

OpenTheo

Life and Ministry with Sinclair Ferguson

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Have you ever wanted to sit down with an older godly pastor and just ask him about life for an hour? Well, that's what Kevin tries to do with Sinclair in this wide-ranging conversation that talks about Scotland, America, books, preaching, Shetland ponies, Groundskeeper Willie, and the Queen.

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Links:

Theology for Ministry

<https://www.wtsbooks.com/products/theology-for-ministry-how-doctrine-affects-pastoral-life-and-practice-9781629956558?variant=41604258365640>

The Epistle to the Romans

<https://www.wtsbooks.com/products/epistle-to-the-romans-9781955859035?variant=41473237811400>

The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters <https://a.co/d/a3RaCxc>

The Holy Spirit (Contours of Christian Theology) <https://a.co/d/76VeDQV>

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and Salutations welcome to Life and Books and Everything I'm Kevin D'Onne glad to have you with us. I am recording this in Sun Valley California Sunny SoCal with one who has seen history of the world. He has seen his share of lack of sunny days being from the great country of Scotland.

Sinclair Ferguson, we are here at the Puritan Conference. Sinclair, thank you for taking time to record this. Well, thank you for having me, Kevin.

And I just want to thank Crossway, our sponsor and highlight the book by Dane Ortonland. In the Lord I take refuge on 150 daily devotions from the Psalms or the Sams. Many, many Christians for thousands of years have found comfort in the Psalms and to make it a part of your daily practice would be very beneficial and Dane provides a great walk through using the full text of the ESV and providing devotional insights in showing how the Psalms comfort it could solve us.

So check that out. Dr. Ferguson, thank you. Yes it is.

Did you do a... Did you know how to speak? Yes. Well, good. I have a second ad coming up later in the program where you also did an introduction.

So this is sponsored by Sinclair reading these books and blooming them. Thank you. You are kind enough to take time to do this and to do something that I know is enough thank humility, but genuinely you... If you got on your schedule, talk to someone about myself for an hour.

That's not your favorite thing to do. Is that because you are especially sanctified or because you are especially Scottish? Mother is because I am especially me. I know I was brought up not to talk about myself.

It is really instinctive. It is also part of our family culture. It is also part of our sense that I am actually relatively boring individual with a quite interesting inward life.

That's what I think about myself. So the idea that in the quiz it is about Americans who want to know more about the American government knows about it. I think there is all this other thing that is kind of peculiar idea.

Well, we are inquisitive Americans. You've spent a good part of your life here in America. Now you're in Scotland, but you go back and forth so you understand this culture very well.

I wonder even though you've been in the States, you've worked here. You've been a professor here. You've been a pastor here.

Are there still things that you just scratch your head and you think I am a stranger in a strange way when you're in America? You know, because I've been in the States so much and worked here so much, the times when I felt like most would be the first two days returning from Scotland when I noticed I had a different accent from the day I was. But I think although I was always conscious in the States, I'm not really from around here. We sometimes enable you to get away with things that people don't get away with.

It is a country that I think personally has been very beneficial to me, even just in terms of my own spiritual growth, not just because of the Christian context I've been in, but because you can't, you just don't get the same private. You can't get the same private space here as you do in the United Kingdom. And even in the United Kingdom, constitutionally I'm extremely shy.

Even for a Brit? Yes. My father was kind of for a variety of reasons, kind of, politically shy. And I think I probably drank in that model so that sometimes I think where did that come from? And then I remember my dad.

And that kind of at times I realized that kind of regression flashback. You can't function here, at least in the areas I've functioned and live a life of complete shyness. And I think that has really been a real blessing to me in the sense that it's increased and enhanced my level of engagement with people in my comfort level, my natural comfort level.

And I think to my spiritual comfort level being people. So actually, I mean, quite apart from the fact that the parking spaces in the United States are actually large enough to park a car. That's great.

You know, I really do feel indebted to the new world for the blessings that speak to me. One of the things I've always tried to do is to watch the Senate judiciary hearings for Supreme Court nominees because I think I found my own interest in the question, what does it really mean to be American? Well, you understand it as an American or not. I found that fascinating and very informative.

Have you had a working answer to that question? Well, I mean, I have a kind of working answer that's at least helping me to understand the Constitution. But the other thing that I guess I have noticed because I've lived in three different parts of the United States is that you're really, depending on where you live, you're living in a different country. I know there's a tremendous cross-specialization of nationalities, but there are also these distinctive... Philadelphia is very different from Colombia after a period.

Yeah, Dallas will be one of the three years also. Well, if you're a Dallas, they'll tell you they still are their old country. Yeah, so I'm a dangerous thing.

It was only when we went to South Carolina. That was actually the first place I ever heard anyone. I read it, but I never heard anyone speak about states, right? Great.

So it's all very... it's all very interesting to be an outsider looking in, but also at the same time become, to a certain extent part of the culture. And looking back now, I was glad. I think even looking forward to us.

