

OpenTheo

Gospelbound, with Sarah Zylstra

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

The only way we can move forward in the church is by going back to the Gospel. Journalism and education have become intrinsically destabilizing forces for Christianity, and anxiety is at an all-time high. Sarah Zylstra and Collin Hansen have written *Gospelbound: Living with Resolute Hope in an Anxious Age* to respond to this very problem. [Collin also hosts another podcast called *Gospelbound*). You will find encouragement and direction in this episode.

Life and Books and Everything is sponsored by Crossway, publisher of *Ten Words to Live By: Delighting in and Doing What God Commands* by Jen Wilkin, the Best-Selling Author of *Women of the Word*.

Ten Words to Live By teaches readers how the Ten Commandments come to bear on their lives today, helping them to love God and others, to live in joyful freedom, and to long for that future day when God will be rightly worshiped for eternity. Ancient and timeless, these words cannot be overlooked. They serve as the rightful delight and daily meditation of those who call on the name of the Lord.

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Books and Everything:

Gospelbound: Living with Resolute Hope in an Anxious Age, by Sarah Zylstra

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations! Our loyal listeners welcome to Life and Books and Everything! I'm Kevin Young and have Justin Taylor, Collin Hansen, with me, and we'll hear from them in just a moment. But as always, we're grateful for Crossway and any fine books they put out and today we are spotlighting 10 words to live by, lighting in and doing what God commands by Jin Wilkin, a book on the 10 Commandments. Justin, how did that title? 10 words to live by? Was there a fight about maybe 10 words by which to live? You felt like you could end with a preposition? Yeah, the prescriptivist lost that one.

Okay, I guess so. Well, yeah, I've seen good stuff about the book online, so check that out by Jin Wilkin and today we are going to talk about a different book by a different publisher. We're very grateful for this book by Colin Hansen and Sarah E. Koff Zylstra called Gospelbound.

So Sarah, this is a momentous occasion. You are the first female guest on Life Books and Everything. I mean, talk about this is one of the glass ceilings out there.

Talk about you, there will be elementary schools named after you. This is really sticking it to the patriarchy. So we are very glad to have you on the show.

Kevin, this is my first book too. It is? Oh, you've written so much. I didn't realize it was your first book.

Yeah, first all over the place. Well, we're grateful to have you on and we've enjoyed reading lots of your stuff on Gospel Coalition and elsewhere over the years. So Sarah E. Koff Zylstra, some people may think that's an odd name.

I think it's a lovely name. You must be Dutch. Are we related? We are related.

Okay, so where are you from? Tell us a little bit about yourself. I'm originally from Iowa, so I grew up in a small farming community in Iowa. Shadda Justin who still is hanging out

in Iowa.

It was called Kanawha. It's a really little tiny town, probably 750 people in it when I was growing up there. So lived there for a long time, went to college at Dorchester University that you may have heard of in the cornfield of Iowa, met a boy there named Adam Zylstra and married him and then we moved to Chicago to go to graduate school and then we stayed in Chicago.

At some point, the four of us may have lived within 100 mile radius of each other. It's true. Yeah, that's true.

I think we did. I think we did. Where in Chicago? We are in the South suburbs.

We live in a suburb called Homewood and we go to church in a suburb called Orland Park. I know. You know, I was born in South Holland.

You were born like five minutes from me. Uh-huh. Yeah, there's probably an elementary school there too.

Yeah. Yeah, I'm sure someday. Named after you, Kevin.

Is that what I'm saying? It's just a matter of time. Okay. No, certainly not.

But Sarah, are you are you Chicago sports fan? I'm a Chicago Cubs fan. Yeah. I mean, you know, when you grew up in Iowa, you don't really have it.

Yeah, there's a lot of Cubs fans in Iowa. So you just have to pick the team that proposed this to you. So growing up, I was like kind of marginally a Twins fan because I was closest to Minneapolis, but then I moved to Chicago for graduate school and that's when we really got into baseball.

So do you think the Andy Dalton experiment with the Bears is going to turn out? No, do you? No, I don't. Yeah. Does anyone? Does anyone? Yeah, I mean, Ryan Pace.

Ryan Pace. Yeah. I hope he enjoys his last year as a general manager of the Bears.

Sarah, tell us before we turn to the book, that's great. Now where you're from, tell us about what you've been doing. You're a writer.

We read in the book that you and Colin are both trained in journalism. You got your Northwestern University swag on there. Give us a little bit more background about you and how you came to know Colin and write this book with him.

Yeah. My life is run sort of in an odd parallel with Colin's because he grew up close to where Dorchester is. And then I started writing in college.

I went in undecided. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I really liked the

communication in English classes. And so I majored in those.

And then we moved to my husband and I moved to Chicago. So he could go to graduate school. I worked as administrative assistant for about 18 months.

And then I wanted to go to school too. So I enrolled U of C does not have a journalism program. And so I went up to Northwestern where Colin had just graduated from.

So I missed him again. But then my last semester there or my last quarter, we went out. It was a religion and reporting class.

And so we went to places like the Buddhist temple and the Jewish temple and the Sikh temple and we went to all the places we could learn about different religions. And then they said, Now we're going to teach you about evangelicals. And so we went out to Billy Graham Center and stuff at Wheaton College.

