

# Navigating extremism:

## A conversation with Elizabeth Neumann

### TRANSCRIPT

June 6, 2024 | June 27, 2024

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome back to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and your host again for today's conversation. These days, we're all very much anticipating what's coming toward us in terms of our political season. At Denison Forum, we're preparing a whole fresh slate of resources around the election that's coming in the fall and around politics, obviously stuff there we could talk about.

Every single day, almost every minute of the day, which many are discovering is somewhat harmful to us in some ways. So we would encourage you to have some healthy boundaries with that. But there are a lot of things that we need to talk about. And we love to get into these conversations to help you as a believer.

To be equipped, to think biblically, to live holy and beautiful lives and to serve redemptively in those places where God has given you opportunity and influence. And so today we want to have a conversation with a new friend. Her name is Elizabeth Newman. Let me tell you a little bit about Elizabeth. She was assistant secretary for counter and counter terrorism and threat prevention at the U S department of Homeland security. Just that alone, Elizabeth makes me want to talk to you for about three hours. But Elizabeth is a frequent guest these days on national news outlets. She is also the chief strategy, strategy officer for moonshot, which we're going to get her to tell us what moonshot is all about.

Especially after NASA's most recent launch, if those are connected at all. She is based these days in Denver, Colorado but has roots back to Texas where Denison forum has its home as well. And so we're looking for a conversation today about her recent book. Called kingdom of rage, the rise of Christian extremism and the path back to peace that itself is worthy of about three more hours of conversation, but we're going to try to move it along.

Elizabeth, welcome to the Denison forum podcast. We're glad to have you.

[00:02:13] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Mark, it's a thrill to be with you.

[00:02:15] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, we're looking forward to this conversation, but as we just kind of get into this topic, like I said, so much it just seems like politics, partisanship. Extremism is just overflowing and in many ways drowning us these days.

So give us a little bit of the backstory. Is this your first book on this topic? What's, what caused you to write about what you are describing in terms of this book?

[00:02:45] **Elizabeth Neumann:** It is my first book, probably my only book. It was really hard to write books. So much respect for authors. I, I've been in the Homeland Security space for two decades. I moved from Austin, Texas, where I was in seventh grade. I'm a student at the George W. Bush School. To Washington, DC when George W.

Bush became president and worked in his faith based and community initiatives for two years during that time, 9 11 happens. And I, it changed my career trajectory. I wanted to go and help do whatever I could. So there were opportunities to work in the Homeland Security space and I did that as a very junior staffer and just kind of never left and have been at it for about two decades now.

And, and certainly. Experiencing 9 11 up close in Washington, D. C. on that day left a, quite an impression that I, I really wanted to make sure that we never had to endure such a horrid thing again. And when we flash forward to the experience of 2020 of riots and fighting and anger and terrorist attacks.

And then, the culminating in January 6, this moment where the capital does get attacked, but it's not by Al Qaeda. It's, It's by American citizens. It's by American citizens, many of whom profess Christ and were carrying Christian symbols, and they were marching alongside organized militia and neo Nazi groups.

It was gut punching to me, and I wanted to better understand how it happened. I knew, I knew some basics from my professional side, but I was really interested in how do I apply that to my community, the, the the Christian, the conservative community where we've had people that have radicalized and radicalized to violence and that's the origin of the book is my own attempt at trying to understand, and then hopefully equipping fellow believers and fellow moderate Republicans and conservatives who.

Are against violence with enough information so that they can be peace builders in their own communities.

[00:04:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And that's, that's one of the things that intrigued me in the early pages of the book, because. I haven't heard very many people kind of connect the dots, if

you will, back to the experiences of 9 11 and some things, obviously some significant pivot points from 9 11 to January 6th and the journey that we basically have taken over the last 20 25 years.

Can you kind of unpack that a little bit more? We're it's sad for me to say this, but my experience has been that it's almost like for too many people. I know that it's almost nine 11 is old news and that's like the old world. And we entered into some kind of a new world, you know, 10, 12 years ago.

And a lot of people want to just kind of set aside those kinds of things, but particularly as, you know, being a young adult at the time of nine 11. I can remember I was standing, you know, most people that were alive and adult, at least at that season, they can remember where and when I was standing in the plumbing aisle of Home Depot when I got a call from my assistant that I needed to get to the church that I pastored very quickly.

Talk about that connection a little bit more. These things are actually related this, this hyper partisanship that we're now experiencing this rise of extremism that we're going to talk about through your work and the problem of radicalization. Talk a little bit more about how those things are actually connected and go back at least to nine 11, if not further back.

[00:06:28] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Yeah, so I think it's useful to use 9 11 as a reference point because so many of us still still have those memories. And remember the, gosh, we were so scared. We, I, the, the lack of ability to get good information was a huge problem that day when I was evacuating. We were we, we were evacuating because the Pentagon had been hit and we could see the

fire the smoke. But we didn't know if anything else had been hit, there these rumors, the state department had a bomb, or that the white house was being attacked, or that there's more planes in the sky, and they're inbound. So there's like absolute chaos in D. C. as there was in New York as people are fleeing and we didn't know what was next.

