

Losing Our Religion: A conversation with Russell Moore

Recorded October 18, 2023 | Released October 23, 2023

TRANSCRIPT



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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** This is the Denison Forum Podcast, and I'm your host, Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum. We're glad to have you in the conversation with us. The Denison Forum exists to equip Christians, to equip believers like you to be culture changing Christians who work toward biblical flourishing in every area of influence that God may give you.

We want to talk today with Dr. Russell Moore, who is Editor in Chief of Christianity Today. He is also the author of a recently released book called *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America*. Now, if you don't know what an altar call is, that's okay. We'll explain that to you in just a moment.

Dr. Moore has been called by the Wall Street Journal as one of those voices in our culture who is vigorous, cheerful, and fiercely articulate. What a great description for a believer and for a leader in our culture. He has also been profiled and featured as an author in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time Magazine, as well as the New Yorker.

Many of you know that he was and is an ordained Baptist minister and served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Before that, he was chief academic officer and dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also taught theology and ethics.

Moore was a fellow at the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics and currently serves on the board of Beckett Law and also as a senior fellow with the Trinity Forum in Washington, D. C. As part of his work, he hosts The Russell Moore Show Podcast as well as co host Christianity Today's news and analysis podcast called The Bulletin.

He is a native of Mississippi where he and his wife, Maria are parents of five children. They live in Nashville. They are part of Emmanuel Church there in Nashville, where Dr. Moore teaches on a regular basis. We're glad to have him with us. Welcome to the Denison Forum Podcast. Dr. Moore, welcome back to the Denison Forum Podcast.

[00:02:06] **Russell Moore:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** We're glad to have you with us. And I know that things are busy for you anytime that you release a book. There's a lot going on and lots of conversations. But we're glad to have you with us to talk about your newest book, Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America.

So, as I understand it, about 26 and a half million people may be in America that are described or categorized as evangelical. Maybe a good place to begin for some of those that may not live in this space the way you and I do. A basic definition of evangelical and then a brief explanation of what an altar call is because if you didn't grow up in the the Baptist world that you and I are

familiar with, if you didn't grow up in parts of the evangelical world, you might not be totally in tune with what an altar call means.

[00:03:01] **Russell Moore:** Well, on the first question defining what an evangelical is difficult. And it's because it's not a precise definition.

There's some fuzziness to it. But then if you add to it the fact that we have you know, those statistics that you're mentioning about 26 million or other surveys have different numbers, but around that that includes people who would call themselves evangelical, even if they're not a part of a church, even if their theology doesn't line up.

And it, it would fail to include some people who in every way and in every other time would be considered an evangelical, but who just do not like the word at all and distance themselves from it. I think that basically, if you think about what an evangelical is, it's that part of the body of Christ, part of the church, that emphasizes the personal, so the need for personal a personal relationship with God through Christ.

So that one doesn't come to God church by church or family by family or nation by nation, but person by person. And so everyone personally needs to repent of sin and believe in Christ. And that personal sense too of the Bible. So there's an emphasis in evangelicalism that's not just about the Bible being important in church, but the importance of the Bible as a personal way of hearing from God and engaging with God. And the same thing would be true in terms of the need to personally share one's faith and be a witness for Christ. So it's an emphasis on those. Sorts of things to the rest of the church.

As far as an altar call it's something that one does not see a very often now for various reasons, but for a lot of the last 150, 200 years, an altar call has been a moment in a service in which people are challenged to come forward and for various reasons, for some people to profess faith in Christ, for some people it's to get prayer for something in their lives. Some people it's a way of saying, you know, I need somebody to pray for me because I've not been living the way I should be living as a Christian and I need. So it's a sort of call for a turnaround and a redirection.

[00:05:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's an interesting phenomenon, going back to the word evangelical, how I've learned this just in the last number of years, that there's a theological definition, there's a sociological definition, now there's a political definition of the word evangelical, and they kind of overlay with each other and often get confused in terms of which conversation you might find yourself in at any given moment.

[00:06:10] **Russell Moore:** Yeah. And you know, a lot of people who will say to me, I was just telling a friend last night, it, it seems that the only time I hear from people who are saying, I don't want to be called an evangelical or use the word evangelical.

It's almost always with people who fit closest the definition of what an evangelical is and a lot of them want to get rid of it. And I don't. I understand why they do. But I don't know of an alternative that sums up that point of emphasis that, that we have. And so, what one person said to me, I just, I feel like if I say that I'm an evangelical Christian, I have to explain what I mean and what I don't mean.

I said, yeah, but you have to do that with Christian too. If somebody says on a plane, I'm a Christian, they might mean I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. They might mean I'm an American. They might mean my parents used to go to church. I mean, they could mean any number of things. So you have to unpack it no matter what.

