

Investigating Christianity:

A conversation with Detective Wallace

TRANSCRIPT

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum, back with you for another conversation. I want to remind you that Denison Forum and the Denison Forum podcast are here to equip you what I like to say to be outfitters, to help you to be a better cultural missionary today, wherever God gives you the opportunity.

We want to help you do that by helping you think biblically, live holy, and serve redemptively. So, To help the whole world be a better place. However, we can do that until Jesus comes back. Just want to say a word here at the beginning of word of gratitude. Thank you for listening and following and sharing this podcast.

We are grateful for that. And if you're looking for more resources, you can check us out on the web at denisonforum.org. You'll find all kinds of articles, podcasts, other resources. That will continue to help you to grow strong in your faith and to live that faith in a compelling way in the places where God sends you.

Today's conversation is going to be one of interest to many of you, I believe. I learned by reading a few years ago that our society is literally obsessed with drama. I was reading a work by the Swedish doctor and global world health expert Hans Rosling. He wrote an entire chapter in his book called Factfulness about how human beings are hardwired for drama, that it's kind of an addiction for us.

And one of the ways that we see that in our culture is in our entertainment. We, it's kind of a weird, strange thing that we read all kinds of troubling headlines about violence and crime and tragedy in our world. And then we go home and we sit down in front of a television and we watch a show about medical crisis or firemen, or particularly something about police and crime and a lot of Violence, murder, and death.

I can remember when I was younger, when I was a kid, we watched every episode of emergency and dragnet. And if you're too young to know what those shows are, you can talk to your parents, grandparents, maybe great grandparents. I'm not sure. I can remember when I was in high school and college, I'd walk through the room.

My parents would be watching shows like hill street blues and ER. And today you can find it on your television in the chicago series chicago fire chicago med chicago pd You can see it in ncis 9 11 swat and we could go on and on crime death police violence It's everywhere. And for some reason we think it's entertaining.

But we keep coming back to that today. We're going to have a conversation with our friend, Jim Wallace, probably known to many of you as J Warner Wallace. Jim is a Dateline featured cold case homicide detective. He's also a national speaker and a best selling author. And today we're going to sit down and talk with him about his newest book.

But based on two decades of investigative experience, Jim provides incredible tools and a unique perspective to investigate not only crime and violence, but more importantly, to explain and to examine the claims of Christianity and to experience, to express really a very unique. Way of understanding the truth of the christian faith and the christian worldview So the title of jim's book is the truth in true crime What investigating death teaches us about the meaning of life which just by its title probably gets your attention Jim, welcome back to the

[00:03:37] **J. Warner Wallace:** I'm glad to be with you. I hope that, you know, this is, you're right about true crime. I don't know why, I mean, I think we can speculate about it, right? We, one thing we know for sure, statistically, that is a category of mystery that is very popular. But I think mystery in general is probably popular, right?

Because we love to puzzle. Like every good story, sometimes a lot of good stories have a surprise ending. you know, where you're like, Oh, I didn't see that coming. Right. And we actually see that as a virtue in movies. When we see movies like, Oh yeah, that's kind of what a, what a surprise ending in this, in this movie.

And I think for a lot of it is that we like to try to figure out who did it before the episode of Dateline tells us who did it. So that's probably a lot of why we are interested in this kind of stuff. That's right.

[00:04:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** like the board game, right? We want to play the board

[00:04:26] **J. Warner Wallace:** That's right. That's right. For sure.

[00:04:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, remind us again some may not be familiar, but tell us just again, how in the world did you get from being a homicide detective to being a Christian pastor and a cultural apologist, a Christian apologist?

Remind us again a little bit of

[00:04:44] **J. Warner Wallace:** I just was not raised in the church, so I didn't have, and the only Christians I would meet, the vast majority of them were people I was taking to jail. I did know some cops that were Christians, and I was about maybe eight years on the job when my wife wanted to go to church. I think largely because when we were, we weren't, Raised as Christians, but you know, a lot by us, at least a lot of the preschools that are offered for young children are offered by churches, probably a smart strategy.

Right? So, we ended up putting our kids in preschool just to prepare them for elementary. And as we had them in those preschools, those were either Catholic or Baptist preschools that was just happened to be in our area. Once the kids were school age, I think Susie probably thought should we continue this for some, you know, they've had this kind of upbringing and it seems like it's having positive impact on our kids.

I was not interested though, in taking it another step because I just didn't think that anything was true about Christianity. And I just, My, I'm like my dad, he's somebody who is not a believer, but he'll go to church with you. If you wanted to go, if he thought it was good for you, he'd say, great, I'll go with you.

It's, you know, it's kind of a useful delusion. Great. I would have done that too. But when I stepped into the church for the first time and we put our kids in the children's ministry, and now we're kind of, to be honest, I'm kind of waiting for the kids to come out, you know, and I'm listening to the pastor and the pastor is saying something about Jesus that caught my attention.

He said that he was the smartest man who ever lived. And that claim seemed pretty bold and, and I'm interested in wisdom. I had written, I'd read a lot of ancient philosophers and speak, you know, everyone likes to have a one liner they can pull out and look smart in a crowd. And so I thought let me see what's so smart about Jesus.

And, and that started a journey for me in scripture. And I just applied a skillset that I knew worked when you're trying to assess eyewitness testimony. So I applied that skillset to the gospels and that's how I became more and more confident that they were telling me something true. about this man named Jesus of Nazareth who lived in the first century in this small corner of the Roman Empire and I, I, that began a journey that doesn't make you a Christian just because you might understand the facts, but it opened the door for me to start reading the scripture to see what it said about me.

I would never have done that if I didn't trust what it had said about Jesus. And that really was the opening for me to kind of walk through and, and kind of understand my own condition. Now, you'll learn a lot about human condition working murders, because these are the times when. People are pushed to their very limit or are tested in a way that all of us hope we're never going to be tested like that.

And as I kind of watched those attributes, I became more and more interested in writing about them. Look, I only started writing Christian apologetics books because that's right after I got saved. I started serving in my children's ministries, you know, of my, when my kids were kids, I served in the kids ministry.

