

OpenTheo

Moving Past Despair

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

When you consider the prospects for Christians right now, you might think they would be in despair. And you might be right. There is a lot of evidence that things are not going well. Kevin, Collin, and Justin look at several specific phenomena that would cause despair. And then they give us things that we can do now to move from that despair and into hope. Plus, there are some great book recommendations!

Life and Books and Everything is sponsored by Crossway, publisher of *Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord* by Michael Reeves.

Rejoice and Tremble examines the difference between sinful and godly fear and corrects the negative perception of the fear of God. It is part of a series created in partnership with Union School of Theology to teach Christians to delight in God, grow in Christ, serve the church, and bless the world.

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Books and Everything:

Uprooted: Recovering the Legacy of the Places We've Left Behind, by Grace Olmstead

A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War, by James Byrd

Churchill: Walking with Destiny, by Andrew Roberts

Surviving Religion 101, by Michael Kruger

The Life of John Murray, by Iain H. Murray

Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America: Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest, by Crawford Gribben

The Soul of Abraham Lincoln, by William Eleazar Barton

Gilead, by Marilyn Robinson

The Only Plane in the Sky: An Oral History of September 11, 2001, by Garrett M. Graff

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations. Good to be with you again on Life and Books and Everything. This is Kevin DeYoung.

Good to have you with us. Collin and Justin are here as well. We want to thank our sponsor, Crossway.

I'm grateful for their sponsorship, for the big EVA dollars they send our way. Fortnitely, just bathing in it like Scrooge McDuck money tower. Thank you, Justin.

All right, all right, should we cut that out? [Laughter] Go, you're called, Justin. Okay, all right. No, but we are mentioning today the new book by Michael Reves, Rejoice and Tremble, the Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord.

Michael Reves is one of those, well, I hope people have heard of him. It does seem like anyone who's has read his stuff says, "Have you heard of this guy Michael Reves?" It's fantastic. I haven't read this book yet.

Justin, the cover makes it look like it's in the genre of Gentle and Lonely. Is this a series or is this just a cover design trick? No, it's a, I guess it's maybe a cover design direction, but they're not part of the same series, although Dan's next book is going to be in that series. So if that's not confusing enough, you'll just have to buy the books and figure it out.

There is actually a little companion book that Mike wrote that's shorter and more accessible. What does it mean to fear the Lord that the ideas maybe pastors and leaders, small group leaders might buy the bigger one and the masses might buy the smaller one together, but yeah, I agree with you. It's the same thing that I don't hear anybody say.

I read "Delighting in the Trinity" and it's Ho-hum. They just say, you know, it's one of the best things I've read this year. Four and a half stars, 477 reviews on Amazon.

Pretty impressive. So is this book more devotional in focus or is it like new studies in biblical theology kind of genre talking about the fear of the Lord? I think it's trying to do both and so it's a theological piece of work that is meaty but also accessible. And I think Mike's incapable of not writing something that doesn't have a devotional flavor to it.

But he's advancing a thesis about the fear of the Lord and that it's not being afraid of God per se but that there is a sort of rejoicing that is bound up with a very idea of fearing God biblically speaking. So it's not boring biblical theology but kind of devotionally driven Puritan-esque sort of work I'd say. And Mike leads a seminary for university, forget the title, but over in the UK.

Yeah, in school of theology, yep, in Oxford. Yeah. It teaches there and is the president of the school.

And he's he's he's he's as tall as I am. I think there's not even Dutch and not even not. It's it's about that it's pretty much the number one thing I hear from people after I speak.

Wow, you're taller than I thought. That is the big impression I make on people and so when I saw it Mike might even be a little bit taller. You know you don't expect people to be towering Andre the giant type theologians.

I know I hear the same thing like you're bigger than I thought your voice. I think the implication is your voice sounds like you're kind of a midget but a large person. You could hurt people or protect quarterbacks.

It's true. I was once asked when we lived in Minneapolis a couple guys don't mean they asked me if I had played offensive line for the Bears. Maybe it was just a way of saying you're fat.

But. Okay, so that's a good segue. Life and books and everything.

So start with a little I don't know if this is life or everything. But what do you think of draft the Bears? I just saw the Bears tweeted out a conglomerate of like 10 people giving them a draft report in nine of the 10 gave an A or an A plus. I was very pleased as a Bears fan that they managed to get Justin Fields and they got the offensive guard or tackle out of Oklahoma State.

But you kind of figure Ryan Pace knows this is my last chance before I get fired. I might as well trade a lot of future draft in hopes of making something work. We were on some family outing and I told my son on the way home I said did you see what the Bears did.

And he threw both arms up in the air and said we finally did something right. So that's maybe the collective reaction of Bears Nation. So you're a Bears fan.

Justin. Yes. Legit you have been your whole life.

Not legit but I am. I mean, no joke for the Vikings Kansas City Chiefs as a good I win and became more of a Bears fan when we moved to Chicago land. All right.

And Colin you root for the Saskatchewan Rough Riders or something. The Kansas City Chiefs of course. Yeah.

Well, we didn't have my homes. We didn't have as good of a draft this time because you know we were picking 31 and last year was 32. So, you know, we get excited in January.

You want to tell everyone where you were born Kevin? I was born in South Allen, Illinois. Is that what you wanted to hear? Did you did you see Kevin the roar on the south side at whatever they're calling that baseball stadium now these days? Guaranteed rate field name stadium. I'm just going to keep calling it kamiski.

And that was that was pretty that was pretty cool. I mean, I I've never seen any fan base more excited than the Bears were when they traded for Jay Cutler. So I don't hate the Bears.

So I'm really hoping this turns out better this time for you, Kevin and John. The only thing. Okay.

Some Bears fans. So I don't like Green Bay and I really don't like Aaron Rodgers. I could go into a lot of biblical reasons why.

Theological reasons, you know, I can't be a lot of cool reasons. But so if he leaves Green Bay, that's great. But the only thing that would be worse than him being the quarterback for the Packers would be him hosting jeopardy.

So please, please spare us from that. What if you got hired as a pastor in Charlotte that might actually. Oh, yeah.

