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Well, welcome, Doctor Campbell to the forum podcast. Thank you for being here. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure. Yeah. I'm really excited to meet you and to talk with you, for a lot of different reasons. One is, you're quite an accomplished scholar. You've produced videos. You've written books in different genres, but most importantly, you're a jazz musician.

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Most importantly, first and foremost. Yeah, we were talking a bit before the show. We both share that passion with both jazz musicians. Yeah. So I want to ask you about your jazz background, actually. Because I haven't ever met a theologian. Who can talk eloquently about jazz composition and jazz performance. So. Yeah. Tell me a little bit about your jazz background.

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Well, I guess, jazz was really my my first love. Like, in high school, you know, before I became a Christian at all. Jazz sort of captured my heart, if you like. I sort of became a bit obsessed with it. Learning saxophone. Started practicing several hours a day, ignoring all my studies and just doing that.

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And all I wanted to do was be a professional jazz musician. And, I went to university to study jazz performance, and it was actually at the university where I became a Christian and then this sort of weird conflict occurred a little bit because I realized that, you know, you know, the Christian things, like, you know, Jesus has to be Lord and number one sort of thing.

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And I'm like, pretty sure that's jazz in my life. And so I had to sort of figure out a lot of that out early on. And I went through various phases of, of, trying to negotiate or figure out where does music fit with being Christian. And there were some obvious answers like, well, playing church or, you know, when you write music, make it based on a scripture or something like that, and, you know, did all that and and all that sort of thing.

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But there wasn't really, at least in my neck of the woods, much theological integration with the arts, apart from sort of utilitarian, how to use music to achieve some sort of gospel goal or evangelism mission goal, something like that. And I played well into that. You know, for a long

time I didn't really have an integrated sort of like God is creator, and that the arts have a role in his creation.

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And it's part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to create. And actually, we were all creators in different ways. And, you know, that's been a slowly evolving thing for me. And rather than a side, you know, because then I ended up like I did do the professional jazz thing, but also I ended up going to seminary and doing the Bible teaching thing, and then Bible scholarship thing, and jazz was, oh, I still a passion and I'd still gig professionally and things like that, but it was sort of like a on the I can never call it hobby.

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It's not in the category of hobby, but passion. Maybe it's a word, but. Yeah, right. You know, it's like a professionally trained passion. Yeah. That people pay you to do. So, you know, it's not a hobby, you know? But it's still on the side. I wouldn't give it a lot of time. And I feel like this is.

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This is what I'm supposed to be as a Christian. I'm supposed to be doing this other thing. But in more recent years, especially since being back in Australia, I've lost five and a half, nearly six years. It's it's sort of had a pretty even place with my work as a biblical scholar. And, and in that world and I've actually been very first time really happy about the integration in my life of being an artist and a theologian or an artist and a biblical scholar.

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And, and I don't see a conflict anymore. And actually, I've, I've understood I've started to understand that, that even as a biblical scholar, really I approach it as a creator, in the sense that when I write a book, there's a lot of crafting that goes into that and art even, and and yeah, there's a lot of intense academia stuff, but I really want to produce something that's beautiful and that will speak to people and communicate.

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And I'm doing the same thing when I play jazz. You know, I want to communicate something to people, but also I want to create something beautiful. And I realized, there's something that that they do have in common, and that's that creator element. And, and I'm so as a, you know, New Testament scholar started to push into that a little more, theologically.

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And, and I think in the future I want to sort of write in that space and, and develop that area a bit in my own thinking. Yeah. But also for the sake of for the church and for other artists, because I feel like particularly in the sort of contemporary Western evangelical tradition, we've lost something because it was certainly not always the case.

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Right. And other and other church traditions today have a much more robust, understanding of the role of the arts theologically. And we've, we've it's sort of become very flat. And I want to help us like recapture, a vision for the arts and, and faith, really. I love that you I love that you talked about, goddess creator.

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I'm married to an artist. An art teacher. So, visual artist? Yeah. Visual. Yes. She has multiple disciplines. She teaches art in a classroom, does art on her own. She's made similar observations about kind of the shallowness of the way Christians often think about art. And so oftentimes she'll say, well, if you just paint something like paint across.

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Yeah. It's done. Yeah. That's a conversation anymore. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And what strikes me as jazz and I'll admit to the audience here, I'm a little biased. I'm a jazz musician as well. So a lot of angles going on. Yeah. That's right. That in some ways jazz is like the epitome of creativity because you're creating literally on the spot.

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You're improvising. If people don't understand that or know that about jazz, is that oftentimes there's a lick or a melody. Yeah. And then people play with it live on the spot. Yeah. So it actually is. Yeah. Live creation. That's right. What unlocks in you that allows you to put that together and not see them as conflict, like the whole integration of your faith in your craft?

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It's been a long journey, sort of something, a question, I guess, ticking in the background for a long time. And I think a lot of my sort of academic work is, is some question from way back when that's just been mulled over in the back of my mind for a long time, and you start to notice, you notice when people say something relevant to it, or you see a book published in the area and just over like years, discover years.