When I came, it was first of all to teach in Sanne, which is a kind of isolated, not quite monastic, although the Sanne, where I talk, I actually had the word monastery in a West Ministry, was originally West monastery in London. And I didn't often think then, I think it's a mercy that I didn't come from Scotland to be in the past of a congregation, because it's been thrown into trying to negotiate the peculiarities and the state of differences of one culture to another. I think I would have found that, probably, more of the parallelized, literally, to the time became a pastor in Colombia.

I knew everything, but I think it probably developed a little emotional sensitivity to on that journey. Right. I've been at conferences before with you and Alistair, Alistair Bang, who's been a friend of yours for a long time.

So I'm not mistaken. I've caught YouTube glancing at each other every once in a while, as if to communicate by your eyes. This is a different sort of week.

This would not fly in Scotland. The length of the introductions, the exuberance. What is it that still sometimes hits you that makes you feel like, I don't even think the Americans know how American they are.

I mean, I'm still struck by the fact that people applaud before you've actually said anything. That's a great point. I think, too, there is, I think the one American Christians, there's a kind of view of Scottish Christianity.

There are ways of doing things. For example, I remember one instance years ago, Alistair and I were both at an event. I need to shroud it in anonymity here.

But the event ended with a declaration. So there was this declaration that we prepared. And it stunned me that we were all now invited to get up and sign it.

So a declaration of independence? Well, two things for us. So that was the first thing this happened to me. Yes, this is a country that was founded on a declaration.

And I just did the census as I watched things happening. That was almost like a census. You hadn't really done something unless there was a declaration.

So, retinal groups make all kinds of decisions. So Alistair and I stepped together. And I don't know.

I was about, he said, "Sinter, forget about yourself." Exactly. So I think Alistair was more sensitive to the American lifestyle. Of course, Alistair's wife Sue is an American.

And I think that that flavours your ability to actually belong to the model. I think we both came from the same city. And one of the things was you can take the boy out of Glasgow, but you can't take Glasgow out of the boy.

Are you Glasgow proper? Not as surrounding that with these layers? No, I was real East End, Glasgow, the wrong side of town. Was Alistair in the same part of town? Alistair sounds more refined than I do. Speaking of Alistair, I think we were waiting for him to come.

I was standing talking to Sue. And she said, "We can't go anywhere without people recognising him." And I thought, "That's not so surprising." But she said, "Because of his travel voice." I knew across my mind that there is an element in certain Scottish accents that have that. I guess that's how the friendship works.

You just do it. Notice things that other people need. You mentioned about the way American Christians can view Scotland and Scottish Christianity perhaps, and particularly, though not exclusively, press materials.

And we know, if you know that Scotland is very post-Christian and much more so than England, certainly much more so than Northern Ireland. It's very post-Christian. It's good gospel work, and you're a part of some of it, but hard gospel work.

And yet, press materials in particular, we know all the glory days and the stories and the covenants, or the degree fryers and the solid league and covenants, and all the history and the chalmers and walking up. This is not a fair question historically, but where do you locate? I think he and Hamilton maybe wrote about this, but where do you locate where the gospel was lost? Maybe that's too strong. It is the 18th century in Scotland when the moderates are the ascendancy, or is it really later after the free church and it's the beginning of the 20th century? Where do you historically look and say, "That's where Scotland started to lose its Christian heritage?" Well, A, I'm not a church historian.

B, I do have a very considerable interest in Scottish church history. And C, I think I may hold an idiosyncratic view of this. Not bringing that to the soul.

So what I'm about to say should not be treated as law, but you know it came. I think that's where, and in fact we're not sitting in the cathedral in any case. My own conviction is that the gospel never really rooted out what one might think of as the natural theology of medieval Roman Catholicism.

But that it had a tremendous impact on the country, and the power of its impact was the way which it was able to seize the centre or hate country's life. And so there was a kind of mastery, almost dominance of the major institutions. But even from the beginning of the Scottish Reformation, you know, John Knox has supported us, who left him pretty quickly.

And Knox's vision was that the wealth of the church in Scotland in the 16th century, which was probably Catholic wealth, which was greater wealth than the wealth of the monarchy, would stay in the church, would stay in the front church. But in actual fact, only a fraction of its state, and it was members of the nobility who, whatever support they gave at the beginning, saw that there was also benefit for them. So Knox's radical commitment to the gospel and to the advance of the gospel in the building of the church was not something that was universally shared by his earlier supporters.

So I believe there was a dominance of the gospel right at the heart of the country's life, influence in the institutions, not just influencing education, not just this great vision for basically the education of anyone to their capacity for education, to be supported. And that has, that went through right into my childhood in many ways. So there have been enormous benefits, but I think the default of Scottish Christianity has always been a form of, well, philologically, semi-polegism, with little, little, poor, polegism.

So that, first, when I was growing up as a youngster and was converted, it was suddenly within the, within the broad national church, regardless of conformance as a form of arrogance, that a young person would be sure they were going to heaven. Because how would you be here about that? Yeah, well, I know. And it's, you know, there are similar influences, right, that have crept into Christianity, where how can you have done enough, or how can grace done enough for you to be sure? And I think people didn't realize that's actually the old Roman Catholicism.

