

Welcome to *Defragmenting*, a podcast of Cairn University, promoting biblical integrity and thoughtful Christianity.

As the hymns writer noted, Our hearts have a proneness to wander from the Lord we love. On account of this inclination, God, through the writer of the Book of Hebrews, calls us to pay much closer attention to the gospel lest we drift away from it. In his book, *Lest We Drift*, Jared C. Wilson explains the subtle yet powerful ways that even those who claim to be gospel-centered can stray away from the purity of the gospel of grace and the counterfeits that we drift towards in its place. He joined Dr. Keith Plummer to talk about this and more. Let's join their conversation now.

I am very pleased to have as my conversation partner today, Jared C. Wilson. Jared serves as assistant professor of Pastoral Ministry, author in residence, and general editor for the church at Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also the primary preaching pastor and the director of the Pastoral Training Center at Liberty Baptist Church in Liberty, Missouri. He is the author of several books, including the one I asked him to talk with me about today, *Lest We Drift: Five Departure Dangerous from the One True Gospel*, published by Zondervan Reflective, a book that Paul Tripp, who wrote the foreword, calls "a must read for those in ministry, not just once, but once a year." Jared, it is a pleasure to welcome you to *Defragmenting*. Thanks so much for accepting the invitation.

Well, thanks for extending an invitation, Keith. It's good to be with you, brother.

Give us an idea of big picture, main idea, what it is that you were seeking to address in this book.

Well, the impetus for the book began as a postmortem, although I don't know if I thought of it that way necessarily for the gospel-centered movement or the Young Restless Reformed, whatever you want to call that thing we all have names for, probably. Really asking what happened. Your podcast is called *Defragmenting*. Well, there was a fragmenting of what was once a, maybe a loose coalition. It's not a denomination or anything like that. But I was trying to examine where everybody went, why everybody went, where they went, and what happened. From there began to just follow the threads, explore the new pressure points that I think have led to these fractures, not necessarily on the gospel-centered movement, because if you write a book about a particular slice in time, especially this gospel recovery thing or the new reformed thing, it really was about 20 years, 25 years, that little slice of evangelicalism subculture. If I wrote a book that was just about that, then the book becomes dated. And so I thought, let me use that as a way of just examining some current and ongoing threats to not a gospel, to a movement per se, but to just our evangelicals' grasp of the gospel and gospel centrality, because the book really helped me in some ways come to terms with, okay, movements come and go.

We can profit from them. We can enjoy them. They can be formative for us. But I want to be more committed to gospel centrality, not necessarily a particular subculture wrapped up in gospel centrality. I want to love my church, I want to love the kingdom, and I want to love the gospel. Those things can feel the pressure of what this movement had felt the pressure of.

For those who might not be familiar with it or have some uncertainty, what would you say were some of the identifying characteristics of this movement, gospel-centered movement?

Yeah, well, I think historically, generationally, at least for my generation, I'm Gen X, was born in '75. I was a young man at the height of the seeker sensitive church movement, which itself is a I guess, evolution of the church growth movement of the '70s and '80s. When you get into the late '80s, into the mid '90s, late '90s, you have really just the domination of the seeker sensitive church movement, which is now the broad term for that is attractional, although there's lots of... I'd like to say there's 31 flavors of attractional. But when that was just emerging, it was just a few flavors. Members. I think for a lot of ministry-minded and just church-loving guys of my generation, the gospel-centered thing, this recovery of really reformed theology or just reformational evangelicalism in different denominations, even non-reformed denominations, in Baptist, non-denominational, et cetera. But this recovery merged with our growing skepticism about the fruit mindfulness of the seeker church and the attractional thing. I really think it was a Lord-orchestrated, inspired movement. I don't know it qualifies

as revival, but it certainly seemed to be a renewed interest in the mid 2000s and running for probably 20 years of historic Protestantism, biblical exposition in preaching.

It had big practical impacts upon the way guys who are then becoming the leaders of their churches who started out maybe college students, high school students, or just young men in ministry, but now assuming the reins of more churches and planting churches, where it was a reaction to the pragmatic, attractional movement and an embrace of what we saw as a more biblical, historically rooted thing. Of course, the figuresheads were not guys who started in 2000. They were guys who were doing ministry and preaching and teaching for decades before that. But they began to see, I think, the fruit of the seeds they had been planting, figures like RC Sproul and John MacArthur and John Piper and Tim Keller. Those four come most to mind. But not just them. There was, of course, a calvocate of scholars and preachers and teachers who became the elder statesmen. With all movements, institutions emerge from those. Coalitions form, and some endure and some do not. The big tent poles, if we had to characterize what the gospel-centered movement looked like as an edifice, you had The Gospel Coalition conference every other year, and then the Together for the Gospel conference in the intervening years, and then church planting organization conversations like Acts 29 and others that came institutionally as the scaffolding for that movement.

