

Understanding the role of media in politics and faith

TRANSCRIPT

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

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome back to the Denison forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison forum. And we're glad to have you along for the conversation today. As we seek to discern the news differently to help you think, to live, and to serve everywhere that you can in the most redemptive way that you can as a representative of the kingdom of God.

And we're grateful for your participation with this conversation. We're in the middle of our series, our special series called politics discerned differently. And we hope that you've already listened to a couple of the previous episodes. If you haven't, you can go back and pick those up. And we hope that all of this series will be encouraging and helpful to you. And if it is that you'll share it with others so that we can all navigate this political season in the most effective and redemptive ways possible. Today, we're going to have a conversation about news information, journalism, media, and what does it mean to seek the truth in politics as kind of a foundational reality and essential for doing anything well, but particularly for doing politics. My guest today and conversation partner is one of my coworkers, Connor Jones. Let me introduce Connor to you. He is the director of performance marketing. I'm just going to ask him at the beginning here to define that term in a moment.

He is the director of performance marketing at Denison ministries. He's a graduate of Dallas Baptist university with a degree in business management. Previous to working at Denison ministries, he worked for Lockheed Martin in their PAC three missile program. He was a contract negotiator there. His role with us is to leverage many of the digital platforms that you're probably familiar with to increase the reach of our content and to grow the audience for Denison Forum, as well as for our other ministries, Christian parenting, First15, which is our devotional ministry, as well as Foundations, our Bible study ministry. You can find all of that through [Denisonforum.org](https://denisonforum.org) as well as [Denison ministries.org](https://denisonministries.org). Connor is very passionate and got a, a great interest in a number of things, politics, sports, pop culture, entertainment, current events. He also

enjoys fishing movies, traveling with his wife, Reagan, and they are about to welcome their first child into their home in just a few days.

Congratulations on that Conor and welcome to the conversation.

[00:02:33] **Conner Jones:** Yeah. Thank you, Mark. So happy to be here. Obviously very excited for what's to come in our family, but also just enjoying this time of quiet before the storm. So excited to be here on this podcast though, and talk about misinformation and media and all the fun things that come with a political season.

[00:02:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Absolutely. Tell us what performance marketing is as the, the water that you swim around in at Denison Ministries.

[00:02:58] **Conner Jones:** Yeah, it's a great question. We, you know, I did some ministries were fully digital ministry for the most part, we have some books and that's a big piece of what we do, but most of what we do revolves around digital content, podcasts, articles, videos, YouTube, and getting it out on social media, getting into the.

Hands or really more so on the screens of many people as we try to increase the reach of the content that's created through each of our brands. And even this podcast later today, you know, I'll be helping figure out what do we do with this? How do we get it distributed? How do we publish it? And then more importantly, on my side, how do we market it?

And get it in front of the faces of more people than our typical listeners. As we try to just grow our listenership on this podcast, our readership of the daily article, our readership of other articles and resources and listeners of many different podcasts for all of our brands. That's my job and I just love doing it.

It allows me to be creative and also I'm just so passionate about all the content that's created here by so many incredibly talented and passionate people. I just love to. Get their stuff out into the world. So that's my job and just what a joy it is to do

[00:04:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** You do a great job of it and recently kind of reconfigured your role to be even more strategic in that. And things are going well and living in the information age, we need people like you because it's hard to sometimes figure out how to get to the best information. And you know, you can create good stuff in a lot of different ways, but if you can't get it into the eyes and ears and hearts of people, then it really is not going to have the effect.

And today we want to talk about. Just how truth and accuracy relates to politics. That's obviously a big, big issue. We talk all the time around here about truth is just fundamental to Christianity. We know that the ninth of the 10 commandments the ninth commandment says, don't bear false witness.

That is don't lie. And the Bible just so often is reminding us that we are to think truth. We're to live the truth. We're to seek the truth. We're to speak the truth in love. It's kind of just in the DNA of what fundamental basic biblical Christianity is all about. And that's what we're trying to do.

We're trying to help people think biblically. We want to get our content to them so that they can be living truthful lives and and serving in truth give me a couple of your thoughts just why this is so foundational connor. Why is the truth? Fundamental to our understanding and our experience of freedom Of healthy relationships and just general flourishing because it's, it's not always that way.

I was reading and teaching recently from Micah Micah six, where a lot of conversations in politics today, today go with Christians. Micah six, eight is known to many Christians, but that conversation in Micah is actually set in a season where later on in that chapter, Micah says that, that lying has become a strategy rather than a sin.

To the people of that day. And that kind of parallels what we're experiencing some ways. But talk about just the fundamental importance of the truth, especially when it comes to politics.

[00:06:10] **Conner Jones:** Yes, so truth we live in a culture right now that particularly with younger generations Leans into post truth. What does that term mean? It means taking essentially whatever you believe and saying, this is, this is just true, you know, living by quote unquote, my truth. And that's something that we've seen really expand in the last probably decade or so.

I think 2016 is when it really took off, became like the word of the year. And so post truth has taken over. And we've seen a lot of people turn into these ideologies that they get behind and they think you know, this is what I believe, this is what's true for me, so this is just the reality of the situation.

