

00:00:01:02 - 00:00:06:07

Unknown

You're listening to the Forum Podcast, a production of Calvin Theological Seminary

00:00:07:20 - 00:00:16:09

Unknown

Yeah. So that's a deep experience you've had that has influenced how you think about the church.

00:00:16:11 - 00:00:34:03

Unknown

It's an influence your, your writing. It seems like there is a significant pivot in some ways your faith got deeper even though. As you said some things were quite unhelpful. Yeah.

00:00:35:13 - 00:00:54:06

Unknown

How do we pull out of this. Again I'm asking you as like an that representing all Americans. Yeah. But how do we let's pull out of maybe lessons that we that you've learned in your own experience with being on the receiving end with a version of Christianity that is at the same time life giving? And I think you said.

00:00:54:08 - 00:01:29:09

Unknown

And at the same time. Contrary to that. And. I mean you outline a lot of blind spots. What's our way forward. Right. Actually that's such a good question. I mean I really feel that change is only possible if people are willing to be humble. It's the same in music, of course. That's why the greatest musicians, almost without exception a very humble.

00:01:29:11 - 00:02:04:00

Unknown

The way they've become great is because they believe they've never arrived. They're always learning. Yeah. And they humble themselves to that goal. And the church Christians need to be humble. That's why you know, the biggest sin in the Bible, the most biblical sin is pride. You know, trace that through in the chapter on acceptable sins.

00:02:04:02 - 00:02:32:23

Unknown

Without exception, all through the scriptures, God even says in Proverbs I detest the proud of heart. Like God hates the person who is proud. That's a big that's, that's so heavy. Like feel that strong language. Yeah. Yeah. And whereas God lifts up the humble Jesus says the humble will be exalted. The proud will be lowered.

00:02:33:01 - 00:03:07:21

Unknown

And humility is the key. Like for anything. Yeah. In marriage. You know. As a musician. As a teacher, as a scholar, as a Christian, as a church, as a national Christianity. If there's not a willingness to question, are we going in the right direction. Do we need to listen to critique. Do we need to think this afresh without humility.

00:03:07:22 - 00:03:36:13

Unknown

None of those things are going to happen. And sometimes and unfortunately this is what happens. And you see it all through the Proverbs. If you don't humble yourself you will be humbled. And my fear for the American church is it will keep careening down this direction to the point of its own self-destruction. And the church will be decimated in America almost by its own doing.

00:03:36:15 - 00:04:02:23

Unknown

And that is my fear. And I think that's a legitimate fear. And, a lot of American Christians might think I'm really exaggerating, and we're too big to fail. Well, again, look at Turkey. Yeah. Look at England. You know, there are more people attending mosques than churches in England. Okay. It can happen. And that was the center of Western Christianity.

00:04:03:01 - 00:04:34:11

Unknown

You know, Americans still go to the UK universities for their PhDs so it can happen. And, the history of the church is full of it happening constantly. So I what are you gonna do about it? You know, and I think you need to be humble. Be open. Ask God for help and change course. So where do you where do you find hope these days?

00:04:34:13 - 00:05:18:02

Unknown

Well, look, I find hope. In the fact that God's purposes won't be thwarted. So if you if you. What you really care about is the kingdom of God. Ultimately doesn't really matter whether the church dies in America or not. I mean, of course it matters, but doesn't, but doesn't really matter. Right. So I find hope in the fact that even if the worst happens, like this could happen in Australia, where Christians are persecuted, like, properly persecuted, not just like, oh, you're a nasty Christian, but, you know, thrown in prison or tortured or beaten like they are in, China.

00:05:20:22 - 00:05:36:18

Unknown

That that God works through that, that that's where the that's where the church grows. And if that's actually what you care about, then there's a reason for hope. It's like, I like it as Australia becomes more secular. I'm like, that's good for the church. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

00:05:37:15 - 00:06:06:11

Unknown

So kind of as I hear you talk, part of what I hear is this perseverance word. You know, we're. Interviewing and having podcasts about this topic of perseverance and really hoping to help people who are at this point of burnout. Yeah. Or, or at a low point, like a spiritually dry place. Many in the United States, some surveys came out during Covid.

00:06:06:13 - 00:06:25:23

Unknown

Just emphasize for ministry leaders how many were considering leaving because it was just so difficult. Yeah. Or people are to the point where they haven't experienced like yours and they're ready to hang it up. Yeah. Yeah.

