

Ghosted: A conversation with Nancy French

TRANSCRIPT

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** This is the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum. Welcome you back to another clarity conversation that we hope that this time will equip you to think biblically, to love beautifully, and to serve redemptively until Jesus comes again. We like to do that through all of our resources at Denison Forum.

You can find us as always at denisonforum.org. Today, we are having a conversation that I've been greatly anticipating with Nancy French. In case you haven't heard of her, she recently released a memoir that we're going to talk about today called Ghosted: An American Story. And yes, there is a story behind the title.

We'll get to that in a little bit, but if in case you haven't heard of Nancy French, let me introduce you to her. She has collaborated and coauthored multiple books with celebrities, five of which have landed on the New York times bestseller list. And she's also written books under her own name. One of which obviously we're going to talk about today.

She has conducted a multi year journalistic investigation, written commentary and published the nation's in the nation's most prominent newspapers and magazines. And as I said, she has just released her memoir. Many of you may recognize that she is married to David French who is a New York Times columnist.

They live in Tennessee with their five children. And we'll see if we can get her to talk a little bit about her kids. That probably won't be too hard, but Nancy, welcome to the podcast. We're glad to have you today.

[00:01:34] **Nancy French:** And thanks so much for having me. This is so fun.

[00:01:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, we're looking forward to it. So let's just jump right in, and make the most of our time. Cause there's so much to talk about here. But why your story, why now, what kind of catalyzed, okay, I need to put this on paper and make it available to people.

[00:01:55] **Nancy French:** Well, you know, I'm 49 years old and as I approached 50, I realized that I was sort of hiding behind other people's stories as a ghostwriter. So I could very easily just talk to my celebrities, be absorbed into their stories, and hide behind their stories, putting them in the forefront, which is, It's been wonderful and I've enjoyed my career so much, but eventually I realized that I wasn't doing this out of some profound sense of humility, but rather that I hadn't really grappled with my own story.

And so this book is allowing me to sort of think through what God has done in my life.

[00:02:28] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Okay, great. Some people may not be completely familiar with, you can actually have a career as a ghost writer. So tell us a little bit about that and how, how did you find yourself being a ghost writer? Because when I was reading the book, I was like, It wasn't like a childhood dream of, I want to write other people's stories.

So tell us what a ghostwriter does and how you make a career out of it.

[00:02:51] **Nancy French:** Yeah, so I think I've always been a storyteller at heart. I've always wanted to be a storyteller and I think Southern people generally maybe have a little bit of flair for the storytelling aspect of life. And so I loved writing. I thought about writing a lot, thought about storytelling a lot, but I dropped out of college three times.

Eventually I wrote some things like I would answer ads in Craigslist for 50 and then I would do the work and they wouldn't pay me so like that was the level of my writing career. And I did a couple of books that very few people read. And then but ghostwriting is very interesting because almost all celebrity books are ghostwritten.

Like 99.9 percent of the time they're ghostwritten. Even the ones that they say that they've written themselves, pretty much, there's a ghostwriter, someone like me who toils in obscurity and different places in America without any sort of accolades, which is great because that's the job. And it's a great job because you get to know your celebrity.

You get to. Go to their homes and see their works and you know, their workplaces and meet their families, and it's so much fun. So I love ghost writing. So after I wrote a couple of books that didn't sell so well, I switched over to ghost writing. I helped Anne Romney with a book. That was sort of campaign related that never saw the light of day, but then I started ghostwriting legitimately For the first time that and with a book that was published with Bristol Palin Sarah Palin's daughter So that one became a New York Times bestseller and from that point forward once you have one a New York Times bestseller under your you know So I've just been ghostwriting for a long time, many, many years.

And I did it for GOP celebrities at first until 2016. And then I sort of switched into Hollywood and did some other things. But I love ghostwriting. I think it's a sacred honor to tell people's stories. I've actually enjoyed it. It was just time to tell my own,

[00:04:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And it, and it's a really, a really gift a really important gift, I think, because a lot of people have great stories. Everybody has a story, but not everybody can tell their story well. And that's where someone like you can really come in and help, especially put it in print. And get it into the kind of nuance and detail that really causes a story to come alive.

And so on your own story you know, my motivation here in having this conversation is, is multifold. But one of them is, is I want people to go get your book. I want them to read the book or listen to it on audible if they want to which is kind of what I did. I have a, I, I'm a more of an auditory reader or learner.

But how can you give us a kind of a thumbnail of the book without giving away all the thunder of the book? If you were summarizing it, how would you do that to try to encourage people to read it?

[00:05:35] **Nancy French:** you know, I would say that ghosted is a story. Of yes, I'm a celebrity ghost writer, but that's not exactly what the title refers to. It also refers to being alienated and ostracized by the groups of people who are supposed to love you. But this is for all the people out there who feel spiritually, culturally, even geographically homeless, politically homeless during these weird acrimonious times.

I can't be the only person who feels unsettled. And so this book is like me extended my and I want to give a hand to all of you who feel homeless in various ways and saying, you are not alone. Let's talk through this together. But it's in the context of my life. I've had a crazy life.

