

How to be a good citizen of heaven and America:

A conversation with Jim Denison

TRANSCRIPT



NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

Mark Turman 00:03

Welcome back to the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman host for today's conversation and also executive director of Denison Forum. Our goal at the Denison Forum is to help explain today's culture and society, to Christians and others, so that they might have a redeeming influence in the culture and to the society to try to help us thrive and flourish in all the good ways that God wants us to that Jesus described when he said that he came to give us life and to give it to the full or abundantly to give us the real invest life based on God's plan God's design. And we hope today's conversation helps you and us to do that.

Mark Turman 00:45

We're going to be sitting down with Dr. Jim Denison, the founder, co founder and cultural theologian of Denison Forum, we're excited to have a conversation with him about the intersection of faith and politics as we step into a new season of presidential election politics. That's very much in the news and very much on our minds. And we'll all have the opportunity to vote in about 12 to 14 months. And so we thought we would give some ideas around how we

can approach that in the most biblical and helpful ways. Thanks for joining us for the conversation. Dr. Jim, welcome back to the podcast. So we're glad to have you with us today.

Jim Denison 01:25

Glad to be with you today. Dr. Mark. It's always a privilege to have the conversation.

Mark Turman 01:29

Well, we are you excited to have a conversation. I'm not going to tell everybody what the conversation is yet they'll know by the title that we give this but before we get into that, just want to talk to you a little bit about what's new at Denison Forum. This format of podcast gives us a little bit more time to talk about various topics a little bit more in depth. But before we get to today's topic, I want to talk a little bit about what's going on at Denison Forum.

Mark Turman 01:55

One of the things that you and I and our teams have been talking about is helping people to realize that Denison Forum is the oldest and the original part of what is now a larger reality and a larger ministry called Denison Ministries. And we're actually talking about it under a banner that we've created called four brands, one mission, kind of unpack that for us what what in the world is Denison Ministries? For those who may not know and what does it mean to have four brands or actually four ministries that are pursuing a common mission?

Jim Denison 02:33

Yeah, thank you, we first of all want to be as confusing as possible. So that's why we wouldn't have one thing called Denison Forum and something else called Denison Ministries and as egotistical as possible mark or I can put my name on everything that we possibly can. And so I think rather than First15 We're going to call it Denison 15 next. But I think what probably not have Christian Parenting will have Denison Parenting. I think that just makes sense.

Mark Turman 02:53

So we're not about clarity, we're about confusion. And we're not about humility. We're about arrogance. Okay, so thanks for every level. Thanks for coming.

Jim Denison 03:01

Yeah, well, what do you may as well be transparent about this, you know, so I'm proud of my humility. And so actually, it is kind of odd how all of this has come about.

Jim Denison 03:10

So we started back in 2009, as you said, with a thing called Denison Forum, didn't call it that did not want to call that actually hit some donors urging me to name this for myself. And I resisted that our initial name was actually called the Center for Informed Faith. That didn't make a lot of sense to a lot of people. But at that point in time, we were connected to other organizations that had centers of various kinds. And so that's what we called ourselves for the first couple of years of this ministry, because I so much didn't want to name this for myself, I wanted this to be something much bigger than than the me much broader than me.

Jim Denison 03:40

It's kind of like when Bill Bright was starting Campus Crusade for Christ that became Cru made the decision early on, this isn't just about him at UCLA, this is a much larger movement you hoped and so we only change the name actually, parenthetically, when some councils, some public relations experts, got involved with our ministry, and they said, Look, no one's ever heard of a center for informed faith. But a lot of people had heard of me at that point in time, at least, you're in Texas. And so they urged us to move in that direction. So that's the only reason we started out being called Denison Forum. It was actually Denison Forum on Truth and Culture was actually the purpose of it. And my goal was to pretty quickly drop the Denison and you just be the Forum on Truth and Culture, if we could be was ultimately the goal. Well, we had to have a larger DBA for the IRS. And so our lawyers called us Denison Ministries, and that was just a DBA that the IRS recognized us under that was our legal name, but we never used it for anything. It was just a thing that was on paper.

Jim Denison 04:35

Well, then a couple years later, we decided we needed a devotional resource to encourage people that were reading the daily article on a spiritual level takes a certain amount of courage to stand up and do the things I asked people to do in the article. It takes a certain spiritual depth to do that. And so that's where first 15 came about, as a devotional resource for daily article readers, to encourage them spiritually to do what it was I was asking them to do culturally.

Jim Denison 05:00

My wife has been a marvelous Bible teacher for more than 30 years. And we wanted to make her content available to the world. So that's what we created foundations. As a third brand. We call it Foundations with Janet. But it'll be broader even than that, so that all of her biblical content can be available to people.

Jim Denison 05:15

And my wife also felt that we needed to be able to equip parents to help children know and love the Lord, if we're going to impact culture. So that's where Christian Parenting came about.

Jim Denison 05:24

So we had these four very separate brands, we were what you might call the house of brands, like Procter and Gamble that might have Huggies, here, and Fritos over there as a word for very different things, that we're all intended to fuel a movement of culture-changing Christians, but in very disparate ways. Well, that was how we did a growth campaign. That's how we grew to the size that we are now.

Jim Denison 05:46

And in the last year, we've come to understand that these brands aren't really understood by those that are outside those brands the way we wish they were. We always intended this to be holistic. We intended people, as I said, to read first 15 and the daily article and Christian parenting and foundations, we just haven't done a good enough job of communicating all of that.

And so that's how we've decided in recent months to begin emphasizing the idea that we have one mission, which is to build a movement of culture-changing Christians, to build a movement of Christians who will use their influence to impact culture for Christ. And these brands are together, how we see that happening.

Jim Denison 06:22

So that's why we've kind of resurrected Denison Ministries as the umbrella term for those four brands together. I know it's a bit confusing. I wish it wasn't we wouldn't have done it that way. If we'd known then what we know now, but that's why there's a Denison Ministries of which Denison Forum is just one brand, all four of them together, seeking to build this movement that we believe God is calling us desperately to seek in these days.

Mark Turman 06:46

Well, that's yeah, really helpful. And I think will be useful to our, to our followers to understand some of that history and understand what we're talking about. I guess our culture is getting more used to the term brand. Talk about how you feel about why you think we use the word brand, as opposed to something like well, we have four different ministries. What Why do you think we use that terminology?

