

Learning to disagree with Dr. John Inazu

TRANSCRIPT

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

Mark Turman (00:02.855)

Welcome to the Denison forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum. And we're glad to have you along with us for this next episode, as we seek to equip you to discern your world differently, to discern it from a biblical standpoint so that you can think biblically so that you can live holy and serve productively wherever God gives you an opportunity. We want to help you do that through conversations like this. Joining us today is Dr. John Inazu, who is the Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion at Washington University in St. Louis. Let me tell you a little bit about John. He teaches criminal law, law and religion, and various First Amendment courses in his work. He is a former litigator, but he's also an author and frequent speaker on the topics of pluralism, assembly, free speech, religious freedom, and other issues we might call lightweight. Right. John has written three books, one of which we're going to talk a little bit about today. He has also written at times for the Washington post, the Atlantic, the Chicago Tribune, the LA times USA today, newsweek and CNN. He is also the founder of the Carver project and the legal vocation fellowship and is a senior fellow with interfaith America.

John, welcome to the Dennison forum podcast. We're glad to have you with us

John Inazu (01:29.826)

Mark, thanks so much. It's great to be with

Mark Turman (01:32.241)

Well, I know as a professor, you're on your way into another semester of teaching. And so it's an intense time, but it's also going to be a unique time, in this political environment where faith and law and so many other things are intersecting. But, if you would, tell us a little bit about you and maybe a little bit of your personal story, some of something about your faith. and then what is it that kind of prompted you to write this book that we're going to discuss today?

John Inazu (02:01.486)

Sure, you know, fresh off the summer, I'm thinking about my wife Caroline and our three kids, Lauren, Hannah and Sam. We've just been doing some fun family travel and just celebrated 20 years of marriage. I was raised in a Christian home and then became more serious about faith through the ministries of young life and intervarsity Christian fellowship during high school and college and have been connected.

Since then, I served briefly as a youth pastor for a few years when I was in graduate school. So I've seen the inside of a church staff in that capacity and was also a volunteer young life leader for a number of years. So that's sort of what forms me faith wise and or part of an evangelical Presbyterian church here in St. Louis. And in terms of the book, this book is called Learning to Disagree. And it was really grew out of peak of COVID when I realized how much we were all distanced from one another and all this shouting we were doing over COVID policies and everything else, thinking of the reminder that we're made to be in relationship with other people and we need to figure out better ways to do that and trying to think through how my own expertise and experience might contribute to it. So you can think of this book as taking what I do in the classroom, what I've done in my writing over a number of years, and then also just in my everyday life, how I try to, with varying degrees of success and failure, try to apply these ideas of understanding difference, of learning empathy, of figuring out how to disagree better in life, in the classroom, and in

Mark Turman (03:41.917)

Yeah. And that's a really great place for us to start. as, as you said, the book is titled learning to disagree the subtitle, the surprising, the surprising path to navigating differences with empathy and respect. John, I've heard this term empathy talked about and tone and thrown around really a lot more the last four or five years in my work as a pastor and, working with others, often referring people to, talk with counselors around different issues, kind of give us the working definition that you use for the word empathy and how it might be different from something like sympathy or other terminology that we sometimes use in this kind of conversation.

John Inazu (04:25.558)

Yeah, I actually don't employ too technical of a definition, but in distinction from sympathy, what I'm trying to get the reader to think about is something that more closely approximates someone else's experience. So can you understand what someone else is going through? Can you put yourself in their shoes? And then importantly, with the recognition that it won't always be fully possible, I'm not going to empathize with what it means to be a woman in our society today or many other characteristics that I don't but there are ways through listening, through seeking to understand, through trying to imagine what a different perspective might be that we can move closer toward empathy than not. And then I think another piece of this for Christians is I almost think of it as the relationship between empathy and discernment. So when we are called to speak

the truth in love, that doesn't mean we always have to speak. It just means that when we do speak, we speak truthfully and in love.

And so part of empathy might also be discerning times when we're not supposed to speak, when we're supposed to listen more or just be alongside

Mark Turman (05:32.137)

Yeah. That's a good, good distinction for us to understand. how would you say that just being in the practice of law, studying law, teaching law now to, those that would become lawyers in the future, how has that kind of prepared you and enabled you to even to be more empathetic? Has it been, well, as a good lawyer, need to, you need to kind of position yourself of, well, if I was on the other side, arguing the other end of this case, or if I was the judge.

How would I be looking at that? Is that some of what the practice of law and the learning of law has helped you with in terms of empathy?