When they were in high school, I became their youth pastor. Along the way, I was attending seminary and trying to learn and trying to be, you know, present. But now that I was involved as a Christian. And so I was teaching high schoolers when I started partnering with Sean McDowell, Josh McDowell's son.

We were taking these immersive trips to Berkeley and Sean was the one who said, Hey, you should write a book about this. And I just didn't think I had margin to write a book, but ultimately that became Cold Case Christianity, which was my first book. And it took off. And then after that, people kind of saw me that way, you know, even though even back then.

I was really far more interested in the kinds of things that I'm writing about now in the truth and true crime, but you know, once you're in a certain niche publishers see you that way and it took me a few years to get to a place where I could convince them. Hey, let me write about human nature because it turns out, I think that's so much more helpful.

Most people, let's put it this way. Mark, when you have a conversation, with somebody about Christianity. I doubt it begins with somebody saying, you know, I've always wondered if the, how would we test the New Testament manuscripts to see if they're reliable? I've always kind of wondered about the second point of the cosmological argument.

I mean, most of our conversations don't begin with, Yeah, they don't, they don't begin with deep, you know, apologetics type philosophical, but most of the time they begin with something like, I can't believe there could be a God if this happened to my kid or that this happened to me. Or where is God now that I'm, I've suffered this trauma or this, I mean, at some point people want to know, not just is Christianity true, is it good?

Does it have anything to say? about my life. Does it ever, where does the rubber meet the road on this thing? And I think most of the questions you're going to have that are going to start conversations are probably going to be in this book rather than the other books I've written.

[00:09:34] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I, I think you're exactly right. 'cause it's, it's what we talk about a lot in our ministry and in church ministry is how do we meet a, how do we meet a felt need to get the opportunity to talk about and meet a spiritual need that's even below that? And even what you referenced a moment ago of.

A church having a daycare center to try and administer to families, try to give them a good, safe opportunity to have their children in an environment while they work and do other things. That's a church trying to address, you know, of a human community need that then opens up opportunities just like it did.

And I want to call it out just right here at the beginning, what you said a second ago, there are a number of pastors and church leaders who listened to this podcast. And just that one testimony you gave a moment ago that, Hey, the, the pastor said this one thing that triggered something in your heart and mind.

And so if you're a pastor, if you're a teacher, if you're leading a small group Bible study, know that your work matters. You never know how God may use you to say a. Simple statement that will send somebody down a road toward the discovery of faith and to an understanding of who Jesus is and change literally the trajectory of their lives.

We'll talk about the word trajectory in a minute I wanted to go a little bit further down your story Jim and just say, you know we were talking before we started recording about a mutual friend who is in law enforcement's had a Significant career in law enforcement and is back doing some of that work.

Now, as a pastor for 35 years, I had a number of nurses and EMTs, firemen, and occasionally some people that worked even in higher levels of law enforcement relative to things kind of like the FBI, that kind of thing, but many first responders particularly in law enforcement struggle because they do see people at their worst and as, as you have as a homicide investigator, there's a real struggle there oftentimes with becoming jaded and cynical.

How has God kind of worked that out in your life through the, the duality of the careers that

[00:11:40] **J. Warner Wallace:** There's a chapter in this book about called the killer inside. And that that's one of the ways that that's one of the approaches that has helped me to, to readjust to how I saw the world around me. Cause, you know, 15 crime stories, 15 rules for life. This one, this chapter talks about The nature of all of our cold cases, it's striking.

I first started working unsolved murders that I used to think, how did they get away with it? And 30 years later, they're still out there. Cause he never committed another murder. They're not serial

killers. They committed one murder 30 years ago. They killed a spouse. They killed a worker. They killed the, you know, someone, a coworker was something, you know, something like this.

And, and then the next 30 years, they, they, they lived as though they'd never committed the murder. And they're not your neighbor. They're your doctor. They're your deacon at your church. They're your, you know, whoever you can, they're the leader of the PTA, whatever. I mean, I'm telling you, these folks end up living lives just like the rest of us.

It's to the point where, when I would go to trial, the, the defense attorneys would, just couldn't believe. I had one defense attorney tell me, I've worked with a lot of guilty. you know, a lot of people who I knew were guilty, but they needed a, still needed an adequate defense. But this guy here, your work, this, you got the wrong guy.

I've had a chance to talk to this guy. I know what his life is like, who his family is. There's no way this guy did this because they don't understand this thing. We call the enigma of man that somehow all of us are capable of such altruism, such beauty, yet at the same time are horrifically capable of the worst that any human could ever do.

And that's not just some of us. That's all of us. And, and that's why these guys who'd commit one murder end up spending the rest of it. How could this be? I mean, we have a tendency to think that there are good people and bad people, and we put them in these stark categories. And the truth of it is, is that's not the case at all.

And the studies show this, I mean, we've got lots of studies and I present them in this book that talk about our innate nature. Look, we need to figure this out and teach our kids. Are we innately innocent and pure and good? And we're corrupted by environments and bad families and bad governmental systems, because if that's the case, we can simply replace the environments.

Replace the systems and we can get a different result, or are we so deeply fallen and broken that we will corrupt any environment we happen to be in, including religious environments? I think the second is true, and the studies will show this, and I've listed them in the book, but this is the ancient claim of scripture anyway.

Like, you don't need any of these studies that I cite in these 15 chapters to know these things are true if you've been reading your scripture. Because it turns out the scriptures describe the world the way it really is. They describe us the way we really are. And so for me, part of what helped me to kind of deal with the evil I was seeing is to realize that, no, actually, if I'm sitting across the table from a guy who is in an interview for a murder, that table is not separating a good person from a bad person.

That table, if anything, is separating a proud person, hopefully from a more humble person, somebody who gets who they are. And once I got who I was and realized that I was capable of anything, just like anybody else, and as Luther used to, has said it once I forget how the exact form of, of Latin he used for this, but the idea is that he was, he would say that we were so inwardly focused toward our own souls, that we were That even when we do things that look like they're good, they're really being done for selfish purposes.