Jim Denison 07:10

First of all, I don't like it. I really don't. I much rather say we have four different ministries, that would be my preference. Absolutely. I guess the way we've come into seeing ourselves that way, is, first of all, from a marketing point of view, the way you market a brand is pretty similar to how we market our ministries, because we're a digital ministry. So you're buying Google ads, you're using search engine optimization tools, you're doing things that our digital team understands much better than I ever will, that you do in the context of how you would market a brand like Chevrolet or Cadillac or some such as that. So a lot of the nomenclature comes out of the marketing world, and out of the way that a digital ministry markets itself, if there's any redeeming value to all of that it is that brand, doesn't connote ministry in a way that could be off putting the people that maybe aren't as familiar with the faith as we are people that might be a little distanced if they see this as a ministry, but they might be more willing to access our content if it comes to them in the guise of a brand. And so maybe it's a little more user friendly, perhaps lower barrier to entry for those that may be more secular in their own orientation. But mainly, I think it's just out of the marketing world, which is really how we grow as a digital ministry. We grow in the same way brands grow. And so we just kind of think of ourselves that way.

Mark Turman 08:26

It's really yeah, that's, that's clarifying. And, you know, I've been full time with Denison Ministries and Denison Forum for about two years now and getting used to you know, sometimes the church is accused of having its own lingo, its own language that people who have not come up in faith or not experienced a commitment to Christ at this point, they're like, they don't understand a lot of things that we talk about if they come and visit our church's ministry being one of them. And then, as you talked about, in your, in your statement a moment ago about this movement of culture-changing Christians who use their influence, to change and redeem the

culture and the Spirit of Christ. That really is what's encapsulated in that biblical word of witness. When we talk about our God, our job is not to change human hearts. So you say all the time that human words can't change human hearts, that's the work of God. But what we can do is witness to or testify to, by our words, by our, by our good works, by our attitude, we can give testimony to the presence of Jesus Christ, and to His grace and truth and work in our life. And that's really what we're talking about. We're just using somewhat different terminology to talk about using your witness or your influence in the culture in an honorable way that God could use the debt to then influence and impact the lives of individuals Am I Am I on the right track with you

Jim Denison 09:57

know exactly right. It's exactly right. It's really just finding new ways to say the same thing. You know, language changes over time, it just the way it works. And the King James, it says that Zacchaeus could not see Jesus because of the press. And now we're thinking about these media people, these mean media types that are gathered around and not allowing Zacchaeus to get to the front of the line to be able to see Jesus as he passed us. Well, in King James day, the press meant the crowd, doesn't mean that anymore means that very differently. And so I'm really glad that modern languages would say he couldn't see them for the crowd. You just have to use new words to communicate the same truth.

Jim Denison 10:32

Well, that's what we're about, and trying to find new ways to help people think about this, a very dear friend of mine, who was actually mayor of Dallas for a period of time and very insightful leader said something to me some time ago that really resonated where he said, he felt like my call is to use secular reasoning for spiritual truth. And I really think there's some truth in that, where it really that's why the daily article always starts with news always starts with something in the culture that people might be interested in knowing more about, and then tries to pivot over to biblical thinking and biblical redemptive actions.

Jim Denison 11:03

But you start where people are, it's Jesus in John 4, the woman comes for water. So he starts with water and leads her to living water is Paul in the synagogue, citing scripture, and Mars Hill citing Greek philosophers, it's this. Calvin talked about accommodation, the idea of God accommodating himself to us. Only incarnational is the idea God comes to us because we couldn't come to him, you know. So I really think that's what this is, it's finding new ways to connect with people to communicate the same truth. We're not changing the truth, we have no right to do that.

Jim Denison 11:34

I used to tell my seminary students quite often, the only word God's obligated to bless us His Word. I used to warn them as at the end of the services, sweet, I don't know if I should say this properly. But I used to see a sweet little old lady, you know, we used to say that, would come up to you at the end of the service, and say, I've never heard that before, be very afraid. We're not

here to make up new truth. We're here to communicate God's timeless truth. But we want to be doing it in ways that are effective. And that's I think what you're talking about?

Mark Turman 12:03

Yeah, well, that's, that's a great setup to the conversation, the topic that we want to pursue for the rest of our time together, which is something of a topic that you and I would approach with trepidation. So we like to talk about and we're comfortable talking about things like faith, hope and love, Paul's three key words that he loves to bring out over and over again, over and over again, faith, hope and love. But we want to talk today about the intersection of faith, hope and love with things like politics, government and power. And we're having this conversation at a time when presidential debates are just now beginning. We're about 14 months out from the next presidential election, which will be in 2024. But we're going to talk about this intersection you have written on this, our teams have written on this and continue to do so we want to say right at the outset that we are a non partisan ministry. We just had refresher training in our organization about what that means that we don't endorse candidates, we might talk about various policies that are connected to a candidate or to a party. But we don't talk about individuals as candidates. We are non partisan in that way. And we want that to be clear.

Mark Turman 13:28

We also want it to be clear and to remind ourselves what the Bible says in Philippians 3:21. It says that our citizenship, love that word. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we are eagerly awaiting a Savior from there, the Lord Christ Jesus. You see some of this coming out of the apostle Paul, who as you read the book of Acts, had some very unique intersection with the Roman authorities with the Roman government had citizenship even though he was a devout Jewish man, he had gained Roman citizenship which becomes a part of his story in a unique way. But we're heading into a another likely very strange, very contentious, political season.

Mark Turman 14:17

I've just been thinking, from the standpoint of, of context, you and I, when we met 30, some odd years ago in seminary, we would have conversations and we would be taught things about the importance of historical and grammatical context as it comes to the study of scripture that we needed to understand the context out of which a biblical writer was speaking on behalf of God. We needed to understand the words and we'll get into some of that in a little bit. But I've just been thinking about where we are as a country politically and as in a civics way over the last 25 years or so I go back home The way to my thinking of the famous Bush Gore election in 2000, that was so strange and decided by the Supreme Court, I go back to the reality of 911. And how, in recent days on the Denison Forum Podcast, we've had a lot of conversations about new Atheism, that is led by people like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Peter Singer, and how some of their thinking over the last two decades has become popular around this idea that all religion is dangerous and evil and should be eradicated. We now find ourselves in this strange world where we have a former president running again, but also facing indictments, we have a current president, whose son has a very complicated story and also facing indictment, which is bleeding over on to, but if we, if we were voting today, most pundits would say we'd be we would be reliving the 2020 election. So all of that is context for the conversation today. And

leads me to ask your cultural theologian, what are your greatest concerns? And what might be your biggest hopes? Small question?

Jim Denison 16:22

Oh, yeah, let's start with that small question. I'm so glad we're discussing such an easy, simple topic. Yeah, you're gonna have conversation. I thought we're gonna talk about the Cowboys.

Mark Turman 16:30

Today. Who's that?

Jim Denison 16:32

Who are they? you know, because it's also been, you know, it's been longer since they won a Super Bowl since even Bush Gore. I mean, that's, that's how old I am. I actually, I'm old enough to remember when the Cowboys actually went to the Super Bowl. But that's not what you wanted to talk about.