Yeah, I don't know. That would be interesting. So how are things we'll get to a more germane topic.

Oh, this is this is germane, but I'm curious. How what's the COVID like in your neck of the woods people bearing with it. Are they hanging on every word from the CDC and whether they can be outside and open their miles or not? I think I saw that Iowa was number one in the nation for COVID refusal of the vaccine.

So 71% of islands have said no to it. I don't read beyond the headline, but interesting. Does that surprise you Justin? I don't really know the state of Iowa that well, you know what, in terms of how everything's going to shape out in terms of.

You're gearing up for 2024. That's all I know. We're ready to go.

So yeah, that I was surprising to see that that was noted as one of the refusal. But if you walked around or you lived your life there in Sioux City, does it seem like. Yeah, COVID's done or we're never going to get out of this.

What what's the ambiance? I think just walking around it seems like people are compliant when they go into stores and aren't wearing masks. Otherwise, it seems relatively calm to me, but I'm interested to see what the school districts will do come fall. Well, masks still be required.

Will they be encouraged, but not required? I know that it's strange to think that we're actually in the last month of the school year. It's my daughter said this school year has been really long and really fast, which is kind of the paradox of life. It's it's flown by and yet it's dragged on.

What's it like there in the deep south of Alabama? Well, this is a it's kind of a I don't know. I haven't thought about this until it happened on Sunday morning. So our church does 8 a.m. You don't have to wear a mask or distance.

930. You do have to wear a mask. No distance.

11. You can be outside. You can do whatever you want.

Still kind of distance, but you don't have to wear a mask when you're sitting there. It's kind of an all, you know, everybody can be happy kind of approach there. And I was sitting with my son and we don't require the kids to have to wear masks.

And he was really scared when I told him he didn't have to wear his mask. He was like, but I'm I'm in danger if I don't wear my mask and and I thought, Oh, it's a kid who's only been in kindergarten. You know, and he's been wearing a mask all year in kindergarten.

And my approach to masks is one thing, but he's much younger and more impressionable. And I just was trying to reason with him about the situation, but I wasn't

getting through to a kindergartner about that. So it kind of makes me wonder what some of the long term consequences are going to be because then he goes to baseball where it's hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people outside and nobody is even coming close to wearing a mask or distancing.

It feels like nothing's ever changed there. So I don't know how long, of course, this is a COVID era podcast that we started. So I appreciate you Kevin bringing it back to that original perspective, but it's going to be a long time as we still try to sift through.

It's like community to community. I mean, in my, in my city in Birmingham, I can go over here. And that's the baseball game and nobody's wearing masks.

And then if I shift to this baseball league over here, then everybody has to wear masks outside even then. If I go to this bakery over here, I don't think they'll ever not require masks again, ever. Over here, you wouldn't even think at this fast food joint at our culvers, by the way, you go to the culvers and no, nobody's, nobody's wearing a mask.

Butter burgers where you can donate to the FFA at the cash register in our ride. To cheese curds. This is Wisconsin.

Yeah, this is why when we were driving in on Saturday after the baseball, my daughter just screams cheese curds. And this also may have been why that evening in family devotions, I was just praying. I said, God, thank you for and she just screamed out burgers.

Well, she's got full block. I know it. I've been preaching through Genesis and I was struck in Genesis 18 when the visitors come to Abraham and Sarah.

The two angels on the Lord that, you know, he makes this meal for them. And then he provided a calf so he gave some good meat and then he took curds. And milk.

And milk. So he is dishing out culvers, basically cheese curds, burgers, say us a fine flour. So cakes.

I mean, did you mention culvers in your sermon? I didn't. We, I think there's one just over the border in South Carolina. We don't have one here in Charlotte.

Of course, now that I'm gluten free, all I can get is roast beef in a bowl. And some mashed potatoes, which, you know, for mashed potatoes in a bowl or not too bad. I was on Saturday.

I went to the Nebraska spring game. And that was their first, you know, in a year and a half, any sort of live event outdoors. The captain tendons at 50,000, you have to 50% of the stadium.

You had to wear a mask indoors and then they reminded you. And then going through

the gates and then you had to wear a mask there, but everybody knew they weren't going to enforce that once you got to your seat. So every other row was occupied, but then you're sitting right next to people.

You have to wear a mask in, but most of the people weren't wearing a mask when they were seated. So, you know, it all feels arbitrary, but you kind of understand that people are trying to do something. So we talked about this at the very beginning of COVID died.

And I don't know if you've ever got an answer. I'm sure there'll be dissertations and books for years written on this, but without trying to take sides on mask or no mask. It's just the facts of it.

Do you think where we're at? Is it all is it all political? I mean, you saw that Brookline Massachusetts, which I know know well from my time at Gordon Conwell. I mean, they voted to go against the CDC and the CDC when they finally said, if you're vaccinated in a small group outside, you can take your mask off. And I think most Americans were already doing all of that, whether they were vaccinated or not, or a whole lot of people but Brookline Massachusetts said, no, we don't think the CDC, we still require masks outside.

I think even if you are vaccinated. So, is this all political if by some, you know, flip of the switch, you could go back 15 months and the political sides were different. Would this all be different or is there something in red and blue psyche that makes one more risk taking, more risk of verse.

So, if you're not a type of neighbor versus rugged individualism. Is this all political at this point, or are there deeper reasons why these divides have fallen along such now predictable lines. Yeah, I'll take a stab at it there a little bit.

So, this has been one of the most interesting and costly social experiments we could ever imagine. So, let me just take you back to I mentioned somebody listening here might think, Oh, gosh, well, based on what Colin described there being outside playing baseball. I bet I know what I can think about that place in terms of knowing wearing a mask, knowing being responsible.

Okay, well, what you don't what I didn't say is that our community also has 90% vaccination adoption. Already 90% and we did a month ago had 90%. Why is that? Well, it's a heavily Republican area, but it's also a heavily medical community area.

And so I think and I was talking on the phone with somebody today. And he was, you would have thought based on what he was saying to me. He was calling me from rural Alabama.