We're so self absorbed that even our good works are done for the wrong reason. And they count as filthy rags to God anyway. In other words, he would say that even your best looking person is every bit in his need of a savior as the person who looks terrible. Or was accused of something. And once you know that, you start treating people differently. And you no longer, you no longer see the other side as something other, otherly. You see them as just another, another soul in need of a savior.

[00:15:35] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And you, you start rehearsing in your mind, hopefully that, that

[00:15:39] **J. Warner Wallace:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I say it all the time because you think I could never do that. No, your buttons might be different. They might be a little harder to press, but you have buttons and you just, but for the grace of God, no one's ever pushed them and yes.

[00:15:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** in my teens, my pastor came back to this over and over again, that given the right set of circumstances, any of us is capable of anything. And if, if the sooner you embrace that, the sooner you'll start moving toward the kind of humility that will be useful to the spirit in terms of protecting you.

From, from getting in those situations or making those kinds of decisions when you're in those situations. But it can be hard for us to, to comprehend that. Like I said, we want to categorize ourselves as good and people who do other things as bad, and somehow that makes us feel safer or better. Maybe a little bit of both.

But we, we hide it. We had what one pastor called our shadow selves. We, we want to pretend that it's not there, or we try

[00:16:42] **J. Warner Wallace:** No, absolutely. And I'll tell you something about that. That's something that you, it's a prop. I think it was Spurgeon who said it's a proper assessment of who you are. That really helps you to find a place of humility. And that's why I say that table that separates us is probably a table that is separating one person.

Who's maybe more humble or more self aware than another. And I think a lot of cops would, would, would strongly divide and probably disagree with me and say that, no, we are the good guys. Cause we hear that a lot, right? There's like, you know, the white headed, you You know, sheriff and the black hatted bandit, you know, this is ridiculous.

We separate this way when in fact our Christian worldview has been saying this for thousands of years. And, and humanism is elevates the human and theism elevates God. And so I think what we have to say is if, if, if Christianity is true, I suspect you'll have a much larger capacity to love others. And not separate from others you can think that that all humans are basically good and poor him He just got unlucky on the other hand.

You'll never look for a savior. By the way, if that's the case You'll look for a solution I think there's two ways of looking at this one If you're a humanist you're looking for a solution if you're if you're not you're looking for the savior And that's the difference in how we look at look at the world.

[00:17:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Yeah. So helpful, Jim. I want to, as we go through our conversation, plumb down into some of these chapters and deal with that. And we've, we've already kind of tumbled into one of them, which is I think foundational to a big conversation you've written some on this, your book has a specific chapter on this.

Our team is doing some writing these days around the topic of identity. How is this? How is this idea that we are all. Deeply, deeply broken the theological word of depravity. How is that foundational to the, as, as a place of starting to build your identity, a healthy identity? Why is this idea of looking yourself in the mirror or seeing yourself in the pages of scripture and understanding this fundamental problem that begins to surface itself in the third chapter of the Bible? How does that so key to having a proper understanding of our

[00:18:57] **J. Warner Wallace:** I'll tell you what it is, is, is, and here's how we discovered it. We knew this going back. I think identity is so important, Mark, that it's at the center of everything, of everything that troubles us, everything that can encourage us, everything that elevates us. Identity is so important.

Central that if I had to give my, my life to studying one thing, going back and doing it over again, it would probably be this thing because identity is at the, at the core and you discover it in, in moments of trauma. So there's a chapter in this book on trauma and there's a chapter in this book on identity.

Now these are so connected and I don't think people usually think of it that way, but here's what I would suggest at every point of someone's trauma in their life, regardless of what it might be.

They experience a shift in the way they see themselves, which just adds to the trauma. In other words, identity shifting is part of trauma.

So if you said, oh, yeah, I see myself as a successfully married man. Then my wife divorces me. Changes the way I think of myself. Oh, I saw myself as a detective. I retired. Changed the way I think. These things will cause some level of trauma or you get in an accident. Oh, I never saw myself as a cancer patient.

I never saw myself as somebody who would lose a child. I never saw myself. Every time you experience a major trauma, it changes. Trauma by nature, by definition, is just a shattering of the world you expected. We have a view of what we thought the world would be like, and then something happens that destroys that view.

Now we're lost. We're unaware and part of what it destroys is the way, not only we see the world, but the way we see ourselves. Now, what's interesting about that is the opposite is also true. A shift in your identity will cause trauma every bit as much as trauma will cause a shift in your identity. So if you were looking to minimize the depth of the trauma, you might suffer in the course of a life.

One of the surest ways you can minimize the depth of your trauma is simply to establish an identity that doesn't shift. 'cause shiftable identities cause trauma. It's pretty simple. Now, what's interesting, of all the classic ways that people like Eric Erickson and others have defined identity, the idea of forming it from the inside out or the outside in, the outside in is very ancient.

You look around at things that are around you that have existed before you even existed, and you say, I'm one of them. I exist. I form an identity based on a tribe, a nation, a clan, a family name, a family business, something that's out there, you know, where Wallace is. We've got three generations of Jim Wallace's who work in law enforcement.

My, my dad, I was born in his academy. My son, he was born in my academy. We are all named Jim Wallace. We all work at the same agency. Okay. So you can form your identity around something that's outside of you. You just pull it in or inside out. I've got a desire, a way I see myself, a longing, sexual preference, a sexual identity.

I've got innate, an innate ability that I want to exploit. Whatever it may be, I decide from the inside out on the basis of my heart condition, the desires of my heart. And I simply tell the world around me, you will now identify me this way. It's inside out. Very, very common right now in current culture.

The problem with both of these is that they are immensely shiftable. You want to identify yourself as this, as a detective? I had to retire. And then I was like who am I now? And I spent

probably five years trying to figure that out. Why? Because it's a shiftable identity. At some point I realized that so I drove off the lot and that's the first chapter or second chapter of this book.

I realized, Hey, I'm not, I'm a was, my son is still an is. I don't want, no one wants to be a was, nobody. So that's, that's a problem. But also if you think the desires of your heart are not going to change over the course of your life, you haven't lived very long. Those things change. And that means you're going to experience moments where you're wondering who am I?