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It's sort of slow reflection. But I guess it sort of came to, a head, if you like, when I returned to Australia because, I was living in the same city as my alma mater. Yeah, Australian National University school music and and, people I had studied with and had played with for years were now kind of the faculty teaching there, and they invited me to come in and teach and become part of that community.

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And, and at the same time, you know, I started working for a theological institution, called Sydney College of Divinity and, but the my, my new boss and my new role, we both really flexible. And I said, look, I and I, by the way, part of this is, part of the teaching music led to me doing a PhD in music, which I've just completed this year.

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But congratulations. Yeah. Thank you. But, you know, when I was talking about taking on this new job, as a research director at Sydney College at 20, I was saying, look, you know, I'm doing this PhD. Music and and music's become really important again. And I'm spent a lot of time doing that. And my boss was like, cool, nice.

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Do that. Like, don't let us stop you, you know, like, just do as much as you want. You just had permission. Yeah. And he said, look, all he really cares about is the results in the job. I've been asked to do. Right? Doesn't care how much time I spent doing it or when. So if I need to slot things around for a gig or for teaching a class at music school or whatever, totally cool.

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And I'm like us the first time I've been in that sort of situation and all of a sudden they could coexist. Yeah. And once they could coexist in my practice, it made a lot easier for me to notice, the, the similar mindset that I'm using across those spheres and, and realizing I'm the same person. Yeah. Doing this and doing that, I'm not two different people.

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They're integrated in me. So what what's going on there theologically? Yeah. You know, say more about that. So you teach jazz performance. I'm assuming you teach New Testament or Greek. How are they the same? How are they different? Well, at the moment I'm not really teaching New Testament in Greek. I'm a research director. So I'm. I'm running our PhD program.

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Okay. And I'm supervising New Testament PhDs. Perfect. But I've spent many years teaching New Testament very subjects and Greek. You know where the parallels are. So many, so many, like, one thing and we were talking about this a little bit earlier, one thing that, I really see in common is this internalization of knowledge. So there's a point, and I guess artists might even call it mastery.

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I mean, I feel, you know, it feels like a bit of an artistic term to use whatever. Your masters. Yeah, yeah, yeah, but, but part of it, if I accept that part of mastery is that you never, you never really arrive. You and part of him. What makes a master is that they're always like even Herbie Hancock, 84 years old, who I heard a few weeks ago in Australia still perfecting the art, you know.

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So if you take mastery in that sense, I felt like, like teaching well, in New Testament and especially like a language like Greek requires deep internalization. And everyone knows everyone who's taught knows how different it is when you're teaching something like that versus when you're teaching something that you're one lecture ahead of the students, right. And this is mad panic.

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And you don't because I've done that too, that you hope the students don't find out how thin you are on this area or that area when they ask that question, I'm sunk or whatever you know, whereas when you have the deep internalization, it's a totally different experience and it enables you to teach in a totally different way with a freedom.

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And I feel that is parallel to jazz because to improvise at a really high level, you need to have internalized the music, all the rules, all the techniques, all the theory in a way such that you don't have to think about it. You're not threatened by it. It's not a challenge for you. And you just get to convey your musicality through it.

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So I like as a practitioner, that's a sort of really practical commonality, I guess. But I feel like if I'm moving from one to the other, I'm sort of doing the same thing, just with different stuff. You know, it feels the same to me. Yeah. So, so my experience, and knowing a lot of musicians in jazz, we tend to over sometimes as a beginner, we overthink when it's time to play that solo.

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Yeah. I wonder if you see that, but then maybe pivot that to people studying theologically or understanding the Bible. You see that kind of overthinking as well. And what does that look like? Yeah. I mean, it's a classic seminary problem. I think that you, you maybe for the first time, really start to intellectualize your faith. And this students often, encounter, maybe a disconnect between the mind and the and heart.

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And for the first time, this the scriptures that have been read at sort of a heart level engaging. Might as well, of course. But now being engaged, you know, historically is a historical artifact, was a literary artifact or something like that. And a lot of students struggle with it. And I, I when I went to seminary, I experienced that too.

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But I was not afraid of it because I experience the exact same thing in music school, because this music that I had loved and was passionate about and sort of blundered through with a lot of passion, now was being intellectualized now was being paired down, deconstructed and rebuilt. And you do have the same disconnect. It's like I'm in my head a lot.

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I'm thinking about the music like this and where's that love I used to have? It feels right. It feels like I've lost it. But if you trust the process and you follow it through to the end, they come back together again, you know? And I realize, I can reengage the heart now because I've mastered the material to the point where it's not in the way anymore.

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You know, it's not occupying. It's not stopping me from engaging my heart, you know, because up in the the frontal cortex, your your active brain, if it's too full of stuff, you know, it prevents you from really going deep with with it. And I really learned that as a musician and especially as an improviser, and I, I think the same thing can happen with theology.