00:06:26:01 - 00:07:03:17

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. How do those folks kind of. Yeah. Get to the loving part again with their. With their faith when they've dis dismembered the. But they into. Yeah. Grammar and contacts and all this stuff. Yeah. Look, I'm, I'm not an expert on burnout and, I'm sure you know a lot more about it than I do, but, I guess some things I can glean from my own experience, might be helpful, I don't know, but, for me, getting to that place of,

00:07:03:19 - 00:07:22:11

Unknown

And I don't think for me, it was exactly burnout. It was more like, flame out. Okay. Like it was. It was tragedy and conflict and destruction and everything falling apart. But it did lead me to a precipice. Like, with burnout, was like, do I jump off the cliff? And this is done, or do I hang in there and and.

00:07:22:11 - 00:07:42:04

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. So sort of parallel maybe. But for me, it was, The experience was a stripping away. Which was painful but good. Yeah. And

00:07:42:04 - 00:07:56:16

Unknown

everyone's using that deconstruction word or whatever, whatever. You know, and there's a lot of baggage with that now, but there's, there's, there's a good kind of deconstruction, you know, which I experienced way back in music school.

00:07:56:18 - 00:08:13:21

Unknown

You know, you sort of get taken apart so that you can be built back better. So deconstruction just to be left in as pieces on the table is not good. Of course not. But deconstruct and to be reformed is great.

00:08:13:21 - 00:08:24:14

Unknown

So it's a painful process. But sometimes the deconstruction has to happen in order to get there, because you can't get that shape with the existing structure.

00:08:24:16 - 00:08:53:00

Unknown

You can try to push it and make it happen, but it doesn't. It's not going to go there. So you have to take the parts apart and rebuild it. And I experienced that. I experienced in that personally, like in basically every part of my life including music. And I experienced it spiritually and. All I can say is it was really good.

00:08:53:02 - 00:09:30:08

Unknown

And, and that reconstruction though painful was refreshing. Because it came back to things like, like I sang before. The parable of the prodigal son. I just kept clinging to that image of the father and who the father is, and his loving heart, his heart beat for the lost. And I kept clinging to that image and what that meant was all the stuff about, you know, the new perspective on Paul and Greek verbal aspect and all the, you know, details, just don't matter.

00:09:30:09 - 00:09:59:20

Unknown

Like they're still there. You know, they have their importance, their place. But for me, spiritually, it's just irrelevant. It was stripped down. My faith became much simpler. And I think through that process, deeper and stronger to like growth actually was what pulled you out? Yeah. Growth. And, you know, we have the patent in the Bible, don't we, that you go down before you go up.

00:09:59:20 - 00:10:32:16

Unknown

Of course. Death before resurrection. Yeah. Suffering before glory. I think that's what's happened with the. What happened? What burnout the positive side can be. You go down, you deconstruct, you let everything fall apart and then God will lift you up. That's the way. The way to be exalted is to be humbled. The way to be great is to be terrible first, you know.

00:10:32:18 - 00:11:00:19

Unknown

And you're not going to have true greatness unless you lower yourself. You're not going to, you're not going to be co glorified with Christ unless you suffer with Christ. Yeah. And you're not going to move to a new spiritual. Chapter. Unless you close the previous chapter. Yeah. So let go before you grab onto something else.

00:11:00:20 - 00:11:20:17

Unknown

Yeah. And I get why that's scary for a lot of people, especially when you're if you're, if you're pastor your job your health insurance is all tied up. You know your family is tied up with your job.

You read my mind about my next question. Yeah. Is so I work a lot with pastors. You know, through Calvin Seminary, we do continuing education.

00:11:20:17 - 00:11:29:16

Unknown

We have peer groups of pastors and ministry leaders and support them through their sustaining their call and.

00:11:29:18 - 00:11:56:23

Unknown

There is a grind to having to stand and deliver sermons and week after week after week, many to two sermons a week. And. Sometimes when you hear leaders talk, it's almost like there's an inevitability that it will start to feel fake. Yeah, because the congregation is requiring. Yeah, at Lisa how they're understanding straight up answers that are not threatening.

00:11:57:01 - 00:12:28:04

Unknown

And then you have up and down like waves your own personal faith. And so sometimes it's almost like an occupational hazard. Absolutely. It is to have to stand and deliver and, and then if the passages say well I love jazz, I really love the way you talk about jazz theologically. But my congregation. They get terrified when I start talking about jazz because it triggers authoring security and anxieties about their certainty.