And we would have a person come and talk to us from Christianity today, which was Colin. And so after he was done talking, I went up to him and said to him, Hey, did you know I'm an evangelical? At his jaw dropped to the floor because I was the only evangelical probably at Northwestern at that point in time. So it was that was good.

And then I started writing for him at Christianity today. And then he left and I stayed. And then about three or four years ago, he said, How about if you come and write for me at the gospel coalition? And I said, that's silly.

I'm not going to write puffy stories about Christians for you. I'm going to write real news. And then he said, Oh, come on, it won't be puffy.

It'll be good. This does not sound accurate at all. We're going to tell some good gritty stories.

It's going to be we're going to have a good time. Maybe I made that part up. I don't think he said we're going to have a good time, but it is.

So that's good. I mean, this is a compliment for both of you. You both write like you've been to journalism school.

And I mean that as a compliment, there's a clarity, a succinctness, the the action moves on. You both write well. Is this is this a knack you had or does Northwestern really just give you the skills because I wish more people had those skills.

You know, one of the benefits of growing up in a rural public education, like I had in South Dakota, is that all the way through high school, we were still doing grammar. I mean, I wasn't. I was not, I was not doing the greats of Western literature.

I was not reading those books, but we kept doing grammar. And so I had that I had that

base. Also, my grandmother has been a newspaper columnist for the last 60 years in Madison, South Dakota.

So a bit of that is just the Argus leader. No, that's way too big. The Madison daily leader in Madison, South Dakota.

And so I just kind of I guess I grew up a little bit around journalism. It was one of the plausible, you know, places that I could that I could go. And then the benefit of middle at Northwestern was being consistently told how terrible I was as a writer.

Like that was the consistent benefit was handing a magazine feature writing paper to Bob McClory, who was that professor late Bob McClory, was that professor that Sarah was with on that trip and him just tearing it apart and saying, this is horrible. And but it you just you just need that at some point. I don't know how you develop as a writer.

If somebody does not tell you, you're not very good at it, because I don't know that anybody just comes out and it's they're just really awesome at it. It seems to be more of a discipline than it is a gift. I mean, there is a gift aspect.

I just see more of the gift develop when people are trained in it. What do you think, Sarah? I agree. I think there's both.

I think you're born with it a little bit. But certainly it just is a little bit stagnant. Excuse me.

It's very emotional. We all got journal. We were all together last week.

And I think we all got cold because we hadn't been around human beings. Yeah. Until last week.

I mean, go ahead. Keep going, Sarah. No, that was all.

I just I think it's both. I agree. Okay.

That was just a cough. I don't think she's breaking up yet. I had a professor, probably my favorite professor in college and a church history professor, and I was reading all these Puritans.

I was reading all these old translations of Calvin. And so I was imbibing that sort of writing style. I've told this story before.

So I was writing these papers with very long ornate, flowery, lots of subordination in the sentences, words like behoove or beseech or come on the eight. And I was I was writing with that sort of edge that they had of really tearing each other down. Anyways, he was you talk about just giving somebody on its feedback.

He said, well, you know, obviously you can write, but you should not write like this. I know you're reading all these books that write like this. But if you want to be understood and you want people to read, don't write like this.

And it was at first, you think, oh, no, this is this is how the great heroes of the faith wrote. Well, actually, that's not always true. It's sometimes how their Victorian translators thought they should have written.

So Justin, when did someone tell you you were terrible at writing? He just gives us an editor and keep telling everybody else. I just get to tell people that. Yeah, nobody has told me that yet, but I'm sure the day is coming.

No, you know, there was a significant moment for me, my freshman year going to be in a religion major to public university. And my advisor, favorite professor, as a freshman, just said, you really need to take a writing class. And I think he saw that I had some potential, but wanted me to get trained in writing as a required course.

And so that was humbling to hear, but also good just to concentrate on the craft of writing. And then he would also as a professor. And I think back in this now having created some papers, he would hand write like an entire page of comments and critiques and feedback.

And you realize in retrospect, what a gift that was and how mind numbing that must have been for him to be looking at freshman papers and Western Civ and writing that level of feedback for each one was a gift. Well, let's talk about this book gospel bound living with resolute hope in an anxious age. Colin, I've been meaning to ask you, you have a podcast by the same name.

Is it the gospel to which we are bound? Or is it the gospel for which we are bound, like your Canaan bound, your Heaven bound, your your or both? We're by which we are bound. Yes, we're by which we are bound to one another. How is the gospel binding? This is the prepositional podcast, apparently.

We'll devolve here into a study of the genitive. No, that's exactly the double meaning that we had in mind with this. And the same thing with the podcast is the dual meaning of we are tethered to the gospel.

We don't stray from the gospel. The gospel doesn't change. That good news is the same.

The imagery that we like to use in the book or when we talk about the book is to imagine a cultural hurricane, just these winds blowing all over the place. But this is what keeps you keeps you steady. This is what keeps you standing in the middle of that.

But you're absolutely right. Then you head into Romans 15:13 and you see this discussion of a bounding in hope. And so there is a leaping forward as well.

And so the main premise of this book is that the only way we move forward together in the church is by getting back to the gospel. So that double movement is going to be the essential organizing principle of the book. We don't move forward through all the different challenges that we face or ways that we want to reform or to change or to improve the church by some sort of novel new ideas.

We improve in those things by getting back to the gospel ultimately as found in God's Word. And so that's the meaning there. And we'll just keep kind of hammering away at that.