That's helpful. Throughout the book, you make a distinction between... I mean, you I got the impression you want to retain the legitimacy of gospel centrality while warning against or warning against gospel centrality becoming a tribal marker or simply a cliché. And you talk about some of the things that you have in mind that are essential for gospel centrality. And you speak of the gospel as needing to be center of the story, keeping the gospel central to the biblical narrative. And I really appreciated this. You said, "If we do not embrace the pursuit of Jesus as the center, climax, and culmination of the entirety of the Scriptures, we run the worst risks, in my estimation, of turning the faith into mere inspiration or intellectualism, and neither inspiration or intellectualism saves." And that's related to one of the ways of drifting that I hope we can talk about in terms of pragmatism and efficiency. But you also talk about keeping the gospel central to our view of sanctification as well as self, our identity. And I wanted to ask you, when you speak of the centrality of the gospel, particularly with respect to sanctification, our growth in practical Holiness, one of the things that you did very well, in my estimation, is You talked about the poles that we can easily drift toward with respect to either legalism or antinomianism.

That is a recurring theme there. And you also address how it is in some ways that you have seen that in the gospel-centered movement. Could you say a word about why it is so key to keep the gospel at the core of our views about sanctification and what some of the dangers are if we don't?

Yeah. Well, to keep the gospel center in how we see the process or the experience of becoming more like Christ, which is what sanctification is ultimately, is to become Christlike, to be holy as he is holy. First of all, the reason we would do that is because that's the biblical portrait of sanctification, that we are working out what has been worked into us, that the Holy spirit has worked into us to bear fruit according to God's good pleasure. So if that were the only reason. But I think the reason we struggle with that is because we are such... The premise of the book is that we tend to drift. We take our eyes off of where we're going and the center of our faith, we tend to drift one way or another. To have our eyes fixed on Christ is to not to contribute to our sanctification, but to cooperate with it, to not quench the spirit is to, 2 Corinthians 3, to behold the glory of Christ with an unveiled face is to be transformed into his likeness from one degree of glory into another, into the same likeness of Christ. And this comes by the Holy spirit, Paul says.

That's in verse 18 of 2 Corinthians 3. If we take our eyes off Christ, we, in some ways, fail to cooperate. Now, the beauty of sanctification, and especially the gospel being at the center of sanctification, is that the Lord will fulfill this promise that he's made to us. He is faithful to complete the work that he began in us. But working out what he has worked in, we want to walk in step, as Paul says, with the spirit and not according to the flesh. I think what's interesting is the way people spiritualize the drift on either side. Depending on what flavor of evangelicalism or gospel-centered, quote, unquote gospel-centered, you would tend to drift into either an antinomianism light or a legalism light. Neither would be... Sinclair Ferguson is probably the most helpful or at least the most

prominent voice I know that is helpful on recovering historically a record about this and the Meryl controversy in Scotland and bringing it into the contemporary to show these sorts of... That antinomianism and legalism are not just formal heresies. They can be climates. They can be temperaments. Where we would see, for instance, the the antinomian temperament or climate would be in the guy who, in the spirit of it or in the in the name of being gospel-centered, has a real allergy to talking about the law and and thinks every time you come to a commandment or an imperative, even in the New Testament, that you somehow have to have to wave that away or idea of the Jedi mind trick. It's like, this is not the law you're looking for. This is not the imperatives you're looking for.

I introduced the word, but I'm thinking now, maybe for the sake of those who might not be familiar with it, what are we talking about when we say antinomianism? I think people are probably familiar with legalism, but let's just pause and say, what do we have in mind when we talk about antinomianism?

Yeah, so antinomianism, There's, of course, different degrees of that as well. But broadly speaking, it's against the law or anti the law. The idea, formally, is that the imperatives or Commandments, not just of the Old Testament, but including the New Testament, that we are not under obligation to those things. But it's more the temperament or climate where you may hear, for instance, and I think preaching is usually the biggest tell for these things, and I'll give an example on the legalist temperament side also. But when you have someone who's preaching a passage of scripture and it has imperatives in it, and they either don't preach those as points of application or they don't put those in the context of the finished work of Christ, or they just feel this internal tension about somehow pressing those imperatives towards the ownership of the hearer. There's maybe this almost like residual embarrassment. They don't know what to do with those. They feel like to highlight those may be not gospel-centered. I try to make the point in the book that to be gospel-centered is not to be gospel only. It's to be gospel-centered. To be gospel-centered doesn't mean we need to avoid the law or somehow have this allergic reaction to it.

It's to have it in the right order. I think something that we have inherited from the Lutheran tradition is this law, gospel gospel distinction, that the Lord has two words for us, law and gospel. They're both important words, but we need to make sure that biblically we're holding them, not intention per se, but that we have them according to their capacities, according to their design, that we don't expect from the law what the law is not designed to do, and that we fully expect from the gospel what the gospel is designed to do. So yeah, I think when you have a guy who's preaching, he doesn't know what to do with imperatives or Commandments, or he just glosses over them, or he uses them as a... The only rhetorical move he has is, this is here to tell you that you can't do it, or something like that. That's a giveaway of a drift.

