Ed Stetzer

Part 2 of 2: Evangelical Ministry in a Shifting Culture
with
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Dr. Darrell Bock: There are open mics here. As you have questions, feel free to approach the mics. We'll continue our conversation.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Way too many people got up fast.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's exactly right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: These better be easy questions.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I think I know these students better than that. I think you're in for a wild night.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Let's rock and roll.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Are you ready to roll? Okay, we'll go over here where there are two and over there there's one. So we'll start over here to keep the lines balanced.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I would rather – this guy concerns me so let's go over here. I don't even know him.

Audience: My question is with regards to wanting to be associated with Evangelicalism, do you think the issue of homosexuality and people's perception of the Evangelical stance on it is affecting people wanting to be associated with Evangelicalism?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah, for sure. Evangelicalism is perceived on this issue as being intolerant and small minded, depending on the part of the country you're in, in particular, the Gordon College situation that just played out. Michael Lindsay signed a letter to the president that Michael Wear signed, it was Obama's faith advisor, about the desire to continue to receive federal funds but actually hire according to their beliefs and practices. They have really just seen a great undercut. They couldn't even place students in student teacher roles anymore in some of the school districts in and around where they are, Salem Massachusetts, places like that.
Dr. Darrell Bock

School districts that they have supported. That's a really interesting story. School districts that they have supported, poured funds into themselves, as a way of expressing their involvement with the neighborhoods where the schools are. Those communities have completely repudiated the school as a result of their simply trying to live out their religious and biblical principles.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

I will tell you where I think this is going to go. The human rights campaign polls on these issues, the pro LGBT Marriage Equality Organization, call us Evangelicals resisters to the current trend. There's not really a lot of shift in actual devout, practicing Evangelicals.

You may have heard. There was a PRRI poll out recently that a few numbers probably contrasted to. But for practicing Evangelicals, they're not moving a lot on the issue. Conservative Catholics are not moving a lot on the issue. So, contrary to some of the things you may hear, when you ask somebody are you an Evangelical? They say yes or no but half of those people don't go to church. The half that don't go to church are shifting some on the issue.

What I would say is you're going to have to get to the place where two things will happen. Number one, nobody cares what Evangelicals think about homosexuality in Canada. To the point where the prime minister of Canada is actually an Evangelical. His name is Stephen Harper. He goes to First Alliance Church in Calgary. The CMA has a very clear position on these issues. But it doesn't matter because you're not having a battle about marriage and about sexuality in Canada. It's over.

What's going to happen is on our current trajectory, within five years gay marriage will be legal in all states. That battle will be over in the courts. What happens is, again, I could be wrong. People say the Alliance Defense Fund, we had a great conversation. They think I'm naïve. But, ultimately, you can't hound 25 percent of the population that's not shifting on this issue, who are Catholic priests, Mormon leaders and Evangelicals. It doesn't work that way. So, I think ultimately, you get to the place where you recognize there's a minority that believes differently.
I think the difference is we didn't used to be the minority on this. But I think ultimately, we are now. The shift is really remarkable. We've polled on the data. It's remarkable how quickly people have changed their view on LGBT issues. What's going to happen is that the United States is just going to get used to it. Much like, nobody's mad at Evangelicals in France because of their view on LGBT issues because the culture has moved on. We haven't. We're in the middle of the great national debate on the issue.

I predict that next election, you're going to have one candidate who's going to be very aggressively LGBT marriage equality in the Democratic Party and you're going to have one candidate in the Republican Party who works very hard to say nothing about the subject. Largely because the perception is, the issue is a losing issue already.

So the question is, how do we as Christians respond during that time? That's where it gets tricky. Do you fight what is probably going to be a losing battle on the legislative front? If you read the news this morning, some data we released, or do you say we're just going to separate ourselves from the states definition of marriage? I don't know how Evangelicals will play out on that. It's going to be a bumpy ten years. We've been on the wrong side of history lots of times and that's okay. Jesus is still on the throne. The Scriptures are still true. The Gospel still needs to be preached.

I preached at Pathway Vineyard the Sunday after Maine voted – do we have a Vineyard person here in the room or are you just whistling randomly? Oh, that's right, you, but you've been like nine denominations. All I can say is get a theology. Dallas is the place, baby.

I preached there and Phil Strout, the new president of Vineyard, he was the pastor of the church. It's a great church, the largest church in Maine. The Sunday after the state was – the first wave of states that voted – years ago, people used to say no state has ever voted to adopt LGBT same sex marriage but then they did. They couldn't say that anymore. Maine did.
Let me tell you. The Sunday after I was there, it was after the election. They did the same thing they did the Sunday before. They preached the Gospel. They loved people. They showed and shared the love of Jesus to a broken and hurting world. Nothing changed other than their context and the opportunity to minister to people remain before them.

So, again, it's going to be bumpy, especially as Christians engage in these issues but if we engage them well winsomely – I'm not afraid to speak up on issues but also we've got to recognize that these are not our enemies. People have different views. Let's not treat them as our enemies. Sometimes, I think Christians treat people as their enemies. They're not. They're people like us who need Jesus to change every part of us like we do.

The Church can never forget that at the end, the Gospel is about extending an invitation in the midst of whatever challenges the culture is putting before them. Being able to do that well is probably one of the core callings of a pastor. Make sure the hand is extended even in the midst of places where there's disagreement about what someone should be doing with their life.