[00:07:18] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right, And the challenges of coming up with a new word that might be that might return us to a more biblical theological orientation. You know, that, that's why there's, you know, that's why we have new translations of the Bible, right? Because words and their definitions tend to drift over time and but I'm with you.

I think we just, we're just going to need to retain the word and constantly clarify what we mean by that and those definitions. But the interesting it's just an interesting title the word altar call. There'd be some Christians that would think, you know, well, altar calls are in the Bible.

Somewhere in the Bible, it says that you're supposed to invite people down an aisle like Billy Graham would do. And like most all of us who have led churches have done in various ways.

And there's certainly nothing wrong with it and there is some biblical precedent for certainly calling people to decision and then the idea of expressing that publicly, nothing wrong with that, but the core idea of that, to me the idea of an urgent pleading to respond, to repent, to seek renewal.

Because of having heard hopefully the voice of God through a biblical message, but it made me kind of wonder about and it wanted you to comment about what is your posture in this book in terms of an altar call when I'm reading when I was reading the book, it sounded like, okay. It sounds like a preacher speaking to a congregation of people inviting them to respond.

Sometimes it felt like you were the congregant listening to the preacher. This book is both in some ways a sermon that you might say from you, but it is also a reflection of your own journey. Can you kind of unpack that a little bit?

[00:08:56] **Russell Moore:** Yeah. I mean, if you think about what what an altar call was or is at its best, It's a combination of bad news and good news.

So, at an altar call, there is the, that urgency. You have one life. It's not as long as you think it is. You really need to pay attention to what God is saying here. You really need to think about judgment and those sorts of things, but it's also good news because, I mean, one of the things, I think I mentioned this in the book.

Sometimes it's hard to remember because I took so many things out that I sometimes forget what I took out and what I left in. But it was always the weekly invitation that we had in the church that I grew up in served, I think now, I don't think I knew it then, but it served a really important purpose.

And it wasn't just for unbelievers it kind of focused us every single week that we're all sinners in need of grace and mercy. And that Every, any person could potentially at any time become our brother and sister or sister in Christ. And so you don't give up on people. And so I think that was a really good way of shaping the consciousness and the attention of people in all kinds of ways, just by its, it's presence there and so I think at this moment right now you're really, it seems to me

there are a couple of different ways that people try to respond to the crisis that we're in and the crises that are all around us. And one of those ways is through a kind of waving of it away and a well, well, let's not, if we don't pay attention to it and if we just talk about the good things then it will all correct itself. And I don't think that works.

I also don't think it's faithful. I think of in the book of Jeremiah there's a prophet by the name of Hananiah who what he would do is to say, you know, the things that Babylon carried away from the temple, they're going to be home really soon the yoke of Babylon is about to be broken and Jeremiah had to say he's lying to you.

You love to hear that. We all love to hear that. Everything's just going to be fine if we just don't pay attention to it. But that's often not the truth. So there's that, but then there's also a kind of cynicism. And that's really the reason why I wrote the book is because every day I'm really trying to help people work through that pull toward cynicism and kind of a giving up.

And for some people, that's a giving up on Jesus for some people, that's a giving up on the church for some people. It's a giving up on themselves. I was talking to a woman last night who she started crying and said you know, I feel like I am in a place of cynicism. And how do I get out of it? And I said, I think you're getting out of it because the very fact that she knew that she was in a place of cynicism, that's 90 percent of it.

And and actually seeing that rather than just numbing yourself to it. So there's that. And I think there's that temptation as well. And we have to avoid both of them.

[00:12:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, that's such a good word. And one of the things I took away from the book is that just the, so many of the people I intersect with are at a place of fatigue.

Yeah, there's been so much that's gone on over the last 5 to 10 years in particular, you could stretch it out further than that. If you go back to the Great Recession of 2009, 2010, there just seems to be an incredible sense of fatigue. And something new, something terrible coming out in the news almost every day seems like, and people are getting very discouraged around that.

But there, there also seems to be Dr. Moore calling here away from what I might call the temptations that have overtaken a lot of us in terms of evangelical, what I might call idol worship. One thing, let me go back to, let me go to the end of the book and then come back to the beginning.

When I listened to most of what I consume these days in audible version. And so I listened to the book and there was I had to stop for a moment. I thought it was maybe a glitch in the audio, audio presentation of the book where toward the end of the book is a statement. That I've also heard you talk about in other contexts, which is what is not repaired gets repeated.

In the, like I said, it appeared to be repeated twice in the text of the book. What do you mean by, why is that statement important? Why, what does it mean to say that which is not repaired gets repeated? And then I want to get into a little bit more of the finer, deeper parts of the book as it relates to some of the idols that you point out.