We Thought gosh, if they're this coordinated to, to manage this are they going to hit us again tomorrow? Is it going to be the metro system? Is it going to be the water system? It, it was so fearful in those days after 9 11. And. And certainly it, it is much easier now in hindsight to look back and see that we made decisions at, at certain times and places that were probably ill advised and could be, could have been done better.

Fear is not necessarily the best motivator and sometimes mistakes occur. And I, I definitely think that there's plenty of room for retrospective and for learning. How to do it better if we ever have to do it again. But I also, now, you know, two decades in and having people come out of college

and graduate school and come into the workforce and, and I still work in the counterterrorism space, it is sometimes interesting that it, you know, It can get overly simplified.

People, when you just study it from a history book, go, Oh, well, it's so obvious that we shouldn't have gone to Iraq. The clearly the weapons of mass destruction. We're not there. That's a common refrain. And And I, I just, I think it's really important for people to remember the fear, the fear that was so palpable for weeks, months afterwards.

And and there's probably a significant lessons to be drawn from, from a faith perspective. And, and I'll tie it back to our moment at the current moment here in a second, but what I, what I, We'll also say is that in the days and weeks after 9 11, we were searching for answers. Why would somebody do this to us that there were a lot of commentators that would go on TV trying to explain the rationale you know, this is what sloppy jihadist theology is that they've issued fought was, and we spent a lot of time focusing on ideology.

What's the ideology that drives somebody to commit an act of violence? And in the counterterrorism space, we, we call that the narrative. Narratives are important. Stories are really powerful in driving motivation. But what we now know two decades later is that narratives are secondary to another in thinking.

Needs that the, the real reason why somebody becomes open to the idea of joining a terrorist group or committing a mass attack is because they have an unmet psychological or social need and those unmet needs can be bucketed. And I'm overly oversimplifying here, but they can be bucketed into the need for belonging and the need for significance.

Those are. Basic human needs. Remember going to high school in our Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Those are up at the top. And something has happened in, in our society to make achieving those needs of belonging and significance. More difficult. And we see a number of societal ills that come from those needs not being met.

It's not just joining an extremist group and committing an act of violence. It could also be deaths of despair, opioid addiction. You're more open to gang recruitment. You're also more open if you're a female to being sex traff trafficked. So there are multiple ills that come from those needs not being met.

And, and while I don't necessarily say this in a, in a secular audience. I think for a Christian audience, when I say significance and belonging hopefully what comes to mind is we have answers for those as a Christian community, right? Jesus is our significance. We are daughters and sons of the King.

Jesus is our belonging. And if Jesus experienced the ultimate humiliation, when we experience the ultimate you know, some, some lesser humiliation, we, we have somebody who is walking alongside with us in that humiliation. So we, we actually have tremendous, exciting answers for these problems that our culture is facing.

And part of what was really hard about doing this book was realizing. If, if we should have those answers, if Jesus has given us these answers, why did our community reject them? Why were, why, why was it so easy for us to instead replace Jesus with politics or replace you know, our worship and fear Of the Lord with a fear of liberals taking over our schools or right, pick a culture war topic and we sit in a moment where we're constantly told all the reasons we should be scared that they are coming for us, that they're going to change our way of life.

And yet the Bible gave us a prescription for what to do with fear and nowhere does it say we should panic. Nowhere does it say we should take up arms to, to address it. And, and so I, what was interesting in, in, as, as the years passed and we started to realize ideologies less It plays an important role in providing that narrative and the justification for violence, but it's not the real thing that is driving somebody that the reason that that matters is when we're looking to prevent, we then can start.

Addressing or appealing to those psychosocial needs as opposed to trying to counter ideology. One of the things that we learned over lots of trial and error is that trying to counter somebody's ideology never works. It usually has a backlash effect. They dig in more deeply. And so when you're looking for, okay, we want to do more than just drop a bomb or send a drone or send in troops, like we actually want to prevent people from radicalizing in the first place.

The answer is to understand those unmet needs. Around the time that the counterterrorism community is coming to this discovery that the science is becoming, the evidence base is building, we also started to see a spate of attacks in the United States. It started in 2015 and it has been going up ever since.

And those attacks were coming from U. S. citizens what we call domestic terrorists or domestic violent extremists primarily motivated by white supremacy or anti government extremism. And We also, in kind of grappling with this, like what's happening, why is this changing, started to realize, oh, wait a second.

This threat has actually been with us for quite some time. Now, anybody old enough will remember Oklahoma City bombing might remember Ruby Ridge or some of Waco and some of the 1980s exploits by various militias and white power groups. But the counterterrorism community have been so focused on the overseas piece on how do we defeat Al Qaeda that we kind of weren't watching what was happening domestically.

And it's not that it just spiked in 2015. It did go up, but it had been there the entire time. In fact, If you go back to when we start collecting data in 1994, the preponderance of attacks, plots, and deaths, with the exception of 9 11, because it was such a large scale attack,

[00:14:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right.

[00:14:28] **Elizabeth Neumann:** are from overwhelmingly, the majority of them, are from domestic terrorist movements, movements that are classified on the right side of the political spectrum, white power and militia.

It's not even close. Like Al Qaeda, ISIS, all of those attacks, they're bad. We still need to protect against them, but that's not. Where the predominant threat is coming from. It's coming from these other movements that are here within the United States.

