight in this episode is *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church* by Paul David Tripp. For every celebrity pastor exiting the ministry in the spotlight, there are many more lesser-known pastors leaving in the shadows. Tripp draws on his decades of ministry experience to give churches twelve gospel principles necessary to combat this leadership crisis. Each of these principles, built upon characteristics such as humility, dependency, and accountability, will enable new and experienced leaders alike to focus their attention on the ultimate leadership model: the gospel.

Timestamps:

What did you do on Labor Day? | Crossway sponsorship: *Lead* by Paul David Tripp [0:00 - 11:48] - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/gospelbound/leaders-who-wont-flame-out/>

Changes in Online Christian Writing [11:48 - 38:46]

What is the last book that moved you? [38:46 - 54:05] Collin's books:

*Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church* by Paul David Tripp

*How to Talk about Jesus (Without Being That Guy): Personal Evangelism in a Skeptical World* by Sam Chan

Alexander Hamilton by Ron Chernow

Kevin's books:

The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race In America by Shelby Steele

Churchill: Walking with Destiny by Andrew Roberts

Justin's books:

Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers by Dane Ortlund

The chapter on Adoption in

## **Transcript**

[MUSIC] Greetings and salutations listeners. I am Kevin DeYoung, the Life and Books and everything podcast. And yes indeed, I am joined once again.

After their well-deserved week off last week, by Justin Taylor and Colin Hanson. What did you guys do for your Labor Day?

[MUSIC] I was spending time with my family. And enjoying being in the water.

And yeah, just squeezing some of the last out of summer before we get hit by a hurricane and the temperatures drop. So it was a good time. How did you, Kevin, how did you enjoy your monologue? Well, I'm sure that the listeners have been clamoring for much more of that.

In no doubt, we have spiked the servers with the monologue. It was sort of enjoyable and I just wrote down, jotted down some few notes. And so on the one hand, I was surprised that I talked for 50 minutes.

And the other hand, you see how the people who talk three hours a day for the living, I mean, that's a certain sort of gift and punishment to be able to do that. I think I could get the hang of it, unfortunately, or fortunately. But to be able to be interesting for that long, all by yourself, it takes a special Mac and it's a different kind of communication than preaching for sure.

Justin, how long would it take before you just began reciting all kinds of 1990s Nebraska football trivia? Three hours apart. That's right. That's all I do on Labor Day is just watch old 90s Husker reruns on YouTube.

And you mentioned about the guys who have a show that they have to fill in three hours a day, but there's no sports going on for multiple months. Yeah, but you can still fill all that time with controversy and the latest. I didn't listen.

I mean, I couldn't do it. I just shut off sports media. I mean, you didn't listen to me entirely about no, I didn't listen to sports media for basically March until now, except for maybe some podcasts when baseball came back.

But I'm, I'm not against sort of, I mean, athletes being willing to speak out on political issues or talking about a lot of the social issues or obviously debating debating COVID those implications. It's just not, it's just not what I'm looking for. So I just, I just steered clear of all that.

It feels surprisingly different. I mean, it makes sense now, but surprisingly different without fans. Yeah, it just doesn't have the same momentum and everything is pieced together.

I mean, I guess it's better than nothing, but it's, it's hard to feel like even, even the NFL starting, which is the most normal of things starting has started on time. You had all the games. Still, I mean, the ratings were terrible for the first game on Thursday, whether that was people staying away because they don't like the politicization of it or they just didn't know it was here, whatever reason.

Justin, what did you, before we jump in, what did you do on Labor Day? Yeah, I hung out with my family and it was a call on was benching, trying to get in some last minute pool time with the family before we enter the long hibernation that you two don't have to experience. But basically it's like, oh, let's go swimming because we won't be able to do this for nine more months. Life is a Midwesterner.

Yeah, I, we have a little above ground pool in our backyard. I just went in it this afternoon. I imagine I will be for the next month or so.

So if you're in the area, Justin, bring your family. I'll bring the Jim Gaffigan clip of Jim talking about what it's like to be in the teacup between towards the center of the pool. I thought you were going to say the Jim Gaffigan trick or treating in the Midwest with your snow suit over your, your Halloween costume.

Always snowing. All right, this podcast episode is brought to you once again by Crossway. We really do love Crossway are grateful, not only for them sponsoring this podcast in this episode, but I bet hardly a day goes by that I don't read a Crossway book.

Certainly a day doesn't go by if you count the ESV. So I'm very thankful for Crossway. All of us are.

And so we're grateful for that. And we will mention some Crossway books right now. I have one to mention.

All right. This week we're brought to you by the new book by Paul trip lead 12 gospel principles for leadership in the church. I think on one of the episodes upcoming here,

guys, on life and books and everything we should talk about leadership in the church in this book specifically, but we can all see the church's leadership crisis.

I was actually just talking with somebody today about how many friends we can count personally and how many other people you just see in the news were no longer in church leadership. Trip is arguing that lurking behind every pastoral fair is the lack of a strong leadership community. I think that's the distinctive of this book when he said it said it next to a lot of Paul's previous works, including the book dangerous calling and trip draws in decades of ministry experience to give churches 12 gospel principles necessary to combat this leadership crisis.

I got a chance to talk with Paul for a gospel bound podcast and the response has been tremendous to that. Just what we were hoping for that. The book hits people at a time and a place where they need it.

And to find encouragement in Christ. And yeah, I just encourage people to read that individually, grab some friends, maybe some peers in ministry. I wonder what it would be like, guys.

I don't know if you're you have any thoughts on this, maybe Justin or Kevin, but it'd be one thing to read that book within your own leadership community, but then also then to read that with some of your peers, like Kevin, it's a different relationship you have with other senior pastors versus a relationship you have with your church. I bet the book could be read in both environments, drawing out different lessons from it. But that's the book of the day, our week on life and books and everything strongly recommend that one.

