

Why we must choose life

TRANSCRIPT

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[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** This is the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum, sitting down again with our Founder, CEO, and Cultural Apologist, Dr. Jim Denison. Jim, good morning.

[00:00:16] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Good morning, Mark. So glad to be back with you today.

[00:00:18] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Great to have this conversation, and I know our audience will be looking forward to it as well, and so we're going to take on a couple of topics today that are related to the calendar and one of those is coming up on January the 21st, which is Sanctity of Life Sunday. We're going to get to that in just a moment.

But before that, we're going to kind of back up and just talk about this thing called the liturgical year, or the Christian calendar. For many in our audience that may be completely foreign language. So what in the world is the liturgical Christian calendar, Jim? The Protestant evangelical world that is a lot of our audience, not exclusively our audience, a lot of that terminology is foreign to us. **Can you explain what the liturgical Christian calendar is?**

[00:01:08] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, it was foreign to me as well. I became a Christian at the age of 15 as I've shared the story out of a bus ministry of a Baptist church in Houston, Texas. And nothing that we're talking about right now was at all part of the rhythms of our lives and our experiences at all.

It was really way past seminary that I started encountering liturgical resources in ways that have been really helpful to me. And so from a very early stage, in fact, even back to Irenaeus and Tertullian in the early part of the second century, the church began developing an idea that it needed rhythms throughout the year, throughout the life, in order to be able to help the church to experience and express the entirety of the Christian faith.

A lot of this comes out of Judaism, all the various feasts and traditions of Judaism as we know about Passover and Pentecost and Booths and the weekly Shabbat or Sabbath and the monthly New Moons and all the things that the Old Testament brings forward as a kind of a rhythmic way of living in Judaism.

Well this gets brought forward into the Christian world for two reasons. First because in many ways we're not yet at a place where we have a Bible that we can easily share with each other. The Bible doesn't become codified until some centuries after that. And so these traditions become a good way of teaching biblical truth.

A good way during Lent, for instance, as we'll talk about in a moment, of teaching what happened during Jesus life, and especially the last week of his life. So it's a rhythmic way of educating ourselves of teaching and carrying forward biblical truth and tradition.

And then as well we're in a pre literate culture in a number of ways And so even those that have access to the literature of the Christian faith need to be able to teach that to others in ways that will be memorable in ways that will be communicatable so that they can hand this down to the traditions and to the generations that will follow.

Some of these are seasonal Lent itself comes from the word meaning spring and is tied to Passover. But it's also an annual tradition you think of Pentecost in the context of the fall in gathering and Thanksgiving as we think of it in a Christian or an American context and so there's some seasonality to this as well.

But it's essentially a way of living out the Christian life in its entirety holistically through the year in ways that can be remembered and practiced across the entirety of the Christian tradition. And you see that.

[00:03:23] **Dr. Mark Turman:** kind of rhythmic thinking about our lives in a lot of different ways. We just entered into a new year and , that is a seasonal celebration. In some ways, as you and I have talked, you know, December 31st to January 1st is just a turning of a page in some ways.

But for us, there's a rhythmic form to that. And we just finished the Christian season of Advent and we're going to talk about Lent in a moment. But even if people are not Christian, they have these kinds of rhythms and seasons. We get to Memorial Day and we declare that to be the start of the summer.

We declare Labor Day to be the end of the summer, the beginning of fall. The start of school is something like the start of a new year when you're raising families and that type of thing. And so we're still very much tied to some rhythmic practices within our lives as a way of marking time and just really focusing on different things perhaps at different times of the season.

And you can understand in a preliterate culture and in a time when people were trying to communicate faith in various ways and tie it to things that were relevant and meaningful in people's lives. Well, the changing of the seasons and that type of thing would have made perfect sense to try to create those kinds of rhythms.

Let me back up and ask this question why is it that you find the liturgical calendar in orthodox expressions of faith such as Catholicism and the Greek Orthodox Church But you don't typically find it very much in Protestant churches. Was that something rejected whole scale through the Protestant Reformation? Is there some reason that many Protestants and evangelicals don't pay as much attention to the liturgical calendar?

[00:05:09] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, that's a great question, really good, and it does go back to the Reformation era. When we think of the Protestant Reformation, everybody thinks of Martin Luther and the Ninety Five Theses and 1517 and all of that. Well, that was just one form of the Reformation. The Protestants, the protesters, as Luther was leading them, and as Calvin as well was, were what were known as magisterial reformers. And by that we mean reformers who were supported by the magistrates of the day. This was the more official version.

And to boil this down, far more than my son Ryan, who's an actual historian, would probably want me to, but to boil this down, they essentially took the position that we're going to keep within our churches anything the Catholic church was doing, unless it's expressly unbiblical.

They, for instance, considered the supremacy of the pope to be unbiblical, so they didn't continue with that. There were other things that they rejected as unbiblical, but if they were doing something of the Catholic tradition they didn't think was unbiblical, they would bring it forward, they would often reinterpret it, they would invest it with a different set of meaning, but they would continue to do it.

Sprinkling infants, for instance, was originally a way of washing away inherited original sin, so this baby, if it died, wouldn't have to go to limbo, which wasn't hell or purgatory or heaven. It had this kind of tradition. So the magisterial reformers kept the baptizing of babies, but they used this as a way of dedicating the child to God.

as opposed to washing away inherited sin. Well, that's the magisterial reform, and from that, we see liturgical traditions today. Episcopal, to some degree Presbyterian, back to Calvin, and

Lutherans, back to Martin Luther, could all be described as magisterial reform. Well, there was another kind of Reformation known as the Radical Reform.

Now, we're thinking about Ulrich Zwingli and the Swiss Reformers. They decided they would keep in the Catholic Church only that which is expressly biblical. The Bible, in other words, had to teach it, not just not reject it. And so, for instance, the Bible doesn't reject sprinkling infants, but it doesn't teach that either.