John Inazu (06:08.856)

Yeah, I think that's right. you know, part of it is trying to overcome the presumption that many people have about lawyers as the people who are just stubborn and like to argue all the time. That is sometimes a well earned description or feature of lawyers. But but to your point, I do think the best kind of lawyer and the best kind of lawyer is someone who really seeks to understand the other side's argument sometimes in order to defeat it sometimes because you want to look for potential moments or areas of compromise or creative solutions to solving problems, maybe even outside of the litigation process. But ultimately you want to be able to go to a decision maker or a client or an adversary and say, this is a really hard issue. And here's why I think we disagree about it. And here's why I understand your argument. But I think my argument is more persuasive rather than saying the other side is stupid and where morally correct, right, to have a kind of nuance and an understanding of the complexity of issues. And I think law at its best teaches us how to do

Mark Turman (07:13.629)

Yeah. And even in what you're indicating there kind of feels like a theme throughout the book that as I was working my way through it, which is to approach somebody, even if you know that you're going to have a difficult conversation or you feel like you need to have a difficult conversation with them, that even the way you begin is important. and the way that you try to disarm, the emotional, temperature.

Of the conversation. Can you kind of unpack that a little bit of, Hey, I need to, have a friend of mine that, that used to say he, he, he was trying to start difficult conversations by saying, Hey, I

need to clarify something with you and try to take the emotional charge out of it. From the beginning. that part of what you're trying to teach us

John Inazu (08:03.49)

Yeah, it's only part of it. I would even take it a step further back and suggest this is something I learned from young life that that before you even start to speak, you need to earn the right to be heard. Meaning you need to be in a relationship of trust where the other person believes you think the best of them believes that you care about them as a human being believes you think that they're smart and intelligent and to be able to enter a conversation without assuming the superiority of your position or assuming that the other person wants to hear from you, but actually then to make sure you're focusing on the relationship first. I think there's a kind of 1990s apologetics out there in some Christian circles that is just, if I can just get the truth out, if I can just get these five propositions out, surely someone will be convicted of the truth that I have. And I think that's a fragile and often unhealthy way to think of actual human relationships where people want to know Can I trust you? Do you love me? Do you care about me as a person and all of that has to precede the propositions however true they might

Mark Turman (09:15.421)

Yeah. And as your book relates in several different chapters, that that idea of relational capital and relational trust, really ought to be part of what we use to discern whether or not we should even have a conversation of a certain nature with somebody, as in maybe might cause us to be more quiet at times, or to start at a different place. John, I'm, wondering, do you feel

John Inazu (09:35.64)

Ha.

Mark Turman (09:43.897)

In writing this book and the research and the, and the work that you did putting in on it. Do you feel like that our culture, our generation, is having a harder time with disagreement? and if so, what might be some of the reasons for

John Inazu (10:00.652)

Yeah, you know, I think in some ways it is harder. I mean, I often want to guard against a kind of presentism that makes us think this is as bad as ever been. I don't think that's quite true. We've had certainly more disagreement and more violent clashes in past eras of our history. But there are a couple of different factors that are contributing to the current moment feeling in a very real and visceral sense more intense than we might have felt even a few decades ago. So one of them is that as we have allowed more voices to be heard in our country, in our cities, sometimes even in our churches, we have less consensus about what people believe. We have less consensus about what, you know, think of anything from culture to the music that you would hear in

church. And there's more disagreement there. Some of that is a good thing, that welcoming other voices to the table that might have otherwise been excluded in past eras. But that dissonance also comes at a cost. And that means we can't assume as much consensus as we might have had in an earlier time. And that makes it harder and makes it feel the stakes might be higher and trying to muddle through what our agreement actually is. And then of course, another factor that exacerbates all of this is the social media bubble and world that we now find ourselves in. We're being barraged with different viewpoints and having our own views reinforced not just once or twice a day by reading the paper or watching the news, which is what we might've done in an earlier era, but every couple of seconds or minutes, some social media update is telling us what the breaking news is or why we should double down on our own prior assumptions about some contested issue. And that, think, changes our brains and changes the way that we interact with news and people and events. And that's fundamentally different than how we were experiencing the world even a few years

Mark Turman (11:55.709)

Hmm. Yeah. It seems to make us live on the edge of anxiety, almost all the time perpetually and can make it really, really difficult. As I, started working my way through your book and we'll get to the way that it's laid out. But, one of the things that the description of the book, that the publisher offered is that, you're trying to help us get to a place of nuanced disagreement. and that's another word, this word nuance that seems to trafficked around quite a bit in a number of conversations. but it feels like John, that part of our disagreement is, is that we don't have much tolerance for nuance. can you kind of unpack that a little bit? Do you think that that's true? Why would we not want to recognize the complexity of the issues that we are sometimes talking about and realize that we have to pursue some kind of nuance? Because if there were black and white answers, they would have come up really quickly, right? Usually.