And one of those that's really stirred my affections for Jesus the most this year so far. Great. I enjoyed the podcast you did with with trip and Justin, I'm really excited for crossway to send me a free copy of the book.

Still nothing, huh? How many times do you need? I know. And that's \$15. We'll be happy to send you a copy.

OK. No, and let me just jump in to say, Colin, great job with that interview. You really are gifted at those one on one interviews.

It's obvious that you've read the book and that you care about the content of the book and you let the author speak. Not all of those three criteria are common among interviewers. So great job.

It's a great preview of the book. And if anybody doesn't subscribe to gospelbound. Yeah, go and subscribe there.

Thank you, Justin. I appreciate that. I have learned there is an actual chemistry to those

interviews, just like there's a chemistry to these podcasts, which the benefit of how much we get to talk and how much we have long how long we've known each other.

That makes a big difference when you're interviewing somebody like Paul, we've known each other for a long time. I used to edit his columns for the gospel coalition and we've both been through a lot of the similar incidents and Paul's willingness to talk about his experience there and what he learned and lessons there was really made a difference. And it felt sometimes you wrap up an interview and you think, wow, that act, that went really well.

It does not always go that way, which is usually my fault, but you just don't always have that chemistry, but it felt like there was something special with that one with Paul. So lead, check out that book from Crossway Paul. You asked good crisp questions that led to good crisp answers different from many of the sports interviews, which boil down to, I'm going to describe what just happened and talk about talk about talk us through.

What were you feeling right then when that happened? I just described it. Do you have any feelings? Say something. And Colin, you should do an interview like that.

What was going through your mind? Does you were writing chapter 12? Take us through it. Well, I, one of the things I do differently is that I generally don't ask people to recap the book and in part, it's to save time. And I just figure if people, if I ask questions about what I'm interested in, that's probably going to help the interview.

And if you're interested in the kind of conversation we have, go check out the book, but I don't want the interview to be the same as the book. So that's what I aim to do. Sometimes it works better than others, but that was a time it worked.

Or maybe you can do like the Chris Farley interviews. Yeah. Hey, Mark, remember that one time in the book when you said only only religious people, we're going to get married and have babies.

That was awesome. That was awesome. That was awesome.

Just sort of see what happens. You know that we're of a certain age with our younger colleagues. I have to introduce them to the Chris Farley technique of interviewing.

So listening YouTube is your friend. You can't go wrong. Just just look up Chris Farley and Chris Farley interview or Paul McCartney specifically.

Now, how amazing would it be if someone just did that sort of interview style for the Trump Biden debates? If there is one because there would be enough. Remember that one time when you said we're either one and just tell us just, whoa, what was that about? Well, I did it. You can do that for hours.

All right. And speaking of interviews, well, we'll let one of our cats out of the bag. We have an interview coming up at the end of the month with James Eglinton, the author of the critical biography, critical in the academic sense, not the pejorative sense of Herman Bawink, which is coming out with Baker academic.

And I've been reading through it. It's great. It's filled with Dutch people, which is just an added bonus.

And I'm not sure if you look good, it's still amazing, Justin. There's shout out to various places, nothing to Orange City yet, but there is some to Holland, Michigan and Hope College. So that will be coming up.

You can look into the author index and just see how many Lake Vans there are and be. First of there's any d'yeongs. Yes, there's quite a few.

The thing is people always come up with, oh, there's this. I don't know how you say this weird name, Ho-weeks-a-ma. You mean Ho-weeks-a-ma? That's like one of the most common names you could ever have.

Why that's Klein-Walter-ink. What's hard about that? It's just what it looks like. So I hope you're enjoying if you ever venture 30 miles to the north, Justin, and enter into Sioux County.

You can encounter those many fabulous Dutch people there. OK, we're going to talk about books. We are.

And we're going to talk about. The process of writing, editing, getting a book published, not so much. The three of us that we could talk about that, what you do to write a book.

But let's start with Justin. You have all sorts of experience receiving books to be published, deciding which books to be published. You've worked on many projects as the editor.

How do you decide what is worthwhile to publish? And how do you, or crossway, how do you go about making something that an author presents to you with a lot of promise and making it better? I'm grateful that crossway to be inheriting a process that's been honed over a number of years. But we take every project seriously and we remind ourselves that even if it does not turn out to be the right fit for crossway, that got a sovereign over the entire project and that these people have poured their hearts and souls into proposing a book and giving us the honor of considering them. So I think most books that end up working have a combination of at least three factors.

The author has to be passionate about it. The author has to have a certain sort of competence, whether through training and through experience or most likely a combination of the two. And then there needs to be a real need in the church for the

resource.

So if any of those three are missing, I mean, you can be the world's most passionate author and there can be a legitimate need. But if you're not competent to write it, it's not going to work. You could be really competent and there could be a need.

But if it's not something that you're just dying to get out to the world, you don't have a passion for it. It's just something you're kind of doing by duty because you can do it. It doesn't tend to work.

You can love the project and have training in it, but there might be a need. So a lot of dissertations fall into that category. You know, you're you love the subject and you're the world's expert on it, but we don't need to read about, you know, Jonathan Edwards as a judge.

OK, John Witherspoon. We don't need another book like that. There's no need.

So that's one matrix to think about book publishing. We actually have kind of a sophisticated matrix at crossway of scoring each and every project that we consider. So we ask and we rank and we have a whole committee doing this independently, asking about the importance of the author to cross-phase publishing program, what we think about the content, what we think about the writing quality, what we think of the ministry potential for the book, how much we think it will be distributed, how widely will it be read, what are the economic factors, what's our own personal passion as a as a committee member for this particular title.

Does it fit with our calling as a publishing house? Not every publishing house that publishes every genre at every level is going to be a week in ineffective publishing house. So we try to score the different projects and have them meet a certain threshold for consideration. So at the end of the day, we usually land on a consensus because we know who we are as a publishing house and what we want to accomplish.