The only baptism you find in the New Testament is the immersion of believers. So they went back to that and started immersing believers, Anabaptists, Rebaptizers, and others in the Radical Reformation. So they only kept in the Catholic tradition what they thought the Bible expressly does teach. Well, the liturgical traditions we're talking about, that the Catholic Church carried forward, a lot of that out of Judaism, is not rejected by Scripture, but neither is it prescribed by Scripture.

No place does the Bible say, thou shalt keep lent or you shall have advent and so forth. And so the radical reformers that a lot of us as evangelicals come from took that posture toward Catholicism and only kept that which they found the Bible expressly to teach.

So there was, to boil it down, a bit of an anti Catholic bias in a lot of the radical Reformation for the reasons that we've been discussing, and that applies to liturgy, it applies to weekly liturgy, daily liturgy, as well as liturgical rhythms.

Some years, I'll add this very quickly, Mark, some years ago I read a book called **Evangelical Is Not Enough**, which made up a really important point. Made the point, and this is written by a former Evangelical himself, who now is in the Catholic tradition, who said, you know, in Evangelical churches, we're more than happy to sing hymns that were written by other people, some of them centuries ago, but we're unwilling to pray prayers written by other people, some of them centuries ago.

And I thought that was a good point. From that point forward, I, myself, have been much more using liturgical resources in my own spiritual life. A lot of this comes from some of the Desert Fathers that I've enjoyed learning more about, and Henri Nouwen and others such as that. But for a lot of us who are evangelical, if the Bible didn't expressly teach it, we didn't think we should do it.

And that applies to liturgy in particular, and liturgical rhythms as well.

[00:09:04] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, such good insight. I remember reading a book a few years ago I may get the title wrong, but the title is something like, **Sacramental Evangelical, Pentecostal, why can't we be all three?** And it's helpful for people that are, you know, this may be more than our audience wants to know, but you know, we're about 500 years past the Reformation, but, you really can't say that there was the Reformation, there were multiple Reformations. Go, you know, there was no internet, there was no cell phone there was no television, and so this was actually several different movements going on in several different areas and they took on different expressions depending on a lot of factors, including who was leading in that particular area and so it's not, it's very hard to talk about it as one movement.

It was actually multiple things happening with overlapping things, obviously similarities. But you mentioned a minute ago Lent as a word that expresses or is a word that stands for spring. Many people I think commonly just when they hear Lent they think, Oh, well that's, that has something to do with Mardi Gras down in New Orleans, and it has, all it really means is that you're supposed to give up something, and we don't even really know why we're supposed to give up something, but we're just supposed to give up something that we really enjoy, and kind of make ourselves a little bit miserable for a while and people vary, well am I supposed to give it up for a day, or a week, or a month, and they're very confused in many ways because of how the world in many ways have reinterpreted just this whole idea of Lent.

Can you kind of straighten that out in terms of what the Bible may be pointing us to and what the early church was trying to point us to in this rhythmic celebration that this year begins, interesting enough, on Valentine's Day and that we have a resource that we want to offer to people as a tool that might assist them in that.

But, set the table for us if you will, Jim. **What in the world is Lent? How can it be helpful to us in deepening our relationship with God?**

[00:11:05] **Dr. Jim Denison:** You've expressed the confusion of it very, very well. And again growing up in a church that never got near anything like Lent or anything like it, I understand the questions and the confusions. I had Catholic friends who were giving up chocolate for Lent, for instance, and I didn't understand what that was and why they do that.

And even when I became a Christian, I didn't understand why Christians would do that, what the purpose of that would be. So as you say, Lent comes from a Latin word lengthen, which means spring. We find a reference to this in Irenaeus and Tertullian early second century. It's a very ancient tradition. It's the idea of giving something up in sacrifice in preparation for the celebration of Easter is essentially what we're talking about here.

So it was initially a 40 hour fast that then became a week, and then by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 it became 40 days. The 40 comes from Jesus 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, primarily. But it also goes back to the 40 years that the Jews wandered in the wilderness in preparation to come into the promised land.

There's some reference to the 40 hours of Jesus body in the tomb, between his crucifixion and his resurrection, the 40 days of rain during the time of Noah, so 40 is a significant number in the Bible. And from an early day, it was believed that this number could translate over to spiritual preparation for the celebration, as I said, of the resurrection.

And so by the 4th century, it came to be believed that there ought to be this 40 day period of time to prepare the church for the resurrection itself. Now it's really a 46 day period because Sundays don't count. Sundays are days of celebrating the resurrection, so it's really 40 days excluding Sundays.

So you back that up, and it starts on a Wednesday, typically known as Ash Wednesday. Those that follow this tradition will go to church, and the priest or the pastor will place in the form of a cross ashes taken from the palms of the previous year's Palm Sunday day. Typically, to remind us of the suffering of Jesus on the cross and the sufferings that are brought about from sin.

The day prior to that, Mardi Gras, is French for Fat Tuesday. The idea being that you would feast on Tuesday since you're going to start fasting on Wednesday. That was where Mardi Gras came from relative to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent.

In the early centuries, Mark, this 40 days was very, very strict. During this period of time, an individual was to eat only one meal a day. For the entire 40 days, they were to abstain from meat, from fish, from eggs, from dairy products for that entire period of time. Over recent years, that's been significantly lessened, even in the Catholic tradition itself. But that's the history of this, and the idea behind it is to prepare ourselves for the resurrection, celebration of the resurrection, through this period of contemplation, of introspection, and of sacrifice, so as to, in a very small way, enter into the sacrifice of Jesus when he came to die for us so that we could live for him. So there's some background behind it. There's some real value in doing it, even today, as we can talk about in just a moment.

[00:14:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I heard a pastor recently talking about that with his church. And this tie in of choosing to give up something as a means of helping you, prompting you to focus more on the person of Jesus, on the sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus as an act of preparation, and as he was encouraging his church.

