

How to be salt & light for Christ as outsiders in America

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

Mark Turman (00:02.715)

Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum. We're glad to have you along with us as we seek to equip believers to think biblically, to live holy and to serve intentionally, to just extend the kingdom of God in every good way in this time and place. This is a part of our special politics discern differently podcast series. And you can find this podcast on all of your favorite podcast platforms. You can also find more resources about politics and civility and navigating this unusual and many ways historic season that we're in. You can find that on the Denison Forum website, which is denisonforum.org/election. Not only are there podcasts, but there are articles and other supporting material, not only from us, but also from some of our friends and partners.

You can find all of that at denisonforum.org/election. I was thinking about what to call this. We want to talk about what it means to be salt and light for Christ in these uncivil times to navigate this political season. What does it mean to be a cultural missionary as compared to a cultural warrior? I even thought about calling this echoes extremism and enthusiasm for politics. We don't know exactly what we'll call it in the end, but joining me today are a couple of friends of Denison Forum. Carmen LaBerge is a radio host, but she's also an author and speaker. you can find her at times on mornings with Carmen as a part of the faith radio network. She also can be found at her own website, which is [Carmen LaBerge.com](https://CarmenLaBerge.com). I get the privilege of talking with her on a regular basis through her radio show and is, really an incredible opportunity.

I love the way she puts together both, things like politics as well as foreign affairs, affairs of the heart, politics, and parenting. We cover all kinds of ground. talked about astronauts, even today. but Carmen lives just outside of Nashville. She is a graduate, with a business degree from the university of Florida, as well as a master of divinity from Princeton theological seminary.

Mark Turman (02:22.287)

And I love the way her bio reads. she resides just outside of Nashville with her husband, Jim, and they raise kids, cows, chickens, and cultivate fruit trees, laughter, and a very good life. So we're glad to have her as part of the conversation. Also joining us as a returning guest, Patrick Miller,

who is a pastor, cultural commentator who writes about politics, culture, technology. He has articles that have been written and published by Christianity Today, Newsweek, The Gospel Coalition, and other public aid publications as well. You may have come into contact with his very popular podcast called truth over tribe, which is Apple, one of Apple's top news commentary podcasts. there he will interview Christian thinkers, writers, and authors. He and Carmen have done some work together, so they're familiar with each other and we'll have fun in this conversation. Patrick also wrote or co -wrote the book Truth over Tribe, pledging allegiance to the lamb and not the donkey or the elephant.

He's also about to publish a book called Joyful Outsiders that is in pre -sales right now, but will come available in January. Patrick has a master of divinity from covenant theological seminary. He also pastors a church called the crossing and he and his wife, Emily have two children. So Patrick Carmen, welcome to the denison forum, discerning politics differently podcast. We're glad to have you with us.

Carmen LaBerge (03:48.099)

Thanks, Mark.

Patrick Miller (03:49.506)

Yeah, it's fantastic to be here.

Mark Turman (03:51.707)

Well, we're looking forward to the conversation and just for our listeners benefit, we have an idea of where we're going, with this conversation, but we hope that you'll have a feeling that you just bumped into us at the coffee shop and heard what we were talking about and you want to eavesdrop in some more. And so we hope that this will encourage you, bring you clarity and help you to be the follower of Christ and the ambassador of Christ in this season. And so.

We're going to cover who knows what kind of ground, but Carmen, let me just talk a little bit with you for a moment to get us started. This term echo chamber is one of those, terms that terms that have just been seemingly invented out of nowhere over the last few years. can you kind of give me your working definition of an echo chamber and why it is important for us to try to check ourselves to see if we actually are living in one.

and that it may be adversely affecting the way we see the world and particularly the world of politics.

Carmen LaBerge (04:54.563)

Sure, I think it's a good starting point for the conversation. So we've all been in an echo chamber, whether we know it or not. We move actually between different echo chambers, depending on

how diverse our day or our week or our month or our year happened to be. So I was recently invited to join some women who they get together every single week. They've been getting together every single week for longer than they can, any of them can remember.

They are all more mature in terms of age than I am. And they were surprised to discover that I didn't agree with automatically with everything that was said with every viewpoint that they offered. Like they were stunned. They didn't even think anybody like that existed. And I said, now I'm curious to know like, why do you think anybody would just instantly agree with everything that you said? And they literally.

Their system is so closed, they are the only ones sort of feeding back into the same loop. They are a closed echo chamber. And so the only time that we are ever exposed to any ideas other than our own is when we widen that circle, when we allow other voices to be heard. And so any of us who want to be heard in a conversation,

we're always kind of like intruding into whatever the echo chamber is. So you can get trapped in an echo chamber pretty easily if you have a very closed system of friends or a closed group of people or influences, if you only listen to one media outlet, if you're, so in any way that you have closed or walled yourself off,

then you have created an echo chamber of one sort or another. It's particularly dangerous when we start talking about politics because we need to be a people who are able to talk with folks who come from a lot of different perspectives and together, we the people then can make decisions about a way forward in life.

Patrick Miller (07:05.187)

Yeah.

Mark Turman (07:05.577)

Absolutely, yeah. Thanks for that, Carmen. Patrick, I know you've written about this in part through your book, Truth Over Tribe, but there'd be some other indicators that you're living in an echo chamber, you may not even be aware of it.

