

A Great Calm, why Christians observe Lent, and the role of women in ministry: Insights from Janet Denison

TRANSCRIPT

Recorded February 8, 2024 | Released February 14, 2024

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to The Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum, and sitting down for a conversation today with our founder, CEO, and cultural apologist, doctor Jim Denison. And joining us as well is his wife, Janet. Good, uh, morning to both of you, and welcome back to the podcast. We're glad to have you with us.

[00:00:24] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Thank you, Mark. So good to be with you today. It's a real privilege.

Good to be with you, Mark.

[00:00:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** good. Well, I'm glad we can have a conversation today. We're gonna cover, a lot of ground, I think, as we, have a conversation today about several things. But, Uh, we're recording this just a few days before Valentine's Day, and so I wanna put you on the spot a little bit.

I know that you guys have the tradition of not going out to eat on Valentine's Day, which means you're very smart. took me a little while to realize that that's just not a great day to find a quiet restaurant because that's when everybody goes out to [00:01:00] eat. but, you guys tell us a little bit how long Well, first of all, how long have you known each other, and how long have you been married?

[00:01:07] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Well, we've known each other since college. We knew each other for a year before we started dating, and then We dated for 2 years after that. So we've known each other for, 3 years longer than we've been married, which is 43 years. So doing the easy math, I taught second grade. Doing the easy math, 43 plus 3 is 46.

So that's how long we've known each other. But, um, anyway, it's been a joy and a privilege to be there. But, yes, do not go to a restaurant on Valentine's Day unless you go at 4 o'clock with the other, uh, Older senior adults like us.

[00:01:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yes. And that's not always a bad thing.

You know? Sometimes, uh, sometimes early dinner is a really good thing, so it's not a bad uh, Janet, if you don't mind, Do you remember the first date [00:02:00] that you had with Jim?

[00:02:02] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Yes. He asked me out on a date to see a movie, and we went to Swinson's for ice cream after that.

And it was great. There was a second date, so I guess it went well. I'm either with the smokey and the bandit mark, which shows you just how romantic I am. I was saving you then. Well, there you go.

And then at Swinson's, I demonstrated my ability to Tied the stem of a cherry in a knot in my mouth. And I think that did it. I think I swept her off her feet just with that 1 capacity. So I guess I should go back and say there was a date anyway? Anyway.

[00:02:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's what yeah.

I was gonna say that that yeah. And there was a second date after all of that. You know?

[00:02:44] **Janet and Jim Denison:** By the grace of God.

[00:02:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah. Now I really Can't fault him for, you know, choosing a Burt Reynolds movie.

You know, Burt Reynolds, Sally Field, and, I do have to tell you that I saw Smokey and the Bandit 5 times when it first came out. So, but I don't I don't know that I ever used that as [00:03:00] a first date. So, well, let me ask you this. Any other, uh, particular traditions around Valentine's Day?

And, do you recommend celebrating Valentine's Day?

[00:03:11] **Janet and Jim Denison:** If you're married, definitely celebrate Valentine's Day, but We do it pretty simply. We just go out and and have a meal together. It's more about time spent together than it is something to buy or give.

I think Valentine's Day's become a a day that has a lot of pressure for people, and it ought not to. I sometimes see those jewelry stores advertising diamonds for Valentine's Day, and, you know, that's a lot of pressure for somebody if we couldn't have afforded a diamond for the first 30 years of our marriage. So, anyway

[00:03:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. You you wanna be careful that you're not sitting at dinner, uh, uh, worried about how this is gonna affect your finances for the next 2 or 3 months.[00:04:00]

[00:04:00] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Exactly. Not shouldn't be a day filled with pressure. So should be a fun day just Just to celebrate having a Valentine, I'm actually more concerned with the people who don't have a Valentine on Valentine's Day Because that's a hard day for a lot of people.

And so I always think it's really important to kinda be aware of Who doesn't have a Valentine and maybe make it a special day for 1 of them?

[00:04:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Oh, absolutely. That's a great idea because it it can be, uh, rather depressing, uh, and and sad if if, uh, you're not in a relationship. And, uh, that's a good call out, Janet, that, you know, Uh, we sometimes overemphasize, uh, romantic relationships when the the Bible says that there's a lot of people who are called not to be in a romantic relationship. And their life is just as meaningful, just as fulfilling, uh, and, you know, that we need to honor that and uphold that in a big way. We don't always do that.

Uh, even in the Christian community, we don't do that [00:05:00] as well as we should. So, You know, if there's somebody in your, circle of relationships, maybe you wanna do something unique and special and have them to your house or go out for a special meal in that way. That's a great way to do that. Well, let's move on. We got a couple of other things we wanna talk about.

Uh, Janet, you have written a resource that we're making available at this time of year called a great calm. Can you tell us, just kind of an overview of the book and what was it that catalyzed your decision to write this book?