00:12:28:06 - 00:13:03:07

Unknown

So yeah. Yeah. I mean it seems like you have some experience with this. Yeah. Yeah. What I think like part of it is a cultural problem that I perceive in American churches. Yeah. And seminaries of a cutthroat something goes wrong. You're out. Okay. You're fired. And if that is in the background, that's terrifying for pastor. Can you even admit that you're going to struggle with these things with your.

00:13:03:07 - 00:13:25:08

Unknown

Yeah, board of elders or whatever? Fear and doubt or something. Because they're going to vote to kick you out. Yeah. And get some new. Yeah. And that's a real problem. I know of a church in, in Canberra, an Anglican church. Canberra's the capital city of Australia. For listeners who may not. You think it's. We got a few.

00:13:25:08 - 00:13:58:21

Unknown

Yeah. Maybe not from Australia. Where the senior pastor, the rector of the Anglican church, really went through about 18 months of, of, basically mental illness. You. Yeah. Depression. Spent a little bit of time in hospital that sort of thing. But basically could not work. And they did not fire him. They paid his full salary.

00:13:58:23 - 00:14:28:11

Unknown

For a year and a half. They had other people come in to take care of his duties, preach for him and he, and they just waited for him to get better. He's better now. He's not 100%. Yeah. But I'm like wow that's not an evangelical church by the way. Okay. It's an Anglo-Catholic church. But I'm like wow, that was a loving thing they did because they recognized their, their pastor as a human being.

00:14:28:13 - 00:14:49:20

Unknown

And rather than throw him out and show their church suffered through that time. Yeah. Because they did not have consistent leadership. They did not have consistent preaching. They didn't you know, they had people blowing and blowing out. They suffered, but they suffered with him. Right. And they saw him through to the other end. And I'm like that is a picture of the gospel.

00:14:49:22 - 00:15:18:23

Unknown

Yeah. That is a picture of God's love and churches I hate to say but American evangelical churches that fire their pastors because they struggle with some of this stuff for five minutes. I think is just a horrible travesty and lack of love. And a betrayal, honestly, because he's a pastor, he's poured out their heart for you, for your congregation.

00:15:19:01 - 00:15:43:20

Unknown

Have they've dug deep, they've worked long hours. They've maybe neglected their family at various points. You know, they work hard for your spiritual health. And then as soon as they struggle, you kick him out. Yeah. How could you do that? Yeah. What a tragedy, right? What a tragedy. Yeah. So I would love to see churches say we love our pastor.

00:15:43:22 - 00:16:19:00

Unknown

He's struggling. He needs some time off. He's burnt out. Let's lovingly enable that to happen without any fear for his job. For his health insurance. For any sort of insecurity for his family. And now it's our, our, it's our turn to minister to him. You know. So I guess some of that all plays into the professionalization of ministry, where it is a one way transaction providing religious goods and services.

00:16:19:01 - 00:16:43:15

Unknown

Yeah. And they're the consumers. Yeah. And they're not getting what they're paying for. If you're not providing. So that whole model is wrong. That's not the Christian model is not the New Testament model. The leaders of the church, according to Ephesians four, is to prepare all the members of the church for works of service as a as the body builds itself up together in love.

00:16:43:17 - 00:17:11:09

Unknown

So it's the church that does the ministry. The leaders are just there to train the church to do that. Yeah. Help to train the church to do that. So, so part of this whole issue I think, is through a wrongheaded conceptualization of what ministry is and what church is and should be. And maybe if we address some of those things, it makes it easier for,

00:17:11:11 - 00:17:26:22

Unknown

A pastor to have to, you know, so-called deconstruct or burn out and let that process happen. Yeah. Until the healing happens and the resurrection happens. And wait for that to happen.

00:17:26:22 - 00:17:38:07

Unknown

you know, I think you have to go through that process of of that, that deconstruction. And for me, as I've mentioned it, it's simplified things like a refiner's fire.

00:17:38:09 - 00:18:06:09

Unknown

You know, but then the refiner's fire is the object that you're refining is stronger right. And purer and when I was doing my PhD, I spent some time in Oxford and had breakfast with a pastor over there from NAB's Anglican church and Vaughan Roberts, and he, he took me out for breakfast and said, you know, as a PhD, students, can you summarize your research in one sentence?