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You know, if you follow it through with the study of theology, trust the process. You will once you you really internalize that new knowledge and that revelation of God through the scriptures, you'll rejoin heart and head. And it'll be I mean, the funny thing, same thing happened in music school. I felt like leaving seminary.

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I knew less than I thought. I knew my first day of seminary. It's not uncommon. Yeah, right. But that's actually, again, that's part of what the process does. There's a huge, it humbles you and teaches you, how much you don't know. And that's like the first step to, real wisdom, you know, to to know that you don't know, so, you know, that those sorts of parallels, you know, music in lots of ways is an expression of life.

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I feel like and, and so actually, it's part of our should be part of our thinking about anthropology or our theological anthropology. Music can fit in that space. And, that being the case, it has a lot to teach us just about being human and theology. Yeah, it's the study of God, right? It's theos. But it's also a study of humanity and our relationship to God and and with each other.

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And so the lessons you learned from art or any sphere of life ultimately will find parallels in the study of theology, I think. Right, you know, right.

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Something that strikes me about jazz, then, is that when you are performing and you just had a gig here in Grand Rapids last night, there's something interactive about it. You're not on your own producing something, right? Someone's playing a melody. Someone in the background is kind of toying with it, toys with it, and then someone else hears that, and then they build on to that.

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So there's this, you know, collective construction of what's happening. Yeah. And if you have the eyes to see in the ears to hear, you really get to enjoy it at a deeper level. Yeah. I wonder if there's something parallel. And I don't want to force this. Right. But with theology, is there a communal kind of co-creation part as well where we shouldn't be doing this on our own or.

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Yeah, tell me about that. I really think, yeah, I think that's a great question. And I really do think, theology should be done in a communal context, with music, like, you do a lot of practice on your own, you know, all by yourself. But then when you're performing, unless you're doing solo piano or something.

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But for me, one of the great joys of, of performing jazz is that collaborative thing.

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And having those musical personalities interact with each other and listen to each other and bounce off each other. It's one of the great joys, and it is a relational thing, and it's a very bonding thing. You know, you become close, you become friends. Yeah, just through the practice of playing together. And I think, that enriching element of the community has so many parallels, first of all, to the church, because we are cross body members, different members, different body parts of the one body, and we enrich each other by being connected.

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But also in theology, you might have to do a lot of hours on your own studying Greek, learning your paradigms, or reading Calvin or whatever it is, you know, and you have to do those. Yeah. It's, you know, if you're really going to do it properly, but. In academia, for example, that is a collaborative practice. We are interacting with each other's written work, or we're going to conferences and going to a conference at the end of the week, where you will rub shoulders with hundreds of other scholars and talk about what you're working on, what you're thinking about, what you're reading.

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And that is, I think, a thought for me, my experience, a vital element of being any Testament scholar. And I don't want to do that on my own. And I think that's where you, you can easily go wrong. That's why we have peer review in academia in general. Our peers help us to achieve a standard together and you contribute to a conversation.

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Sometimes they're angry conversations, you know, but they sharpen each other and help each other push each other. So maybe this isn't a fair question. I mean ask it anyway. And you can say I don't want to answer this. You're going to because you brought up going to this conference. Yeah. What percent of the scholars there do you think are playing jazz and what percent do you do you mean that literally?

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Unknown

No, not literally metaphorically. We're going because that's low. Yeah, exactly. You got to find the other person. So. And what percent are still in a place where they're kind of pursuing the need to be the expert, like the solo expert? Yeah. I think what I've observed, I've been in theological education, and working with pastors for over a decade, and I have observed a lot of people who have still this pressure of being the expert and an anxiety about all of a sudden doing it together because they're supposed to know, especially when they get the degree.

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So I guess what I'm wondering is how, how common is it for someone to have gone through. And there's a lightness and an improvization happening at the conference. And how many people do you think are still,

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Maybe in, in school in that way you're still schooling in the I guess you see what I'm asking you? Yeah. Yeah, I think it's a great question. I've got no way to quantify that. Of course, that's right. Yeah, but I can tell you, I know almost instantly whether a person is one or the other. And how do you know

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the first group, the jazz group?

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There's an openness to new things. And so you talk about what, you know, so what are you working on? And I'm like, oh, I'm working on this. And I go, fascinate me. Curiosity. There's curiosity. There's a sort of willingness to let whatever you're working on to impact their own views on on the thing because and they'll go, you know what?

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I never thought of it that way. I've always thought this. Yeah, and maybe that's right, but I'm really going to think about what you're saying here.

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Whereas the other type, you know, almost instantly because you say did it and they go, oh no, it's that right. You know, it's like, oh, I don't think that's fair. You know, you know, or or it's, it's sort of just turned like a judo move against you or something like to show or to show their own expertise.

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Yeah. It's about them. It's about their ultimately their ego had to say. But, you know, I'm sure that exists all through academia in every field. But, obviously I prefer the former group and, those are the people that make it a real joy to work in that space. Yeah. And, one little anecdote. When I was quite early on in my sort of, academic career, I hate the term career, but academic career and, just completed my PhD and it had been published and, and a senior scholar who had been a mentor of mine, a great New Testament scholar who was in his 70s.