Patrick Miller (07:19.66)

Yeah, you know, first of all, I'd say we need to give ourselves some grace because this is a historically recent phenomenon and it has a lot of different causes. One is what Bill Bishop has called the big sort. And this is something that happened starting in the 2000s where Americans began to move, geographically move to locations where most people shared their politics. All the way back in the 1980s, the majority of Americans did not live in what are called landslide counties. These are counties where one politician wins

the election by 20 % or more. So it goes in a landslide for one side. Majority of Americans didn't live there, which meant that they had cross-cutting relationships. So I couldn't talk about those evil Democrats or those evil Republicans because one of them lived next door to me and it turns out he's not a bad guy or she's not a bad gal. And today the majority of Americans now live in landslide counties. We have geographically sorted ourselves.

by our politics, which is how you end up with a group of women who maybe have not encountered someone in recent history who do not agree with them. But the other thing that's happened is our social media algorithms. They are designed to recommend to us content that we want to click, that we want to engage with. And it turns out the stuff that we most like to engage with are things that agree with us or things that offend us. And so again,

We are online in a world where everybody's on our team and everybody agrees with the things that we agree with and they disagree with the things that we disagree with. We're geographically around people who agree with us. And so it's very, very challenging to develop relationships with people who don't see the world the way you do. But if you don't do that, you have almost no hope, I think, of having change in our lives, of seeing people as humans. I mean, think about this with Jesus' disciples in Luke 9. They're going through Samaria.

and the Samaritans say, hey, Jesus, move along, we don't want you to stay here. And what do his disciples say to the Prince of Peace? Let's napalm them. Let's pray for God to send fire on them. Now, I think the reason why they said that is because they didn't know any Samaritans, but Jesus, as the Lord and King of the universe, he knew that these were people made in his image and he rebukes them. says, no, this isn't how we do things in my kingdom. And I think it's a challenge because about three, four years later, many of those Samaritans were in churches with them. They were sitting across the table from them.

Mark Turman (09:11.945)

Yeah.

Patrick Miller (09:32.684)

And that's what we need in our life. We need those cross-cutting relationships so that we can actually encounter people who see the world differently and realize we might disagree about some big things, but you are not a demon in disguise.

Mark Turman (09:44.715)

Yeah. And it makes me wonder, you know, how do we, how do we change this? I, I have pastored and lived in a North Dallas suburb for about 30 years. And it's been a regular, the first 10 or 15 years, when I started pastoring here in this area, we started having a bunch of people

that moved here from Atlanta. There was mostly business related moves. you know, there were companies in Atlanta that had Dallas offices and vice versa. And we just seemed to trade.

all kinds of people, both that would come in and out of my church and also out of my neighborhood, back and forth to Atlanta. And then in the last 15 years, it's been that way with California, but the reasons have not been driven by business moves. They've been so many people, I talked to somebody yesterday, I just had to get out of California because of this, that, or thing. And they were usually referring to something political, not something career related. And so,

I guess one of questions that kind of grows out of this, well, a quote that I read this morning, people don't believe what others say. They don't believe what others do. They usually believe what their friends tell them and they always believe what they think and what they say. And so if that's your mindset, if Patrick, if we're, we're resorting these ways in the landslide counties and communities and even

know, people saying, I'm going to I don't want to be in a blue state. I'm going to be in a red state or vice versa. I don't want to be in a red state. I want to be in a blue split blue state. How are we going to get around those people that see the world differently? How are we going to hear their views and perspective?

Patrick Miller (11:28.568)

Well, again, we need to give ourselves some grace. You may be located in a region where there are very, very few people who disagree with you. But that said, in most places in America, there are people who disagree with you, and it will require some intentionality on your part to find those people. And here's the key, not to sit down with them and tell them why you think they're wrong, but to sit down with them and say, hey, you see the world differently than I do. Tell me your story. Help me understand why you stand.

on these particular issues in this particular way. And you'll find out often the reason is, it is their story. I mean, we stand where we sit. We don't come to our conclusions in a vacuum. And as you get to know those people, you may find your own ideas are challenged, which can be a great thing if you have wrong ideas, or you might find that your own ideas are strengthened because you realize, you know, this person has a great reason, but I know that I'm standing in the truth, and I feel more confident now that I've talked to this person. But that's something you have to actively seek out. At our church,

We literally gave everybody in our church \$5 gift cards to a local coffee shop that was locally owned. And we said, hey, we want you to do one thing. Find someone who disagrees with you about something substantive. Take them out for coffee. You pay for their coffee with this gift

card. And you sit down across them and say, help me understand why you believe what you believe. Your job isn't to answer their questions. Your job isn't to try to convince them of something. It's just in that first conversation to be a listener. And this is proverbial wisdom. Listening is a key before you begin speaking.

Mark Turman (12:52.085)

Yeah, and that's a real opportunity. It makes me remember an opportunity a couple of years ago, there was a group called StoryCorps that was trying to intentionally do this as well, which their job was to record dialogues or conversations between people and particularly between people who had very different viewpoints. And so basically what I did was, is I went on their website, I described who I was and what my general perspective was on a lot of cultural topics.

they matched me with a person who was different from me. They created a safe and neutral space for us to meet and for us to have a, you know, just a civil conversation back and forth. And it was a, you know, a wonderful experience of realizing and learning that you can listen and have a good conversation with somebody who doesn't see the world the way you do. Carmen, I wanted to come back to you because all of us,

But particularly you, Carmen, live in the world of media. We live in this idea where now every media source, including us, if we're doing podcasts or radio, every single person that is trying to communicate is seen to be a person with some kind of bias, sometimes even extreme bias. Seems like I very rarely hear the word journalist anymore or journalism. We know that

trust in media basically across the board is low. How does a Christian that cares about the kingdom of God, cares about what's going on in the culture? How can they find a way to be reasonably informed on the things that are going on that they care about?

Carmen LaBerge (14:38.221)

That's a really good media diet conversation. I actually get this conversation a lot. Like, who are your sources? Who do you trust? How do you know that you're telling the truth? How do you get to the real story? I would say that part of this is reading widely or listening widely, having some discernment in the midst of that, having trusted voices that you know you can turn to.