He was taking off a bunch of the political and theological boxes of all these different stuff. And then I started talking about COVID protocols in the church and he responded

and said, Oh, that my neighbor across the street. I watched her husband die of COVID.

And I watched her pack up and move out. My wife as soon as I my wife and I as soon as we could get vaccinated, we got vaccinated. I just think it's it's not an easy thing to predict in terms of vaccine or mask or following or not following depending on the place.

I don't think there's an easy way to do that because we're more complicated individuals who have different experiences and different opportunities, even within there. I will say this, though, overall, there does seem to have been a uniquely American response that does supersede all sort of stuff. And what I see with the American response is twofold.

One, that Americans seem to have a higher requirement of freedom than any other country. And I mean, including me sure that looks different in the Bay Area, California, Brookline, Massachusetts, I get that just in the aggregate. There seems to be a major difference between the United States and other countries.

And second, Americans seem to have a strong preference to solve their problems through technology, especially namely the vaccine and an ingenuity and a willingness to do whatever necessary to accomplish that purpose. So I feel as though at the same time, Kevin, we're experiencing this great social experiment that's revealing a lot of different perspectives and different cross experiences that you can't easily predict. And at the same time, Americans have really acted like Americans during this in ways that the British and even the Canadians and the French and the Germans would not recognize me.

When I hear my friends in Australia right now talking about their continued lockdowns and their numbers, it's just obvious to me that no matter where you were in the United States, you would not put up with that. No, you wouldn't. I mean, because they've, I mean, I know people in Australia too, and their death count is astronomically low.

And it's come at a very well, to me, to an American, severe cost. And I do think you're right. There is something in much of the American psyche that says, we will trade off freedom.

We'll take freedom if it means we lose something in possible security or safety. And I think that's simplistic, but I do think that's even some of the divisions within America is to what degree should we make that trade off with, you know, some people saying, look, make a decision, you do it if you feel unsafe, wear a mask, take care of yourself, and others saying, well, if you really cared about people in your communities in your neighborhoods, we'd all shut down. And then it gets into, you know, how much, how long we think it's going to last.

Do we have basic trust that the government, you know, has our best interest at heart. That's not usually the American way of seeing things. Do we believe science? What is

science? We've seen that capital as science.

It tends to just mean whatever reinforces my own particular worldview when the science has come on several of these issues saying, well, you don't get it from contact services being outside in the sunlight is one of the best things to be. Before we move on, Justin, rather, any any thoughts on why we've ended up with this polarity. Yeah, I mean, I think there's a lot of reasons and presidential politics obviously plays a significant role in it.

If President Trump had championed mask wearing in a different way with that have had an effect upon his followers, I don't know for sure. But I think one of the most frustrating things about this and I think that another thing that Americans tend not to put up with is. The moving of the goalposts.

You know, if you kind of set out a reasonable goalpost, here's the goal. Let's flatten the curve. Let's mitigate.

And then if if you feel like there is no end in sight, like there is no trigger point at which we'll say, okay, well, we're going to reverse course. That's where I think Americans get frustrated and they start to feel like you're playing upon our emotions or you're just manipulating us or things like that. The thing that I'm most interested in is the people who are arguing a certain logic where they will never be able to take a mask off again.

You know, the risk aversion as a sign of faithfulness requiring masks. I just don't know if it will work because COVID's never going away. It will always be with us and the flu will always be with us.

So does that require a perpetual wearing of masks? It would be nice to have some definitions and some benchmarks rather than feeling like we're in this perpetual state of ever being able to move beyond this. I know, I know Justin that presidential politics play a big role in this and I certainly agree. However, do you guys think we would have dramatically different numbers on vaccinations if President Trump had been reelected? No, I don't.

I think we've just about reached, I mean, they'll keep trickling in, but you've seen the numbers of new vaccinations go way down. Now, it also coincided with pressing pause Johnson vaccine. So did that say, Oh, well, we can't trust it.

Or you have what a third of the country vaccinated. And, you know, it's much higher than that if you just look at adults, but yeah, I'm guessing the people who really wanted it have gotten in line and gotten it. And you'll see some more people trickle throughout the summer who who are considered low risk or younger folks and weren't, you know, didn't want to rush and go to mass vaccination events.

And then we'll line up and get it. But yeah, I, you think about it with all of the effort to get people to vote with constant commercial signs, the news 20, I mean, all over the

place in the most contested the world's most important election. And even the best of years, what percentage 60 something percent.

So yeah, you're not going to what made us think we were going to get 95% of adults to get vaccinated. It just wasn't what I agree with you guys that it probably would have not made much of a difference if Trump had been reelected. What if he had been reelected and he made this a major focus of using the bully pulpit to encourage vaccination among the supporters arguing against arguments against it.

You think that would have made a difference. Well, that's, I get my, my guess would be that President Trump would have made a strong argument saying, Hey, we've got to get the economy going again. We've got to get this country opened up.

The best thing really the only thing you can do about that is to get vaccinated. I do think for some of his supporters that would have made a difference. I also think that some other number of people, especially African Americans would have been less likely to get it in that case, because going in there were two groups that were majorly skeptical white evangelical Protestants and black Protestants.

Both were very skeptical and the real question was enough for the same reasons for the most part different reasons. The real question was going to be how much either one of those groups could move the white evangelical group is much bigger, but just so makes a bigger difference overall. But the question is who who's going to be able to get them to move.

Certainly Trump might have been able to get more of the white evangelicals to move but again, I'm not sure what the offset would have been on the other side. But I know that vaccine skeptic skepticism does continue among many black Protestants. And the messaging has often been terrible, because the people that most want you to get vaccinated are also the ones telling you, you should still double mask after you get vaccinated and we're not sure about school.

So, if someone had given from the top down a consistent message of get vaccinated, once you do this, we have a mechanism in place to then move back to normal once we reach such a percentage or even you have a card or something. And we can take the masks off go back to normal, but when you're trying to motivate people with no discernible reward in sight for many of them. It becomes hard, but it is it's a major technological marvel and it's a major accomplishment to have 100 million people go and do anything.