[00:05:29] **Janet and Jim Denison:** I started thinking about this book during 20 20 And how difficult a year it was for just about everybody, and especially those who were by themselves or going through a grief process of some time. They had to grieve by themselves so much of the time. And there was 1 woman in particular that I just hurt 4, uh, who had gone through not just a sad time, but a tragic time. And [00:06:00] She had to struggle through a lot of things on her own, and we did a lot of texting and emailing and, uh, just trying to speak into her life a little of God's word.

And so through that process, I realized that every single human being goes through those Difficult, times of grief or tragedy or loneliness or just some of the harder times in life or Yes. Sometimes life gets too busy and you kind of lose focus as to what really matters. And so a great calm is a book to leave on a shelf and reach for at 3 AM or when the calendar is too full or when you go through a really hard time. And somewhere in the book is a chance just to be still with God And think about who he is and think about all that he's provided for us in this world. I took

[00:07:00] the title from a passage, after Jesus had been preaching his sermon on the mount, and he got in the boat, went to sleep, and was asleep in the bow of the boat.

And a storm comes up on the Sea of Galilee, and it's very frightening to his disciples. Meanwhile, Jesus is sleeping in the bow of the boat. And they wake him up and basically say, wake up. We're gonna die. And Jesus stands up in the boat, and he speaks to the storm.

And scripture says that after he spoke to the storm, peace be still, uh, there was a great calm that spread over the waters. That's the verse I used for the title because There's just storms in this life that we cause ourselves or others can cause us. And this book was written for those times Because Jesus can speak into that storm, [00:08:00] whatever it is.

[00:08:02] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And it's such a a great insight. Uh, and I can imagine that there's somebody listening to us right now who are they're experiencing that at this moment, and they're like, lord, bring the great calm.

bring a great calm in every aspect, whatever that means. and as as we learned, Jim and I learned in seminary and other places, You're either in the middle of trouble, on your way into trouble, or just coming out of trouble. And, um, that could be somewhat, uh, discouraging to think about, but that's Just kind of the way life goes. And as you were talking, I was thinking, uh, you know, during COVID, I was pastoring a church, and, I remember there was a man who had been attending our church, a single man, and he ended up getting sick. And, His daughter they were able to find his daughter and but she was not able to visit him in the hospital, and he ended up passing away alone in the hospital, uh, during that season, and she she really struggled, uh, in that season.

We remember other people that were, being [00:09:00] cared for in nursing homes, and their families could not visit in that season and, those kinds of things. Janet, I know you and Jim have gone through some struggles since you put this book together. how have some of those truths that you write about in a great calm. How have they come back around to be important to you since you finished the book?

[00:09:22] **Janet and Jim Denison:** I think it's really just the practice of reaching for the book that is the first step. there's always Jesus promised we would have tribulation in this world.

Sometimes we don't share that enough with people who are Christians. They shouldn't just know that there are troubles in the world. They should actually Grow to expect them. And so the first step when a hard time comes is knowing where to run. And I think God's word is everything in those moments.

I think the calm Jesus spoke over the waters that day is the only [00:10:00] calm that will stained during those really hard times. And so I put together that book full of scripture that somebody

can just sit and know what Jesus would say to them. Because he would say today what he said back in the first century, and that's what makes it scripture.

[00:10:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah.

Absolutely. Makes it timeless in that way for sure. You guys have spent your whole lives, uh, and your whole married life, ministering to people in different ways and in different uh, opportunities. Does it seem like that people are struggling more today and in need of a resource like this, a great calm. And if it seems that way to y'all, Uh, why do you think it is the case that it seems like people are struggling more and in need of the calming power and presence of Christ?

[00:10:53] **Janet and Jim Denison:** I think we thought about bringing this book out again and talking about it again because this is an election year, [00:11:00] And we're guaranteed angst, uh, with family, with friends, with people we know, and people we work with, And people have very divided opinions, and those opinions are gonna separate this year if we let it.

And there's so much unity found in God's word. And the piece that Jesus spoke over the waters that day is a piece that transcends the stuff of this world. And so I feel like this year, uh, is especially going to be divisive, uh, And there are just ways to rise above it. But the first step is finding that calm in your own life and finding a perspective of Christ that you can just witness to the world.

[00:11:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Such a good idea. And, Janet, I could imagine that somebody listening to our conversation today is thinking about somebody that they know that's going through a [00:12:00] struggle, going through a time where they need the calming presence of Christ. Uh, but I could also anticipate them saying, you know what? I keep trying to talk to this friend or this family member, this person that I care about.

I'm concerned about the struggles that they're going through, but they don't seem to want to listen. How would you encourage them? How would you give them some guidance about what steps they might take, to try to help this person open their heart to what what God might want to bring into their life in terms of calm and comfort.

[00:12:30] **Janet and Jim Denison:** I think when you're talking to someone who is going through a hard time, 1 of the most important things to know about God's word is that his timing is everything.