This is what I'm going to say is my truth. They're not relying on any sort of absolute truth. Now, as Christians, we know that the Bible is absolute truth and this should dictate everything that we go about in our lives. This should dictate. A complete baseline for what we believe on many different topics on many different controversial topics, especially in politics This is something that we can always start to we can always say is there a scripture on that?

What does God have to say about this? I'd like to think about it in this way Imagine if America didn't have a constitution that was its baseline for the way it runs We would just be an anarchy, right? We would not have any sort of Rule of law. We would not have any sort of baseline for here's what we do in this situation Here's how the supreme court works.

Here's how the presidency and the legislative branch works all of that Think of it in that way if America had no baseline It would be anarchy. So when you go into a culture that has no baseline

It's it's a way of anarchy within truth. So You Leaning into the Bible, leaning into scripture is something that Christians need to do, especially when you start to get into controversial topics, which is very big in this season of politics.

It's going to be big in the rest of this election season. You're going to get a lot of information that's going to try to tell you how to think or what to do, but really the best thing we can do is turn back to scripture and look for absolute truth in the way that God intended for it to be.

[00:08:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, that that's a great call out. I think just as a first place to start is what does the Bible say about this either in the form of direct command or in the form of guiding principle? And, you know, there are some things like telling the truth and sharing the truth you know, very explicitly called out other things we have to be a bit more discerning in terms of principle when we read stories that are intended to be instructive and examples to us.

But even just like said in that passage with Micah realizing that we can, because of our sinfulness get to the point where we use lying and shading the truth and telling half truth. We can do all kinds of things like that as a way of advancing our agenda. And even if we're not doing that individually as Christians, or even as a group, There are going to be people around us who don't believe what we believe and they may They may believe that that's okay.

They may believe that that's an acceptable way to live and conduct themselves. And so to be aware of that, and that really relates to kind of this big area where you work and spend a lot of your time, which is the role of media of journalism. That's interesting to me that we don't hear the term journalism really talked about very much anymore.

It's been replaced by media. Talk about why, particularly in our form of government, in our approach to politics and the selection of our leaders obviously truth is foundational to that, but what should be the role of media and journalism as we try to go about the process of politics?

[00:10:06] **Conner Jones:** Right. So, you know, you bring up a good point on the people in the book of Micah and the way that they were strategic with line. That's obviously something that happens today happens very much. So in media and in social media deception is something that we can find on every corner of our screens. As we go down a timeline or a, for you page on Tik TOK or Twitter or Instagram anywhere, really Facebook, you're going to have to be discerning with that.

So. On top of that, thinking about journalism. Journalism has definitely changed over recent years and social media has completely changed the game of journalism. Journalists can now not just respond on a TV screen. It's not the days of Walter Cronkite anymore where the Americans would sit around their living room and watch him and just expect to hear the absolute facts of the day.

Now journalists can use social media and they do and they use it Very aggressively to push their own agendas not all journalists, there are many who are right, try to be middle of the line straight and narrow and just, you know, report the facts or report their story, their investigation, whatever it is, but journalists have found a way to build their own audiences.

And so when you get on social media and you're seeing a journalist, a lot of times they are reporting something and they're doing it to their specific audience because that allows them to continue to grow and build a big audience and make their name more known. And you know, that can be a way of deception.

There's also a lot of people on social media who are, I would say, quasi journalists. They don't really have any, you know, deep Background in journalism, but they've found a way to build an audience on social media. These are people that we got to be really careful about. These are large accounts that massive followings, they don't belong to any sort of organization.

They don't belong to a network or a big publisher or anything. They just report quote unquote report what they hear, what they find and what they want you to know. And they, like I said, they respond to their audience. They're truly trying to build up a rage And that's something we also have to be careful about not allowing rage to become our driver These people love to use rage to drive their audience and to drive conversation and to Get a viral tweet or a viral post or a viral tiktok They know that if they can get people angry and upset they're going to come out in droves and they're going to Continue to push their post continue to push their profile and You It's just a new way of journalism.

Now, the other thing that's interesting is we've seen a big rise in independent journalism. This is something. That's really grown. We've seen this with Substack has become a popular spot for journalists to no longer have to work for an editor or a publisher. They can kind of do their own thing, but still make money on Substack and allow people to fundraise for them.

And so that allows us to read their articles. And say, okay, I really like what this person's reporting. I like the way that they go about it. They are clearly well sourced, whatever they're reporting on. I want to know more of, because I trust this journalist because they're not belonging to some network or newspaper or magazine.

They are their own reporter. That's great. So media is ever changing. It's constantly evolving and it's evolving with the rapidly Evolving social media landscape. And so we've got to be careful to focus, like I said, in the first question you asked Mark on truth. And so there's lots of different places we can do that when maybe we can get into that later, some, some different locations where people can go for really good fact based reporting.

But yeah, I, there's a big, just change happening in media as, as linear television kind of declines in the rise of digital. News publishers rises and that means more people are in it than ever

[00:14:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, absolutely. And kind of, you know, we've, we've come up with in the last decade or so all kinds of new terminology that we're trying to understand. Like, like one thing I wanted to call out is we hear terms like fake news. Now we're hearing terms like disinformation and misinformation kind of are, are those all the same?

Or are there distinctions, but even between those three terms of fake news, disinformation, misinformation is it just people using different terminology to talk about the same thing? Or is there a distinction,

[00:14:41] **Conner Jones:** That's yeah, so essentially, they're pretty much the Same if you if you were to go on to social media and find something that just is like clearly not real You could say that's fake news or disinformation or misinformation um You know fake news that that term really came out of nowhere when donald trump started using it in the 2016 Era when he first became president.