You know, our case rate is still higher than UK than Israel and other places. So, all right, COVID, let's transition. And I want to ask you guys a, how's that for a good Midwestern term.

But I still say you guys, you guys, let's talk about to use you all use guys. And there was an article a couple of weeks ago from Rod rare that we had talked about just in a text thread why our conservatives in despair. And I gave many anecdotes, many charts, it's it's Rod so it's very long, gave many examples of why conservatives are in despair.

I think the overall sense was and for good reasons are in despair. So I don't want to talk about that article in particular though you're welcome to but I want to use that as a launching off point. So let's let's say that for conservative Christians.

And Rod was thinking maybe more broadly conservative politically but there's a there's a large overlap so conservative Christians. Let me first ask you make the case that things are bad things are bad out there. If you're a Bible believing Christian things do not look good.

Now we'd want to give, you know, we're balanced guys. Well, this is good and this isn't that bad. But if you're making the case plausibly make the case that really here are some reasons for earthly despair.

And then we're going to ask, I mean, ask us a follow up question. Alright, if that's the case, what do we do. So I'll give you one, one piece of evidence, and we'll just go around the horn here, maybe a couple of times.

So one, not a surprise coming from me with perhaps my family and with the infamous blog post that I did last year about militant fecundity. And I think our literally Al Qaeda, I think someone said to me. So you look at the declining fertility rate in this country.

And you talked about that in an excellent episode of gospel bound last year Colin. Was that with Mark Rickneris. Yep.

Yep. And Philip Jenkins had his book on faith and fertility looking at globally. But for many years in the Western world United States has been an outlier.

Not just talking about the baby boom but past that. And now our population is growing only because of immigration and longer life. But that's the fertility rate is, is well below 2.1, which is the replacement rate.

And all sorts of people, you can read the mark right nearest book you can read the Philip Jenkins book showed that there is declining religiosity that goes hand in hand with declining fertility. And in fact, when you look at that some of the gaps in political beliefs. It's often not as much a gender gap as a marriage gap, or as a family gap on whether you have children or not.

And I think Mary everstad has argued this in some of her books that it isn't just that as religion declines certain family issues of size or sexuality also decline. The reverse also happens that as you have those declining metrics in norms of family life. Traditional

religious beliefs become less plausible for all sorts of reasons.

So I'm a firm believer I think you guys are too that the biggest trends affecting all of us are the ones that are happen and build up over the slowest amount of time. Now yes, you have a 911 you have a COVID you have things that just explode on you and they make a big difference for a long, long time. But this is one of those that is the product of all sorts of cultural forces and millions and millions of decisions.

And it is having and going to have a massive effect and will make traditional beliefs traditional Christianity biblical faith church going all sorts of things much, much more difficult declining fertility rate. What do you have Colin bad news mine. My bad news goes along with your bad news Kevin and I think they'll mutually illumine one another because there's a silver lining in both of them.

So my bad news would be what we recently saw from the Pew Foundation the church membership rate falling below 50% for the first time in recorded history. And so I think it's not to be very clear. Most historians would tell you that around the American Revolutionary period there wasn't anything remotely close to 50% membership with churches.

Okay, so we're not saying this is all time. Okay, but seeing that drop for the first time in the last 70 years below 50% not only that but the key is that for 50 years. The membership rate was stable around around 70.

And in 20 years has declined 20 points. And there's no reason to think necessarily that it's stopping there. Because the younger generations are as we've come to expect less and less and less affiliated with churches and mosques and synagogues they're included in this so that's my bad.

So if you're new statistic, maybe we'll leave people hanging coming back for the silver lining and that relates to yours Kevin. So I'll get a little tease there. Okay.

Justin, make the case that things out there are bad. I think if you look in terms of culture, the all of the most powerful elite institutions are aligned against the Christian faith. So I think about the media or whether you're talking about sports figures and the industrial sports complex, or whether you're talking about education where we all hope to send our kids off to college and university.

All of those forces are a raid against belief and against confessionism against piety and putting God at the center. So from a cultural standpoint, everything, it feels like a tidal wave moving against the church. But then you think, well, maybe the church itself is this bulwark able to withstand all the pressures from the outside world.

But the number of moral scandals that the church has endured does not seem to neatly line up with some particular subculture, but seems spread across the various

denominations and demographics. So if you're talking about the sort of intellectual apologetics, you can point to Ravi Zacharias if you're talking about egalitarian mega churches, you can point to Bill Hibles. If you're talking about a young restless and reformed, you can point to a Tullian Chavision, or a Josh Harris or a Mark Driscoll.

So it feels like the church itself is losing its ability to withstand the kind of cultural wave that continues to break against it. So if you want to make a case against the future of the church, I think pointing to the difficulties of discipling the next generation, especially in a social media age, where all of those things kind of converge together to make faith, at least, not if not impossible, more difficult. Yeah, Colin.

Well, just to reinforce Justin's point, I've got an interview now out on Gospel Bound with John Dixon, a very accomplished apologist out of Australia. And I asked him what's the low point in Christian history? What's the worst part of Christian history? And he said, we're living in it right now. And I was like, what do you mean? And he said, it's the abuse scandals.

And so all the challenges outside of the church, he says, inside the church is actually what's worse. And just to give it a quick example of what he's talking about there, how does Ireland go? Century after century after century after century of being just considered this Catholic powerhouse. And by the way, same thing with Quebec.

Same thing with Quebec. To within like one generation, it's known for its outstanding secularism. I'm with you, Kevin, that it's usually bigger picture trends that are behind these kinds of things.

So I'm more of the Charles Taylor variety, not surprisingly here when it comes. This is a 500 year window we're looking at. But it is jarring when all of a sudden you're looking at a 20 year window of just collapse.

That's just to reinforce Justin's. Yeah. Let me piggyback on both of those themes.

The this has happened in my adult lifetime. When I was, you know, an intern in ministry and 20 plus years ago, I remember teaching a class, a Sunday school class on relativism. And the big thing was absolute truth and people out there who want to say there is no absolute truth and your way is as good as any other way.