So obedience is presented as though it is somehow in conflict with grace.

Right. And not the fruit of it.

You quoted Augustine, who said, Grace is given that the law might be fulfilled.

Exactly.

Yeah.

On the legal temperament, which may, I think, in some ways be more prominent, at least in the tribes that I run in, what you have is a yes, but attitude towards the gospel. So it's not gospel-centered. It's gospel prefatory. But the real passion, the real meat is for the imperatives and for the Commandments. And so you can see that in preaching where someone's passion tops out not on the glory of the finished work of Christ, but in the, I would say, lesser glory of our obedience, not the greater glory of Christ's obedience, but the lesser glory of our obedience. That's really where they are most energetic, most passionate. If you looked at their sermon, manuscript or transcript, you would see that most of the ink is organized around our obedience or the points of application. And That in

itself can be a telltale sign as well. And I really recommend if someone's interested in exploring the theological grid for this and the biblical array of teaching and instruction on this, Sinclair Ferguson's book, *The Whole Christ*, I just think is really excellent in this regard.

Well, you say in the beginning of the book that while we might be familiar with the concept of drift as it relates out there, we are often less aware of our own susceptibility to it. And you talk about how it is that there are certain things that contribute to drift, three temptations that you identify, and those you identify as the temptation of efficiency, the temptation of security, and the temptation of power. And you say that "We are most susceptible to drift when even though we might say, I do believe in the centrality of the gospel, there is some deficiency in our belief that it is sufficient." Let's just take any one of those three. We won't be able to speak to all of them, but you do a good job in describing both of them. And you say, "The devil is perfectly fine with us holding gospel centrality as an idea." But take any one of those, efficiency, security, power, and tell us how succumbing to that temptation opens us up to drift.

Well, in some ways, the temptation to efficiency is really about recognizing that very often the Spirit's timing is not our timing, particularly, I'm thinking not just in the individual Christian life, although certainly we can have frustration with the time it takes to develop the right spiritual instincts and impulses and spiritual muscles, so to speak. But also just at the church level, anyone who's in ministry leadership has gone through seasons. Maybe their entire. Maybe it's one running continuous complaint that people are not growing or changing the way we think that they ought to. I'm preaching hard, I'm ministering hard, and I think it doesn't take anyone in ministry or just in the Christian life long enough, if you got your eyes open, to see how inefficient discipleship actually is. I mean, who among us hasn't at some point said, I really thought I'd be more by now. I've been a Christian a long time, Keith. There's times I'm like, Why am I still struggling with that? Certainly, I think if we have the right eyes, we can see, especially if you've put miles and miles into following Jesus. If we've got the eyes to see, there are things.

You can say, Man, thank the Lord, I don't struggle with that anymore, or None of us is where we ought to be, but praise God, none of us is where we were. At the same time, there are frustrations that that come about where we begin to distrust the Spirit's work normatively through just the ordinary means of grace, which, spiritually speaking, really aren't ordinary. But if we're just looking at word and ordinance, and that's how the spirit is feeding his church and he's using all kinds of other means as well, just the encouragement of the body and the way that we sharpen each other and encourage each other. But sometimes that's not enough, and we just think we need to shore this up. The guy, for instance, just to go back the previous exchange, the guy who's tempted to drift more into soapboxing for the law and spending more of his energy there than on the glory of Christ is, even if not explicitly, he's distrusting the glory of Christ to change people in a way, or at least in as quick a way or as evident a way as my really bringing to bear the imperatives and the legal demands of the law.

And so we just have this need for quickness, this need for things that are neat in the West, especially so. Efficiency is just part of our culture, drive through, fast food, self-serve culture. And then we create these structures that prize efficiency as well as more of the business world or mindset and the self-help mindset bleeds into our thinking on these things. It just created a perfect storm for us to become frustrated with the slow growth of spiritual renewal, which a good grasp or even just a cursory grasp of church history can show us, normatively, the spirit works in these gradual, one degree into another, right? Growth. Then there may be a moment of a revival or a big explosion of something that the Holy Spirit does, and it has residual effects for, hopefully, a decade, two decades, what have you. But then comparative to church history, the normal process is the ordinary means of grace, people becoming more Christ-like by I agree, and churches growing that way as well. I think we prize what Zack Eswine calls big things quickly, and that frustrates us. Yes.

We're particularly primed for it because of the accelerated pace of life at which we live and the expectation for immediacy and speed and efficiency that we just come to take for granted and think, Well, why shouldn't that be the same in the church?

Well, yes, that, I think, flows into the pragmatism conversation as well. It's like, Well, we can see We

see the principles, we see the formula. And if we want to see that, we just need to do these things, and we can embrace the soft legalism of pragmatism as well.