But I think a lot of the temptations in terms of thinking about our position, time as Christians, I think a lot of Christians imagine that they want to be on the right side of history or that history is this thing that's always progressing. That's one temptation I think you see from more liberal Christians. And there's a nostalgic bent as well that wants to just get back and to recover something that's been lost.

But ultimately, Sarah and I believe that both of those are a mirage. But there is still this time concept. I mean, we could get into inaugurated as katology, get into the already not yet of the kingdom.

But we think that kind of understanding of time of being bound to something behind. But that's our best chance of looking forward in hope is what we've been called to as Christians. So I have an initial question for Colin and then for Sarah.

And this is totally unscripted. So Justin will jump in whenever he wants. But Colin, the very first sentence is America seems to be in the midst of a full blown panic attack.

The new republic observed in 2019. And that was before COVID. Is it the case? I think you're saying it is, but I'll just ask it an open ended.

Is it the case that we're more anxious than we've ever been before? And to what do you attribute that? Well, that's really kind of the premise that we jump off here from of course, we don't have social science data to be able to go back to any other time period. But by many measures, we are living in an unprecedented anxiety spike. Part of that's just a rising understanding or at least sense that we should feel anxious.

At somebody read this book and say that anxiety seems to be the proof that you really care about the world. So if you're actually not reporting that you're really anxious about everything, then people think, well, aren't you paying attention to things? And so when you start to get into why is that the case, we could point to any number of different factors there. I would start with a theological factor.

And that's something that Tim Keller and others have observed. Well, Sarah points it out in her part writing on this that simply there's less belief in God. Well, if there's less belief in belief in God, then wouldn't that lead to more anxiety? Because ultimately, this is all

there is.

There's no way to rectify these injustices except in this temporal place and time. And we're ultimately in charge of this president that I love is in charge or this president I hate is in charge. All of those things are naturally going to lead to anxiety.

So I would further than amplify that theologically to say that, well, I mean, yeah, that's if there is no God, I mean, you could go back and you look morally, if there is no God, anything is anything is possible. And it seems to be that's kind of what we're living in. Now, anything is possible.

I'll let Sarah jump in on that as well. You know, we did just look at studies from like the 80s and 90s. And the 90s is when you can see it'd be interesting if somebody did all these studies back around the world wars, right? Like how anxious were we back then? But they did track them through the 90s and even through like the recession in 2008.

And we're still far more anxious now than we were. It overlays a lot two things. And one is technology like our smartphones also follow the same path.

And there's a book called I Gen in which she lays out over and over and over again, like how that was kind of a turning point in the 90s when our cell phones came along and our smartphones were packets all the time and how drastically that has changed numbers for the worse and a lot of different things. In some cases, it's better. Teen pregnancies are better, but that just means that kids are spending less time physically together and more time alone.

So our depression and anxiety follows that same path. And the only thing she didn't lay on top of there, which I think would explain all of it, is that our belief in God also changed in the 90s. And you can track that as well.

Like before that, you could drive a bus through a neighborhood and pick up a bunch of kids or an adult take them to a Billy Graham crusade and they'd get saved. You can't do that anymore. There's a distancing there.

So I think if you can understand that the illogical part and the technological part, the rest of it makes sense. Yeah, Colin. The other thing I was just trying to think about before is if you look long term over the course of centuries, not just some of the recent periods there and I could look at, but if you go back over centuries, the category of theodicy is a relatively recent development.

The sense in which we blame God for what's thing, what things are happening or a sense in which we presume to hold Him accountable. And I think that's a source of a tremendous amount of anxiety is not just that we sense that this is not the way things should be and that somebody needs to be blamed for that. Either God on that vertical plane or each other on that horizontal plane.

And so what's interesting is that if you look back through history, there are many times when circumstances would seem to indicate that people should have been more anxious. And yet there wasn't evidence in the written reports of that that people felt that way. So something that seems to spike as Sarah's pointing out here, along with people's changing beliefs about God and changing expectations of this world.

And just to put a little bow on it, I think we live in a time where Christians are tending toward an over realized eschatology. That is a largely a result of tremendous improvements in quality of life around the world. And so I wonder if as we look back and this is a podcast that started and the circumstances of COVID-19, I wonder if looking back one reason why people didn't turn more toward questions about God or to turn to faith in some ways is because they expected there would be some kind of deliverance that would come from us politically or otherwise.

And I think in many cases, that's how it's played out with vaccines. One of the things that you guys draw attention to in the book early on is the role of the media, not just social media, but your own professional background of journalism, where two things exist. One, it's a secular world.

If there's anything about religion, it's reporting about religion, but it would be just very odd for a journalist to be talking about the activity of God in the world. And then the whole notion that if it bleeds, it leads. And that's a hallmark of modern reporting.

And we can blame the media for that, but the four of us are human beings who like to click on those stories as well. So how did you guys end up trying to kind of forge a different path? And what's your analysis of what's gone wrong in terms of the media adding to our already anxious hearts? Yeah, this is another thing that started changing, I think, in the 90s is the split of journalists from in terms of their religiosity from the general population. And so increasingly, journalists don't go to church and don't believe in God at the same rate that people generally do.

So it's a profession that's more secular even than our secular country. And so I think it's hard to write well about something or charitably about something or even be able to understand what's happening if you really don't. Like you're really not familiar with the terms or it just seems very outdated or even homophobic or racist to you, then you're just going to keep writing about it really negatively.