So there's lots of other things we could talk through, kind of how to go from A to B, but that's the big picture of what we're looking for. And in terms of cross-wave self-identity, we like to publish in the Reformational Historic Stream of Christianity. We tend not to be a pure textbook publisher, but we do publish academic books that tend to have crossover to wider audiences, but publish popular level books, children's books, thoughtful books, which are sort of in between popular level and academic.

And I think that for the most part, when people see the cross-way brand on a book or the logo, that they have a pretty good idea of the general theology and direction ethos that the books can have. How do you think through sales, what you hope to be sales? Because cross-way, you know, to stay in business at some level, you have to sell books, so you can't just out of the goodness of your heart. And yet we know that cross-way sees

it as a ministry.

You are technically a nonprofit. That's right. Right.

So how do you think through, yeah, we really want to do some project, but because we think it's good for the church, but it's going to have very limited sales. I think authors often wonder, do you look at, you know, a particular book and say you give the author \$5,000, do you think we need to make \$5,000 of profit in this book in order to make up for our investment here? How do you think through that in a way that's realistic without being worldly? It's a great question. My mentor and predecessor, Al Fisher, once said that he heard a publishing executive suggest that in his way of thinking there was no conflict between mission and business.

And Al's response to that was if you don't think there's any conflict, you're probably misunderstanding one or the other because it's inherent that we all have ministry-minded motives. But if you don't ever think about business principles, you're, you can have that ministry for a while, but it's not going to last unless you have some outside source of funding. If you're self-funded through your sales, you need to care about that.

One of the things that you can think about is that there are certain books that are going to have very large sales that can help other books. So if you only published the low selling books on their own, you need some good selling authors to kind of raise the tide for all the different ships out there. Every book that we actually look at the considerations for, you know, are we getting a return on our investment? And it's one factor among many.

So it's not the final factor or the only factor. But yeah, it's, you can say that a certain book might only sell 300 copies, but it's going to be a such value to the church that we need to publish it. And once in a blue moon, there may be a project like that.

But if it's only going to sell 300 copies, it's not actually reaching that many people and having that much of an impact. There was a recent article. I can't even remember where it was from looking at secular book sales.

And it was surprising to us to see what the secular book industry thought was a successful book in terms of sales figures, which seemed very low to us at crossway. Are you at liberty to say not people or titles, but what would crossway or if you know more about the Christian bookseller industry, what would be considered, you know, passable, good, great. Do you have some of those benchmarks? Yeah, it's still somewhat relative.

I think that you can have a really high profile author that if they were to sell 5,000 copies in a year, it would be a disappointment. But others, that would be a really great where we oftentimes do a print run, hoping that we will print in the first printing enough supply for 12 months. You don't want to print enough books to last for five years, but you also



don't want to print enough books that won't last for a month.

So that's what you're kind of shooting for out of the gate. But I would say 3000 tends to be kind of a starting place in terms of book sales that we would hope for the first year. Again, that doesn't mean we can't do any books that don't hit that.

And sometimes our projections are off and sometimes they're way under that. But we're hoping kind of out of the gate that most of our books would hit 3000. But there are certain authors that right out of the gate, they're going to probably be selling 20,000 copies or 30,000 copies.

Colin, let me ask a similar question. How do you and the other editors at gospel coalition balance that obviously ministry, you want to build up the church? It's a little bit different because there's not the, is not the same business model, but you still want, I'm sure to see page views and somebody is probably looking at that frequently. So how do you decide and how do you let that factor into what's published? Or how do you just ignore those metrics? If you're governed by what people want, you won't be faithful anymore, or at least you won't be focused.

And particularly true with online books. Yeah. A lot of time to get there.

There's still it's something of a timeless, but online. I mean, you, you, you can tell us better than I can, but angry, polarized. That that's what's going to get a big, because you don't need to get a broad swath of you're not trying to win 51% of the public.

You just need a very small, passionate minority. And then they pass it around to everyone who's angry. And then it goes to all the people who hate it and people who love it.

I mean, that's, I hope it's not tempting. But you have to, I'm sure you look at other people or sites doing that and you say, yep, we could do that too. Yeah, Justin, does anybody hate by a crossway book? I'm sure that they do on rare occasions, but that's not the norm.

So I try to talk to people about the medium and there may be some people who hate the three of us so much that they want to listen to an hour and a half. Don't worry people. I don't think it'll go that long and hour and a half of us talking about Dutch names and Orange City, I would things like that, but doesn't generally happen.

In the past, did you take out a newspaper or did you travel to another city to be able to read a newspaper or just to be able to pick up a column and say, I hate you for this and I paid whatever a year for that subscription. It only worked that way, but the internet does. But if anybody's paying attention, then they realize that that doesn't make a lot of sense for a business model.

You can't really build a business model on people who hate you. So you do have to generate a steady audience and you can build a website really, really, really quickly by making it all about hate and making it all about opposition. But I don't think I've seen that really work for the long haul.

There are a couple websites that I can think of, watch dog websites that can keep that going, but I think it's spiritually corrosive to the people who edit it. I don't know if I could explain the level of spiritual hazard that comes in this job or when you're editing. We were talking, well, over the weekend about my former boss, Mark Gallic, converting to Roman Catholicism and talking about all of the editors at Christianity today, none of them leaving under really positive circumstances and often veering off into really different theological directions or in distress.

And so you want to publish things. I mean, I'm looking to publish things that are edifying, that are edifying to me, that are edifying to our editors, that we're proud to publish, that we think are going to build up the church. Now, sometimes that does mean being controversial, but the goal is to build up is to edify, is to encourage the church leaders, especially.