It was like this is fake news then that kind of just picked up but misinformation disinformation are terms that have been around for a long time And they're really highlighting those pieces of news or reporting or content that it's just so clearly not evidence based And this is something that we see quite a bit on social media today as people want to just push their agenda So they will say whatever they want to say and that's what I was talking about a minute ago That's the kind of stuff that Gets people invigorated.

They become mad. They like, I want to end this. They're not actually ending anything or moving anything forward when it's not even a reality. So we have to be careful to watch for misinformation. You know, we've seen this recently with the Donald Trump assassination attempt immediately, and not even an hour following that, all kinds of theories started being tossed around.

Names of. Potential suspects as the shooter were being tossed around and there was a man in Italy. He is a soccer commentator whose name was being tossed around and his picture was being thrown all around social media as the person who was responsible for the assassination attempt. He woke up in Italy the next morning to a million texts and messages Claiming he had been this, you know, this horrible shooter and it wasn't him.

So things like that spread really fast, really rapidly. There's no evidence for it. And we have to be cautious to make sure that we're, you know, vetting what we're reading, vetting what we're seeing. You know, on a lighter note, you got things like I saw yesterday, there was a phone call or a big zoom call for men to hop onto a zoom to support Kamala Harris.

And there were celebrities on there and it was a big deal. Right after that happened, it came out that Joe Burrow, quarterback of the Cincinnati Bengals was on there and had endorsed Kamala Harris. And people all over social media were like, I'm sorry, he did what, you know, because people don't want their, their athletes to be involved in politics.

The team had to come out the next day and say, Hey, this didn't happen. He was not on that call. He did not endorse Kamala Harris. You know, that's, that's not true at all. That was complete misinformation. And so, you know, people that, that one's a light. Light situation. And there's nothing super heavy about that, but it is just an example of how information can immediately spread even though there's no truth to it There

[00:17:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and it's just incredible, the power that we've discovered in the internet. Connor, there used to be in, in the previous days of the big three or the media companies, NBC, ABC, Fox, those guys, there used to be an accountability that was built in. They held each other accountable. I can think of stories even where a reporter.

Or an agency got something wrong and one of the other big networks called them out. Sometimes people even lost their jobs over some of these things. There's several different stories I can remember over the last 20, 30 years, at least. And so there was kind of this built in accountability for accuracy and for truth.

And I'm sure they didn't get it perfectly right. But they did, it did serve that purpose. Do you see anything like that emerging in this world of independent media and where any person, regardless of their training, their skills their access, you know, we, we generally know, like in the case of politics, that, You have to have a certain kind of credential to get into the media room in the White House for a briefing or to get a credential to go up on Capitol Hill and to talk to politicians.

There at least used to be, and I'm sure there still is, some kind of filter criteria that you have to meet. But is there anything like accountability that happens in the world of mass media and the way journalism works today, or is there something like that coming that you can see?

[00:19:07] **Conner Jones:** is it's different than what you were talking about the four major networks they don't necessarily Hold each other accountable the same way that they used to I think one of the reasons for that is because it's become so Partisan if you watch one network, you are definitely Getting a certain agenda approach to you.

So then the other network, rather, they're going to hold them accountable, but they have totally different audiences. So if Fox news is calling out CNN or CNN is calling out Fox news for something that was reported wrong, it's not really an accountability the way that it used to be with those four networks.

So now with news really hinging on social media and internet and these independent reporters, I think it looks different and here's how I think it looks now, I think one is. It requires just due diligence on the part of the readership or the listenership or viewership the audience essentially.

It's our responsibility to make sure that these that these networks or publishers are reporting accurate truth. They are reporting accurate facts. And if we discover that they're not it's on us to call it out. What do I mean that by that? I mean, for instance, on Twitter or X. There is a function called community notes where people essentially can call things out and it can get voted up.

So for instance, last week, there was a very big community note that happened on Twitter. It was with the communications director of the United States secret service. This is after the assassination attempt on Donald Trump. And he had tweeted out the day afterwards that the secret service had not denied any requests for additional resources at the Butler Pennsylvania Railroad. a few days later, it was re, you know, they, they came back and they're like actually maybe we did deny it some resources and they made a, you know, they made a statement about it. So then on community notes on X, people went back and they said, Hey, just so you know that this original tweet that said that they had not denied any resources is no longer accurate.

It is. It's been completely redacted, retracted, and here's a link to the actual statement. Now, same thing with reporters. When people go on to Twitter, they can see something that's been reported and you can see if there's a community note saying, Hey, this is not true. This is not what this person said, or this is not what was reported.

These are not the actual statistics. This was really big deal during COVID when people were trying to report all kinds of stuff. So, There was all kinds of misinformation being thrown out for many different facets of the pandemic. So then X started to introduce this. It allows people to have a voice, but I also think this goes into if you're reading journalism and you're like, this is just, this is not good reporting.

This is not good journalism. Then unsubscribe or, you know, stop paying them. Or if it's on Substack, it's an independent journalist. Yeah. Don't, don't read their stuff anymore. Don't. It's don't pay for their Patreon, whatever it is that they do to make income or read or grow their audience. If you can't trust it, don't read it.