I mean, the Daily Article is one of my go -to, but I have a few others as well. who is out there that I trust that's talking about the things that I know people are interested in? And so I think that's part of it. Like, cultivate some trusted go -to sources, but then also, don't be afraid to read and listen widely and have conversations with people who come from a different view on a subject or topic.

that you're concerned about. And then when somebody uses a term, I want to take that term and I want to discover what they mean when they use it. Because not everybody means the same thing when they use a term today. And so even the term journalism is a good one. What does that mean? Is this person a journalist? What does that term even mean? What does it mean historically? What does it mean in this context? What does it mean today when everybody has an iPhone and a blog and a TikTok?

Mark Turman (15:56.587)

Right.

Carmen LaBerge (16:06.183)

And so I think that some of those conversations are good for us to have. I am just not afraid to say, hey, I feel like there's a story here that we don't have all the details about. Here's what we know now. I expect us to learn more. As Christians, we are ultimately interested in the truth wherever that leads. So let's be people who are curious and inquisitive and recognize that the story is almost always unfolding.

Mark Turman (16:33.747)

Yeah, it's a good word. I had a pastor friend of mine that taught me to lead the church by saying, as much as we know now, here's what we think and here's what we're going to do, leaving open that door that there's always the possibility of more information. Patrick, I know that you mentioned it a moment ago, just an understanding that we're all still, I think, trying to really comprehend, which is...

that particularly internet media, social media is driven by algorithm rather than by what at least many of us thought was just randomness, but is actually driven by an intentional algorithm. we're learning more and more about that. think we're coming to increasing levels of clarity about the role of social media and that type of thing. Do you think that Christians should just abandon social media as

not a worthwhile stores, even though so many, particularly those that are 30, 35 and younger, get a very high percentage of their news is coming to them through their social media feeds. What would you say, particularly to those in that younger demographic who lean a lot on social media, how should they be looking toward that kind of information coming to them?

Patrick Miller (17:51.95)

Yeah, let me try to give a nuanced answer because you're absolutely correct. A large proportion of people between the ages of 18 and 35 are currently drawing their news information from social media. Now, the question is what form of social media are you gathering those from shorts on YouTube, shorts on TikTok? Are you gathering those from Twitter where there's articles and

you're clicking the articles? Are you just reading tweets and threads about particular issues? I think this is obvious. The world is really complicated.

And it's hard in a 1200 word news article to articulate the entirety of the truth about any single event. It is near impossible to do so in 60 seconds on TikTok or 60 seconds on YouTube or in 140 characters on Twitter. And that's where I think a lot of people are getting their news. They're seeing headlines and so they're reading the headlines and think that the headline summarizes. mean, how many times if you actually click it, do you read the headline and read the article and discover, okay, this was a headline designed to get me to click something.

Patrick Miller (18:50.35)

This does not really describe what happened. And so that's my fears when people say they're getting their news from social media What do you mean when you say that are you actually going to the news sites and gathering it? But the second thing I would add to that is you have to realize how this content comes to you Artificial intelligence is what powers social media and they are what are called AI algorithm recommender algorithms And their job is to give you, to recommend to you content that the platform provider believes will keep you on their platform. So by the way, it's designed not to take you away and go to the article or go read the full thing because they want you to stay on Facebook. They want you to stay on Instagram. So they might be giving you news like material, but they don't want you to leave the platform. But they also want it to be emotionally engaging because when you're angry or you're joyful or you're upset, that's when you want to continue scrolling because you're looking for the next dopamine hit. will the next video be? Here's the biggest thing.

When you get your news from social media, it is completely decontextualized. By which I don't merely mean that every bit of information is, you know, if you read a newspaper with articles, they are all, you different stories. What I mean is each little bit, you're gonna go from a cat video to a story about a murder to a puppy video to a story about what happened with Donald Trump. All of that context is lost and that's not actually how we think. That's not how the human brain is designed to work.

And so you're going to really train yourself to have a granular mind where you can't stay focused on anything and you begin linking things in strange ways. So it's actually, think, absolutely terrible way to gather the news. I'm not saying that you can't learn anything about the news from social media. I'm saying if that's your primary news source, you are almost surely going to be misled.

Mark Turman (20:31.721)

Yeah, I think that's the reality that we need to face is that many times we're coming to the news and to the sources that we choose because we want to know something, but we don't realize the

vulnerability that we have. We don't realize that we can be misled. I have a friend that I work with here at our ministry who said, you know, when he was young and

and exploring faith that he was eager to be led, which put him in a place of being easily misled and actually led him for a significant period of time into a cult that was very dangerous and destructive to him. And that awareness that we can be misled as easily as we can be led. Carmen, a lot of what you describe as your ministry is that of cultural or not cultural, but conversational apologetics.

We talk around here at Denison Forum about we want to see ourselves and help people, believers, to be cultural missionaries instead of cultural warriors. Can you kind of tease that out a little bit? What is conversational apologetics, cultural missionary type work compared to what some Christians engage themselves in?

Carmen LaBerge (21:44.909)

So I think the ambassadorial language is probably common for some people to recognize that we are ambassadors of a king and a kingdom. And if I see myself as an ambassador, that's less of a warrior image, right? I mean, it's a diplomatic mission. It recognizes that it's on foreign territory. So it embraces the missionary spirit that you're talking about. But as an ambassador, I am there to represent.

a king and a kingdom. And so if we can help people understand that in every conversation today, they are representing Christ. They are a representative of the king and the kingdom, big K, big K king, big K kingdom. And so in the midst of whatever the contemporary conversation is, they are, I am a conversational apologist. I am the person there to represent Jesus, to represent the gospel in that moment, in that context, in that conversation. And so I want to have cultivated the mind of Christ on what's happening in the world. In order to do that, I need to be immersed in the scriptures. I need to be in accountable relationships with other Christians, hopefully some that are more mature than I am. And so when I'm entering into whatever that conversation is out there in the real world, I'm doing so not on my own behalf not on behalf of any particular kingdom of this world, but literally on behalf of Christ. And so I'm not there to be defensive, but I am prepared in every moment to bring forward the gospel witness, to make the character and the ways of Jesus relevant and pressing in upon the conversation. And when people say, you know, nobody out there is bringing God into the conversation, like, you know, the view of the church is never brought forward, I'm thinking,

Well, you're the person standing there. Like, you are literally the mouthpiece that God gave that divine opportunity to. He's the one that set that appointment, and you might have missed it, but God had an agent of grace right there, a minister of reconciliation present. And so part of it is

helping people see themselves, Christians, helping Christians see ourselves for what we really are, and then equipping people to genuinely do that.