I'm sort of the Forrest Gump of politics because of my occupation. So I've seen everything up close. So people out there who are confused and are trying to make sense of it all, they might be able to read my perspective and say, Oh, that's what was going on behind the scenes. That's interesting.

I didn't know that. Now it makes sense.

[00:06:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And there's a lot of surprises that come in this book. Right off from the beginning there are all kinds of surprises. I, I didn't know your backstory and so many of those things that you would read a book like this to discover and to find out. But talk a little bit about I w I was just, I got through the first 20 years of your life, the first two decades.

And I was like, Wow. How does anybody overcome some of this stuff? Without giving it all away, talk a little bit about some of the, the distinctives, the uniquenesses of the first of your, of your growing up decade and of your teen years kind of take us up to that, maybe that first time that you dropped out of college, a lot of trauma in there, and I'll use I use a line that I just read from another New York times guy, David Brooks.

He says. You know, how do your parents and extended family still show up in your life today? But give us some sense of what the 1st 20 years were like and some of the things that were pretty difficult to overcome. And then how is that especially your family still showing up in your life?

[00:07:38] **Nancy French:** Yeah, so my family my dad and my mom grew up on Montego Mountain, which is in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. And my grandfather was a coal miner. My dad worked in the coal mines. We had a pretty. Interesting yet violent hillbilly family, self identified and my dad, in order to get us off the mountain or get him off the mountain, when he was 15, he lied about his name and birthday and joined the Marines and toured for three years and then came back to the mountain and still was young enough to go back to high school.

But that Really opened up his world and it allowed him to get off the mountain. We were raised in rural western Kentucky and then western tennessee, and so we had a lot more opportunities than were available on monteagle and however sadly Though my parents were very religious. We went to the church of christ three times a week But during that process I was abused by a preacher a vacation bible school teacher , and then that set me off on a bad path, romantically bad decisions that resulted in just terrible things happening, including a boyfriend trying to kill me.

So I had a lot of turmoil in spite of the fact that my parents tried so hard to give us a better life. They did give us a better life, but then I sort of had my own problems that I was dealing with secretly. And then but, I dropped out of college three times and I never graduated. So this is my, so my husband who is sarcastic.

He says, you know, Nancy is very ambitious. She might drop out of more colleges before we're done. So, and that's true. Who knows?

[00:09:16] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and and Is that, how is that when you look on back on that, you, you kind of finished the book talking about your parents and do you still feel their influence in a significant way, even now, as, as you move into this season of your life?

[00:09:33] **Nancy French:** Yes. My parents are just amazing. They've been so helpful, especially during this cancer journey. Both of them have had cancer. and have cancer again now. So like

we're sort of all going through this. This has been a very difficult time of life as they age, as I'm battling cancer, but they're just amazing.

They've been so supportive and I'm very thankful for their role in my life.

[00:09:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, it's such a great thing to see how they kind of broke the cycle of what had gone on for previous generations in your family and just said, we're going to try to make this better. We're going to make some decisions that are different from what Previous generations might've made as I was wondering, Nancy, if you could go back now and talk to Nancy when she was 14 or when she was 21, if you could go back with knowledge and, come alongside of yourself when you were at those points, what would you want to say to yourself when you were 14 or when you were 21?

And some of these things were really deeply impacting and even traumatizing your life.

[00:10:39] **Nancy French:** That's a good question. I don't know. I was pretty stubborn and incorrigible. So I'm not sure. I think I had people who actually tried to say Speak to me, speak truth into my life that I didn't listen. So I doubt I would listen to myself and I'm not even sure what I would say because frequently you just have to let things play out, you know, and see what happens.

I had so much despair, but I had so much to look forward to. I didn't know it. But, I actually had people tell me that very thing, , now that I think about it. Mark, there's a really interesting, confusing chapter where I met a prophet named Gary, and I, I think his name is Gary in the book.

Sometimes I change the, the names, but But he told me that very thing. He was like, you have no idea what it lays ahead of you. It's going to be great, you know? And I was like, okay, Gary, you know, like I wasn't sure, but but he, but there's other prop parts of the prophecy that have not come true yet that I always keep in the back of my mind because other things did come true.

And I'm like, okay, so when, what is all this, like I'm still completely confused by God and the way he operates in my life,

[00:11:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So a lot of your story, as you, like I said, so well told would, would want people to know the book is descriptive. At times it's, it's graphic. I would even imagine that as you were writing this, you were like, how, how far into detail do you go with some of these things? But it's also, that is also a lot of what makes it compelling.

Would you say that there's like an instructive theme, every story is both in some degree descriptive, but also prescriptive or instructive. Is, is there a single theme or a couple of themes that you would say are. Maybe the instructive takeaways that people will get from hearing your story.