Yeah, we believe in grace, but it, you know, it's the grace that works in us to make us justifiable. And if we ever get there, so, you know, if you ask people some of these old kind of evangelist questions, do you know you're going to have them? They would say, well, I hope I've done enough. And one of the things I don't know, I mean, I don't know enough about American church history to know it's absolutely true, but my impression is that one of the differences between Scottish Christianity and the Vatican Christianity is that much of American Christianity.

Much of American Christianity's default is evangelical, right, and language. Yeah. I mean, here people still heartily saying amazing grace, which is like full of gospel truth.

I'm saving a wrench like me, and don't blink an eye. Whereas default, I believe default Christianity in America, as in Scotland has been a best semicolon. So that that have been the way I would put it is that I've been seasons of gospel renewal, awakening, advance strength within that context, rather than that it's been gospel everywhere.

And that has been declined from that. So, in a sense, that it seems another big difference is, as you know, the special and I do, Kevin, there really was a Scottish Enlightenment. So we know about the European Enlightenment, but it was a distinctive Scottish Enlightenment.

And it was mainly ministers from the country. Yes, who were a part of it, who were friends with to Adam Smith and the irreligious or at least religious people, was all in there. And it gave it a certain conservative, I don't mean an theological sense.

It wasn't radical, like France at all. It was very much among middle class, upper middle class, established it was in the university. It was in the Kirk, but you know, I'm just leaning on things that I read and study because I did my work with her spoon, but you go back, you know, 1710 1720s, the Johnson's Sin affair, who's, you know, he's not heretical.

He's very soft on core doctrines, and that is one of the precipitating factors for the Earth's skin to lead. I mean, that's sort of theological laxity won't really take root in America. I mean, I guess you could say there's some of it coming up in the Presbyterian world in the second grade awakening, but a large degree, it's not until the end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century, we're standing here with some pictures of Mason and others.

So, I mean, it's almost a 200 year head start on some of these very latitudinarian, which surprises people if you just want to think of the glory of Scotland and the nostalgia. Only I could have been a Presbyterian pastor with one of these beautiful stone Kirk somewhere out with the Heather on the Hills, but so I don't, I'm not an expert either. I'm not an expert at the rest of our brethren here, but certainly so what you're saying, rings true.

So all of that moderate religion, in a sense, already had a seat bed. And then, before I get into the first thing, I think that this has almost been a pattern right through the years. If you, if what you believe is kind of a certain decency of lifestyle is what Christianity at the end of the day really means, then you relegate, it's the distinctive truth of Christianity to a secondary position.

And you'd have ministers, but for began to do this, not go to doubt them, because they're not really fresh. That's right. They didn't function.

We don't want to get rid of the Westminster Confession. It's not really functioning in our

lives as a guiding thought. You can't, you can't nab anybody for denying it, and I'm no longer a Calvinist, but it doesn't operate.

It doesn't show up. It doesn't sing. It doesn't come through their sermons.

One of the things I did is I compared an action sermon. So you know that, which is what they called when they had communion with the action sermon. On almost the same text from Hootenlayer, almost one of the great modern ministers, his sermons were best-sellers, and then John Witherspoon.

And it's remarkable. Not that Hootenlayer's sermon on the cross, that the action sermon, said anything necessarily wrong. It just didn't say anything.

It talked about the example. It talked about Christ's love. It used some of the traditional language, but there's no leaning into the glory of the cross and the lossness of mankind.

And that's already the middle of the 18th century. So where did you, we talked about where you served in America, where did you serve in Scotland? Well, so my story is I was, I was ordained when I was 23 as the assistant minister in a large city center, even a general judge, in the mainline in the United States called St. George's tribe. And that was where I started.

And in fact, that was where I was converted. I was never a member of the church. Actually, I was never a member of the church because in Scotland, in Scottish Presbyterianism, I think laterally they changed it, but ministers were members of the press, but they're not members of the complications.

So I was there for three years. My boss was a very famous Jesuit preacher. Church was having in the summertime's kind of standing room only.

Is this before Keswick now? So Keswick for Americans and as a W. Keswick. Keswick. It's all famous for the higher life, but now it's not, you know, from what was this later? I would say since the 1960s, I mean, some people would see John Starr's exposition of Romans 5 through 8 that were once published under the title of the man made new as a kind of marker in the center, but the old Catholic message of higher life had come on.

And I never had my boss preach that old Keswick message. He did have a very strong emphasis on conversion and consecration. And consecration was a big Keswick theme on her, but it wasn't consecration and the old sense of sanctification by an act of faith.

Like complete submission? Yeah, I mean, I look back. I look back and think, you know, I was naive, a young man, all the rest of it. I'm very shy.

And he was a very big public figure. He also was, he had a shyness too about him. And so I never said to him, "How do you do this?" And he never said to me, "let me help you

do this." And in retrospect now, I think, if I'd asked him how he did something, see with C, you'll not be able to do these things for another 25 years.