00:18:06:10 - 00:18:35:01

Unknown

And I couldn't do it at the time. Not really. I sort of fumbled around at ten inch, like a paragraph and whatever. And and, for me, I realized that that was a learning point because I'm like, until I can give that one sentence answer. I haven't really mastered it. Yeah. This, this this interacts with another comment.

00:18:35:03 - 00:18:59:12

Unknown

When I was a first year seminary student and the lecturer said A lot of people think they're clever by complicating things. He said I think the person who can simplify something is the clever one. And for me that crystallized something to. Yeah. As it's not something to look down on to simplify and to crystallize and make something easily understood.

00:18:59:14 - 00:19:16:12

Unknown

It's actually a difficult intellectual task to do that. And you have to actually really understand the subject to be able to do that. And I feel like a parallel there with my own sort of personal deconstruction again, and I'm really happy with that work. But, you know, the way I'm using it

00:19:16:12 - 00:19:36:11

Unknown

is that simplifying and crystallizing. And then when it is like that, like for me, clinging to that image of the prodigal son, the father, and meditating on the father's love every day and and what that tells me about who God is became that crystallized.

00:19:36:13 - 00:19:53:18

Unknown

Yeah. Vision of what this is all about, you know. And that is a profound blessing. If you come out the other end. Yes.

00:19:54:07 - 00:20:14:00

Unknown

Almost like that. The tension. So people will say they feel like they're have a mask on or a shadow self, or they get to this point where they're performing. Yeah. Their ministry. Yeah. Feeling unsteady on their own? Yeah. An example will be someone preaching about grace. Yeah. But feeling driven like they're they need to earn it. That's right.

00:20:14:06 - 00:20:31:05

Unknown

Even though they're preaching about it. Yeah. So it's almost like lean into that tension. Yeah. Don't run from it. Like. Yeah. That's a sign that you're about to grow. Yeah. That's right. Right. And lean into it. Lean into into it and observe it and do something with it. And I think you know that experience I've definitely experienced that.

00:20:31:05 - 00:20:58:19

Unknown

Like leading up to the inevitable conclusion of my first marriage. I was preaching a lot, and I was teaching in class, you know, and I felt like a phony. Yeah. A fake? Yeah. And I didn't feel I was able to be honest about what was going on. Yeah. Because of people involved, it also the way it would be would be heard and responded to.

00:20:58:21 - 00:21:30:06

Unknown

And it's soul story. Yeah. You know, so I would say to any pastor who finds themselves faking it, you have to stop right away. You have to down to because that is bad for your soul. Yeah. You are creating that shadow self, which is great way to put it. Or a duplicitous self that, has terrible ramifications for your own spiritual well-being.

00:21:30:08 - 00:21:59:03

Unknown

And, I think churches need to be able to enable past us to down to. Yeah, when that happens. You know, speaking of preaching. So I was pretty active preacher, until the end of my marriage, and then I didn't preach again for five years. I didn't want to preach for most of that time. Right. The thought of it made me feel sick, and I was relieved that I didn't have to do it in.

00:21:59:05 - 00:22:17:21

Unknown

And and often I thought, because I love preaching so much. I thought, oh, at first I was like, how am I going to survive? Like, it'd be like, how would I survive if I don't get to play jazz? You know, be like unthinkable. But I didn't miss it. Yeah. Partly because I didn't miss that conflict.

00:22:17:21 - 00:22:58:18

Unknown

Yeah. And that pressure. And I loved the opportunity to just work on what's going on with me. And when I finally got to preach again. As a different preacher. Yeah. Totally different preacher. Really honest. Maybe too honest. But yeah I know the people who heard that responded very strongly to that honesty. Because I'm like, I don't I'm not here to B.S. anyone, you know, like I'm not going to be fake.

00:22:58:20 - 00:23:26:08

Unknown

And, I'm going to tell you what I really think. And if that's hard to hear, well, I can't do anything else. So it was ultimately, I think I'm much better preaching now, like it was a five year gap but had to happen. Yeah. It's almost like I think you said the word duplicitous. Like it's almost like, again, that's a signal.

00:23:26:10 - 00:23:55:01

Unknown

Or maybe reframing that as an invitation to look inside. Yeah, I think I've, I've heard other colleagues give advice to pastors to say you need a place somewhere. Yeah. Where you're not a player. Yeah. So if the church is anxious and uneasy about your uncertainty. Yeah. Find a place. Yeah. A therapist, a spiritual guide, a spiritual director, a coach, somebody.