So that's what we're looking for, because if you don't do that in the internet, then you will end up with endless submissions of 20-something's who are absolutely sure at how terrible everybody older than them will be in the church. You guys have both been doing what you do for well over a decade, or at least Justin has in common a solid decade. Have you gotten pretty adept at being able to make an educated guess as to what is going to get a lot of views or what books are going to sell? Well, do you guys have a good sense for that? How often are you really surprised that you had modest expectations and this completely went viral? Justin, how do you see it on the book side? Yeah, Colin's been really insightful and helpful here, just emphasizing the differences between the two mediums, because when you're talking about a book, maybe listeners don't know this, an average turnaround time between when an author submits a manuscript and when it's published as a year, and perhaps an average time between when they propose the book and submit the book would be six months, it can be longer than that.

So you're talking about sometimes a two-year turnaround from when we're seeing it to actually when we're seeing the proposal to when it's actually published. So so much can change. Think about what we were all doing a year and a half ago, how the world looks so different.

So that's another factor to kind of stir into the mix in terms of trying to predict how something's going to do. Yeah, anybody who's in publishing has built up enough experience to think, you know, I know when something's going to take off when it's not, but we're still, I think, regularly wrong. There's books that I tell the publishing team, the

marketing and sales folks like, guys, listen to me, we're not printing enough copies of this.

I have a feeling about this one. This one is really going to take off. There's a lot of buzz about this topic and then it just kind of lands like a cannon's door.

Yeah, that's one example. Another would be your book. It's a whole cabinet.

Well, I want to turn that on you, Kevin, as an author, I was talking with somebody last week and she said, Colin, I saw your name on the back of. I can't remember what it was. It was like, it was just do something.

Yeah. You're like the thousandth person who's told me that they saw me on the back of a book. Kevin D'Young's just do something as an author.

How do you, I mean, you, you're a good example with, you're doing both, Kevin. You're publishing at the gospel coalition, your blog. You're also publishing with crossway, especially.

And just do something was not, but most of your books have been, but you're publishing a lot of things in both places that are not, they're actually not, do not expecting them to be popular. And well, they're very successful in that aim. Not being popular.

You know, with books, I some, I mean, just do something is, is my best selling book and Moody did that. I'm grateful for them. And I did think way back when I pitched the idea and at first they're kind of like, yeah, I don't know why we're not.

Emergence been pretty good, but this sounds like another will of God book. I'm going to do any other will of God book. And I said, well, here's the angle I'm taking.

And I really did think that it would either be nothing and it would just be another, eh, there's a will of God books or it would have enough of a hook, enough of an angle. I probably didn't think it would do as well as it has for as long as it has, it continues to have a very long tail and can sell. So that's one, but there have certainly been others.

And, you know, I've, I've done enough books now that I've learned that, you know, the books, I mean, I joke about the canons of door. Um, you know, the Heidelberg Catechism one that was with Moody, that's done. Okay.

But the more, I mean, the more academic, the more robustly theological it is, um, you know, they, they may serve the church more over the long haul. But, uh, at least with my books, you know, maybe like RC Sproul or somebody was different or some of Piper's, but mine haven't hit with the same kind of splash. Now on the scheme of things that I hopefully, uh, they're doing some good and doing all right.

But I've had to learn to not trust just my instincts, which are, am I, and people like me,

would they be really pumped about this book? Because there's actually not a huge market for people just like me. You have to, you're not going to sell thousands and thousands of books. Just with the, so you need to reach a broader audience.

And then with blogging, I'm interested in both of you. This wasn't where I thought we were going to go, but I think it's worth discussing how you guys think that medium has changed. I started in 2009.

Justin was five years before that. Colin's been looking at this for at least that long. It's changed so dramatically.

And, uh, I hope this doesn't sound like sour grapes are making excuses for myself. But we've talked about this before. I think it's very, very difficult for pastor bloggers to, to get a wide readership in the same way.

You, there are very few people like Tim Chally's who just they themselves, he himself does it every single day. And if Tim were starting today, he'd probably tell you that there's so many other people doing that, you know, he probably wouldn't build up the same audience that he's just has faithfully one of the first guys in and, and continuing to do it. But it seems like most people are part of an aggregate and go through an editorial process.

So it's become professionalized in some good ways. But it also means that the blogs that, you know, I'm going to write a theological primary blog for tomorrow and nobody's going to read it. That's fine.

You know, I'm writing it eventually put those together as a book. So there's value in it, but it seems to me you have to be ready to write almost immediately on whatever the Supreme Court decision, the latest gaff, the latest thing that's going on, the latest controversy, not that all that's bad, uh, if you, you know, comment from a Christian perspective, but it makes it harder for someone who's day in and day out, week in a week out has four or five or six other things that need to be more of a priority. And so I try to write one blog post a week and I don't even, I never check.

I don't know how to check. I don't want Colin to tell me because I'm sure I'd be discouraged at how few people read those and I would have to imagine it was a much bigger audience. Five, 10 years ago, unless you get people angry.

At you. Yeah. I don't want those babies and then all of a sudden.

It is, it is very different, but we've known each other for a long time. I think we all, we all knew that it was going to be different at some level. Um, I don't think we could have foreseen the rise of Twitter and how that would affect things like what you were doing on your blog in the early days, Justin.

And I don't think we could have quite foreseen what would happen with social media in terms of what it would do to grow blog audiences and then what it would do to ultimately shut down a lot of those same blog audiences. But I think if you take the long view of things, writing is writing and good sensibility, editorial sensibilities are good sensibilities. And the main things have held through there.

I just think blogs were especially at place for 20 somethings at the time who were coming of age during and 30 somethings during that era to be able to have a direct to consumer, direct to reader outlet that was not available to them in a time of incredible flux with the decline of newspapers and ultimately the decline of magazines as well. So it really flooded the market with a bunch more content. But what I expected to happen is what's happened.

Very few people can keep up with the level of output that was being expected at the time. So, Kevin, you, you weren't writing one blog post 10 years ago or 15 years ago, four or five a week. Exactly.