John Inazu (12:57.742)

Right. Well, I think we sometimes avoid nuance because black and white and extremes make for better sound bites. So it's much easier to remember a lack of nuance or it's much easier to make a slogan or a talking point out of a lack of nuance. But in the world, of course, most hard issues are hard for a reason. So when I tackle in this book, really challenging questions of religious freedom, gay rights or criminal law or whatever it might be, there are complex legal and policy and moral and theological questions in play. And when those issues are channeled through our courts and our laws, they're usually not slam dunk. They're usually not unanimous opinions at the Supreme Court. They're usually contested and conflicting. And they're hard for a reason because there are powerful arguments on both sides because there isn't, when it comes to the policy space especially, there's not a clear answer that's just self-evident to everyone. Now that doesn't mean that we just throw up our hands and say, it's all relativism as Christians, we can never do that. We have to continue to pursue wisdom and prudence and truth in the midst of how we engage in the world. But I think that starts with recognizing this is hard, this is complex, and even our

Christian beliefs and convictions are not always necessarily going to translate to one clear policy position that's evident in the world.

Mark Turman (14:31.079)

And that could be frustrating, disappointing, even annoying for Christians to realize that it made us not come out to a real clean, easy scripture and verse kind of answer, which is something of the uniqueness of the role that you have in the work that you're doing, the intersection of both law and faith. The book talks significantly about the authority that comes those different angles, the authority that comes from the law, the authority that can come from our understanding of faith. Can you talk about how those things intersect in this book and, and how they need to be appreciated for both the contributions that they bring, both the contribution of law and

John Inazu (15:18.968)

Well, you one thing that I think law and faith have in common is they both fundamentally depend on a kind of trust. Law is not always going to be perfect in a human society of flawed human beings. We're going to get the law wrong. Judges are going to get some decisions wrong. Politicians are not always going to have completely pure motives. And that means we have to trust a larger system, even when we're disappointed by individual results. It doesn't mean the system is always right, but if we lose comprehensive trust in the system, then we have to start thinking about, what are the alternatives to our system? And those alternatives are fairly bleak, you know, for all of its imperfections to live in a law governed democracy like the United States is a huge gift at a moment in history when we can look around the world and see alternatives that are very dire. And then there's a similar component with faith, which is that faith also requires a kind of trust. And I think there's a tendency for some Christians to want to replace this trust or this confidence with a kind of certainty and a kind of certainty that isn't really backed by faith. I we can be clear and convicted about what scripture says about what we think and how we think we're supposed to lead our lives, but that doesn't translate to certainty in the same way that we can look at a math equation or something like that. And I think actually understanding faith as confidence and trust in the person and work in Jesus rather than a kind of certainty and a logical proposition is a healthier way to engage with our own faith, but also gives us some pointers about how to engage with others in the world who might not think what we

Mark Turman (17:00.195)

And sometimes we can get really uncomfortable with that. with the, with the aspects of faith that are not mathematical in their certainty, there is a, there is a certainty of faith and there is a confidence and a an assurance of faith, but it doesn't work like a math equation. and sometimes we get, uncomfortable with that. John, one of the uniquenesses of this book, particularly, and it's helpfulness

the unique way in which it's laid out. and so I'm to let you describe it rather than me describe it, but, tell us, tell us why the book or tell us how the book is laid out and tell us why it is laid out that way. if somebody imagines themselves as a first year law

John Inazu (17:47.616)

Yeah. So you can think of this book as a narrative based story of a year in my life as a law teacher. And it takes the reader through an academic year. Each chapter is named after a month of the year. So chapter one is August when the academic year gets started. And then I walk the reader through the course of a year where I teach criminal law in the fall and law and religion in the spring. And then there are a whole lot of other events and episodes that emerge during the course of that year.

The reason I structured it this way is a growing conviction that people are drawn to stories and narratives much more than propositions or didactic teaching about certain things. And I wanted to have an account that engaged with the reader in a more compelling and relational way. But I also wanted to highlight these points of disagreement. within each chapter, I focus on a single question.