So I usually tell people if you buy this book and want to give it to someone that is going through a difficult time, do it with the phrase to just take it and put it on their shelf and know it's there, And then wait for God to call them to it. [00:13:00] Because sometimes God's word hurts during hard times. They it seems to be a promise that isn't for you. And I think there are some books, some

studies, some messages that are best given when god says. I've had some interesting comments from people that I give that to.

I I always say, put it on a shelf and don't read it until god tells you to read it. And then when they pick it up, they're open to what it wants to say.

[00:13:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's yeah. And I've had that experience before.

You know, I I can remember, oh, gosh, couple of decades ago, somebody telling me you just have to read this book. You have to read this book. And I was like, well, I don't know that I wanna read that book. And, uh, I was I kinda bowed up against it, and I I took the book, uh, a little bit reluctantly. And I did what you said.

I put it on the shelf. And then, gosh, in this particular case, it was Several years later, god called me toward that book, and it [00:14:00] was the right thing at the right time. and so that's,

[00:14:03] **Janet and Jim Denison:** think timing is everything.

[00:14:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yep. And the whole and the Holy Spirit has the the sense of that way better than we do.

[00:14:11] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Absolutely.

[00:14:13] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, the book is called A Great Calm by Janet Denison.

You can find it on our website at denison forum dot org. And, uh, if you're looking for a resource for yourself or somebody, especially as Janet indicated, we're heading into this disruptive experience of the election. there's a lot of other things going on. There's plenty of illness, uh, and other unexpected things that come our way. we all have those periods where We need Jesus to step into our lives like he did in that moment on the Sea of Galilee and bring that great calm.

And that's the promise that we have from him that While we do go through a lot of things, we always know that with Christ, storms will stop. They ultimately will come to an end. So we encourage you to check it out, a great call at, uh, [00:15:00] dennison forum dot org. Let me shift this a little bit, uh, now, and we're gonna come back to Some other things, Janet, that, uh, I want you to speak into, uh, in the things that are coming up on the calendar. Uh, Jim, I wanted to see if you had a moment to respond to a couple of Questions that we, have been fielding, uh, at Denison Forum.

And, uh, we're about to step into the season of Lent, And, um, we're offering a resource that you released, uh, called Awaken My Heart, and that's a lent devotional, 47 days, I believe, that begins on Ash Wednesday, which 1 of the uniquenesses of the calendar this year is that February the fourteenth is not only Valentine's Day, it's also Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. But, Jim,

explain, for a a brief moment what Lent is. And then 1 of the questions that we had come in in the last couple of weeks about Lent, and about the resource that, uh, that we've released for this season of focus. Is isn't [00:16:00] Lent just for Catholic Christians? Is it really something that anybody that's not Catholic would ever participate in?

[00:16:07] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Oh, those are great questions and questions that I had myself because I didn't grow up in a Catholic tradition, of course.

And so I remember having Catholic friends that would put stuff on their foreheads This Ash Wednesday thing and no idea what that was or why they would go about doing that. Uh, Janice got a story about a friend of hers that, No. She came to school or work or something. I went to work, and she had just come back from church. And we worked at a toy store, so we were up at the counter.

And I thought she'd been back in the stockroom with something that was dirty, and I reached up and wiped off the smudge off her forehead. And she was just panicked, and I felt so terrible because I just thought she had had a box come down and Hit the corner of her forehead or something. Wiped off her ashes. I did. I felt terrible.

So all that to say, folk do have questions about these things and understandably So so the word Lent itself, it comes from the [00:17:00] old Anglo Saxon word lengthen, which simply means spring. It's a period of time that going back to the earliest eras of Christian history has been set aside to prepare our hearts for Easter. It's typically been a 40 day period. It started out being less than that and eventually over time became that. In thinking of Jesus 40 days in the, uh, wilderness, uh, being tempted by, uh, the enemy, uh, the Israelites 40 years of wandering in the wilderness as well.

Jesus' body for 40 hours in the tomb from his crucifixion to his resurrection. It's where 40 comes from. It doesn't use Sunday. Sundays are days of celebrating the resurrection, so they're not really days of fasting. So it's 40 days of fasting, 47 days total when you add the Sundays to it.

Starting back on Ash Wednesday is how you back up 47 days from Easter, and, uh, typically, ashes from the previous year's Palm Sunday are kept. The palms branches are kept by the church, and then they're turned into ash, and that's placed on the forehead at an Ash Wednesday to signify this entering [00:18:00] into a period of spiritual preparation. There was a time in the life of the church when fasting during Lent was taken very, very seriously, when only 1 meal a day was eaten when dairy products were avoided. Uh, that's not been so much the case in recent years. And you hear about people giving something up for Lent as a way of setting aside something sacrificially as a means of preparing for the celebration of the resurrection, but that's a bit of the history behind it.

In terms of why it's not just a Catholic tradition, the tradition precedes what we think of as the Catholic church. It wasn't something started by the Roman Catholic church, which came along a couple centuries after practices that we think of as Lent began. Uh, it's celebrated today around the church. Certainly, in the Orthodox tradition, it's a very, very common thing to do. More and more in mainline traditions, Protestant traditions as well.