Mark Turman 16:46

You're probably gonna get a call from Jerry Jones or someone because of that comment, probably.

Jim Denison 16:51

Well, that might be even more divisive than what we'll talk about today's. Yeah, exactly. So yeah, cuz I have that same history. As you do, Mark, we're close enough to the same age.

Jim Denison 17:01

I was actually in Cuba when the 2000 election happened. It was surreal to watch the coverage on a Cuban television and a Cuban Hotel. When I went to bed, if I'm remembering right, I think Bush was president when I woke up Gore was president might have been the other way around. And then later in that day, no one was president. And as we all know, how well that you know, the hanging chads, the whole nine yards, all of them recounts in Florida, the whole all the stuff inside then the divisive pneum of all of that. And to the degree that this could be that again, that's really pretty, pretty frightening, isn't it?

Jim Denison 17:33

As we think back about how challenging all those days were, I guess, probably my greatest hope, in the course of this particular processes that we've learned enough from our history to discover the no election ends America. That even though we always say that, even though we always say this is the most important election in our history, that the future of the nation is in jeopardy here that the soul of the nation or the future, the God of the country is in question here. That's not been true historically. Even in the 1800 election between Adams and Jefferson, which was horrifically vitriolic if you go back and look at some of the language that was used that in the first contested election after our first president, we survived that we even survived the Civil War, we have survived enormously difficult, divisive days. And so I would really hope that we could learn from that and tamp down the rhetoric here a little bit. I know we may talk about this a little

bit, but tamp down the zero sum kind of sense that we have to win, which means you have to lose, which means this is a context for it, which means there can be no compromise. And there, you know, all of the stuff, all the rhetoric that's in this, hopefully we can learn from history, that it's not that as difficult as this is as weighty as this is as massive as these issues are, that are before us. We've been here before, we'll probably be here again, let's take a breath. Let's calm down, let's learn enough from our history, to not be as conflicted as maybe we are.

Jim Denison 18:58

My greatest fear is that we won't do that. My greatest fear is that with the advent of social media, or now we can be divisive on a level we couldn't in the past, on a level where we can take steps in terms of protest in terms of even political violence in ways we weren't able to in the past, just because we now have technology to inflame some of that, and to enable some of that, I'm worried that we won't learn from that. And we will step into maybe some uncharted territory, at least since the Civil War, in terms of the way that people will respond to the election and to the results of the election, whatever it might be. So I pray for that every day. You know, we're told to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and I do that but I also pray for the peace of Washington every day. And I pray that God will redeem the victory all of these days and use this to cause us to realize we need a god bigger than ourselves. And maybe this could be a catalyst to the awakening when you

Mark Turman 19:51

know what a good word. I want to chase a little bit of a rabbit that you just related to, which is the presence of technology and the influence of technology, in this particular case on political processes. Do you have a sense you seeing any indications that maybe we're coming back to a more sober view of technology and of social media? The proliferation of all kinds of news agencies? Do you have any, any indication that maybe we're coming back and saying, Okay, we have to be a little bit more cautious about everything that we see, through all of these new streams, and through all of these social media channels, that we really have to come back and start having a more realistic conversation about what we're listening to and what we're learning from.

Jim Denison 20:49

I hope so, and I think there may be some evidence of that AI, is I think, causing all of us to understand, man, we're at a place now technologically where you can deep fake videos, you can deep fake images, we have no way to know if what I'm seeing is actually what it's claimed to be. We're seeing some of that, remember the picture of Pope Francis in that white coat that he was supposed to be wearing. And there was a picture that went viral of Donald Trump being arrested, you know, some time ago, and both of which were fakes, but looks so realistic, that it would be difficult for you to understand otherwise. So I think maybe we're starting to understand now that technology has gotten so out of hand, that you really can't take at face value, everything you see everything you hear. And that extends beyond just the images, you see the videos that you might concern, but actually to the biases that are inside there. So I think people are starting now to understand that networks have biases that if it bleeds, it leads, and the way they make money is by inflaming people, the way they make money is by appealing to one

specific demographic to the exclusion of others. That's been said enough, that's been communicated enough. And there's enough fat behind all that now that hopefully, more people are starting to see that they have to be more discerning than they've been, we need to listen to voices with which we disagree. We can't just get in these echo chambers. Hopefully, we're starting to see enough of that, that perhaps we can pull back from the brink by which social media and things like it can so inflame us, that the future of our democracy on some level can be imperiled.

Mark Turman 22:15

Yeah, that's helpful. So give me a little bit of your advice, your wisdom, I'm just thinking that there's a person listening to this podcast on their way to work going down one of the busy roads of either Dallas, Houston, Oklahoma City, they've got, they've got a full calendar, they're trying to they're trying to take care of their family, they're trying to take care of their job. They're trying to hopefully be involved in their church, and maybe their child's literally game of some kind,

Jim Denison 22:49

or their grandchild's, which is very important

Mark Turman 22:51

which is even more important, I would say yes, even more important, but as as you would try to counsel under this umbrella of trying to catalyze a movement of culture changing Christians, in this particular topic of politics, government power, how would you encourage those people that are listening to this to say, Okay, here's the way you need to try to be aware and informed. But don't turn this into your hobby. You know, with all of the potential news streams with all of the places that they could go looking for information, we know that we can literally get consumed in this, we're going to talk about that as a potential idolatry for us as a temptation in a moment. But from the standpoint of media, from the standpoint of social media, from the stamp, how would you counsel a Christian to say, here's a healthy approach, so that you're reasonably aware and informed and you're making some kind of reasonable choice when you go into a voting booth? How would you counsel people to approach that?

Jim Denison 24:07

Yeah, thank you. That's a very practical question. To me, it's on two levels.

Jim Denison 24:10

On the one level, some issues about which we're making decisions when we decide those for whom we vote are biblical in nature. There are certain moral issues or certain ethical constructs that are before us as a culture that we need to be evaluating from a biblical perspective, biblical point of view, and that's everything from abortion, to euthanasia, to sexual morality, they're just issues today about puts about was very clear. And we need to be thinking biblically about those issues as we decide which candidates to support.

Jim Denison 24:38

Then there's a second category of issues, which are not, I think, understood to be within a biblical context, per se. There can be biblical principles that could apply but they are not themselves within biblical intention. I remember when the Panama Canal Treaty back years ago was so divisive in the church, and I'm thinking where in the Bible are we told what to think about the Panama Canal treaty, you know, so much of our hard way of doing. economics and politics are foreign to the biblical era, the kind of capitalism that we the kind of democracy in which we experienced life is not the biblical era. So there's certainly principles that apply.