Related to this broader topic of learning to disagree. So for example, can't how do we learn empathy is framed around one of the chapters or is forgiveness possible? So even as we're Marching through the course of an academic year I'm also trying to raise a set of thematic questions along the way and you know This was a really fun and different project for me to do as an author and a scholar But one of the things I realized was that in creating a narrative I could also do some character development and show the reader along the way how people change over time, how I change over time, how I still have some learning to do on my own, particularly as I recount my own failures during the year.

Mark Turman (19:29.043)

Yeah. And it's a really, enjoyable rhythm, especially, for all of us, all of us have gone to school, even if we haven't gone to law school or to some other kind of graduate level experience, we've all gone to school. We all know the rhythms of what happens in August and in the fall, and then how your feelings and, and the rhythms of your life changes, you get toward the holidays and then into the spring. And, it took me a good while to learn different, felt about a spring semester compared to how I felt about a fall semester. but, but we all identify with that, whether we're in the third grade or, you know, we're doing a law degree. We all have some sense of that because it's a part of our lives and it, but it also speaks to some of the rhythms of how disagreements come. And I appreciated how, you know, you could, you could be walking into a family gathering at Thanksgiving or Christmas.

John Inazu (20:00.64)

Right?

Mark Turman (20:27.035)

And realize that that is an environment, especially today, a ripe environment for disagreement and for unhealthy conflict. And I appreciated the story, that you talked about there about how the discernment came to you that it just wasn't a good time to engage. So, talk about that a little bit more of just learning to discern the context of when we have certain kinds of conversation.

John Inazu (20:56.17)

Yeah, you so maybe the first point to mention is that for a lot of us and maybe some people listening to this podcast, we ought we can stand to be reminded that God does not need us to be his spokesperson on every issue under the sun, right? We are not called to engage every time we get fired up by a social media post or every time we catch something wrong or awful in the world. We just don't have to do it that God is not depending on us for all of those instances.

Mark Turman (21:09.875)

Hmm. Yeah.

John Inazu (21:24.94)

He does want us to be his ambassadors and his reconcilers in the world. And so to do that, well, we need to discern the relationships that we're called to be in, and then we need to invest in those wisely. If we're looking at a difficult conversation, say with a family member or a long time friend, we need to ask ourselves if we're ready to jump into that conversation. First of all, we better be going in with a full tank. We should have a kind of emotional and physical rest to us and an awareness of how difficult the conversation might be. Maybe even an anticipation that we're going to hear some things we don't like and can we go in with a kind of thick skin that can absorb some some hits or some off-putting comments without just jumping reflexively back at the person. I mean even that can be a tremendous form of witness if we just are able to absorb some of the comments rather than trying to preach back or intervene right away. And then in some relationships, it might actually be a reminder that we need to invest first in the relationship before the conversation. So I think about this, and I actually talked to quite a few people who are struggling with family dynamics right now. It could be politics or religion or some other issue. And they're thinking or they're saying, I feel like I don't even know this person anymore.

And part of the reason for that is that they don't know this person anymore, because even though there might be a very long shared history for the last few months or few years, maybe you've gone off to college or moved to a different state and you're having a very different set of experiences and new sources and social circles influence your life. And that causes some rift and some division from your past sets of relationships. So before jumping back into that really hard conversation, maybe we should start with.

something far more normal, something far more human, catching up over a meal, or starting with some softer topics rather than jumping right into the divisive ones.

Mark Turman (23:28.985)

And just realizing that, you know, at our best or when we're at our best, are growing and changing. And especially if it's somebody that you don't know at all, or somebody you haven't engaged with in a long time, hopefully that person, as well as you have learned and grown and, some of their thoughts hopefully have matured and changed. And so you got to make room for that. John, another one these terms that again, just floats around in our world a lot. I get into a lot of conversations where where people say, you know, we just, we think in terms that are zero sum too much. but your book calls this out. I love, love the fact that you use terminology that people are trafficking in sometimes maybe not as, well versed as they should, but you bring these terms out and that makes the book very accessible to people who are not lawyers, people who, don't have the credentials that you have, but you're using experiences, stories and terminology

You can find in just about every coffee shop that you walk into. but you'll hear people often say, well, we're just thinking too much zero sum. and as I read through that part of the book, I thought, well, John's making it very clear. There are some things that are just there's zero sum. There's just no other way around it. it either has to be a, or it has to be B, talk about those kinds of conversations and that reality

We sometimes have this idea that, if we just keep plugging at it, we're going to get to that somehow neutral ground. that's, know, somewhere between a and B, but that it can't, sometimes it can't be that. And we have to recognize