[00:12:25] **Nancy French:** As I've mentioned, I'm a college dropout. I am no theologian. I have a faith that is mine and probably not super advanced compared to, you know, a lot of your listeners. I don't pretend to instruct people to like, take this as a lesson and to be like me and do the following because basically, basically you could read the book and do the opposite of everything I did.

And that would probably set you on a much better path. But you know, I just, I'm just trying to Not be overcome with the acrimony of the moment and to, your beliefs, your very well reasoned political or spiritual beliefs do not require you to hate your political opponents or your spiritual opponents.

And to look at your fellow Americans with love. And to not get seduced into this contempt, this contemptuous cycle where we just hate each other so much and we try to eviscerate each other just because we perceive them someone to be on the other side of the aisle.

[00:13:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, yeah. I want to get further into that in just a second, but before we do early on in I'd say the first third of the book, you made a statement that really just kind of stuck with me and is still kind of bouncing around in my mind, which is that through some of the things that you'd gone through in the first 10, 20 years of your life, particularly the abuse situation at the hands of a, of a pastor, you said that God was amorphous to you kind of unpack that, that term and that idea.

What do you mean that God felt amorphous to you for a long time? And What would you say to a person, whether they're a Christian or not a Christian, if that's the way they're thinking and experiencing God at this point, kind of this mystical reality that didn't seem to be fully real. Talk about that for a little bit and how God walked you through that to a different place.

[00:14:11] **Nancy French:** You know, that's interesting. I don't exactly know why I said that word amorphous. But I was the recipient of just terrible theology. So I would sit in church and I would hear them, you know, say things that it just wasn't true. So maybe God was amorphous because all the language that I had around God was inaccurate.

And so God was allowing me to reject all that. I don't think it was necessarily bad. But I, You know, and I think we talk about God and Jesus sort of like they're the flu There's some sort of fog, come down Jesus, or fill my heart Jesus Or you know accept Jesus into your heart But I've been thinking more about the corporeality of God and Christ like Jesus was resurrected He has a body, like I don't know.

I've just been reading more about that. I've read one book. I'm not a theologian but God has become real to me over the course of my life and and I'm not talking about like his actual physical body versus The fogginess of it, but I don't feel like I did anything necessarily to draw

near to him if that makes sense I've always had this very tender heart toward God I've always believed in God until I didn't until the abuse happened and it set me on a bad path But even after that I was able to come back and feel and even now like I feel very Profoundly betrayed by the church, but I feel very held I felt held very tightly by God, if that makes sense.

I don't think there's like a one, two, three step thing that I did to to fix that, to rectify that problem. I feel like God just drew me to him. And I could feel him very palpably. And that's one of the things I wanted to document in the book is not a story of my faithfulness to God, but rather his faithfulness to me.

[00:15:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, one of the, one of the things I got from the book was that you know, as you kind of got into college and then ultimately met David and ended up in different places and in different. Environments, it seemed like, the landscape of faith and the landscape of Christian faith, particularly got a lot wider is the way I think you described it in the, in the terms I would give it, but one of the things I hear coming through the story over and over again is a journey towards separating disappointment with people apart from your relationship with God.

Has that been some of the road that God has been working out here? Just because the church or church leaders disappoint you, that's not the same thing as God disappointing you.

[00:16:39] **Nancy French:** Yeah, I don't want to let church leaders off the hook because you guys need to really get some stuff together on these, this abuse issue for the past, yeah, a part of the book details my investigation into Kannecock camps in Branson, Missouri, and I spent three years documenting abuse there. Very meticulously proving it and the church sort of yawned collectively, which was Terrible for me because I had this in my past where I was abused Members of the church knew about it.

They did nothing and then fast forward. I'm almost 50 I spent three years working on behalf of other people and Estimated hundreds of victims people have committed suicide. It's this terrible situation. And then the church is like, hmm You I don't really want to know about this. That is something that is very difficult.

That sort of feeds into the, this is very difficult to feel comfortable at church sort of vibe. And I know a lot of people don't understand that. That's one of the reasons why I wrote the book. I wanted people to understand my spiritual journey and also why some people, I'm not deconstructing, but I understand why people would deconstruct.

I understand that there's so much out there that it's been. decimating emotionally for especially women and children, abuse survivors, male abuse survivors. And so I just wanted to give voice

to that and show what it looks like when you've been abused. It doesn't look good. You make a lot of bad decisions.

You look sort of, unsophisticated. You look sinful. You look, I mean, you are, you know, like at least for me, I'll speak for myself. It put me on a bad path. And a lot of times people who are the victims of sexual abuse in church. They go on a bad path and then the church looks at them and taps their toes and they say, well, why would we listen to this person?

This person is not moral as opposed to looking at the person and saying, oh, this person has been traumatized and has been pushed into some very difficult spaces. So I just wanted to, without trying to protect my brand, just tell the truth and say, okay, this is what it looks like. It is not pretty, but you still have to deal with people like me in the pews and we're not, the worst people in the pews for you.

We could actually be an asset to the church if you didn't ignore all of the pain.