Mark Turman (24:06.985)

Yeah, and I think Patrick would love to get your thoughts on this as well. you know, some of us, at least one of us is old enough to remember when we would sing the hymn onward Christian soldiers. But it feels like in some ways in the church that we've overplayed our militaristic metaphors and that that's it's become a lesson that our words matter. I remember when I was in seminary that, you know, I had a professor that said, you guys down in the preaching department are just word merchants. You're trying to find the right word to create some kind of an emotional response, a zinger, if you will. Patrick, you feel like we're overplaying one metaphor and that as one person said, you know, we're kind of bored with the cross and we're kind of bored with the idea of being missionaries, as Carmen just described it. it part of the fact that in the church we're just not using a full picture of what God's called us to be in the culture.

Patrick Miller (25:11.042)

Yeah, you know, I think what Carmen articulated is spot on and it's a lovely way of saying it. You know, when we think about being a culture warrior, again, pardon me, say, let's name the fact, no one wants to be called a culture warrior, but everybody is on some level a culture warrior. And here's what I mean when I say that. Culture is a shared space. My daughter walks into my office and she sees this. swiveling device with wheels on the bottom of it and there's like a mesh back and a plush seat. know, what she sees is a carnival ride. And as much as I try to convince her that that's actually a chair, to her it's something to sit on and spin around and have a blast in. Now, culture is a shared space. So most adults would walk in and we would say that's a chair. We get into culture wars when we look at the same thing and we don't see them the same way. When I walk into a library and I see a drag queen, leading a discussion amongst elementary school students, what do I see? Do I see someone who's grooming children or do I see a wonderful expression of human autonomy and sexuality? That's a culture war. That's where these items happen. And I think what you're hitting on is how do we enter into those moments? Do we enter into the war as warriors or do we enter into the war as missionaries or as you said, re-representers of Jesus? Because what did Jesus do? Did he take the sword or did he take the sword into himself? And of course he was killed for our transgressions. And so I think that's, has to be our orientation in these war zones is to say, look, we're not here to fight. We're here to heal. We're here to redeem. We're here to reconcile. And that totally changes your orientation in those battles.

Mark Turman (26:48.37)

Yeah, it really starts to acquaint us with something that is really biblical but often uncomfortable for us, which is the idea of suffering rather than winning. And maybe that's an idea that we can chase out here for a minute is this idea that

has kind of grown up in the midst of all of the culture war terminology. And we have some idea in our brains and sometimes in our hearts as Christians that we're supposed to quote unquote win. And we don't even have a real clear definition of what that would mean. But we seem to be far moving farther away from the idea that in Jesus's perspective, winning in some ways means a willingness to both suffer and serve, which is what missionaries do as opposed to a different definition of winning. So how does that hit either of you? mean, do we have just wrong ideas about quote unquote winning in the culture?

Carmen LaBerge (27:54.561)

I'll jump in. think that for both what Patrick said and then Mark what you just said, one of the things that comes to mind is that we are so trapped in the immediate. I mean, now is it, and this is our time. And God's got this eternal perspective. And we actually have read the end of the book. We know the God who knows the end from the beginning. And whether or not we trust Him and we trust that he is really working it all out together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose that he really does know the plans that he has like we either trust that or we don't and it is hard it's always been hard to live as a Christian in the midst of the already and the not yet but I don't think that is communicated very frequently today I mean I just know a lot of Christians who imagine that

This is, it's their job to make wherever they are a Christian place, whatever that means, a Christian home, a Christian community, a Christian school, a Christian nation. And that's, we are Christians and we are generationally responsible for the time in which we live to advance the gospel in all ways, but we're never gonna take it. Like it's not, we're not taking it for Jesus. That's not in terms of overcoming all the differences and all the opposition to him in a particular time and space. I see no biblical evidence that that's gonna happen until he comes again and takes it for himself.

Patrick Miller (29:35.47)

And one thing I would add to that is, as Christians, we don't want to be outsiders. We have this idea that we're supposed to be insiders in our culture. And there's historical reasons for that, but let's set all that aside for just a moment. We forget that part of our identity in Christ is the fact that we've been called to be exiles, sojourners, and foreigners in this world. I can point to countless passages that use those terms to describe our identity.

And when you're an outsider, that is a form of suffering. There's nothing more fearful to the human brain than being outside the tribe, than being the one who doesn't know, will the tribe share their resources with me, their food with me, their knowledge, their expertise, will they keep me safe? We are literally designed to not be outsiders. And yet God in this broken world and His providence has realized...

that part of how we can redeem the world in which we live is by being outsiders, people who are outside the gate. And that is a form of suffering. In fact, I wanna read this passage from Hebrews 13, because I think it explains why we need to be outsiders. This is Hebrews 13, 12. It says, so Jesus also suffered outside the gate. So just catch that. Talking about where Jesus was crucified, outside the city gate of Jerusalem. This is his city. He's cast outside of it as an outsider, and that's where he's killed. That's where he's crucified. So says he suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify or set apart the people through his own blood. Now catch this command that comes afterwards. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. That's a command from the Bible to say, you might wanna be an insider, it's time to go outside the gate and be with your savior who was crucified outside the gate and bear the reproach alongside him, knowing that through that suffering, there is redemption, there is healing, and that actually is historically how the church has most changed the world not by being insiders always, but often by being outsiders.