But you couldn't keep that up. I was like to four or five a day. None of your generation.

No, no, I really was. And they weren't four to five essays a day, but they were linking to videos or making comments or providing short summary or, or quoting a sermon or a poem. But Justin, did you have nearly the responsibility at crossway at the time or the number of children at the time? It just seemed to be a stage of life thing for a lot of people.

Kevin, you were Justin. Yeah. What'd you say? How do you view it? You know, you, you're, you still blog.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

I think, hopefully this doesn't sound like a humble brag, but somebody once said that I used to be like Christian Twitter for them before Twitter existed, like a, a bit of an entry point into the controversies, the things to read, the things to see of the day or the Christian dredge report, that kind of thing, not in terms of the size, but in terms of being a portal to other things. That's true. So yeah, I mean, the social media in some ways has kind of killed the blog.

I would disagree with you at one level, Kevin. I don't think it's actually a disagreement, but maybe an encouragement for those who are out there. I think there is still a place for Christian blogging and 10 or 15 years ago, you did have to write, I think, every day to establish yourself, to get momentum for people not to think, well, where did he go? Now I think you could write an essay once every two weeks, once a month.

If it's of sufficient quality, hopefully it will catch on. I mean, I'm sure there's brilliant essays out there that nobody's discovered. But if you're trying to network with people

and producing something that's really thoughtful, we give two examples.

They come to my Gavin Orland Samuel James. They will both write for Desiring God for TGC, but they've also maintained their own website presence. And those two guys, I'm sure there's other good examples out there, they come up with enough things that are of high quality that they catch my attention.

And, you know, I want to highlight them. I want to read them. And I think if they were turning out something every day, number one, the quality would go down and I just would lose interest with so many other things out there.

So I think it can be done, but I think quality matters over quantity. And back in the day, quantity might have mattered just as much as quality. I'll give you a couple other examples to go along with that, Justin.

David French versus Rod Drehr. David French writes one newsletter column a week as far as I can tell. And almost every time I see people sharing it with interest saying, wow, this is really insightful.

You have to check this out. Rod still writes multiple times a day. But I think I'm not sure there's anybody left from that early 2000s page.

That you're talking about, Justin, other than Rod. And I'm not sure it's spiritually possible. Right.

I think it's, I think the culture is too toxic. And just the fact that you have to be tied so much to a laptop, a phone, now, especially to Twitter and that you have such a, such a draw toward controversy. I don't know that people could, even if they wanted to, I don't know if they could or should maintain that pace, Justin.

Well, that's the thing to write up and not saying that that's what he's necessarily doing. But, you know, I heard somebody say once it was equipped from, you know, I think it was George Will or somebody, maybe it was William F. Buckley, you know, how am I going to write two or three columns a week? And he said, easy, you'll, you'll find two or three things that really make you upset every week. You'll write about that.

Well, yeah, you can, you can do that. You could do that every day. I mean, you could just go through Twitter, look at ESPN.

Look, there's always some new controversy to sure that you could write about. And very, very, very few people should be called to that. And, and then I just want to say a word to pastors as an encouragement.

You know, I can find this temptation. Maybe others can. You look at even, even like a David French who writes very high quality.

It seems like he does more than one a week. I know he does the, the, I'm thinking of the Sunday Sunday thing, but maybe he writes the news week piece as well. Yeah.

Otherwise. So, you know, I have to remind myself, I am a pastor and as much as I like to write, as much as I like to read and keep abreast of things and I'm doing podcasts. I'm doing all this stuff and I'm a pastor and there are people whose job is to be a writer and they are a commentator and they are a pundit.

And we need a few people to do that and praise God for those who are serious Christians and are good at it. But if we think that's kind of what a pastor does or that's even a secondary thing that a pastor does, you know, I think a few examples, maybe of, of Moller, you know, Al's carved out a niche for himself to do the briefing, but you probably really only need one person to do that kind of thing. Were you going to say something, Justin? No, I was just going to quote the Will Buckley.

William F. Buckley advice to George Will. So, thanks. Wow.

The exact same thing. The exact same thing. Mind meld.

Sticking with books, Colin often, maybe every time I ask this question at the end of his podcast, it's a good question. What is the last book? Colin, you may ask it in a different way, but what's the last book that moved you or the last book that sparked something in you as a Christian? There's a good question to think about and maybe it's very recently or maybe it was years ago, however you want to take that question. Colin, do you have an answer to that? What's the last book or two that moved you? I mentioned Tripp's lead book earlier.

There's a few authors. Paul Tripp is one of them. Tim Keller is another who speak a language of of gospel centered theology and spirituality that really speaks to my heart and stirs me to love Christ more.

They have an ability to cut to my soul and then expose the sin, but then bring the consolation of Christ together at the same time, which I really appreciate. So that's just when they came to mind, but there's another one that's coming out this fall. It's by Sam Chan, how to talk about Jesus without being that guy.

It's coming out with Zondervin. It's kind of a companion to one of his earlier books on evangelism. I find that one of the most helpful ways to stir my affections for Jesus is to just talk to people about him.

And so that book was just a reminder of the joy of talking to people who don't know Jesus and introducing them to him. And so that just filled me with a zeal to go out there and to continue to build connections and friendships and opportunities to be able to talk with people about Jesus. And so those are the two books that come to mind.

I'll spend it back to you, Kevin. What, um, what comes to mind for you? Uh, I knew I was going to ask a question. I was still thinking about it, but I'll try and then we'll go to Justin.

You know, over the summer and writing those, those posts on racial tensions. And, you know, speaking of blog, that that's, you know, that's probably it. I sometimes think of blogging now for me as I try to be a faithful presence and plot along for, for the times where maybe I need to, I'm going to like years ago, the, the Rob Bell love, wins review.

Okay. If I keep a blog presence and it's trickling along and then once in a while, eight, I have a presence. I have a platform as something I can say.