Yeah. This is also related to something that you talk about with respect to one of the ways that we can drift, and that is into superficiality, because it seems as be that there is a connection between the demand for efficiency and speed and novelty and the shallowness. What I would like to do is I'd like to take a break here. We're going to hear a few messages, then we'll come back. Then on the other side, what I like to do is talk about some of the five areas of drift that you warn us against.

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I am back with Jared C. Wilson. We are talking about his book, *Lest We Drift: Five Departure Danger from the One True Gospel*, published by Zondervan Reflective. You, in the book, are addressing our tendency, our proneness to just move away from the centrality, the supremacy of the gospel. And you have identified five ways in which we can do that. And one of the ways that you say that we can drift has to do with a drift into victimhood. You have a chapter called Less Than Conquerors: A Drift into Victimhood. And what I really was intrigued by in this chapter was you showed how it is that this takes various forms in different segments, both more progressive and more conservative. But say something about that, if you will. What do you have in mind when you speak about drifting into victimization, victimhood?

Yeah, well, it's really about theologically where we frame our sense of security or our identity, which in some ways has overlapped with therapeutic categories as well. But Where we get our sense of self, what Ray Orton calls our felt okayness. And then how we position that for payoff or in the world, how do we position ourselves and have a voice? And what I have found interesting, and in some ways, my book came out earlier this year, which meant I was writing it the year previous. As recent as it is, it's a tad outdated in that a lot of conversation has shifted in in the ex gospel-centered or the fragments of gospel centrality around what some have termed the woke right. I don't use that term in my book because nobody was really using it that I was aware of. But the concept is there. What's really fascinating, and I think in some ways, I don't know, confusing, is that for the longest time, and continuing, this hasn't stopped, but among leftists, you have this reframing of identity as victims. They see themselves as a victim, whether of just personal afflictions, therapeutic needs, or of oppression.

That's where what is called the wokeness or critical theory, all of that is predicated on this binary of oppressed and oppressor. And so everything has to fit into, crammed into this thing. And if you have privilege, then you're in the oppressor class. And if you don't have privilege, you're in the oppressed class. And you can't really get out of that unless we bald-facedly reverse the order. And what has happened with the woke left is this attempt at revolution to turn it around and you have a new fundamentalism, anti-free speech, all sorts of things, in order to turn the oppressor-oppressed identities in reverse. But all of that is a failure to understand that while the Bible affirms the reality of victimization, it does not give us the grounds to accept as our identity as victims. I'm thinking in particular of, I mean, no one was more victimized than Paul, I mean, other than Christ himself, but Paul as ultimately a martyr, but so much suffering. And yet he says in Romans 8, we are more than conquerors. Jesus through Christ who loved us. So he refuses to accept this victim label and use that as how he's going to make sense of the world or how he's going to relate to others.

And so what we've seen, I think, in the last 10 years or so, and more recently, probably in the last five, six years, it's really come to a head, is the adoption, the embrace of the leftist binary into right wing, even Christian certainly in the political sphere, you see this, right? There's no one more oppressed than straight white men and that thing. Even when there are threads of truth in these things, just as there might be on the historic record of racism in our country, even when there's threads of truth in

these things, they become all-encompassing where we see ourselves as an oppressed class and we identify ourselves as victims. The Bible just doesn't allow us to do that. It can validate our victimization or it can validate that we have been harmed in some way. But it forbids us from embracing this identity as if Christ did not conquer death and hell for us, as if we do not have eternal life in us. And in Christ, the persecuted church is victorious in the Spirit. And so it doesn't forbid us for working in our against real oppression and against real victimization. It doesn't mean that we just say about abuse and things, that doesn't matter, that we're so heavenly minded, we're no earthly good, that thing.

But it just forbids us from front facing our message as this victim or oppressor, oppressed paradigm, which is really the language of liberation theology and all kinds of heresies that, that, oddly enough, are finding that vocabulary is creeping its way into voices that would identify with historic reformed Protestantism.

It seems that that is closely related to the temptation of power that you spoke to because there is a competing with one another to see who can be more greatly the victim so as to exert power over the one who is victimized.

Yes, certainly. It's a misreading of where our security comes from, where our spiritual power comes from. And again, it's not to say that there aren't earthly structures that we need to be justice to bear. There's plenty of biblical testimony about that, but it's about what we center as our message. When we center this victimization message, it's clear that our ultimate goal is not the Lordship of Christ or the glory of Christ. It's clear that our goal is some comfort, some security, earthly security, and power.

You're right, the cross does not secure your body from victimization, but it does secure your identity from victimhood.