Jim Denison 25:17

But there are a great number of issues about which we're going to be making decisions as we decide the candidate that we support, that are going to be more a matter of personal preference and personal ideology, personal investigation. And so we need to keep those things separate, right. And there's one thing where the Bible is very clear on this on another, we're in opinion here. And my own, my own opinion about ethics might be different from yours. And it's going to inform my vote, and I'm going to vote for this candidate based on that opinion. But I'm not going to be as divisive about that I'm not going to be as an integral talk about this, I'm not going to be as mean spirited, I'm not gonna, I'm not going to see that as a hill to die on. I'm not going to I'm going to see that as a place where I myself would agree with this versus that. But it's not going to be as biblically conclusive as some other issues might be over here.

Jim Denison 26:01

So first of all, interpret the issues biblically. Then second, look at them from a point of personal discernment. And let that give you wisdom as you decide the person you feel called to. And then third, and most importantly, pray, as God's wisdom and direction were counseled in First Timothy to to pray for our leaders. But also believe that in a democracy, we can pray about that and vote which which we cast relative to our leaders, we can because we have the voice that they didn't have in the Roman Empire, we can be praying about God's leadership relative to our vote, our political engagement candidates we might be supporting outside of voting ways in which we can engage in political service and public service. That ought to be a point of prayer for us on a daily basis, especially in a political season.

Mark Turman 26:44

Did you know that North Texas Giving Day is the single largest day of giving to our ministry, as a Dallas based nonprofit, we're able to take part in this unique event that raises millions of much needed dollars for hundreds of nonprofits in our area. And no, you don't have to live in North Texas to give North Texas Giving Day is coming soon. It's September 21, this year, but you may schedule your gift now. And know that when you do, you'll be giving twice that amount due to a generous \$75,000 matching grant, visit dfpodcast.org. to double your impact today. And thank you for being partners with us.

Mark Turman 27:33

That's helpful if it just reminds me of same thing that we deal with in our faith and church life, that there are a lot of issues. And almost all of these issues have substance, but they are not all equally weighted. Right. But we seem to have grown up into a culture over the last couple of

decades, where we want to weight everything equally, and almost make every single issue I live for death or a hill to die on, as you said. And that really becomes exhausting. And, and very difficult to have any kind of reasonable conversation or compromise going on in our processes.

Jim Denison 28:18

And unfortunately, mark, I would that it causes a lot of people to pull out of the process causes a lot of people just to stop, I hear this just stop reading the news to stop paying attention to this. They're all equally bad. It's just politics. And then they pull that entirely, which is bad. Also, you can't have a democracy if people don't participate in the democracy. And so both of those are wrong, right? Where everything becomes weaponized, or on the other side where everything's so bad that we become passive then. And on that, at that point where I think it was Plato that said, Those who don't participate in democracy are doomed to be governed by those inferior to themselves. And you don't want that either. So and both of those are bad outcomes.

Mark Turman 28:56

Well, and I had that experience, just in the last 10 days, I found myself in a conversation where there were a handful, three, four or five people that are all in their 30s. And we brought up something that had happened in the news that day, and a couple of them their response was, and that's why we don't watch the news. That's why we don't pay attention to any of that. That's why we don't, it's too frustrating. It's too confusing. It's too combative. Nobody seems to want to get along or to find a reasonable solution. So we just turn it all off. And, and we can understand that response.

Jim Denison 29:33

I understand that I'm trying to keep my marriage together and raise my kids and the stuff that especially if it gets into your family, know, especially if you and your parents are going to disagree if it comes up or even you and your spouse, you and your kids are going to disagree. Why go there? You know, it's why the old story is tape and no one should discuss religion and politics and public you know, kind of in polite company just because of the divisive pneys that can come out of all that. But again, if you're going to leave, leave the playing field and you're going to be the victim of whatever had is there, at the end of the day, there's going to be an election, the end of the day, if you stay in America, you're going to be on the other side of whatever happens in 2024. And you're going to be much better having participated than not. But it's a challenge. And I get that I understand that.

Mark Turman 30:15

So as Christians as trying to catalyze a movement of culture changing Christians who use their influence to be redemptive in the culture, are there any other biblical principles broadly, that you'd want to point to other than what you've already mentioned, as far as, okay, we're stepping into this, we know that it's a part of the reality of our country, we should be grateful that we get to be a part of a democracy. That's one of the principles perhaps we should focus on. Are there other principles, truths biblically that apply? We are first and foremost Christians and citizens of heaven, but we get to for this season, the citizens of this country is well, and in this generation?

Are there two or three other principles biblically, and or passages that you would point us to and say, okay, anchor yourselves to these truths?

Jim Denison 31:10

Yeah, that's a very practical question. You start by being grateful, exactly, as you said, as you said that a scene came to mind for me, I've been to Cuba 10 times over the years, I still pray everyday for some of my Cuban friends. One of the Cuban pastors who's worked as a translator for our ministry over the years, was in Dallas some years ago, and so got the opportunity to host him for a couple of days. And he wanted to go to the Bush Library. And so we went. And if you've been to the Bush Library and Dallas, George W. Bush Library, then you'll know one of the first things that you do if you wish to do it, you've got in this theater, and they have a film that they play there in which they talk about President Bush's eight years in office and what he did when we walked out now, obviously, it's, it's created by the Bush Library, and it's obviously going to be supportive of the President, but I felt it'd be very factual. Based on my experience as an American, I didn't think that it was on some level, overdramatic or politicized, I felt like it and it discussed the weaknesses as well as the strengths, the challenges as well as the victories.

Jim Denison 32:09

When we walked out the pastor had tears in his eyes, the Cuban pastor and asked him why. And he said, We'd been so deceived. Speaking of what they in Cuba had been told about George W. Bush, and have been told about America.

Jim Denison 32:22

And it brought to mind another conversation I had with a Cuban one time down on the island, we were driving to the airport, and we'd become such good friends that he thought he could be honest with me. And we were in this car, and he didn't worry about being overheard by the government. And he asked me said, I just want to know, why are there American warships positioned around Cuba? And I said, Excuse me, he said, Yeah, those warships that are around Cuba ready to attack us. I really had to struggle to convince him that wasn't true. Because his heart and he was shocked. But I would say to him, that wasn't true. Because in his state run, one party system, he had no access to anything other than what the communist government had taught him from the time he was born. Those two friends would be so grateful to be in a democracy, as flawed as it is. As frustrating as it can be, they would trade places. And so the first thing to do is be grateful that we do get to live in a country like this and participate in the process like this.

Jim Denison 33:19

And the second be biblical as you respond to all of this. So a few examples very quickly, one, I've got some notes here I've mentioned to you.

