

Why we observe Black History Month: Tyrone Johnson discusses biblical equality

TRANSCRIPT

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

Dr. Mark Turman: [00:00:00] You're listening to the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum. Denison Forum exists to help believers think biblically and act redemptively, and we want to have an important conversation today with one of our friends, Tyrone Johnson. Tyrone is a pastor here in the Dallas area.

He is the pastor of One Faith Community Church. He is also a very gifted worship leader and musical artist, producer. He's taken his skills literally to places all over the world, not only the United States, but places like Cuba, Turkey, Greece Ethiopia, Israel, Kenya, Brazil, and I could go on with others.

And we're sitting down, he and Dr. Denison and I, this morning to talk about an important topic, the topic of biblical equality confronting the problem of racism. We're going to spend some time talking about and understanding why we observe [00:01:00] Black History Month, which is February, and we're going to ask you to join us in that conversation.

But as we begin, I want to just say good morning, Ty and Jim, welcome to the podcast.

Tyrone Johnson: Well, thank you, Mark, I appreciate it. Yeah. It's a joy to be

Dr. Mark Turman: we

Dr. Jim Denison: honored to be here with my dear friend. I truly am. Tyrone and I have been friends for a very, very long time. We've led worship together at Park Cities Baptist Church. He's led, Tyrone, I don't know, 300 study tours to Israel, something

Tyrone Johnson: It's close to it. Close to it.

Dr. Jim Denison: close to it, close to it.

And just one of my dearest friends in the world. So Tyrone, thank you for your time today to be in this conversation with us again. Just so grateful for you and for Angela and your family. And grateful for your time this morning.

Tyrone Johnson: Well, I really appreciate it. I want to thank you guys for asking me just to be a part of this conversation and I really appreciate that. I really do.

Dr. Mark Turman: well, I want our audience to know that they're sounding very reserved and professional right now, but it was anything but that kind of conversation before we hit record,

Tyrone Johnson: don't need to tell [00:02:00] people that, Mark. You, Mark, yeah. Mark, you're not supposed to.

Dr. Jim Denison: why we had

that conversation before we hit record, Mark.

Dr. Mark Turman: last thing you said, Tyrone, was keep it real.

So I'm just trying to keep it real.

Tyrone Johnson: This is a good point.

Dr. Jim Denison: Just trying to keep it real. That's right. Good point.

Dr. Mark Turman: well, we're going to release this podcast. Yeah, thank you for that, Tyrone. We're going to release this podcast On the 1st of February, which is the beginning of Black History Month, and some of our audience, that may be news to them but Tyrone, give us a little bit of the background of your understanding of Black History Month, where it came from, what's the goal of having a Black History Month from your perspective?

Tyrone Johnson: Well the, to say a goal of having a Black History Month, I think, to me it was started as a recognition of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, their birthdays were in February. So, when it was first started, it was started to honor them and the work that they had put into advancing fair, equal rights.

[00:03:00] Anything that had to do with trying to establish just an evenness in the country when it came to race and how people were treated. And that's why it started. And I think now it's, when we first started talking about this conversation it brings up a lot of things to me now when I look at how things are trying to be, I don't wanna say erased, but forgotten in a way, which is interesting to me because , for anything to move forward, we have to at least remember or recognize the past. And when we spend so much time trying to pretend it didn't happen or not, act as if it, that wasn't a part of it. , no matter what part of history it is, I always, whenever I have these conversations, I always talk about the Bible.

It's like, well, we just don't see all the good things in the Bible. You know, we just didn't take [00:04:00] that book. Oh, take all of that out. Oh, that was mean. Oh, take that out. We didn't, no

we try our best to learn from those things from then and so we can move forward. And when I think of even other countries, when it comes to their past and how their past was hurtful to others, there was always a reconciliation and a, at least in that a realization of what happened.

But, as far as the year, we have a hard time doing that here. Cause we haven't even, it's like we're still trying to decide, well was it really bad? I mean, you know, so,

Dr. Mark Turman: Or, or it wasn't all

Tyrone Johnson: right, exactly. So, yeah, right.

[NOTE: The timestamps below are incorrect due to an initial split recording.]

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, we like to talk about thinking biblically and acting redemptively, and in recent days we've talked about that as moving toward biblical flourishing we actually have seven ideas around biblical flourishing, one of those being biblical righteousness, which includes what we're talking about today the idea of biblical equality.

Can you unpack that a little bit for us as a context for this conversation? Ha,

[00:00:24] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, especially in the context of what Tyrone just said, because I thought, once again, he was just so brilliant in his observation there, that in the Bible, we don't leave out the bad parts. David's sin with Bathsheba, for instance, and Moses' failures, things like that. But in American history, we have a hard time admitting all of that.

Well, I think there's a reason for that. We had a founding myth. At the beginning of America's history, which made us a city on the shining hill that said that we were God's last greatest hope for humanity. And I understand all of that. I'm grateful for all the good that's come out of all of that.

But I was reading just the other day when we declared independence, only a third of Americans were for independence. Another third were Tories. They were for the British and another third were ambivalent, weren't certain what they wanted to do. Well, you don't hear that reported much because we like to think of our battle for independence the way that we do as this great unanimous cause of all Americans united around George Washington to overthrow King George and, and create this great nation.

And again, I'm so grateful for our nation, but we're, as Americans, sometimes I'm comfortable with the parts that don't fit into the narrative. Well, that's especially true with what we're discussing right now. It is a simple fact. It's a horrific fact that in America's founding, there was a very common belief that European civilization was superior to African civilization.