Paul would not have said things like, he desires and encourages that we would share in the sufferings of Christ. I'm preaching through Acts at our church, and we We've been in going on a little over a year now. One of the things that becomes clear, I think, when you take it in that dosage is in the beginning, you have all these explosive... I mean, the Holy Spirit from Pentecost on, these shadows are falling over people and they get healed and all these sorts of things. Then you begin to see not that the spirit is not involved anymore, but that the normative witness of the church's expansion and the gospel's success is not these flashes of what we call miraculous things or at least signs, I guess I should say, signs and wonders. But the normative witness becomes suffering. You still have these moments of miracles all the way to the end. But the normative pattern becomes what I think is, I think, what we should see as more normative is that our witness to the world is not from our place of power. Our witness to the world is from our place of security in Christ, no No matter what.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. I think some Christians, some evangelicals, sometimes struggle with that. They cannot see how Christ might be glorified if we were not in positions of power, comfort, super mega influence, et cetera.

You identify dryness as another potential precipitator of drift. And you say this, I suspect the many preachers struggle to preach Christ in passionate ways is because they struggle to feel a passion for Christ themselves. The problem is not one of hermeneutic, but one of heart. And in that chapter, you talk about how it is that we can resort to even ministry activity to, in some ways, anesthetize ourselves from sin and dryness and so forth. Could you speak to that? Because I don't know when people think about drift, the dryness This is something that they would necessarily think of first. So what do you have in mind there?

Well, it's interesting that you would say that, too, and I think you're right. But in some ways, I think this is the answer to the question, what happened to the gospel-centered movement. I mean, apart from just, again, the historical pattern is just that movements come and go, that nothing lasts that long. We have enduring influence, but in terms of what it was at the peak of its cultural impact and those things move through cycles and have expiration dates on them. That's just how time and history works. If I had to say, I don't think it's monocausal, and that's part of the point of the book, is the Balkanization of

the young rest was performed is really the result of multiple pressure points that created the fracture. But if I had to say, what stands out and what is a great cause? In some It really ties a lot of them together. I think, going back to the beginning of our conversation, when I was saying, as a young guy coming out of the seeker church deal, I think there were a lot of people like me who came into the gospel-centered movement out of the attractional pragmatic or just more shallow or something or less vibrant stuff also.

They came into it because it was a movement. It was dovetailing right at the right time for the rise of social media the social Internet. These institutions were being built up. It had publishing houses behind it, et cetera. They knew they didn't want to do that, the attractional thing. This had depth to it. It had meat in it, and it was speaking a language that promised, this is what the Lord is doing. I think we had a lot of guys jumping in, mainly as a reaction. This is not what I came out of. But they weren't really one to... They didn't have, I've used the phrase previously, gospel wakefulness. They had not had an experience of the gospel itself. I don't mean that they're not Christians. It's just when you're jumping into a spiritual renewal movement without spiritual renewal that's only going to last so long. And once you begin to find it, there's another movement begins. You then jump over to that because that's where the Lord's working, obviously. And so you jump around. And I think we had a whole lot of folks who they were, one, to gospel centrality as an idea, but not to gospel centrality.

And I think we saw that in the way that they carry out ministry. We see that in the way that they speak today, where they almost belittle and mock people who are still speaking the language of gospel centrality as being outdated, not with the times. That's not where things are going. I'm like, You know what? I want to go where the spirit's going, even if nobody else is going that way. Even if it's not popular, even if it doesn't sell books, whatever it is, that's by God's grace, that's what I want to do. Certainly, I see it in my own ministry, so not even just to speak of the public platform stuff, but just in pastoral ministry, the times when I am struggling to preach Christ or that impulse isn't there. I get to the end of sermon prep and I'm like, Oh, yeah, I got to connect this Jesus somehow. That's not just a failure of a hermeneutic or homiletics. That's a failure devotionally. That's me because when I am intimately communing with Christ, the impulse is, of course, I would preach Christ. What else would I do? You almost have to make guys who have intimate communion with Christ, you have to make them do the nuts and bolts exposition to preach the text as it lies as well instead of the other way around.

But sometimes I think we have a theological robustness, but a spiritual dryness there.

When someone finds themselves there, what would you advise them to do?

The Lord is so kind. Keith, the Lord is so kind. There's not a... I mean, what do you do? You confess it to God. You return to him. And that's just the beauty of that we can come back to him and he's not like, You know what? You've done this 100 times. This is 100 times this week, or whatever. He's not shaking his head or tisking at us. He is so kind. If we would just say to him, Lord, I'm struggling to come to you even now because I feel like you are too good for me to approach you because I take you so much for granted, and I don't talk to you the way that I ought to or as often as I ought to. He just embraces us. What do you do? You just return to the Lord. His grace is more available to you than you are to him. There will be no hesitation. In that embrace. So we can get it back. We can get it back.