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Right. So established reputation taught, had taught me, had read my book and said, this commentary I'm working on, I want to apply what you've researched and can you help me? Can we talk about some verses here or there and, and and how this how you would apply this in that. And I found that incredibly humbling.

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Oh yeah. Because I'm like, wow. First of all, you know who am I. But second, here's a guy at the end of his career with an established reputation and produced some wonderful, contributions to New Testament scholarship, revered in our circles. Humbling himself and asking me how to help him to incorporate new scholarship and new ideas into his own work.

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And I'm like, man, that's. But you know, you see the same thing among the best musicians. Of course, the best musicians are like, wow, I've not heard that sound before. Let me I want to check that out, you know, and they're not threatened by younger people doing different things that they're sort of like going, oh, how can I?

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And we were talked about when I saw Herbie Hancock few weeks ago. He had this young drummer who had I knew everyone in the band except the drummer. He was 26 year old guy. So here's this 84 year old master, world renowned Herbie Hancock on piano, playing this 26 year old drummer. And they're looking at each other and they're smiling each other.

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And you can tell the young drummers bring in this sort of cutting edge, like fusion, a jazz, stuff. And Herbie is taking that energy and doing something with it and, and making himself young with it. It's like an invitation to join. Yeah. What he's doing. Right? Yeah. And I'm like, that's the same thing. But in that world it's just the older master interacting with the younger.

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What they've got to bring and encouraging that. And and they're inspiring each other and they're energizing each other. And I'm like, when you see that in scholarship, that's a beautiful thing. When you see, a doctoral supervisor with that relationship with their PhD student, that's a beautiful thing. Yeah. You know. Yeah. So. See, you've got a new book out.

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Yeah. It's still new. Newish. Yeah, newish. And, you know, there's this game I think it was on Sesame Street, the show. Like, which one of these is not like the other. Yeah. So of course you've got these heavy hitting, solid theological, important books. You know, people, people around here cite you when they're writing papers and their dissertations, and then you've written a book more recently, and I've got it in front of me called Jesus the Evangelicals or Jesus versus evangelicals.

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And there's a picture of a table that's been flipped over, and there's money all over the floor. Yeah, but tell me about your decision to write this book. Yeah. You're right. It's the one that's not like the others, you know? Really? I think this book comes out of a place of wanting to integrate, my reading and study of the scriptures with life and the church.

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Okay, so I often found myself, whether teaching in America or teaching in Australia, we're talking about a biblical text or a passage, you know, and I feel like, you know, there's something the church needs to hear from this passage that it's not hearing or it's taking it in a direction that I think it's not how it's intended.

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Or wouldn't the church be blessed or rebuked or or challenged or encouraged? And I can feel it in the students that because they're coming from their own church traditions, you know, and they recognize what I'm identifying, you know, and we identify together. They go, yeah, my church, this and that. And I don't think my church is read this passage, you know, that sort of thing.

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Right? You know, and I'm like, we would talk just sort of anecdotally and it's part of, you know, integrating Scripture and theology with the real world, the world we live in, church life, Christian life. And, I know that I want to do that for me personally, and I want to help students or whoever in that community of scholarship that I'm in that I'm part of to do that, too.

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So this book is really an outworking of that in the sense that the evangelical church, particularly the American Evangelical Church, has got some problems. Yeah. I think the subtitle is actually a biblical Critique of a Wayward Movement. Yeah, yeah. So the word way would, some people didn't like that. Very biblical allusions. Right? The wayward. Yeah. But I was serious about it because, of course, like, it's not true of everybody.

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Of course it's not like, you know, say that many times. Great book. And there are always dangers in generalizing. And, and I could be accused of not being nuanced enough. And what about this church and what about that? You know, and I'm like, yeah, of course. Right. And there, there, there's lots. That's good. But if you're not willing to generalize then you will actually miss some big patterns that are problematic, growing and potentially disastrous.

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And sometimes people I know as individuals, there's a question I like to ask is that if you lack self-awareness, would you know it? Yeah, exactly. It's a silly question, but it's like it gets you to think a little bit where you sometimes need someone from the outside. That's right. Or a parallel side to look at things with a fresh eyes.

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And that's my interpretation, is that you have done that well with this. Yeah. And I want to acknowledge that. Yeah, I say that in there that sometimes you need someone else to point out your blind spots. Yeah. And I'm like, we have blind spots in history too. But by definition, I need someone else to point them out to me.

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Yeah. You know. Yeah. So we, There's a couple points, right? You make toward the end of the book of you that you distill it down. Yeah. And then you distill it down again into, like, the bullet points. And I thought, I bet this was his outline before he wrote the book. These are his points that he was trying to make.