[00:18:55] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, which goes to something I really wanted to get you to weigh in on, which is, you know, it just, it's in the church, but it's also in so many other organizations, institutions as well. But there just seems to be this knee jerk. default reaction when these situations like Kennecook and others are exposed, even your own story within the context of your own church, as you were growing up, can you, have you been able to figure out why the knee jerk reaction is to contain a story like this, rather than to bring it out, to deal with it, both morally, spiritually, legally, Why is that our knee jerk reaction, especially within, like I said, an organization like a church or a larger institution like a university?

You know, it seems like all people, even people that are not of faith, they all know that we're all broken and that there are bad things going on and that there needs to be accountability. Why, why are we so reluctant to come forward with confession and with that kind of accountability? Maybe my follow up question here is, is, do you think particularly for the church right now, the opportunity of real accountability and transparency, is it still available to us?

Can we recover that in some way? Right.

[00:20:17] **Nancy French:** And I don't know if this has been your case, Mark, but growing up, I feel like from the pulpit, we were told repeatedly, basically that we're supposed to protect God's brand. That basically we're his PR strategist. So don't do anything that could harm the reputation of God. Which is really. It's funny when you think about it, like God is sitting there thinking, you know, I could really have dominated the people's choice awards, but you know, Nancy Anderson there and Paris, Tennessee, took a swig of Pabst Blue Ribbon and the cow pasture, you know, like it's so dumb.

But this is what we, we say to each other. And we say it, if you just open your ears to it, you'll hear it. Over and over and over. And this is the message that Cannacock leaders gave to victims. They said, listen, don't tell anybody about your abuse, sign this NDA, if you don't mind because what if people find out about this and then they don't become Christians, don't you want people to become Christians?

Don't you want people to accept Jesus on the, on the campus of Cannacock and Branson, Missouri, and ring the salvation bell so that it rings out throughout the night and we can celebrate. So imagine, and that's literally what someone, this is what they were told. Okay. So think about that. So you're some kid 12 years old.

You've been abused, sexually abused. Your silence contains the seeds of salvation for all these people in Branson, Missouri. So you have to keep your mouth shut or people are going to hell. This is what we're told. It's insane. And so what I found over and over and over is that people would believe that Harvey Weinstein is a rapist.

Bill Clinton. Yeah, you can believe he's a rapist. But if you get any, the Catholics, sure, they've got problems, but not the Baptist, not Donald Trump, not anybody who's on my tribe. Now, just think about that. We are so hesitant to call anybody out who might be on our side. So Donald Trump, for example, has been held liable in court for rape.

But if you go to any evangelical and say, is Bill Clinton a rapist? Is Donald Trump a racist? Sorry, racist. Forgive me. Freudian slip there. Rapist, either works. But if you say that people will recoil, they'll say, Oh no, no, no, no, no. Let me defend this Republican. Let me defend this Christian. Let me defend this Baptist.

Let me defend the people in my tribe. But you know, the people in the other tribes, you know, you very easily believe that they have problems. Even to the point of conspiracy theories that have no evidence whatsoever. So if you go and, and Google like these conspiracy theories that deal with pedophilia.

You'll find a mountain of writings about that, but you go to Fox news and search for Cannacock. Where are you going to find nothing now that has been proven that rape, that abuse has been proven and it's against children and it's by Christians, but Christians are not outraged by it. They try to ignore it.

They make fun of me for bringing it up with every breath that I have. And I get it. Cause I'm like a one note song, but I'm just going to talk about it until people pay attention.

[00:23:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And, and we see some of those same. Same tendencies and practices going on. I come from a Southern Baptist root and we certainly have big, big issues to

address within, you know, our limb of the Christian faith along these same lines of, we just have to protect the base. We have to make sure that the reputation of the churches in the denomination holds true when the, it would seem to me, tell me if you agree that the reality of it is, is that.

If, if we would come out in the open and be honest and say, you know what, we, we say in our, on our best days that we are all sinners and, and that means that some of these things are really going to show up. And when they do, we have to deal with them more diligently. We have to come back to ideas, particularly in the church, we have to come back to ideas Of real church discipline and how that overlaps with you know, the legal side of things within our communities.

If we would do that, I I'm wondering and suspecting that we would gain more credibility, not less is.

[00:24:35] **Nancy French:** I mean, if Christians just decided to do two things, let's just be creative as we think about this. If they decided to call the police when you're supposed to call the police, that would have taken care of 99.999 percent of the problems at Cannacock and the SBC. And if they decided not to be completely comfortable with deception and lies, let's say they decided lying was wrong.

Just that one thing. That would change everything. Think about how that would change politics. Think about how that would change all of these abuse situations. Like, Cantercot Camps to this day hasn't come clean about the abuse that happened there. What if they did? You know, it might cost them a lot.

Because bad things happened and people have died. And but as Christians, are we supposed to count the cost for doing what's right? Or are we just supposed to do what's right? And, you know, be able to be comfortable with, we know that God holds our destiny in our hands, even if we've made mistakes. So I'm not out there trying to find a pelt for my wall.