Don't watch it. Don't listen to it. That's the only way they're ever going to be held accountable. So if someone's continuing to grow an audience, they're going to just keep saying what they want to say, because that's the way they're growing their audience. So I do think it's up to us as consumers of media to To call it out.

And I think this did happen in a way with media accountability on each other recently as we watched president Joe Biden in the weeks after his debate performance, you know, he was kind

of standing up against the media and he was saying, I'm totally fine and all of that, which, you know, that's up for, you know, discussion, but media members started calling each other out because they were like, where were the journalists in the white house that are supposed to be telling us how the president is.

Going about his days how he's functioning They actually did hold each other accountable in a way and a lot of them took responsibility that you know what we fell short We should have been reporting on this better That's a great example of media on media accountability, but I would say that it's extremely rare in today's environment but yeah mark mark.

Have you seen any of that recently accountability or how did you go about it?

[00:23:17] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I think you're, we're seeing it evolve in a much more kind of chaotic way. I think you're right. But I, I, there has to be a, consistency and a repetitiveness of the accountability, you know, as, as we're talking about this, I'm thinking about you know, how how people feel like there's any accuracy relative to this big, the big conversation that we've had over the last number of years of was the 2020 election stolen or not stolen.

Right. And depending upon what side of the political aisle you're on, you have a, a view of that. But there's just been constant review of that whole story. To where I would say it, it appears that most people, I don't think all people, but most people in America. would say that Joe Biden did not steal the 2020 election, but that's been because there's been ongoing investigation by people from various sides and ongoing reporting about this to where people were saying, no, that fact is not accurate.

That fact is not true. the way it was actually actually played out. And we have one of the other things I wanted to get to in our conversation is, is just the role of, of what we have in media now, which is fact checkers. And that, that's something I'd love for you to comment on is, is can you, you know, can you trust the fact checkers in the things that they're doing or, or do they, are we, are we going to now move, you know, we've moved to the place where At least most of the major news outlets that we have grown in our country are now labeled as coming from a particular ideology or side of the political spectrum is the next thing we're going to have that applied to the fact checkers.

They have their own bias or ideology as well, or, or are we seeing that they are generally more trusted? For their accuracy. And it feels like maybe that's becoming the game, but I, I, I hear people, I could, I could see somebody listening to our conversation right now. Connor going, Oh, so now I have to not only listen to the news, but I have to go.

I have to go find a fact checker that I trust to make sure that what I heard was really what happened. Is that kind of where we're going?

[00:25:39] **Conner Jones:** You know, it could be fact checking is an interesting concept in today's media environment, but we definitely have to be diligent in understanding how to interpret different reports or different stories or different statements and fact checking should be a helpful tool. I would say that it does not always come across as helpful because you're exactly right.

Everyone has an inherent bias that includes the fact checkers. They should be telling us exactly how it is or what was. A lot of times I think with fact checking it comes to, you know, in a speech that a candidate is making or in a debate they claim the other person said this. Then they come back and fact checkers are like, Nah, that person never said this or it's being completely misinterpreted or taken out of context.

You know, we should be able to rely on fact checkers but I just think we have to be cognizant of the fact that they do have an inherent bias. So how do we go about that? We either can check on multiple spots of fact checking but it's like you said it's just more work. You're like I just want to know the truth. Do I really have to go through and do all my own investigation here?

You can go that route or you can rely on several websites. I know that there is ground.news. That is a great spot that tries to call out inherent bias within stories. There's another one. Let me see here. It's called Allsides.com. This is a great website. This is a place that it really points out which way different stories are leaning.

This one here's how msnbc is reporting it. Here's how the daily wire is reporting. Those are completely different spectrums different ends of the spectrum on a political stance. And so they're going to report the same story totally different. So that might help you find the middle ground as you're looking for actual facts.

I think I think taking in content from both sides of the spectrum is going to be the way that you can do your own fact checking. Without having to rely on someone else come up with your own, you know conclusion to how something is being reported is it? Being reported this way on the right and this way on the left there's probably a middle ground somewhere and somewhere there's also the more likely evidence based true.

[00:27:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And that's what I love about all sides. All sides doesn't report the news. They just give you articles from different news sites about the same topic. And you can decide. Which ones you're going to read, which ones you're going to listen to. And, and then you can form your own opinion, your own interpretation, because that's part of the challenge in the world that we're living in with so many voices in the conversation.

It's hard to know, it's hard to know when we've gone from simply strictly reporting to opinion and to interpretation. And that's where sources like all sides can be kind of helpful to you.

Connor, I wanted to get you to come in on a couple of things as well. You know, we live in a country where we have this kind of chaotic kind of wild west experience of media and journalism reporting and opinion.

But we know that there are other countries in the world that, that have a state controlled media. That's the way it is in Russia. That's the way it is in China. That's the way it is in many, many Middle Eastern Muslim dominated cultures. And, and we have this kind of just wild west open.

Anybody can get into the conversation that has a computer and an internet connection. So. I wonder if you could comment on why having a free press, a free media is important to the operation of our country, the way we understand it. What. Why is it a good thing that we have a free press journalism opportunity in our country?