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And one thing that you, you say is you talk about how politicized American evangelicalism is. Yeah. And almost to the point that it's if you say the spiritual nature has been distorted. Yeah. And what it what you then say is that it's fueled by this assumption that political power will transform American culture or. Yeah, American culture specifically.

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Yeah. Now you got to put yourself in my shoes. I'm reading this amidst our most recent election, right? Yeah. That's right. Yeah. It was really you know, people are trying to decide who's going to have the power. Yeah. So say a little bit about that point maybe and and what's at stake. So of course sometimes we point out an issue or a challenge.

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And I like to take it even further and say, okay, well yes if that's a problem. But then what is that problem then. Cause yeah, yeah. Let's assume that the goal of this political, activity by evangelicals in America is to transform America. Right? And I think that's a reasonable assumption. Not always true, but generally speaking, they want to see a transformed America for Christ or a more Christian America, or see America as as God's blessed country, God's chosen nation, something like that.

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But but basically, we want to see, Christianity thrive in America. Let's say that's the goal. The question becomes, all right, how do you achieve the goal? What Jesus says in the Great Commission is go and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the father, son, and Holy Spirit. I think that's the New Testaments.

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Instruction. Yeah. For what we're supposed to be doing in the world is mission. And if you are trying to transform America through a different means, which is, say, political legislation or legislative coercion, like legislating Christian moral values, will you be making disciples of Jesus? And the answer is, I think, profoundly no. That is not how people are changed.

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That is not how people's hearts are transformed. That is not how they become Christian or want to adopt Christian morality or values or way of thinking or worldview at all. Because laws don't change hearts. That's the bottom line. And, sociologist James Davison Hunter wrote a book about this. Saying that cultural change is rarely, if ever, a product of a top down legislative political agenda.

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Unknown

Cultural change happens from the grassroots through the arts, through persuasion, conversation, community institutions like universities. That's where worldviews are formed and shaped, for better or for worse. But that's but that's that's how it happens. And you cannot take a shortcut and say, we're going to ban this or that at a legislative level, and that's going to make people live in a more Christian way.

00:31:55:11 - 00:32:22:23

Unknown

It's simply not going to work. And so that's part a, part B is the tragedy of that. Not only that whole thing is tragic to begin with because it's wrongheaded, but the double tragedy is because evangelicals are perceived as being power mongering, power hungry, hypocritical. And just want to make everyone live the way they think they should.

00:32:23:01 - 00:32:50:13

Unknown

They're actually disabling them from conducting the mission of making disciples. Because no one wants to be disciplined by a hypocrite, right? Yeah, right. So there's a lot at stake. There's a lot at stake. Yeah. I want to talk about another dynamic, too. So we're in Michigan. Michigan was one of these battleground states. Yeah. Where, both politicians, they visit a lot.

00:32:50:13 - 00:33:14:23

Unknown

Like one time I was downtown and I couldn't get to where I was going because there's so many candidates downtown. We're getting text texted all the time. Yeah. And about, you know, do this or don't do that, which struck me about the whole process. Is that it was it was so fear mongering. Yeah. That's how that's how we experience it.

00:33:15:00 - 00:33:39:10

Unknown

Yeah. Now some of the fear comes from observable facts that are terrifying. Some of the fear comes from outright lies and so regardless of kind of who's saying what there's a sense of like you should be terrified. Yeah. Of the other person. Yeah. I don't hear a lot of sermons about fear. Yeah. In church these days.

00:33:39:10 - 00:34:01:04

Unknown

Yeah. And so, what what's your council, what's your what's your pastoral moment for me as a person in the United States, who's just had a long cycle of fear mongering. Yeah. What do I need to hear? What's the good news that I need to hear? Yeah, it's a really great question. And I think it's a right.

00:34:01:05 - 00:34:05:18

Unknown

It's a good analysis. Observation.

00:34:05:20 - 00:34:40:04

Unknown

Perfect love drives out fear. And I think the Christian who really knows God through Jesus Christ and knows and is secure in God's love for them and God's care of the world and the sovereignty of God, can sit back a little and and not freak out. Right. Now, I'm not I'm not advocating, lack of political involvement or, you know, you should, you know, politics is the world.

00:34:40:04 - 00:35:14:00

Unknown

And and we should just, you know, ignore it or or not be interested in it. But, we have a much bigger picture. And if you part of the problem of conflating your Christian faith with nationalism,

which a lot of American Christians have done historically and today, is that what happens to your nation becomes disproportionately important. Now, of course, it's important for everyone who lives there.

00:35:14:00 - 00:35:38:02

Unknown

And in America's case, it's important for everyone in the world because the huge influence of America, right throughout the whole world. But if you really believe that Jesus kingdom is not of this world, and if you really believe that God is going to renew the heavens and the earth, why does it really matter what happens to America?

00:35:38:04 - 00:36:07:12

Unknown

What are you worried about? What? What if it becomes completely pagan? What if it becomes a muslim state? Well, okay. Not ideal you might say, but it's not the end of the world. Do you think that's going to thwart God's purposes? I mean, all the early churches, the first century churches, Paul's churches were in Turkey to here today to, to Kurds, 98% Muslim.