Jim Denison 33:26

Number one, God uses human governments to carry out as well. And we need to be aware of that be grateful for it. That's Romans 13, one to seven, First Peter 2:13-16. God calls some of us to engage personally, in public service. In fact, I'm convinced he's calling more Christians into

public service and are answering the call. I think every Christian should pray about that and ask God, are you calling me to be involved in public service? And if so on what level? I'm thinking about Joseph Daniel Estrin, Mordecai, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, there was a person named arrest us who was the city treasurer in current, and according to Romans 16:23, supportive Paul's ministry.

Jim Denison 34:05

Second God called some of us into public service, we want to be grateful for them and, and and supportive.

Jim Denison 34:11

Third, Scripture makes it clear that governments are urgently important to the common good. They seek and administer justice, that's Genesis nine. So we're supposed to pray for our leaders. First Timothy two were to honor their position. First Peter 2:17, were to pay taxes. Not everybody wants to hear that. But that's Matthew 22:21. And Romans 13:7, we're to seek the welfare of our city, Jeremiah 29:7, and a democracy that means that we vote we obey the laws, we support our leaders wherever we can.

Jim Denison 34:41

But then fourth, and last, were always to obey our highest authority. We obey the authorities, according to Romans 13, wherever we can, but if we must choose, we choose our highest authority. And that's Acts Chapter Four when the Sanhedrin who was the authority in Israel and of the Romans commanded the disciples to stop preaching the gospel. And they said, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. Paul counseled us in Romans 13 to obey the authorities he was beheaded for not obeying the authorities. First Peter to Peter counseled us to, to honor the emperor, he was crucified upside down according to our elite tradition, because he wouldn't stop preaching the gospel. So obey the authorities. But always if you have to choose obey your highest authority. So those are four biblical categories in which to think about our engagement in the political process.

Mark Turman 35:35

And that's so helpful to create a framework and a foundation for how Christians need to walk into this. Make Me Think when you first started talking about your experience with your Cuban friend that can't remember who it was that said, democracy is a terrible way to run a country except in comparison to all the other alternatives.

Jim Denison 35:57

Winston Churchill, yeah. And he was right. And worst form of government ever devised, except for every other form of government that's been devised. So that's, that makes me

Mark Turman 36:05

I have a corollary to that, or at least what I think is a corollary over the last couple of years is we've seen the growth and the number of people who are billionaires, I, I just stepped back, and

I think it's just really scary to think about any individual, a Mark Cuban or Jeff Bezos or anybody else. It's, it's just mind boggling to think about somebody who had access to a billion dollars and what they can do with that. And the only thing that gives me comfort is, is at least there's more than one. And because there's more than one, they can hold each other in check. And maybe maybe that will help us and protect us in some way, which is kind of the way that democracy is set up to work as well. Is that we exactly? Founders. Yeah. Go ahead. You talk about? No,

Jim Denison 37:05

that's exactly right. Yeah, we don't always recognize this necessarily. But you know, the first four presidents, if I'm not mistaken, were all Virginians. And they all came from wealth and from their landowners. They were wealthy landowners on various levels. And yet, when they created what became the United States, they were as aware of the less successful colonies compared to Virginia, and those that would be participating who did not have the same needs as they did. And that was one of the great concerns early on in the drafting of the Constitution is part of the reason the Bill of Rights came about so quickly, is to keep billionaires so to speak, didn't have them back in the day, but kind of, by analogy, from having an outsized level of authority and of power. They knew what it was to have a king that knew what it was to have a ruling class. That was the virtue by virtue of birth, you know, and the divine right of kings and all of that. That's what they there were those that John Adams included, that wanted George Washington to be introduced to people as Your Excellency and he refused to do so there were debates about whether we should have special garb that he would wear when he went places, and he refused. He were he resigned after two terms, when at that point, there was no term limit for presidents at all, to solidify the idea, and then went back to the farm, went back to the to what he had done before to solidify the idea that we want to be a government where so called billionaires don't have such influence that the rest of us really don't have a part to play. Now, I'm not trying to be naive here, relative to the to the role that money plays in our political process and billion dollars or whatever it is that it takes to run for president and all the and the dark money and the hidden money and all that I'm trying not trying to be naive, but at least we have a system that on some level that's protective. Certainly think about Russia, think about the oligarchs in Russia. Think about Vladimir Putin and that handful of henchmen that he works with there. And you see what a democracy without such checks and balances looks like. So again, worst form of government, except all other forms of government, and we can be grateful for that.

Mark Turman 39:06

Jim, one of the things that plays into this conversation really is kind of behind and at the foundation of this, and I don't want to get too far into the philosophical, theological weeds. But I do want to touch on this because it really plays into another part of our conversation that I want us to go into, which is, when we come to things like politics, a lot of the thinking is based on foundational principles. One of those foundational principles is theological in nature, which is, are human beings fundamentally good? Or are human beings fundamentally evil?

Mark Turman 39:44

We've talked about this I remember sitting in your philosophy class decades ago. This was one of those things that we talk about. It has a lot of ramifications not only for how we understand

government, and an attempt to rule ourselves in a democracy, but it also has a lot to do with how we see ourselves, and how we see other people, it has a lot to do with an understanding of identity, which is a really significant world word in our culture today. Can you speak to just still logically and practically, to whatever extent you want to go to the idea of, we should see ourselves we should see all human beings? Should we see them as fundamentally good or as fundamentally flawed and evil? Or is there some other way besides those two options to look at it?

Jim Denison 40:39

When it goes directly to how you see government absolutely does, as we'll get to in just moments. So the biblical doctrine that we're talking about is, you know, what's called the doctrine of total depravity, which is the idea that sin affects every part of us, doesn't mean we can never do anything good, doesn't mean that we are so evil that we can never accomplish good. That's clearly not the case. But it does mean that every part of us has fallen. That's not a concept that has historically and theologically been accepted by everybody.

Jim Denison 41:04

There was Thomas Aquinas, for instance, would kind of move against that idea a little bit in the idea of a mind, the idea that the mind may not be as tainted by sin as the will was a discussion that you can have inside tomism and things but I certainly as a Protestant would agree with Luther and others that total depravity means and with Agustin that sin touches every part of us, we're all fallen people. The Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The Bible says that there's none that does good, not one. Well, that goes directly to how you're going to set up a government. The founders believed that the founders believed very much in the concept that all of us are finite and fallen. So the government cannot be easily or safely entrusted to any one person over others. They didn't believe that you should have a democracy because people are so good, that they can be entrusted with ruling other people. They believe that people are so evil that nobody can be trusted with unaccountable power. In other words, they didn't think that there can be a king, who like George the Third who was divinely chosen by God, and was God's instrument on Earth and could be trusted to be on some level inerrant in his leadership. They didn't believe that that was true of any human, a king or anybody else. They didn't believe that a parliament had was staffed by people that were so much better than everybody else, so much more educated and so much more cultured, that they can be trusted with unaccountable power. They believed and I agree with them, that a government of the people by the people for the people should be structured in such a way that it recognizes that none of us can be trusted with unaccountable power over anybody else. That's why we have elections. That's why we have separations of power. That's what we have the structure that we have.