And in a strange way, I think, my years with him have benefited me in retrospect more than I was conscious of the time. So then, by the time I was 25, 26... And what does Tron mean? Because there's this old sci-fi like Star Trek kind of thing, Tron, as Americans think. And it's a weight, W-E-I-T-H-T.

So it was used for weighing things for taxation purposes. So in the old days, when these old cities had different gates, there was, and there's still an area of Glasgow called the Tron Gate. And I haven't really researched the history of the Tron Gate, but it was the place where things were... The Tron Gate, yeah.

That was the taxation issue. And there were two churches. There was the Tron Church.

And there was another church called St. George's Church, and they united together quite a long time ago, hence they became St. George's Church. Affectionately known as the Tron. But when I was assistant minister, and I think when I actually later became the Black Americans of the Cold of the Senior Minister, I think there was some people who had actually belonged to the St. George's Church.

So if you were one of the ministers, you'd never have to have the Tron. So you served there, and later on came back, where did you go soon after that? I kind of fell. One of the older ministers said to me one day, he said, "You're the new boy on the block, and they're out there saying, 'Let's work him over.'" And I really fell.

We needed to get away to... I felt I needed to put down more roots, spiritually, theologically. And so paradoxically, we went as far away as it is actually possible to go and still be in Scotland. So we went to the most northern way of the Shetland Islands.

And that island is called Ants, UNST, not to be confused with U.S. So there are islands on the west coast of St. Albert. And then there are two sets of islands off the north coast, the Arkney Islands, which you can sail to from the north coast in about an hour and a half maybe. So you can get the islands where you need to sail for the rest of the day.

So days, which are going to get there. And that's still the same today. You can actually fly.

And then you reach the mainland of Shetland. And if you wanted to get where we lived, you then got a ferry onto another island, went through that island, got a ferry from there onto our island. So it was what the wrong is called Altmouth, which we would always translate as the back up beyond.

And I presume this is where the Shetland ponies come from. Exactly. And it is the reason they're so small is because it's so windy.

And do they get any sun? Yeah, in the summertime. Well, yeah, the sun never goes down for a couple of months. It really doesn't.

So you can read outside. You could read inside if your wind was a large enough. On us, we had a 24-hour golf tournament in the middle of the summer.

Not that you played for the thank you for the words, but you could start any hour of the day. You could go to a golf course in 11th, 13th, 18th. And then what was it like in the winter? It was very dark.

So there were only a few hours of daylight. We did people. Now we have all these terms and people get lamps and things.

Seasonal-affected disorder. But it really must have taken a toll on people. Yeah, we're the Scottish and their kids do it.

I mean, it's a great slide, bro. I'm just getting on. So the islands originally belonged to Norway.

They were completely distant just about from Scotland and Norway. And so the people really did not think of themselves as Scottish. If you ask them if they were Scottish, they probably would have said that no, a shetlander.

Oh, yeah. And there were very beautiful parts. Our island was actually a very lovely island.

The next island, which was called the Yale, was, I think, had maybe the highest incidence of clinical depression, of any block of the population. They were, I mean, just completely memorable people. I've never been back since I left.

And although we have contact, but I've often thought if I slept through the island again, I'll burst into tears. And the people would have no idea how memorable they were to be. How much they actually met.

And for being there meant because one of the first things I did, I think they didn't really know what an evangelical was, but somehow another they had, I was young evangelical. But you were in a church in Scotland. Yeah.

Yeah. So apparently the two rumors that preceded me where one, that I must be a converted pop star. Oh, you get that all time.

I mean, I mean, so obviously, and the other one was, but I must be a close personal friend of Billy Graham. So I thought, I guess, some case, in general. That was the, you know, it was like a picture.

So one of the first things I did was I actually bought, bought and sold Bibles at a discount

because, you know, the idea that I'm expanding the scriptures. And, you know, the idea of preaching a thought in my cell and was, you know, that would have been chief foolishness. And I think, Dorothy, my wife would say, that's where, not that I'm not that I've ever mastered the art, but that's where I needed to learn how to be sinful, and yet not simplistic.

So that idea that the congregations, people in congregations all come at different levels and layers. And that it is one of the challenges, but also one of the throws of preaching to be able to, to feed those who have little understanding. And at the same time, satisfied, right, those who have greater understanding.

I mean, actually, it's one of the things that was said about Kafka's ministry in Cambridge, that, you know, his ministry did this. And I think that was, that was an enormous help to me. But I don't know what part I remember one woman actually in the congregation, who I watched her at the beginning of my ministry.

And she was scarcely on the seat from the Saman began, not with anticipation, but with fear. I watched her before she was afraid this young man is an even jal And so they weren't going to open up to a 26 year old. And so you had to kind of look for little signs of other the gospel was getting kind of trained.

And in this woman, the sign was that eventually she was actually sitting there right by and actually hearing what was being said. So you go from there back to the trauma to be the senior. This is kind of any part of my life.

I actually went for a short one to walk to the back of truth. So in Edinburgh for a year and a half or a couple of years. And in retrospect, that was a very strange decision.