Mark Turman (31:26.933)

Patrick, is that exactly, I love that passage and thanks for reading that, but is that really where a lot of Christians in America are getting frustrated because they're like, no way, this place called America was created so that we would be insiders and we wouldn't have to have this life and this ministry and this journey of being people experiencing exile. That no way that that's we came here our forefathers came here so that we could have our own quote -unquote home as Christians and we wouldn't have to live that life of exile. Is that where the is that where some of this tension and animosity and frustration is coming from?

Patrick Miller (32:16.146)

Yes, There is no doubt that in the history of America, going all the way back to the Puritans, and I'm a Presbyterian, I love the Puritans, they're part of my tradition. There's no doubt that there was this sense in which going to the new world would be a new Jerusalem, where God would set up his post -millennial reign and begin to transform the world to these people, these kind of idealistic visions of a perfect world. And that's not the way things panned out.

And I also wanna say this, we need to tell a complex history. You don't have America without Christianity. This is a nation that has built into its constitution many ideas rooted inside of the Bible. Anyone who wants to deny that is not telling you the truth. And yet, if you go back to the early forefathers of our nation, you will meet many men and many women who were not Christians, who were not drawn to these ideas because of any sense of faith. We can say for a fact that two of our first three presidents

One of which was not an Orthodox Christian, the other one who outright denied Christianity. So we have to paint an honest picture of our history, but here's the key part. If you go throughout

American history, you will find Christians at every juncture who were outsiders. Let me just ask a question. People was like, it's so much harder today. Okay, imagine going back to Mississippi in 1962 and preaching a sermon in Mississippi about the truth of interracial marriage, that that's not a sin. How's that gonna go for you?

Mark Turman (33:28.939)

Yeah.

Patrick Miller (33:39.756)

Would you be an outsider there if you're Orthodox? I can do that from every possible generation. We are outsiders in this world because God has not yet redeemed it. So exactly what Carmen said a moment ago, until he returns, we may have some power, we may sit in an office as a senator or a representative or even as a president, right? It's not as though God can't use us where we're at, but at the end of the day, this world as it stands with sin is not our ultimate home. Our ultimate home is in the resurrection, in a renewed creation.

Mark Turman (34:08.47)

Yeah, that's a good word and makes me make my mind go in a certain direction where I've been pondering for the last few days, couple of weeks, actually. And Carmen, I'd like to get you to respond to this initially and both of you to weigh in and maybe the.

expression of this and some of the feeling of this being people of exile and being in that experience and like I said, embracing this idea of Jesus suffering outside the gate. So here's the thought process I want to try on for you and get you to respond to starting with Carmen, which is our system of government is built on the idea of majority rule and minority rights that

Majorities will shift back and forth and majorities will get to lead the way, but never to the point of crushing the minority and their right to exist and to speak. My thought is, is where could I find scriptural support for that? And then secondly, what are we to do and how do we think that at any given season in American political life as a Christian,

I'm going to have times in my life probably where I get to be on the majority rule side and the people I wanted got elected, the party that I most agree with is in power. And then what do I do when I am in the minority side and I need to contend for my understanding of faith and faith with involved in culture? How do I handle myself in that environment? And we seem to have lost that dynamic that

We as Christians particularly have this idea, no, it should always be that we, quote unquote Christians, however we want to expand and define that group, we should always be in the majority and we should always be leading the way. And we don't like the idea of being in the

minority position. So that's a long way around the bush, Carmen, to say, does any of that make sense? And is that part of our struggle as Christians trying to engage our culture right now?

Carmen LaBerge (36:23.583)

Okay, so I'll make this observation. There's probably not just the three of us, but pretty much any group of mature Christians that you want to pose such a question to. Somebody can find a text in the Bible to support whichever component part of that you want to see illustrated or defended. So I'm going to resist the temptation to say, well, you know, if we look here in the Bible, you know, we have an example of majority rule because I don't necessarily, the first ones that came to mind were not good. Like, crucify him, crucify him, does not really, like, that doesn't feel like an example that I want to point to in terms of like positive majority rule. Now, backtrack a few days from that and you've got, know, Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. So if we're electing Jesus on Palm Sunday, then yes, the majority rule crowd looks really good. But if we're, if we're going to talk about what, you know, we would describe as Maundy Thursday, like suddenly it doesn't look so good anymore. So I think that, you know, what I want to talk about, I would always be seeking to maybe transition the conversation to, what is God's rule and God's reign look like no matter what particular form of government I happen to live in as a Christian. Could you be a Christian today if you lived in China? Like, could you still be a Christian? Well, the answer is yes. Well, then obviously the form of government is irrelevant. The form of government that I live under, not just the particular party that happens in any particular cycle of American politics to get elected, but in terms of a form of government,

Can I still live as a Christian in the United States of America no matter who gets elected president? Absolutely. I could live as a Christian in a completely non -democratic, you know, small d, non -democratic form of government. In something that's not Republican at all. I mean, in something that's oppressive and actually where I have no rights as a woman, no rights as a human being, no right to religious freedom, no right to speak my voice, no right to gather together with other people.

So the freedoms that we enjoy here in the United States should never be, we should never fail to recognize just how incredible a privilege that is. And yes, how we have won and guaranteed and ensure those rights. And those are the, I think the freedoms in which we want to then explore, okay, we are the Christians who are alive today in this particular nation state.

in this particular time and we have the opportunity to cast a vote. What are we going to do with that? So I don't know if that lands the plane on your question at all, but those were some of the thoughts that were ruminating as you were asking your question.

Mark Turman (39:26.655)

Yeah, no, that's helpful, helpful. Patrick?