One of my favorite lines from C. S. Lewis is in *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*. And he says, "We must bring to him what is in us, not what ought to be in us." And just that honesty, like you're saying, coming to God, not with the thoughts of, Okay, well, I should be saying this, and I can't go to him because I can't really say that, but just saying, This is where I am. Please help me. You were very candid in your chapter dealing with this. And you said, I've come to believe that most followers of Jesus will not be substantially deeper in their relationship with him until they've actually drifted into dryness to the point of catastrophe. And then you say, This was certainly true for me. Now, someone might read that in fear, do I have to reach the point of catastrophe? But could you tell us a little bit more about that? Do you think that that is really what is required for most of us to reach that intimacy with Jesus?

Well, it's not. Yeah, I wouldn't say it's required, but I do think what has to happen more often. Everyone's experience of catastrophe may be different. We may bottom out in different places. When I'm discipling young men, particularly guys who are married or in their early years of marriage, and they're still struggling with pornography, I give them a picture of what I blew up my life. I blew up my marriage with pornography as a young man. And that's what it took for me to bottom out and have a desperation for Christ that I didn't have before. It took that. And what I say to them is, don't let it take that for you. Let your bottoming out be me saying to you, Brother, you need to rid this stuff out of your life, or you're going to go off a cliff. That's where this is going. So let this be the bottoming out. There's a pastor who's calling you on this, who's telling you that you're heading off a cliff. Don't wait until you're off the cliff. But for some of us, 1 Thessalonians 1, For you became imitators of us and of the Lord because you received the word in the midst of much affliction and with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

I think that intersection receiving the word in the midst of much affliction, there's something about that as a perfect storm for this gospel wakefulness embrace. That's what it took for me. I'm feared that that's what it takes for a lot of people is they have to... In the recovery community, they talk about hitting bottom, right? I think that's a worldly way of getting at a spiritual truth. I think there's a spiritual truth that's there that they are recognizing that people don't change until the pain of change is in some way less than the pain of staying the same. So as long as we can keep medicating and managing what's going on, that's what we'll do. And so, yeah, I really do think that for most of us, not for all of us, but for most of us, and everyone's bottoming out is different. I'm not saying someone has to lose their marriage and everything else, but they just come to the end of themselves. And it could just be seeing the depths of sin in their own heart. It doesn't have to be that they've lost things in their life and family or what have you, but they just have a despair.

It just so happens that for some of us, we don't feel that despair until we begin to see all these crutches removed. And That's what happened for me. It was the day that my wife came and said, I don't know who you are. I don't want to be married to you. You're not the person I thought you were. She was the last idol that I'd had in my life. All the things that I had aspired to do were not panning out. I didn't know at the time, but it was the Lord who was in his kindness protecting other people from me. I had been to ministry before that, and at the time I was out and couldn't figure out why. But he was protecting I wasn't qualified, and I didn't really even have that language, to be honest with you. I was still in the seeker church mindset stuff. That was the last... My wife saying she didn't want to be married to me anymore. I went into a deep depression, and we just lived like roommates in the house. I lived in the guest bedroom. Man, I just was crying out to the Lord in ways that I had never...

I believe I was a Christian then. I have some friends who will say to me, I think you got saved. I was like, Well, in a way, I did. I don't know. I think I was regenerate, but maybe I wasn't. I think I was. But I just cried out to the Lord in ways when he's your only hope, he becomes your only hope. When the Lord in his kindness began to restore, stitch things back together, including my marriage, but also into the future, opening doors for ministry and things like that, the restoration, I'm not a perfect guy at all, and I still have these tendencies to drift. But what happened to me in that guest bedroom is still such a mark on me that when I came into gospel centrality, yes, I loved it as an idea. It made sense of things. I had already been a Calvinist for a while. Even when I was in the secret church environment, I was a Calvinist, which is a weird thing. But I had some of the theological vocabulary, but now I had this spiritual vibrancy that I thought, this is what I'm all about. And today, if somebody's like, why are you still doing the same dumb thing that no one else is doing anymore?

And the truth is, there are lots of people doing it. I'm just like, man, it's not because in 2007, I went to my first Gospel Coalition conference. It's because in the early, in 2003, my life fell apart and the Lord came near. And when I wanted to kill myself, like legit suicidal ideation. When I wanted to just off myself and didn't have anyone, I had Christ, and that changes a guy. Sometimes I forget and drift and lapse, but That's what I'm still... His salvation. I mean, the good news is so good. Why would I want to center on anything else?

To whom else will we go?

Only he has the words of life. Amen.

Yeah. Well, when people hear worldliness, the term worldliness, I think our tendency is to think of gross, overt immorality and sensuality. But you contend in your chapter about drifting into pragmatism, that there is more than one worldliness. What is the relationship between pragmatism and worldliness? We touched somewhat on this before, but I'd like to maybe dig a little bit deeper. How is the drifting into pragmatism really a form of worldliness?