And in recent years, I've seen a number of evangelicals like me who've become very interested in spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines, and practices that we [00:19:00] learn from Catholic tradition and Orthodox tradition as well. And so while I don't myself practice Ash Wednesday by putting ashes on my forehead, and I don't this year plan to do something by way of a specific fasting sort of a regimen. I do want, during this period of time, to focus even more directly on what Jesus did for me, to use this time to be even more intentional about spiritual formation, spiritual discipline. And every year, I try to pick up a Lenten resource to help me do that. Our hope is that this specific book, *Awaken My Heart*, will give people a biblical reflection.

Just take a few moments, perhaps at the start of each day, to focus more fully on Jesus, who he is, what he did for us, so that by the time we get to Easter during the celebration of the resurrection. Our hearts are more ready, and we've been drawn closer to him during this period of time. So it's really just a time to reflect, The time to draw closer to the Lord, a time to focus more on spiritual discipline, and that's something all of us need, whatever our denominational tradition might be.[00:20:00]

[00:20:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Good word. Uh, we had 1 of our, followers that sent us the question, isn't Lent, a pagan festival or based on a pagan festival. is that true? Is there some connection there to something that was that maybe was not Christian, but was adopted and kind of baptized by early Christians that turned, uh, uh, something previous into this celebration, or did it emerge just completely out of, people of faith in the first few centuries after Christ?

[00:20:30] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Oh, I understand the question because there has been, In pagan tradition going back even prior to the Christian era, uh, this idea of rebirth in the spring and, uh, various pagan rites and rituals that were followed as a way of hastening that, bringing spring rains that would be essential to harvest and those sorts of things. Reproductive Rites, unfortunately, pagan, uh, religious traditions.

Easter bunny and Easter eggs have apparently more of a pagan tradition in that context of, uh, of celebrating [00:21:00] spring and rebirth and reproduction and all that goes in that. I don't know of any evidence, however, that says that the early Christian emphasis on 40 days of preparation for Easter had anything to do with that. It's really not in any way aligned with any of those pagan traditions. It's a solemn time. It's a time of fasting.

It's a time of reflection. It's not a time so much of celebrating. It's certainly not a time that utilizes any of the pagan festivals that were used by the Druids and by other ancient peoples, that sort of

thing. So I would say they're more things that have Maybe a calendar alignment, and they have anything that would be causal. I wouldn't think at all.

It's not unusual for the Christian church to come along and adopt traditions outside the Christian tradition and use them for evangelistic purposes, of course, but I don't think there's a causal connection of any kind here, Where this was some pagan ritual that the church just co opted in some way. It just more is something that both happened in the spring, I think.

[00:21:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and it's interesting, right, how, how things get [00:22:00] blended together over, even centuries of time. You know, we have we have the common, uh, at least in my part of the world over the the course of my life, the the common sense. I grew up in a Roman Catholic like family, the first decade or so of my life. And so the focus on lent was was significant, but then, kinda what you were saying, the focus on the Easter bunny and Easter eggs, and I could never quite sort out how all of that all fit together. Uh, and and I'm still not sure how all of that kinda fits together.

but the emphasis is is is that, you know, as you said, we ought we ought to be preparing our hearts every day, to be spending our days with Christ, and and, uh, there isn't a greater celebration than Easter. Uh, it is the essence of our hope. And, Uh, whether you participate in Lent, I just I I have in my mind the passages that Paul wrote to the Colossians and also to the Romans that, You know, some people choose to observe these kinds of [00:23:00] rhythms to their faith. Other people don't. And Paul's very clear in terms of giving us instruction through the holy spirit that you should do what the holy spirit is leading you to do as a way of keeping your heart and mind focused on him, focused on his love, focused on what he did for us in the cross and the resurrection.

That's the main thing, and there's a lot of freedom and a lot of opportunity to do that in a lot of different ways. is that perhaps the best way to look at this opportunity?

[00:23:27] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Oh, I think so. Absolutely.

Same question we have every year at Christmas relative to Santa Claus and the birth of Christ. Certainly Halloween and the degree to which that's a celebration of All Saints Day, All Saints Eve versus occult traditions and practices. Really, I guess the only holiday we have that hasn't had some pagan, uh, kind of connection that I could draw to it would be Thanksgiving. And that certainly isn't a biblical holiday, so to speak. And so, uh, really, that's a common question where we have to navigate culture and ask, Alright.

What can we use that's in the culture and use [00:24:00] that for the Lord? What do we have to stay away from that's in the culture that really would keep us from drawing closer to the Lord? And ask God to lead you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what he wants you to do in a way that's most effective for your soul and for your witness, and know that he'll do that. God loves

each of us as if there were only 1 of us as Augustine said, and he has a good pleasing perfect will for each of us to draw us closer to Christ.