So I think that's one thing that happens. And we can test from that just from going to a top journalism school where we didn't know very many other Christian people who were there. And those are the people who go on to be in the mainstream news.

There's also a change there just in terms of education. So I think that's what Sarah is getting at here. Journalism was not typically a professional path.

It was not something that you pursue. You didn't need education for that. And so one of the things that changed is journalism became post, I would say post Watergate especially became more of a prestige profession.

It started to move into these academic environments, places like Northwestern and Columbia really would raise and it's a steam level. And so as they became more educated as journalists and especially at those institutions, they became as Sarah is pointing out even more disconnected from that community. But I think the assumptions go down a lot deeper.

And I know Kevin, you'd also have some feedback on this, but Sarah and I talked a lot about this last week. I think there are certain professions that are inherently destabilizing for Christians and just for Christianity in the way that they're understood in this economic and academic environment. I would point to education and I would point to journalism.

Both of them depend on the pursuit of novelty and the pursuit of something that is different or it's just new and education especially also you have to disprove previous generations. So I don't know how that works for you as a seminary professor, Kevin, but it seems that the way to establish yourself academically is by disproving previous generations or other scholars. And I just don't think it should be a surprise to us as Christians that in the academic and journalistic fields, there always seems to be this drift because it's different from pastoral ministry.

Sarah and I were talking about this with her pastor at length at the conference last week. Pastor's job is to faithfully apply week after week the good news of the gospel, the whole council of God to this congregation, and to repeat the same old things. That is not how journalists are trained.

And I don't think it's how academics are trained either. So there's just something inherent. It's not just we've got a few bad seeds in there.

If we could just figure that out. No, I think there's something inherently destabilizing for Christians in those professions. And I think it has a lot to do with certain fields, as you said in education.

And I it'd be interesting to go back and say, has it always been the case in those sort of professions? I mean, almost all of the leading universities began as training grounds for ministers here in the United States. And some capitulated quickly and some took centuries to do so. But it really was a and this gets us off track a little bit to talk about education, but they really were universities with an emphasis on the university that there was a truth, there was an overarching truth.

And so often you go back even a little earlier than that, it was always that theology was

the queen of the sciences and theology had the overarching, we would say, meta narrative to help us make sense of all these things. But absence of that, certainly certain fields, we saw when I was at University Reform Church, and we would have professors there, there were certain fields that you knew you could more easily find a Bible believing Christian, horticulture or botany, or some engineering fields or entomology. And there's something about some of the hard sciences, maybe it's left-brained or it's dealing with facts, not being swayed by opinions, but give me the evidence that comported well with Christian belief, whereas anthropology, the arts often, and that may not have always been the case, certainly we know in the history of Christendom, the arts and Christianity were very closely tied.

But then the arts became almost a rival access to truth, a rival means of arriving at the true and the good and the beautiful, that must be opposed to Christian thought. Colin? Well, I was just going to say this is relevant for the book, one of Sarah's major passions is classical Christian education. She writes about that in the context of hospitality in this book of a way of being able to make Christian truth accessible to other people who don't yet believe, including how we raise up the next generations.

And I mean, something Sarah and I have talked a lot about the rise of the social sciences and pragmatic education in the 20th century, I would imagine, Sarah, you can embellish this and connect it back to the book if you want, but I would imagine that's part of what you're talking about, Kevin, in terms of it wasn't always this way with education, but education's lost this sense that we go back, just like I talked about with the movement of gospel, that we go back so we can move forward. It seems like as a society, that whole concept is increasingly foreign. We don't go back to learn anything except how much more righteous we are than the people who went before.

And then to add there, Sarah? No, I think that's true. I think that's why I was so like, why we love classical education so much and why we were so surprised by the beauty of it. It's largely we're trying to be take after how people have been taught for hundreds and hundreds of years before John Dewey in the 1920s and kind of the change toward more pragmatism, far more pragmatism, and why would you need to learn philosophy when you just need to learn how to run an assembly line to be a productive citizen? So there's some economics in there too.

At the end of the introduction, this sums up well what I think your book is about. You write, "Are negative things happening in our broken world every day? But is God working things for good? Are there really people following him so faithfully that they give up their suburban comfort to love low-income neighbors or they obey God's word instead of following the world's path to sexual fulfillment? Does anyone still take these words of Jesus seriously? Whoever finds his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life or my sake will find it.

Absolutely. We've seen them. We've talked with them.

We've learned from them and we are thrilled to get to share them with you." I think that's the burden of your book and Sarah so much of the writing that you do for the Gospel Coalition so well is to tell these stories. Do you have a fear that, boy, people aren't going to read a book that's trying to give some good news? Yeah, but that doesn't. I mean, we think that when we started four years ago where is anybody even going to click on these stories? We know they don't so we just did it anyway and some people did click on it.

I do think somebody might want to read it. Not as much as if we had certainly had written a tell-all book about all the wretched things about Christianity that we know. More people would read that but we just believed in this message.

So where did it? Just to underscore that because this convicts my heart and I think it probably should convict everyone listening. Let's be honest. It's gospel bound living with resolute hope in an anxious age.

If it was called, I don't know, gospel catastrophe or gospel pandemic or gospel less, you know, living with resolute something, you know, if it was a tell-all like you said, this is a book about gospel less, how the church in America has forgotten Jesus and loving our neighbor. Let's be honest. Even Jealous has gotten derailed.