He said, you know, it can be food because obviously we're very dependent, very tied. And, you know, many of us are probably thinking right now, well, we're going to eat next. So it's very much tied to that, but he also brought it into maybe some of technology being a way that you could change your rhythms as it relates to how you intersect with technology, your use of your phone, your use of something like Netflix, your use of technology in a lot of different ways. And he actually mapped out some suggestions of, Hey, you could choose to change things in your life, and when you have that longing to pick up your phone, let that become a longing to stop and pray that kind of a rhythm, and was encouraging that as his people might consider what they would do through Lent and through other seasons within their church life.

So, it doesn't have to be food. It certainly has historically often been, but it can be other things. But again, just to try to help us connect with the idea of Jesus suffering. and to prompt us into focusing on him. And the use of obviously Scripture and other resources like we've provided you and your son, Ryan put out a resource called [Awaken My Heart that people can get at denisonforum.org](#) and this is a 47 day devotional reading, right? An opportunity to really focus on this through this tool. [Tell us a little bit about the resource and and that'll help people know what they can expect.](#)

[00:15:53] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, that's the intention. The desire here is to give people the ability, through a brief period of time, a kind of a guided experience, to be able to end that day, to enter more fully into what this season really means, what Jesus life for us means, what his death, his resurrection really means for us in a more focused, biblical sort of a way.

We don't mean this to replace [First 15, which is the spiritual devotional resource that Denison Ministries has provided for years](#) and that I still do every day. It certainly would want this to replace other things might be doing. I read [Oswald Chambers](#) every day. I read from [Daily Light](#) every day. So we meant this to be short enough and biblical enough, practical enough that you might add this to your routine for this period of time.

If you're not doing a devotional, if this isn't something that's in your regular rhythm, this might be a great place to start doing that and something you would want to do even past the Lenten season with other resources that could be helpful to you as well. But that's the idea behind this, is to give us a thought, a biblical thought, that could on that day and across this season help us to enter into solidarity with believers all over the world.

More than 2 billion Christians around the world, the large majority of which are in more liturgical traditions and are going to be practicing Lent in a very direct, very intentional way. When I lead trips to the Holy Land as you and I've done this together and as I've gotten to do this for so many decades, before we go to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, my favorite church in the world, I remind people what you're about to see here in the liturgical traditions, you're going

to see the iconography, all this, that may be very foreign to a lot of us, but this is how about 85 percent of the Christian world worships. The largest growing Christian movement in Africa is Anglican, for instance. We think of ourselves as being on the cutting edge, but that's really not true around the larger world.

And so the large majority of Christians are going to be using Lenten resources in a very direct, very intentional way. And this is a way we can join with the larger body of Christ. We can now more focus on the sufferings of Jesus and what could be more intentional about our own spiritual rhythms, our own spiritual disciplines during this season in a way that hopefully will transcend the Lenten season and become a rhythm for us that will draw us closer to Christ all through the year.

[00:18:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and like I said, a great way and a great season to start that. For 47 days, and to follow in the example of Jesus, you know, Mark 135, Jesus got up early in the morning and went to a place by himself to pray. And we often say as preachers, if Jesus needed to do that, we probably all need to do that even

[00:18:24] **Dr. Jim Denison:** probably do.

[00:18:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and Jesus had that regular rhythm. And this will help you the season of Lent and the resource Awaken My Heart. Again, you can find that at denisonforum.org. Thank you, Jim, for you and Ryan putting that together.

Let me move the conversation now to another thing that's on the calendar, which is **january the 21st, this coming Sunday is what is called Sanctity of Life Sunday**. Don't know exactly when it started. You may know exactly when and how that started, but is an opportunity for believers and for churches as they gather to come together and to focus on the gift of life that comes from God.

Genesis 2 7 says that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God didn't do that with any other part of creation, and so it expresses in some ways what we talk about as man being unique, made in the image of God. **Why is there a Sunday in many churches called Sanctity of Life Sunday, Jim?**

What's that all about?

[00:19:29] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. It's actually called **National Sanctity of Human Life Sunday**. If we want to get the entirety of the title together, starting back with Ronald Reagan. Many people don't know this, but in 1983, on the 10th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, **Ronald Reagan published the only book ever written by a sitting president in American history**. And it was

specifically about abortion, and the right to life. I've read it, it's a marvelous read, it's a very, very persuasive read. And it was in that context that the president felt that Americans should, on whatever Sunday was closest to Roe v. Wade, which was on January 12th, 22nd 1973 is when that horrific ruling was handed down, discovering in the constitution a right to abortion.

On the 10th anniversary of that is when President Reagan began stepping into this. And so the next year, 1984 there was this thing for the first time under his leadership called what we think of as sanctity of life Sunday. And from that point forward, it has been a practice for pro life supporters, again, on whatever Sunday is closest to January 22nd, to every year, come together to celebrate life, to not just be pro birth, but pro life.

To support women those especially that are facing unwanted or at risk pregnancies, as well as to support the unborn, to support pre born children, as a way of gathering the body of Christ together around this. Typically, there's a March for Life. There has been for a number of years now. That'll be the Friday before Sanctity of Life Sunday this year.

And the whole goal here, again, is to bring visibility to the cause of life from conception forward, the sanctity of life to remind us that as our founding declaration says, all people are created equal and endowed by our creator with the inalienable right to life. And that begins at conception according to science and should be the case with our culture as well.

And

[00:21:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Denison Forum we consistently just keep saying to each other and trying to say to those who don't know much about us, perhaps, That our goal at Denison Forum is to help people to think biblically and to act redemptively and to let God use your influence in that way to move the world toward what we call flourishing, biblically flourishing in every way possible.

It really ties back into what Jesus said in John 10 10 when he said that he came to give life and to give it abundantly to the full. You and I have talked recently about how the Apostle Paul in his letters seems to pick up on that idea because he uses a word that can be translated as overflowing in a lot of different contexts.