The Holy Spirit is right now, according to Romans 8 29, in the business of making us more like Jesus. And how he does that with me is gonna look a little differently than how he does it with you or anybody else. Yeah. That'd be my thought, would be to pray through this and say, Lord, how during this season can I draw closer to you? Can I be more disciplined about my relationship with you?

What practices could I consider? What could I do and not do that would help me to be more like Christ when Easter comes than I am even right now? Think that's a prayer the Lord would be delighted to answer.

when we first started this ministry, I wrote an advent book, and Jim wrote a Lenten book because we [00:25:00] just found that if you take some time to prepare self for those important holidays that you'll just experience them spiritually instead of just having them come and go as another holiday. So setting aside a little bit of time each day to focus, I love using the Linton book for that reason.

It just keeps me focused on what the season is really to be about. It does me as well. I've got it on my desk right here. Even though it's my content, I'm looking forward to using it across the season. And I use Janet's advent book every year for that purpose.

I do have to share, though, Mark, that back early in the days when we thought about an Advent and a Lenten book, Janice said, I'll write the Advent book. You can do the Lenten book. I said, great. Then I did the math. Advent's 25 days, Lent's 47 days.

So I got outsmarted on that 1. But, uh, our Advent guide is 1 of the best sellers that we do every year. Janet's Actually, already written the Lenten guide for next year. Actually, the Advent. The Advent [00:26:00] guide for next year.

Yeah. For for next Advent. And so, um, she's she's way ahead of the curve on this, So it's a terrific resource that people use literally all over the Christian world. That's why we did them, though. We just know the value of, uh, Setting aside even other devotionals just to focus on specifically what God would say to us during the season.

[00:26:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And, you know, it's a really good reminder that all of us in all of our relationships, but particularly in our relationship with Christ. We need to be, uh, creative and intentional about creating uh, rhythms in our faith that bring about both focus and, I would say, festival.

I'm thinking I was reading just this morning, uh, some of the, uh, uh, latter chapters in the book of Exodus where God is kind of giving structure to how the nation of Israel is to walk with him

and live with him in a relationship of faith. And he says just very clearly, 3 times a year, you're gonna celebrate. Uh, you're gonna [00:27:00] have a celebration of Passover. You're gonna have a celebration, uh, at the beginning of the, uh, of The farming season, you're gonna have a celebration at the end when harvest comes, and he's he's very clear about calling out these festivals, uh, as a way of creating rhythm and creating, uh, as I said, both focus and celebration. And and that's something for us to do.

We sometimes, as Christians, mischaracterized as people who are killjoys, uh, when we we actually are and should be the most joyful people, uh, on the planet because of the hope that we have in Christ.

[00:27:38] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Absolutely. It's a great word, Mark.

[00:27:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** let me turn the conversation to a third topic for a few minutes, which is, Uh, as we move continuing to move on into our calendar, March will soon be upon us, and March will actually be an what I would say an early Easter. Sure. Uh, it may be the earliest that it can ever be, uh, because of how the [00:28:00] calendar moves a little bit. But, uh, Ash Wednesday in the beginning of the lent season, if you choose to celebrate that, is February fourteenth.

And Easter, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection will be on March the 30 first. And so That's pretty early in the calendar, but, uh, right in the midst of this season is something that in our culture seems to be gaining more attention and more traction. Uh, we'll be marking, uh, March as women's history month and, uh, Uh, went back and did some reading around how that all came about. It actually has a pretty long history in some ways. Started out with a day, and then it became a week, and then it became a month.

what do you guys understand about, uh, women's history month, and what do you think is significant about calling out such a celebration.

[00:28:53] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Well, it's a great example again of how, um, things that start in 1 Specific purpose or realm can be used for other purposes as [00:29:00] well. So as you say, the the observance itself goes back to 1909, I think, when, uh, there was a movement actually within socialism, within socialist movements in America and in Europe to recognize women as workers, to recognize women's rights as workers. Uh, that eventually got aligned with the suffrage movement, the belief that women ought have the right to vote, and over time became much more about that, I think.

And then Susan b Anthony, her story, uh, became, uh, got picked up in the midst of all of that. She was Prior to that, she was born in 1820. She was actually arrested in 1872 for voting. She was 1 of the people that was really, uh, championing the suffrage movement and Led to the nineteenth amendment in 1920 when women for the first time were given the right to vote. And

from that point forward, uh, it became a week and then a month, as you say, It's celebrated really all around much of the world, uh, certainly in Canada, Australia, America as well around the same time, and And it's moved to a place now where it's a time to [00:30:00] recognize the contributions women have made to our culture, their significant places of leadership, The importance of gender equality women's, uh, having same pay for same work, uh, which I very much believe in and the importance of women being in cultural to a leadership.