00:23:55:02 - 00:24:14:20

Unknown

Yeah. Outside of the system? Yeah. Where you can do that work? Yeah. To. To arrive. Yeah. But I also think I agree with that completely. But but I also think, wouldn't it be great if our churches are communities where you can just get up in the pulpit and say, this morning, I just want to share with you, I'm really struggling with doubt.

00:24:14:22 - 00:24:46:15

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. And do you know how many people in the congregation would be like, oh, thank God someone said that. You know, because I struggle. Yeah, exactly. And if the pastor can struggle with doubt and be open about it, it's a safe place for me. To admit I'm struggling with doubt. And one of my, mentors and friends while I was living in the States, Mark Dever, pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church, and he has told his congregation, I'm 49% agnostic.

00:24:46:17 - 00:25:08:23

Unknown

You know, and I'm like, wow, he said that. But, you know, it's DC, it's Capitol Hill. Living in a difficult, challenging world. A lot of them work in government. And, you know, they're being pushed and pulled in all sorts of directions. And spiritually has an effect on them. Right? Yeah. Because we're aliens and strangers in the world.

00:25:09:01 - 00:25:30:01

Unknown

What a relief. What a beautiful thing to hear that that beloved pastor struggles with doubt too. And it's okay. We'll get through it together. Yeah. That's why I'd love to see churches to be like. Yeah. Where a pastor can struggle and it's okay. Yeah. That you don't have to hide it. Just be honest.

00:25:30:01 - 00:25:33:21

Unknown

Be transparent. It could be really. Bless people. Yeah.

00:25:33:21 - 00:25:57:06

Unknown

Okay, so I kind of want to ask a question to make some possible connection. Sarah. So you just you talked about your own flameout or burnout as you described it, and how that was a process of almost like a purifying process of getting rid of some things in you that were preventing you from being healthy.

00:25:57:08 - 00:26:24:23

Unknown

And you arrive on the other side a better preacher. Connecting in ways that you didn't five years before. Yeah. So what I'm curious in wondering about is whether there's a parallel to, say, the American church. You know, in the way you talk about in your book Evangelical Church, I think, you could even make it broadly to the American church.

00:26:25:01 - 00:26:54:03

Unknown

Are we going toward a process, a flame out of burnout because of the critiques about the judge? Mentalism? Yeah. Relying on political power. Yeah. I'm wondering about that. And I'm asking the question. In a way it's almost even hard to talk about. Yeah. To be honest with you,

because it is so polarized politically. Yeah. That even saying things politically, like you just the electricity room just jumps up with my being asking.

00:26:54:05 - 00:27:15:05

Unknown

And so this is not a Partizan question. Yes. And so I, I'd encourage the listeners to don't even listen to this as a Partizan question. Yeah. This is a question about the state of the church. Yeah. Demographically it's on US decline. Yeah. And maybe some of these things in your book con right are accelerating that. So I guess that's a long way of asking.

00:27:15:05 - 00:27:37:04

Unknown

Instead, I have this question of, are we headed toward some kind of flameout? And could that actually be potential for growth? Yeah. How many? How many? Walk me through what you're thinking about. That kind. Yeah. I think. I'm not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I got my pen out when he gave his prophecy.

00:27:37:04 - 00:28:18:11

Unknown

I'm going to write it down the way it looks to me as an outside observer. And, is it seems more than likely that somewhere down the road, the American church is going to go through some sort of deconstruction. The big question is whether it will be a forced deconstruction or voluntary deconstruction. So I think it's not too late for the church to adopt a position of openness and humility to say, oh, we brought about these certain things, these convictions are we are we doing are we taking the right courses of action here?

00:28:18:15 - 00:28:58:13

Unknown

Are we heading in the right direction? If that really happened in a widespread way, in a deep and meaningful way, then that will still lead to deconstruction. But it would be a less rough deconstruction, one that you are inviting and, and that would be a great thing for the church. If there's not that humility, if there's a sort of, proud insistence of heading in the same direction and not addressing problems that I think are pretty evident in the church, then I do think more than likely there will be a forced deconstruction.

00:28:58:13 - 00:29:21:00

Unknown

And I think that for two reasons. One, young people in the church are leaving by the millions. That's just a statistical fact. And it's yeah, of course, young people have always left the church through history, and some of it's just they're just not going to follow Christ and like come back right later on. They often do. Yeah, they often do.