Patrick Miller (39:27.256)

Can I? Yeah, yeah, can I? I think you nailed it at the beginning there and said it so well. And really, we do have to realize our situation is situational. God's put us here, but he could have put us anywhere. And he's gonna call us to follow him no matter where that is. As you were sharing, I was thinking about the fact, I don't have a Bible passage here, that both of these ideas in conjunction with one another really are the child of Christianity.

And here's what I mean when I say that. And remember I said earlier, know, America does come downstream from Western Christianity. This nation doesn't exist without it. Here's what I mean. Where do you get the idea that the minority deserves special protection? Where does that come from? If you go back to ancient Rome, if you were the Potter Fum, Fum Amelius, the guy in charge of the whole Roman household, you could take advantage of anybody in the household. there was a slave, it didn't matter if they were eight or 15 or 30.

You could use them sexually, you could abuse them physically without any recourse, that was your right. There was no sense that minorities deserved protection or that women deserve protection. Where do we get the idea that those who are weak deserve special protection? Well, it comes from Jesus. He's the one who said it'd be better to tie a millstone around your neck than to hurt a child or lead a child astray. He's the one who gives us the notion that it is actually the weak who are deserving of special attention and special care.

and that they aren't to be discarded and ignored or set into the social margins. So the idea of minority rights, you don't have it. Literally, you do not have it in world history until Jesus. So that's a child. But also, catch how majority rule is as well, because you can flip it too. And you can say that in the ancient Roman world, it was really a minority that was in charge. You had the imperial family that was in charge of everything. And who said that the masses of the people, they actually matter? They actually have a value.

even though they're all peasants, they're all slaves, and you think you can walk all over them as the Roman army, can crucify them wherever you want, you can tax them until they have no money left, right? Who's the one who says these are all people made in God's image, and you might not value them, but he values them all? Well, now you see the other side, where even the large group, the majority is highly valued, but you don't get either of these pictures, by the way, until you have Christianity, and then it's when you put them in conjunction with one another that you have the system that we call liberalism, with a small l, I'm not talking about conservative and liberal, just liberalism in general, and that is the child of Christianity. And when it's properly functioning as a methodology, we get the politics of civility, we get the politics of kindness, we get the politics, one might say, of the kingdom where people are treating each other with respect

and dignity. And you cannot get that without Christianity. So that's not a Bible verse, it's just a historical argument to say without Jesus, we don't have these ideas, and they are beautiful ideas.

Carmen LaBerge (42:10.869)

Okay, I would like to, I just want to cheat off of, I want to cheat off of Patrick's answer to the question.

Mark Turman (42:23.103)

Yeah, and I think very well said. And I also think that's where you get the dynamic, the helpful dynamic that we see in the better days of our country. And you still see it some today and in our churches, this idea of both leadership and accountability. And that dynamic plays out itself in terms of majority rule and minority right. And that's what will be with us.

Whoever wins whatever party whatever candidate late wins in November or in any election We'll pick up and start with that new dynamic the next day which is okay the opinion in the view and the and the direction that the majority gets to now lead out in is still going to have to deal with the accountability and the opinion and perspective of the minority fortunately because of Jesus and because of Christianity

And because of our forefathers, there's no, there's no, we're going to pack up everybody that's in the minority and put them on a ship to another part of the world the day after the election. Fortunately, we don't live in that. And the benefit of that is, is that that minority can create that kind of accountability that leadership always needs. But this also, Carmen, your comment about immediacy and urgency also led me down this other idea. I know.

We're probably all aware of Elizabeth Neuman's book about extremism and how people get radicalized, even as we see people today in our political life on the right and on the left, far right, far left, however you want to talk about that, people getting radicalized, even Christians becoming in many ways radicalized at some point. Just this, let's talk about a moment for this problem of extremism and how

We as Christians need to be aware of our vulnerability toward extremism. We would all probably sit here and go, well, you know, I can't imagine any person that calls himself a Christian becoming radicalized along a political ideology. But in fact, it's already happening. What is our, where do the two of you think that we have vulnerability there? What do Christians need to understand about how extremism can work in our current dynamic. Who wants to go first?

Carmen LaBerge (44:53.251)

I'm let Patrick go first.

Patrick Miller (44:56.174)

Yeah, you know, I think extremism, I will say, if you asked me three years ago, I would have said, there's no way that extremism is really a threat in the church. And, you know, then January 6 happened and I thought, okay, maybe there's some things going on there, but I still wasn't totally convinced. It wasn't really until reading Elizabeth Newman's book, Kingdom of Rage, that I became very aware of the fact that this is a problem in the church. And I know part of what Elizabeth would say is that you're at risk for radicalization when you begin to see the out group, whatever group is not you as an enemy who wants to harm you. It's the minute you start saying, so it's not just, hey, I'm a Republican and I don't like the Democrats. It's now, I'm a Republican and the Democrats are out there trying to destroy my life. They want my family to fail. They want my marriage to fail. They want to liquidate my bank account. They are coming for me. That's the point at which we start becoming radicalized. Now, where I think this links into our faith, is twofold. One is to say, look, God tells us, do not be afraid. And when we're living in fear of the other as though they have the power to destroy us, to take away from us what's most important, we aren't living out the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is that the most important thing in my life cannot be taken away from me. No one can steal Jesus from me. No one can steal eternity from me. But the second thing I would just say is this, is that it's truth. We as Christians are supposed to be people of the truth.

And so it is a long stretch from I don't like the policies of the Republicans to saying, now actually I think these Republicans are coming after me they want to destroy me. Now you can find misinformation and Twitter threads and Instagram posts and all sorts of things out there that we talked about earlier that are going to tell you that those people are coming after you, but you have to really evaluate. Have I actually met, I mean, have I truly met someone on the other side of the political party who wants to destroy me? And if the answer to that question is no, am I living in reality if I begin to believe that? If you can fight, that temptation towards radicalization with those two elements of both truth and I will not fear. I think that's how pastors and Christians have to discipline themselves through the temptation to become radicalized.