And so what started out for very specific political reasons over time, I think, became a much broader sort of cultural, celebration and is, I think, a very biblical idea. Um, in Galatians, we're told there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We're all Abraham's seed and heirs according to the covenant. According to the covenant, scripture is very clear that God made male and female in his image and his likeness. Jesus chose the first evangelist of Easter to be a woman when he appeared to Mary Magdalene.

Women were some of Jesus' most important leaders and supporters if you go back to Luke's gospel. Well, then so, uh, I I owe that to say, I think it's a valuable way in March to be grateful for all the ways that God continues to use women to advance his kingdom in the world.

[00:30:58] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So, Janet, what's what's [00:31:00] your impression of, uh, I think March eighth is, uh, International Women's Day and having a a week and a month set aside. Um, do you think that's is that important to you? Does it have value, uh, as a woman in terms of raising, the the attention that women need to have and should have in our culture?

[00:31:21] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Well, I appreciate all the efforts. I was in a museum not too long ago and read about a woman here in Texas that did so much towards bringing women's rights to Texas. And, uh, I think Eve was the first 1 to take the right, and I think we've been paying for it ever since. I think it's just a natural part of life. Women have tended to have to, fight their way to a place of recognition as opposed to being naturally handed that. 1 of my favorite examples in scripture, uh, there are times in scripture when Paul [00:32:00] addresses Priscilla and Aquila and puts her name first, which is actually a very intentional choice on his part to indicate that she was really the 1 carrying that 1 and and maybe leading out in that. Uh, there's a lot of instances in scripture where I think women are honored, and, uh, and God has always done that. Uh, I think a lot of times, the need to fight for our rights has caused us to do some things that aren't right in the process.

And so a lot of times, it becomes more about recognition and the battle than it does the goal of it. And so that's kind of my measurement on all things, uh, that line up with women's rights. It's more important to be right than to claim a right, if that makes sense.[00:33:00]

[00:33:01] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I think, yeah, I think you're exactly right.

Jim, give us a little bit of biblical context to this. You know, Some people have claimed over over time that the Bible is kind of anti woman, that it's, uh, in some ways oppressive to women. Um, uh, help us to put that in context that, uh, that's not the case When you read the biblical account, you made reference to, uh, Jesus choosing a woman to be the first witness of the resurrection, Kinda just across the broad sweep of of scripture, you know, I've I've heard you talk about how, Uh, the story of of God that is revealed in the Bible comes in a context of culture or or really many cultures, uh, and that that women in the Bible are often living in a patriarchal society where they were the possession of their father until they became the possession of their Husbands, talk about how that is more a description [00:34:00] rather than a prescription for how women should be understood in our culture.

[00:34:04] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Yeah. Thank you, Mark.

Great question. 1 of the real challenges we have as we're trying to explain and apply scripture today is just the human tendency to read an ancient book as though it were written today, and to read it as though what were written in our context and in our culture. And so if you're in today's context and culture, it's almost an odd conversation To be describing the idea that a woman should have independent value and not be the possession of a father or the possession of a husband, but that was categorically the way it was. That was just the way it was in the Roman Empire. That's the way it was in the ancient Canaanite empires before that.

Babylon, Assyria, all of that. Mark, we have a letter written from a Roman soldier to his pregnant wife. He's out on the front lines, and he writes this letter back It says, if the child is a boy, keep it. If it's a girl, throw it out. We have that letter.

That was in the first century, a very common understanding of women as Possessions of men as a means to an end. Very common in the Roman Empire. For a man to [00:35:00] have a wife whose job was to raise children and then a large number of Prostitutes or women in his life with whom he had sexual relationships. And that was again just a very common thing tragically in the day. So in this context, I would say that the New Testament comes forward to do everything that can be done within its context to say, a, that that's wrong, be that women are valued just as just as men are valued, and to elevate women to every role which was possible in the day and in the culture.

For instance, Lydia becomes the first convert in Europe. Paul reaches out to her at the Zagaktes River there in Philippi, and she becomes the host of the church, and I would say the pastor of the church in Philippi. Well, she can do that. She's able to do that in their culture and context. She was a dealer in purple.

She was a well known business leader in Philippi. Philippi was in a different context culturally at that point, and so Paul is used by the Holy Spirit to elevate Lydia in that way. Priscilla and Aquila. No 1 in the Roman Empire can tell Paul that he can't [00:36:00] put Priscilla ahead of

Aquila in his letters, And he does that. No 1 could tell Jesus that he couldn't elevate women, as we find in Luke's gospel, to be among his most important followers and leaders in the early church.

No 1 could tell Paul in Romans 16 that he couldn't list Junius as among the apostles, not meaning the 12, but the early leaders of the Christian movement. So every place the gospel could elevate women, it does, starting with Jesus' example himself. Then you move that through Christian history. And whether it's the Susan b Anthony's of the world or the William Wilberforce's with slavery or whatever it is, when you find the Martin Luther King's relative to civil rights, You find Christians at the front edge of moving toward the kind of equality that the gospel intends and that Genesis describes. So from Genesis 1 to today, that's always been God's heart and his intention, and the Bible is the most revolutionary document in history in advancing gender equality and racial equality.