[00:14:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Wow. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's so much to just kind of wrap your brain around just in all of that. But so yeah, so Elizabeth, one thing I want to ask is, I'm going to have people ask me if I don't ask you. You've been, you've, you've built this career kind of, it sounds like in some ways kind of providentially or somehow other stumbled into this career of counterintelligence and counterterrorism.

Somebody is going to want to know, I want to know how do you sleep well at night or do you sleep well at night knowing what you know, knowing the work that you do I guess just, and this is obviously a faith rooted question, Having given yourself for the last 20 years or more to this area of engagement in work, what is it that keeps you calm, peaceful, and gives you hope?

Hmm.

[00:15:47] **Elizabeth Neumann:** is a huge part of that. My family and friends, every time I was in government service would proactively pray for me. And that was a huge comfort. It might come as a surprise. I, I'm sure some of it is just when you're in a field You are watching the people more advanced in their careers and you're adopting how they deal with circumstances.

So, when I would be early in my career and would be reading our threat matrix and, you know, Oh, the latest plot. Absolutely. I was quite fearful and fixated, but I was. Watching, you know, people with 10, 20, 30 years more experience than me, and they were, they mentored me. They helped me know what's the appropriate level of alarm.

Okay, we need to take this one seriously, or no, this one seems like it's going to wash out. But also how, how do you. Take care of yourself in that, and it's, you know, exercising, getting outside, making sure you have a hobby outside of your work having connection with family and friends who hopefully are not necessarily in the same field.

All of those things can help create balance and health for you as you're, you do endure quite a bit of stress in that, in that field. But funny enough. I will tell you the hardest moment of my career was, was not in that early stage when we were dealing with multiple threats and I, I was so junior, I didn't know how to even perceive it.

It, it actually was serving in the Trump administration in not because of the threats, but because of the, the chaos and the people who lacked, they lacked a moral grounding. They lacked an ability to make decisions based on what's good and right and true. There was constant lies, constant backstabbing.

It was a very toxic environment. And so trying to navigate that faithfully as a believer was, was hard. That, that was Did keep me up at night wrestling over decisions of, is this the time when you say something, or is this the time that you hold your peace? I'm, I'm very much a believer in the constitutional system.

Trump was elected by the American people and had every right to implement his agenda as long as it was constitutional and within the bounds of the law. And we were frequently asked at the department of Homeland security to do things outside the bounds of the law. And that was challenging to be up against that pressure, sometimes withering criticism because we wouldn't go past that line.

[00:18:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** has been, yeah, I suspect that if, if you want to, there's several more books that you could explore along some of those lines, but let, let's go back a minute to again, some of the connection a little bit to the connection of nine 11 and, and then to January six I learned this on a personal level, on a pastoral level, the connection between fear and anger.

And now in the terms that you're casting this, which I think are so helpful on a, on a wide scale, the, the connection between fear and rage can you tease that out a little bit and how that really is kind of foundational and, and fundamental to this idea of radicalization and extremism, what happens to human beings when they are being driven by fear?

Instead of being driven by faith and hope how does that lead them toward a place of of deep anger and and even to this thing that, that you describe as rage,

[00:19:28] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Mm hmm. So, we know that anger is a surface emotion, and it sounds like this is something that you learned in your pastoral care, that there's, there's something else that's underneath that. It's it has its purposes it's kind of like having a fever it's important, it's an important tool to tell us that something is off and, but the fever itself is not the, Disease or the sickness, you know, it's just a symptom.

So anger is often a symptom of something else. That is a deeper challenge. I, I in the book and then personally have really been influenced by Dr. Tim Keller's exploration of our root idols and how often anger is often it comes to the surface when one of our root idols has been threatened.

And those root idols comfort control power. I'm blanking. There's 4 of them. But, but the idea is that they might manifest as. You know, a love of money or you know, seeking a new job, but underneath it is something even deeper that we, as human beings, we like to be in control and we like to be empowered and we like our comfort.

And when that is threatened Yeah, our defenses go up. So in some ways that's just normal human behavior. The moment that we find ourselves in, though, is one in which we are extremely online. So we're disconnected from real human beings when we're having conversation. Most of our conversations are occurring online.

The algorithms. As well as the mainstream media have learned that the way to, for them to make money is to keep you angry. So, we are in the middle of an ecosystem that is designed to keep us upset, to keep us angry. So, That is kind of set out against us as well. If we're, you know, checking something out turning on the news connecting on Facebook to see how a friend is going.

And then you see somebody's feed that is, you know, the latest outrage. You know, somebody's going to mess with our kids school curriculum. Like we're just constantly bombarded with all the reasons why somebody is out to get you. And. In doing that, we're kind of setting the stage for the definition of extremism, which I, I use a, a scholar's definition that says extremism is when our in group perceives a threat to our success or survival by an out group.

And therefore, hostile action is necessary. One of the things that I, I'm trying to educate in. And laying that definition out is that the first part of that definition, my in group faces a threat to our success or survival by an out group is like the message that we're constantly saturated in, in our politics and our media.

Somebody is always out to get us. And it is very fear based, sometimes based in reality, sometimes not a lot of times, not it, a lot of times it's manipulated. reality. So it's a cherry picked anecdote. Somebody got fired because they didn't show up to pride month. And, and maybe that did happen.