John Inazu (25:12.47)

Right, right. So, you know, starting with sort of the big principle in a diverse democracy where we have lots of different views over things that matter, we're going to have all kinds of political and policy conflicts where there are going to be winners and there are going to be losers. And you think of a lot of hot button issues, there is no middle ground where you can just agree that we've compromised effectively. These are going to be very important issues where the sides are going to keep contesting and because of the political process, there will be winners and there will be losers. And I try to illustrate this with maybe a gentler example, but one that's kind of near and dear to me, which is the collision of people who suffer from allergies and people who love pets when they are in common places like airplanes. So I happen to be in the former category. I have allergies to quite a few different pets and trees and plants and those sorts of things. And so I'm often taken aback when I sit down on a plane, I do a lot of travel and I'll be on a plane and next to me, the person in the next seat has a little carrier with a cat or a dog in it. And then quite, quite immediately, we're all breathing in the same air. And so that dog or cat is having an effect

on me. That's an example of a zero sum situation. You either allow the person with the allergies to be allergy free on the airplane, or you allow the person with the pet to be on the plane, but we're not both going to have our preferences maximized in that example. you know, I mean, as silly as it might sound, there are real costs one way or the other. But because we are coming with different preferences and different perspectives, someone has to make a decision. Sometimes that someone is the airline, sometimes it's a regulator or a policymaker.

Sometimes the law backs a decision and if you don't agree with it, you go to jail. And so these can be very consequential, but they're everywhere in our lives, especially in a society where people don't always share our beliefs over things that

Mark Turman (27:17.267)

Yeah. And, and then later it kind of came around the book and I wanted you to chase this out a little bit further from the standpoint that, we often get into conversations, especially when it becomes law and faith or law and religion. And the idea is sometimes touted that, when it comes to the intersection of law and religion, religion should never yield you talk about that some, and you talk about that from the standpoint, well, let's talk about that a little bit more deeply because it's, it, are in a world that not everyone shares our faith, and context for a particular situation matters a great deal in this chase that out a little bit more because some people, you know, they, raise up phrases of separation of church and state and they, it's like, well,

The idea sometimes among Christians particularly is, that Christians should never yield even an inch within the framework of their faith when it comes to other matters of consideration and law as it relates to other people who, particularly those that don't share our faith.

John Inazu (28:29.954)

Right. I think this starts with just recognizing where we are as a country and as a society. So I'm someone I would actually be delighted if everybody shared my views and my beliefs over everything that I thought was important. You know, we might be able to disagree about ice cream flavors and sports teams, but when it comes to the existence of God and his plan for the world, I would love it if people all agreed with me. But as a fact of the world, they don't. And so then the ethical and political question for Christians is what do you do the reality of that disagreement. You could try to win at all costs and then control or coerce people to believe as you do. We've got a lot of history over thousands of years that that doesn't go very well, that people typically aren't coerced into belief anyway. And when we try, we do a lot of harm and a lot of damage. And so I think the, the invention and the brilliance of civil liberties in the first amendment in the American context is something that we can embrace not just for our own protections, but also realizing that those same liberties are going to protect other people, including people we don't agree with. And this is, spent a lot of my time working in the areas of free speech and religious freedom. Those, those rights and those freedoms only work when they're for everyone. And a

consequence of that for Christians who are advocating in these areas means that as we increase breathing space for people to exercise their own religion or speak their own minds. We are allowing space for people to say things that we don't think are true, to say and do things that we might even find harmful to society. But we would want those same freedoms for us because there are lots of people in society who think that about Christianity and Christian beliefs. so the overarching premise, I think, is we should maximize the ability to persuade one another in our words and in our actions, the best way to do that is to ensure strong civil liberties for everyone, not to seek special protection just for Christians or just for the people that we like.

Mark Turman (30:35.209)

Yeah. And love the way the book calls that out and the, opportunity of disagreeing deeply, but without a desire or without any intent of malice or harm toward each other, still the flexibility, the freedom that our country seems to have lost a significant amount of in the last five or 10 years of making, as you said, making breathing room for that. so

Let me, from the standpoint of the book, let's move to the spring a little bit, because, I was really intrigued by the, conversation about the difference between wrong and between evil. And this is, think, something that Christians really, struggle with sometimes maybe the way that we've understood faith, the way that we've been taught certain elements about our faith. That this is something we may not have room for, and maybe we need to grow

John Inazu (31:14.253)

Mm -hmm.