But what do you mean by that statement?

[00:14:27] **Russell Moore:** Well, it's I'm quoting there a a psychologist that I heard talking on my colleague, Mike Mike Cospers brilliant documentary podcast series the rise and fall of Mars Hill. He's talking to this psychologist about people who have been through trauma and she's making the point that it's often really hard and uncomfortable to think about trauma and to work through it, but what is not repaired is repeated.

And so there's a sense in which you can lose your understanding of what's normal and what's abnormal. And really the first step is to say, wait, things are not the way they're supposed to be. So, and I talk often about

this seems to happen every week or so there'll be a young man who will say to me, I'm really scared about having a relationship with somebody about getting married because you'll say, I have, I've not had any good role models. I had a terrible home situation and my grandparents had a terrible home situation and I just don't want to perpetuate that and to cause anybody else to grow up in, in family like that.

And I will almost always say I'm 99.9 percent sure that's not going to happen. And the reason I'm sure of it is because you are aware of the fact that you grew up in a dysfunctional situation and that you didn't have models. The real danger is when somebody doesn't know that and they just assume this is just the way life is.

This is just the way that it's supposed to be. And I think the same thing is true in terms of the church if all we do is to say, let's just get back to the kind of influence that we once had, or the kind of bigness that we once had, that is only going to carry the things that have been revealed that we have seen into the future.

And so instead, what we have to do is to step back and say, Okay, wait, how did we get here? And what's a way for us to move beyond that without, and this is the big problem that I see happening all the time is sometimes when a person has encountered something bad. In the church or anywhere else in their life, often the response is to say, well, the answer to that is whatever the opposite of that is.

And so, often you end up with a kind of mirror image where you're perpetuating the same problems, just just in a different direction. So for instance, somebody who sometimes has been in a really legalistic sort of authoritarian church will sometimes think that any call to discipleship or obedience that makes them nervous, because oh, it sounds like legalism and they can move to the opposite extreme and that goes the other way to somebody who's been in a really chaotic sort of life situation can end up with, okay, I want to have a list of rules for everything because they want that structure and order. That's not the answer either.

It's instead a, if we think about the way that C. S. Lewis talks about The devil doesn't send errors into the world one by one, but two by two on either side of the truth and the way in the life. Then that means we don't just have. We don't just have the problem in front of us. We can also adopt an equal problem as a way to try to counterbalance it. So to say, okay, this isn't the way it's supposed to be. So let's spend some time in prayer and reflection asking how we can move forward differently. I think that's where we need to be right.

[00:18:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** We do seem to have this tendency of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, you might say, when it comes to we identify something that is wrong in our life or wrong in our culture, wrong in our sphere of influence, and we tend to go whole scale the opposite direction, creating just as many problems in the opposite direction, which seems as we work through what you've written here, five major sections of the book that, yeah.

That talk about things that on the face of them seem like good things like stability and authority, credibility, identity. You hear these words talked about a lot, especially the word identity seems to just be all over our culture. And at first blush, you're like, wait a minute, I thought credibility and authority were good things.

But it's often the case, right, that the devil takes something good and he warps it or he twists it into something that God never intended for it to be. And that's in many ways what you're trying to point out here and trying to really hold up a mirror for us to see that. Can unpack that a little bit more about these good things can actually become idols if we take them out of their biblical context and direction.

[00:19:50] **Russell Moore:** Well, anything that is meant to be a good when it is made ultimate can become a God and a destroying God. And so you can even see that with. For instance, something is as good and as joyful as marriage and family those are good things, but if they're made ultimate, if you have somebody who expects his or her spouse to be a perfect soulmate and to meet all of their ideals and expectations of a spouse, that's going to end up being someone who resents.

The spouse is because I can't live up to that. That's not what that's not what this is meant to be. Or somebody who you know, often you'll see people who they have such they have made ultimate their children to such a point that their children end up becoming disappointments because they don't meet that idealized image, which they never can.

And so anything that's meant to be secondary, when you make it when you either take it out of the direction that God has designed for it, or you make it that central point of your life, you end

up actually losing it. I mean, when Jesus says the one who the one who loses his life will save it and the one who saves his life will lose it.

That works itself out with all of these things too. So if you, for instance, if you are trying to protect the credibility of the church by saying we need to have the sort of public projection that doesn't deal with what's actually going on. The end result is you lose credibility. So in every sort of sexual abuse or financial misconduct or anything else in a church or a ministry, often there will be people who are saying, well, we can't let this be known, or that will jeopardize the credibility of our church. And then what inevitably happens is not just that's morally wrong, which it is, but it's even on its own terms. It doesn't even work. Because nothing remains hidden and when it doesn't, then there's really a loss of credibility.