I mean, I looked back and I think that was just one of the strangest decisions. Yes, you do know. And now in retrospect, I saw one thing immediately Kevin and then there was another thing.

I saw the retrospect. The thing I saw retrospect was I was Moses and Lance skills. That obviously I needed to more and more develop, but they had to do with books writing, you know, and so on.

The other thing was we had been back in the main line just a few weeks from I had a no brother at that time. And he called me and said, "Sink girl, doctor, so dad's here six months to live." And my dad, a short story about my dad was when he was a young man, the younger brother had died and his mother, I didn't go to the left. His mother threw away with the eyes.

And I think damaged him very badly psychologically. And so he kind of went through life with almost slightly angular coping mechanisms that surrounded him. You know, if he was gracious to something he would be over, almost hot, ugly, kind.

I mean, Dorothy says she did not understand me until she stepped into my hall and she said it all became. Because you're like that? So I think I was just strange. I mean, I was just desperately in love with her.

It was probably strange. However, in these last six months, all those coping mechanisms, we were living, you know, 25 miles away from them instead of a country away from them. And all the coping mechanisms my dad had, they were irrelevant now.

They saw an overday but my mum, my brother, myself, Dorothy, and he had to. And he knew the Lord who he would be like, "Yeah." And then I discovered, you know, when I had been converted to my family, I'd still go to church. And I'd always kind of fuss the Lord about why not doing more of my mum and dad.

And then they started to come to church. But it was in those last six months, eight. He kind of opened his heart.

I still remember vividly him quoting him to me. I'd never heard of my life before. And so I look back now and I see, you know, it was a real indication to me that sometimes you make decisions and you unwise the extrapolate from the decision to where the decisions were to lead.

And I could have had no idea where. And then about 18 months after that, my brother died and so we were there from my mum. So I look back on that as, you know, what possessed me to make those decisions looking forward.

But then looking back on the sea, you know, the Lord's hand is just on our lives. I mean, I could never be satisfied right enough for it to talk about that. I have so many more questions.

And if you have 15 more minutes, we'll get a few more. I do want to mention a couple of books. One is a book theology for ministry, a doctrine of sex, pastoral life and practice, which is something of in a lie to Sinclair Ferguson, edited by William Edwards, John Ferguson.

He related to us folks on how right. And then Chad Van Dixorn. I'm going to learn for it.

I didn't do a chapter in it, but I do encourage you to pick that up from P and R. And then here's one that you did an introduction for the Epistle to the Romans by John Murray, West Mr. Seminary Press. It's just re-issuing that book. One of the best commentaries on any book of the Bible.

So do pick up the Epistle for the Romans, West Mr. Seminary Press, doing this new edition Sinclair as an introduction. Did you meet John Murray? Kevin, I did. What was he like? Also very shy? I don't know whether he was shy, but he was also... He was also interesting.

He was very interesting. And I, or I have tremendous debt to him. So, I mean, you know, maybe people who are listening may not know that I taught at West Mr. Seminary in Philadelphia.

What were those years? And that was 1983 through, well, often, 1983 through '98, full-time nothing happened, and then thereafter to do frequently. John Murray died in the 70s. And he saw John Murray.

I was on the... in Scotland, Inter-Farcity was very much a student-led organization. And I was sitting on the committee that was deciding the teaching series for the next year. I was at the end of my first year of university.

And the student, who was the president of our Inter-Farcity group, said in this meeting, he said, "Professor John Murray is retiring from West Mr. Seminary, and we'll be able to have him speak at the Christian Union." And I have a fairly vivid memory of sitting there thinking, "Who in earth is Professor John Murray and where in all of our old-class professors?" And so he came, and for some reason our meeting was in the graduation hall of the university, which was a beautiful wood paneled room. And the metaphor I used for the experience I had listening to on my voice, it was this look he came up to me where I was sitting. He said, "Some come with me, took me to the back wall, and said, 'You see these wood panels? You didn't notice one of them actually as a handle on it, and it's a door.

And I'm going to take you through that door and show you things that lie behind it." I think it's like a large road, it was all of this. It was a very difficult to describe the impact of that, but it was the grandeur of theology, a passion with which it was presented. And I didn't know that where I was.

Was he a very passionate presenters? Yeah, he was. He had that old Scottish Presbyterian ability that I don't to put tremendous emphasis on particular words. I just, I don't know, I'm not wired to be able to do it.

And I think if I tried to do it, I would just be shouting. Did he have a different Scottish accent? He had to, well, he was from the north of Scotland, the north of Inverness. He had been brought out in a particular kind of Presbyterian tradition.

Historian away, we were listening to Joel Biki yesterday, and he was talking about his mother and father up on time, and it reminded me very much of Professor Murray, who said that he owed so much to his father Alexander Murray, who was a very modest occupation. But was a man of great godliness. And there is a strand of that in Scottish Presbyterianism, which is very, I mean, it's just marvelous to see him.

Was he married yet? He married very late. He was married by that time. Okay.

So he was 67th. He was a young man. A woman quite a bit younger.