I don't know if those blogs on racial tension amount to that, but I was thinking of that as trying to put in a lot of time and effort and energy. And it certainly did trying to speak meaningfully on a very difficult subject. But in the course of that, you know, I read a bunch of things.

And, uh, I think I mentioned before I, I really was, I've read a lot of Shelby Steels stuff before and, uh, his older book, *The Content of Our Character*, which is from 1990, I think. So it's very dated in some of the examples, but amazing how relevant it still felt. Not, not a Christian book.

And, uh, and I think, you know, most people would say Shelby Steel is a conservative on today's spectrum on those issues. But I think that book is it's hard to categorize. I mean, it's just a very thoughtful, honest, in some ways, bracing look at why race is so difficult.

And, you know, I really just at times stopped and sort of thought on a personal level. Yeah. What, what, what do I bring to these discussions that, you know, he's really good at pointing out for both black and white, where you come with fears and projections and your own anxiety.

Over various things. So I thought it was a bracing book in a good way. It was a sort of book that I thought I would, I would love whether people ended up agreeing with it as much as I did.

I would love for a group of thoughtful Christians to sit down and say, what, what do you, what do you make of this? What do you think of this book? So that's, that's one. And then I'll mention another book, also not a Christian book, but, and I'm, I confess, I'm not very far through it. But I've really enjoyed and really, you know, a great biography, even if it's not a Christian biography teaches you a lot.

So I'm reading through the, the Churchill biography from Roberts. And, you know, just, it's really an excellent one volume. I've read other biographies of Churchill, but it's so good at sort of understanding.

Kind of who he was, put him in his own social context. And anytime somebody gives



penetrating insight into a real human being, and you can do this certainly with fiction, not real human beings. But I just find it very instructive for myself.

And I started thinking, you know, not what a biographer would say about me, but just kind of what makes me tick and my social location. And so it's just been helpful for me as I learn more about what made Churchill tick to think about what makes me tick. Have you read that biography, Colin? I have not.

I let it read and appreciated a lot about Churchill. I was just going to mention, Kevin, that I could listen to the podcast. You're going to continue to suffer as long as I go through the Hamilton book.

It's going to be well, folks, but I'm through page 500. So I'm two thirds of the way there. You guys don't have to put up with it long.

But I was telling one of my pastors how encouraging the book has been, but encouraging in a way that I wouldn't have expected. I didn't realize how terrible these guys were. I mean, how human, how petty, how partisan, how backbiting, how prideful, how stubborn, how ignorant in some ways they were.

And wow, I told this pastor how encouraging that was to me and he said, well, Colin, knowing you, I guess you would be encouraged. It just sounded like this isn't what most people would be encouraged by. But there was a sort of I was talking with somebody else about this.

And she said, maybe, Colin, it just makes you feel a little bit more normal. Or your your situation today feel more normal. And I said, yeah, I think that's what it is.

It just makes me feel more normal. And that's I think what books can transport us to is a perspective to give that mirror on ourselves that we wouldn't have seen otherwise. And I'm sure it says something about us being, are you 40 yet, Colin? 39 pretty soon you'll be the man.

I'm 40 soon, April. Yeah. OK.

So, you know, we'll call middle age ish. But I'm sure when I was younger, and maybe we need both kinds of biographies, but I'm sure when I was younger, I resonated with the almost hagiographical biography that of the Christian Saint preacher or missionary. And boy, Whitfield and amazing.

And now I'm drawn. I still want to be encouraged and I still want to have heroes. I do.

But I'm drawn to the. Oh, this was a real person, their real life was like our real lives. And it's not a moral equivalence.

They're truly our heroic men and women in history from whom we can learn a lot. But I

appreciate that realism. And that's what a good biographer does.

A good historian does is tries to love our dead neighbor as ourselves. I think of. And this has a lot to do with.

We've talked about even how we understand history and we talked about with monuments, but how we look back. I get so frustrated and we are going to come to Justin with his books, but quick monologue. I get so frustrated with the sort of phrase that says, well, if if you would have been alive back when surely you would have, whether it's, you know, you would have been on the right side of history or the wrong side of history or pulling somebody back from the grave.

If they were alive today, we know they would be on our side or they wouldn't be on. It's just nobody knows that you just don't know what you would have been like. You might have been a lot worse.

You might have been. It's just it seems historically an almost pointless comparison. And what I think as Christians who do history, we ought to think about if we meet the person in heaven, maybe some of the people are not going to be in heaven.

But if we met the person in heaven, the person would say, you know what? You were you were you were pretty fair. That's that's that's now that I see myself more clearly from heaven's vantage point. I can see where you were trying hard to to understand what I was like.

And I think so much of history, I'm thinking of history as agenda doesn't do that either to make people all saints or all sinners. Or not to pay any attention to their own social location or context. And I don't I think that's unchristian.

I don't think that's loving our neighbor as we would want to be loved as we would want someone to look at us sometime in the future. So in this no there's nobody who likes a good historiography rant more than common to me. So we are great.

Yeah, we're here for it. I'm amending you right there. I had not thought about that, Kevin, of how my interests have changed in reading biographies.

But I bet that I can remember the turning point for me was reading Carl Henry's autobiography and thinking how petty and bitter a man he was when he wrote that and thinking. Oh, OK, so so that's a common struggle for people in this position. I'll be that when I'm old.

Well, it was is a warning. I mean, it's like the warning passages of Hebrews or something. It's a it's a story mark.

This is caution. If you're not careful, this is where you're going to go. I think when I read

the Hagiography, I think I can never I can never measure up to that.

And then it condemns me, I think, in my sins. Well, Justin, what what are what's the last book that really triggered your affection for Christ? Well, you guys both mentioned two books of all cheating. Do the same thing.