Therefore Europeans as a race were superior to Africans as a race. And therefore it was legitimate to enslave Africans in the same way you would utilize other inferior species. Horses, oxen, whatever. And that in fact, you were doing them a favor. I have a hard time even saying this because you're bringing them into European civilization and they'll be better off enslaved to Europeans than they were being free in Africa.

I could show you, in fact, in my paper, what does the Bible say about racism? I quote at length, the conversations that were going on, the arguments that were being made to make the very point I just said in America's founding. Slavery had a very specific worldview. Behind it is the point. And to Tyrone's point, that so often gets overlooked as we look back at America's history today.

So things like a Black History Month are crucial for us as we as a nation come to terms to some degree with what we're saying. People often ask, okay, why don't we have an Asian History Month or an Anglo History Month or a Latino history, my, well, African Americans have been victims of slavery as no other race has been.

What I've just said right now applied to them in ways that didn't apply to other races. That's just one reason why I think it's so crucial that we move forward in this way. I'm so grateful that the founder of what we're now doing, Dr. Carter Woodson, gave the lie to that idea that Africans were inferior to Anglos, PhD from Harvard. When he founded in 1915, what is known today as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, someone like Tyrone, with a graduate degree in biblical studies, who was so articulate and so brilliant, so grateful for his leadership in conversations like this. Dr. King, who started college at the age of 15, one of the most brilliant theologians and philosophers in American history give the lie to this horrific idea that there's this inferior ness about African Americans. And so, all of that to say, Mark, it's just so critical that we continue pushing back against that part of our history because it still lives today. It's still the case today that if I feel myself inferior to Tyrone, on any level, he's certainly a better singer than I am.

He's brilliant on so many levels. If I think I'm inferior to Tyrone, but I think white skin is superior to black skin, then I can feel myself superior to him on levels that can't be changed. A lot of racism in my experience is a reaction to inferiority and it's always going to be there to the degree that we're fallen people.

So continuing to have these conversations, continuing to push back against that narrative, continuing to think biblically. Back to your point is critical being able to act redemptively. To think biblically, there's neither Jew nor Greek slave, nor female. Well, all Abraham seed nears according to the covenant in revelation, seven people from every tribe language, people in tongue gathered around the throne.

God loves all of us. Each of us as if there were only one of us. Well, I could go on and on. This is a big issue for me, Mark. Thank you for letting me in the conversation, but all that to say, it's critical that we push back against this as biblical thinkers so we can act redemptively toward the future God intends for us.

[00:04:58] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, thank. Yeah, thank you for that. And could you, lemme just from the well of your biblical understanding, which is deep, deep for all of us. We know that but , you mentioned just a second ago that this has always been and will be with us until Jesus comes again because we are fallen human beings. Talk a little bit, Jim, about how this problem of feeling superior or thinking that you're superior is not simply tied to this relationship between Anglos, Europeans, and Africans, but actually it's kind of all over the Bible in various places, and that this is just a part of our fallenness, of our depravity. Can you kind of frame this from a biblical context a little bit?

[00:05:40] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, there's two sides to that very quickly. You think of Moses who married an Egyptian and faced racist attacks on the part of his own family relative to you think of Simon of Niger, probably black, certainly from Africa and Simon of Cyrene, perhaps all through Scripture, you see this kind of sense of antagonism, certainly Jews and Gentiles.

Gentiles thought that Jews were worthy of being enslaved, and Jews thought, they used to say that God made Gentiles so there'd be firewood in hell.. Jews wouldn't allow their women to help Gentile women in childbirth, because that would only bring another Gentile into the world. And so, there is this sense in history of inferiority that reacts in a racist sort of a way.

But I also have to say, and I'm sorry to have to say this, because I'm so grateful to be an American. But I do have to say, that a systemic, entrenchment and embrace of slavery from an economic systemic point of view has been pervasive in America in ways that have not necessarily been true. I wouldn't say we're unique in that sense, but it certainly has been to a degree here that hasn't been true in a great number of other countries.

The South's economy was built on slavery. Our agrarian economy depended on slavery in a way that wouldn't necessarily have been true in England. Wouldn't have been necessarily true in France or in Germany or someplace. So certainly think of the Aryan super race, Nazism and all of that, obviously there's always been this kind of racist movement, but there was an entrenched systemic ness to the racist slavery that we see in America on a level that still persists on some levels, significantly, tragically today. So yes, racism is a part of the human condition, fallen human condition. I think that's true, but I think there's, if not uniqueness, there's a degree to which that's been an issue in America in a way that we Americans need to, I think, do a better job of understanding.

[00:07:29] **Tyrone Johnson:** Hmm.

[00:07:30] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So, Jim, to follow on with that is, is that for us to set an expectation that that this is something that we need to be aware of in terms of our fallen nature and in terms of the American engagement in this horrible line of thinking that, it's been so deep all the way back to the founding of our country that we have to recognize that it's going to take really hard and intentional work to root it out of our systems.

Is that a proper way to think about

[00:08:01] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. And I'll speak to that in a very large conversation. As you know, I'll speak to this very briefly and be very interested to see how Tyrone, would think about this as well. On the one side, I do agree with what you just said. I mean, this goes back again, if they'll, if people will look at my paper, what the Bible says about racism, they'll see lots of evidence of how this predated the founding of this country and was part of the enslavement that helped to create this, especially the Southern economy, Northern economy too, but especially the Southern economy.

On the other hand, I don't agree with Howard Zinn and those on the critical theory approach that would say America was so flawed as a nation that the entire democratic experiment has to be torn down. That from its beginning, our only purpose in being was to advance the economic interest of white slave owners. You'll hear a lot of that today that's being taught in a lot of the academy today. A lot of diversity, equity, and inclusion movements are built out of that kind of idea that we are so systemically flawed, so systemically racist as a country, that the whole American experiment is flawed.