Mark Turman (31:32.269)

is a better, deeper understanding that you describe between wrongness and evil. Can, can you kind of walk us through that

John Inazu (31:41.772)

Yeah, let me start maybe by pausing what I think should be two fairly non -controversial theological claims for Christians. The first is that there is evil in the world. Evil is a reality of the world. You know, we trust that at the end of time, God conquers evil, but there is evil in the world for now. And the second is that every single human being is made in the image of God. So if you start with those two premises, then you have a because you want to both name the reality of evil and evil is sometimes manifested through people, but also hold on to the reality that everybody is an image bearer. And so I think one way to do that is to work as much as we can to distinguish people from the ideas, beliefs and practices that they hold in doing the world and to say to you as a person, you're an image bearer. I might find your ideas and your actions very wrong and even evil, but I'm going to be committed

encountering you as a person. The challenge here is that when we lapse into calling the person evil or seeing the person as evil, we're no longer in the realm of disagreement. Not trying to, you don't try to get along with evil. You try to eradicate and minimize evil in the world. And so to do that hard work of distinguishing people from the ideas they hold. And then as a matter of ordinary political discourse, just think about the difference between saying, I think you're wrong and I think you're evil. The first opens up a whole lot more room to have a discussion, to treat each other as equals, to learn from one another. If you start a discussion by saying, I think you're evil, that discussion rarely goes well or rarely goes

Mark Turman (33:23.314)

Does, does the law go down that road, John, does the law ever contemplate or deal with the ass? The law is always dealing with right and wrong, but is the law itself ever trying to operate in the, in the discerning of evil?

John Inazu (33:40.998)

It's interesting. Mean, there are some some lesser known legal doctrines that go in that direction. So for example, in criminal homicide, there's something called depraved indifference homicide, where we say, you know, people who murder people are bad, and people who kill people are bad, and they're doing bad things. But there's an even worse category of bad when you do something that's so egregious that we would think most ordinary people, even when they kill someone wouldn't do it that way. And so the law and some jurisdictions creates this elevated category, which you can think of as more wrong than wrong in some ways. So there are examples out there, but I think one of the really useful features of the American criminal justice system is that we, you know, we presume innocence until proven guilty. We want the humanity of the person charged with even a really bad and awful offense to be recognized by the courts and by the people who are judging them.

That's hard to do in the ordinary day to day when we see someone who has done really awful things to hold on to the rights and the dignity that even that person holds. And here I think actually, you in our own systems of law and jurisprudence, Western societies owe much to Christian principles that have informed these notions of dignity and humanity, and it's important to hold on to those.

Mark Turman (35:05.747)

Yeah. Lots to think about there and, and, really some big intersections between faith and law at that point. John, in the subsequent chapter, after that, as we get around in, terms of the semester of the spring, we get around to the celebration of spring and the celebration of Easter. And, you make a statement about forgiveness. You have a whole chapter, of, know, can we forgive? Will we forgive?

and you made a statement that just really pierced me when it read, when I read it, said, is have we decided that forgiveness is offensive, that it is repugnant to us in some way. And I thought there was a really great insight. I won't get the quote exactly right, but you're like, the statement was if, if you never feel like you've ever significantly harmed another person, you're not going to have much appreciation for forgiveness.

Talk about that idea that in our current culture where it is so partisan and it is so, combative and so intense at times in the kind of conversations that we're having with each other. and sometimes particularly online, but not limited to online, unpack this idea of, especially for us as Christians,

We just cannot traffic in the area where forgiveness is offensive to

John Inazu (36:35.864)

No, that's right. You know, and this reminds me probably we're saying the book itself overall is not a Christian book. It's as you know, it's meant to be engaged by anyone, you know, of any faith or of no faith, but it's informed by some deeply Christian principles, including this notion of forgiveness. And one of the intellectual challenges I had in writing the book was how much can or should you translate ideas to more general context. And forgiveness is one of those ideas that I think is so deeply rooted Christianity and an example of Jesus and the commands of scripture that it's hard to know always how that might translate more generally and more broadly but but I think for Christians the dual insight that we both absolutely need forgiveness that we're not above forgiveness and that we're capable of being forgiven Tim Keller puts something along the lines of you know, we're more

Mark Turman (37:19.219)

Hmm.