00:29:21:03 - 00:29:52:05

Unknown

And that's that's normal. But the numbers we're talking about are beyond that. And their own stated reasons are to do with the sorts of problems that we've been talking about. And they're disillusioned with the church. And don't see another option. So they just leave. So the church, the church's next generation or generations is not going to be there.

00:29:52:07 - 00:30:16:17

Unknown

The other couple that with the fact that, a church that is wracked with these sorts of problems has a huge image problem with the outside world and, that is going to make mission difficult to impossible. When you sort of say, let me tell you about Jesus and God's love and his compassion and gentleness and kindness.

00:30:16:17 - 00:30:45:23

Unknown

And I'm like, that's not what I perceive the church as being about at all. I didn't see any of those things in the church, rightly or wrongly. Right. That is the perception. Yeah. And if the church keeps going that direction, There'll be no mission and there'll be no future generation. So the church. Will face a catastrophic deconstruction.

00:30:54:11 - 00:31:15:02

Unknown

And as you said, any time you make a category or generalization, that's generally true. Of course there's exceptions. Sure. So as I'm, I'm thinking of the scenario where there's this decline of the Christian church. Yeah. In America.

00:31:15:04 - 00:31:40:20

Unknown

Kind of depends on where you are in that system. Sure. As to what? What the recipe is for wellbeing. Okay. So there are churches that are leaning into threading the needle politically. Being active but not Partizan. Yeah I guess it just depends on where you're from. It seems like. Yeah. In that system. Yeah.

00:31:40:22 - 00:32:12:23

Unknown

Is it. Here's, here's my attempt at humility. Okay. So I'll ask a biblical scholar about this. Talk to me about the early church in the fall of Rome. Yeah. Yeah. Did the fall of Rome. Was that a purifying experience for the church? To the church grow as a result of Rome falling? Maybe it's sort of the typical scholarly answer is like if this is not my dissertation, you, you can do that too.

00:32:13:01 - 00:32:42:00

Unknown

But it just made me wonder because there's if there, if there is this kind of fall of institutions. If, if the fears that many people have actually on either side of a political aisle about a decline of, you know, an empire. Yeah. Yeah. I guess I'm wondering you can hear my wondering in my struggle

to get this question is, like, is there some wisdom from the early church about how to deal with the fall of an empire?

00:32:42:01 - 00:33:06:03

Unknown

Yeah. Well, you know, I think there are two ends to that. And maybe I'll start with the end that you didn't mention that I would rather talk about first. Go for it. Is that is that the way that Christianity became established within the Empire? So the first three centuries of the church, Christianity was more or less, formally or informally, illegal and heavily persecuted.

00:33:06:05 - 00:33:49:06

Unknown

But then by the time of 8312, when Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he's doing that in part because Christianity has become a huge movement within the Roman Empire. It's consolidating political power. Yeah. I mean, I mean, like, apart from whatever, whatever other factors there might have been, but that's definitely one of the factors. And, so the question is the church in Rome grew exponentially not only without political support, but against political persecution.

00:33:49:08 - 00:34:14:16

Unknown

And how did the church grow? It grew by all accounts. Rodney Stark is probably the leading guy on this leading scholar on this. By all accounts, it grew because the church loved other people. They cared for the sick and the poor and the marginalized people with the plague, putting their own lives at risk, losing their own lives, caring for people that no one else in Rome would touch.

00:34:14:18 - 00:35:00:15

Unknown

And most Romans thought Christians were crazy nut bags for various reasons. Yeah. So. But we learned a few things here. One, the love of God enacted in serving other people as well as through proclamation, grew the church exponentially. It had nothing to do with political power, or legislation. And it was in spite of severe state persecution. And yet, in 300 years, it became such a huge force in the Roman Empire that the Roman Emperor himself decided to become a Christian, because that's where the empire's going.

00:35:00:16 - 00:35:20:05

Unknown

Right. So if you want to win an empire, that's how you do it. So you're saying if you want to win an empire. Yeah, but. But the goal should not be to win an empire. I know you know, that's not the goal. Yeah, but my point is, if you want the church to grow within an empire or wherever you are, that's how you do it.

00:35:20:07 - 00:35:46:19

Unknown

The early church was not perfect, but a great model and example of showing the simple love of Jesus in everyday lives. To the point was, it was infectious because they were different. You know, another Roman emperor, He there's a classic letter. I think it's Emperor Julian. Where? Because the Roman Empire had no welfare system.