One of those is Romans 15:13, where he is ending that letter to the Romans and he ends with a prayer and prays that the God of all hope will cause them to overflow with hope. He seems to be picking up on this idea of abundance of flourishing in some way. Can you kind of unpack that you recently have been thinking and have been expressing that you really feel like there's at least seven expressions, or what we sometimes are calling pillars, of this idea of abundance or biblical flourishing.

Share with us some of those, all of those if you wish, how did you come to think about

[00:22:51] **Dr. Jim Denison:** and this

[00:22:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** biblical flourishing around these seven fundamental ideas, starting with this very fundamental concept of the sanctity of all life. Kind of take us down that road a little bit.

[00:23:04] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. Thank you, Mark, for that. So, for some time now, I've really been focusing in a variety of different ways, on what you could think of as America's founding creed. G. K. Chesterton said, America was the only nation founded on a creed. The Declaration of Independence, and especially that sentence, as I quoted before, we hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal, that they're endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I believe that assertion to be the foundational assertion that explains the American experiment and that in many ways provides not only why we exist, but what our best future could be. And so I've been thinking about that founding creed from a biblical point of view. I've been kind of teasing it out, parsing out the various pieces of it as I think, they provide pillars of the American experiment and what you could think of as human flourishing.

And so it seems to me that you can identify them as seven. And I think of each as depending on the previous, each as a foundation for the one that comes next.

So, to me, the first is a commitment to biblical authority.

Upon that foundation, second, the necessity of faith in Christ.

On that foundation, third, the sanctity of all human life.

On that basis, fourth, biblical sexual morality.

On that basis, fifth, biblical justice.

Sixth, political civility.

And seventh, cultural engagement.

I believe those go together. I believe each depends on the previous. And I believe that if we as believers can embrace these and live them out, think about them biblically and act in this context redemptively, we can make a dramatic, catalytic difference in our nation.

I believe they're foundational to the American experiment and foundational to our future as well.

[00:24:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, and it shows just how important and how closely interconnected these seven things are when we sit down as a church or come to a worship experience like this coming Sunday to focus on the importance, the beauty, the gift of human life, that that is tied directly back to that very first pillar of the authority of Scripture as the ultimate guide and reference for our life.

Connect those two a little bit more, Jim, that we're not just simply taking up a side in a political conversation, that this idea of being pro life and not just simply pro birth as you referenced a minute ago, that this is deeply grounded for Christians in their faith and in their understanding both of who God is and of the nature and understanding of the Bible.

Can you unpack that a little bit for us? Thank you.

[00:25:43] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'm happy to do that. And if people would like more than this, I have an article on our website entitled, [What does the Bible say about abortion?](#) It's a very comprehensive study. I look at each of the passages that speak to this issue in depth. We look at it from a historical point of view as well.

We look at what the early church thought all the way through the medieval era to the current era. And then we look at moral objections against abortion, moral claims for abortion. We look at the five claims people make for abortion from a so called moral claim. Point of view today, and then we close with some very practical things that we can do.

So if folks listening to this would like a lot more than we have time for here, that would be a place to go. What does the Bible say about abortion? They could simply Google that with my name or they could go to Denison Forum and find that there.

But to put that into a brief context from Psalm, really, I guess you could start with Genesis one, could you? Where we're created in God's image then to Psalm 139, that makes very clear that God formed us, knitted us together in our mother's womb. Jeremiah one verse five, where the Lord says to Jeremiah, before you were born, I knew you. Before I created you, I had a purpose for you, an intention for you.

All across scripture, it's clear. Life begins at conception. Life begins in the mother's womb, that we are humans from that moment forward. Science agrees. Back in 1973, in Roe v. Wade, the justices tragically made the statement that we don't have to make a decision on this, that this is unclear. Well, in the science, that's just not true.

From the moment of conception, this thing that you could call a fetus or a zygote or a baby or whatever you wish, has chromosomes that are only human, all the chromosomes that we'll ever have. Has a unique chromosomal makeup that is specific to itself. If left alone, if it's not aborted, it will become what we call a human.

It can be nothing other than human. If it's not a human, what is it? Entirely and only a human. As President Reagan makes the point, in fact, I'll quote from him here if I could, because I thought this was itself such a telling way to make this point. He says, the real question today is not when human life begins, but what is the value of human life?

who reassembles the arms and legs of a tiny baby to make sure all its parts have been torn from its mother's body can hardly doubt whether it is a human being. The real question for him and for all of us is whether the tiny human life has a God given right to be protected by the law, the same right we have.

I think he says that extremely well. So, we have always believed that abortion is wrong, that life begins at conception. The Epistle of Barnabas that was written before AD 132 specifically forbids abortion. The Didache, which is a late first century document, expressly forbids abortion. So those that follow Jesus have long, for 20 centuries, believed that life begins at conception and should be protected from conception for the mother's sake as well as for the child's sake.

This isn't just a political issue. There was a day, Mark, before recent decades, when this transcended political divisions, when you had a very large number of pro life supporters in the Democratic Party and you had pro abortion supporters in the Republican Party. Only in recent years has this become such a partisan issue so that now if someone hears that you're pro life or they'll say anti abortion, they tragically, they won't say pro life. It's all about how you caricature, I'm afraid, in today's culture. But if they hear that you're anti abortion, they assume you must be Republican, you must be a white evangelical. That's historically not been the case at all.

This is not so much a political issue as it is a biblical issue, and it has to do with life itself. If I can make this point from Roe v. Wade to today, more than 63 million babies have been aborted. To put that in context, that is four times the population of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston combined.

[00:29:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Wow. Wow.

[00:29:38] **Dr. Jim Denison:** This is the moral issue of our day because it goes to life.