But what they don't tell you is that it only happened once or twice. And then the court system weighed in and said, no, you can't do that. Right. Nobody ever finishes the rest of the story to say, actually, no, the First Amendment has held. The First Amendment actually is stronger thanks to court decisions in the last two decades than it was in the 1990s.

No, we only hold out the, is, you know, somebody Who went through a very difficult circumstance. I'm not minimizing that, but his one circumstance is not the domino that's going to lead to all of our religious freedom going away overnight. But, but if you're in certain ecosystems of, of media. That is what you hear.

You are constantly hearing these stories of why you need to be scared because your way of life is being threatened. So that first part of the extremist narrative, I would say we're swimming in and unless you turn all of the news off, which I don't know that that's an answer either. It's the second part though, the, the therefore hostile action is necessary that moves you into extremism.

And the concern of our present moment is that we have. Unprecedented numbers of people, according to multiple surveys and, and academic research polls one, one survey suggests that we have nearly 80 million people who believe that violence may be necessary from time to time to achieve their political aim. 80 million people. They're only 280 million adults. Like that's, that's getting off like awfully close to, you know, 30 percent there. And that is an enormous number of people that are what I would can say, cognitively embracing an extremist ideology. Now, that doesn't mean that they're going to go out and commit an active or join a terrorist group, right?

It's a very, very small number of people that actually mobilize to violence. But the difficulty is when you have such a large group who are open to it, They're constantly talking to one another and affirming these beliefs. And it's a milieu that the one or two people, or really it's more percentage, the 1 percent who participate in that milieu, who will actually go commit that attack.

So the larger the milieu is, the more power and influence it does have to increase the number of attacks. We can shrink that milieu. You have a much smaller number of people who are like, you know what? Violence is okay. You're going to have fewer and fewer attacks. So that's That's one of the things that I think is less understood.

We often talk about the, the a gunman at a school shooting or at a grocery store as being a lone actor, as if they were all by themselves. No, they're participating in the same conversations that you and I are in that ecosystem of fear and anger and hate. And the more that you contribute to it or.

The more that we don't start calling it out and saying, this is unhealthy. It's unbiblical. That's easy. It's easy to say that like these conspiracy theories, that's gossip and slander. It is unbiblical. We should not be participating in it. You certainly shouldn't be sharing it on Facebook. But aside from that, it's also just very unhealthy for our society to be that wrapped up in it.

It creates the cycle, the pathway for people to mobilize to violence.

[00:25:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think so many great call outs just in, in those few comments. One is, is just your own testimony about self care and that in and of itself is a recipe that people need to hear that yes, you know, when it comes to politics and other things, it's, but in this particular case, it's good to be aware, it's good to be informed.

It's good to be prayerful and to participate. As one of my friends recently said, you know, Jesus only talked about the, the leader of his world one time Caesar, who was a direct rival to his title is Lord. Jesus only referred to him once and simply said, pay your taxes and keep your eye on God. So there's something for us to learn about that.

So we need to be. Aware and in touch, but there are certain things not only of that, that are really helpful in what you're saying. One is, is the call out that we are in a media complex that is built on fear anxiety, and those things end up fueling and promoting fostering within us this. It opens the vulnerability toward the idea of hostile action or anger or violence in this case.

And that. That Christians need to understand the biblical mandate against violence. Violence in the way that we're talking about it is not the same as when a nation goes to war against another nation. That's a wholly different kind of conversation. We're talking about violence, which the Bible is always speaking to with very condemnatory type of tones that that's not right, that is, You know, Jesus is the turn the other cheek teacher.

And we have seemed to become bored with that. We've seemed to become unwilling to hear that in some ways these days. But we have to hear again that we we have to learn. And I noticed you referenced Jonathan Heights work, Jonathan Heights, recent book on the anxious generation. Some of the influences that are now becoming even more clearly documented about the impact of technology on us that we have to recognize that there is this Fear mongering and, and, and machine that's happening around us, particularly on social media.

But then the other thing I thought Elizabeth was so important to note, which is why talking about percentages at some point, is it really helpful? If you're talking about 1 percent of a very large number that will likely mobilize to violence when that, when that first number is really big, then your problem set is really big, right?

And that's what you're trying to help us understand. Am I on the right track?

[00:28:42] **Elizabeth Neumann:** You are. We don't have the, even if you got to a place where you're like, you know what I want is minority report. I want the government to be able to predict who's going to be the person. One that technology doesn't exist. The social science doesn't exist. Two, like the numbers it's, it's massive.

You know, we have 800, 000 sworn law enforcement officers in this country. They're no match to 80 million people who, who are potentially willing to commit an act of violence, even if you take the, the lower number of people who are prepared to commit an act of violence today, that's around 3%. That's 8 million people.

We don't have security forces of such number to be able to actually deal with that. The problem is so large that we need people of goodwill and civil society to step up and, and. Reclaim civility. It's such an antiquated term, but we post COVID, especially have just embraced the, the loss of all of our norms of civility.

And this, I mean, it sounds so simple, but genuinely treating the grocery clerk. At the store with a smile and a kindness, even if they do something wrong, as opposed to berating them, that is pushing back against violence. When we are modeling for our kids and for others that are watching us, that what we do when somebody wrongs us is to berate them or bully them.