[00:29:29] **Conner Jones:** It's honestly one of the greatest rights that we have and that we can get free press. I think it's one of the most unique pieces of our constitution because when you think about it, the founding fathers realized the importance of a free press, and they also realized that they would be the ones being reported on.

They knew that it was crucial that they were held accountable. And how do you do that? You do it by one responding to the people through a democracy and the way that they vote, but you also have a press that's reporting on abuses of power or reporting on things that are just not being done correctly.

Or whatever the con, you know, whatever the content is, you could be reporting on sports and you want to hear what's going on. You want the behind the scenes things, Hey, this person's saying this and that and whatnot. It doesn't matter. Free press is awesome. It's a way to hold. You know, our government or our people in power accountable.

And that's something that's like you said, in Russia, China, North Korea, Cuba, that is not existent. And that's a very sad thing because the people there are being told one thing that is just not the truth. They're being fed a very specific narrative. It's propaganda. They're being fed propaganda every day.

You know, if you're in Russia and you are, you're, you're trying to learn what's going on in the war against Ukraine and Russia you're only being told one side of the story. You're being told why you should be invading Ukraine, why you should be anti Ukrainian and why you should go enlist in the military to fight on soil that's not even in your country.

They're being sold one side of the story. Same thing in China. In fact, I've, I've, I've, I've read that in some of these countries, while the Olympics are going on right now, they're only getting

to watch the successful tournaments for their country. So they're only seeing their nation, they're only seeing their nation win.

That's not surprising. If you're in North Korea, yeah, it's a dictatorship. They only want their people to believe that they win, right? They only want their people to believe that they're successful. They don't want you to see that the United States is winning, right? Tons of golds or that Italy is or Great Britain or France.

They don't want you to see the beauty of a democracy with a free press and what it looks like to, to be able to see how our athletes are competing in the Olympics or how our government is operating. Those are closed off societies where the people really don't understand the government and they hold elections technically in some of them even in Venezuela this week, there was an election.

That was completely upended by the dictator there, Maduro. And the people don't have an open internet system right now. The country has shut down their internet so that they can't communicate. And it's them trying to prevent them from being able to essentially protest and potentially host a revolution within their own country.

If the people can't communicate with each other, they're not going to be able to organize. And. That is something that we probably take for granted here in America and in Western society because you're right. It is the Wild West and on social media or on the internet. And even on TV sometimes just some of the people that you see in a panel or whatnot. You're just whoa.

I can't believe this is happening right now. Yeah, it's the Wild West but it's far far better. Any sort of free speech or free press where we can report on everything happening in Washington, DC, or on Wall Street or in Hollywood, or on your favorite sports team, whatever it is, that free press allows us to understand how our country is operating and to express our ideas.

And it's a beautiful right. And we're just so blessed in this nation to have that right. And to be able to report on people in power or organizations, whatever it is.

[00:33:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think, I think that's just a good reminder for us because we do, I think all get frustrated. We get frustrated not only with the volume of information that's coming at us, we get frustrated at like I said, so much of it becomes simply opinion rather than just telling us, hey, these are the things that happened today, whether it's in politics, sports, the weather, whether it, it, it. We, we're so inundated and so much of it is now dominated by opinion and interpretation rather than simply telling us what happened.

But it's so important for us to realize that even though it can be exhausting to us at times, and there needs to be an ongoing process by which those who are not telling the truth and not telling

it clearly, Need to get filtered out. I think that's a process that will continue. You know, bottom line is the internet and social media as a means by delivering information is still relatively new.

And as a new way of doing information and doing news and doing opinion, we're going to get better at this, or at least I hope we get better at this. But it is still, as you said, so much better than being in an environment, being in a country. Where the government who is exercising power is also controlling what you know about the exercise of that power.

And that's why, you know, fundamentally there is a tension between journalism and politics because politics is, as Dr. Dennison said in the earlier podcast, is the organization of power for the execution and implementation of community that hopefully benefits everybody. And in a big country with as much of a land space as we have as a population of 330 million, how do you hold officials at the local, regional and national level?

How do you hold them accountable? Journalism is intended to do a lot of that. And that's why journalism and reporting and media needs to be accurate. It needs to be truthful as much as it can, knowing that we always have some kind of a bias out of our own lives and our own perspective. But that kind of leads me to another thought that I wanted to pick up with you.

You mentioned in the aftermath of the assassination attempt just how quickly Conspiracy conspiracy theory started to fill the internet on both sides. That there were these crazy stories, even within an hour that. You know, the secret service had done this as an inside job. There was the idea that this was staged by Donald Trump's campaign to kind of make him out to be a martyr type figure, which is just beyond imagination.

And all other, like you said, I love the, the crazy story about the soccer coach from Italy. Conor, as you kind of work in this space, as you consume a lot of information and news on your own, have you kind of been able to discern? Okay. This has the mark of a conspiracy theory that's probably not based in fact.

How do we spot that so that we don't get caught up in some of these crazy stories, like for instance, one of those things is, you know, 10 minutes after an event of such magnitude, like an assassination attempt, somebody is going to get on the internet and start explaining it. One of the characteristics may be of conspiracy theories is they come really fast.

They're generated really quick Are there other indicators that we should be looking for?

[00:36:48] **Conner Jones:** Yes, you're exactly right. It is typically a really fast response. If something just happened and there's already theories being thrown out and what, what makes it hard is these people throw out theories, but they make it seem like fact the way that they phrase things, the way that they word it will make you feel like, okay, they know something.