[00:29:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So Jim, when you say that, when you really stop and think about that, it's an astounding statement given all of the things swirling around. And we're certainly going to hear more about people's positions as this issue is politicized again in the upcoming political season that we're entering into.

This is a significant political football, so it's important that people think clearly and have some sense of both the significance and the history around this issue and that they look at it as through a biblical lens more than through a political lens, but when you make that statement that you believe that this is the moral issue of our day how do you get to that when you talk about some of these other things, you know, I mean, even some of the things you've referenced already, which is biblical sexuality, the authority of the Bible the necessity of faith in Christ.

When you're saying that, how are you trying to get us to think about this as the moral issue of that day? You know, some people would say, well, that means that in a political sense, then this becomes the sole criteria upon which you would cast a vote for a candidate or a party. How do you want us to think and to act upon that idea of this being the moral issue of the day?

[00:31:08] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, thank you. It goes to two levels. The first we've been discussing, and that is the fact that we're talking about life itself. Whether a person is going to actually be given the opportunity to live. Which, from an ethical point of view, is the foundational issue. The foundational issue is the right to life.

Itself, whether we're having a biblical conversation or really in any context or even in any religious context the most essential ethical question one has to ask has to do with life itself. And then we build upon that foundation. You can't really talk about sexuality if the person's not alive to have that conversation or about faith in Christ or about the necessity of biblical authority justice any of the other issues. Those only apply to living People, they only apply to those who are themselves alive. And so the right to life is foundational from that point of view, because it deals with life itself.

But also on a second level, there's a larger cultural phenomenon at work of which this is simply a tragic expression and a symptom. As you know, Mark, for many decades now, we've been in what we call postmodern relativism.

It's the idea that all truth claims are personal, individual, and subjective, that you have your beliefs and I have my beliefs. That I believe is the cardinal reason why abortion is as popular as it is above all other reasons. Rape and incest is the reason women choose abortion 1% of the time, the health of the mother 3% of the time. If you ask women why they've had abortions,

21%, the largest percentage will say they were unready for responsibility. Another 21% they can't afford the baby now. 16%. They're concerned about how having the baby would change their life. 11% they're too immature or young to have a child. 8%. They have all the children they wanted or all their children are grown.

What those that support abortion ultimately want is the right to make their own decisions about their lives unencumbered by objective accountability. Whatever that issue is. The majority of men in America support abortion. And I believe the reason they do, above all other reasons is, they want the freedom to make their own decisions about their bodies as well.

And, if they, I'm sorry to say this, but if they cause a woman to become pregnant, they want that woman to be able to abort that child, if it's unwanted. They want freedom to do with themselves what they want to do with themselves. We want unhindered personal autonomy. It's the placards you see at pro abortion rallies.

My body, my choice. Keep your hands off my body. Things like that. There's this larger move that's been going on for decades now that says, I have the right to decide what I want to do with my life, and you have no right to tell me I'm wrong. Well, that applies first and foremost to abortion, but not only to abortion.

That applies to LGBTQ advocacy. That applies to euthanasia. That applies to a liberalization of what were illegal drugs across the board. Our country has left the founding belief that democracy required morality. We've left the founding belief that John Adams and others made clear that our Constitution is only for a moral and religious people and is wholly unsuited to the governance of any other.

We've now moved into an uncharted season in our democratic experiment where we think we can have the right to vote without any kind of objective right. And so if I have no objective rights, if all rights are personal, individual, and subjective, which is where we are now as a culture, well then abortion is just one expression of that larger belief that I should be able to do with my body what I want to do with my body, and you have no right to tell me I'm wrong.

That makes this an expression of the foundational moral crisis of our day. All the other immoralities we've been discussing are expressions of that moral crisis as well.

[00:35:09] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's just such a strong and clear explanation of how we have become focused on the right to freedom as we would define it. Without any, without any sense of responsibility for what comes with that freedom. And that, that seems to be the thing that we've lost is that we want the freedom, but we don't want anybody calling us to a responsibility about the choices that we make.

And you can't have one without the other. It just, it,

[00:35:39] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, I would just, go so far as to say that in America today, the only laws that are popular are the ones that I wish to be applied to me. I want murder to be illegal because I don't want someone to murder me.

[00:35:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** right?

[00:35:51] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I want theft to be illegal because I don't want someone to steal from me. But beyond things that I wish as my own personal protection, we're in a place now, as a culture, where more and more, we're seeing our society decide that it's going to recast, rename, redefine, re legislate morality around this principle of unfettered personal privilege.

And as we're watching this happen, we're seeing this relative to adultery rates, we're seeing this with pornography, we're seeing with movements to legalize prostitution, we're seeing this with a degree to which what was at one time a pretty clear set of moral convictions is now seen as outdated, irrelevant Puritanism.

We're at a place of moral therapeutic deism that says religion is whatever I wish it to be as I wish it to be expressed. A huge percentage of us that say we're spiritual but not religious. We're in this cafeteria world where I can pick and choose what of the morality that's been provided for me by previous generations I wish to put on my plate.

I wish to consume for myself, and if you disagree, you're intolerant, and being intolerant is the cardinal sin of our culture.

[00:37:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And even if I choose out of that menu to put certain things on my plate, I may reject them later if they become unpleasant, and I want to replace them with something else. And I, and you've already mentioned it, Jim, but I want to just make sure that this is crystal clear to our audience that we're not just simply talking about being pro birth.

We're talking about , being pro life in every biblical sense of that. And that includes, you know, you made a reference in, you and I've shared before some of the writing of Karl Barth on this topic and that type of thing, and that, that, child from the moment of conception if left unhindered, will grow to be a fully functioning human being. Unhindered also means making sure that that mother is properly cared for, that she has food, shelter, resources, that she's safe, that she is allowed and enabled to be healthy herself, so that this child that she is carrying for these nine months would also have the opportunity to be safe and healthy and to develop appropriately.