That is actually, those are actually parts of. The hostile action spectrum that we worry about. It's not criminal. But it certainly is contributing to this milieu of the idea that the, the way to handle our disagreements or the way to handle our grievances is to verbally or physically beat somebody up.

That is. That is not only not the way of Jesus, but it's also just not the way of a healthy society. Like that, that's a miserable way to live in constant fear that, that somebody, that you might accidentally cross somebody on the bad day and they are going to take it out on you.

[00:30:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And that's, that's one of the things I think we're, we're starting to learn. Maybe hopefully is that living in fear and living in perpetual anger is totally exhausting.

[00:31:01] **Elizabeth Neumann:** It is.

[00:31:02] **Dr. Mark Turman:** totally exhausting. And and, and that's what I love about your work and some others that I've recently encountered is that so much of this.

is so clearly spoken to and answered by the message of Jesus and by the teachings of Christianity in terms of faith, replacing and overcoming fear, and then having a trust in God and his goodness and letting his spirit fill us with his fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. Those things manifesting in our lives can turn this tide back and is so needed because if so much of our audience is feeling like, you know, every time I turn around, there's another one of these horrific kind of experiences that seem to be all around this.

Well, like I said, it goes back to that math equation, right? If you're. initial numbers really big and you have this many people that are, that subset is trending toward violence. Then, as you

said, we can't create enough security measures. We can't raise up enough police officers to contend with the numbers.

The numbers just don't work in our favor. We have to come up with another solution. So you talk about in your book about not just extremism, but particularly you're calling out christian extremism and how what we've seen, particularly over the last 10 to 15 years, is the co opting of Christian faith, the co opting of a basic understanding of what Christianity is, and the merging of that with politics, particularly early Christianity.

Right and far right politics. And, and it starts circling around these words, grievance and victimization. Explain some of that to us, how that has become this very unexpected, but now more and more clearly this reality of how, how Christian faith has been co opted for these purposes.

[00:32:58] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Yeah. So historically Christianity has been used by white power movements by anti government movements. So in some senses, this is not new. What's new is that there's a convergence of those more organized and traditional extremist movements and what some call a masculine movement.

Political violence movement which kind of is what we saw on January 6th. But the, it's this merger of people that are by definition extremist with people that are otherwise normal. They're, they're not going out and reading and writing extremist literature, they're not doing a training camp they just are really upset at the politics of the day, and so they're increasingly spending time and space with legitimate extremists.

One concern is that it makes it easier for those groups to recruit people into them if they're literally showing up the same protest and we actually see this happen online all the time where an extremist group will say there's going to be a protest against transgender rights or you know, at pride month.

Legitimate political speech, right? Like they're not, the people protesting are not intending harm. They're just protesting. And we see the extremist movements online go, well, let's go, let's go join them. And it's a little disconcerting because you don't know. Are they going to join to actually create, instigate something to, to actually cause some violence or may lead to occur, or is what they're doing, going to meet people to become friends and then eventually, you know, inviting them deeper and deeper into their dark world.

And, and there are stories of this. I mean, I've met people who have been like, yeah, I. Moved to this area and met some people, was friends with them for six months. And then I found out that they were white power people and they are no longer my friends, but, but that they actively recruit from people that they perceive to be open or vulnerable to their beliefs.

And so that is happening. So that's one concern I have. But there's another thing that's happening and, and this is much more at the feet of. Mainstream republicanism as it is, as it is right now mainstream. And you know, Christians who are participating in it. And, and that is people who have really turned their their religion into politics.

Like their, their faith is in a politician or a political party or their MAGA movement. And in doing so, there, there. Weaving together narratives, all of which are grievous, right? Everything is against them. Everything is going to come get them. But for Donald Trump, who is going to save them or, but for the Republican party, which is going to fix our country and for some people.

They become much more open to messages that do come out from politicians, from influencers, that it's not just about your vote. It is about being willing to take up arms. So, back in April, Carrie Lake, who is running for Senate in Arizona made a statement at a rally that not only do we need to put on our armor of God we might need to strap on a Glock too.

And so you have politicians who are using language that will influence, it's a small percentage, but will influence people to think that I got to be ready for a fight. We are seeing some of the crowds that were at January 6th start to get reactivate online. They are, the Proud Boys, in particular, are, are Regrouping.

There are indications that some of the trials that the former president is going through is, is leading people to not only are they making verbal threats, but we are seeing some planning happening where people are stockpiling weapons. They're making plans for where they need to, you know, Go protest.

And, and maybe that's all they're going to do is protest, but there are active threats against the judges, against the jury members. And for those who are on the receiving end of those threats, even if it, it was just that a verbal threat and they didn't intend anything, it is quite scary for a member of the public or a member of a judge's family.

They don't have police protection. They don't have most people can't afford it. I mean, it, it is quite terrifying to be on the receiving end of those threats. And so there are quite a number of people in this movement that are at least on that lower end of the hostile action spectrum verbally harassing, bullying.

And then crossing and sometimes crossing into the criminal space where they might physically show up and start stalking people or some types of verbal threats can be criminally prosecuted, but it is kind of hard to do. So, so we do have a reactivated you. Political violence movement. It's not that it went away.