Or if identity is made ultimate, whatever identity that is, I end up losing my identity and I end up losing it. So a lot of what I think we're called to do is to reprioritize and to put second things second. And that's the way that you can actually love them. I mean, so for instance, if you look at one of the, one of the things that comes along with a kind of Christian nationalism or any other form of of religious nationalism that makes the nation or or the state to be central is you end up at first with a kind of rallying around that.

And then ultimately you end up with, in, in our context and anti- Americanism because you end up, it ends up destroying true patriotism because you end up comparing your actual country with the God that you expect your country to be. And that ends up in, in losing even that. So even on their own terms these things don't don't do what we think they're going to do.

[00:23:38] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, and the irony of it, right, is that they all end up leading us to a place of emptiness and disappointment that we've taken something other than God and made it ultimate. And if we chase it long enough, it ends up disappointing us on a grand scale.

[00:23:54] **Russell Moore:** Yeah. And a lot of times what we do is like, it's kind of like an addict will do. Is when that emptiness comes about, we tend to think, well, the answer is more of what it is. That's making me, I just don't have enough of it. And that leads us to even more emptiness and meaningless. And

[00:24:11] **Dr. Mark Turman:** We doubled down, tripled down trying to see, well, it's just, we're not just, we're just not dedicated enough, or we just don't have enough of it.

So. It's the problems with us. It's not with what we're pursuing as ultimate and you know, it's such a good word. And, you know, I see that I had just finished a series of conversations with a young couple who are getting married in a few days. I'm like trying to tell them, look, your spouse can be a really good spouse.

They're going to be terrible as an object of worship. They're going to end up disappointing and frustrating you. And like I said, that can be true of your job. It can be true of your hobby. It can be true of your politics. In any of those bases.

We talk at our ministry as you do in yours, a lot about this term culture war. And I've been just as I work through your book and also in other thinking just kind of this idea has hit me lately. Well, if you, if we were to win the culture war, what would we actually have won? And then moving on to that, trying to help Christians understand nowhere does the Bible call us to be a cultural warrior. It calls us to be a spiritual warrior in terms of prayer in a very specific way. But it rather calls us to be cultural missionaries. Your book gives some good suggestions about how to move in that line of thinking and get out of this really exhausting experience of culture warrior and move more into cultural witness, cultural missionary. How can we do that better and give up this idea of winning some kind of a culture war?

[00:25:41] **Russell Moore:** Well, I think the first way is to recognize what, how it is that we get into that mode. And and I think the reason for that, at least in the situation we have right now, is secularization, but it's secularization of a different sort than the kind we're worried about.

So a lot of people are looking out at the world around them and rightly very concerned about secularization. You look at what's happening in North America with the rise of people with no religious affiliation. You see what has already happened in Western Europe and other places we see that.

We know where that ultimately leads. But there's another kind of secularization that comes in and takes biblical concepts and redirects them in other sorts of ways. So that metaphor of war. Which is a good and important metaphor, but we're misapplying it because it's you know, the liberal preacher who doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but has to say something on Easter.

So what he gets up and talks about is, you know, the, what the resurrection of Jesus tells us is there's always an opportunity for a new start. Yeah, something like that. Well, that's that's true. There, there is an opportunity for a new start, but that's not what the resurrection of Jesus is about.

And the same thing is true when you take spiritual warfare categories that are biblically revealed and crucially important both for our personal discipleship and for the witness of the church and you redirect them away from what the Bible calls principalities and powers in the heavenly places over this present darkness and you instead do exactly what the Bible says not to do, which is to start to think that we do wrestle with flesh and blood.

So you start thinking in those terms, but you're directing them toward, toward your neighbor and the metaphor matters. I mean, if you think about the metaphor of war or the language of spiritual warfare literally demonizes because it's meant to refer to beings that are not redeemable.

We're not trying to bear witness to demonic spirits. And so when you start having that mindset toward the people around you, you start to give up on the possibility of redemption and then with that, you start to, you start to kind of reverse the ordering that the scripture has given to us first Corinthians five for instance.

It's not those who are on the outside that I judge. It's those who are on the inside. That's where the witness has to be. If you get that out of sync, then you're going to panic about whatever's going on around you. And you're going to, you're going to minimize whatever's happening in you or what's happening as a community in us.

And that's where I think we've ended up in, in the danger. And so what that ultimately leads to is a lot of things. I mean, one of those things being the kind of polarization that we see. But another thing is what we referenced a little bit earlier, which is exhaustion. If people are in a constant adrenal sense of emergency, then they're ultimately going to end up exhausted and they're ultimately going to end up apathetic toward everything.