So it's not, as we've said over and over again, it's not simply about being pro birth. It's about being pro life on a very wide scale.

[00:38:15] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, that's right, Mark. One quick example of that, if 21 percent of all abortions are chosen by people who say they can't afford a baby now, we can do something about that. The church can do something about that. We could apparently, if that's true, save one in five abortions simply by providing financial resources for mothers facing at risk pregnancies, or unwanted pregnancies.

If we would step in as the body of Christ and be the hands and feet of Jesus, helping women dealing with this crisis in their lives, how many babies could we save and how many mothers could we bless? We do the wrong thing, Mark, when we caricature women that are choosing abortions as evil, as people that are committing murder in some sense that they just chose to make, some decision they just wanted to make.

This is a crisis for them. They didn't choose to be in this position. Over the years, 40 years as a pastor, I've counseled with a large number of women who had chosen abortion in their lives. Each of them were grieved in that choice. None of them wanted to be in the position of having to make that choice.

None of them chose to become pregnant knowing they could just simply choose to abort the child. It's not that simple. And so if the body of Christ could stand for women as well as their children, we're doing the right thing for all of us. And that's when we're pro life. Critical that we keep making that point.

I'm so glad you said that.

[00:39:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yes, absolutely. And Jim, I want to take this down a little bit further into where we are in the last calendar year. So we're not quite to, I think, a year's time since the overturning of Roe v Wade. And one of the things that we've seen, very disappointing, is we've actually seen the number of abortions rising since the overturning of the Roe v. Wade decision 50, almost 51 years ago it, so it almost feels like when I hear that reality that the overturning of Roe was a victory on paper only and now we're seeing the reality that the majority of abortions are actually chemical abortions that happen privately in the home.

, did we actually go down a road in the last number of months where we are experiencing something around we won the battle, but lost the war or set the war back in terms of contending for life? How are we to think about that? In this, you know, many of our pro life friends, and we would be a part of this as well, celebrating that Roe was overturned for a lot of reasons, including the fact that it was never good law.

But how do we think about the fact that this victory in many ways has actually turned out to be very detrimental in many ways? Especially along the lines of chemical abortion. Yeah,

[00:41:03] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, and I'm glad you brought that up because we have to be realistic about this. We want to be as practical as we can be as we try to think biblically and then act redemptively. So after the Dobbs decision, there is unfortunately no doubt that across the aggregate abortions have gone up somewhat, not enormously, but somewhat previous to that decision, which makes the point, and this was made, I wrote this, a lot of us wrote this when Dobbs happened, all that the Supreme Court did in 2022 was what was undue Roe v. Wade in terms of taking this away from the states. This should never have been a national issue. This should have been a state's issue as it was prior to Roe v. Wade. That's what they did was return it to the states. They didn't outlaw abortion. The Supreme Court has no ability, constitutionally, to outlaw abortion.

You would need a constitutional amendment, which I would be very supportive of, by the way, but you would need that for the Supreme Court to outlaw abortion constitutionally. All they did was return it to the states. Well, we knew going in that this was going to make this now a local fight, a local contest.

I'm glad it was overturned because it was bad law. I'm glad it was overturned because it took this out of the ability of individual states and even local precincts to be able to help make a decision here and make a difference here themselves. And so as it is now, now we can get involved politically.

Now we can get involved individually. We can get involved communally in ways that can save life that we couldn't prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. So I'm glad for that. I'm glad it gave us an ability to be engaged in a way we couldn't before. But we ought not be surprised. The number one, the so called blue states, where the large majority of abortions occur, were going to make abortion legal as soon as Dobbs happened, because they had the constitutional in their own context ability to do that, and Dobbs did not remove that right from them, so it wouldn't be a surprise that New York has done what they've done, that California has done what they've done, and others where abortion is numerically more likely to happen.

But we also should be aware of the fact that chemical abortions are 53 percent of all abortions now. And even though states like Texas make it illegal to mail them into the state, it's impossible to regulate. And so it ought not surprise us that whether abortion were legal or illegal in your specific state, that you would have access to chemical abortions, at home abortions, in ways that would make abortion plausible in a way that wouldn't have been the case had that not been the case previously.

And that has nothing to do with Dobbs. That's just simply the way that abortion is being procured. In today's times and culture, as opposed to how it was made available in previous generations, and that's going to continue to be the case. I think you're going to see chemical abortions become an even larger percentage of the total number of abortions as they're being more available, as social media pressures brought more to bear, as Teladoc medicine or some version of medicine is being made more available to people as well, you're going to see, unfortunately, this version of abortion become, I'm afraid, even more the larger percentage of how abortion is practiced in America.

So does it mean Dobbs was wrong at all on the grounds or to give us the ability now to be involved locally in ways we couldn't previously.

[00:44:13] **Dr. Mark Turman:** But it's certainly an area where Christians need to be even more dedicated to prayer in this effort. There are enormous medical risk to chemical abortions and to medical abortions as well. But already we're seeing stories of young women who get drugs from various places, including on the black web and foreign countries and having some horrific stories and experiences through chemical abortions that are in many ways unregulated and unmonitored, and some of our friends in the crisis pregnancy world are working in that space, they're ministering, developing new ministries to young women into young couples who find themselves facing a medical crisis that was brought on because of an attempted chemical abortion or an actual chemical abortion.

So there's a lot to be, that we need to learn and be aware of and to be praying about in that space. Jim, I'm wondering what you might say. To church leaders in this space in my involvement in this over a 25 plus period of time I've had a number of opportunities and conversations where pastors, church leaders, deacons, elders other ministers at church are leery about bringing this conversation very much into their church in a public way.

It's still only a small percentage of at least evangelical churches that actually even will stand up on Sunday morning and say This is National Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. It's a very, very emotionally packed issue that's now been highly politicized. I could imagine a pastor saying, well, should I say something or not say something about this?