It's just that the moment being in an election and you know, the former president going through a number of court cases, all of those are creating more opportunities for people to, to cross into that hostile action space of we got to do something about this. So I, I want to circle back to the Christian extremism.

label it because I struggled with, I struggled with whether to call it that. It really is this confluence of, of several different movements, but I chose to frame it that way to be direct. One is because the faith has been co opted, but two is, There are parts of our community that are letting it be co opted like we could be pushing back much stronger after 9 11 We asked the Muslim community Please push back against this narrative that violent jihad is the only way to commit the jihad called for your in your scriptures, please please tell your your followers that The Muslim faith can be practiced peacefully.

So if we ask that of the Muslim community shouldn't the Christian community be Be able to acknowledge that there were brothers and sisters in Christ in on the Capitol grounds on January 6th, there are brothers and sisters in Christ that deny that that was a violent day that view what happened on that day as an act of patriotism.

Not an act of violence that led to five deaths and 140 plus people that were injured. We, we need to call those out for what it is. They are lies and we are supposed to be people of the truth. So it's not, I'm not suggesting that everybody that attends a Christian church is you know, responsible for what happened on January 6th.

But I am saying we, this is a moment that we need to take stock and examine where, where have I not stood up. And push back against slander and gossip and that lower end of the hostile action spectrum. Where have I not said, no, we need to speak the truth here. And, and that is a conspiracy theory and we don't know that it's true.

Like that, that's really important for us to be salt and light. We have to start within our own community and requiring people to tell the truth and not traffic and fear and lies.

[00:40:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, because I think what you're pointing out is that, you know, sometimes just simply by our silence, we're failing to be salt and light. Where we become complicit in a way by omission simply by not using our influence, not using our voice, not calling things out when we can in an appropriate way, with clarity and with integrity, then, then we're putting ourselves in a place of becoming complicit Elizabeth, along that line, one of the things that was really helpful clarifying in kind of a new aha moment for me was when you talked about in your early days of your career, right after nine 11, you became very focused and, and the whole essence of what was going on was trying to identify the next, what you define as a complex coordinated attack, which is what nine 11 was, it was a complex.

Coordinated attack by you know, almost two dozen individuals and all synchronized to work in a certain way. And that there were great concerns that there were more of those coming. But I think it was a really helpful call out to say, we've really pivoted to something that's not only internal to our citizens rather than external with foreign groups or powers.

That's still there probably will always be there. We think in terms of, you know, threats coming from things like China, Russia, other groups cyber types attacks. Well, we know that those air there. We know that there are they're always going to be that there's going to be that pursuit. Of complex coordinated attack.

But what you've called out in this book is a more individualized radicalization. And you've already referred to it, but I want you to go back to the connection between narrow, between need narrative and network. We talked about need and narrative a minute, but how does network come into this because all of that's been aided by what you mentioned a moment ago about technology, how is that setting this up and really.

Leveraging the vulnerability of people toward extremism.

[00:42:34] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Yeah. So in the three ends, needs, networks, and narratives traditionally, if you were to ask this question, say in 2008, the network is the thing that allows a terrorist attack to or a terrorist group to come together and attack to be planned. And you needed lots of different people. You needed fundraisers, you needed somebody to coordinate travel.

You needed somebody to be on the receiving end because you were sending. People from overseas into the United States, somebody had to set them up, get them a house, get them a job, get them a car. And usually the way that terrorist organizations worked is that everybody knew what their job was, but nobody knew what the other person's job was.

They, they, they use cutouts so that if you took out one person, You weren't taking out the whole network and that person wouldn't give up the the secrets they could only give up You know one or two people that they might know So we call that cell style terrorism where little cells have a certain responsibility But they rely on other cells to make it work So when you would look at the network, that was really helpful for us to be able to understand, like, where's the money coming from?

Or we see a lot of travel activity out of this area. So, so we should assume that maybe that's where their training camp is. So you're looking for dots on a map and trying to figure out what the different dots were responsible for. And if you could connect the dots and you can kind of paint the picture of what might be.

Being planned and how to possibly thwart it. Back then, the answer to the network was cut off the head of the snake. If you could get either the top guy or the second in command, you would disrupt the process. Because if you took out somebody lower down the chain, they can easily replace them. That was the theory.

Today, you can plan a terrorist attack without ever leaving your house. And ISIS really changed this for us although in some ways it's, it could be argued that the militia and white power movement actually started the online extremist movement back in the 1980s. They were, they were the first to share propaganda through computer networks.

They were the first to try to do things in certain networks secretly, so law enforcement couldn't detect them. So it, the idea of using the internet to share propaganda and plans has been around for quite some time, but ISIS really was able to capture the social media moment and make terrorism, you know, kind of, Fun and interesting and viral, if you will, for a younger generation.

So we had a number of people initially leave the United States and fly over to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS. That was kind of the initial version of ISIS is that you could find them on your social media platform of choice, they, and then they would connect you to somebody who could give you instructions on how to get there. ISIS started to falter, they started to lose territory as the western forces started to push to fight back against them. And so at some point ISIS says, don't come here, the best way you can contribute to the cause is to fight where you are. You find a weapon that you have access to, and just create havoc and do it in the name of ISIS.