They've got inside sources. They've got inside information. You gotta be really careful with that. It's kind of like I was saying earlier, there are so many So many of what I would call influencers as opposed to reporters on social media that claim to have inside information, claim to have inside sources, claim to understand a situation better than the actual media, and they will just say things as though it's matter of fact.

And because they are first or because it's so extravagant or because people truly believe that they've got this inherent knowledge of what's going on. That theory will start to spread. So it's on us to say, okay, this event just happened. And I like your example of the assassination attempt, because this is a very big recent one where let's say in another event like that happens down the road, if you are within, I would say not even just 10 minutes within an hour or two hours, essentially anything before an official statement comes out from investigators or the government or local law enforcement.

If you were starting to see things being tossed around social media that are just acting like they know what happened, you should automatically red flag that. You should know that there's a very good chance that that is not accurate. Now, could it be accurate? Potentially, but you need to wait for official confirmation.

This is the case with anything. This, this has happened in wars. Where we, we just, you know, especially right now in Israel and Gaza, we see something that happened. Let's talk about for instance, that what they claimed was a bombing on a hospital that Israel did in Gaza. I quickly went around and this actually ended up involving several large media accounts as well and, and establishment media that claimed what happened was the, that Israel airstruck a hospital and killed several people.

I want to say somewhere over 500 people that ended up being completely inaccurate But that started spreading really fast because there was some footage some videos and people just believed it Instead went around social media very fast it was kind of almost 24 hours later that all these different people and different organizations had to retract that and say, okay Actually, it hit the parking lot next door and did not kill nearly as many people That's misinformation, like we were talking about earlier, and that's exactly what happens after a large event.

People want to start getting their agenda out, and so they, they will just say anything. So we need to watch out for that. It also just plays into, it's not always immediately after an event. Sometimes it happens far after. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, conspiracy theories didn't start flying around immediately.

That's just the way it is. It took several years for them to really start to pick up steam. When the Warren Commission came out, people were like, Whoa, what's going on? This doesn't really seem to answer everything that we think might have happened here. Then conspiracies started to

come about. It's a very popular thing because what it does is, conspiracies solidify what you want to believe.

What you think is happening. On a lighter note in a way that we can see this as UFOs, right? If there's all this evidence or these little pieces of things saying UFOs Might exist and this has happened in recent years and you are one who Honestly, I fall into this category. Sometimes I want to believe that UFOs exist because I think it'd be so cool then that that's an inherent bias on anytime.

I see a story. It's like, oh you know what? I think that they do exist but I have to approach a UFO story with That middle of the line road, like, okay, what's, what happened here? What are we seeing in this footage or whatnot? Same thing with news, same thing with any big story. Same thing with all the election news that we're going to be taking in over the next few months, both sides are going to do anything they can to push their agenda.

And that means conspiracies are going to be involved and you're going to see, you're going to see posts from like, unverified, essentially journalists. They just don't have any credentials. They don't have any reason to have a following other than they have figured out a way to spur rage. And so they're the ones that are going to be pushing conspiracies and it's just going to spread like wildfire.

So that is where fact checking comes in, but it's also where our own due diligence comes in waiting for official statements. Let's not let them accuse people of an assassination attempt within an hour. Let's wait. Slow down. Everybody wants to get information out first. That means false stuff gets out.

It's just part of it. But if you just exercise patience, if you just exercise due diligence, you should be able to find and flag anything that doesn't seem legitimate.

[00:41:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. Yeah, and love what you mentioned just a moment ago about rage. It seems like one of the characteristics of most conspiracy theories is it's intended to generate A response in you of both fear and anger, and there is a connection between those things. Anger is usually the outward manifestation of fear.

When we're afraid we either try to fight or we flee or some other, but those are typically the two biggest responses and most conspiracy theories are trying to motivate us. To believe something and then to do something based on fear that is driving us then toward the emotion of anger or the emotion and action of withdrawal.

And so it's not generating it's not speaking to our better angels. You might say it's usually speaking to the, the worst things about us. And that can be another thing to watch for in

conspiracy theories. And is this Is this person simply trying to advance their own popularity and to gain their own, to build their own following.

Right. But that kind of goes also into I guess what I would call a related topic, Connor, which is the comp, the, the conversation around censorship. The fact that we live in a free country and we have a free press and we have freedom of speech, All of that we celebrate, even though it's really messy at times, but now we're having big conversations, particularly about big technology providers and platforms.

And because these are privately owned their ability to sensor out things that they, as. A board of directors or as an organization may not want or may not like give me some of your thoughts around this topic because it's been in previous elections. It's likely to come up in this season that we're in now of.

You just didn't want to hear what this person was saying because you don't like this person or you don't like their position. And so how are we, what are some good ways for us as Christians to think about when it comes to the practice of censorship in this wild west that we're living in?

[00:44:13] **Conner Jones:** Censorship, it takes form in many different ways, especially online with the big tech companies that you're talking about. It's You know, they do have this amazing amount of power to form the way that we communicate. And so I think when you Okay, let's look at an example this week Google Google has insane power because they just control so much of what we find on the internet They control so much of when we're looking for something They're the ones putting up front what we're going to see first.