Jim Denison 42:45

Well, in recent decades, we've moved as a culture away from that in pretty significant ways. There's a lot behind this, some of it came out of World War Two, Carl Rogers, particular way of seeing humanity that is said, our problem isn't that we have too much authority don't have enough authority that we have too much. It's that we need to be free to actualize ourselves, we

need to be free of governmental constraints, we need to be free to become who we wish to be. And that kind of a psychology of self esteem comes into play. Well, that can move in a direction that says the government ought to be trusted, more than I would say it should be. The government can do good things in ways that don't require as much accountability as I think it requires and that government can solve problems. It was said by one particular leader, there's nothing wrong with America that can't be made, right by what's right with America. Well, I don't think I agree with that. I think in a doctrine of total depravity that the government needs to be, I think, limited, it needs to be accountable to the people, because I do believe that all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So it's a big philosophy conversation that goes back to a theological foundation. But it goes to how you see the role of government relative to the people.

Mark Turman 43:56

Okay, so, as you as you're talking, I'm sitting here going totally on Page with you, and understand where you're going. But I'm also thinking, well, we hear a lot of conversation about human beings being made in the image of God. And as you referenced at the beginning of what you just said, that, even though we are totally depraved, in the, in the words of Luther, that doesn't mean we can't do good. So what does it and we would say, we've talked on this podcast and in your writings about why we contend for life is because we believe every human being is valuable as a reflection of the image of God that is unique to human beings. And we're not like as I say, Peter Singer, the philosopher at Princeton, I believe, you know, Peter Singer would say we're no different from the dog on the street or from the from the snake that just crawled out your back fence. He would say we are of no different value from Any of those things, so balanced sighs that upper scores for me the tension between total depravity and being made in the image of God.

Jim Denison 45:12

And those are intention absolutely our Genesis one for you get to depravity before you get to the fall we're created in God's image and his likeness. And that continues to be the case. The Fall means that sin has affected every dimension of us, but not on a level that can't be redeemed. It's not a physical versus spiritual thing that would be Greek psycho dualism, you know, the idea that the body is bad and the soul is good. Well, if the body is inherently evil, how could Jesus take on flesh should be sinless? So we're not saying that your body is inherently evil? That would be a Greek concept. No are we nor are we saying that total depravity means that you're beyond redemption. The Bible says that when you trust in Christ, you're a new creation. The old has passed away all things have become new. But the Bible also makes it clear that God can you not can redeem all the allows, and that he redeems even our fallenness for his greater glory. He redeemed Pharaoh's heart and heart. In the Exodus, he redeemed Cyrus who was a pagan leader by using him to set the Jews free from Babylonian captivity. God used Caesars power to get Paul to Rome so we could preach to Caesar. And so God redeems even our fallenness because he still loves us. We our children love by our father, who recognizes our flaws, but loves us anyway. Because He is love. His character is Love doesn't love us because we're worthy of love, loves us because he is loves each of us as if there were only one of us, like Agustín said, so there is a balance there. We are so depraved that we

should not be trusted with unaccountable power, we are so loved that none of us is beyond redemption. And keeping those together is what the Christian faith does, I think uniquely better than any other worldview.

Mark Turman 46:49

Well, and that's, that really speaks into you know, our one of our guests on the podcast at times has been Curtis Chang, he then takes this, what we've been talking about Curtis then takes this it's really his passion, and to say, Okay, now take that fundamental idea and the tension between being made in the image of God, but also being totally depraved, and how that gets expressed and manifested in our institutions, including government. And that we have to, we have to apply those biblical truths and that biblical tension into the reality of the institution that necessary as you pointed out, the necessary institution of government and politics. So that that then says to us as believers, you cannot, you should not turn your back on this and say everything related to politics is dirty, corrupt, and evil, and I'm going to stay as far away from it as I can, even if God's calling me to vote, or to run for office. But at the same time, we should not go the other direction and turn our political engagement into something that looks like religious passion. And that's where I want us to go for a few minutes, if you would, this, we have this tendency now to meld in what looks to me as a pastor in inappropriate ways were melding some of our political and spiritual ideas and passions, we're melding them together sometimes in ways that they should not be connected. And even to the point of turning politics into something that looks like a religion, a form of secular religion. Am I completely out of left field or help me help me along with your line of thinking?

Jim Denison 48:47

I wish you were Mark, I would love to say I don't know why you would say any of that none of that is true. In my experience, I would love to tell you that, but that would be patently false. So really, I think it starts at the point of human nature itself, we were created by God to need him and each other. We were created in His image and his likeness. He is a God of community, Father, Son, and Spirit three, and yet one, we were created. In fact, he says in Genesis two, it's no good for the man to be alone. So we were created to need community, we were created a need mission, to need purpose, they need to reason beyond ourselves, I think for which we were living. Well, now in a post Christian, heightened secularists culture, we still have a need for community and mission. We're not finding it in church, we're not finding it in the kingdom of God, but we have to find it someplace, or like those heat seeking missiles, you know, that are looking for a target. And if it's not going to be this, it's going to be something else. For far too many of us. We're finding community and mission in political engagement.

Jim Denison 49:42

And what I mean by that is we've come to a place where we in this country are deciding that our future is entirely conditioned upon our leaders and our political process. We didn't used to think that I'm old enough to remember when you could go days with never hearing on the news about the president, or about the Congress. I'm old enough to remember days when politics was not nearly as intrusive in our new cycles as it is now. But now for lots of reasons we could talk about having to do with clicks, and, and, and sound bites and all the things that go into media these

days. It is obviously far more central to our media consumption than it used to be. But along with it, so many of our issues do have political consequences and political instrumentality, that we've gotten to a place now, where for far too many people political engagement is how they find community and mission, tribalism, and competition. I used your sports analogy in my own mind a minute a minute ago, kind of pick that out. And I think it's a brilliant way of saying this. That's how I'm a Dallas Cowboys fan, that I can't be a Washington Redskins fan. If we win, they have to lose. Now, that means we have to win every play, I have to root for us on every play, it's a zero sum game, there can be no compromise, there could be no common ground, there could be no third alternative, we have to win, which means they have to lose. That's a I think, unfortunately, an analogy for how people are experiencing political engagement these days.