There's many ways up the mountain and who's to say what's right and wrong. And Christians were saying, no, we're not moral relatives. Well, we have quickly gone from the ones trying to make truth claims in the public square to by and large, holding on to just the same thing.

And we've gone to just our right to have our own little world not be invaded. And you don't find relativists out there. That was sort of the rallying cry for whatever you want to call them on the left or not Christians or liberalizing forces.

When they weren't in the ascendancy now that they are. I mean, Twitter is not a place filled with moral relativism. It is filled with moral absolutes and with all sorts of very strict codes and judgments and enforcing of moral values.

So Christians have gone within a generation and I believe in religious liberty and religious freedom and it's important to fight for those things. But for most of us, we don't really think there's any way that people are going to find our truth claims plausible in the public square. We just want to be able to have a right to kind of live our life and do our thing and not get thrown in jail for holding these things.

Justin, I mean, your point is exactly right and I tried to say this to people at times when they would be impatient or quickly dismissive of conservatives concerns. And certainly conservatives get things wrong. We all do.

And this may be thinking admittedly of more of a white evangelical. But if you think of, okay, what you look out and if you believe that marriage is between a man and a woman and that God made men and women and that you're heard, you're not assigned a gender, you have a gender. And that's for a reason.

And there's something called biblical manhood and biblical womanhood. And then maybe even go farther and you think that you want to have a large family and your wife thinks it's a good thing. To work at home if she's able to do and that's a God honoring thing.

And you're at a church that believes that Jesus Christ is the only way. And if you add on top of that some, some basic, you know, national patriotism and the sense of, oh, we should be proud to be Americans. And you mix that all up and I know there's all sorts of, you can say, well, what about this danger in that danger, but if you just have that sort of mindset, which most Christians certainly in white churches would have, and then I would affirm all those things.

And you're going to look out, and you're going to see almost every commercial, well, you're not going to see a commercial, a movie, a TV show, hardly any institution of elite higher learning, that's going to defend your way of looking at the world, let alone champion it, let alone provide a plausible accounting for it. So it is not hard to look around and feel like, okay, not only am I a cognitive minority. And not only does this seem to be declining quickly, but wow did I just read that an MP from Finland is going to be thrown in jail quite possibly, because she's a conservative Christian who tweeted things about biblical marriage.

And these aren't made up stories anymore, not that they were made up stories but you could maybe 10, 20 years ago just see these sort of well one day it's coming well, it's there in different parts and so it's easy to see why a Bible believing conservative Christian would be discouraged. Anything else you want to add to that before we try to

say something positive. Justin.

Colin. Well, I would just say also, let's take racial issues and just the feedback that I get negatively from pastors are just how hard it is to navigate politics, pandemic, race. I've got my theory which I've talked about many times on this podcast that it has a lot to do with the very fact that podcasts like this exist.

Now, the proliferation of media in part has created all these different little worlds that don't allow much consensus institutionally to be able to build. But I'll just say this, I would imagine that for many of us, and maybe those of us who are white were just naive. We would have thought that in the 90s and 2000s we were making a lot of progress as a society on race.

And by all accounts, it's the opposite now. So I'm not trying to speculate here as to all the different reasons why that is. I'm just saying the sense now is that things are getting worse in race relations.

And I can't think of another time in my lifetime when that was actually statistically how people are tested to things. So that's just another thing to point out. And with that, I've floated this theory to you guys before.

I don't know if it's worth floating here out loud, but I guess I will. I see some similarity with African Americans and with white conservatives. Take the metaphor of home.

I think a lot of white Christians, that's the three of us, would look out and they would say, now, wait a second. Don't you see where this country used to be on some of these things and where we are now? And look at all these factors that we're just talking about. This does not feel like home anymore.

This is how did we become strangers in our own country? And there is a profound sense of loss that I think sometimes even people a little to the left of me, I think don't sympathize with enough. And then, if I can, you know, postulate a thesis, I wonder if many African American friends would say, okay, but do you realize for many of us this has never felt like home? We've always had to live in a dual culture. We've always had to be a culture within a larger culture.

And do you understand how the history that you're telling hasn't always felt like our history? Not everyone would say that, but many would. And so I do think that's why even people who would have most of the same religious beliefs can often talk past each other because there's a visceral sense of, can you hear and see what I'm feeling and why there is such a profound sense of loss and you don't seem to even want to try to understand it? Yeah, I agree with you entirely, Kevin, on that. And now I think we're getting more into, we're moving away from analyzing statistics and more to the existential feeling with regard to your question.

And I think that to go back to the whole COVID discussion, this past year, I think has existentially raised the feelings of angst for many of us. What are the things that are up and what are the things that are down? Social media usage is up. Partisan politics and talking heads and TV is up.

We're more exposed to those than ever. What are we having less of? We're having less evangelism. We're having less fellowship.

We're having less corporate gatherings where we participate together of the ordinary means of grace. That's a recipe for feeling disconnected from each other and from having meaningful accountability and the way in which the Lord has designed our world to work. So I think it's natural that we're feeling the existential angst even more.

And the three of us have talked about this a little bit before wondering, you know, are de-conversions actually on the rise? Is abuse actually on the rise? Or is it our awareness of those things? So in a media culture that reports continually on, say, de-conversions on abuse, a lot of that has been very good to bring that into the light. But it also makes us feel like the whole world is crumbling around us and we're strangers in our own homeland and not sure where we fit anymore. So, oh man, a lot of want to follow up on there, but I'll try to transition.

I'll try to keep moving to think about, okay, somebody's listening to this and they say, wow, yeah, I see that and I think it's really bad. What do we do? And let me just start and give a couple of thoughts. One is we need to be honest with ourselves.

When we ask the question, what do we do? We need to say, well, what are we aiming for? Meaning, if what you're really aiming for in that, so there's a whole litany of what's discouraging. If, by God's grace in 30 years, something was less discouraging, what would it look like? I think if some of us are honest, it's really what's animating us is on the civic political side. And those things matter, you can't have, you know, very rarely are you going to have those things going in one direction and religious things being untouched going in some other direction so it's not shaming anyone for caring about those things.