I don't believe that's true. I do believe there's significant evidence on the other side of that. We could have a conversation about some of the founders themselves. Who did not agree with anything I just said. Who were the John Adamses, who were very much opposed to racism and to slavery. George Washington, who freed his slaves and spoke vehemently against slavery.

Thomas Jefferson, for all of the horrific ways in which he practiced slaveholding, who at the same time protested against slavery. And said that slavery would be the thing that would be the greatest sin in America. And so I do think it's a more ambivalent issue than that. But back to your point from a practical point of view.

I do think that we as Americans need to be more aware of the degree to which there are systemic issues in our country, not just relative to African American racism, a great deal Latinos that could have this conversation, Asians that could have this conversation, certainly women that could have this conversation relative to gender equality in our country as well.

The degree to which we're flawed people, and as flawed people in a democracy, the good news is we can make a difference in a way that other cultures can't by virtue of how we can, on significant levels, impact our culture through our own personal civic engagement and by praying for the spiritual awakening we need so desperately.

So it's a both and, I think, Mark, and it's a very complex story. But we should each be seeking to make the difference that we can make where we have that opportunity today. It's called

[00:10:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Tyrone, I wonder, I wonder what your thoughts are just listening to Jim's analysis. Anything that you would respond to in that?

[00:10:30] **Tyrone Johnson:** Well, well, no, what, what Jim said is. As always, it's always a brilliant answer and always makes total sense I mean a perfect example. There's a whole

conversation on generational wealth and how this is established and how this is built. And when you think of the military members that came back from World War II and the government was very free and giving loans and giving out so they can establish and get a home and get this and that, not many were given to African American soldiers. So, so there you begin to start. Of place of not even starting in the same place. You're not even starting at the same level. So as years go on, then if you did get alone, then you can only live in a certain area or you would only be able to get alone in certain places. So then you start putting. Yes. So then you start putting people in certain parts of town and so, you know, so, but as you look, as Jim was saying, as you look down through that, **where we are now is a part of where we were then.**

And it's just brought us to this point. Now, I'm kind of on the thing with Jim. I don't think we need to tear everything down to start over, but I think we need to be aggressive in addressing the things that we can make a difference and change that are there now that have, you know, people always fuss about, oh, we need reparations.

Well, you don't have to do reparations. It's not always just money financial reparations can also be, okay, you know what we took that, from them that maybe we need to figure out a way to make them hold some kind of way or make this family, because when you think that's, and that was just. That's just one story of one family.

You know, I saw the movie, I remember the movie Hidden Figures that they did about a

[00:12:23] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yes.

[00:12:23] **Tyrone Johnson:** lady that helped with the journey to the moon. And there was one that, okay, in order for her to work in this area, she had to take a class. Well, she couldn't take the class because she was black. Well, she had to take a class that was somewhere else, but then it was only at night.

And then she was black, so she had to sit in a different part of the class in order to be able to, and that's just one person. So you have one person that kept going through all of those hoops to get through it. So just think if you had somebody who went through two hoops and, just couldn't do the other five.

Or did three hoops and couldn't do the other four, you know, so you, when you look at how those things affected people over history, you can see where a lot of situations are now are just from historical, trying to catch up and it's like, you know what, I'm, I'm tired, I'm, I'm tired, cause I was watching that movie and now, you know, people can look at that, oh, wow, she really did good.

I say, yeah, but you don't realize what all she had to do in order to be able to do that. Yeah. You know, and that's just one, and she was willing, and she had a husband, and they had a family, so he had watched the baby, and she hadn't gone all night, she was only taking, you know, on top of working during the day, and having to do the, you know, so it's, the thing that I've always said

when it comes to race, and when it comes to recognition is, the only thing that it does when we recognize one another as far as race.

our race and recognize one another as far as our potential. It enhances all of us. It's not just one. It's not just well, if we recognize Black History Month, it only recognized black. No, if you recognize Black History Month and the things that African Americans have attributed to building this country, then we have a different appreciation for African Americans, how this country together was able to expand and grow, not just one or not just thinking.

I always go back to this when somebody asked me about it. I think about the story of Joseph and Joseph you know, has a dream given by God, and he has a dream to, you know, you need to build grains. He does all of this, saves Egypt, saves everybody. All of, all the Israelites moved to Egypt, and then all of it.

Then you read in the Scripture, and then there was a Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph.

[00:14:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right,

[00:14:50] **Tyrone Johnson:** And you may ask yourself, huh, that's interesting. Well, think about it. Down through Egyptian history, Egyptians were very meticulous on their history. So, they taught what they felt needed to be taught. So, but it was something about Joseph being a slave and saving the Egyptian race and everybody else that, well, we don't need to teach that, or we don't need to teach that, or we can leave that out.

So you get two, three, 400, then there was a Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph because by that time they've already convinced himself, well, we probably could have done it on our own. You know, this, who was just, well, he was somebody from way back then, and every year, every time it goes by, he's less and less.

So then when you don't, when you don't know him, all these people here, you're just like, why are these people here? It's more of them than us. We got to figure out some kind of way to control them.

[00:15:44] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. They're a

[00:15:44] **Tyrone Johnson:** So what do we do? Yes. Instead of looking at, they're from the descendants who saved us. You see, so it's not just now, it's always, it's always been.

And so if, if we just have to come to that understanding of, you know what guys, there's nothing wrong with finding out mistakes that we all make, and then let's just go from there, correct them and just ask forgiveness for them and move forward. It's possible, but it, it just takes that, realize that we have to do that, you know.