And by the way, if you identify yourself based on some skillset you have then get ready. Cause there's always somebody who's got a better set of skills than you do in that area. And they're probably a better version of you. And it's hard for us to imagine that. Now, if we wanted to, to kind of protect ourselves, we could simply look for something that transcends us that is unshifting and put our identity in that.

And it turns out that if you did that, you would put your identity in something that's so high that when you encounter trauma, you're still going to encounter trauma, but at least the identity shifting won't occur. You know, but before that thing happened to you, if you're a child of God, if your identity is in Christ then your identity is the same before the trauma as it is after the trauma.

Amen. Amen. You're still going to experience the trauma, but you're going to have a more shallow depth of that trauma because at least it's not going to accompany or not going to also be, now, what happens though is you have to ask yourself, and this is a different chapter on trauma. Okay, so I had a view of the world the way it was going to be and this thing shattered that.

How do I overcome that? How do I, how do I grow now on the backside of trauma? It's about reassessing the story to begin with. Did you have the right story all along? Or can you find yourself, maybe the story was wrong. Maybe your expectations were wrong. Maybe your view of the world that didn't accommodate this trauma is an inaccurate view of the world.

You know, you see this, for example, I've been going through Job. By the way, that you talk about a long book of just friends who are the worst friends in the world. Yeah, conversations. Yeah, but what's great about it is, is that you see in that book that people have a wrong view of God and that wrong view of God causes them to suffer even longer and more deeply than they would have.

And, it makes you a terrible, theology matters, it makes you a terrible friend if you think God is a certain way and you just harp on your friends about what you think about God, which isn't even true about God. It's important for us to get the story right. So I tried writing a couple chapters here that'll help you to flourish, but they're gonna, I'm trying to throw them as you know, through a crime story.

To get your attention and then show you how the modern studies affirm this, and then show you how this has been on the pages of scripture all along. So this is an apologetic of sorts, but I do think we have to master identity and I'm glad you're writing about it because I do think it's, it's, It might be the most important and I can tell you I do a lot of counseling now we we do marriage resiliency retreats to the billy graham association and these are resiliency retreats for law enforcement who have been involved in critical Shootings things where they are now critically injured.

Maybe you have to retire We just had a couple of last week who definitely are going to be retired on the backside of a terrible shooting where he got Very deeply injured So the question then becomes well, who am I now? I never saw this coming. I always thought I was the kind of tactically, I never thought I'd ever get injured, but now I clearly, I am one of those.

I never thought I'd ever be forced out of the job. Now, clearly I am one of those. I never thought I would lose this identity until I was ready to give it up. And now it's being torn from me. Okay. Like how do we move forward? And that's what I hope these chapters will help people assess.

[00:25:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And they, they really are. And it is a compelling way to bring people into the conversation and into a thought process. Like I said, playing somewhat on this addiction of puzzling out and drama and even vice. So, you know, people will say, Oh, he went through and he was in, he was involved in a story like that.

And then it leads to. This reality about how human beings actually are, how they actually behave, how they actually think and choose. But you know, in, in terms of law enforcement, again, talking to one of my friends recently, he said, you know, every time I get ready to go to the work, I, I have to choose to believe the lie that I'm actually totally in control

[00:26:36] **J. Warner Wallace:** No, that's a really good point. Yeah.

[00:26:38] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And, and, and, and the only way that I can actually walk out and do the job is to somewhat, you know, embrace that fallacy. Because I can do everything right and still end up in a place I never intended, never desired, and never expected to be in. But one of the things I love about the book and about your style of writing is.

You give people handles even this idea of storytelling and narrative that we are always, we are always creating and redefining our story as a way of understanding ourselves and understanding the people around us, understanding God. Is that, is that the way that this book kind

[00:27:19] **J. Warner Wallace:** Yeah. I think that all of us, and this is, I think I tried to do this. Yes. I'm trying to figure out, I'm trying to create analogies much like you see in classic literature,

much like you see Jesus do with parables. You're trying to figure out a way, like, how can I contextualize this so that this is like this, this is to this as this is to that.

And that's, and that's kind of what we're trying to do. But what's great about looking at your life. and understanding trauma through the lens of, and what the secular people call this is meaning making. They, they believe that if you are, can, can practice meaning making, you can actually experience post traumatic growth behind any, any injury or trauma.

And I don't think you can make up meaning though. I think the problem with creating a fictional story about your life or about the world around you only works until you encounter another form of trauma. And because it's not a true story. It's just your preference for the story, you're going to stumble again.

And so what we had to do instead is find the meaning, not make up a meaning. We have to figure out, like, what are we really here to do? Why are we here? And so I think it's like any story. There's this opening chapters where you establish the characters. Then you have rising action, a climactic chapter, falling action, and resolution.

So I think most of us, when we experience trauma, we think we're in the end of the story. Like what a terrible story. This is a tragedy when in fact, we might just be in the climactic chapter. We're not in the final chapter. We're in the climactic chapter. Something beautiful is about to occur and resolve itself, but we, we can't see it yet.

So a lot of what we're trying to do is to tell people that the people who prosper, the people who, who experienced post traumatic growth, all of them are really adept at figuring out where they really are in the story instead of where, because if you stop Job in chapter two, it's a terrible story. It's a tragedy.

If you stop the story of Jesus at the cross, it's a tragedy. If you, even I was just saying the other day, if you stop the story of John Mark. When Barnabas and Paul say, Hey, you're not going with us. Paul says you're not going with us because you were a loser last time and you fell out. So you're done.

If you stop that story right there, that's a bummer too. But it turns out that John Mark was still used and became very, very close to Paul. And Peter ends up scribing Peter's gospel. I believe is the gospel of Mark. And now he's one of the four classic evangelists. images emboldened and blazed on, on the four, the four evangelists, right?

And who is this guy? He's a nobody whose story could have stopped at that trauma, but instead he, he, he, he grew on the backside of the trauma because he knew the story wasn't over yet. And I think for a lot of the people we're talking about here, they have to understand that rising

action, climactic chapter, falling action kind of narrative and figure out where they are in that narrative.