But on both the right and the left, if we said, well, here's what what does success look like? What do we want? And if it's, you know, unemployment number, there's an art studio or there's more patriotism in the country or there's more adherence to the Constitution, or there's more the rule of law or on and on and on list of good things. First, we have to ask, well, is, is that what we're aiming for because that's one sort of thing. And if all of that were the case and churches were declining and theology was atrophying and the glory of God was less proclaimed from the pulpits would we consider it a good thing.

So let's just think, I'm going to answer the question thinking, what I want to see happen

is the glory of God in our pulpits, churches, good churches growing new believers, and you can't ignore all of the societal structure that makes that possible, that gives you freedoms to do so, that gives the intellectual apparatus, the institutions to train people. So all of that matters. But what I would want to say from the outset is, and this is not surprising, but ordinary faithfulness is going to go a lot longer toward that end than you think.

And it's easy, we talked about this too offline, but it's easy to feel like someone comes in with the loudest voice and whatever their thing is, and there could be good things and their thing could be racial justice, their thing could be global missions, their thing could be, you know, Francis Turretin, you have all sorts of good things. But if you're made to feel like, if you're not into the thing that I'm into as much as I'm into it, tell me right now what you're doing to make that happen. So honestly, most people out there are, you know, they're trying to make ends meet, and they're trying to find time to, you know, get to church and maybe get on Wednesday night and get their kids homework done and save a little bit for college and they're, you know, maybe they'll go out and they'll splurge and they'll go to the pizza ranch or apple bees for, for dinner.

And they're, they're, they're not living the life of nonstop activism nonstop activity, they are living nonstop activity but it's all the activity of, you know, I'm trying to get through life. And if there's a way that we can be, maybe as conservatives bent toward the status quo that can be unhelpful and yet I do feel a burden as a pastor to want to release people from unnecessary guilt. It's a lot of guilt we should feel, but if we present to people as sort of Christianity that requires 50 hours a day, or the sort of Christianity that requires you to be the most gifted, brilliant, once in a generation talent, and committed on the level of the great, the heroes of the faith, we're not giving people a Christianity that they can flourish in, and it's a Christianity that seems so much more oppressive burdensome than the Christianity in the Bible, which is stop doing that start doing that show this fruit is not just a person.

So I wanted to say to people that if you're loving the Lord if you're raising kids to the glory of God if you're being faithful in church if you're tithing if you're doing, if you're praying, you're probably doing a lot more than you already realize. Yes, dream and think and plan and, you know, consider special callings in your life. But if the answer to this question is, you must have superhuman strength time and ability, then we're just going to be adding burdens to people on top of the ones they already feel.

Justin, what say you? Yeah, I agree with all of that and would also want to say, let's do radical things as the Lord gives us the opportunity and the ability and let's stretch our faith. I think the key thing is we all want to be recognized for it. So there's a lady in our church who is legally blind and praise probably more than the three of us combined.

She's, I don't know that from her I know that from other people who've witnessed her

praying faithfully for our pastor and for our people and for her neighbors. The world doesn't know about her but she quietly serves and I would say not just in an ordinary way but in a radical way. But I think that this generation is primed to think that there is no virtue in an act if it is not seen before others.

So I want to call people to ordinary means of grace, and also call them to radical living but to redefine radical living is not just what will show up on your Instagram feed or in your TikTok video or whatever the kids are doing these days. Whatever happened to the vines weren't good enough. What do you think Colin? Tweet pick.

Well, I think we, I mean gosh guys the fact that we can do podcasts like this, the fact that we can find a bunch of different podcasts that would be incredibly edifying the fact that crossway and other publishers are producing the best books at the cheapest prices with the most accessibility of all time. The fact that we know so many amazing seminaries that are raising up wonderful leaders, faithful leaders in how to teach the scriptures. It is a matter of perspective in so many different ways.

There are better things going on than you could ever have found in any other time of history and let me pay off my T's from earlier. And that is that the real thing that's changed and this is in Kevin's fertility numbers as well as what I was saying about declining attendance in church in church membership. It's really a story of the Catholic church and of the Protestant mainline.

Primarily that's where those numbers are coming from. They're not primarily coming from evangelicals and so the, the, what's happened is the 20% buffer. That evangelicals and traditional believers had of support from other ecclesially connected people in the United States who might be able to sympathize with us on certain views.

That group, well in one case many of them have died. And the group that they raised or their grandchildren that they raised are in many cases pretty aggressive non-Christians. They're, you know, they're the so called nuns.

So that's the main thing that shifted that 20% buffer is the difference between say the values voter election of 2004 and today. Okay. So it's actually not necessarily a story specifically about the evangelical church there.

And so I think in general the problems that we're talking about are not inherent to God's design for the church, meaning there's no reason why we should necessarily be overly discouraged because also that number of people. That number of how many children are being born is a higher number for evangelicals. So I mean at least those who are especially are connected to a church.

I should clarify. There's a lot of complications behind there. So I bring that all back to an article Christian Smith wrote recently for first things called keeping the faith.

And in one sense you read this article and you think that's a lot of sociological jargon to say the same thing that Christians have been saying for thousands of years. And you would be right to say that, but that's how amazingly counterintuitive it's become. Okay.

So who's the biggest influence on children parents? What happens when parents raise their children as Christians? Typically, they, I mean, almost always they come out as Christians. What if you added in there a commitment to God be, you know, what if you had an environment that was both affirming of them as human beings and honoring to God. And you had an ecclesial community that supported you in that work, but you took that primary responsibility as parents.

What are the odds quote unquote odds of your kids being raised as Christians? Almost, I mean, are being practicing Christian Christianity as adults. Almost certainly they will. So we're not talking about anything that's an inherent threat to the church.

Really, we're talking about this sort of halo effect of protection that we've lost a little bit just in terms of politics. The reality of the family does it has not changed. If you're discipling your children, likely they will follow you in the faith.

There are many wonderful resources, more resources than you ever could have dreamed before to help both your church and to help your family to do that. That's a different picture then. All of a sudden, when you look at it that way, now there are real effects.