I just want people to be honest so that all of these victims who are out there suffering silently can be recognized. Yeah,

[00:25:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** how it took the better part of 100 years before the Southern Baptist Convention would come back and acknowledge and confess and repent of some of their Some of their choices and some of their influence relative to racism and to slavery that it, it, it took a century or more for, for this group to finally come back and say, and could say it openly, say it.

Publicly, and it just shouldn't take that long. It just shouldn't require that much effort, Nancy. One of the things you talk about in this conversation, both out of your own story and the work that you did in investigating Canada, you talk about the use of words like victim and the word

survivor, how, as I was reading through that, it sounded like you were saying it's, It's no one is now allowed to even use the word victim.

And the only word you're even maybe remotely allowed to use is the word survivor. Both of us make our living with words. I was caught when I was a preacher in training, my professor called me a word merchant. Why does it matter that we use words well and that, that there really is a proper place for the term victim, especially when it pertains to children, but not just children to anyone who is wrongfully abused especially in a sexual way.

Just talk about that and why you brought that out in your book and in your story.

[00:27:14] **Nancy French:** so I love words and yes, I don't have a college degree, but I did have a Latin at Henry County High School back in the 90s and I really loved word origins and I thought about the word victim, which comes from the Latin word which means victim means someone who is wounded. Right? And so, I, sometimes I talk to these people who are sexual, who have experienced sexual abuse, and they'll say, well, I'm no victim.

And I think, what does that mean? Why is that word so stigmatized? Why are you not a victim? Like, what do you think a victim is? And then when they describe what they think a victim is, you, you hear a lot of negative stuff. But, and they would never say that, like for, for example, about me. So if I'm talking to a Cannacock victim, I would say oh, so you think victims are people who try to get attention or victims who brought it on themselves or, you know, whatever.

Do you feel that way about me? And they'd say, oh, no, no, no. I'm just saying. You know, but there's, they've internalized their own self criticism. And so instead of saying victim, they'll say survivor, which is sort of a step toward the positive that you went through all this and you survived it. But what I began to notice is.

And I'm fine with whatever language people have for themselves, but for me, I feel like we don't need to jump to the toxic positivity. I noticed that in one obituary in in a Dallas newspaper, a Cannacock victim was described as a survivor of sex sexual abuse at Cannacock camps. And he had died via suicide.

And I thought, I don't know if he survived that. I think he actually succumbed to that. I feel like he did not take his own life, but the camp took the, his life, you know, from him. And so I was just like, you know, let's think about what language we use and try to de stigmatize the word victim because the victims are the one, the people who did nothing wrong.

And so we need to really think about the perpetrators and the predators, and you can say survivor or victim or whatever, but I think that there's beauty to be seen and experienced by not jumping to the conclusion, by not jumping to the healing, by just sort of allowing people to think about,

lament, and grieve what has been lost during their sexual abuse, and only then can you truly move forward in healing.

[00:29:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I thought that was a really powerful part of the book where you talk about at different points, just needing to sit with it and to sit in the grief with it. And, and that's not a it's not a way of advocating, you know, sinking into yourself, but a reality of, of, of acknowledging the reality and the, the loss that has occurred and the deep woundedness, you know, almost all my Christian life, been a Christian since I was 17, I've heard various times.

People say, you know, the Christian army is the only one that shoots it's wounded and in some ways it seems to be some pretty glaring examples. Of exactly how we're doing that. I wonder, Nancy, you you've, this has not been easy work. I picked that up especially not only looking into your own story and really understanding your own story, but then looking into the Canuck story and, and people that are been hurt and damaged very deeply by that.

Do you, do you think there's in any sense something that's getting better among us hopefully in the church, particularly about identifying and stopping sexual abuse, particularly child sex abuse. Is there Anything in here that's at this point giving you hope? Is there a particular area where like, we need to really focus here to try to get better at, at dealing with this from what we've been doing the last number of decades?

[00:31:04] **Nancy French:** I want to say yes. But I don't feel very much hope, you know, yeah, maybe in the past few decades, you know, maybe since 1980 Maybe we do background checks. Probably not. Well, I mean, I know a lot of churches are really trying very hard And so I really appreciate that but I mean call me when the Baptists do jack squat over anything On the list of 700 predators that they've been surreptitiously keeping track of for years.

So crazy, nothing's happened. I mean, I haven't, I'm not really down on all the, you know, recent developments in the Baptist church. Maybe Mark, you know more about that, but I've, I have talked to people who are on that task force and I don't see that that has moved the needle at all. I don't think anything has happened with canna cut camps, for example.

Nothing has happened. No one has been held. You know what happens is. Lawyers get involved, which I'm all for, you know, married to one, a good one. A wonderful one, but it should be that the church should be righteously indignant. It should be that the church says, you know, sodomy and rape. We're against those things.

Yes. We were against rape in 1998 when we thought Bill Clinton did that and we're still against it. Think about how radical that would be if you could just maintain your consistent posture against Sexual crimes from 1998 until now, you know, but we can't. So to me, in a lot of ways,

it's gotten worse because we used to have a lot of moral clarity about this until it got advantageous for us to stick close to our predatory allies.