John Inazu (37:29.688)

We're more loved than we ever think we could deserve, and we're more in need of judgment than we ever think we might need. And both of those seem true. So for Christians to hold on to those theological truths as we engage in the world, that we ourselves are always going to need to be forgiven, which should give us the capacity to extend forgiveness to others. But then also that we ourselves are forgiven, which allow us confidently to engage in the world. even if people don't reciprocate, to have the witness and the example of Christians forgiving in the world, how powerful is that? How powerful would that be if we saw more of it? The idea that the watching world would observe Christians forgiving each other well, that would be amazing to see more of that today.

Mark Turman (38:23.731)

Yeah. If we could practice it in our own house, then it would become much more appealing to those outside of our house. but even your comment just then made me triggered my thought of, part of what you talk about in terms of, well, if we're going to, we're going to pursue what you're calling us to in this book, which is to be people who disagree better, and hopefully arrive at greater resolutions with people, but also end at healthier places, even when we can't just, when we can't come to an agreement. but what about those times when we're not seeing that kind of empathy and patients, a desire to forgive a desire to understand the other person when that's not being reciprocated. What should that tell us? What, how should that be a guide to about what we should do next when we're engaged with this person around a topic that's hard for us to talk

John Inazu (39:27.608)

Yeah, know, two things that might be in some tension with each other. The first is that we we should expect in the world that if we're actually living out the fruits of the spirit and demonstrating Christ's love to others, that we're going to encounter people who don't know or aren't capable of responding in the same way. You know, if they're not Christians, if they're not motivated by the Holy Spirit. So we should expect some asymmetry and we should expect some people not to be responding in kind. And when Jesus says, he doesn't just say, you know, love the people who agree with you or who treat you the same way. says, love your enemies and, be patient with those around you. So we should expect a little bit of that. I think up to a point, and then this is where the sermon and community jumps in. If you're in an individual relationship where you're really laying down your life and trying hard and the lack of reciprocity crosses a line to a kind of abuse or an emotional intensity that you don't have the capacity to bear, then I think the beauty of community is the recognition that it's not always up to you in every single relationship. And maybe the best decision in that case is to step back from the relationship and let someone else handle it or work at it. So I don't think the advice is generalizable, either to say that discernment is important. And then in many cases, especially more ordinary cases, the expectation We won't always see reciprocity if we're trying hard to lean into the fruits of the spirit.

Mark Turman (40:59.421)

Yeah, I think it's a really good word that we do know and hopefully we are learning with Jesus that we are to go the second mile, that we are to be people who speak with grace, who serve with grace, and even sacrifice in grace and kind of take on more of the burden than perhaps we would see in the world. But that's what we're called to Because that's what we've received in grace from God, but that does not mean that we continue to subject ourselves to, verbal kinds of abuse or anything like that. That's, think where Jesus was talking about being, you know, wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove. and that's part of the discernment in this, John, one of the things that people hear from us at Dennison forum all the time is what I call

The graduate level education of faith, which is to speak the truth in love. we talk about that from Ephesians four on a regular basis, so much of what you've written in this book and the larger body of your work and other environments as well goes down that theme. give us your inside view How do we get better as graduate level Christians at speaking the truth and love in the environments that we're

John Inazu (42:22.907)

Yeah, I'm gonna come at this maybe a bit obliquely at first but what I want to say is make sure you have friends in your life who are truth tellers and this is what I mean by that be surrounded by people who will be honest with you about whether you're someone who needs more courage to speak more truthfully more of the time or more discernment and restraint to speak less so that you can be more loving in the world and and we're always very good at judging for ourselves which of those we are. So that's where the importance of friendship really comes into play. Have people who can tell you, you know, I think actually, Mark, you should have a little more courage in this situation to speak up and you can't always just dance around the issue or alternatively, it's time to pull back and listen more and it's time maybe not to engage for a while. And I think friends are an incredible gift from God of how to do that better when we don't always see the way forward.

Mark Turman (43:21.299)

Yeah, I think it's, really helpful. I, know, I don't know that it's true, but I would say I've certainly heard of a lot more people who have said to me, you know, I just, I, I, I'm afraid of conflict. I, I avoid conflict. and maybe there are more of those people in the world than those who are more of a combative mindset and love a good argument. I kind of grew up in a family that loved a good argument just for the sake of the argument some of my brothers, particularly were more adept at it than I was. but, we have to realize there's both sides of that to us. and that sometimes we need to speak up more strongly and sometimes we need to lay back, which is kind of where, I love the way the book ends because the book kind of ends on a Sabbath note, which I think is important to us. You get to the end of a school year

May and you have a great summer vacation and you described some of that at the end of the book. And there's even some lessons about how to disagree better in that, walk that out for a minute. how does that understanding of detaching and giving yourself some room? You've already referenced it a little bit earlier in the conversation of, know what, you don't have to be an expert on every single topic in the world.