Jim Denison 51:07

Along with that they're experiencing the world through which you could think of it as a kind of segregated news curation, you know, where we're in these sorts of echo chambers, and we only hear from the people with whom we agree, I only want to hear the guys calling the game that are cowboys. Guys, I don't want to hear the Redskins. People call the case. I don't want to pay attention to their version. I want my version of it. And so we're further entrenched in our positions, because we're only consuming news that agrees with us. And we're only getting around people with whom we agree. Well, the all of that gets politicized and gets weaponized by those on the other side, not just the media, but those in the process. years ago, as we were starting this ministry back in 2009. I was talking to a good friend of mine, who was asking how we were going to finance this. I said, Well, we're going to be a donor based ministry. It's to what you said, Well, who's your enemy? Ask Well, what do you mean? And he said, to raise funds, you do three things. You convince people, they have an enemy, convince them, they can't defeat their enemy, convince them you'll defeat their enemy, if they give you money, or vote for you, or whatever else you want him to do. He was being a little overstating relative to us as a ministry. But I think he was right, in principle. So we're a country. That's right. Because we have tribalistic political engagement, and everything's a zero sum game, and there can be no compromise. And if we win, they lose. We are ripe for political leaders and for media influencers as well to take advantage of that, and to further weaponize that and to further demonize the other side.

Jim Denison 52:34

Now, we're in a place mark, where a higher percentage of Americans than ever before do not want our children dating somebody of the other party. dating somebody who identifies with a different party. We're in a place now where we're not just choosing states based on red and blue. We're not even choosing cities based on red and blue. We're choosing communities within cities, based on red and blue, based on political demographics. We're at a place now where we have a smaller if I'm I think this is right to have checked to be sure, but I think I'm correct, that we have a smaller number of states who have split governance than ever before, certainly in recent memory, is that the case, meaning by that we have a governor who's of a different party than the majority of their state legislature might be. That's how monolithic we have become within red, and blue. And even inside that relative to red, and blue. Well, we weaponized all this

because go back to where I started, we want community and mission. And we're finding that in politics, and that is idolatry.

Mark Turman 53:35

And, you know, that's that's just mind boggling to think that if a person that was trafficking down this road, if they walked out of their front door some morning in the next two or three months, and they saw a political candidate sign in their neighbor's yard that they didn't agree with that they would, they would go to the thought of well, I need to move I need to sell my house and move or I hope they do. That that would be their thought process is is really how this gets down to street level, right? Probably does.

Jim Denison 54:13

I mean, I'm hearing stories Mark about people during election campaigns during election seasons that are deciding where to live. And that's part of what they do is they drive to the communities to see what the signs are, to see if the signs predominantly are what they agree with or what they disagree with, and are making decisions about who the neighbors are going to be who their friends are going to be. Because they've come to a belief, genuinely I'm afraid we erroneously but genuinely believe that really, this has to be a zero sum game, the future the nation is in jeopardy here. We see ourselves like the citizens revolting against the British back in the 1770s relative to birthing the nation. The future of the nation is in jeopardy and I have to do whatever it takes to win, which means the other side has to lose. And we've gotten to that place and our psychology and the outcome of that is not a thing we've been to since Civil War. And I certainly am praying every day that that doesn't become anything that looks at on some level like our future as we kind of see this thing go forward,

Mark Turman 55:09

which is, which is, as I've heard you talk about this before, really a gyration over the last 3035 years, because I think I heard you quote, Ronald Reagan who said in his political engagements, I don't have any enemies, I only have opponents, and am I quoting him correctly. He told his staff that told his staff

Jim Denison 55:28

that regularly, Mitch Daniels, who worked for the Reagan administration then became governor of Indiana is the one that made that public that he would say that quite often one of the anecdotes that goes into that if I could tell it very quickly that Chris Wallace made clear in a book he wrote back some years ago when he was involved on the Democratic side of all that. So President Reagan wanted Tip O'Neill, who was the Speaker of the House when was a Democrat and the the house, the Democrats, I think controlled the House at this point, wanted them to do something that he was seeking on a legislative level tip on Nielsen. But if I do that the Republicans are going to hold it against us in the next election. Coin and Chris Wallace, the next day, he got 435, handwritten because the 435 members of Congress 435 handwritten notes from Ronald Reagan, asking him to support this legislation that he can give to every one of the legislators so that this wouldn't be held against them in the future. Well, that's a way of understanding that we have differences. We can even be opponents, but we are not enemies.

We love the same country, we want what is best, having differences of opinion is healthy. If two people always agreed one wouldn't be necessary, as they say, in the way we do ministry, as you know, in our executive leadership team, if we come to an immediate consensus, we say, okay, we haven't thought about this enough. We need to be thinking about other positions, there are two sides to so many issues. Debate is so healthy to get into a third position that's better than either of the other positions could have bent, we need Democrats and Republicans. We need all of us to make this happen more. It's an analogy to the body of Christ with hands and feet And eyes and ears, we need to be embracing differences and differences of opinion. And seeing the other side is an opponent who loves the country, just like I love the country. I'm really praying that we'll have that mentality at some point as we go forward.

Mark Turman 57:16

And I and I could imagine that somebody's listening to us listening to you, in this moment, is already shaking their head and saying, Well, that sounds weird to me or something along those lines, which is an indication of, of this rise of what you sent me an article about a month ago to read. That was actually a book review of an author named Emily Finley, who wrote a book called The ideology of democratism, not democracy, but democratism. And basically what she was doing was trying to name in her book, The Rise of what you've described in other ways as the rise of a secular replacement religion, for what has historically been Christianity as the dominant faith system within the United States, that now there is a rise of secular religion that Finley calls democracy ism in as one of its major manifestations. What do you mean when you talk about the rise of a secular replacement religion?

Jim Denison 58:25

Again, we're at this place where we have such a secularized culture with more people that say they have no identification with religion than ever before. Gallup, you know, years ago said, for the first time in American history, the percentage of Americans with a membership in a church, synagogue or mosque has fallen below 50%. And so we're at a place now where religion is seen as being irrelevant, if not, in fact, dangerous to society, you know, part of that clergy abuse scandals. Part of that is the political politicization, of denominations and of churches, all that's inside all of that. We're at this place now, where we are a secular people on a level we haven't really been in a very long time, you'd really have to go back prior to the first Great Awakening. Prior to the 1734. It was in colonial America that maybe one in seven had any kind of church connection, that sort of thing, really, from the first Great Awakening till now. We have been as really one of the most religiously affiliated people in the world. We've resisted the secularism of Western Europe for generations, longer than many skeptics said that we would and all that goes inside all that.