I think the two that come to my mind, number one would be Dane Orland's new, gentle and lowly, which is an interesting book as, you know, Dan's a friend. He is a former colleague. He was actually my supervisor, but we're the publisher of the book too.

There's been a lot of people who've written on how God loves you and is, you know, crazy in love with you and is reckless love for you. I mean, it's a very well-worn topic. It's not like, well, I've never been somebody's ever talked about Jesus loves you before.

In some ways, it's the oldest evangelical cliché there is. But I think Dane was able to put it into a study of the heart of Christ and to think about things like union with Christ and justification with by Christ and intercession of Christ to put theological bones upon that concept and to do it in a beautiful way. It was moving to me and encouraging the other thing that comes to mind says you kind of poke me and say, okay, what books have moved to you? I was talking last week with Paul House about the J.I. Packer Corpus and his different writings and his different strategies.

And we both mentioned his chapter and adoption and knowing God. And I don't know if there's a connection in it. Packer was an adoptive father and I'm an adoptive father if there was a certain heart resonance there.

But it's such beautiful doctrine. It's not just kind of jumping to application, but it's building upon theological truths. Some of the deepest theological truths there are and to hear Packer's own passion for that doctrine and for its application.

I remember reading that and just seeing the fatherhood of God in a fresh way and being moved in my spirit and grateful for the adoption that God has given to his children. It's the one area Paul House said that Packer was most critical of the Puritans for not emphasizing adoption, even more of which if you know anything about Packer, he was very slow to criticize his Puritan redwoods. Yeah.

Do you guys have? I've been hankering for a good biography of a pastor that I haven't read. I assign Don Carson's book on his father for my pastoral ministry class and I love reading those papers. I often will get people saying this is the best book I've read in seminary.

I made my wife read this. I've read it with tears. They were really moved by that book.

I've shared that with Don several times. You guys have any books, biographies of pastors? Well, the other one that I recommend we're setting up an internship program at

our church, the two that I recommend most often. One would be the one you just mentioned about Carson from Don Carson by his father.

The other is, can't use his autobiography, I mean, it's not an autobiography, but it is in a sense, liberating ministry from the success syndrome. And I suppose it's the same theme that I've been sharing here consistently, which is in his failures, he finds evidence of God's grace. And I guess that's the theme that really resonates with me in my sin.

Christ's grace abounds more not so that I might continue to sin, but that I might trust in Christ and to grow and to fight against my sin, which not coincidentally is another reason why I love Danor it's book. He, Christ is our advocate on our behalf against our sin, not standing against us in that sin. So that's the other one in terms of pastoral ministry that I often refer to.

You've got Augustine, Luther, Calvin, I don't think that's probably who you're thinking of, but you've been influenced by members and remains a Robert Murray McShane, haven't you, Kevin? I mean, yeah, that's not been my go to, but McShane is good. I was really influenced by the two-volume Lloyd Jones. Yeah, that's right.

I think it was Ray Orlin who mentions the McShane one being of particular value to him.

[MUSIC] Yeah. Did you guys, I'm changing subjects here and will not go too much longer, but did you do anything for 9/11? I mean, anything personally, anything with your family, did you go back and watch some of the things? I mean, I went and I just, I posted on Twitter an article I wrote a couple of years ago on where were you on 9/11.

I just went through where I was. I was at seminary. I was in Boston area, had special residents there.

I was engaged. We, Tricia and I weren't able to get married and we were going to get married on a military base because their dad is in the Navy and we couldn't do that. So I was just reflecting on some of those, but I was surprised that on 9/11, I saw some of the familiar videos and I watched the towers get hit.

I watched later, George would be bushed with his megaphone speech among the rubble and we can't hear you. Well, I hear you and the world hears you and the bush even throwing out the first pitch at Yankee Stadium. He has been did a little short episode on that before and just rehearsing some of those.

I was surprised how emotional I got and I am a Dutchman who is not prone to excess emotion welling up, but I was surprised. I felt sad and happy and patriotic and a lump in my throat and wanted to sing the national anthem and it made me grieved to think, will our country ever, will we ever experience anything like that I think appropriate pride and unity in our country? So I had a whole mix of emotions I didn't expect and I didn't plan on that day to fair it out, but it was there. Did you do anything Colin? Not this year, next

year's 20 years.

Yeah, and a lot of what I've been thinking about has been pointed toward that. It occurs to me that we're among the younger adults who will remember 9/11 for the rest of our lives. I hadn't really thought about that before, but of course there are going to be students I was in the middle of college.

There's going to be students who remember it, children who remember it for a long time, but of course our children will not. And so will be that generation that continues to talk about that. And I don't think even though many other things have happened since then, major elections, major international events, financial crises, a pandemic, it hasn't really has it really a relativized 9/11 as that turning point event or a turning point event.

It still feels like there's a before and there's an after with 9/11. And so I think to some extent it's just always going to be that way. There won't be another year where we all of a sudden forget it.

We don't remember where we were. I suppose the other comparisons are apt of Pearl Harbor and JFK assassination. I'm not sure there are any others in the 20th, early 21st centuries.

Challenge explosion. Challenger explosion. Yeah, I think probably just because I'm young on that one, I think I was in elementary school.

I mean, like kindergarten or something. A third grade and they wheeled out the TV. Okay.

And an assembly for all of us to watch because the teacher was going up. Right. Yeah.

And it was such a different experience with the Challenger because it was heart-rending and it was emotional, but it did not affect anybody personally. I mean, you know, if you knew them, if you maybe had hopes and dreams. But I remember driving after 9/11 and there was actually like a telephone wire that snapped and heard this big explosion.

And you know, for all you knew like the city of Minneapolis is under attack. So there's that existential dread. I don't think we have anything that has quite replicated that since then.

Yeah. And that's interesting where, yeah, Challenger did not have that effect. Kennedy's did not affect people personally either, but of course it did in the sense of all the transformations that it brought about.