But talk about that as a rhythm of our life and putting some oxygen back into our lives and into our souls as a strategy for disagreeing in better ways.

John Inazu (44:56.128)

Yeah, and you know, I owe a lot of this in my own life to my friend Andy Crouch. He was very persuasive in his admonitions, you know, to do Sabbath weekly, but also, you know, to the extent that your life and your job allows you to do so. Take a week a year and have a week of rest, especially a week offline. So a kind of tech Sabbath or a time away from the news and from social media and from email. Not every job can do this, many, think with a lot of advanced preparation can. And for me, the one of the most life -giving pieces of stepping away from all of it for a while is just to be reminded of how much my day -to -day, whether it's what I do or my emotions or how I'm engaged with other people is shaped by the constant influx of news and events and things in the world. And when I step away from with my family or in nature or creation or just reading more deeply or going on a walk and praying, especially over the course of a week and not just, for an hour or something like that. I can be reminded in a very powerful way, both of the beauty of the world around me, but also of my insignificance to that world. And by that, I mean, you know, we're just, none of us is as big a deal as we think we are and the world can go on without us. And I think a lot of people need that reminder, the reminder that it's a privilege to be in the work that we have, whether it's ministry or law or teaching or something else, but that it's not because we're needed in that space. It's because God and His grace is letting us be used there.

But ultimately his plans are going to go on and work with or without us so that to be in a posture of gratitude and an ability to receive and embrace the call rather than to try to control it. I think it makes a huge difference, at least in my own life.

Mark Turman (47:01.139)

Yeah. It really, was a great reminder to me of just, the humility that can come into that is to realize that God was running the world for a really long time before I showed up and he'll be, you know, if he chooses to, he'll be running it for a very long time after my time is done. But I also thought it was a very good call out for a law professor. have a, I have a friend that went back to school, after starting one career felt called into law.

John Inazu (47:11.669)

Hahaha!

Mark Turman (47:30.141)

And, made the very difficult challenge of going to law school, as a second career. and he'll be listening to this podcast and I don't think there was a single law professor that recommended he take a Sabbath. And, most people in law school and in other kinds of graduate schools would say, yeah, that's a great idea. I don't know how that would work. but it's so important, you know,

John Inazu (47:53.966)

Well, know that, yeah, and then maybe the serious point attached to that comment is if you can't figure it out with the training wheels of school, it's not going to happen in practice, right? When you're into the practice of law or into the business, if you haven't worked on those hard rhythms in school, when you have a boss and a bunch of deadlines and clients, they're not going to come. So the stakes are kind of high in terms of formation and practices because getting them right early on really matters downstream.

Mark Turman (48:24.019)

Hmm. Yeah. It's such a good word because some of the reasons that we're not disagreeing better or in getting to healthier conversations and resolutions is because we're living in perpetual fear. We're living in perpetual anxiety. We're living in a lot of times perpetual fatigue rather than taking that step back and letting God bring rest into our lives and, getting a better perspective. you

We try in the best efforts that we give sometimes, you know, how will I feel about this in three or five years? We just may not have the discipline to think about things like that as consistently as we should, unless we're consistently pulling back, getting that rest and getting that perspective that God really is in control and that God is not only real, but he is good. And he means good for us and for all of us. And that's his plan.

John, thank you again for taking some time to talk today. And for this conversation, it's been really helpful. Want to remind our listeners that this is John and Nasu. The book is learning to disagree the surprising path to navigating differences with empathy and respect. You can find that at all of the major book providers. can also find, well, John, you tell us what's the best way for people to follow you in your ongoing work. If they want to do

John Inazu (49:44.535)

sure. Yeah, I've got a weekly substack that's called some assembly required and that's a good place to be in touch with

Mark Turman (49:50.343)

All right. You can subscribe to that as I have, and, you'll be able to follow John's work and, we appreciate you for listening in on our conversation today. I hope it's been encouraging as well as equipping. If it has, please rate, review us on your podcast platform and share this with family and friends. You might even consider picking up John's book. It's a great resource for small group discussion. There are some tools for that in the back of the book that will help you as you walk through some of these conversations.

and a way to strengthen not only your efforts at disagreeing well, but also those that you traffic and share life with. Thank you for following our ministry at denisonforum.org. You can find more resources there as well. And we'll see you next time on the Denison Forum podcast.