When in reality what the Bible teaches us is that every single era from Eden till now is in a fallen and darkened world in which there is sin. It manifests itself in different ways at different times, but it's all headed in the same direction. And in every single era, there's a Holy Spirit and a light that shines in the darkness, and you have to hold both of those things together just the way the Bible does so that you're able to not be thrown or panicky.

And that's one of the things that I think, I think for some Christians, it gives a feeling of conviction if they're in this militant culture war framing, but the outside world can see that for what it is. It's actually a lack of confidence in the gospel and in what we believe. I quoted at some point in their Leon Wieseltier Jewish thinker who says wherever identity is the thinnest, it's the loudest. And so you have a sense of when you don't have that confident standing in Christ, then you're going to end up in this frantic sort of, sort of outrage mode. And the rest of the world can see that for what it is. And it doesn't advance the gospel.

[00:31:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, it doesn't, it doesn't become attractive. If you're as anxious as everyone who doesn't believe then they have no motivation to believe in Christ. And yet, we're called to this, you know, it strikes me as a Christian over and over just how many tensions we're called to live in.

One of those being what you're pointing out here, which is a deep concern about the condition of the lost world and the brokenness of our world. That we should carry around in ourselves the suffering of Christ, as Philippians says. There's a great sense of burden and concern that we should have while at the same time, a, an even greater sense of confidence that God is not surprised and God is not panicked.

God is working and he has an urgency about him, but he's not panicked. Yeah. And helping people to get to that place where they can hold onto those two things, but lean more into the confidence side. So that there is an abiding and an attractive hope.

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I was also wondering just listening to you talk about as people move through not only fatigue and cynicism is it also in this, and if you take this mindset far enough, especially the war, the worrying, war ing metaphor is that where, if you misapply that, you start to dehumanize those that you disagree with or that you fear so that we no longer hold on to, as C. S. Lewis used to say, you've never met a mere human being, every single person is an image bearer of God. But as we look across the long story of history, we see how people, including Christians at times, have dehumanized people and is that a further step we take if we misapply this metaphor?

[00:33:36] **Russell Moore:** Yes and one of the ways that we do that is... We tend to forget how complicated we are and how complicated all people are. And so what we tend to do is to put people entirely in the category of wherever the argument is. And so that person is entirely whatever it is when in reality there, there's no person who is the set.

Of his or her political beliefs or religious beliefs or anything else. And so it, it keeps you from connecting with people at that human level and at that point of spiritual longing. And that ends up not just dehumanizing people. And dehumanizing people ends up in all kinds of awful situations as we've seen in history, but it also ends up losing the next generation because I mean, one of the things that sometimes we think is effective is to come in and to spend those childhood and adolescent years giving a picture of unbelievers or whatever, whoever we view to be a threat to our faith as evil and stupid. And that's really, you know, we think we're really emphasizing that. The problem is though, when when a, when that young person then goes out into the world

and they encounter an atheist or an agnostic or a Hindu or something else, and they think, wait, this is not a stupid person.

This is not an evil person. This person is displaying kindness and all of these other things. Then they start to, to completely mistrust what it is that they have been taught. And so they're able to say, okay, well, if they weren't telling me the truth about them, then they must not be telling me the truth about the things that I cannot see in terms of God, when in reality the Bible already gives us a picture that shouldn't surprise us when we encounter good aspects in unbelievers because they're, we're all made in the image of God and there's common grace shouldn't surprise us, shouldn't surprise us when we see sins and failures in Christians and in ourselves because we understand we're all fallen and we're all sinners.

So if you lose that tension, then you end up with a you actually end up with the opposite of what it is that you are trying to argue against. So for instance, if you think about a lot of times when people are worried about the way that that materialistic Darwinism explains everything through biological processes and that's not in step with a Christian understanding of the world.

Sometimes a person can do that by getting up and saying you know, I've heard people say, well, if these people are right, then why are there still apes? Because you know, they should be obsolete, just like an old model of a car once a new model comes along, it's obsolete. Well, the problem is, when that kid who's hearing that, then meets a completely naturalistic, materialist Darwinist, and that person actually does have an explanation for that, and isn't just sort of stupid, then they end up thinking, Oh, wait, well, you didn't even know who you were talking about at all.

[00:37:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And then to come back and go back into question that person, whether it was your parent or your pastor, if they don't acknowledge their limitations, right, they may double down. And then that again goes back to reducing their credibility. And it just seems to happen over and over again. And, you know, it just seems if you look across all of our culture, it is going to the credit credibility conversation is that we all know that we're all broken at every level. And you'll and you see, you see people leaders in every sector, politics and business and

medicine and education. You see people make really bad decisions and really blow up their careers and really do damage to their to their part of the world.