[00:16:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I just, man, thanks for that. I, I had never thought of it that way, Tyrone. And I was actually, actually reading that story just this morning about Joseph and the dream and , the saving of Egypt and all that. , and like you said, , how could it be that they're such a dramatic event, seven years of feasting, followed by seven years of famine in this.

How, how could something that dramatic that be like saying, you know, well, we're just gonna over the years, we're gonna forget about World War Two,

[00:16:46] **Tyrone Johnson:** Right. Exactly.

[00:16:48] **Dr. Mark Turman:** on that scale.

[00:16:49] **Tyrone Johnson:** Right. Exactly.

[00:16:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and, and how could that be? It kind of brings me to this day. I've had several conversations over the last few years with some of my African American friends.

About this telling of history and what sometimes is called the revision of history. And what I've taken from several of those conversations is, my African American friends are not saying, look, we're not trying to revise history, we just want the other chapters included. We want, we want a

[00:17:16] **Tyrone Johnson:** What the whole story told. Exactly.

[00:17:18] **Dr. Mark Turman:** telling of history.

Is that the idea that we need to

[00:17:20] **Tyrone Johnson:** That's exactly what the idea. Cause I can remember growing up in junior high school. So, in junior high school we had a, I was in the 7th or 8th grade. And I had a history teacher taking Louisiana history. We went to Louisiana and one week we had a sub, an African American teacher sub come in.

And we were talking about history. And she was talking about that at one point pinchback that Louisiana had a black government. I was like, Louisiana had a what? Never heard that. All my years had never heard that until she taught it. But that's the whole thing. It was not like it wasn't there until she showed up. It just was a part of history that, well, it didn't, we don't need, we leave that out. Because if we can leave the parts out of accomplishments, then when we say that they aren't capable, It's more believable because there's no history of anything they've done. See, it's much easier to do that. So if you're telling me that, you know, when it was in Carolina, when once Reconstruction first started, and you had businesses, and you had African Americans in Congress and stuff, and everything, and white people realized, wait a minute, no, we're supposed to be on top.

They're not supposed, we're supposed to be on top. And they go in, and they threaten everybody, if you don't leave now, we're going to burn this place down. And so But we never hear that history, you know, that they was, you know, that you people think, Oh, well, slavery, then there was reconstruction and now with civil rights and everything's great. they missed the whole reconstruction only worked for a little bit. And then because of, you know, political again, political games where, if you give us presidency, we'll take all the troops out of the south,

I mean, if we can just address Our things, our history, truthfully, it benefits all of us.

It always benefits all of us.

[00:19:30] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, , can you comment on this idea that , we want to try to just move past the bad chapters of our life, either individually or corporately, we just don't want to look at it individually. Consistently deal with it thoroughly. We would rather just try to find ways to diminish it and move on and how we do that both personally and corporately around something as significant as not treating people with the kind of honor and respect and seeing them in the image of God that we should.

[00:20:01] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, that's two thoughts very quickly. Thank you, Tyrone, for that brilliant response. Again, As always the first, and I said this earlier a little bit, but I expand on it for just a bit. The will to power, as Nietzsche called it, desire to be like God in Genesis 3, is the basic temptation in human history.

Every temptation is just a version on that, right? Be your own God by stealing this. Be your own God by by having that affair. Be your own God by doing whatever this thing is. That's what sin is. It's our desire to be our own God, to be the king of our own kingdom, to sit on our own throne. Well, that's where racism comes from.

It's my desire to be superior to somebody else. It's part of the human condition because Satan continues to tempt us in that very way. So when we write history, winners get to write the history. Winners get to draw the lines on the maps. Winners get to create the nations that we now take for granted.

Iraq was a fiction. that decided to put together after, I think, World War I, that we're going to put Kurds together with Sunnis, with Shia, and they're all just going to get along because it was to the West's political and economic advantage to do so. And how's that turned out for us, right? So every historian has to be subjective on some level.

This conversation is probably not going to get reported in the Dallas Morning News tomorrow. Now, if somebody walked into one of our houses and You know, and, and shot us it might get in the news, I'd rather it not be, but typically this is gonna get left out because most historians wouldn't see this as worthy of that.

So just because so much happens, you can't record everything that happens. The Bible says that everything Jesus did had been written down the world couldn't contain all the books. So even deciding what to put in or not, it's a subjective decision. And then second, how to treat what you do put in is a subjective decision.

As well, the history gets made by the winners, and it gets made in alignment with a narrative. And as I said earlier, America's founding narrative is that all men are created equal. Endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Praise God for that.

But we think because we said it, it must therefore have been true for everybody. And we don't want to hear counter evidence. Because it conflicts with the narrative that we so appreciate. So, that's why history gets written the way that it does. Sometimes it's intentional, sometimes it's just people literally not knowing it.

Not talking about it because they literally didn't know it. I didn't know what redlining was. Until some months ago, I heard it being discussed, I went and looked at it and was horrified to discover that for a significant part of history where I live in Texas, it was a fact that minority communities were segregated into areas called redlining on maps, where they got higher interest rate loans because the banks decided they were less suitable candidates for loans, where there were fewer parks built, the schools were less significant, even grocery stores were not as available.

They were called a food deserts, redlining, and then it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy because the schools are less appropriate. The students aren't as effective. And so therefore they get the worst jobs. And so therefore , they're insured at the higher rates. And , this was decades Mark of a thing known as redlining. I never heard of that. I didn't know that existed. It wasn't like my entire life. I knew it and I was leaving it out intentionally.

[00:23:20] **Tyrone Johnson:** Right.