All these other things are real and they will affect us, but all of those fundamentals, they don't change. That's all still there and available for us. That's really good.

And that's a good article too. It's worth reading. Let me just mention one other thing is connected with this and I'll reference the book that I did a review of and we'll get into the review per se, but the reparations book by Duke and Greg Thompson.

Let me mention a real helpful schematic they have. And then I'll spin off of that probably in a way. Well, I think in a way, certainly they would not agree with, but they're talking about race.

And they say very helpful and in the beginning, there's four ways to look at this. Race can be a personal issue. And then the response is repentance.

Personal sin, you treat people poorly, you have partiality in your heart and your actions, you repent. They said race can also be a relational problem. You don't know people or you lack trust or, and there the answer is racial reconciliation.

Or it can be an institutional problem. There's laws that need to be changed. There are standards that are unfair.

So there the responses reform, or it can be a cultural writ large and there they call for

repair. So it's obvious that the church knows best how to do the first two. Okay, repent, reconcile.

And then the institutional side reform. And then the civil rights legislation of the 60s and other laws that needed to be changed and further back than that constitutional amendments. Okay, here are laws on the books, unfair.

They need to change. When you get to the last of those cultural repair. And I'm not even going to decide even the disagreements that I have and articulate with the book and I know they're going to write a response to what they disagree with me and hopefully I'll be a good enlightening discussion.

But I think so often in these discussions. What it can feel like is, unless you're on the level of cultural repair. I'm just talking about the book I'm just using your categories now for a moment.

Unless you're on the level of cultural repair. What are you really doing to help with whatever the issue is now I know on the issue of race. It would probably be well, this is a unique historical sin in this country and this is different than, you know, some smaller issue in the end.

And that's true. A response I would give to that is you also have abortion. And it's not a, it's not a game of what about is them.

It's a fair I think logical point that, you know, someone could say to Justin Taylor or to Kevin Deanna or Colin Hanson, what are you really doing about abortion. I write that it's wrong. When it comes up in the Bible I preach that it's wrong.

Justin's adopted a number of children. Maybe we give some money to a crisis pregnancy center. Colin publishes articles on gospel coalition that people tend not to read.

We pray about it in our personal lives we pray about it in our churches. I would say all of that is something. All of that is caring about the issue of abortion.

Whether you've marched whether you're speaking at pro life rallies, whether you are seeing legislation get passed on the level of reform and repair. We pray for those things certain people will be called to those things, but there's a level of complexity that I think Christian shouldn't feel like I'm not doing anything about this issue unless I'm at that level. And my point is simply that's true.

I would argue about abortion and I would argue it's true about race. I would argue it's true about a hundred other issues, which are infinitely complex in their solutions. And if what we insist upon people is to be as involved as the most involved people and to be involved at a level that you might find solutions which have not been found over many, many millions of dollars in people.

I want to just hold out to people. You teaching your children that racism is sin is doing something you teaching your children that life in the womb is precious is doing something, praying about those issues is doing something, preaching from the text as they come to you is doing something. And whether or not you're at the level that someone else might want you to be at doesn't mean that you have to walk away tail between your legs and think I guess I'm not really doing anything I must not care.

I've been convicted lately of hearing a line out of my own lips that I don't think is good theology and saying to people who are hurting and in need I wish I could do more than just pray for you. And of course if there are tangible ways to love people we should be moving towards people in love and do what the Lord calls us to do and as opportunity of else but I need to continue to preach to myself that praying is not doing nothing in fact it's doing the most significant thing in the world. And there is not something government's going to be able to solve government is not going to be praying to the father through the sun by the spirit on behalf of these things on issues of justice and issues of life and mercy and love and the spreading of the gospel so that we can pray and pray and pray and pray is doing a lot and then as opportunity avails itself let's move toward people in love.

Colin you want to add anything before we wrap up with some books. And he said well you can read books or you can write books. Now Kevin you're the one where people who can do both but I'm in one of those seasons where I am writing.

And so I'm reading less than ever before. However two books that come up for me. And I'm currently reading continuing to read through grace Olmstead's uprooted recovering the legacy of the place we left behind and then James birds, a holy baptism of fire and blood the Bible and the American Civil War both of them as you guys and the listeners know right up my alley which by the way loved meeting so many LBE listeners at the gospel coalition national conference and women's conference.

Thanks so much for everybody out there who came in and said hi it's a growing army. It really has grown and it's been gratifying I know for all three of us. And it's just great to be able to see those people and to know that you guys are listening and find something helpful in our in our musings here but one thing I want to say about reading is that both these books I expect I'm really going to like and both of these books I am having a hard time getting past the beginning.

I'm just not gripped by either one of them so far. And I want to help people to know that that is a more common than not experience for me. It seems like there's a momentum to reading that is really downhill with a book and especially when I'm reading so many different kinds it seems to take my mind a little bit of time to be able to just get into the mood and the mode of that book.

And so I expect I'm going to like these books but they just keep sitting there on my shelf

shelf and when I've had a long day and it's 11 o'clock at night and I've been writing all day and things like that I look over at my shelf. And I think, oh man, you know maybe what's in my YouTube TV right now instead, even though I know I'm going to like these books so just to relieve some maybe guilt or shame for some people out there who have the same problems that I'm having right now. Good word.

I hear you. Alright, I'll do some books and then we'll wrap up with Justin. I can't remember because I did a solo podcast a month or so ago and mentioned some books so if I already mentioned these but I finished the Andrew Roberts biography of the book.

I did a little bit of this biography of Churchill walking with destiny. I did listen to quite a bit of that in the car it's a big book so I read and listen to it. Yeah, one of my favorite biographies really I, man, one of my favorite books I can remember reading in the last at least five years it's just really, really good.

And I know it's a big investment but it's it's you know get it on audible. Lots I could say about it that that was a fantastic read. Maybe this will be our sponsor next time but I do want to mention Mike Kruger's book surviving religion 101, which is a great it's framed as letters to his daughter Emma he really does have a daughter Emma.