Mark Turman (47:08.395)

Carmen, you want to build on that?

Carmen LaBerge (47:11.543)

First of all, I agree with everything Patrick just said. And there is not a better book out there than Elizabeth's book, Kingdom of Rage. And I think that for me, the shift in perspective is the one that I'm always inviting people to consider making. So if they are at a place where they actually do believe that the other party is

is now on a path that really does want to harm them, take their wealth, take their children. I mean, it's a long list of the fear that has now resulted in this sense that the other party, the people in the other party really are out to harm me. And that is the test of extremism.

Once you've arrived at that point, then how do I talk with you? How do I help you begin to see something differently? Because I can't just say to you, wait a second, those are still people. I mean, I can say that, but it's ineffective. Because in the mind, the mind has already made the shift. That is an enemy. It's an enemy combatant. So I describe what happened to me when I, at one point in time, in a particular organization,

I really did see other people as the enemy. They were really fighting at cross purposes with what I was being led to do and the good that I thought we were all pursuing together. And they were, in my view, seeking to harm not only me, but people like me. And then God just really changed my perspective on them as individuals. And I went from seeing them as enemies, like, literally enemy combatants, to prisoners of war. And it's really hard to be angry at a prisoner of war. When you can see that person as captive to a false set of ideas, as captive to an agenda that is not life-giving, it's not anger that you feel. It's deep pity. And it produces a different response it presses in on my compassion side. I want to stand close enough to the fire to snatch them out. I'm no longer fighting against them. I am now fighting for them, for them. And so it inspires that missionary spirit. And it keeps me mindful that there's a spiritual battle going on on a level and in a way that I'm not privy to but I see glimpses of, I can smell it from time to time. I certainly know when the spirit within me is in direct conflict with the spirit in another person. And when I'm mindful of that, I am reminded this is not a battle of flesh and blood. And that is something I feel like we have to constantly be reminded of and remind each other of because that's the threat. The threat is that it moves from the conversations we've been having to a literal battle of flesh and blood. And so I hope that's clear. it's the perspective of the Christian that needs to shift in seeing a person who is advancing a cause in a direction that's clearly not life-giving. I need to see that person as having ideas that are captive to an enemy thought process.

Mark Turman (50:56.107)

Yeah, absolutely. A good reminder and a reminder that, especially when it comes to engaging in politics in the way that we are privileged to get to do, that a person that disagrees is not automatically evil. They may just simply have a disagreement about how to solve a problem. But we have gotten to such a place of polarization that

Sometimes our parties or our candidates seem to be asking for blind loyalty from us from on all topics. And hopefully we can move away from that kind of an extremism and that kind of definition of loyalty. But there is this, there is this sense of urgency and this sense of vulnerability, think, particularly toward being radicalized or moving toward an extreme. it's not just

something that is a temptation of the young. I've heard, you know, had recent conversations with people say, you know, that people that are in their older generation, those that are beyond 60, they have this sense of, my life is starting to come to its home stretch and we have to do something now or we're going to lose the culture. We're going to lose the opportunity of faith. And so we're vulnerable no matter where we are on the age spectrum.

But let me move us forward just a little bit. We got time for maybe another question or two. But wanted to kind of try to bring us around to something that Christians can pray about, can work on. And my first question to both of you is, do you feel like Christians are generally fearful of admitting, you know what, I just don't know. I don't know about that topic or I changed my mind about that.

Do you sense that Christians generally try to avoid that kind of attitude? They somehow feel like that they're admitting that they're not spiritually mature like they should be, or they're not as informed as they should be. When you look at the Christians that you're talking with and learning about, do we seem to be uncomfortable with that terminology of, don't know, or I changed my mind about that? Patrick, you want to lead off on responding to that?

Patrick Miller (53:22.338)

Yeah, I suspect that depends on your environment, your upbringing, the kind of Christian culture you're in. Fundamentalism has had a huge impact on Christianity, evangelicalism, and the church in general. But part of a fundamentalist attitude, and this is not unique to Christianity. You can find fundamentalist progressives who've never been inside a church, and you find fundamentalists in every crowd, is that they believe that they truly do have the corner on the truth in every possible issue.

They know what kind of skirts you should wear. They know what kind of cars you should drive. They know what the Bible says about this, this, and that. They know the right economic policy for the president. You name it, they know the answer to it. And usually in fundamentalist circles, there are individuals who are the houses, one might say, of absolute truth. It might be a pastor or a father. I mean, it can be lots of different things in lots of different places. And because those people are often upheld as the ideal leader,

what you see amongst those who are sitting under them is a sense that I should grow into that. So if the pastor has all the answers or dad has all the answers, or again, you can be outside of the church. If the, you know, protester and rally leader has all the answers, then that's what I need to be as well. And so I can't admit when I don't know things. I don't want to admit it because that would be admitting that all the truth that I've already committed myself to might not be true. Now, of course, I think there's a real beauty in admitting that you don't know what you know,

that you don't know what you don't know and admitting that you don't have all the information because it turns out, as the Bible says, we are fallible creatures. We make errors all the time. My human brain is not equipped to handle all the information in the universe. And I love to learn new things. I love to be challenged. And I think he can even look at Jesus. I mean, isn't it interesting that he asked questions? This is the king of the universe. He actually can know everything and he actually does know everything. And even he showed curiosity about people, about their hearts, about what they believe. And if he can show curiosity, which is almost a way of saying, he doesn't say, I don't know everything, but it's a way of saying, I want you to share what you know with me. And I think we as humans, and Jesus is also obviously fully human, fully divine, but we as humans who don't know everything, how much more so should we feel freedom to say, I'm not a fundamentalist, I don't have the corner on the truth and everything. There's things I'm more confident about and things I'm less confident about, but I wanna have an attitude of openness towards others.