[00:30:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and come back to that, Jim, from the standpoint of every, one of the things that all of us, I think, are longing for is to have a sense that there is both hope and goodness at the end of our story, and that in many ways, we just, from our identity, from our understanding of God's identity we keep hoping sometimes against significant evidence, we keep hoping that there is hope.

And that there is ultimately goodness at the end of our story and how does how does the christian message come into that? How is that a part in some ways a part of every one of these chapters and every one of these 15 principles that you're calling? Out talk about that from the fundamental side of it.

I keep bumping personal confession here. I keep bumping into the importance Of, of realizing and believing in God's goodness as the foundation of our hope. Can you kind of unpack that, chase that out a little bit with

[00:31:19] **J. Warner Wallace:** of things about that. I think as a boomer, when I was first looking at Christianity, I wasn't in, and I didn't have a life that I thought was needed fixing arrogantly. I at 35, I thought I would kind of reach the pinnacle of everything I wanted to achieve. I was the honor cadet, my Academy, I was working at the top position as an investigator.

I felt like I achieved everything I wanted to achieve. Great marriage, great kids, moved into this neighborhood thought this is, this is a great life. I was more interested, is this story about Jesus true? Because I don't need it to help me. I just need to know if it's true. Now, I don't think that people in this generation we're talking to now, millennials and Gen Z, are as interested in truth the way that boomers were, because the word truth is much more malleable right now in culture.

It usually means it's true for me. Okay, I think what they're more interested in, is it good? So I've stopped writing books about, is it true? I've done those. Now I'm writing books about, is it good? Does it matter? Person of Interest was one of the first book in this kind of genre, and the second one is this one, Truth and True Crime.

I do think it's about hope. Now, there's a chapter in this book that talks about, it's toward the end of the book, that talks about why hope matters, and how certain worldviews can provide you with hope and certain, some can't. Our fear of death, And the thinkers on this today are called there's a theory out there called terror management theory.

And these are people who believe that because we are unique as humans, that we recognize our mortality in a way that no other species does. Horses don't know that they've got a certain shelf life and now they're at the end. My dog, who was Bailey before she died, didn't know that she lived, is living two years past what the expectation for corgis was.

Okay. She didn't know. She just knew she wasn't feeling great. Okay. You and I know. I'm in my 60s. I feel like I'm on the back three. I can see the clubhouse. I can see it coming. I'm making plans. I'm not making 20 year plans. I can see I'm getting close. So, so now that, that view, these theorists believe, these psychologists and researchers believe that that's the tail that wags every dog.

That our fear of death, called mortality salience, and you know, this, this, or death anxiety is what causes us to make decisions now, in the present. And it actually changes the way we behave with others. Okay. If that's true, I would want to know, is there a worldview that has, can, can kind of temper that in some way?

Now, what researchers say is that worldviews that present what they call, Cause they're not believers. The persisting self. Allay death anxiety better than worldviews that don't. In other words, if you think that yourself will not persist beyond death, that everything you can experience, it's worth experiencing, you have to experience in the 90 years on planet earth, and then you're back in the dirt and yourself does not persist.

Those folks fear death more. Then people who think no, I'm actually going to extend beyond the self is going to extend beyond. Now, if you think that you're going to be reincarnated that's not a persisting self. That's a persisting something, but it's not you with your memories, your relationships, or you're now reincarnated as somebody else.

So you need to have a view of the world in which the self with your relationships, your knowledge, your experiences persists beyond the grave. Those people, the people who lean in and actually believe it. They have less than a statistically have much less fear of death. And then that becomes the less the determiner of why they make decisions in the common, in the present age.

So I think that that, that tells me, and only that it's not just theistic, like theistic views in which you, there's a God. that you feel you can pray to, Oh, they actually do better than that. And if that, if you've got a theistic view in which there's a God, you can pray to, and that God actually cares about your prayers, that's even higher.

So, so there, there are some things about the Christian worldview that provide more resources and offer more hope than other worldviews. Even if you didn't believe any of it was true, it's just

the idea of the persisting self is so powerful. Now Tim Keller used to say it this way. He used to say that if you're.

An atheist, you'd be wise not to think too deeply about your worldview because it'll bring you to a place of hopelessness. Because if you think that you're insignificant, meaningless beginning from the dirt, through an evolutionary process, which has no meaning or purpose, just, you just are here. And then you're insignificant, meaningless death in which there's no reason for life.

If you think that somehow in between these two insignificant, meaningless points of birth and death, you could have somehow a miraculously meaningful life. You're fooling yourself and you know it really and people and even sincere atheists who write about this would say you shouldn't think too Deeply about the the lack of purpose in the universe.

There is no one who really cares about you. There is no real plan There's no extension beyond the grave on the other hand people who think deeply about their Christian worldview actually have increased hope Now, isn't it interesting because by the way, I know a lot of Christians who don't have a hope because they don't think deeply about their Christian worldview.

But the whole point is if you think deeply about your atheistic worldview, you get ready to be depressed. If you think deeply about your Christian worldview, you get ready to have hope. Now, isn't it interesting that the group that says that we are not the deep thinkers, really are the ones who really shouldn't be thinking deeply.

But the ones that are on the theistic side, we, we should be thinking much. Yeah, there's a, there's a reason why we should be thoughtful because thoughtful Christians have hope.

[00:36:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And, and, and thoughtful Christianity will lead you to a deep place of conviction about the goodness of God. Not just the reality of God, but the goodness of God is reminds me of a couple of quotes. One, why I think it was Paul McCartney, former, former beetle who was asked. Decades ago. What do you think happens when you die?

He said, we just conk out. It's like if that's where we're going. It's it's a pretty dismal view but it also makes me remember what c. s lewis said. He said it's not so much that i'm troubled that That this may or may not be real or that God may or may not be real, but that this may be an indication of what God is really like.

And he was speaking through his pain at that point that, Hey, that this kind of pain is really what God wanted for me. And he, he moved on past that, but you can kind of see the, the thought process playing itself out. And few of us think as deeply as C. S. Lewis or even can, but we need to strive to get down that road because.