And she was a student. She was a professor of... Yeah, she just, she was a professor. I don't know how that she ordered it.

I think she actually took courses in the same way. Yeah, that's how they first became a colleague. I've had all kinds of interest inside and Western stories about it.

But so then I would hear him kind of basically on an annual basis, a fairly vivid memory, very unusual justifications. My highest moment of my theological life was at a meeting of theological students. I asked him a question.

I dared to ask him a question. I really like questions. He was not looking for a student-granny method.

I've never forgotten him. And it's a very difficult question. I'm full of... I'm really somebody.

I'm a question he says is difficult. But I too, especially at first address and to reading him. You know, it is, you know, various people you read shape you at different parties.

Do you have a person like Piper would say Jonathan Edwards has been his companion and dead mentor. Do you have a particular person? Is it John Owen? Well, I would say, I think the theological has shaped the way I think most is actually Calvin. No, it's Gideon.

The theologian who has shaped the way I think about ministry is probably John Owen. For all his academic greatness, there's a tremendous amount of material in Owen covering issues of personal Christian living, but also of ministry. So, you know, I don't know quite, I mean, I sense I'm a little bit of a might, but I might be lying to a being a man of his congregation as well.

He is of the purest and the biggest influence. I remember some lectures. Maybe we're these even given at RTS many years ago now.

You can find them three lectures. So you're talking about pastoral ministry. Remember at one point you were talking about being a professor, which you've been a pastor and you've done both and they've overlapped and I'm a pastor and I also teach it in RTS.

I'm very happy to do that, but you said something paraphrasing like men don't be quick to think that the professorship is where it is at or that would be the pinnacle. I think rightly in our Presbyterian and in other traditions as well, but we, a lot of our heroes are those men who were field, hodge, bannermen. I mean, people who had pastoral hearts and stuff, but their main thing was to be a professor.

And I certainly think both are very good admirable qualities. I would not tell them, but you couldn't do one or the other or hopefully you can't try to do both. But I do find sometimes among pastors, a sort of wistful longing, those would be greener pastures.

And then often when I need some of the professors, it's to be a pastor would really be back in the game. What did you mean if I paraphrased you somewhat accurately, not to be quick to think that that would be the pinnacle of the same usefulness? Well, my observations about soundery life in America is that for some students, not necessarily for all, but for some students, even to many students, what they encounter in soundery is the finest handling of scripture they better encounter it by men of great ability. But it's handling of scripture in a certain environment.

And therefore they see that as almost like a higher form of biblical ministry. And I think that is a bit of a problem which I think can be solved by better biblical ministry. So I think that is one problem.

The second thing, you know, because I have had people, even before they've come to sound like come, you know, and they want to interview the faculty and they'll come into your office and say what they want to be as a soundery professor. And stateably I feel what you want me to leave the room of this seat. Because I think it is, to me, it's one of the strangest things in the world to want to be a soundery professor in order to train men for something that you've never actually done.

And that can worry me. Now that said, I believe that if a soundery has a decent size of a number of faculty, then there should be room for eggheads, because there are elements on it. So there are elements of soundery education to do that require some kind of scholarship, but only eggheads for patients to engage in.

And you need that to go write that monograph that's going to show what I see the thing is wrong and that will trickle down and we'll thank you for doing the new work. Because, you know, ultimately a soundery function is really multifunctional. It's not only teaching the students, but it ought to be serving the church at large.

And there are lots of things to go on where it's just important that you'll give the room. So, I had a lovely conversation with one man, my regard as a exceptionally bright, very, very bright, demonstrably bright man. He was actually in the room when I first met the Westminster faculty and we ended up meeting a couple of years ago and it was very touched by the fact.

He said, I remember when we first met you that you seemed to know what you were for. And I thought, yeah, I think in God's grace, I took a lot of what I was for. I suppose they're just doing what you were as yes.

What is my life for? Where do I fit in? And he is really, I mean, he is the most gracious, lovely man. What's that answer? What did you know? I mean, I can almost hardly remember, but if I might have said, but I've always thought that I belong somewhere between the Church and the Academy. That's why I want to straddle both for a variety of reasons.

But I think I can do the academics, but that's not the biggest thing for me. The biggest thing for me is how can I take the privileges I've had and employ that in the ministry, but I feel fundamentally, I'd be called to it. And I go to the church where he has written some things for the Church.

I want it as well. He's elevated and he knows that's what he's for. When people come up at a conference, people you've never met, you'll never meet again, and they want to shake your hand and they want to thank you for something.

So I have this sometimes. There are certain things they usually say to me. Sometimes I listen to your preaching, your blog, your podcast.

More often than not, there's a few books. They'll just do something, hold in our holiness. There's a few.

What do people say when they want to come up and thank Sinclair Ferguson? What is it that you've done? I know you want to talk about yourself. If I got raised in their life, is it a message? Is it a book? What is it that they are inclined to come up and want to thank you for? I think it probably differs between people who hear more than they read. There are people who do that for whatever reason.