Yeah, well, I have to take a step back to distinguish or contrast worldliness from walking with the Spirit, because the way that the New Testament characterizes these things is you can walk in the way of the world, or you can walk with the spirit, you can walk according to the flesh, or you can walk in the Spirit. And so worldliness is not just, Oh, I enjoy things, drinking and going to movies and whatever else. It is a false spirit. It is an acclamation to the flesh in us. And so when you put that contrast in place and then think of pragmatism as really a form of legalism, what pragmatism is, and I distinguish that from practicality, because sometimes folks will, I think they use the word pragmatic when they just mean practical. And the Bible is full of practical things. The Bible is full of practical exhortations and Commandments unto Obedience and all sorts of things that we work out that we do.

Okay. What would you say is the distinction between the two?

So pragmatism is when you take those things and turn them into a formula for results. If you do these things, you will get this result. And certainly in the secular world, the pragmatism isn't about doing spiritual things for some spiritual benefit, its best practices or what have you. But when we bring that into the spiritual world, it becomes a form of prosperity gospel. If I just push the right buttons, then I will get this result. In church life, in particular, this has been something that I ate, slept, and breathed for a long time, and then I've had to, for lack of a better word, deconstruct in my own church ministry, is there are things we can be pragmatic about. Where's the best place to put the signs How do I get to the bathroom in a church building? Pragmatism would say, success is you put the sign at eye level and what have you. When we start getting into now people's spiritual lives and we start saying things like, If you do these four steps, you will You'll have more success as a parent. Or if you do these three things, you'll enjoy victory over X, Y, or Z.

That's not the biblical way. That is a worldliness. It's applying the mechanism of the flesh or the the formula of the flesh to the working of the Spirit. The truth is the Spirit does as he pleases. It's like the wind. You feel the effects of the wind, but you do not know where he's come from or where he is going. You cannot control the Holy Spirit. And so when we start preaching in ways that forefront imperatives as keys to success, when we begin to bring back out, this is really interesting seen every cycle or so, the church growth language gets recycled despite the fact that it has never really resulted in a depth of discipleship or biblical literacy or any. We keep bringing out. This is how you get a big church, if you just do these things. I think it shows us what we really want. And that is in the category of worldliness versus Spirit-drivenness.

Related to this point about pragmatism, You say, "One giant tell of a believer's personal biases and cultural anxieties is to look at which issues they think can be solved by just preaching the gospel, in quotes, and which they think will not be solved by such a remedy." You talked a bit earlier about some of the differences in terms of issues of social justice and so forth. But what is the relationship of pragmatism to what one thinks is a matter of just preaching the gospel and what isn't?

That's a good question, Keith. Let me see if I can wrap my head around it. How is pragmatism related to what we apply just preach the gospel to or don't?

Yeah, because in that chapter, you say, Those of us who promote gospel centrality need to say clearly that we are not gospel only us. We are gospel centris. And you talked about that before. But in that chapter, were making this distinction that some people will level a charge against other Christians who are bringing out the implications of the gospel and say, Well, what we need to do is just preach the gospel. But they selectively apply that because there are other areas where they are not satisfied with just preaching the gospel. They want to take other measures. So is there a relationship there with

pragmatic I guess pragmatism could be the word for it.

It's certainly a self-protection. It reveals where our own, as you said, our sense of anxiety or security is. Just to illustratively, I think this is the thread that I pulled on there, but I just found it interesting when we started having or tried having the racism conversation six years ago, seven years, whenever that was. Covid just certainly disrupts everything. It's a alert, everything. But anyway, in the last 10 years, when I think we began having conversation about, or we've had umpteen versions of this conversation in American history. But our evangelical tribe or my evangelical tribe started having this conversation about America and historic racism and the impact of that today, whether it's still an impact today or what have you, and what the extent of that impact is, is there such a systemic injustice, et cetera. I found it interesting and sympathized with men like the leftists. They were taking over that conversation. We should be on guard against leftist categories, as I was sharing earlier about the press to presser paradigm, critical theory, liberation theology is always hanging out on the margins of evangelicalism there in the left wing and trying to have forced its way back in.

It has a renewed the social gospel, all of that. So we do need to be on guard against that. But it just seemed like there were others that were like, We cannot have this conversation. And even just to bring up racism or to bring up race is, You're woke. And they just really shut everybody down. And what they would say is, It's not a skin problem, it's a sin problem. It's just all this rhetoric like, Well, yeah, of course. That's what we're trying to have this conversation. What does the gospel say about these things? And from so many of the voices, I would say, the solution is just preach the gospel. The gospel is the solution to this problem. And then five years later, when you have other perceived problems, which have truth as well to them, suddenly just preach the gospel is not the solution anymore. It's those gospel-centered guys. They're so hung up on the gospel. They haven't followed the implications of it, and they fail to embrace the bearing of the law upon these issues and the rise of Christian nationalism and all these things that move beyond because just preach the gospel is not enough.