And so in Europe, what you would see were vehicle ramming attacks and knife attacks. In the United States, you would mostly see gun, gun attacks, but we also had some vehicle ramming attacks as well. So there was this decentralization of knowledge and that, you know, here's how you they, I think they tried to do some bomb making stuff, but bomb making turns out to be a little hard.

So it really was. Find a gun, find a knife, find a vehicle, and you can do this for the glory of ISIS. And what we see from that moment is we no longer need a sophisticated network. We, we already have one in our phones. And the other thing that shifted, thanks to social media, is the rate at which people radicalized.

Before 2010, it took about five years. To somebody from first, first exposure to extremism to actually becoming an extremist. Now it's, I, I want to say one study says and, but the study is dated. It's more like 18 months. We have. examples of people that have radicalized, meaning exposure to planning an attack one week.

That is how quickly it can go. So it is, it is completely game changing for law enforcement to go from something that took years to plan and years for somebody to get recruited and radicalized.

You have a lot of time to plot those dots in the map and try to figure out what's happening. to now.

Tomorrow, somebody might stumble across a website, become enamored, go down a rabbit hole, and a week from now plan an attack like that. It is impossible for law enforcement to detect that. That's why so much of our public messaging right now is about bystanders asking bystanders. To report if they think their loved one is in danger of, of doing something, or if they just think that they need help.

It is really, really difficult once the process has started. If they're already vulnerable, they can radicalize pretty quickly.

[00:47:46] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And that's where you start seeing things like these initiatives of, if you see something, say something, right? Those kinds of things start to grow because this problem is of extremism is accelerating and is accelerating at an alarming rate. And On a very individualized kind of way. Which is why I think the latter half of your book is so important, which is that there is hope in this story.

There are ways to turn people away from radicalization. And like I said, Just starting with the realization that fear and anger are exhausting in and of themselves. At one point in the book, you, you call out in the in the hope section of the book, that extremism is, is likened to a drug addiction, addiction families that have been caught up in this, that's to remember, that's something to remember that every quote unquote, lone actor who becomes radicalized and actually chooses to engage violence.

They have a family. They came from a family. They came from a community where something went wrong. A number of things went wrong. But you give a lot of information, a lot of help, a lot of insight into how to identify, People that are moving down the road toward radicalization. And what are some things that, what are some things that a family member can do or a neighbor could do speak to some of those things and even take it to the point of how could, I'm wondering if there's a.

Church leader a pastor, a deacon, an elder listening to this. And they're thinking, well, what could my church do? What could I do in my neighborhood? What could my church do in our community that could help with this problem?

[00:49:30] **Elizabeth Neumann:** So, in the book, in the appendices of the book a lot of detail is laid out for you to help you think through whether the person you're concerned about is radicalizing and, and, or if they're at risk of violence. Those are two separate categories. So, but one of the things I love to start with, and I'll start with kind of the.

Question of what can churches do we have got to start talking to our kids about this just like we talked to our kids about drugs and sex We need to be talking to our kids about The extremism that they already encounter online. They might not realize it's a thing It's extremism, but it's so pervasive in the gaming communities and in the social media platforms that youth are involved in that they are likely, they have come across it.

So we want to open the conversation, talk to them about it. And I list out some suggestions of how you have a conversation with. That eight to 12 range and what you, how you have a conversation with teens. And just every other kind of parenting advice we get in terms of, you know, how to talk to your kids about drugs and and, and sex, the goal here is to start a conversation and continue a conversation.

So that if. They see something online, they're coming to you to ask you about it. If they see concerning behavior in one of their friends, they're coming to you to talk about it. The goal is not, you gotta know all of this, and neither can you, a parent, keep up with this. The way that extremism, Morphs and changes online happens on a it is so atomized right now and it happens like on a day to day basis The narratives are constantly in flux There be a whole other podcast to talk about some of the very weird Versions of extremism that are manifesting online right now.

So the goal is not for you to be an expert The goal is for you to have that open dialogue with your kids and, and really you know, as, as Christian parents and where the church can help is let's, let's go back to what scripture teaches about how we think about people with whom we disagree. I, I keep mentioning it, but it's really important gossip and slander.

Bible is really clear about that. And participating in conspiracy theories, or sharing a post that's making fun of a politician that you don't like, that is gossip and slander. And we need to treat that with the same seriousness that we address sexual perversion. We, we spend way more time focused on, Non believer sin, as opposed to the sin that we are committing as believers.

And, and I think when we are catechizing our kids we, we want to, to draw connections to the way that this manifests today and, and help them have a biblical basis, not just a, Hey, it's bad to be a racist. No, no, it's not. It's not because the world says racism is bad. It's because God made us all in his image.

And here's what we believe that means. And here's how it, how we live our life because of that. It's not only that we don't put somebody down because they look differently than us or have different skin color. It's that we also have God's heart for justice, and we have God's heart for those that are marginalized.

And we practice and live that out by, you know, fill in the blank. Every family might be different, but by serving the refugee community in your area, by serving alongside people of color who

you might not see on a daily basis. Exposing our kids to other communities who are suffering is an important way to humanize so that when those dehumanizing messages come in from extremist groups there, there's an inoculation built in that we call that protective factors.