[00:23:21] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I didn't know it to be included. To Tyrone's point, if we'll simply include it in the story. And that goes to my other response very quickly. The reason Tyrone could say what he just said, that Black History Month helps all of us. That having this conversation helps all of us. It's because Tyrone's not a racist. Tyrone doesn't see the world as a zero sum game,

[00:23:42] **Tyrone Johnson:** Right.

[00:23:42] **Dr. Jim Denison:** where if this benefits me, it must hurt you. If this is to my good, it must be to your bad. If you want it for me to win, you have to lose.

Football's a zero sum game. Let's not talk about the Cowboys game last night. But nonetheless, football's a zero sum game, right? Athletics are a zero sum game. People see most of culture as a

zero sum game. If the Republicans win, the Democrats have to lose, or vice versa. Well, Tyrone comes along to say, no, we're all created in the image of God.

We're all loved equally by God. We can all love each other equally. So to understand the African American experience is to understand the human experience.

[00:24:18] **Tyrone Johnson:** Right.

[00:24:19] **Dr. Jim Denison:** It's as though my family came along and decided to have a Ryan history month for my son, Ryan. Well, that benefits my whole family to do that or to have a Janet history month.

It should be a Janet history year. If our family was going to be fair to that, that would be the right thing to do. That benefits all of us. Well, that's because Tyrone's not a racist. It's because Tyrone sees all of us the way that God sees us, and I'm so grateful for that. If we could get to that place, we would then understand that elevating and being grateful for the African American experience is to be grateful for the human experience in a way that honors God.

[00:24:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And, and Jim, just, yeah, love when you start helping us think in that direction, especially this idea that the Bible calls us to a faith that is pointing us and inviting us really into an abundance mentality rather than a scarcity mentality. Can you kind of compare and contrast that, the, the idea of what Jesus says, you know, so many people memorize John 10 10, you know I've come that you might have life and have it abundantly. I've been captured in over the last year with Paul's use of the word overflowing. He just sprinkles that word all over his letters this idea.

He seems to be picking up on Jesus's idea of abundance, which is you can only have an abundance or overflowing mindset about life if you are a person of faith. If you're a person of fear, you're going to be a person that has a scarcity mindset. Am I thinking in the right direction that way?

[00:25:49] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Oh, I think absolutely. Again, and this again goes back to the will to power, to the drive to be my own God. There's only room for one person on the throne of my life.

[00:25:57] **Tyrone Johnson:** Mm.

[00:25:58] **Dr. Jim Denison:** so if I want to be my own king, well, it's like Herod, who, when he heard from the Magi that there's this King and Judah, he was troubled in all of Jerusalem with it because they knew what Herod was probably going to do about this.

Right? So I've got to get rid of the competitors here. I've got to kill the enemy here and everybody's my enemy. If you're not a means to my end, then I have to be a means to your end,

and I don't want to be a means to your end. Well, that gets extended to racial conversations. And now we have people as a means to the end of my context, whether that's female to the male, or that's African American to the Anglo, or whatever that story might be, Mark.

And so, if we can back out of all of that, and again say that God loves each of us as if there was only one of us, there's enough God to go around? There's enough of God's love to go around? It's like when your kids used to ask you, which of us do you love the most? They're doing a zero sum game here, right?

If we can come back and say, no, because God is love. He can love all of us as much as he loves any of us. And he can help us do the same thing. We can love each other with his love. Love is a fruit of the spirit. If I'll be filled by the spirit, then I can love everybody the way God. Now only then, that's your point.

We can only really do this in faith. It's either faith or fear. I either have to fear you as an enemy to my throne, or I can love you as somebody equally loved by the king if I'll get off my throne. If you want to get along with God, stay off his throne. Every day, ask the Holy Spirit, fill me, empower me, manifest your fruit through me, and then I can love as I am loved.

Then I can love as he loves. Then the abundance you're speaking of becomes our experience and then Black History Month elevates all of us. And then we're having a conversation about how all of us can be improved in humanity by a God who loves each of us so fully. But we have to completely change our thinking to some degree.

We, we commodify each other. We live in this consumeristic environment. We live in this boy, if I wanna buy that car, then I gotta get there before you because I want the car. And you can't have the car because I want the car. It's just as consumeristic, consumer driven. commodification of life that is how our environment works, it's how our culture works, it's how our economy works.

And again, it's how the will to power works. So every single day, get off the throne. Every single day, submit to the spirit. Every single day, ask God to help me, love as he loves and how different our culture would be if we would.

[00:28:18] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, thank you for that. I had a question I wanted to put to both of you, and we'll let Tyrone answer first which is, obviously, in this conversation, across history, there have been some places of hard pivots. We've even referenced some of them, like, Joseph's story, and then the Pharaoh who came to, did not know Joseph.

Hard pivots in American history. Obviously the Civil War is the biggest hard pivot in this conversation, but also the Civil Rights Movement. We're recording this conversation today on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which is an important day for us, to stop and remember and to reflect.

Tyrone, I want to ask you to answer first, which is, do you think that we're headed toward, Another hard pivot in this conversation within our culture.

[00:29:03] **Tyrone Johnson:** Ooh, that's a, that's a good one. So, you mentioned one of the hard pivots was the civil war and it's, it's almost, I almost feel like what that hard pivot was supposed to do. It's almost like we're still trying to figure out what is the outcome of that.

First, we have a hard time recognizing that the Civil War was pretty much because of slavery. One wanted to keep it. One didn't. When after the Civil War and the whole lost cause. came into prominence and so that that the purpose of them, their purpose was to, you know, make the Civil War as honoring our wonderful soldiers and everything.

And that's how we ended up with a lot of the statues way, way, way long after the civil war was over when we talk about the confederate monuments and stuff. And so I think where we are now in this, when it comes to voting, I was thinking about this today, I was thinking about, so, you know, we're talking about voting laws.