I could imagine a church deacon or elder saying I wish my pastor would or I wish my pastor wouldn't say something about this and call us to prayer or to call us to generosity in terms of supporting a pregnancy center or something like that. What would be your encouragement to them?

[00:46:16] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. Thank you for that. Mark thinks on three levels. The first thing to do is to decide if we're willing to be prophetic or not. Are we willing to speak biblical

truth to cultural issues or not? Are we willing to do so even though some won't like what they hear? If the answer is no. Then at that point, we've really decided that we are no longer fulfilling the biblical call, I believe, to shepherding people well.

I don't believe a shepherd can shepherd well if he doesn't protect his sheep from that which could harm his sheep. And prophetic speaking of biblical truth to cultural issues is one of the most significant ways we can do that. For larger churches, preaching on Sunday is the only practical way that we can enter into their lives and into the issues that they face.

In some of the churches I pastored, for the vast majority of our members, the only time I interacted with them at all was on a Sunday morning in the context of a sermon. So if I was going to help them deal with the issues they're facing from a biblical point of view, I had to do it in a sermon. So if we're just not going to do that.

If we're just not going to speak biblical truth to cultural issues, then we really have revised what our call is. And I think we've abdicated our responsibility to shepherd our sheep, and to be the prophetic leaders in our community that God's called us to be. So first of all, make that decision. That I am going to speak biblical truth to the issues of the day.

Abortion being one of the most significant issues that we, I would say the cardinal cultural issue and moral issue of our day, as I've been saying. Second, decide to speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4. 15 is our mantra, speaking the truth in love. I'm right now thinking about the pastor's article I'll write next week, Mark, and in that article I plan to tell the story.

The first Sunday after I became pastor of First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas, it was Sanctity of Life Sunday my first year to speak on this subject after I become pastor there. So on that Sunday, I spoke as strong and bold a word as I could on the right to life and the significance of life and the value of life and the importance of defending life.

Afterwards, our counseling minister, who's been a long time, very dear friend of mine, and I were speaking and he very gently, very graciously said, well, I agree with everything you said. I'm so glad you said that, but also be aware of the people in our congregation who have already had abortions. He, as a counseling minister, would know those stories in a way I never would.

I'm sorry to say to you, I hadn't even thought in those terms when I prepared to preach that sermon. That was 1989. And I still remember that day very, very clearly. And so my encouragement to us is to speak the truth, but do so in love. Recognizing that probably if you're a congregation of any size at all, you're going to be speaking to people who've chosen abortion, people whose daughters or granddaughters have had abortion.

You're going to be dealing with people for whom this is a very personal issue. And we're not here to bring guilt. Guilt is not of God. We're here to call people that have chosen abortion to the life they can find in Christ, to what could happen if they would come to Him in a spirit of repentance, seeking His forgiveness, seeking His grace, seeking for Him to redeem some of those people that are the most affected.

Effective voices for life today are those that have been through the tragedy of abortion and now want to help other people not experience the same grief and the same guilt that they've experienced. So second, we wanna do this compassionately.

And third, we wanna do this practically. We wanna be prophetic, we wanna be compassionate, and we wanna be practical.

This is a year long issue, not a one Sunday a year preaching emphasis. So how can we encourage our members to be involved? How can they volunteer? How could we be supporting, as you said, pregnancy clinics and crisis pregnancy ministries? How could we be working to help families help children to process this issue effectively?

How can we, in our youth groups, in our single adult ministries, be as proactive and biblical in teaching the entirety of the Christian worldview? What practical ways can we make a tangible difference? What's our strategy for being pro life across the year, not just on the Sunday when we happen to be speaking to the issue?

So if we'll be prophetic, compassionate, and practical, I believe God can use us literally to save lives. And what a privilege that is.

[00:50:35] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah and congregations can make a big, big difference and would encourage our churches and our church leaders to think deeply along these lines that Jim's laid out. Jim, I want to just one last question, just kind of bring this down to the one on one level. There's likely somebody listening to this podcast who right now may be dealing with someone who is facing an unplanned even unwanted pregnancy.

They're contemplating the idea of abortion. Just pastorally, what would you say to that person? What would be two or three ideas? If somebody that they know, somebody that they love, somebody that they care about. Has the privilege of being brought into that situation. How can they think biblically and act redemptively in that moment when that person is trying to work through?

They're scared they're overwhelmed they may not have support from the father of the child or from extended family, they may be facing a lot of the issues that we've touched on today. And that's what's possibly moving them, at least in their thoughts, to considering an abortion but you're standing there as a friend or as a family member you love this person and you believe that this is a human being from the moment of conception and that there may be a lot of problems around the way that that child is conceived, but there are no illegitimate children.

There may be illegitimate processes that created a child, but there are no illegitimate children. What would you say to that person who may have that opportunity to speak into that person's life and to love them well? How would you encourage that individual to do that in that, in those conversations?

[00:52:20] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, I love your pastor's heart, and the fact that you always want to have conversations that are practical just like this. First thing, obviously, I'll say, but we don't want to overlook this, is to pray. And that's the Holy Spirit, to give me His heart for this person. I heard a missionary years ago say, God, break my heart for what breaks your heart.

Well, God's heart is broken for this person. This is a crisis in their life. As I said earlier, they didn't choose this. They didn't want this. They're in a position they didn't intend to be. It didn't want to be. And so as any circumstances that could be described in that way, we'd want to come to them with God's heart, with compassion.

So first pray for that. Lord, give me your heart for this person and give me your insight. Show me what I need to say. God knows their mind and heart in ways I can't. Lord, guide me. Show me how I can be helpful. Show me how I can be your hands and feet. Give me the words to say. Give me the things to do.

Give me the wisdom to bring resources into their life, whatever that needs to be and can be. So first of all, God, Be moving in my life. Be moving in their life. Be moving in their heart, Holy Spirit. If they're a believer, I know that the Holy Spirit lives in them. And if they're not, that the Holy Spirit's working in a convictional way outside of them.