[00:32:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And there's so much to do. You know, and we're hopeful, you know, the Southern Baptist convention will meet here in about a month and hopefully we'll see some new movement there. One thing I can feel good about is that they, the messengers, to the Southern Baptist convention, rejected attorney client privilege and said, you know what, if it comes out and it results in more lawsuits and all that, then we need to be ready for that.

If that's what it's going to take, to do what's right. And so that was at least a positive step. That they said they were not going to hide behind attorney client privilege. And I hope they stick to that and hope they continue down that road.

[00:33:19] **Nancy French:** Interesting. That is good.

[00:33:21] **Dr. Mark Turman:** so that's, that's a positive sign. Let's, let's turn a little bit to the other lightweight area that consumes so much of your life and story, which is politics.

You had a great story about you and your son and the being on the playground and the definition of the word Patriot Love this definition that you were able to share with him. Just kind of impromptu. A patriot is somebody who loves their country and tries to help is. Maybe I'm not getting it exactly word for word, but that's yeah, a person.

And that led to your husband, you know, very unexpectedly going into the military tell, tell our listeners a little bit of that story enough that, that, that. That's a pretty good teaser to get people to read the book in and of itself. Tell, tell us a little bit about that. So people will know what we're talking about.

[00:34:09] **Nancy French:** Yeah, we lived in Philadelphia, Center City, Philadelphia near the Liberty Bell, and I've always considered myself very patriotic. My dad is former Marine. My everyone in my family, you know, we've, we've got military in our, in our family. David, however, was just an attorney.

And so we lived in Philadelphia and one day my son, who was You know, knee high, was looking at the statues around the Philadelphia State House. And then there was John Barry, who created the Navy, and George Washington, who did a host of things. So, like, you'd have this statue of Washington, and at the bottom it might say, planter lawyer, statesman, president, you know, like, all the things that they did.

And so, My son went around and looked at all the statues and he goes, who are all these people? And I looked at all the amalgamation of the job descriptions at the foot of the base of the statues,

and I sort of thought, well, I think they're patriots. I think that's probably the best way to put it. And then he said, are we patriots?

And I said, yes, we are patriots because I've always felt like just this deep abiding appreciation for America. And I still do. And so. I know my son was wanting his own statue, but we went home and David was standing in our apartment sort of holding a newspaper and he looked like he had something to say and I was like, what is going on?

And he said he can't see he goes I've got something to tell you he goes I've done a lot of different things in my life occupationally, but I feel the overarching theme is that I'm a patriot He goes I've always loved America and I was like, okay, and I felt very like You know, like when you're the arm hair, you know, stands on end and you're like, wait, what's happening?

This feels very like Important and he goes I've always felt like You know, I've done a lot of different things I've been this this this and this but I think the overarching thing is that I'm a patriot and I feel like I should join the army And go to war and this was after 9 eleven America America was experiencing a shortfall And so, but when he said that to me, like, I just had that conversation with my son and I knew that it was God's way of preparing my heart for the fact that David was about to be deployed and that's exactly what happened.

But I knew that when he was deployed, that he was, that it was the right decision for our family. It was the right decision for David, even though it was very difficult and his unit suffered more casualties than any other unit during that. Time during the surge it was very harrowing and when David French came home.

He was not the same man. I married he's he came home a totally different person I think it was Beth Moore who said that she's been married to six different men. They're just all the same guy I feel I feel the same way and I'm sure he would say that about me, too We've been married 28 years and we've had a lot of ups and downs and we've changed a lot But as Christians who are being sanctified you want Your spouse to change and to get better and David when he came back from war.

He was traumatized. He'd seen genocide But he was closer to the way that God wanted him to be because he'd been following God's, you know Plan for his life. And so anyway, it was very difficult. But yeah, I document all of this very meticulously in the book as well There's a lot in this book.

[00:37:11] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And it, yeah. And having pastored families in the military and the spouse going on deployments and that type of thing, having family members still have a family member that is in the military right now. And just watching some of that, some of the rigor that goes with that. Yeah. The, the high calling and cost of being a Patriot, especially

when it comes to military service is particularly challenging, but also kind of becomes an introduction in some ways into the political involvement that you and David have had that included being on the Mitt Romney campaign being involved, as you said, with the Palin family and their story.

Your husband becoming right up to the edge of being the never Trump candidate. I'm, I'm just wondering how you think about the, the journey, well, maybe put this way. Has your definition of patriotism changed? And if the definition hasn't changed, what has been the the evolution of your engagement as a political interested patriot?

[00:38:16] **Nancy French:** I love America so much. I feel the same way about America and patriotism what I have changed about is that I was guilty of doing terrible things that actually hurt America by engaging in this rhetoric That's actually damaging. So like earlier when you were like, what's your instruction for the people for the reader?