Faith particularly christian faith is a thinking man's faith for sure. Jim, let me pivot a little bit. As you got into these stories, I There has to be a reason why you picked every story that you picked to start with But as you've investigated so many different crime situations and in so many really ugly Situations that human beings have been involved in.

What's surprised you? What was just, wow. I didn't, I didn't see that reality

[00:38:27] **J. Warner Wallace:** Okay. So I, I talk about it a lot because it was surprising to me. So if you've heard me talk about this book in the past, this isn't going to surprise you that I'm going to tell you what this was surprised me. And I think it's, it's, it's still surprising for most of us who don't, who don't know God or who would say, That there's, are, are secular answers to some of these questions.

So if I said to my secular friends I discovered through research over the last 35 years done by sociologists and counselors and social workers and just researchers of the human condition, anthropologists I discovered there's an attribute. There's a, there's something you could adopt. And if you adopted this approach to yourself and to the world, you would flourish at the highest level.

This one thing is the secret magic sauce that'll increase the longevity of your life, the quality of your physical health, your mental health, the deepness of your relationship. She'll be a better employer, a better employee. You'll get better grades, make more money. I mean, every way that we measure.

Anything that deals with human flourishing, every barometer, every measurement will increase and improve if you'll simply adopt this and do this and, and be this. And if I asked my non believing friends, what do you think that is? I think they would say, and I have heard them say, I think it's interesting.

I was kind of surprised by their, I don't think I would have said this, but they would say exercise. There's some, you know, cause there's some statistic on exercise and how it improves the quality of life. Or they'll say something like meditation or, you know, they'll find some, and it turns out that that, that the key to this, according to secularists, now we know is simply humility, humility.

And I don't think many people would just launch on that. I think some Christians might though, because it's an ancient principle and it's been in the pages of scripture that if you just, like, for example, people who are humble, you can be taught. People who are not humble are impossible to teach. And therefore they don't learn and they don't become wise and they don't, they don't adopt certain principles because they think they know better.

It turns out arrogance and pride is one of the things that, that stumbles people and will lead to all everything, diminishing of all those attributes of human flourishing. So, so here's, what's interesting about that. If you asked like, what, what worldview, if you're a secularist, Could you just simply adopt humility?

It'd be hard because the secular worldview does not advance humility Because we're in a meritocracy where everything is earned And anytime you earn something you become prideful about it because you think you're owed that thing So if you said hey if I go through these four years, I expect to get a degree If I go through these five steps, I expect to get promoted if I do all this and buy this and I expect It's all transactional.

I do this to get that and if you start thinking that way and that's the way you live your life You You're eventually going to say I did more than that guy. I deserve that more than he does, or she does. And I got passed over for that promotion. That's not fair. Why do you think? Because everything in your view in a do, do, do, do worldview, just increases our thinking more of ourselves and thinking of ourselves in a higher way.

Even theistic worldviews in which you must do something to earn favor with God or to achieve the highest goal that this spiritual worldview offers. Those are still do, do, do worldviews. And like Jesus mentioned in the parable of the man sitting in the synagogue, Oh, I'm so glad God I'm not like that guy.

This is what we do is we end up saying I'm better. I earned this. I expect this. The only way to combat this type of do do do kind of arrogance and pride that results is if there's a worldview that says, no, I'll tell you what, we're going to take all the doing out. We're going to have, if you want to earn the most that you can receive in this worldview, you're going to have to recognize that you aren't even capable of doing anything.

We're going to, basically this is a done worldview, not a do worldview. Nothing here will be of your own doing so that no one can boast. Oh, wow. So there is a worldview out there. It's the only theistic worldview and it's the only worldview, period, that advances something called humility. You're going to have to first start by saying, Hey, there's a God and I'm not him.

And I'm going to have to bend my knee. This is why so much of the time people will say I just don't know enough to become a Christian. No, it's not about learning more. It's about submitting more. It's about, it's a humility issue because the more you learn, the more prideful you're going to be.

You're do, do, do doing, and that's why you're never going to get there. But it could be a coincidence that the one worldview that advances the one state of mind that would cause you to

flourish the most. Just happens to be Christianity. Or it might just be that it's an evidence that Christianity is from the maker.

[00:43:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah. And I, and I love the way that you talk this out through a very powerful story about celebrity and power. As the contrast to humility that, that, that is, you know, as Nietzsche said, that it is the will to power that is at the core of everything for human beings in his estimation.

And that is certainly true of a secular worldview. But talk about that. And here's, this has kind of become one of my pet peeves recently. Like so many, I'm sure that's listening to this podcast. So sometimes discouraged by seeing. People who are notable and influential on a large scale, especially a religious spiritual scale.

Seeing those people revealed in their humanity and in their brokenness and how disappointing that is that, you know, I think it's right for us to expect better behavior among our leaders. And we're obviously very disappointed when it doesn't happen. There seems this just this whole topic of celebrity and prestige and how it operates in our culture very helpful in this book it almost seems that certainly the the basic idea of celebrity is is antithetical to so much about what christianity and humility is about Chase it out for a moment so that people can kind of get an idea of that, that we have be, we have become addicted to the idea of prestige.

And it's, it's no longer because of technology. It's no longer about being popular at high school or at college. It's something way beyond that now. And it is feeding this appetite that takes us far, far away from humility. Talk about that

[00:45:02] **J. Warner Wallace:** Yeah, that's something we, this chapter involves a gangster named Palone, who was kind of a local street legend and where that didn't, that didn't end well for him. It's not just him. It's like we're, we're in an age right now where there are no gatekeepers. So it used to be, if you want to be a celebrity back when I was a kid, you had to be somebody who a producer would put on a show that would be on the legacy networks, ABC, NBC, CBS would have to probably be in the eight o'clock hour.

So more people could see it. There weren't a lot of shows. A lot of opportunities to become famous because the gatekeepers would keep most people off of them. But now we're in a generation where there are no gatekeepers. So if you can develop a large enough audience, as a matter of fact, the legacy media channels are all these channels are so cluttered with shows and.