But Lord, move in their heart and life and help them to choose life and use me to that end. That's our fervent prayer. First.

Second, we're going to do this in a relational context. We have to earn the right to be heard. We have to come alongside this person on a level of compassion that does not judge.

That does not condemn, that does not suggest some level of moral superiority. I obviously, as a male, have never chosen abortion. I have never been in a dating relationship. Certainly Janet and I in our marriage, never been in a position to be a part of a decision to choose abortion. But Mark, I've committed other sins that women choosing abortion haven't. I have temptations in my life that they don't. I am no better. Than they are for the simple fact that I have not faced this circumstance that they're facing doesn't mean that i'm not facing other circumstances they're not and so we have to come to this not only from compassion but from humility that says look I am no better than you.

I just want to walk with you through this I want to try to be here for you and with you in this and then on a third level How can I be involved practically to help you choose life? If there are finances involved, if there's the need for moral and spiritual and relational support, if there are ways that we as a church can help and be involved in your life.

Buckner Fanning, who was one of my heroes in the faith many years ago, when he was pastoring Trinity Baptist in San Antonio and wanted to get involved in this, began to realize, well, one thing we need to do is provide women who are facing unwanted pregnancy, a place to live in San Antonio, some of them were being forced by family members to choose abortion or by boyfriends.

And so one of the things Buckner and Trinity did was to provide homes for women to be able to come live in during this period of pregnancy where they would be fed and cared for and clothed and where they could be given medical care that they couldn't afford otherwise and be given a way to live through this period of time that they just wouldn't have otherwise.

So give them everything that they need on a practical point of view and then fourth, encourage them. If they don't think they can raise this child to consider adoption, encourage your church members to be engaged in adoption. I love the fact Mark, that your daughter is considering adoption. I'm so grateful for Christians that are choosing adoption and churches that are encouraging their members to choose adoption as well.

So that this mother who's facing the son one in pregnancy doesn't have to choose a lifetime of raising this child if she thinks that's just something she can't do. Give her that option and give the congregation the impetus to be involved at that point as well. All sorts of practical ways we as pastors, we as individuals can walk with people through this. So as we pray and we ask God to help us be his hands and feet, know that he loves to answer that prayer. He loves to help us choose life, even as he chooses life for us. And what a privilege that is to join God at that foundational point for the sake of those that Jesus died for.

For the sake of those that he loves as much as he loves every one of us.

[00:56:33] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. Such a good word. And Jim, I'm going to ask you in a moment to close this in prayer but also just a reminder, we should not be surprised that the devil has turned this into such a major battleground. The devil opposes everything good that God does, and human beings express the glory of God beyond all the other parts of creation.

And we should not be surprised that the devil is trying to stop and eliminate human life, even at its inception. You know, I heard somebody say years ago that the devil meets the young woman or the couple at both the front and the back door. He tells the couple, This is not a sin, this is not wrong, This is not a life, You're not harming anybody, You're protecting yourself.

And then when that person chooses abortion, he meets them at the back door, filling them with judgment and guilt and shame that they've just taken a human life. And we should not be at all surprised That he is battling in ferocious ways at the point of human life. The enormous gift that God has given to us to be partners with Him in the creation of another human being is just absolutely astounding.

And we need to guard and protect that in every way. Just want to Ask you, **Jim, if you would,** just close us in prayer around this very, very important issue and ask God to just give us wisdom, give us love, give us guidance

[00:57:58] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, thank you for that. Jesus said that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Whenever you see stealing, killing, and destroying, you know Satan's at work.

Abortion's all three of those, isn't it? Stealing, killing, and destroying. So let's pray against him, and let's pray for the power of God where we need that power.

So, Father God, thank you that by your grace you chose for us to exist. Not because this planet needed another person to join the eight billion people on this planet, but because you wanted us to be.

Thank you for that, Lord God. Thank you for giving us life. Thank you that your Son came, that we might have life and have it to the full, that we might have eternal life that starts from the moment that we trust him as our Lord. Thank you, Father God, for this life and eternal life that you've given us by your grace.

Thank you for the privilege of joining you in advancing life in this conversation today. Lord, I pray right now, first, for anybody who's hearing these words, who's considering abortion, or is related to somebody, connected, engaging with somebody who's considering abortion. God, I pray that they will choose life.

I pray that your Holy Spirit will move in their heart and their mind, God, that you would move them to that position where they would see life as you do and where they would embrace life as you do, Lord God. Move in their hearts and lives where practical things need to happen for them to choose life. I pray for that to occur, Lord.

Whether it's financial assistance or relational help or whatever it is, God, bring into their lives through the body of Christ the needs to be met, Father God, so that they could in fact choose life. I pray for lives to be saved because of this conversation.

Second, Lord, I pray for pastors that you will encourage us to be bold as prophets, to be compassionate as shepherds, to be practical as caregivers, so that Lord God, we can help in our personal ministries and through the ministries of our churches, to save lives in our communities and to bring people to see life as you do.

Lord, help pastors even in this season of life to be even more effective toward this cause, to your great glory, Father, and to our great good.

And then, Lord, I pray for Christian leaders that aren't pastors, that they would see their own influence toward this end, Lord, that wherever you've given us influence, that we would use that influence for the cause of life and abundant, eternal life.

And then Lord, most of all, we thank you for the one who came to give us life, the Lord Jesus himself. May we do everything that we do in this to his glory and to our good, as we make this our prayer in his holy name. Amen.

[01:00:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Amen. Thank you, Jim. And thank you for not only today's conversation, but for who you are and for all that you continue to do speaking a word of prophetic truth into our culture. And just want to also thank our audience today. And again, as we always say, if this has been helpful to you, please share it with friends and family and rate us on your podcast platform that helps other people to find this podcast and we'll see you next time on the Denison forum podcast.

God bless you.