If we did what scripture taught, we would not be [00:37:00] needing to have this conversation relative to the equality of genders and the equality of races. 1 day in Revelation 7, there will be people from every tribe, language, people, and tongue gathered around the throne in front of the lamb, worshiping the Lord. That's God's intention for all of us.

[00:37:15] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah.

Yeah. And so so well put. You know, I heard a, um, I heard a female theologian, uh, not long ago who said, you know, When you look at the life of Jesus, as y'all have called out already, Jesus drew women into his circle of teaching and influence. That's That powerful story of of of Mary sitting at his feet, uh, and being taught by him, which, Jim, I've heard you talk about was Absolutely revolutionary and countercultural, and and Jesus is very clear about this is not gonna be taken away from her. She's made a good choice, and he honored those.

But how Jesus drew women in, how he disciplined them, and then how he deployed them, uh, as in the case of of Mary Magdalene's testimony. Uh, Janet, I'm wondering, is [00:38:00] is there 1 or 2 you've called out a few already, Priscilla and others. Is there 1 or 2 women in the Bible that are especially inspiring to you. And if so, why?

[00:38:11] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Well, I have started 3 different Esther Sunday school departments over my life, and I've always enjoyed the book of Esther.

Uh, she was limited by her culture. She was not, however, limited by her calling. And I teach women all the time that we have the same holy spirit, the same character of Christ that has been given to us as is given to everyone who puts their faith in Christ. And I know there are some places where I'm not allowed to teach, But if I also know that being allowed is not the same thing as being able. We're able to do whatever it is the holy spirit calls [00:39:00] and equips us to do.

And our sensitivity is sometimes to be, uh, careful with those who can't receive teaching from a woman, but never limit ourselves or God in our life by the fact that maybe some other people might limit what we're able to do. And and I think We are equipped and gifted to do our ministries. And the key is asking Jesus, what ministry are you calling me into? And being open to his calling. Queen Aster marched into the king, an unheard of thing, and, uh, saved her people.

And I don't think there are very many, women in the bible that weren't equally equipped to serve God. I, have always said I like to use the illustration of the donkey turning around and talking to the prophet Balaam and [00:40:00] speaking his word to Balaam. And I usually tell somebody who wants to argue a little bit, Said, well, I know women are at least a step above that donkey in terms of speaking God's word. So I said, we just need to keep it all in perspective. But for women, I've always told them, do what God's gifted and called you to do, and don't let anyone limit you except the leadership of God in your life.

We've been good friends with angry on lots over the many years, Janet, uh, much more than me. A very, very close friendship with Anna. Janet often says about angry on lots. If you ever hear her speak, you may say she is not allowed to speak. You could never say she's not able to speak.

Billy said she was the greatest preacher in the family, and, uh, I could think that I could understand why he would in fact say that. Mark, when we were pastoring in Atlanta, we had a heritage room there that church had established as the church itself went back to the old second Baptist church in Atlanta that predated the civil war. So it had a lot of artifacts there from way way back in the [00:41:00] day. There was a time when Lottie Moon, the Southern Baptist missionary for whom the, uh, Christmas offering is named every year, long time missionary to China. She'd written a letter seeking financial support from someone in Atlanta, and that letter wound up in the heritage room of our church.

I was able to I I was shown it, uh, when I was over there 1 time, uh, with the curator of all of that, and I and I read it. You could read her handwriting. It was very, very clear handwriting. When I was done reading her letter, I wanted to send her money. I was so impressed with just the remarkable power of that handwritten just that simple handwritten letter, the the the anointing of the Lord on her heart, on her life, on her brilliant mind, on her capacities, uh, and what God used her to do in China.

So again, I just really don't know how you can look at biblical or or church history And not believe that God has been using women in absolutely transformative ways, uh, at least as equal to the ways that he has used men over, [00:42:00] uh, over the years of his Spirit's movement. I would say to all Christians that Don't allow yourself to be limited in any way except by God Mhmm. And except by his spirit. And I don't wanna stand before father and say to him, well, I thought this person wasn't supposed to serve you in this way. I don't think that is our right, and I don't think God gave us that place.

He's the author of our direction. He directs our path, And his word directs our path, but I would not, uh, allow people to influence that decision. Our job and we're accountable to serving God, not others' opinions.

[00:42:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. And it's such a such a good word and a good reminder. And and I think verifies and validates the reason why why calling out, uh, something like the value of women and the importance of women both [00:43:00] spiritually and more broadly than that, uh, in the culture is important. I would suspect, uh, that some, maybe all women at times, kinda scratch their head and go, why haven't we gotten farther down the road on on some of these issues than we've gotten.