But there is an expectation, I think rightly so that when that happens within the church, that the church would be the quickest one to repent and to acknowledge and to confess. And. And because there's always that sense in which, you know we get disillusioned because we learned that our parents were not perfect and that they didn't always get it right or tell us the truth. Then we get disillusioned about our pastor and our church because he didn't get it all right. But we all, as we get older have these experiences of becoming disillusioned particularly with those that we claim as heroes in one sector or another, but there should be this expectation among Christians that we are the quickest to repent and to confess and to acknowledge where we got it wrong or where we didn't have the proper information. But sometimes we're just as slow as people who are not believers and that's perhaps where the greatest loss of credibility is. I wanted to move a little bit.

And sometimes even more so. Yeah, even more so because there is a higher expectation and there should be a higher expectation of us. In that regard, which kind of brings me around to this idea of here we are we're about around 12, 13 months away from the next political reality of electing another president.

We're struggling in these days that we're recording this to elect the Speaker of the House again. Do you think as you point out some of these things in your book, Do you think that evangelicals are coming to a place because of fatigue and perhaps temptation towards cynicism, that we're coming back to a more realistic place of seeing the limits of our politics and of our government engagement?

Are we... In any way moving after the last 10 years or so to a place of saying, okay, maybe we got, maybe we made that too big in our lives and we've staked too much of our hope on our politics and upon our politicians and upon our parties. Do you have any sense that we're moving back to a better place to say, you know what, that's an important part of life.

It's an important part of culture. I need to be a good citizen. I need to be a voter. I want to be reasonably informed, but I need to give up this being my ultimate. Do you see any sense of moving in that direction?

[00:40:34] **Russell Moore:** Well, it depends on how we define the word we. So I think there are a lot of evangelical Christians who are exhausted and who are coming to exactly the conclusion that you mentioned here.

I mean, I I have often have conversations with Christians who see the last 10 years very differently than I did, but who will say, you know, are we really going to do this again? And they think about all the broken relationships and they think about everything. And there's a sense of just exhaustion.

And so I do think there are a lot of people who are in that mode. And then I think there are a lot of people who are doubling down, tripling down, quadrupling down on it. Now, here's where I think there's good news and bad news. And that is when I go on to a college campus or I'm talking to trade school students who are in their you know, early twenties, something like that I almost never encounter that kind of experience ethno nationalist sort of, fervor among the Christians. Now, it's there, and there's a lot of it there, but it tends to de Christianize because there is, it's kind of like just what happened on the left in the main line is once the next generation realizes, oh, wait, so the Christianity is a means to an end and the end is the politics, so I don't need to give up a Sunday morning for that.

I don't need Bible verses to tell me to recycle. I can just recycle and you have the same thing happening. So if you go around and you see sort of the next generation of some of this. It's much more extreme than even what we've seen right now. There's a lot of genuine, explicit, white supremacy and even Nazi adjacent stuff, but it's for people who are, they're not seeing themselves as Christians or listening to Christians.

They're listening to the sort of people at the most extreme someone like an Andrew Tate or a Nick Fuentes who just are explicitly not just, not just immoral, but anti moral and anti Christ.

And so you end up with that and we've seen that before. I mean, you look at I've been reading a lot on the German Christians during Nazi Germany.

And one of the things that you find there is that you had a lot of, there were a lot of Christians who were saying, we need to support the regime, we need to support the Fuhrer. At the start the people who were kind of behind it were willing to use Christianity, but were, but really had contempt for the view of weakness that comes with the cross.

And so that was at the front end and it was at the back end too. And you see that in Europe with the rise of neopagan sorts of movements that come along with there's a fascinating book called a world a world after liberalism or something like that with I'm talking about small l liberalism.

It talks about how that sense of ultimate national identity usually starts with some kind of Christian language, but it can't hold there because ultimately what Christianity is contradicting is all that social Darwinism, all that national valorization, and even worse it from this mindset, you become part of a body that is at its root Jewish and foreign, quote, unquote.

And so that just doesn't hold. And I think that's what's happening now. So I think there are a lot of Christians and especially younger Christians who are saying, how do I follow Christ as authentic disciples? Which is why I was telling somebody the other day, one of the things that strikes me you know, I've been around college campuses and those sorts of places for all of my ministry.

There is a shocking difference between 10 years ago and now, and the difference is sincerity. So I the, for among the first questions I'm going to be asked in any sort of Q and A time, if I'm with Christians. Will be how do I pray? How do I read the Bible when and keep my attention span focused on it?