Let the reader here and it's like, oh my gosh. I am NOT preaching to the reader I myself was the one that was doing stuff wrong. I have a spiritual gift of sarcasm For many years. It's not listed in first Corinthians, but I for many years I specialized in owning the Libs and I had clients that I was able to help them eviscerate their perceived political enemies.

And I thought, cause I grew up with Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill as it's sort of like my, my political models that we were sort of insulting each other with a wink. I don't know if you remember Ronald Reagan would insult Tip O'Neill's weight. I mean, It's dramatic. Anytime someone insults your weight, that's legit.

But after six o'clock, they would be friends. And after Ronald Reagan survived his assassination attempt, Tip O'Neill was one of the first people in his hospital room on his knees doing the 23rd Psalm. That's so beautiful. I thought that we were sort of insulting each other with a wink. But that we all perceived each other as fellow Americans that we loved.

Right? But then when Trump came down the escalator, I started noticing that we actually did hate each other. It wasn't an act. It wasn't jokes. It wasn't delivered with a wink wink. It was, these people are evil. And so I was in the punditry game. During that time. So if you're a Christian person and you're like, wait a minute, not only do you, did I realize that I had done things wrong because I would mischaracterize liberals and Democrats.

I would say, oh, well, this person in Madison, Wisconsin did this crazy thing. Well, that's how Democrats are. You know, you can't trust the Democrats and it's not logical. But that's what I would do. Cause it would be easy to get clicks and you could make someone look stupid or whatever. And so that's what I would do.

I would, I would do that. And a host of other things that weren't exactly right. And then I thought, you know, this is not why God gave me my writing talent. And also this is not. Using the political equivalent of the golden rule, you know, there is no political equivalent of the golden rule. It's just the golden rule and it applies across all different aspects of your life.

If you're a jerk on Twitter, you're a jerk. If you're a jerk politically, you're a jerk. And so I was that. Right. So I'm not saying this to your listeners. I'm saying this to me. I was a jerk. I was unfair. So I want to change and so this book is me saying now I haven't changed on my deeply held political beliefs that what I have changed is I've exchanged a partisan mindset that says Okay, the people in my tribe are good, and the people in your tribe are bad.

And I hopefully have exchanged that for the mind of Christ. Which does not mean that I change my political positions. It just means that I engage the culture with love.

[00:41:28] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. It's just, it's such a needed, needed call. I'm just, I'm just wondering maybe I can ask you this. Has it required some apologies on your part?

[00:41:41] **Nancy French:** Oh, that's interesting. I probably should apologize. I'm trying to think, you know, like that That guy Madison, Wisconsin that I may have put on a skillet for one of my clients. I Yeah, it'd be interesting to look back. I don't like it's it I don't even know like the jokes that I've said the the lines that I've written because I wasn't the one delivering them, right?

But this book sort of was my maya call, but it's definitely a Confession like, okay, this is the way that I, and this is why that this happens and we can do better. But you know, because all of the people. Yeah, I probably, like, if I had a chance to sit down with Barack Obama and apologize for making fun of the fact that he didn't wear an American flag lapel pin.

Many years ago. And I drew conclusions about his level of patriotism over that. That's the kind of stuff, Mark. It's just stupid. And I would do stuff like that all the time. Cause it was easy. Oh, well, we're Patriot. You know what? The GOP is patriotic. We care about our military. And then you fast forward five minutes and you've got Don, Donald Trump making fun of John McCain for being captured as a prisoner of war.

And so the party changed. Right. So like, I thought that we were different than what we were. And then I realized that all of our positions were malleable as long as we sort of, you know, bowed to our leader who was Donald Trump at the time. And I just refused to bow before him. I just refused to do it. And so I haven't changed.

I still support our military so much. So I'm so conservative that I could not support Donald Trump. So I didn't flip to become liberal. I'm the same person that I was, but I'm not engaging in this acrimonious rhetoric or being unfair to my neighbor.

[00:43:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And it's, it makes us, it makes me wonder at least sometimes, The way we have gotten to the point of being so partisan is is can we even recognize maybe what we would call good, credible, civil reporting? Is there is, is there even an environment where we can recognize that these days? See, it seems maybe the lesson here in some ways from what you're talking about is, is that if it's really easy to do it, then maybe that's not the best reporting we could do on a, you know, I've heard your husband and others talk about nut picking, right?

Is you go find, you go find some of the worst examples on either side. And you say that that's the norm for that side, simply because you found somebody that was a really, really good. radical extremist on one end or the other. And really doesn't represent the true, true view of a group or a party or or even an issue.

Before we wrap up, Nancy, I just wanted to ask a couple of questions, one of them just about the journey of adopting. You have an adopted daughter. That you talk about in the book, just a beautiful, beautiful story. Talk a little bit about that adventure and how that has shaped your story.

[00:44:43] **Nancy French:** We, yeah, so we had two biological kids, blonde hair, blue eyed, and when David came home from war, when you're not supposed to make any major decisions for at least one year, we decided to add another kid to the, the family through adoption. And yeah, we adopted from Ethiopia, we got Naomi, she's so wonderful and lovely.