They'll listen to sounds. It's just the way the world is now. You don't preach sounds for anyone except for people who are in your congregation, but they do get out because of, you know? It's almost got to the point where occasionally in the last few years, I've done something that's not been recorded.

You're so used to doing something stuck on you. I think it's really strong with you people that you don't want to recall. For some, for people who are creators, more than readers, is the sermon series.

And then for readers, often it's just that people seem to have read a lot of books. Is there a book you think you're known for? The interesting thing, I think what I found recently, and I think it's been largely ministers who've told me this, that they've read the whole Christ. The most common thing that people have said to me is, I didn't realize I was such a legalist until I read it.

And that's been a very interesting experience. Do you book on the Holy Spirit? I would think? Yeah, no, it's for ministers. Yeah, a lot of people, I mean that book is now, I don't know, it must be 35 years old.

I'm always surprised and people say that. But it is a kind of foundational book that probably in colleges and seminars students have been treated. So, and then it kind of varies from book to book.

Have you liked writing? Is that something you've been talking about? I just love it from a

ship, Kevin. I was educated to write. So, I mean although there's a certain fluency in what I'm saying here, because you are a friend and you create that fluency in conversation, speech is more difficult for me than writing.

So, I was talking to Steve Lawson last night about the fact. He was talking about dictating. I could not dictate a letter to you.

If you were my secretary and I said, Kevin, take a letter, I actually wouldn't be capable of being a healer here. So, there needs to be a something for me to have a flow of speech. And then, the preaching is one of those somethings.

There's the space here. There's the box to stand in. You're right, man.

But writing comes. We hardly ever spoke in school. We virtually never spoke in university.

If anyone in our classes at university put that hand up to ask questions, we knew they were visiting Americans. They didn't need to talk about it. So, you were feeling the lack of apoplexy on the professor's face that one of these minions would dare to raise his head.

So, but I'm a very slothful. And, you know, I know he must say to me, he couldn't written all these books if he was slothful, which I say. Those are the evidences of our slothful.

I try to modify the sloth. So, there's an element of it that is, I hate artwork, but there's another element of it where I think that this only dawned on me when people took people that I would regard as very able creatures took me out and difficultly found out to write. Oh, yeah.

And I, that, it was the kind of reflection of that that made me realize I actually don't find it difficult. And so, you know, I don't, you know, I'm a fallen man. It's going to be like hard work.

But then, when you modify that, there is a flow underneath, I think. So, all right, just one or two more. I have a very worldly question, worldly.

Have you ever seen the Simpsons, the American cartoon and groundskeeper Willie? So, I have actually seen the Simpsons. Do you know that character who's very extremely Scottish? No, I don't. I'm sorry.

If we had time later, we can pull up this character who's obnoxious, like just, and almost Scottish. Yeah, groundskeeper Willie. Oh, wow.

Yeah. Okay. He's got a pretty darn Scottish.

Yes. And he's a few puffed grass kind of person. Yes, but they make him a die-hard

Presbyterian.

He has one clip where he talks about, you know, something, some of it should Easter. And he says, "I'm a Scottish writer. I'm a Presbyterian.

We don't celebrate pagan holidays." After they go, he asks her. He has another one where, I told you, it's very worldly, where Bart and Lisa, they're the kids, and they're fighting, and he looks out and he says, "Us, brothers and sisters always fight like Scotsmen and Englishmen. It's Scots and Japanese.

It's Scots and other Scots. They say darn Scots. They ruin Scotland." Is that a stereotype that Scotsmen would own as being somewhat of a dower and cantacris? Or is this just good American humor? Well, I think I need to take this as a fifth amendment.

Okay. All right. Well, there is a, you know, there's certainly a fantasy of kind of characteristic caricature of a conservative Presbyterian, that he is really a keep-off the grass kind of individual.

I don't know if you can't for this story, but this is about two men who are, who are, I trust, both with the Lord. One of them was a man who became a dear friend, who amazingly sang a soul in the service I was converted in when he was a sergeant in the police force. And I conducted this funeral service a few years ago, knighted by the Queen, and he had been the Queen's, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, which is the highest police officer in the land.

And he was an elder in the church. And the man who was at the clock of session, which was called that could be a lifetime of the act, with power, you know. So they had, the, the Goblins had been taken out, and my friends of David McNeese, Task, among the elders, was the, the arm that, that held the X, the wine that this needed.

And the, you know, Presbyterian community and contemporary band, the elders would come in. Right. And then, always struck me as slightly amusing in our congregation.

The two times, apart from the same, the two times the congregation stood, when the money was being brought forward, the offering, Spent the wine was being taken away at the end, the community service. But, but David told me that one community service he brought by this beautiful arm, the, the, the rendance of the wine that he put it back on the, on the community table. And the session, far, comparatively, he was at that time, the senior police officer, the session club tore him down afterwards, so putting it in the wrong place.

Oh, it's so, this is movie, your grandson. Yeah, right. Really.

Although I had a very good relationship with a person. So I sent it in and I said, what did you say? And he misspelled his speech. He said, well, I responded in such a way that he

would never say that.

They did, they did. So there may be a something. Things.