00:36:07:14 - 00:36:37:20

Unknown

Do we say, oh, well, that's you know, that has thwarted God's purposes for the world? No, no, not at all. You know, and in fact, that's the pattern. Like the truth of Jesus moves around the planet, you know, it began the Middle East. And moved to the west. Now it's moving east, you know, Asia, the church is booming in Asia and Africa.

00:36:37:22 - 00:36:59:19

Unknown

It used to be, you know, 150 years ago that a British missionary going to Africa would pack their belongings in a coffin because they had a life expectancy of five years, you know, and they would come back in the coffin. That's how tough Africa was for Christian mission. Now, there are more Anglicans in Nigeria than the rest of the whole world put together.

00:36:59:21 - 00:37:26:16

Unknown

So, what are we really worried about you know. Yeah, I get it. You worried about your children, your grandchildren, you're worried about, your quality of life. You're worried about being marginalized as a Christian in a increasingly secular society. I get I get all that. And that might be uncomfortable. But also the scriptures teach us and history teaches us that God works through a persecuted church.

00:37:26:17 - 00:37:51:05

Unknown

You know, that's where real growth is happening. So my question comes down to this are you really concerned about the kingdom of God and God's purposes in the world, or are you really

only concerned about your own country and your place in it? And I think that's a really important question for American Christians to think about. Yeah, thanks.

00:37:51:07 - 00:38:18:22

Unknown

Something else you talk about in the book is about, kind of acceptable and unacceptable sins that become like, decided by tribal cultures. When you say tribal, you mean like groups of people? Yeah. There's kind of a tribalism of this group has informally agreed that certain sins are really bad, you know, certain are excusable. Yeah. And that kind of spills over into how people think about marriage.

00:38:19:01 - 00:38:38:20

Unknown

Yeah. So, so reading that, I thought, yeah, you know, there's there's a lot of ways that I can see that happening. Give us some advice about how do you know when you're reading something with your own kind of tribal lens? Yeah, yeah, because we all do this. And how do you know when you've got into the quote?

00:38:38:22 - 00:39:06:22

Unknown

Yeah, the good stuff. The real stuff. Yeah. Like how do we help prevent that from happening as we're studying, as we're living our lives? Well, I think, for one thing, to recognize that tribes exist. You know, we have these tribal cultures, and they're not all bad, you know? I mean, humanity kind of arguably, thrived in its early history because we're sort of social and tribal, whatever.

00:39:06:23 - 00:39:32:04

Unknown

But there's definitely an unhealthy side to tribalism. And, the first thing to do is a bit like your question earlier, if you what was it if you don't know if you lacked self-awareness, would you would you know it? Yeah. So one of the insidious things about tribalism is that you often unaware that you're in a tribe, and that it's affecting the way you think.

00:39:32:06 - 00:40:02:02

Unknown

So the first thing to recognize is that fact. The second thing is to recognize other tribes aren't evil. They might be different. You might have some differences of opinion or disagreements, sometimes big differences, but the Christian to our tribes, I'm talking about, I'm sure they also have a lot. That's really great. That you can learn from, be challenged by.

00:40:02:04 - 00:40:27:06

Unknown

So I think the first step is step outside your tribe and like, yeah, get out, step outside, go somewhere else. Read works by people that your tribe bans. Yeah, right. Oh, it looks down on

read them for yourself. Yeah. Because soft and surprising, you know. That you like. Well, they pretty much believe what I believe. You know, the all the big things are in place.

00:40:27:08 - 00:40:52:10

Unknown

So open your mind, like. Okay. And I think that's the key. And also, when you're reading the scriptures and this is the other part of it and the part I think that has brought me to this place is read them honestly and openly and really notice what's there, rather than looking for what your tribe says is there, which we have, you know, in psychology we call it the confirmation bias, right?

00:40:52:11 - 00:41:15:06

Unknown

Yeah. We're literally wired to look for what we already believe. That's right. Yeah. It makes me think about the communal reading, too. Yeah. Of, you need someone outside of you. Yeah. Yeah. To help you with that. That's right. And I think some of the most provocative preachers that have really helped me in my Christian development have been the ones that really challenge what you think the scriptures say.

00:41:15:07 - 00:41:36:14

Unknown

Say you think this text about this, don't you? Guess what? I don't think it is. Check this out. You know something? You're like, oh, it's been there all along. I never saw it. I was blind to it. So that's a big problem, especially for evangelicals, because we regard ourselves as the Bible people. And the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith.

00:41:36:16 - 00:41:59:20

Unknown

And if you're reading the Bible in a, in a truncated way because of your tribe, that's really significant. Yeah. I've heard it said some ways that there's no one culture that has the ability to actually describe God. Right. Because God is so big that you actually need. Yeah. These multiple perspectives to try to start to get a sense for who God is.