Mark Turman (55:36.587)

Great work, Carmen, you want to add anything to that?

Carmen LaBerge (55:41.495)

The older I get, the more I realize how little I know. And that is absolutely honest. And then I would also say that the more times you have gone back,

Patrick Miller (55:46.624)

Amen.

Carmen LaBerge (55:55.657)

over a stretch of a discipleship journey in order that you can walk with a believer on a stretch that you've already been down. Like, right? So the withing conversation, if you're going to be walking with a young person on a path of discipleship, if you're going to be walking with a new believer, regardless of their age, on a path of discipleship, there's going to be a lot of stuff that you already know. You've literally already walked that path.

it's the co -discovery that's so much fun, right? It's when they have an aha moment. It's when the light comes on for them. It's when the truth dawns. It's when the, It's that I think that's the part where Jesus, who's literally the know -it -all, but who frequently throughout his life acted like he didn't know it all, right? Because he's walking with people who are discovering it for the first time. And so

I think the more we are like Jesus, the more we know because we know God, we know his character, we know his ways, we know his word, we know the future that he holds in his hands, but we don't live as if we know it all because there's a whole lot of people who are still

discovering him. And it's a whole lot more fun to be on a path of co -discovery than it is to be the person who nobody really likes because you're the one who acts like you know it all.

So I'm voraciously curious. I know so little about what other people know so much about that I find it really fun to co -discover, but not everybody embraces that the same way. So that would be my invitation to everybody listening. Become a person who's just excited about the fact that other people are discovering what you already know to be true.

Mark Turman (57:46.495)

Yeah, if we could just all get to a place where we were curious, curious first of all about knowing God better and knowing each other better. And we could ask good questions in a loving, kind and civil way. We would all do a lot better. As we get ready to close out here, I got one last, just would like each of you to kind of give one final word and Carmen, I'll start with you. Maybe just frame it this way, which is,

There seems to be in the circles that I run in, just a growing sense of people being, getting to a place of being exhausted and possibly even cynical when it comes to where our political conversations are right now and where we're going to be going for the next number of weeks and months and what comes after that toward inauguration day, all of that. What is it that you would say to people, how would you advise them to be

enthusiastic and hopeful what opportunities might be in front of us that we need to realize and that we should see as an opportunity for the kingdom of God. Carmen, what would you advise?

Carmen LaBerge (59:00.961)

I think my first encouragement is just to remember that government, no government, no form of government is God. And so my encouragement is if you become weary of the conversations that are taking place in the world and you become weary of the politics of the day, go spend some time with God.

Focus on the kingdom. Read the passages where Jesus talks about the kingdom of God is like. Get to know the King. because whatever happens in this election cycle, whatever happens going forward,

you know, the particular country that you live in, God remains God. Jesus is on the throne and we know who we are in relationship to him. And that is the good news of the gospel that we are really on the earth today to share with other people. maybe get a sense of our own, restore a sense of our own calling as gospel people and the gospel opportunity that exists to advance the kingdom, the big K kingdom, no matter what kingdom of this world, you know, happens to be up to today.

Mark Turman (01:00:08.177)

good word. All right Patrick we'll give you the last word.

Patrick Miller (01:00:11.598)

That was a good word. I read that passage earlier from Hebrews 13 about Jesus suffering outside the gate and then they call for us to join him outside the gate and bear the reproach that he bore. I didn't finish the passage though and it goes exactly to what Carmen was saying. This is verse 14, for here, and I'll just add in America, we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. I think that hand was telling exactly what you were saying, which is this nation matters to God.

And there will be the beauties and the glories of America in the new creation as there will be for all nations. However, it is not eternal in the sense that it has a start date and there'll be a day where there will be no democracy. There will only be one king on throne. So there is an end date to this form of government. There's one thing that's eternal and that's what we've been called to build because this is not an enduring city. You know, so what I would maybe encourage people to do on a practical level is

to stop telescoping your attention out to what's happening in Washington DC and start focusing your attention where you actually have the ability to make change and influence lives. And even if it's disappointing to you, that is your own home, that is your own neighborhood and local community, maybe a city if you're in a smaller city or a suburb if you're in a smaller area of a city. That's the place where you can make a real difference. And by the way, that is politics. Politics is how we organize our lives together and do our lives together.

If you are fixated on this election, go join the school board, okay? Go join the PTA. Go get involved with Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Get on the board of a charity. Go serve in a charity. Find a way to do the political thing that actually makes a change because I will tell you what, spending all your time reading articles about Donald Trump or,

Vice President Harris or whatever else you're reading and all the attention and energy you give to it, it's going to feel wasted once November comes around and one person ends up winning the election. You know what won't be wasted is all the work you do between now and then and after then for the sake of the kingdom in your community, giving people an appetizer of what's to come in God's kingdom.

Mark Turman (01:02:14.367)

Yeah, good word. And reclaiming the opportunity of hospitality that Christianity is lost in many ways in that hospitable spirit. Guys, thank you both for being a part of this conversation and also want to thank our audience for listening and eavesdropping in on our conversation today. If this

conversation has been helpful to you, please rate, review us on your podcast platform, share it with family and friends so that they can be a part of the conversation as well. Let me remind you, you can find Patrick in his writing. His upcoming book, Joyful Outsiders, is in pre-release right now and will become available in January. You can also find his podcast, Over Tribe, on your podcast platform. You can find Carmen on the Faith Radio Network. You can also find her at carmenleberge.com. And you can find more resources from us at Denison Forum, denisonforum.org. and particularly on the election denisonforum.org/election. And we'll see you next time on the Denison Forum podcast. God bless you.