Now are those questions that all Christians have always asked. Yeah Basically, but ten years ago. Nobody would have asked that to me that way in public. It would have sounded corny You know, to them they would have wanted to ask, you know, what's a Christian worldview position on

whatever. And now that's the case, there's a resurgence of that kind of sincerity that I think is a genuine sign of life.

[00:46:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And that's a great place to kind of where your book comes to a landing. And I wanted you to talk about that from the standpoint of. moving away from nostalgia and moving and leaning more into our future. You know, I had an elder in my church we got in this conversation, oh, I don't know, several years ago.

And he said, you know, you ask people our age I'm 60, he's about my same age. He said, you know, where would you like to go back and start over again at 20? And, you know, we got into this with, well, we would love to be our parents 1950 in the South. Cars are coming of age. Music is coming into its own after the war.

And we're talking about that. And he said, you know, that'd be absolutely true unless you're a black man living in the South. You'd never pick the 1950s. Right. And it just was a real eyeopening experiencing for me of so many factors are in play and we have this romanticized idea. I remember being in seminary at Southwestern Seminary, and they talked about how Southern Baptists were so great at small group ministry.

So great at Sunday School and that they had this campaign in 1954, they wanted to enroll a million people in Bible study. And so they had this campaign slogan, a million more in 54, and they actually accomplished it according to records. And so we idealize a period like that, Billy Graham coming into his heyday in the fifties and the sixties.

And so much of the conversation that you point out in your book and that we need to think about is that we, well, we want to go back to that. We want to go back to this romanticized period where Christian, Christianity and Christians were revered across the country and we were getting most everything right.

And If you go back and tell the rest of the story, as I think many of our African American friends are asking us to do now is and say, Hey, would you listen to a few more chapters? And some others that are doing that as well. And even to say that somebody listening to me may say, well,

you're obviously woke just by saying that there are some additional chapters that need to be included.

Talk about how we have to move past this romanticized nostalgia. To be grateful for the good things that God has done and has taught us in the past, but we have a God that is still active today and we need to lean mostly into the future. For the ongoing manifesting presence of God now.

[00:48:39] **Russell Moore:** Well, what I would say is there's a way that one group of people can replace the kingdom of God with an idealized future.

And so if we just do this, then we're going to get utopia. So we're right on the precipice of the right side of history. And and so that means that, and that can ultimately become violent. Because if you're Lenin or Stalin and you think, well, we're, that the world that we're trying to get in the future is a worker state. Well, that means we can break a few eggs to make the omelet. So they idealize the future. And there's another group of people who idealize this imagined golden age in the past. And as you say, remove all the complexity and that's what they want to go back to. Neither of those things is what. Is what we have in the actual gospel of Jesus Christ, and when a person can do that with his or her own life to I was hearing somebody say the other day, and I can't even remember who it was, but it I just said it is so dead on.

Because, you know, even after having written that chapter on Revival Not Nostalgia, I found myself with my wife, something came up about the 1990s. And I said, ah, weren't the 90s great? And I just was, oh, wouldn't it be great to be back at the night? I gave all the reasons why. Well, whoever this was, I was hearing talk said.

You know, almost everybody has got that period in their lives where they think the world was so much better than why can't the world be like it was when I was 19, but really what you're nostalgic for is not the world the way it was at 19. It's being 19. And there's that kind of, and so that happens, I think, often in the church where we're looking backward or we're looking forward and we're not seeing the ways that God is at work and that often what God does, as a matter of fact, almost always what God does is to tear something down and to have a kind of renewal that's

in continuity of what came with what came before, but it's not just a repetition of the same thing. And that's the way God works.

Well, the one of the reasons I think why we don't like that is because. It's scary, you know, we want to know, okay, well, this is where we're headed. It's the same thing that we had in 1992 just with better wifi that's comforting to think that what's not comforting is the way God usually works. Which is to put his people in this time of tension and uncertainty that pillar of fire that led the Israelites out of Egypt was not predictable. Wasn't a map. It gave just enough light for the next stage of the journey. And that's uncomfortable for me. It's uncomfortable for a lot of people. And the reason for that is because we in our flesh, we really think that the job we're most cut out for is God. If we just had the requisite power and resources, we could really make good decisions.

And the way God usually works, it starts with people saying, we don't know where we're going or where you're leading us, but we know who we want to follow. I mean, so you think about the way Jesus his disciples would say where are we going? And Jesus response would be, come and see. And then near the end when he says and where to where I'm going, you know, the way Thomas says exactly what I would have been at least thinking, if not saying, which is, wait, we don't remember the way. When did you tell us that? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I would have been thinking he must have given us some codes or something and I was asleep.

But Jesus says I am the way. And that is a kind of following that requires us to lose our self dependence, including the kind of self dependence that says I need an itinerary for the next part of my life or for the next part of the church.