I'm thinking, wait a minute. I just saw the, well, if I could use the word hypocrisy in saying that just preach the gospel applies to some sin issues, but not to others, to some cultural problems, but not to others. They're like, Well, how do we know which ones? Well, if you're looking under the surface, the way you know which ones are the ones that affect other people versus the ones that affect me. If it's a sin that indicts me, hey, just preach the gospel, man. If it's a sin that indicts somebody else, we got to bring all the law to bear and really tease out. I just think that's so exposing. The answer is not gospel onlyism or the new legalism. The answer is the gospel at the center and the implications of the gospel embraced and followed.

You wrote, "The gospel is indeed not its implications, and yet, and yet, to preach an implication-free gospel is in essence to strip Christ's Lordship from his salvation." Amen. Just preach the gospel is not the full counsel of God's word.

Amen. Thank you for reading that. There are people who think I don't believe that, but sometimes I fall into a nice big bin bag chair, Martin Lloyd Jones has claimed that if you're never accused of antinomianism, you may not be preaching the gospel correctly. So sometimes I find some comfort there.

Well, I wondered what has been the reception to the book? Obviously, there's been a lot of positive reception, and I think appropriately so. But as I was reading, I was like, Man, he's saying some things here that I know he'll probably get some pushback from. Have you experienced that?

Well, I don't think the guys who would push back are reading it, or at least they're not talking about it, which that just tends to... We're all so tribal, and that's just how it goes. The book has been really well received, came out earlier in the year. According to the publisher, according to Zonovan, it's done really well. We want to make a renewed push into the end of this year, of course.

In closing, you said something about you describe what you are after at your own church where you serve, and I really appreciated this. You said, What we are aiming for in our worship gatherings and all

the other myriad gatherings of the local church, from Sunday school to small groups, to all the little informal fellowships scattered throughout, is a conscious re-evangelization of the people of God. And it was that phrase, re-evangelization of the people of God, which you make clear you're not saying people need to get saved again. But I really like that. Say something about what you have in mind with the necessity of God's people being re-evangelized.

Yeah. Well, the premises of gospel centrality, which I think help us understand what it actually is, I think one of the problems with people abandoning the movement is they could never really articulate what it meant. I'll ask my students, I'll ask my ministry residents, what would you say if someone says, what does it mean to be gospel-centered? I give them three three tenets to give the substance. In the beginning of our conversation, we talked about Jesus as the center of the Bible, that the whole Bible is about Jesus. So that's the first premise. The second premise is sanctification. We talked about that as well. It's basically that people change by grace, not by law. People change by grace, not by law. And then the third premise is that my ultimate validation is found not in my performance, but in Christ's performance on my behalf. That second piece, and to a large extent, that third piece is how we evaluate how our church is doing. Are people growing in Christ-likeness? Are they seeing themselves as beloved by God, as their validation is not in how they perform for God, but in his approval of them in Christ?

Certainly, the first piece, the whole Bible is about Jesus, impacts how we deliver our preaching and teaching and even counsel, et cetera. But those second two are the lens through which we see how is the church doing? My job on Sundays, and then as I have opportunities to disciple and counsel and encourage during the week, but on Sundays, in particular, as the primary preacher, and as I'm looking at the congregation, I'm thinking, what do these people need to grow in Christ, to to change. In Christianity, if you're in the ministry, you're in the business of helping people change and grow. Well, how is it that they change? People change by grace, not by law. I want to bring that same gospel back into the forefront the next Sunday and then the next Sunday, the next Sunday, because I am wanting to trust by God's grace that it's by beholding the glory of Christ that people are transformed. That's how people change, is by seeing the glory of Jesus. So that's what we want to do. And certainly the preaching of the word and the ordinances that we orient around, those things are bringing to bear the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus.

We want to make sure that that's what our gatherings are oriented around. That's what we want to make sure all of our even informal times together as brothers and sisters are oriented around as well.

Did you ever read Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*?

I read *Holiness by Grace*, but I don't think I read *Disciplines*. No.

What you're saying reminds me very much of something that he says in that book. And he says that over the years, he has asked Christians, What is the one word that best describes what you most needed to hear from the point of your birth to your conversion? And he says, They rightly say gospel. And then he would ask, What is one word that best describes what you most needed to hear from the point of your conversion to the point of your death? And he says, People say things like discipleship, obedience, service, and so forth. And he contends, It's gospel.

Amen.

Yeah, because the gospel is the means by which we proceed and progress in the Christian life. And you have clearly made that point quite well in the book, and I'm grateful for it. I have benefited from it my times through, and I would commend it to listeners, not only those who are in pastoral ministry, though it would certainly be of benefit to them, but just any Christian, because as you bring out, proneness, the inclination to drift, as the hymns writer said, to wander, is there in all of our hearts. And so this is a valuable guide. The book, again, is *Lest We Drift: Five Departure Dangerous from the One True Gospel* by Jared C. Wilson, published by Zondervan Reflective. Jared, thanks again for the book and for the time to talk about. It's been a pleasure.

Thank you for some great questions. I really enjoyed it, Keith. Thank you, brother.

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