00:35:46:19 - 00:36:17:05

Unknown

It had no formal means to care for Porto. But he writes a letter saying, those Galileans, i.e. Christians. Everyone knows that they care not only for their own people, but for ours as well. And they're making us look bad. We need to start caring for the poor. Wouldn't that be great if. Isn't that amazing? Yeah, that's.

00:36:17:10 - 00:36:39:23

Unknown

That's inspiring. Isn't that amazing? Yeah, yeah. Yeah. The example of the church did change the state. This a pagan emperor hated Christians. Yeah. It just like they're making us look bad. We need to do something about it, too. So if you want to influence your community, your nation, your culture, be a simple Christian. Love other people through action.

00:36:40:01 - 00:37:07:00

Unknown

Love your enemies through action and proclaim Jesus and just let God do the rest. I didn't answer your question about the fall of the Empire, but I, I wanted to answer a different. It's a dramatic question to ask. I just think there as I hear you talk about that, it reminds me of conversations I've had with Chinese Christians, in China and from China.

00:37:07:02 - 00:37:30:18

Unknown

About similar things happening. A bigger earthquakes in 2008. Right. The Christians came in and they helped. Yeah. And they actually made the local leaders look really good because people were being taken care of. Right. And it was okay, well, you're a Christian, but you're making us look good, so we'll let you stay. Yeah. Yeah. As a means of helping people after a tragedy.

00:37:30:19 - 00:37:49:23

Unknown

Yeah. So, it just as I hear you reflect on that. There's examples in our one on one lives that we don't have to go all the way back to Rome, probably to. And the Empire to think of examples of where that has happened. Yeah. Maybe at a smaller scale. Yeah. Strikes me as. Also, maybe we don't need to over complicate things.

00:37:50:02 - 00:38:07:16

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. This is this is going down to that distilling. That was just like simple acts. Yeah. In our personal lives, in ways that we can control. Yeah. This is what we're supposed to do. And God's in control of the big picture. Yeah. Just take care of our own responsibilities. Yeah. Just love people. Yeah. Yeah.

00:38:08:05 - 00:38:29:20

Unknown

Well, thanks, Doctor Campbell, for joining me for this conversation. You know, we went in a couple different directions, but I think there's a common thread. And I'm going to call it jazz. Okay. I'm fine with that. And I. And I'm going to call it jazz, with a caveat of two jazz musicians talking together. Sometimes people just throw out and say, it's like jazz.

00:38:30:00 - 00:39:02:06

Unknown

Yeah, and they don't really understand what they're saying. Yes. Is that, you know, jazz has structure and there's freedom within that structure. Yeah. To kind of create something in the moment. So we created this podcast in the moment. And I think what I have observed and I have heard from you is someone who's been formed deeply through formal practices, whether it's music or whether it's theological education.

00:39:02:08 - 00:39:34:15

Unknown

You've had formal discipline study. And you've had the experience of your life. Yeah. We talked about the divorce that you experienced. I'm sure there's other key marker events where you experienced deep formation. And both of those have shaped you but in different and similar ways. Yeah. They've worked together to help you to arrive to the classroom or to the jazz club with a sense of ease.

00:39:34:17 - 00:40:03:16

Unknown

Where there's, humility and confidence about what you're about to deliver. A confidence that you've been through difficult times. You've persevered through difficult times and those that helped you through that in a way that I think I find just encouraging. In our conversation about what we do with all the problems you wrote about in your book.

00:40:03:18 - 00:40:33:07

Unknown

As a, as a witness to the way that we can experience continuous formation. Yeah. In our lives. Yeah. And how that can be infectious and inviting even for others. Yeah. In a sense maybe because you're in Australia and I'm in the States like a non-Asian presence about like, current affairs here. But it seems like that's the non anxious kind of gospel infused breath that we're supposed to breathe out on everybody else.

00:40:33:09 - 00:40:57:05

Unknown

Yeah. Yeah. So I it's been encouraging to me I hope it's been encouraging to the to the listeners about persevering through. And arriving to that kind of light hearted playful but deeply formed, you know, jazz group that we have together which we call the church. Yeah. Yeah. So thanks for your time. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you. And I've found encouraging to have enjoyed it immensely.

00:40:57:05 - 00:41:00:10

Unknown

So thank you. Thank me. Of course. Yeah. Yeah.