How evangelicalism has gotten derailed and no longer really believes the gospel. A whole lot of people, and I guess as human nature, it's why we need the gospel, would say, "Huh, wow, that's interesting. I wonder who they're taking to task." And honestly, wouldn't it be much better for our souls? And again, we need those truth-telling, all of that in its place.

But it has its place and then some. And it's much harder to write a book like this and tell stories like this and say, "You know what? I want to be encouraged that God is doing good things that there are a lot of Christians living faithfully, that there are churches that imperfectly but truly are living out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment." And I ought to be drawn to these stories. Why, for either of you, why are we not drawn to these stories? They should be the ones that do we only like to read them when they're Elizabeth Elliot in the Alka? Is that the only time we want to read them? Well, I think there's a couple different levels operating here, Kevin.

And I would be interested to know anybody listening, send me a note via social media or anybody on the podcast. Why is it that we prefer to be anxious? I mean, Jesus tells us not to be. Paul tells us not to be.

They tell us how we cannot be. I'm not talking here about the diagnosable condition but simply that difficulty that we're all tempted with, we seem to prefer it. And I'm not sure

why.

I would really appreciate help from somebody there. But I will tell you where this comes in in my life. I am, as you guys know, all of you here, all of you my very good friends, my wife, all of you know that I'm more prone to be able to find the problems.

As I'm wired, Justin's vigorously nodding here. I'm much more prone to find the problems. But that is a seedbed that is a fertile ground for pride, for arrogance, for judgmentalism, for a lack of faith.

Those are things I'm supposed to mortify. Those are things I'm supposed to put to death in the flesh. And so part of this project is a spiritual exercise.

I'll take you guys back about 13 years. I was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. I was going into my second year and I walked into one of my mentors, his office, John Woodbridge.

You guys know him. And he, I presented him a proposal, a book, it was called 1976, The Year That Changed Evangelicals. And I was going to do a political and ecclesial and a theological analysis of the events of that year as explaining why Evangelicalism had fragmented in these different directions.

And one of the things I was going to talk about in that book was the falling out between Harold Linzel and Carl Henry, especially during the battles over inerrancy. Linzel was the editor of Christianity today and and Henry had been before him before resigning. And John had known both these men personally, been colleagues with them.

His father had been colleagues with them at Fuller. He knew them in the sense that you know the people that you share Christmas morning with. That kind of sense.

And he said, Colin, you could do that book. But what if you used your time and your talents to be able to encourage God's people? And that's when he talked to me about the history of revivals and wanting to be able to talk about, talk about that. And we ended up writing that book together, God-sized vision revival stories that stretch and stir.

But the thing that I kept hearing from people is not that the revivals, these stories were not hagiographical. We always included the negative effects and what revival doesn't solve. Not similar to what Sarah and I are doing here in this book.

It's not just, oh, everything's awesome because all these people have figured everything out. No, Sarah said it earlier. It's gritty.

But it's just that's where it comes together in my head. Anybody who knows me knows that I'm prone to criticism. But I just don't, I don't think that makes for a particularly healthy faith, a happy home.

It doesn't make for happy coworkers if you're the boss, especially. And so I think it's important for Christians that we go out of our way to identify evidences of God's grace, especially if you're like me, and it doesn't come naturally. So it's as similar as when we go around the table every night, and we just say, how did you see God at work today? We don't go around the table saying, how did you see God disappoints your expectations today? We say, how did we see God at work today? Where did you see the devil win a few today? No, exactly.

So we just, we want to establish that culture. And I just, I just think I have to do that. I'm just not sure as a journalist, I don't know how my faith survives.

Otherwise, just being transparent like that. So let me ask one of my least favorite interview questions, but I think you two are the right people. We'll start with Sarah.

My question is going to be, give me a story or an illustration from the book that, that really stuck with you. Now, the reason I don't like that, I don't, I'm not wired like you guys to, and I don't write books with telling people stories. And I remember years ago, I think I was being interviewed about why we're not emergent.

And the person obviously, I was not being the sort of interviewee he wanted. And it was painful. It was like 40 minutes, and he just kept saying, huh, do you have a story to illustrate the emergent church? I don't have, I didn't write, you need to talk to Ted.

I didn't write the story part. I wrote the theology part. But Sarah, is there a story that stands out that you wrote about in the book that was really encouraging or moving for you? There's a, there's a lot.

Yeah. Yeah. I will tell you about a girl named Rachel Star, who lived in Louisville still does.

And she, when she was driving to work one day, she saw a sign for a strip club alongside of the road. And she was like, she just felt a burden on her heart for the girls who worked there. So she called her husband and said, I think Jesus wants me to work with girls in the sex industry.

And he said to her, that's what Jesus would do. And so she didn't write a mission statement, and she didn't get funders, and she didn't get a board together. What she did is she just called a couple of friends, and they went and sat across the street from the strip club and prayed.

And then they did it again. And then they did it again. So all they did for a year on Tuesdays and Thursdays would go set across from the strip club and pray.

And this is just a side note. I want people to really hear this because so many of my stories, maybe all of them start this exact same way, which is people praying together,

like identifying a problem, finding a friend or two and intentionally and regularly praying together. And if you're doing that right now, then I want you to call me in like 18 months, because God is going to do something and I want to tell your story.

So she did this. And then after about a year, she felt God was saying to her, it's time to go inside. So she went inside.