That's fine. I have no problem at all with IDs. Don't misunderstand me. What I question is. So you pass a law to where people can't give people water while they're waiting in line because they will be arrested. And the only people that do that, the only places that happen usually is when there aren't many voting polls.

So you have more people trying to vote in small areas. Mostly minority areas, and the reason why people are giving them water, so, because they're waiting in line so long. So, we, we, now we're going back to where a lot of things that, those things changed. We're kind of reversing, we're reversing voting rights things.

We're reversing things that kind of help level the playing field. I was thinking about Florida. So, let's just say they passed a law, I think it was 68 percent to where ex cons can now, that's already, they've served their time, they've done their, they can vote again. Well, then the, the state passed laws that, well, in order for them to vote, now they have to pay all their fees, all their legal fees and all that, well, it's hard to know what you owe because they don't even have it all to where it's in one place.

So, you know, if you think and you paid them all and you missed one, now you can get rearrested because you didn't pay a fee from this over here because they had to send your paperwork over here and it was done over there and you didn't know about that. So it's like more things are being done to move us back to go back to what Jim was saying.

Go back to the power. Okay. How can I maintain and keep the power that I have? Well, one way I need to do that is try to. It's kind of sad, but I need to keep people from voting. If I keep people from voting, I don't have to do anything that may I don't have to present anything that they can decide, okay, this side would help me or that would help me or they're thinking in my, well, no, if I just keep them from voting, I don't have to worry about what they think at all.

And again, we're not moving in a way to where we vote the matter of Republican, Democrat. I don't care if, if we are, if we're in this to try to help people, it should be all people, not just certain people. So we should be able to move in a way that leads us that way. So I mean, I know that's a long answer to that question, but a pivot.

I don't where we are now is a country right now. This the place that we are. It's not a pivot. This is something totally different. I feel it as something totally different. It's not a one thing is gonna make it better. It's almost like it there and the movements and support that's behind certain elements of what's going on now.

I don't, I don't know. I look at, at, at Christians now and then I've kind of gotten away from that when I'm speaking at church. I don't say I, I, I kind of like Christ follower because Christians, Christian has become a mantle, a title that people can just take on and it doesn't matter what they think or how they believe or who it is they're following.

Christ follower kind of puts you in, okay, well, I'm supposed to be doing the things that Christ gave us the example to do. And so, you know, when you look at those two things, I think if we all would question what we're doing, our motive and stuff, okay, am I being a Christian? I'm a being a Christ follower.

Okay. If you're questioning whether you're a Christ follower, just go back and read Matthews five through seven. That's that's just read, read the sermon on the mount. One thing that Jesus never did in his whole life was fight for power. That was the last thing he wanted was power in no way, shape or form.

If anything, he would go to the people who didn't have the power and he was with them. He would help them. Those are the ones he wasn't trying to get attention. He wasn't trying to get accolades. He wasn't. He didn't care. So if we as Christians are trying to gain power for one reason or another, thinking that that's going to move us in the right direction, we're moving further away from being a Christ follower and more of just a what a title is. So, I, so, I don't know, because if it wasn't, if everything now wasn't so, I don't want to say closely tied, but kind of tied to church, and when I say church, I mean Christ, I mean, if it wasn't that, that'd be one thing, but now it's so, it's kind of getting convoluted that even Christ followers are having a hard time trying to figure out, well, I don't know who's supposed to be what. Yes. It's, it's just getting, it's, it's very interesting. So I, I mean, we may be at a pivot point, it's going to be a hard one. I think this is going to be harder than any of it because I think the others were more pronounced. You kind of knew one way or the other. I think in this one, even those that think they know one way or the other, it's like even the, what they're using as their balance is not even correct.

So I think that's where we, I know that was long. I'm, I apologize for

[00:35:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's all right. That's okay. It's complex.

[00:35:55] **Tyrone Johnson:** yeah. It very much, very much so.

[00:35:58] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Jim, , your thoughts. You think we're at a hard pivot or coming to a hard pivot?

[00:36:05] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'd reflect on the complexity of this as Tyrone was just saying when you think of a hard pivot, you think of a time and a place where there's one galvanizing issue. There's one catalytic event. There's, there's just a lot of things that can happen. It could be an election like the election of Abraham Lincoln, or it could be a march on Washington after the assassination of John F. Kennedy and LBJ's ability to marshal together to create a civil rights act, you know, and things such as that.

I, I don't see that. In the context today, I think we're broader and more complex than that. If you think of the pivot, just purely from an economic point of view, just as one part of the conversation we're having right now the complexity of this is really challenging.

For example a great deal of interest today in raising minimum wage rates especially to benefit those in minority communities who especially are employed at minimum wages, and so it would just seem on the surface well, of course, raising minimum wages would be to the benefit of those that are employed at minimum wages.

That are paid a minimum wage. And that would be the right thing to do to move forward. On the other side of that we're already getting evidence of places where that's being done and companies are saying, well, I can't afford that. So they're laying people off or they're outsourcing the people that they're not paying on a minimum wage kind of a scale, but rather on a contract basis or something, and some of the very people that were intended to be helped by raising the minimum wage or losing their job because the company no longer can pay them because they're having to pay a higher minimum wage.

And it's a back and forth, kind of a law of unintended consequences sort of a thing. In so many ways, that's where we find ourselves right now. It's gerrymandering, as Tyrone said earlier, around voting abilities and capacities, both on the parts of parties, on the parts of socioeconomic demographics, all sorts of things inside this.