So right now it's going around that there is This kind of like hold back on good news on one of the candidates for the presidency. If you type in this candidate's name, they don't get any good press at the top of the Google account or the Google search. So if you were to go in and type the name in or type in something about this candidate, You're gonna just see negative news.

That is what many are calling a form of censorship. They're saying They're censoring any good news. They're censoring anything that could potentially help this candidate there. It is Google's way of harming this candidate That's very possible. I can't I can't speak fully to that. I'm obviously not in the meeting rooms at Google I don't know what's causing their algorithms do that or they've you know, tip the scales some way You So I think the best way to approach it is the way that actually Elon Musk has done so on x recently he's really opened up the the walls on x to allow for essentially free speech censorship is He is very anti censorship And so him and his team are working hard to make sure that it's a platform that is open to all ideas All you know If you do want to post conspiracy theory there You can't or if you do want to say that I really dislike this Candidate you can but the theory there is It's like a town hall if you hit up and stand in a town hall In the city council meeting you say something crazy.

Everybody's gonna say. Yeah, that's not true. That's crazy Please leave, you know, you're gonna be called out for it and there's gonna be A punishment and in some ways it goes too far. That's where we get into cancel culture and all of that but the idea is free speech and allows ideas to get out, allows us to move forward in our democracy and election season.

And censorship, you know, it's interesting because for us specifically as a Christian organization, we have to navigate this. We have to navigate working around big tech companies not really liking faith based material being Put on their platforms and especially in my role as I'm trying to do advertising and put dollars behind some of our stuff We get rejected like often and so we have to be very creative and pivot all the time when we have a rejected post or ad because the big tech company says this isn't okay like You we don't really want you talking about jesus We don't really want you providing the christian perspective on this material or on this story You So it is a very real thing and as Christians It's up to us to you know Think through how do we get our word out there the internet has so much Potential and we've seen it.

I mean we've seen all the potential that the internet has to reach many many people Our own content here at denison forum reaches many people Because the internet can get it to them and it's across the world So there's a beautiful aspect to it and christians have the opportunity to share their gospel through the internet We have the opportunity to do Bible translations and to share truth and hope and encouragement.

And you know, big tech will probably crack down on it. That's just part of it. So it's up to us to find new ways and navigate it and pivot and be creative. How do we go about this in a new way that, you know, Gets in the hands of people still without being shut down, without being censored. And with the election, yeah, censorship, unfortunately, it's the reality.

It just is with news organizations and with big tech, they're the ones that control the narrative now. And so we have to just be understanding of that. Not saying we should agree with it, not saying we should support that, but we have to realize that is the reality, at least right now, hopefully that changes over time and free speech becomes more, more of a thing on these big tech platforms, but we do have to be careful with it.

[00:48:30] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think it's good to remember that we've always battled censorship. Even when we have had fewer news agencies and organizations, you know, there were always people sitting in rooms that were editors that were deciding what was going to be published, whether it was going to be on the front page or on the fifth page.

Or those kinds of decisions. And there were conversations then when media worked mostly in that way about, you know, this newspaper or that newspaper, you know, advocating for people in policies that they liked and kind of de platforming is the term we would use now. So it's always been there. It's always been a part of the challenge.

Being in a free speech environment, but we should all remember and recognize that those that have created and continue to facilitate the internet, they have that same kind of temptation and bias. And most of us don't understand, you know, how do you create an algorithm and how could you create an algorithm that would.

You know, you put a person's name in and it brings you mostly, if not exclusively bad news, if any news about that person kind of blows some of our minds. If we're not computer people that you can create a computer program, an algorithm to make that happen. But we should we, we should remind ourselves that those that create and facilitate and operate the internet are not.

Setting before us a completely neutral environment where free speech flows fully. It, we would like for that, that ought to always be our goal. And there are conversations in play today about how. We should understand and how we should, how we should hold big tech accountable for these kinds of issues as well.

So that's part of what's coming in part of what we still have to work out. Because we, we want to be a free people and we always have to fight this tendency and this bias. Connor, we just have a few more minutes to talk to maybe a couple more things. Talk a moment about how artificial intelligence is starting to have an impact in this.

We could obviously talk for hours and there's a whole lot more coming in the area of artificial intelligence, how it plays into politics, how it plays into the reporting of politics. Even what we're just talking about in some ways has ties to AI, but what are some of the initial thoughts that you have that we need to remember about the, the aspect of artificial intelligence and where it's coming from and how we need to think about it

[00:51:10] **Conner Jones:** Yeah, this is kind of interesting because this is really the first election cycle where artificial intelligence is going to play a role. I think even back to the midterms in 2022. It was, I mean, kind of in its infancy in terms of how much the public understood artificial intelligence. If you said in November of 22, what is chat GPT?

Most people would have had no idea. And now chat GPT and AI is all it's all part of almost daily life for a lot of people. If you do a Google search right now, you get an AI overview. It's kind of summarizing everything that's on that page on that first page. And it's like, Whoa, this is a powerful tool.

But what that also means is it can be. You know, in a way gamified to present to you an ideology or a bias. So if you're using AI or reading something produced by ai, recognize that. Recognize that you need to not fully trust it. We can't, it's not to that point yet where we can say, okay, everything that's AI is saying is accurate and true.