She was wearing a turtleneck. She didn't wear any makeup. She didn't want to look assuming.

So in she goes and she finds the owner of the club and says, I want to do something kind and loving for the women who work here. And he was like blown away. Like, who are you? What do you even mean? And she said, well, I'm a Christian.

And he said, well, the only Christians I've seen are Christians outside picketing. I've never knowingly had one in this club. And she said, well, here I am.

And so she convinced him. And he said, all right, you can bring a meal in for them. And so she came back the next week with her girlfriends and her fried chicken and her mashed potatoes.

And they laid it out for the girls. Some of the dancers wouldn't eat it when they heard they were from a church. They thought it might be poisoned.

And then, but she did, but she laid it all out for them. And then next week, she came and she did it again. So every Thursday, she's showing up with food for them.

And you can imagine what would happen because it's the same thing that would happen if I sat down with you every Thursday night for dinner. Eventually, we would become friends and share with each other and talk about things. And so they started sharing with her like, I'm addicted to heroin.

I can't get off. Or I always wanted to go to culinary school, but through a turn of events in my life, here I am. Another side note, she said she's never met a girl who wasn't abused as a child.

It's not like people are choosing to be strippers because that's their dream from childhood. So eventually, she went home with a girl and she's like, I walked into her apartment. And the only thing in there is a Disney princess sleeping bag.

She didn't even have a pillow, like nothing. So she didn't know what to do with these. And so Rachele just called her church and would be like, hey, there's an apartment we need furnishing.

And you know what happens if you call your church and say we need donations, they get a whole parking lot full of stuff that you can put in into a girl's apartment or she'd help a

girl go to school or eventually she grew and grew and grew. She had more and more people from her church and Christians who are volunteering with her. She's now in all of the strip clubs in Louisville and in five other cities.

She eventually started to bakery because she said, man, what you have to do when you're trying to pull girls out of the sex industry is give them another way to make money. So she's now got three bakeries operating there. God just keeps blessing them this ministry and growing it.

I don't want you for a second to think that it's easy because it's hard and it's dark. You can walk with a girl for a period of time and then she kills herself with a drug overdose. But it's, you know, for the and she said, when you pull a girl out, there's five girls waiting to walk in.

So it's not like she ever even feels like she's making a huge difference. But she has pulled more than 600 girls out of the sex industry and she has changed thousands of lives, many of them, the volunteers themselves and hundreds of girls have come to know the Lord. And so it's worth doing.

And that's the good stories. You have to know those too. And what's really important about, well, a lot of things is a great story, but I like what you said at the beginning, Sarah, she prayed and thought about how can I go in and be kind and love people and not that it's wrong to start a board in an official ministry.

That's appropriate sometimes. But so often we think, okay, I'm going to make this an official church ministry. I'm going to get a board.

I'm going to get a 501. I'm going to do make and you end up doing most of your work and overhead and she just I'm going to pray and I'm going to go love them. And what you said at the end, it sounds like her, she didn't have a sense that I am going to put an end to strip clubs in America.

When I'm done, there will never be another one. Well, we pray to that end, but I'm going to help this life and this life and this life. And it may not make a dent in the statistical abstract numbers of women engaged in sex industry.

Maybe it will, but it's made a difference in 600 plus lives. Colin, thoughts on that or story you had from the book that stuck with you? Well, I think the one that came to mind is about IJM and that was, IJM is one of those ministries that international justice mission. I'm not sure like who could be against ending sex trafficking around the world.

Like that's just one of the more unifying messages. And we heard messages about IJM eradicating a certain form of like sex trafficking in some country. Which country was it? Because the Philippines and it was just like your general like on the street prostitution.

Right. And so then all of a sudden, and so we wanted to report that story, that's great news, actually making progress in this all the time and money and prayer and everything devoted to this, it's making a difference. And we found out that IJM was reporting something changing.

All of a sudden, all these kids were just being trafficked online. And then came the kicker, the people who were doing it were their parents. And it was just like, whoa, this is staring into a kind of satanic darkness that we don't understand.

And we don't normally want to go there. So what we did is we talked about what it means to have hope when it seems like you save one person and 20 more, fall into the abyss. Because that's what ministry is really like.

This is the grittiness that we're talking about there. And that's where the hope of the gospel, the hope of eternity, the hope of eternal justice comes into play. And so I love that story for the grittiness.

There isn't necessarily some sort of easy, happy ending there. But there is the story of Christians who continue to persevere in the hope of the gospel to change lives here and change lives in eternity. But trusting that God is good, even in the midst of the worst possible situation.

That's just one that really stood with me. And it's kind of like the flip side of Rochelle's story. They both will illustrate each other that we do our best effort in the power of the gospel.

But we don't just do it to get attention or to get results. We do it for the glory of God, regardless of the results, even as we persevere. And it's important when we hear those stories.

This ties in with what we were all talking about earlier with the media. I mean, imagine if every leading website in news reporter was leading day after day, you only heard those stories. And there's probably certain outlets, a Sunday school press or an in-house that wants to just celebrate an institution or a church.

And we might rightly say after a while, well, you make it look like everybody's a hero all the time. And yeah, that's not always accurate. But we've we have so much to the other direction that it feels as if the church has never been worse, our leaders have never been worse.