And one of the most beautiful things about Naomi and how she's been. Our family has been blessed more by her than we have blessed her. But one of the most beautiful things about that is that we did not know what David's. Military service would look like we didn't know if he would survive it and there were so many casualties that year It was really terrifying and harrowing and when David flew into Iraq in November Of 2007 he prayed to God he was like, you know, I need to know Will you please protect me?

Am I gonna survive this and God very frustratingly did not respond to David this book basically could be how all the ways that Nancy does not understand God But so David was just like, okay, you know, like he felt very, like he very he felt like God's absence in his life. Fast forward to after we get Naomi, we bring her home, we're sitting at the table, we're going through all the paperwork and we looked down and I noticed her birth certificate said she was born on that day in November that David was flying into Iraq.

In that very day in a village in Africa. Where we'd never been, God was preparing our future. He knew that we had a future and a hope. He just didn't feel like we needed to be privy to that. And I don't think we would have believed it even if he told us. Like, oh, yeah, David, no, you're gonna be okay. And you're not gonna believe what's happening in Africa right now.

In a remote village in Ethiopia, your daughter is being born. I mean, that would have but when we realized that we realized that God really does orchestrate our, our paths, and he really does help shape. I not help shape. He shapes our lives. And he shaped our lives into something that is very beautiful.

And in spite of the difficult circumstances, Beginnings of my life. I am very thankful for all of the things that God has given me. Not only has he given me wonderful kids, a wonderful marriage. You know, he, I get to live in this amazing country and speak about important issues. And I'm just very thankful as a college dropout to be able to do all of the things that I've gotten to do.

[00:47:16] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And that, and that may be one of the things most surprising to everyone is that you're a college dropout, quote unquote, but that that's a great segue into kind of where the book lands in some way, which is another way of thinking of the word ghosted. Can you talk about that for a second? That ghosted has at least two, maybe 12 different meanings in our minds these days.

But you talk about it a little bit differently toward the end. What do you mean by ghosted?

[00:47:47] **Nancy French:** Well, and I say this and every time I say it, people laugh, but the Bible was ghostwritten. The Holy Spirit exists and I think a lot of times in, in cool churches, we don't talk about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost and because we are cerebral and we are logical and we like to do, we like to exegete. I don't exegete.

I don't even know what that means. I don't want to exegete. But so in many ways, the book is all of the ways I do not understand God. You will be shocked. You will not be shocked to learn that no church has invited me to speak on this book. From from their churches, because this is not a theological treatise, but it is what happened in my life and what God did in my life.

And it's confusing. I included stories that don't make sense. I included stories that you can't make a spiritually tidy assumption about, right? I just decided to use all of them because I think we all have these very confusing, confounding stories. But. After being ghosted by people who should have supported me, by groups of people who should have supported me, and after ghostwriting for all of this time, those two meanings of the word ghosted are solidly in the book, but at the end of the book, I say, there's also something called being holy ghosted and it's totally different.

It is wonderful. It is positive. It is life giving. It is, it is creative. It is amazing. And God wants to convene with us in this way. He wants us to engage with him, you know, so we spend so much time thinking about how to engage the culture, but engaging with God. Really does change the way you engage with the culture, because if you wrestle with God, you have this humility and

this appreciation for the fact that God is God and you're not, and you can look at each other thinking, you know, I might be wrong about this issue.

I might be wrong about the marginal tax rate or the proper way to do immigration or whatever, but you can look at your fellow neighbor and love them because they bear the image of God. And so I hope that what people get from this book is that. Being ghost is, is bad, but there is a father in heaven and there is such a thing as the Holy Ghost.

And it is very warm and cozy and beautiful and you can sink into it when other people have rejected you.

[00:50:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So well said, you know, just that idea that God is not just for us. He's in us by means of his spirit. And, and the story that you tell is yeah, sometimes a really hard, sometimes a really messy story, but you know what? All of ours are in one way or another hard and messy. If we will. If we will allow it humble our hearts, God will be in the midst of it with us.

And our founder, dr. Denison likes to say that God redeems all he allows when we allow him to, when when we allow him to. And that's what this story really conveyed to me. God redeems all that he allows when we allow him to. And just again, Nancy, thank you for telling that story. So, well, the story that continues to unfold we'll be praying that God brings you swift and complete healing from this cancer journey.

And we look forward to hearing even more great things from you and through you. And again, just thank you for being a part of our podcast. And we wish God's great blessing in favor on you and on your whole family. I want to thank our audience for listening to us today. And if you like what you've heard, please rate, review us, but even more share this with your friends.

And we're going to encourage you to go and get this book called ghosted, an American story. You can get it at all of the book. Providers you can also get it at Nancy's website. Nancy, give us your website real quick.

[00:51:31] **Nancy French:** Nancyfrench.com.

[00:51:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** real hard. Nancy French com. You can find it there. And we hope to see you next time on the Denison forum podcast.

God bless you.

[00:51:40] **Nancy French:** Thank you.