I imagine one day at least some AI algorithm or builder will get to that point and we can trust it. In fact, it could be used as a fact checker in the future. AI is probably going to be better than that if there's not an inherent bias in its algorithm. We can say, Hey AI, fact check this for me. When a political candidate says something, is this true or is this not true?

And then AI should be able to just present to you the actual facts. Yeah, this is true or no, this isn't true. And here's why. Yeah. I'm hopeful that we can get to that point. We're not at that point yet in this election season. But AI is also, you know, a tool currently being used, not necessarily by campaigns in a bad way, but it is being used by people as we've been talking about this whole time with an agenda.

And so you're already seeing images or videos coming out and swirling around the internet that sound real, sound like a candidate is saying something. And it's absolutely not real. That's just one example of something that's, that's happening. So we, we need to be very careful. We need to understand AI as a tool that can be used for so much good.

There's so much potential here, but it also is always going to have bad actors. There's always going to be people who are going to use AI to push whatever they want it to push. They're going to use it for criminal intentions at some point. I don't think we've had any major stories yet of AI being used for a criminal aspect, but it's just the reality of it.

We're in a fallen world. And so, and there's always going to be bad apples and that's really unfortunate. But at the same time, there's going to be so much potential. And if you want, I would honestly suggest checking out chat GPT or the Google AI functions or Microsoft co pilot. Anything like that, that can help you discern things, I would say, you know, Hey, Chat GPT, here's five articles on the same topic from, you know, different publishers summarize them for me.

And maybe that will give you kind of a middle ground of how to understand a story or a topic, say, Hey, this article's headline is this, and this article's headline is that. What's the actual middle ground here? What are they, what are both of these long articles saying that I need to understand and come away with.

So you, you can use that in the selection cycle to help you, you know, rapidly discern something. If you're, there's so many topics to try to understand in the selection cycle, so many different ideologies use AI to help you out. That's one of the great functions of it.

[00:54:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and like any new innovation can be used for good or for evil. And. We'll, we'll need to learn how to do that as well. And how to integrate that into not only our political conversations, but most of the other areas of our lives as well. Conor, as we get ready to

wrap up really helpful conversation, I think, but as we get ready to wrap up, like I said, you swim in this space all the time in the work that you do at Denison Ministries.

Going into this season toward the election and the involvement of media, technology, AI, those kinds of things. Do you have kind of like a singular major concern? Do you have something that gives you a lot of hope in this space that maybe would be a good final word for us to think about? No.

[00:55:28] **Conner Jones:** Yes. I think both. I think my major concern is there is tons of Misinformation being tossed about by different people with large followings. But my hope lies in the fact that the majority of people are not actually following those, those large accounts. Right. So, I think most Americans have the ability to really understand and discern.

News in a great and fashionable way. And particularly Christians, I think really have the ability to understand how to apply scripture. And that gives me a ton of hope because there's so much There's so much destruction out there on the internet that it's kind of a dark place in a lot of ways. It's a great tool to use to spread good information, but it's a really dark place.

And so I think when people realize that if you take a step back from social media or the internet, It's actually kind of enlightening. You ever have one of those days where you just set your phone down and at the end of the day, like, Oh, I wasn't really on my phone that much. It's kind of nice. I think same thing with social media.

And my thinking mark is that more people than not feel that way about social media. And I think it's a very, very loud vacuum, but it's not actually as impactful as people think in terms of spreading ideologies or trying to get someone to vote for you. You know if you if you just sit on social media all day and you're just seeing the same things over and over and over yeah, that's gonna that's gonna feed your decision making it's gonna feed your thinking But when you take a step back and you start to actually have real conversations or talk to people or go outside Whatever it is.

You're like, ah This is this is the reality everything on my phone is not necessarily always I'm just, you're just being fed one thing after another, but yeah, and that's where, you know, you can get into a whole conversation about echo chambers and all of that. I could go down a whole spiral, but I know we're going to wrap up.

So I'll, I'll stay out of that. I would just say, yeah, there's a lot of hope. We, we've got one, our hope in Jesus and two, you know, just a hope. And I think humanity is better than a lot of people make it out to be on social media.

[00:57:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, we've got kind of come back around to that truth of, you know, all things in moderation and that applies to your internet usage and to media, to political consumption.

[00:57:42] **Conner Jones:** Mm hmm.

[00:57:43] **Dr. Mark Turman:** the new term I'm running into more frequently these days is doom scrolling. And you can find yourself getting wrapped up in that.

And what happens is, is you end up finding your joy. drained out of you pretty quickly. If that's where you live, it's, it's a great tool, provides us a lot of benefits and a lot of information that's helpful to us. But all things in moderation, especially as we discern our way through this political season and toward our next election.

And we're grateful to live in a place where we have the opportunity to To learn about our candidates and to, as we said, hold them accountable. We would encourage you to continue to discern politics differently. And that would include not only sharing this podcast with others and finding ways to have healthy loving conversations with one another.

We would encourage you to vary your newsfeed and don't just listen to one or two voices, but listen to and curate three or four or five different voices so that you're getting a very holistic picture as much as you can of what's going on in the world And how you need to be praying and involved in those conversations.

Connor, thank you. And want to thank our audience for listening to us. If this has been helpful and equipping to you, please rate, review us on your podcast platform. As we always say, share this with others, your family and friends. And we hope that all of this will strengthen you in this season. We're grateful for your prayers and for your financial support.

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