It just seemed to end a level of innocence. I think it's appropriate that people say the 19, the decade of the 1950s do not end until November of 1963. But once it did, the 1960s and all the tumult really set in at that point.

So I'm interested to see what, of course, we have an election before the 20th anniversary. And that'll probably affect how things are remembered and what we look at that way with that anniversary. But yeah, it will be interesting to see how that resonates emotionally in 20 years next year.

Hey, last question for us moving to COVID. I had a friend ask me recently and in the background was this person like a lot of folks were really moved by that paragraph from C.S. Lewis, which I think Matt Smethers posted early on, where C.S. Lewis is writing in the midst of World War II and he's talking about if the bomb should fall, let us be doing sensible human things and going to church and going to the grocery store and playing in the park. And that was kind of his message to the world.

And one of the things that you do have to take a different context, because some people will say, well, look, that's what we should be doing. Well, that depends on how you think of COVID. Is COVID on scale of one to 10? Is it a one in seriousness or is it a 10 in seriousness? Lewis, the bombs were going to fall whether you wore a mask outside or not.

So it's I'm not saying that's the only way to approach it, but that was in the background. And this friend asked me, what would your message, your COVID era message be to, if not the world, then let's think of the church. If you could get everyone's ear for a minute or two, if that's what Lewis wanted people to hear, what is it that you want people to hear, to know that gets higher up, perhaps the letter of abstraction than, you know, mask or no mask.

And, you know, have we bent the curve or what is there a second wave or not? But spiritually, what do you want people to hear? What's your message? Have you given any thought to that, Colin? I have probably because of my 2010 book, A God-sized Vision with John Woodbridge, a lot of people will ask me about revival. And they typically associate major world events with revival and especially with the division that we're seeing. People wonder what's it going to look like for us to see revival here.

And so I was talking last week with Becky Pippert about this. She was interested to ask about revival. And I said, the basic preconditions of revival aren't there.

God in his sovereign plan can do whatever he wants. But the means he typically appears to employ are the wide-scale repentance of his people in a turning in desperate prayer to God to intervene. And I see instead more of an obsession with everybody else's sins on a kind of horizontal plane.

And as I was talking with Becky, it began to crystallize to me that we're more or less dealing with the pattern of the judges with ever escalating debauchery punctuated by appeals to strongman deliverance. And I don't think anybody would use the book of judges as a benchmark for revival. It's usually the opposite of there.

It's not the repentance of Hezekiah and deliverance or of Josiah and the returning to God and the confession and the desperate pleas to God. So that's what I, that would be my message is we don't need more of condemnation for each other, though clearly sin is sin and deserves to be called out. But what we need is more individual and collective desperate turn to God to deliver us collectively from our sin and to save us from also our circumstances.

That would be my message. Justin, what would you say? I love that word from Becky Pippert through you calling about revival and repentance that really resonates with me. What about you, Justin? Yeah, I think rather than a message to the world per se, the message to the church I think is God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign over all things.

God is good and God is working all of His omnipotent energy for your good. So it seems to me like, you know, there's a certain band of Christians that are not talking at all about God's sovereign control of the world during this pandemic or this crisis or this exaggeration or whatever your analysis is. And they're all other focuses on our responsibility.

So there are people who almost have a fatalistic God is sovereign, God's in control of this. If I get it, I die. I think we need a robust understanding of the sovereignty of God combined with the goodness and wisdom of God and that the wisdom and goodness of God is working toward a certain end.

It's working for our good. When I was part of New Covenant Bible Church in St. Charles as an elder and as a member, for the past several years before we moved to Iowa, we baked it into our Church Covenant on Jeremiah 32, 38 through 41, which includes the verses. This is the Lord Yahweh speaking.

I will not turn away from doing good to them. I will rejoice in doing them good with all my heart and all my soul. So the Lord tells us here is His passion.

Here's what motivates Him doing good His covenant people ultimately for His own glory. So I don't hear that enough. I don't think I say that enough.

So that would be one encouragement to the Church to teach on all three of those things. The sovereignty of God, the goodness of God, and the new covenant promises of God for God to do good to us with all of His heart and soul. That's good.

Yeah, my word to the Church would be similar. I put it like this and I'm preaching to myself as much as anyone. Know for certain and remind yourself that the story being written in the world right now is not the story of coronavirus.

The story that's being written in the world is not the story of a U.S. presidential election. That's not the story. The story that's being written is the story that has always been written.

The story that was decreed from eternity past, the story that has been written on every page of Scripture. The story that is being written right now is of God's saving sinners, of Christ building up His Church, of God by the Spirit, bringing men and women and children to faith and repentance in Him and bringing the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. That's what He's going to do.

That's what He's doing. And we know that Christians know that intellectually, but we forget it. And it can seem like the story of 2020 is coronavirus.

And I'm sure it's going to make Collins end of year journalistic. I mean, how could not. But it should.

Might be the only thing on the end of year. We need to remember as Christians. That's not we're not living in the story of COVID.

COVID is living in the story of God. And it's God's story that He's writing. And when we lose sight of that is when I'm prone to be discouraged or feel like what really is happening or everything that we wanted to do is on hold right now.

No, God is still working as much as He ever has. And we need to remind ourselves of what the real story is out there. I need to be reminded of that.

Thank you guys for joining us. Thank you to all of our listeners. If you subscribe, I guess that helps us.

If you say nice things about us, that helps. If you say mean things about us, that's just send the tweet to @TGC. That's where Colin will keep hate listening people.

Yeah, hate listening as long as you then hate by our books. No, we are grateful for our listeners and grateful for the time that we can spend with each other and with you. So until next time, hope you can whatever I say.

Enjoy God. Love him forever and read a good book. Remember and read a good book.

Glorify God and enjoy him forever. Read a good book. I should remember my own shorter catechism.

So go do that and we hope to be with you next week. [ Silence ]