And to your point, Colin, I think it's as simple as pleading agnosticism to whether they are or not. I mean, we just don't know. We certainly can unfortunately rattle off the top of our heads leaders that have fallen leaders that have sinned in catastrophic ways, some that we knew, some that we just knew from a distance.

And it's easy for those to pile up because you hear about them. And you you may have six or seven or eight or 10 in your head. And it feels like this is an absolute epidemic of leadership failure.

Until you realize there's what 300,000 churches in the country and who's to say that 200,000 of them don't have excellent pastors or at least pastors doing the best. We don't know. The simple fact is it's good to be recalibrated with some stories like this, not to be Polly Ann Aish, but to simply have the sort of hope that we ought to have.

I want to go back to Colin, something you said earlier and I was struck by it in the book. You talk about the danger of nostalgia. So is nostalgia always bad? What's the danger in it? And just to give you an illustration from my current life, I've been reading, I've read parts of them before, but now I'm reading through the whole thing, the David Calhoun's two volumes on Princeton Seminary.

David Calhoun went to a long time professor at Covenant Seminary went to be with the Lord not too long ago. And for a Presbyterian, it's just catnip. I mean, it's just the Hodges and the Alexander's and Warfield and Old Princeton and training ministers and of course, David Calhoun is giving a he says at the beginning even, he's trying not to be hagggy doing a hagggyography, but he wants to be encouraging and he wants to be edifying and rightly so.

But I've been telling my wife, said I have to remind myself that that wasn't a golden age either because I can find myself, we have hanging on the wall, some of these kind of artistic pictures of, you know, colonial houses from 200 years ago and it just looks so bucolic and peaceful and you think, wow, it would be amazing if we lived there and you realize, well, half of our children would have probably died, honestly, and wouldn't have, you know, internet and all those things that are just are comforts and conveniences and blessings, but even more than that, I am remind, remind myself, if I could go back, I would have found that those heroes of the faith had clay feet in different ways. I would have found that the churches probably had less good content in many ways than we do today didn't have the same access to books. So there's something I think that is good about nostalgia when you set foot on your college campus and you return and there's kind of a flood of emotions just from the sight of it and you kind of remember it all again and feel so warm and fuzzy, but Colin, what's the danger in nostalgia and is there any good use for it? Well, I'd love to hear from Justin on this as well, because last night I caught field of dreams on MLB network, which is on basically every single day.

I mean, it's on every day. That can burn. Yeah, can't remember.

It's really exactly. So, so anyway, I love that stuff because that's my, that's my 90s nostalgia and I'm watching field of dreams. I haven't seen this in many years and I'm just thinking none of this movie really makes any sense.

It's just a bunch of like, no, it's disconnected, like nostalgic vignettes and yet I sat there and in the end, I start tearing up because I've never watched this before having a son. Yeah. And my son plays baseball and my son learned how to catch this year and we had just spent a wonderful weekend together and we were in the front yard and he was showing off how he could catch and and hit and all that sort of stuff.

And I was just thinking these, I cherish these memories now here, but that's the key. The nostalgia drove me to live in the now. So it wasn't just a, oh, well gosh, I wish I could go back when I was a kid and I was playing with my dad or something, but it was really just a, well, I'm getting to live that right in this moment.

And I think that's where Jesus would want me to be from what he said. You know, tomorrow you're not promised, but today is what we, is where we live by faith. And I think that comports with another one of my favorite movies, *Midnight in Paris* by Woody Allen.

Tell me about, I read that in the book and I have some friends who, that's their absolute favorite movie. I think when I saw it, I just kept hearing Lightning McQueen and I just couldn't get past it. But yeah, I just think the premise of it is that we all have things about our current lives that we don't like.

And nostalgia is this sleight of hand that allows us to imagine that we can have all the good things of a different time period with all the bad things of that period or this period. And so what you see with, with Owen Wilson in this film is that he goes back to his era, which is the 1920s in Paris. And that's the golden era.

But then he meets a woman in 1920s Paris, but all of a sudden she has a different golden era from the late 19th century there. And you realize you can just keep, I mean, it's the obvious takeaway from the film, but you can just keep doing this forever. And there's always some other period that you think could be better.

John Dixon's an apologist in Australia. And I just asked him about this. And he said, well, actually I would love to, he said today is the worst period in Christian history.

That's his belief as an apologist. And the best would be the sort of like the, like the early Byzantine era, you know, hospital, all sorts of good things happening there. But of course, I'd only like to do it for one month.

And so just it is a sleight of hand. It deceives us. But this is the key.

The problem with it is when it robs us of joy and faith of living in this moment, because this is the only moment that we have. Justin, how do you process through that? I mean, when you're thinking about history, you're immersed so much in that history. I'm just wondering how you process through that.

And do the signs when you enter Iowa still say fields of opportunity? That's a good question. I want to find out. Well, Nebraska, they tried out Nebraska.

It's not for everyone. It didn't stick, but it's true. Well, it's better than South Dakota's motto.

We don't I don't think I don't think we can even talk about that, right? Which is what we're on it. The meth or on it campaign from South Dakota. I don't even want to talk about that.

Go ahead. Well, I actually think more about nostalgia in my own life than I do about nostalgia in terms of historical time periods. And I think that because we're story driven people, when I get together with my college friends and we text each other, we tend to reinforce the same positive stories.

And if we could actually go back in time as being unmarried, single men who are just living with other guys, and there's a lot of angst about grades and about relationships. But those aren't the stories that we kind of reinforce and retell each other. So I agree with you, Colin.