00:41:59:20 - 00:42:32:20

Unknown

Yeah. Because how could one particular. Yeah version of how people are living together. Yeah. To it. Yeah. That's right. Yeah. And I think one of the so you started this by asking about acceptable and unacceptable sins. Like when we're talking about mission and reaching the world outside, a big part of that is who. Our version of God is and what the outsider is hearing.

00:42:32:22 - 00:43:08:05

Unknown

If they're hearing that God is a sort of, tyrannical killjoy, very judgmental kind of jump on you for all your sexual sins and all this sort of stuff. That's not appealing. Like, it's not appealing. And it's

also you're doing a disservice because you're not actually conveying the true god, revealed by Christ, who's compassionate towards the sinner and the father of the prodigal son.

00:43:08:07 - 00:43:19:15

Unknown

So the tribalism has potential, I think, to really destroy witness and mission. Yeah.

00:43:19:16 - 00:43:46:19

Unknown

So I'm gonna get a little personal here. Yeah. Okay. Go ahead. It's in your book so I can ask you about this. Gets out of the bag I know it's related to what we were just talking about with things, certain things that are acceptable or not. And and, you know, you wrote, regarding, a divorce you experienced, that the most haunting and distressing experience of your life, was getting divorced and its horrifying aftermath.

00:43:46:19 - 00:44:05:18

Unknown

Yeah. I mean, I read that as the intro to a chapter, and I had to just sit there minute. Oh, and think of the weight of that statement. And probably what had to happen inside of you to be able to put it into a is inside of in right bloods out of and tell the world.

00:44:05:18 - 00:44:31:20

Unknown

Yeah, yeah. And it seemed like a pivot point where you're talking about the biblical, critique probably of the tribal understanding of evangelicalism in the United States. And here you got this real personal example. So and you explain why this was the case in the book a little bit. Referring to kind of the church shooting.

00:44:31:20 - 00:45:01:23

Unknown

They're wounded and people are down. They. Yeah they don't help them in the way that maybe people could. Yeah. Can really you so yeah. Tell me about the role that the church played in that experience for you. Yeah. Well, first of all, I should acknowledge that my personal experience was kind of a big part of the process of coming to the point of writing this book.

00:45:02:04 - 00:45:31:14

Unknown

The book is not about that, of course, but. And my views about certain things crystallized or even changed coming out of that experience. Now, some people will, and I'm upfront about that. Some people, though, will critique that and say, oh, see, he's changing his theology to fit a moral failure in his life or something like that, which is a very common way, of, say, critiquing, liberal position or liberal theologian or something like that.

00:45:31:14 - 00:46:03:21

Unknown

And but I actually think it's the total other way around in the sense that my personal experience, brought me to a place where I could see and acknowledge and accept a reality that I had pretty much been in denial of. And I've talked to others who've had similar experiences, maybe not their own divorce, but a son, for example, or and I remember talked to a professor at Ted Trinity whose son was married.

00:46:03:21 - 00:46:26:17

Unknown

His marriage is falling apart and he said that that prompted him to to look again at the texts about divorce and remarriage and prompted him to examine them much more closely than he ever had before. And I'm like, see, that's interesting. It's because it's personal. Now that you really take that question more seriously and actually do the work.

00:46:26:19 - 00:46:46:23

Unknown

Whereas before I would, I was happy with pat answers. You can intellectualize it. Yeah. It's outside of you. It's it's out there. It affects other people. Doesn't really affect me. So you don't really do the heavy. So I think you find most people who, who's really worked hard on this issue have some sort of personal connection to it, and that's what's led them to do the work.

00:46:47:04 - 00:47:23:11

Unknown

And sure, sometimes. Absolutely. You could be, guilty of arriving at a conclusion that suits you now. But but I think the more positive spin is when you're brought into that chaos and that tragedy and that difficulty. It forces a lot of questioning and some of those Pat answers don't stand up to scrutiny. And you need a more integrated and a robust, way of thinking about all these things and including the texts that speak to the situation.

00:47:23:13 - 00:47:49:04

Unknown

So, to answer you, I just wanted to put that out there because I know that that question hangs in the air when when I start talking about the personal side of the book for me. But there's a epistemology in there, right? Yeah. You know, some of it. Yeah. Yeah. You're wrong. That's right, that's right. But but in answer to your question, my experience of church and Christians was both positive and negative.

00:47:49:06 - 00:48:18:15

Unknown

So some people had been long time friends were talking decades. We don't speak anymore like that. Just cut me off. And that might be for a variety of reasons. And I won't go into. Yeah, those reasons or presume to know what they all are. But, others kind of harassed me. You know, or wanted to rebuke me or challenged me or whatever.

00:48:18:17 - 00:48:45:07

Unknown

And I'm not saying rebuke is wrong or challenge is wrong. I'm saying it to them. But, other friends were like. Pure life to me. Yeah. Yeah. And, One of the problems I think, that evangelicals have around the issue of marriage is that we connect it so strongly to our faith that we thank you for marriage vows.