[00:53:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, as one of my mentors likes to say, no one in the Bible got a five year plan. And you know, nobody got a five year plan and at the end of the day, we are all control freaks, you know, we, which is a slang way of saying, we're just trying to be God. We want to be God and just really get frustrated that he doesn't lend us the power to do that. And there's yet there's always this hope when we go back to what you were talking about with the college kids, go back to that daily dependence of, I need to know how to pray.

I need to know how to relate to God personally and regularly and daily. And I need to know how can I understand him and know him through his word. And I would add to that, hopefully they come to the place of how do I do that in community? How do I do that in a congregation, a gathering of believers, whether it's a micro church or a mega church, whatever it might be.

But in a community of faith that is seeking to follow after Christ in that way, Dr. Moore. Thank you.

[00:54:19] **Russell Moore:** If you think about it there's you know, I'll often ask people this, when in your life, just looking back in your own life, when was God the most active in doing something that has mattered for the rest of your life?

I have yet to meet somebody for whom the answer is some moment of triumph. It's almost always this moment where that person was thinking, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you. And God may, in those circumstances, seem to be silent and yet you look back and you see all of these ways that he was at work. And I think the same thing is true for us as a church.

[00:55:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, and maybe that's a good segue into, just in the few minutes we have left, just to get a few thoughts about where we are in the world relative to this new terrible conflict between Israel and Hamas. A sense of, I think a lot of us are sensing, I just don't know where we're going. I just don't know what to do. I just don't even know how to think about now another large scale conflict that could cascade and domino into more conflict on an even grander scale. You've written about this recently. The world seems to be very much standing at attention, watching what's going on between Israel and Hamas, and rightly so.

What are your thoughts today about where we are in this situation? What are your thoughts about how Christians need to pray, how they can demonstrate compassion? Especially to civilians caught in the middle of all this. Where are your thoughts?

[00:55:55] **Russell Moore:** Well, I think one of the big problems that we have is victim blaming and a kind of both sides ism that loses a sense of moral clarity.

Doesn't matter what a person thinks about what the Israeli Palestinian Accords ought to look like one day, doesn't matter what a person thinks about all of these various issues. There is no justifying in any moral rendering Hamas and this murderous terrorist action. So we have to be really clear about that.

And then I think, I mean, one of the things that I think Christians can do other than then pray, I have a friend who's a Jewish rabbi who said to me he's, I haven't slept since October the 7th because I've been you know, trying to help my people through this in my synagogue. He said, I don't think, I don't think other people realize just the sense of after 4000 years of anti Semitism, how this feels for Jewish people and another Jewish friend of mine said, you know, we were killed in our beds in the Holocaust and we've all grown up with a sense of that is not going to happen again.

So when it does, there is this sense of not just the kind of horror that you know, any morally functioning person would have looking at this, but there's also an even deeper sense. And so I, one of the things is check on if you're a pastor or a leader, Christian pastor or leader in an area help the Jewish rabbi near you if only just through encouragement.

And I think that's one of the things that we can do. And the other thing is, you know, the Romans eight says often we don't know how to pray. And so we respond simply with groanings, utterances too deep for words. I think in a lot of this, because there are so many, as you pointed out, there are so many potentialities here.

It might be that Israel comes in and eliminates Hamas as I hope, and then the war's over. And there's maybe a renewed effort toward what was happening before this with Saudi Arabia and Israel, maybe a unique kind of peace coming about that could happen. Could be a conflagration that ends up in World War Three. We don't know. And so what we do know, though, is that we can pray.

[00:58:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and that's a great word for us. Thank you for that and thank you for the ongoing work you're doing in that area. Several articles that are available that you've written available at Christianity Today for people to get a handle on this.

Just so much for us to think about, so much for us to pray about. We could hope that there would be a quick and soon resolution to this current crisis. I would hope that other Arab and Muslim nations would rise up and say, you know, we just, we must disavow Hamas now in every way. As a mutual colleague of ours, David French said that we now as Americans, we must see Hamas as the new ISIS.

Yeah. That's the category that they are in, and we need to see it in the same way that we saw Osama bin Laden, the same way that we saw ISIS. It's the same mentality. It's the same tactics. There's nothing noble or statesman like in this organization. And there just can't be negotiation in that way.

Dr. Moore, thank you again for your ministry, for your time today. Thank you for your book. So helpful, so encouraging. And yet so honest and clear as well. We just thank you for that. We pray God's blessing upon your ongoing work. And thank our audience today as well for tuning in to the Denison Forum Podcast. If this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us, and share this with friends and family, and we look forward to seeing you the next time on our podcast.

God bless you.