And so one person could say, well, we're going to stop handing out water because the person that does could be privileging their candidate in some way. They could be having conversations as they're handing out the water that we don't know about. And that's unfair. Then the other side could say, but now wait a minute, and Tyrone just made the point so well in minority areas, it's difficult to vote because the lines are so much longer because the voting precincts are fewer.

And if we don't provide water in the heat of the sun, they just simply can't come. And it's a both and back and forth. Again, there's so much complexity to this. I'm not arguing we shouldn't be making progress wherever we can. I believe the opposite of that. I'm just saying, Mark, all of that argues to me anyway against a single pivot, a single galvanizing issue.

I would have thought that George Floyd, the murder, and I think it was a murder of George Floyd would have been as galvanizing a single moment as it could be. But again, the complexity that emerges out of that, out of the Black Lives Matter movement. Well, is this a political movement or a social movement?

And what are we looking for here by the way of systemic lasting change on the other side of this? And again, very quickly, it becomes very complex and to some degree, really convoluted. In the culture, you see people breaking into storefronts and it's being said, well, that's on some level, that's a reparation across generations.

And the other saying, yeah, but they're breaking into minority owned businesses to do this. And so you have minorities doing reparations for minorities and if they're owned by Anglos. Now it's people that didn't own slaves, giving money to people that were never enslaved. And you see the, but then the other side, yeah, but the anger.

And, and the frustration because for generations, there's been an oppression of generational wealth because of redlining and all that to say I'm not myself seeing a thing, a single move either in the politics of our country or the socioeconomics. It could be a pivot on that level, but again, we can sometimes be surprised by things.

What I think we all want to be praying for is the spiritual pivot that we so desperately need in our country. If we could have the kind of spiritual awakening that we've seen historically in our country, that rising tide raises all boats. If we could get to a place where Jesus was king of our lives, where we were truly Christ followers in every dimension of our lives.

[00:40:05] **Tyrone Johnson:** Mm,

[00:40:06] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Think of the dramatic, significant difference. Take 10 percent of those that go to church on a given Sunday. If they would love their employees the way Jesus loved their employees on Monday, if Christian healthcare, and I speak of this because of a medical ethicist, if Christian healthcare could treat patients the way Jesus treated patients, think of how dramatically Christians in this culture could make a systemic difference.

That could be the pivot to the good in a way that could make the kind of transformative difference we could all pray for. And that could start with us. That could start with those hearing this conversation right now asking, okay, what influence has God entrusted to me? How could I make a difference there by loving the way God loves by seeking justice, the way God seeks justice, and by caring the way that I've been cared for, how could I make a difference there?

Imagine just the systemic difference we could make today if we'd ask ourselves that question.

[00:41:06] **Tyrone Johnson:** I love what Jim said. If it just that percentage, if we just got back to the biblical caring of people, cause I, you know, the, one of the issues now, the whole big issue,

the abortion, you know, one way or the other. Okay, if you're going to go out and protest abortion, that's fine.

But with that same fervor, then you should make sure that you're protesting to make sure that they expanded Medicare and Medicaid so now all of these people that you're making have these children can have a way to take care of them. But see, it's not about, it doesn't seem like it's about really wanting to care about children is more care about you can't do that because we don't like it and it's well God cares for every part of it, not just one part you can't you can't say you stand for Christ in one part and not stand for him in the other part, you know, so it's those things to me.

It's like I would love to. Okay. Okay. We got the abortion. Okay. They've got it overturned. Now let's make sure that every state expands Medicare so now these these mothers can take care of these kids that we want them to make sure they have. But nobody said anything about that, you know, so, so we can't, we can't be one sided on one thing thinking we're doing something great.

And then we go put our picket signs up in the closet, and now we're done, but now we have all these mothers, and what, however, now they have to try their best to raise these children without health care, without being able to take care of them, and we don't care about that part. We can't, we can't be that way.

[00:42:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and,

[00:42:38] **Tyrone Johnson:** be that way. As Christ followers, we can't be that way. As Christians, we can be that way. But as Christ followers, as Jim said, we shouldn't be that way.

[00:42:46] **Dr. Mark Turman:** right. And part of, and part of this is about being willing to accept the complexity of any of these issues. And that these are really big, that, that part of it is, is it's, part of the way that the devil wants to paralyze us, and keep us from moving forward in, in redemptive ways is to overwhelm us with, well it's just so big that you can't do anything about it and so we just throw up our hands and walk away, or we, as you said Tyrone, we pick a little small sliver and we go put a sign out, and we think we've done all that we can do.

But more often than that, we just kind of turn a deaf ear to it. As we kind of get toward the end of our time together, Tyrone, I wanted to give you, a last question. Give you the last word here. Black History Month, is a good thing. What would you, along that idea that Jim just articulated of, if even if just 10 percent decided to take Christ's call in this area of relating to people who are different from other races and from different contexts.

, How would you say that you would hope that someone listening to this conversation would engage with Black History Month in a way that might change them for the good and for the long term? How would you want somebody hearing this conversation to pay attention all through the month of February?

[00:44:09] **Tyrone Johnson:** That's a good question. You know what? My answer would be take the time to read Black history. Take the time to get to know it. Take the time to get to understand what the massacre was in Wall Street. What was the Black Wall Street massacre about? What was that about? What was this? What was he talking about when he was talking about the congressman and they went, what would have happened there?

Find out about history. Find out not only that, find out what doctors, find out who invented things, find out those people where, find out how black people played such important parts in history. Find out who the black person was that that laid out the, the, the diagram of, of Washington dc Find out who that was.