It's it's kind of astounding, really, that, women have only been able to vote in our country for about a hundred years. and, you know, as we move into an election season where political candidates and parties will be very focused on uh, gaining the votes of women and particularly, you know, certain subsets of, women in You hear those kind of conversations every time we come to an election, but it's really kinda astounding to step back from that and say, you know what? Even a hundred years ago, they weren't even allowed to vote that as we talked about Susan b Anthony being put in jail. I wanted to get y'all to comment on 1 last question, and that and it's kind of about Susan B. Anthony.

as Jim noted, she got put in jail at 1 point because She [00:44:00] voted illegally at that time. what you'll also learn about her is that she came through the Quaker tradition, up in Massachusetts and in New York that she actually taught at a seminary, a Quaker seminary at 1 season of her life. And She's known to many of us, uh, around, is called women's suffrage, the right to vote, but she had also been active in the days of the civil war around, uh, stopping slavery. She got drawn in to some of the, uh, experiences around the temperance movement, um, that ultimately resulted in a constitutional amendment as well. Jim, Janet, I would love for y'all to comment on how we at the Denison Forum talk so much about finding your highest place of influence and being that influence for Christ in that environment. Talk about Susan b Anthony as an example of that and and others that inspire us, other females particularly that inspire us, That whole, what I would call, core principle of Denison [00:45:00] Ministries, which is ask God to put you in whatever place of influence he wants you to be and to use your influence there. who wants to go first?

[00:45:11] **Janet and Jim Denison:** Well, I would just say this.

Um, all of us each as children of God are accountable to his calling in our life. And I would stress, male or female, It's every Christian's responsibility to go to God and say, you've gifted me in this way. How do you wanna use me? And we won't be accountable for how we made people feel. We'll be accountable for those moments where god spoke into our life and directed our path and we obeyed or did not obey.

And that's how I think we ought to live our life, not limited by people's ideas, [00:46:00] but driven by gods.

[00:46:03] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It's a good word. Jim, I'm not sure you can approve on that, but I'll give you the chance to see if you can add to that anyway.

[00:46:10] **Janet and Jim Denison:** I I think that is the bottom line is to find your call and fulfill it. You know? At the end of the day, Stay faithful to the last word you heard from God and open to the next, you know, as I've as I've heard over the years. But I do think it's important, Mark, to make the point that you've emphasized here as well.

Know, we talk a lot about James Davidson Hunter and achieving your highest place of influence, manifesting faithful presence. As he said, it's important to understand, I think, That when we're doing that, we may not always see the results of that faithfulness immediately or at all. We may not in our lifetime be able to have the conversation that others will have about us, the Susan b Anthony's who were so influential with abolition and temperance as well as with suffrage movement and and died before the twentieth amendment became a became law. Never lived to see that result, for instance. You know?

That's why faithfulness is so important. Another hero of [00:47:00] mine is mother Teresa, which just makes me like so many millions of others and should be. But there's this wonderful story about a time when she was in New York City opening an orphanage, And a press conference broke out as so often happened, and someone shouted out the question, how will you measure the success of this of this orphanage that they were starting? And the tiny Albanian nun turned and smiled into the glare of the camera and said, I don't believe our lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of obedience in love.

I believe that's absolutely right. And here we are so many years past her homegoing still talking about her. I certainly never met her. She would have no way to know. I'd be quoting her in this conversation today.

If you'll be faithful to God's call, God will use you in ways you can't even measure. Cannot measure the eternal significance of present faithfulness. So be faithful to your call and trust that God is using you for eternal significance you may not see until you're standing before him in glory.

[00:47:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Such a good word. And so as we head into this [00:48:00] season, not only of, uh, preparing for Easter, but also celebrating Women's History Month. We might, uh, suggest to people that, hey.

Maybe you do a study of some of the most significant females in the bible in scripture. That'd be a great place to start, and to learn their contributions in that environment. maybe you wanna read

a biography, uh, in the month of March about, uh, either a biblical female or 1 within our culture that is inspiring as well. We'd also wanna say, hey. Look.

It's never a wrong time to celebrate the great women in your life. We all all 3 of us, uh, have had great moms. you may be uh, married to a great woman that you wanna celebrate, not only at Valentine's Day, but in other ways. we all have daughters or the 3 of us have, uh, granddaughters, that we well, we could have a whole another podcast about our granddaughters as well as our grandsons,

um, and we should and we should have a podcast about them. but take a moment and, look for those opportunities where God might want you to [00:49:00] celebrate, a particular, special, female in your life, and that'd be a great way of honoring them as well as honoring God.

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[00:49:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and Janet, wanna thank you for the conversation today and for all of the things that you're doing to make a difference in our world and in our culture to equip believers to think biblically, to live holy, and to act redemptively. Uh, we wanna take a moment just to thank our audience. We're grateful for Those of you who follow us at the Denison Forum podcast, uh, we're grateful for your prayers. We're grateful for your attention. We're grateful for your financial donations that Help our ministry because we are a donor supported ministry, and we're grateful for all the ways that you help us with that so that we can present these materials to others around the world.

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