It's a slight of hand. It's it could be even a subspecies of envy that the grass is always green around the other side. And you have this rose colored glance at the past.

And I think there were glances, the word that I would use, I think that it's it's good to look back, good to enjoy happy memories. It's good to even feel a paying of loss. If for those of us who have older children, you kind of look back at, you know, when they were cute little kids and and you don't really remember all of the times when you weren't when you were sleep deprived or wanting to pull your hair out.

But it's a it's a gift to have good memories. But I think we're supposed to glance at those and then live in the present, but also to have a focus on the future where our faith is a future oriented faith that we have hope of resurrection. And the present is is hard as well.

We all feel it. But there is coming a point where there will be no more sadness. There will be no more sickness.

There will be no more sin. That's that's where the the gospel bound train is headed. So I want to thank you to for writing such a good book that reminds us of the end breaking of God's grace into the here and now.

And as well, I'll look forward to living in eternity together where all of sin is a story in the past. So that's a good segue. Let me just give you one last question to each of you, Colin and to Sarah.

Somebody gets the book reads it. What are you hoping maybe praying? What would make you feel satisfied as a writer? What they the imprint upon them as they close the final page on the book. What do you want them to think do feel be? I'll take that and give Sarah then the last word.

Glad you asked that one, Kevin. So I had a chance thanks to our sponsors here at Crossway. Thanks to Justin of reading Carl Truman's book *The Rise and Tramp for the Modern Self* last year when I was still working on this book.

And I was reading this whole amazing analysis. And in the end, I'm wanting to know what's next. What do we do about this? And this is what Truman says.

He goes back to the second century church as the model for today. And it talks about how did the second century church persevere to lay the foundation for the third and fourth centuries and the growth of the church. And he says this, "By existing as a close-knit, doctrinally bounded community, that required her members to act consistently with their faith and to be good citizens of the earthly city as far as good citizenship was compatible with faithfulness to Christ." When I saw this, and he says, "I can't cover this in the book.

You guys are going to have to work out what that looks like today in the 21st century." I thought that's exactly what Sarah and I have just done here. At least it's what we've attempted to do is to show what this would look like as a positive program. So if you're thinking about this, think about it in context of what is the church do now that we've come to terms with this analysis from Carl Truman.

Think of it also in terms of as a contrast in some ways to Rod Dreyer's *Benedict option*. I think there's a lot of positives that can be drawn from that book, but I don't know that it has much of a positive social program or much of an evangelistic platform either. And so I'm more optimistic about that.

And so what we do here, journalistically, is to be able to fill in some of those gaps of what this could look like. You don't have to be scared. Yes, there are a lot of scary things out there, but you don't have to worry.

There are Christians who are doing this now around the world. They're showing us the way. So all we have to do is stay fast, stay holding on to the gospel in the midst of this hurricane and keep sort of pressing, pressing, I mean, and kind of facing in, leaning in, facing forward in this.

So we hope that they'll be inspired by the stories. We hope they'll be instructed on what to do. And I hope they'll find a program here that's more positive, I think, and hopeful than Rod Dreyer's, but also that fills in the gaps from where Carl Truman had left off.

Good word, Sarah. I think we want them to, what we say in the book is to think big and

to think small and to think big is to remember that God is holding you. And also to remember like, hey, we're past the turning point in history.

We don't have to wonder, is God going to save us or how is God going to save us? We're actually the part in the storyline that should be the most relaxed. We already know what he did and how he's going to do it. And it's already done.

We're just kind of coasting into heaven from here on out. So to think big and remember those things and also to think small studies show that while you're worried about the federal government, you're not as worried about your city council. And while you're really worried about education in America, you're not as worried about your kid's classroom.

So when we've turned our attention there to those small things, yeah, maybe you can't evangelize the whole world, but you can invite your neighbor over for dinner or hang out with him on the sidewalk while you're walking the dogs. And you can pray for a missionary or bring food to a food pantry and you can abstain from sex outside of marriage. And you can, there's all kinds of things that you can do to live a better way that would draw people into like, this is a different way and it's a better way.

And it's a less far less anxious and more comforting and secure way. That's great. Colin and Sarah, thank you for the book published by NOMAS just come out in the last week, Gospel Bound, Living with Resolute Hope in an anxious age.

Sarah, last question, where can we find the best tulip time parade? What city do you think? Why would you ask such a terrible question? I know that's like, there's a lot riding on. I mean, there's a lot of our listeners, no doubt, May is coming up and they're thinking, I only can go to one. Where should I book my flight? Good luck flying to Orange City, Iowa, by the way.

Oh, well, yes, you got to fly through sucks. Or Pella. I would maybe say Pella.

I mean, that's probably the wrong answer. Yeah, that's good. That's good.

Have you been in the tulip time parade before? I have not, but I married a man who was and he had to grow up wearing wooden shoes and oh yeah, sweeping the streets and dancing. Sweeping the streets, I know. Well, you got to get it clean for the queen to come.

That's the whole idea. Well, I was the dominee and Warrode. There was a dominee float that went through the parade and through candy.

It was an experience. All right, we are from the sublime to ridiculous. Thank you, Justin, Colin, special thanks to our guest, Sarah for being with us and thank you to our listeners until next time.

Hope you, or if I got a joy and forever, read a good book.

(buzzing)

[buzzing]