You know, it's like, is there's so many things I know that many people don't know because like you said, we, that part of history, they, they didn't learn it in school. I remember when all of the back when George Floyd and people were posting about the Black Wall Street massacre, and I, I've, I've literally had

people my age saying, I never heard of that, but most black people heard of it because it's almost , we need to have, we need to know it, you know, but when you don't, like you said, if you in the majority, you don't need to know it. If it doesn't affect you, then no, but we growing up, I know most of history when it comes to the other side, right.

My history, even my kids when they were in school, I, I have a whole encyclopedia of black history that we would have to teach them that they weren't learning in school. You know, because it is important for to, for, for me, for them to know it. So I, I think if, if those, that's listening to this podcast and if they're, oh, I know black history, it is fascinating.

Black history. History. It's beautiful and it's just beautiful how you learn that. You know what's beautiful? One of the things that's right now, Jack Daniels. I know they may not have to, may not want to talk about that on the radio podcast, but Jack Daniels, when it first started, it was a black and white guy that were friends and the black guy kind of came up with the recipe for Jack Daniels. And now the family has kind of went back and said, you know what? Yeah. So they have, they've tried to repair that relationship. They've tried to repair that way. It was ignored. That's all. All people are asking. Just recognize what I've contributed, what we as a people have contributed to this country. We all have contributed something.

Just don't, don't ignore my contribution because you don't want to know about it. Oh, don't ignore my concert because there was a bad part of it. Yeah, but you know, we have to, we have to understand it. That's all.

[00:47:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And you can start somewhere. A few years ago, I, I just, I felt like I ought to read or listen to Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Every, every Christian ought to know that document. They ought to know the things that he's calling for because he's calling for the living out of Jesus Sermon on the Mount by everybody.

And that's, just go back and review that. And this, like, I just learned getting ready for this podcast that every year there is a theme given to African American History Month Black History Month. This year, 2024, the theme is celebrating African Americans and the arts. Which is totally appropriate that we're talking to you as an artist.

And the contributions that you've made. I've been around when you've made contributions to worship and to people's experience in Israel and other places totally appropriate that we would be talking to you as an artist because of the rich history that African Americans have had in so many different categories.

You, you mentioned theater and film earlier, music, writing so many different places that can be discovered and can be appreciated because they have made all of us better.

[00:48:21] **Tyrone Johnson:** Want to, I got it. I'm sorry. I got to throw this in. So you mentioned Israel and one of the beautiful things of going to Israel with Jim. Absolutely beautiful things. So me going as an African American, I've been blessed. I know all the hymns, love all the hymns, but there are other songs that are in my culture that may not be in other cultures.

And I would tell Jim, I said, Jim, I want to sing this song, Jim said, Oh, sing it. And so what that would allow me to do is expose people to songs they may not have heard before. Explain to them what this song meant to back then. And not only that, but that what that did was it would enhance the trip for all of us. It would bring more, more of a meaning to where we are, why we're there, especially in a place like Israel to know that Jesus came for everyone, not just one, someone, everyone.

So to be able to, to sing an old spiritual while we're sitting. Oh, come on. I'm getting chills thinking about, I mean, you know, those I'm telling you, I'm literally getting chills just thinking about just to sing those spirituals in those beautiful places. I mean, that who gets to do that? And so, you know, Jim, Jim could have been the person saying, No, you need to stick with something. No, Jim said, No, sing it. And he would literally say sometimes, no, we can listen to that. We can hear that. We, we could, you can sing that over us. That would mean the world to me for him to say that.

So it, so just those years of just growing that relationship and just growing that understanding and then expanding that I would write down songs before we leave. Oh, I could do this here. I could do that there, you know, and it was just, it was just beautiful. So, you know, so that was a way as small as it was

for Jim and I to be together in those moments and to be open to hear what each other had to bring to those moments, just so everyone can feel that experience and enjoy it. You know,

[00:50:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Absolutely. And is a

[00:50:28] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, now Mark, what Tyrone's leaving out is, I wanted to sing the singer's duets and he would never let me. The fact that I can't sing, the fact

[00:50:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** better because Tyrone would not let them be duets.

[00:50:41] **Dr. Jim Denison:** the fact that I'm a horrible singer should not on any level be relevant to this conversation, right? I mean, talk about ruining Israel, right? And Tyrone just said no. He just said no. And so, you know, I just had to kind of live with that rejection and, you know, still do today.

[00:50:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and that's, and this is where

we

[00:50:57] **Dr. Jim Denison:** didn't tell you.

That's a part of the history he left out. So

[00:51:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's the point.

[00:51:02] **Dr. Jim Denison:** just so you know,

[00:51:03] **Tyrone Johnson:** I omitted that on purpose. That's

[00:51:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And as fallen human beings, we all tend to leave out parts of the

[00:51:09] **Tyrone Johnson:** right. Exactly

[00:51:10] **Dr. Jim Denison:** do. Yes, we

[00:51:11] **Tyrone Johnson:** Whether good or bad, it doesn't matter.

[00:51:13] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's right. Well, gentlemen, thank you for your time today. This will be a blessing to many. And it's been helpful to me. It's given me some insight that I had not had before. And hopefully we can keep moving forward in God's righteousness to treat each other as every one of us bearing the image of God.

I want to also thank our audience for taking time to be with us. And we want to urge you, implore you to pay attention to Black History Month in a way that you haven't before. Learn something that will help you to appreciate others in a deeper way. No matter what part of the human race they come from and that we would celebrate together and this is a real opportunity

for us as believers to demonstrate the love and life of Christ coming through our love and our life in a very unique way.

If this conversation has been helpful to you, please rate, review us and pass it on to others and again Jim, Tyrone, thank you again for your time. God bless you today.

[00:52:11] **Tyrone Johnson:** Thank you for having me. I really

[00:52:12] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Thank you, Mark.

[00:52:12] **Tyrone Johnson:** it.