It's really fair. So last bit, we're recording this in the clean diet a few weeks ago. If you're at Liberty to share, you, you had the experience of preach for the clean.

How many years ago was that? And is that an indelible memory? Yes, it was. It was about 19 years ago. Kevin, it was 2003.

It was a no moral. I actually declined the invitation first of all. You were at the Toronto.

No, it's actually a Westminster. No, it's. They still.

And then they said to me, whoever, you know, I don't know, who's the strange of these things, they said, you would be doing us a great favor if you came. And I kind of interpreted that to that. Thought that had probably the samples and the press, that the Queen never had even a child or speech.

And so I passed it on by with the law. And if you were invited to preach, you spent several days with him. Plus, they, they, I think Queen Victoria had given money to, to the Church of Scotland to build a church.

A classic, but it's just outside the gates of our moral castle. And so they went to, I mean, people probably understand that though she was the supreme government of the Church of England, she was, she was Elizabeth Bush about being the Church of Scotland. And she had no position of any kind, except she had a North issue that called the "Rae" for the Church.

So they essentially joined the local church there. And one of the senior members of the royal family, who will be there, was said to me, especially when they were children, how much they looked for to that. Because they were kind of surrounded by high church.

Yeah, I think it's a most of the time. And I think all of this could failure greatly. So, so, you know, if you watch one of these BBC period dramas of the big house with the servants from downstairs, and the way that the people who matter lived within that context, almost as though those people didn't exist, in a way it was a bit like having a walk-on part to me and a soap opera, because this had been part of my life.

You know, I don't remember her father, so it was a very small daughter. It was five when that was four when she became complete. So she had been, like so many people of my generation, a fixture, absolutely a fixture, like your grandmother.

And she had been a tremendously constant figure. So, in between, and if people watched on television, they drove out remains right through the bulk of Scotland, actually. Lots of people came, and lots of yeah, and I. So, that, you know, I've been stimulated in the last

few weeks to recollect those few days, which, you know, cannot have been in my memory because it was such a unique experience, meeting them all.

And in a sense, like, you know, I ended up looking at the last night sitting in my couch, just chatting to a small number of the absolute close family. And she liked your sermon? Well, you know, I have such a little Steve Lawson's morning. At the end of the weekend, she found me.

I can see it, but I can't kind of see the whole picture. She found me kind of virtually when I was on my own, I'd maybe stop talking to some of it. And she came over on the last night and said, "We want to go down for breakfast in the morning." I was like, "Let's get started." And she said, "But I want to thank you for your sermon." And I didn't really think about it at the time, but as I remember it, very clear memory that this was very, it was a discreet thank you.

But she had no need to. There was no glitter I, you know, so. It was very communicative of she really was thanking me.

And I had just got a funny thought, you know, a number of people I've known. It was never thanked me for saying that. And I've been doing so.

And some rule of the realm. Yeah, that's, you know, Gnostic and fashion, but she did. The thing that really, I mean, several things struck me one was the weight of appreciation for so many people.

And for people who would not be particularly royalists, it was a big word, just royalists. But she had been a real, you know, through all the changing scenes of life, she had been a constant. And also the thing that really impressed and really moved me was how wonderfully Christian, it was as Christian a funeral sound.

And I just wanted to possibly afford for the occasion of that. That occasion of that location. And her fingerprints were obviously all of that.

We'll see if the coronation can match that. Well, you know, I think that's been a big question. People, you know, it's not, I haven't had to ask in the last few weeks, but, you know, for a number of years.

I think it's been one of the questions. Discerning people of that, all the coronations of a speedy Christian sound. Now, whatever people think about coronations and all the rest of it.

I think the fact is the Queen, one of the things that struck me was if I sat next to anybody and she thought she was the Queen, I'd be falling for a psychiatrist to come. But speaking to her, which I did in a number of occasions of wine, I thought this woman believed she is the Queen. And she actually is the Queen.

But it's not a matter of divine rights of kings and queens. I think actually it was a sense of vocation. But now, you know, as I look back on the memories, I just find very impressive and encouraging.

So, I mean, that's unexpected privilege, but the good memories of that. Do you mention my mic? Well, it's so clear you have been very generous to give more than an hour. I would love to keep going.

But thank you for your books. Thank you for your preaching. Thank you for your friendship being kind to me over the years.

I've often told the story. You probably don't even remember. I think we were at a suffering race conference in Orlando.

You had thought, if you had in your mind, it was a pastor's conference or something, but it was for young people. You were doing the Trinity. We walked out and I was thanking you and you said, "Oh, Kevin, the hot tub is a dog's breakfast." It's been a great encouragement to me because I thought it's Sinclair thought that about his sermon.

I often think that about mine. There's hope for all of us. If even Dr. Ferguson's message on the Trinity felt it, like a dog's breakfast.

I thought your dog eats well. Thank you for your friendship. We've been too much in the time.

That's very short. Thank you for listening and joining us in Life Books and everything. Until next time, Lord of Thy God, enjoy it forever and read my book.

[music]

(buzzing)