You could actually develop a larger audience on YouTube probably than you could in some of these legacy shows. So now there's who's gatekeeping YouTube, not very many, pretty much anyone can start if they've got the ability, something to say, and they're actually in some ways you know, exploitive enough.

They can, they can come in and make a scene. They can obviously develop an audience. Now, what does that matter? Why it matters is that everyone has to deal with celebrity now, because it's available to anyone. Like no one here listening. Yeah. Wants less people to like their post on social media, wants less people to follow them.

We all would be enamored if we could, we all would, would love to see more people affirm us. And it turns out that those are the two things that researchers say lie at the heart of celebrity. Our desire, number one, to be loved, to be known, to, to have meaningful relationships. Celebrity never does that for you.

It's an illusion. And people like who have committed suicide in the last, celebrities, there's a number of these, who have either overdosed or committed suicide in the last couple of years, they, they often will complain about the, the, the failings of celebrity. They're, they're basically that their expectations were never met.

So the first thing is this idea of relationship. The second thing is what researchers are calling symbolic immortality. This idea that somehow I could, Develop a persona that will live beyond the grave. And here's the problem, of course, with that is, is that that's just a persona. Look, even if my work transcends me, and people are reading my books in 50 years, they don't know me.

They don't know anything about me. They might have imagined something, or they're listening to the press clippings, or, but the people who really know me are not the people who are fans of my work. Even if I was to be as transparent as possible in books, it's really that my wife knows me better than anyone else.

And, and so it turns out that the things that you're looking for, if you're chasing celebrity, really are not satisfied by celebrity. And in fact, the celebrity opens the door to all kinds of negatives. that you ought to be concerned about. Because that's a different chapter, but there's a chapter that talks about what it is that causes us to do stupid things.

And it's always sex, money, and power. Celebrity is in that power category. The idea of wanting to have the power and authority and respect to eat at restaurants and be known. All that stuff. Okay. I've never known anyone who scratched one of those three motives who didn't eventually scratch the other two.

And that's why you see Christian leaders fall. Because they become celebrities. And then at some point they're chasing the money and the sex that comes along with being a celebrity because those two things are going to become available now in a way they had never been available before. Let me tell you what I see happening.

If, if you're a deacon of a church right now and you're trying to protect your pastor, there's only three things you need to protect them from sex, money, and power. And what typically Elder boards and Deacon boards do is they protect their celebrity from sex. They'll either employ a Billy Graham rule or they'll do something that, you know, put up some boundaries.

So maybe you have some accountability, whatever it may be, cause they don't want their, their, and it's, does it still happen? Of course, because we are deeply fallen where the. The other chapter of the book. So I get it, but they'll try to put a protection up. They'll also protect him in terms of we're going to limit how he can make money, be very transparent about his earning of money.

We don't want that to be a thing for him. So we typically will protect pastors. on the sex and money. But when it comes to the celebrity, oh, no, no, no. We want our pastors to be famous because that builds a bigger congregation. We don't have a problem with our pastor's sermons being a podcast. We don't have a problem with the YouTube channel.

In other words, we don't see the danger in the power side, the celebrity side that we see in the sex and money side, but we ought to, because it turns out celebrity is every bit as dangerous as the other two. And so what we have to do as content creators is find a way to take the celebrity out of it. Now let me tell you what I'm most uncomfortable with.

And I've started to reduce these. I spoke around the country for 10 years. The number of times you walk on a conference stage and before you open your mouth, they're clapping for you. Okay, we have to figure out ways to minimize those. We have to figure out ways to advance the kingdom and advance the content without advancing ourself.

Now this is tricky, because it turns out people listen to whoever they think has trusted authority. So it turns out that trusted authority is essential. But trusted authority is just a hair's line away from celebrity. We have to figure out a way as leaders in the church to leverage our trusted authority without letting it slip into celebrity.

Sometimes look, let's face it. We're in a culture where just being a celebrity is what gives you the trust. Why do you see celebrity endorsements of politicians? Are they really reliable authorities on these issues? No. But people sadly think that if they have a celebrity status that they can be trusted for some reason.

We have to work on that issue, right? Especially in the church. So that's I think that's one approach we can take is just to make sure we stay on the trusted authority line A side of the line rather than slip over into the celebrity side.

[00:51:07] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. A lot, lots to think about there. Lots, lots to consider the very, very helpful. We, we don't, we could talk for another hour easily, but I want to get to one more topic before I let you go. And that's the conversations. You have a couple of checkers in here. They have the conversation about justice and mercy.

The, the fundamental hardwiring in our soul for really both of these for both justice and mercy. But you talk a lot about. How we're always pursuing these. We're never going on this side of heaven to Guinea. We're never going to get this exactly right. Whether it's in our parenting and a lot of us have said, you know what?

I, I was too, too strong in my in my justice and others. I was too soft. My wife and I've had plenty of conversation around that in the raising of two children seems like the world and every human being in it is bent toward I want mercy for me, but justice for everybody else. And, and just, we spent a lot of time on this at Denison Forum about speaking the truth in love, which is graduate level Christianity in my opinion, and so needed in a world and in a culture that is Really uncivil, in a lot of its expressions, especially in our politics this podcast will come out as we're ramping up into another political season moving towards a presidential election We obviously see there's a dramatic need for people who can embrace both truth and love justice and mercy give us a little bit of insight from the book and from your thinking How that's supposed to work.

How do we know we're making progress at speaking the truth and love and embracing both

[00:52:47] **J. Warner Wallace:** So I'm going to come in a slightly different way for our conversation today. So, so yes, you're, you're right that there's a chapter of this book about that balance between truth and grace, justice and mercy. This is in the nature of God. You see it in both the old Testament and the new. In the Old Testament, you'll see it often, all the time, you'll see it in every single chapter of the of the every single book of the Old Testament.

The idea that God is these things in their fullness where justice and mercy kiss. This is how God is described. Okay. You'll see it in the New Testament because Jesus is described by John as coming in the fullness of truth and grace. This is not just him saying, Oh, what a cool guy. No, he's saying only one being.