Jim Denison 59:26

Well, now, as we're seeing the secularism of our country continue to move forward. The basic things that religion as it were, meets the needs of meats still exist. And so an article in the Wall Street Journal, the no excuse me in the Atlantic the other day, from somebody who said he had left Christianity but he missed the church. And he was making this point that he missed the community missed the camaraderie missed the uncondition ality of what it was like to be in a

church community. Well, we're made to need that. Like I said, we're made to need community and mission. And so in a post Christian culture, highly secularized culture We're gonna look for some place to do that going to look for some place to find that for some people, it's brand identities. For some, it's loyalty to a particular job or a particular place. For some, it's a cause, whether that cause might be environmentalism, or that cause might be something relative to the impoverished. It might be something to LGBT relative LGBTQ activism or the pro life pro choice movement, something like that. There's a cause that sometimes captivates people and that becomes their reason for being. But it's like Bob Dylan said, You gotta serve somebody. There's something called the ultimate concern, like Tillich said, that we all have the need for there's a God shaped emptiness. And every one of us like Pascale said, and so we're seeing, unfortunately, so many people trying to replace that God shaped emptiness with political engagement, and that's idolatrous. And when we do it, and we give it the same level of fidelity, the same level of passion, the same level of service, that we would give the award, we see the consequences on the other side. And that's, I think, the democracy DISM, the idolatry of democracy that we're starting to see, on a level that's a replacement religion relative to the secularism of our day,

Mark Turman 1:01:08

and can be, at least in some way, indicated by your level of emotion. Yes, the PowerPoint, just the way your calendar unfolds, where are you spending your time and giving your attention, even by measurement of where you're investing your resources, financially, that might not tell the whole story. But it is a reflection of where your priorities and what is at the center of your life, your hope, your faith and your love, as Paul would say that they can be reflected there. Great conversation, we could go and talk for a lot longer. I've got a lot more questions. But I want to just kind of wrap up and we've written you've written a number of things about how Christians can be redemptive in the context of political engagement. We're going to attach a number of those articles and writings to the show notes of this podcast. But as we kind of move, Jim toward wrapping up this conversation today, kind of a two fold question. As we walk into this next season. Is it ever right for a Christian to to protest? Is it ever right in these kinds of things for us to be angry? How should we respond? If our candidate doesn't win? Kind of can you kind of bring bring us to a close around those ideas? Yeah,

Jim Denison 1:02:47

first of all, being angry, is itself in no sense. The sin the sinless Son of God was angry when he overthrew the money changers tables, as we recall, says in Ephesians, 426 be angry and do not send both of those were commands, be angry, there are certain things we should be angry about. We should be angry about poverty, we should be angry about systemic racism. We shouldn't be angry about the morality of our culture. We shouldn't be angry about the victimization of heresy in our culture. I love Johnstone street statement, I quote it all the time, ideas have consequences and bad ideas and victims. We should be angry about the fact that the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers lest they see the truth of the gospel of Christ. And so there are things we should absolutely be indignant about and angry about, but do not sin. This, the text says in Ephesians 426. So what does that mean, in practical terms, I think it is appropriate for Christians to be engaged in nonviolent protest. I do believe that that is

something that we can and across our history have done. Martin Luther King didn't just get that from Gandhi. He got that as well, from a great study of how Christians, William Wilberforce, for instance, and others that wanted to affect political change did so participate in the process, but being engaged in nonviolent protests were appropriate as well. I do believe that it goes to most right in my Luther King book, quote him and saying this at an unjust law is no law at all. Now, that doesn't mean I have the right to take the law into my hands. But it does mean there are going to be occasions where I have to do something that is obeying my highest authority, even if it looks in some level, like I'm protesting the local authority.

Jim Denison 1:04:23

I'll go back to x four, where the disciples said we cannot but serve God we cannot. We cannot choose to serve man over God. We have to do what we're called to do. It's Paul was a civil civilly disobedient when he refused to stop preaching Peter, the same way every disciple, but to John martyred for their faith and John exiled on Patmos and wouldn't stop preaching one of my first times to Patmos we happen to be there on a Sunday and we had to wait outside the cave where John received the revelation, because we were told there was a group inside. When the group came out, they were carrying folding chairs. They were John's Church. John was held civil disobedience and when he was exiled to Patmos, he led his jailers to Christ. He led his fellow prisoners to Christ. And they started a church that 20 Centuries later is still worshipping in that cave on Patmos. So there's a sense in which preaching the gospel in Cuba is civilly disobedient, preaching the gospel, through the underground church in China, or in parts of the Muslim world, is civilly disobedient. But we're called to do that. So there are times that you want to pray about this, you want God to lead you in this, it has to be, I think, a biblical issue. It can't just be my disagreement on the Panama Canal, it's really, I want to do it in a biblical way. Violence is always wrong. We can defend ourselves that's different. The Bible does condone self defense, Luke 11:21, would be a reference to that. We can think about Psalm 82, verse four, rescue the weak and the needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Self Defense is biblical, but aggression is not. So there'll be a non violent means by which we could protest if necessary. But I do believe there are ways in which we need to make our voice heard. And through means that can be most effective. Maybe that's a boycott in a way that can perhaps get your voice heard through economic means that might not be heard otherwise, if you're if you're boycotting a particular station, or particular, protesting a particular decision, I know my wife has been very active in writing letters of protest to some of the networks that have been airing very immoral content, and have been moving in directions that were endorsing the ideologies with which we very much disagree, and she's made her voice heard in that space. Just yesterday, I had a great conversation with somebody that was helping me with an insurance matter. And when I was done with it, I asked her if there was a way that I could reflect back on what she did. And so she connected me to her supervisor. So I can tell the supervisor what a great job she had done in serving me. Well, there's a negative side of that, too, when sometimes we need to make our voice be heard in, in standing up with the authority and the influence that we have. So I do believe Christians can I don't think we have to be passive, I think we can be active and be proactive. I'm grateful for the March on Washington every year relative to defending the rights of the unborn. I'm grateful, obviously, for the March on Washington that led to the I Have a Dream speech and led to enormous change in our culture, ultimately, out of all of that, so be angry, and

do not soon. And as you are angry, do the most redemptive, proactive thing you can to speak for biblical morality and for conventional common good. And God will lead you in that as you trust his leadership.

Mark Turman 1:07:33

It's a good word, and a good place for us to stop because we like I said we could go on and we don't want to, we don't want to be accused of clogging up the airwaves any more than they already are. But thank you for the conversation. Thank you for the insight. Thank you for the biblical anchors. All of that is super helpful. I also want to thank our listeners. Thank you for being a part of the conversation today. If this has been helpful to you, please rate and review us on your podcast platform. Share this with others so that they can be a part of the conversation as well. And remember, we'll list additional resources from Denison forum in the show notes so that you can follow along in additional ways beyond this conversation, thanks for being a part Jim. Hope you have a great day and a great week.

Jim Denison 1:08:21

privileged to be with you today. Mark thanks God bless