And it's it's great for college students but it's great for entry level apologetics. I read this while back and did a blurb but that's a good book. I've been on a kind of old Princeton slash early Westminster kick for a while I got a bunch of Warfield and John Murray and I'm reading through David Calhoun's on Princeton seminary.

I have the four volume collected writings of John Murray and I've read a lot of them but I hadn't read before the biography that Ian Murray has of John Murray about 200 pages in volume three. And that was that that was, I love reading about these theologians from the past and his Scott I didn't realize there's a picture in there of John Murray and it's his father and son and he's looking about 80 years old and I thought surely this was a misprint and it's his grandson but no no he got married at like 69. And his wife was 41 and they met when she was a student.

Oh boy. So you can't do that no more. Nothing you know bad happened but that that was a great read and then I'll mention.

I'll mention next time but I do want to mention the Crawford ribbon book this would be interesting podcast to survival and resistance and evangelical America Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest ponderous title think British historian is in Northern Ireland Crawford ribbon very well respected historian Oxford University press under 200 pages writing about reconstruction think Doug Wilson think before that rush duney Gary North writing about this movement and writing about it very intelligently very fairly. I commended there's in a day where there's so many history books that are, you know, really tracks more than they are objective history. This was really well done

that I think whatever you think of those people in those movements and I'm on record is being not a reconstructionist.

It's very fair and I think if you if you thought these movements and people were the worst thing to happen to America, you would say see. And I think if you thought they were a great hope you would say see he's just done a really admirable job and an important issue and I think one that will be more important and will find some increasing number of attractors so I commend this book if you've ever been to the world. What's going on how do I make sense of this Crawford ribbons book survival and resistance and evangelical America was really well done.

Justin finish us up with some great Russian novels of the right I never did finish for the screen was off I have to hit that I made a valley effort and I'm very sorry Colin. Three bucks so the soul of Abraham Lincoln by William Barton who wrote the book 1920 he was a congregational minister in Oak Park Illinois it's 400 page book. And this will get your guys's attention Alan Gelso said it is the most serious and balanced investigation of Lincoln's religion so I think I'm going to do a summary of it at the evangelical history blog.

And he was a pastor who just in the waning years of his pulpit ministry got really interested in Lincoln and did like eight substantial studies of Lincoln's life and work and should we should we poll listeners here to get to give us feedback to say, do you want us to do an LBE episode that is only about Abraham Lincoln books. Yeah, you can you can tweet as you can email us because yeah I held back I have about four or five Abraham Lincoln books that I'm working through for just finished. So let us know if the man is there we are at your service to do an episode of LBE just about Abraham Lincoln books.

If you like the idea tweet yes if not just ignore it yeah just ignore it move if we get five yeses that'll be that'll be support that'll be there are six righteous people in the land. So that's one book. Another is several years ago when it first came out I read Marilyn Robinson's Gilly ad and then have subsequently bought the follow up three volumes, which I want to read but I thought it would be good to go back and reread Gilly So I'm reading that it's a sort of book that you can read, you know, a page at a time and actually kind of taking some notes and creating a timeline of that world that Mrs Robinson created so I'm enjoying that for here's to you.

This is Robin's exactly that will be the name of the blog post. Yeah. And then the final one I'm finishing this up I'm maybe have a couple hours to go in terms of audio listen the the lone plane in the sky the oral history of 911.

Yeah you said that's really well done. 45 voice actors. Wow.

And you know the guy who sounds like rumsfeld doesn't sound like he's imitating rumsfeld but he sounds like rumsfeld. The guy who does Dick Cheney's voice it's just

enough like them that you know or a lady who was on the 105th floor with a New Jersey accent so it just it feels very documentary like and is hard to listen to and hard to stop listening at the same time as we approach the 20th anniversary this fall. Do you guys still have strong like I don't know how many things I can look back on historically and have strong emotions with, I still have strong emotions with 911 it still hurts.

Yeah I mean we will definitely want to do an episode in the fall Lord willing if we're back and talk about 911 and it is one of those things we think even within our lifetimes how many fewer people pay attention to D day or to December 7 1941 these sort of holidays, you know get less and less and the same thing will probably happen with 911 and I don't think that's good. I guess it's inevitable you know things in the distance and people don't have firsthand memory of it but it's it's not only instructive for geopolitical but on an emotional level national level even spiritual level to not forget and to thank and to read those books so yeah. Well my parents talked to me about 63 is talking about Canadian assassination and I just don't have, they talk about the emotions and I just can't relate but then Justin when you just start talking about 105th floor.

I just, it's hard. I want to one of the strange things about that day and we won't turn this into a 911 episode later yeah. It's one of those rare events where I can actually trace a range of emotions throughout the day right.

I think there's other things so I remember what happened when such and such happened but I kind of associate that with one feeling but that the ebb and flow of the day and the following day and the uncertain to use. Should definitely do an episode on that and we're all the age where we were still informative years and the world would be a different place at that time it's not like we were through our lives and everything so. Yeah I was writing for me was right in the middle of college so you guys right after college right.

Yeah and you just realize how history moves on and how how close we were to in our lifetimes a certain historical events that at least when I was growing up fell. Oh I mean I had a class in high school on the 50s and 60s I was born in 77 right. So that's you know that's like my kid having a class on the 90s.

What do you want that wasn't a long time that's not history but I was born in 77 so JFK's assassination was 14 years before I was born and yet for me it was always a long time. It was history it was something I never had first hand knowledge of and my parents didn't talk about they all remembered. And so 2001 is 9/11 I mean I've had multiple kids born since 2015 which would have been 14 years later and all of them were born after it.

So you know the seminary students that I have they don't have any remembrance of it maybe they were you know toddlers or some of them were five or six years later. Five or six years old so it really is striking for those of us who were adults young adults at that time so we'll do that Lord willing in the fall but thank you all. Thank you Justin Colin good to be with you at least one more episode in two weeks and we have Marvin Alaska.

We're all who's going to be with us he's got a new book so we're looking forward to talking with him and hearing just a little bit about his very fascinating story and own walk with the Lord and where he's come from and many of us have benefited from world for a long time so look forward to that. And until then more if I got enjoying forever and go read a good book.

[Music]

[buzzing]