Holds truth and grace and fullness. We don't as humans. This is another claim to deity from John in chapter one of his gospel There's tons of claims to deity of John for John writing in that chapter Okay So so the question is like what does this mean for us? How if every every admonition in the New Testament is is Paul or somebody saying hey guys You're not holding these in balance.

You're either being way too judgmental against some people, or you're just trusting, not being discerning enough, and you're letting all kinds of evil into the church. So get these things in

balance, right? And of course, fullness puts them in balance, but we don't do it. So I was at a school in Houston, and I was teaching high schoolers high school teachers of Christian high schoolers, and I had a breakout session with them, and so I'm sitting there, and I just got a whiteboard out.

I said, do me a favor. Do you agree we want to teach our kids how to love like God loves? And we know, right on the board, God equals love, because John tells us that God is love. Okay. fullness of truth and grace. Now, I asked them first, Before I began this process, I said, can you tell me what does it mean to love like God loves?

Just give me some synonyms for God's love. A bunch, dozens of synonyms. Took us some time to write them all on the board. Get them all written. Then I talked about how if God is love and God is the fullness of truth and grace, then we can take the God out of the equation. Love equals the fullness of truth and grace.

God is both of these things. That means they are the same. So I said, okay, now look at the board here to love. Like God loves means we have to hold not just grace and mercy at a high standard, but truth and justice at a high standard. Do you see any word on the wall right now that describes truth or justice?

No. Words like acceptance and tolerance and caring, understanding, those were on the wall. Patience. Patience was on the wall. Yep. Yep. That was on the wall. But nothing about speaking truth. So it turns out that we have been teaching our young people in the church that loving like God loves is just half of what God is.

It's just the grace and mercy side. So, I would always ask people are you teaching your kids that for every act of grace and mercy there ought to be an expression of truth and justice? Because if you haven't been holding those two things in equal balance, you're not loving like God loves. I mean, people who really love you will, will call you out when you're wrong on something.

When it's, when that thing is going to hurt you or somebody else, they'll tell you, Hey, by the way, that's what marriage is. Marriage is, is I've given Susie the permission to love me like God loves me. And that means she has to have permission to tell me when I'm a fool and cause that's what I need. Cause she, if she really loves me, she's going to, we don't typically want to receive that.

But if we're going to love like God loves, we have to hold those two things in their fullness. And we're not teaching that to our young people. We're saying, Hey, we have to allow all kinds of foolishness in the church because we got to love like God loves. No, no. Jesus did. Yes. He walked in and loved people that he wanted to be changed forever and the change forever part in a marriage.

This balance of, of truth and justice and grace and mercy is expressed through. Repentance. That's all about the truth. When I know I'm wrong, I'm called to change and forgiveness. If you are married to somebody and you've mastered repentance and forgiveness, I suspect you've got a great marriage because what you're doing is you're expressing the two sides of God's nature as best you can in the context of your marriage.

We have to teach our young people that this is going to be important because they're surrounded by foolishness right now and they are afraid to call it out because they think it's unloving. No, that's actually half of the equation of what love really is. You're being unloving if you don't call it out.

And if we don't help our young people to see that, we're going to, I think we're going to end up swallowing more and more foolishness in the church.

[00:57:33] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And, and that's just so needed in our culture at every level, really, because in every way, right. We, we. We don't want truth to become a baseball bat and that's where the love enters in. But if you have love without truth, then you have, I just say you end up with, with a soggy Melba toast is what you end up with.

And actually what you end up is something worse. You end up fueling or adding more fuel and oxygen to people's destructive idolatries. Because if, if, if in love you excuse their neglect of the truth, you're just allowing them, even encouraging them to keep going down a destructive path that God has called out and has, has called them to

[00:58:12] **J. Warner Wallace:** Yeah, there's a parent that my love for my kids wants them to play where they want to play, but my, my desire for truth says get off the train tracks. So I think a lot of this is about us balancing those two things. Now look, I don't do any of the 15 things I describe in this book. At all, I am terrible at all 15.

And I think as humans, we better get comfortable with that. We better get comfortable with the fact that I can, we can point to what we ought to do, and this is why, you know, if that was, if we could actually master anything, we'd read scripture once, but the reality of it is, is I got to read it every day because I, I am so deeply fallen that I can read something that I know I should do this and just a moment later I'll do just the opposite.

That is the human condition. But if we don't aim at something, we'll hit the nothing every time. So we gotta be, we gotta try to aim at something. And so I think this is why Proverbs are so important, right? Proverbs are constantly saying, Hey, if you do this stupid thing, expect to have a stupid result. But, but it doesn't mean we're going to necessarily, our, our, our selfishness, our desires, sometimes often trump what we know we ought to do.

So we're in this constant state of repentance. It's not just a one time. I don't think it's a one. There are some people who theologically who think that perfectionism is possible. I don't see it that way. I think that my heart tells me that I'm constantly having to recorrect, to recorrect, to re, I need that, need that truth side of the equation constantly because I, I, I'm going to either deny the truth or forget the truth, more likely deny it.

[00:59:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And just something we have to come back to day in and day out with the Holy Spirit's help that we need scripture. We need the church. We need the Holy Spirit. All of those things speaking consistently in our lives. And as is often the case, right? When we start to understand where we are broken, where we are depraved, where we lack the holiness that God desires for us.

Then we begin to start depending on him and humility to let him begin to build that in us according to his will and his work. And we, we start working out what he works in us, right? So much that we could continue to talk about with Jim, but I want to just tell you again, what a great work this is.

Recommend it to you as you listen to this podcast. This is Jay Warner Wallace, the truth in true cop, true crime. What investigating death teaches us about the meaning of life. A great, great resource would encourage you to pick it up, read it, use it with your small group would be a great thing to read together and to discuss together and to pray about together.

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And again, thank you. We are a fully donor supported ministry. We're grateful for people like you helping us along the way. And we'll see you next time on the Denison Forum Podcast.

[01:01:14] **J. Warner Wallace:** Thanks for having me. I appreciate you, Mark.