And proximity is one of the most important ways we can build practice protective factors. When you actually know somebody from the, the group that's being othered, you tend to be like, No, no, that's not actually how it is. That's a, they're a nice person and you know, no, that's not true. So I, I spent a lot of time and I, I think it would be great for churches and to get educated on what we can do to, to better train our youth in this.

And, and I think also I, I focus on that because when we. And I think it's really important to talk about protecting our kids. We tend to be a little more open about maybe the ways that we're participating in things and not doing things well. So it's sometimes an easier way to have those tough conversations with adults who might be participating in that lower end of the hostile action spectrum, who might be overly idolatrous with their politics.

There are two other. Appendices. One is recognizing risk factors for radicalization. And then the other is behavioral indicators of people mobilizing to violence. That latter category, if, if you detect some of these, that's when you call law enforcement. Before you're detecting those, there's a, it kind of depends on where you're located.

There are a number of resources now that I linked to in the website where you can. Work with a trained psychologist to help somebody who is radicalizing, or once maybe they are radicalized and they want to leave, they want to disengage, there are increasingly more trained mental health professionals.

Who can help somebody who is in that space. You do want to work with somebody that has been specially trained in this though. You don't want to just pick somebody out of the phone book. Because there, there is a little bit of you know, a methodology behind the best way to treat somebody much like we use trained professionals for addiction processes and, and leaving a cult.

It, it, it is. Very much the reason why people radicalize. It becomes a part of their identity and their surface issues. And then there's a lot of other stuff that needs to be dealt with. And you want to work with somebody that is trained to know the proper way to do that.

[00:55:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So be, you know, as we talk about in church often, hopefully is that asking for help when you realize that you need outside expertise to That's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of wisdom. It's a recognition that, Hey, we need some outside resources to help because, you know, most of us are not trained in those levels of intervention and, and interception in some ways makes me think that so much of what you're talking about is just really good, healthy discipleship.

That can, can and should happen within the home. That as parents, Christian parents pour into their kids, not just taking them to church, but living this out and talking this through on a day by day basis and all kinds of different experiences. Yeah, I think you made reference to how in Jewish families, you know, the father is the first rabbi to the family.

For training them and discipling them and then extending that into the church that these things need to be taught and reinforced within the church as well. It also made me think Elizabeth, one of our team members who told us his story not long ago in an all team meeting, where as a young 18, 20 year old, he said, you know, in terms of faith at that season of my life, I was easily led.

And then he went on to say he intersected with a cult and he said I was easily misled and, and he went for an extended season of his life into something that was very ungodly and something that was very unbiblical because he had needs and because there was a narrative that was presented to him. And then there was a network that facilitated it.

Those things are still operating and they still create that kind of vulnerability that all of us need to be aware of for ourselves, but also for our Children and other people that are under our care and our influence. Just for a moment before we wrap up, Elizabeth, tell us what you're doing now.

You're not in the federal government these days. But what are you doing now? Because you're still working in some of these same areas, just in a different context. So what are you up

[00:57:32] **Elizabeth Neumann:** that's right. Well, aside from talking about the book, and I, and I do occasionally Went down the wrong pipe.

[00:57:40] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Oh,

[00:57:40] **Elizabeth Neumann:** It's a good thing you can cut.

[00:57:42] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. We will smooth all that out.

[00:57:47] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Oh, let's see. Can I talk? Yeah. Okay, let's see if I can wrap this up. Okay, so, aside from promoting the book, and I do occasionally speak to church groups and pastors and Christian leaders about these topics I am Chief Strategy Officer at Moonshot which does not send rockets into space, though that was my girlhood dream was to be an astronaut.

So I'm really excited about the recent rocket launches and I'm super excited that maybe someday I can go to space. But no moonshot is a company that works to intervene with people that are radicalizing online and redirect them to mental health support. So we come from a place of believing that everybody can change and that Sometimes when people are searching for content

in the dark spaces online they can be open to to getting that help and, and we have I'm very proud of the company.

I can't claim credit myself, but we have thwarted a number of attacks through this methodology. So, it is it's not the whole set of tools that we need in the country, but it is certainly a really important tool to be able to reach people where the radicalization is happening.

[00:58:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. What a great, just core Christian message, right? Anyone can change. And if, if we lose that conviction and that hope, we've lost our hold on the gospel because that's the whole message of what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying, you know, everybody is welcome and anything is possible because God is so full of grace and anyone can change because of that.

And so, yeah, such a great, great message. And. Again, Elizabeth, just thank you for this work. So important for people to understand and to get ahold of this. Let me remind you again, it is the book called kingdom of rage, the rise of Christian extremism and the path back to peace so many more things I'd love to talk with you about, maybe we can have you back for a followup conversation, but been so.

So helpful today. Want to thank you and ask God to bless your work going forward. And also want to thank our audience for listening. And hopefully this has been encouraging and helpful to you. Would encourage you to get the book and read through all of what Elizabeth is expressing and explaining to us.

And again, want to for following us. If you have been helped, please rate, review our podcast on your pot, on your podcast platform, share this with family and friends. And again, thank you for. Denison forum. We are a donor based ministry and we could not do what we do to equip believers in walking with God without your help.

And so we're grateful, Elizabeth. We hope to see you again soon.

[01:00:25] **Elizabeth Neumann:** Thanks, Mark. It was a pleasure to join you.