00:48:45:09 - 00:49:11:12

Unknown

Are you even Christian anymore? And that was us off that number of times. Are you still a Christian? Wow. And it was easy to be offended by that question. But also, I understand the question because even in my own mind, I was like when I thought divorce was going to happen, I did have it myself, so closely attached to faith that I thought, maybe I'll be done as a Christian.

00:49:11:12 - 00:49:41:18

Unknown

If this happens. You know, maybe it's all going to blow apart. And what I discovered was almost right away. Like when it actually happened. I rediscovered the grace of God or discovered it in a new way. Freshly powerful way where I realize, yeah, this is a huge failure. And, tragedy in your life. Which I bear a great deal of responsibility for.

00:49:41:18 - 00:50:07:12

Unknown

I'm not going to say that this is like a one sided thing or anything like that. I am, I bear responsibility for this happening. But God still loves me. And there's nothing like Romans eight says. There's nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ. And I really believe that in a whole new way, in a profound way.

00:50:07:14 - 00:50:25:23

Unknown

But it was a pastor friend who helped me to get to that point. Yeah. He said, can't, you're going to get a lot of judgment from Christians. This is on the front end of how this when this was to happen, when I got on zoom and I called him and said, yeah, this is what's happening. And he wasn't surprised.

00:50:26:00 - 00:50:46:12

Unknown

I mean, the people in you, me and my situation were not surprised at all. But, he said, you're going to receive a lot of judgment. And he said, I want you to ignore them. And, I want you to listen to the voice of your heavenly father. Wow. Who says I love you as a son? Sorry.

00:50:46:12 - 00:51:06:23

Unknown

I still get choked up thinking about it, but for me, that was like a crystallizing moment where I was like, that's where it is. God loves me as his son. That's why the prodigal son is on my phone cover. Yeah. Rembrandt. Because. And I think about that parable every day. Because

00:51:06:23 - 00:51:20:20

Unknown

that's the vision of God that I cling to, that loving father who, even after the great failure, loves you and welcomes you as a son or daughter and, and nothing else matters.

00:51:20:22 - 00:51:38:19

Unknown

You know, so it also relates is all the tribal like little nitty gritty things that we fight about. It's like man, you know, what matters is this. Yeah. You know and say what you will about me. But I'm a son of God in Christ

00:51:38:19 - 00:51:45:06

Unknown

and and and it doesn't matter what you say about me, you know?

00:51:45:08 - 00:52:04:11

Unknown

So it was good and bad. But there was a lot of bad, and I think a lot of divorced people have read my book and reached out to me. Yeah. And I've recounted similar stories. There've been others have said, oh, that wasn't my experience in the church, was really loving. And I want to acknowledge that. Yeah.

00:52:04:12 - 00:52:40:22

Unknown

Of course. Yeah. Yeah. But there are a lot of people who felt alienated, judged, have been, you know, cut off, and, the book is. Yeah, it's helped them because they're not alone, you know? Yeah. And there's something wrong with churches where we're not loving people who are going through what is, you know, potentially the worst experience of their life.

00:52:40:23 - 00:53:10:11

Unknown

Right. Yeah. You're already leaning into my question of what got you through it. Yeah. But just as I hear you talk, I just hear, like, a sense of perseverance in your spirit. About your experience. Resources on the outside. But even like as we talked about jazz like your perseverance of getting past the. I'm stuck in my theory I've lost my love of this thing and somehow getting through that kind of.

00:53:10:13 - 00:53:32:05

Unknown

Running in the mud kind of feeling with that. But then also with your study of scripture. And all of a sudden it's intellectualized and you've lost this kind of heart with it. So it just seems like there's this theme of perseverance. That I hear in your story. Yeah. Thanks. It's a good observation.

00:53:32:07 - 00:53:57:22

Unknown

As you know, like for anyone who's engaged in any sort of long term pursuit or struggle or just life. Yeah. Like that's a daily thing, right? Yeah. You know, it's, it's the decisions you make every day. Yeah. And there are days where I have to. Where I'm feeling less good about how things are going. But I, I guess for me, bottom line is I don't want to be a quitter.

00:53:58:00 - 00:54:24:08

Unknown

I kind of respect. I can't respect that. And I can't respect myself if I quit. So I would just keep going until it gets better. Okay. But I know that God sustained me through, through a few close friends. Through a really loving extended family. Yeah. And.

00:54:24:10 - 00:54:45:06

Unknown

I felt permission to be grumpy for a while. I took solace. I took solace in the Psalms. Yeah. You know, the psalmist is like you're. It's amazing in the scriptures, you know, God allows people to be like, be cross with him or be more than a bit like, what the heck, man? You know, and and I felt I'm allowed to go through that.

00:54:45:07 - 00:55:07:18

Unknown

I'm not going to stay there, but it's okay to go through that. And honest to God is bigger than that. And it's not going to be a deal cancellation if I'm like, upset for a while. And you know eventually you come through it. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

00:55:07:18 - 00:55:16:07

Unknown

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

00:55:16:09 - 00:55:34:01

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.