This is tricky because we're just not used to that. We're used to being the people who have the power. What I would say is that's just not the case anymore – I've got to change that slide because I can't tell you where we did this – for example, when we ask, people think religious liberty is on the decline. Both Americans and Protestant senior pastors think religious liberty is on decline. Let me just skip a few slides here. I can tell you that they're quite convinced – many Christian leaders have talked about society being in a culture war. Again, not a phrase I use but for our polling. Regardless about how you feel about the terminology, how would you explain the current situation? Fifty-nine percent of pastors, Christians are losing the culture war. Ten percent think Christians are winning the culture war. I don't know where they live. Eleven percent say they have lost the culture war. When we see some of these numbers, some of the numbers are quite stunning. Do you believe homosexual behavior or practice is sinful has shifted just drastically over the last few years.
Here's a poll from 2011-2012 where the biggest shift took place. That's a stunning shift in the views of Americans just in a short amount of time. I will tell you that Americans are not with us. These are religious liberty issues either. Americans believe that Catholic and other religious schools, hospitals and charities should be required to provide their employees with healthcare coverage that includes contraception and birth control at no cost, even if it violates their religious convictions. A lot of people took a lot of solace in the Hobby Lobby decision. Americans didn't agree with the Hobby Lobby decision. We're going to have to come to a truce. Who's the Catholic New York Times columnist?

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Ross Douthat.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer** Yeah. He wrote an article on same sex marriage called "Negotiating the Terms of our Surrender". There's some truth to – it's shifted from let's have a battle over same sex marriage to how we protect the religious liberties or the religious views of what really is a minority view.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** I can't remember the name of the author right now off the top of my head but there's a wonderful book on the rise and fall of religious freedom in America that is published through Princeton University Press this last year. It is an excellent study of what he called the compromise that existed for 200 years in this country on the issue of religious liberty. In effect, the tolerance that was created by that compromise, which he says we are now losing rapidly. He expresses it as a concern in terms of where that's going to allow us the rise and decline of American religious freedom. Who is it?

**Dr. Ed Stetzer** Stephen Smith, if that's his real name.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** That is a terrific book on the history of religious liberty in the United States.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer** It's Harvard Press.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** It's a really well done book.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer** Sorry. We've got to answer these questions a little more briefly. There's that guy again. Why don't we go to this microphone over here? Go ahead.
The Table Podcast  Ed Stetzer

*Audience*  My question is easier.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer*  I like you already.

*Audience*  I see that Evangelicals are widely unknown by most of our population in the United States. They wouldn’t even understand or even know how to define us. Why is that and what do we do about that?

*Dr. Ed Stetzer*  Most people don't use the term. The term is an insider language. They think of Christians and then we have this view that there's a whole bunch of people who say they're Christians that really aren't, which is really weird to a lot of people. I was talking to Luis Palau. I was interviewing him. He's the Latino Billy Graham. He's friends with the Pope, which is cool no matter who you are, if you're friends with the Pope. I want to hang out with the Pope. I'm from New York City so we say “Da Pope”.

I asked him on camera and I asked him beforehand if I could ask him. You've known this guy for 20 years. You've been prayer partners. You get together regularly for whatever lunch. I nuanced it really well. In the grand tradition, we know that there are different denominations that identify as Christian but as an Evangelical you think people need to be born again, right? Yeah, yeah. You think people need to be saved. I nuanced it. I was really careful. I asked, do you think that Pope Francis is, in your and our understanding of the Evangelical view of being born again and converted, etc., that he is a brother in Christ, a born again believer? I asked him beforehand if I could ask this question because I don't think you should just throw somebody under the proverbial bus.

I had Kirk Cameron recently on my TV show and I asked him did he really believe in a pre-tribulational rapture now that he hangs around all these Calvinists? I told him I was going to ask him and he gave me permission to ask it. You can watch him dance around the question for seven minutes on video, if you're so inclined, just Google his name and my name. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have mentioned a pre-tribulational rapture. It's good. There's nothing wrong with it.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  You'll be gone soon enough.
I'll be gone soon enough. He said I've got friends that are Communists. I've got a lot of friends that are Catholic. I've got a friend – a lot of this. He said all sorts of stuff. I said, so what's the answer? He said, yes.

What was fascinating was two things. It was the most watched clip that we've ever put out. There were thousands upon thousands of people that watched this clip. The other thing was the backlash I got for asking the question, which is fascinating, from a lot of reporters, I work a lot with reporters. How dare you ask if the Pope is a Christian. I totally get why that is offensive to people.

But as Evangelicals, we do believe that you can be a religious leader – many of you in this room, if I asked you, do you know so and so, who's the president of this denomination. Do you know if they're a Christian? You'd say, “Well I'm not sure. Have they been a follower of Jesus or whatever?” So, to the world, it's really a weird thing that people who are clergy, we would have questions about whether or not they're Christians. I would hope that all of you would agree that you could be clergy and not be a Christian.

Evangelicals, because of their odd beliefs, there's a sense that we don't know who they are or what they are. So, if you ask most Americans, they don't know how to define Evangelical. Now, you've tried to change the definition of Evangelical to move away from politics, which I think was good. The difficulty is it's hard to do that because Evangelicals really do believe politically, with a remarkable correlation, the same thing. If you called Evangelicals purple, let's say they're purples now, they're going to end up being identified politically as a bloc because Evangelicals really do tend to vote the same way overwhelmingly with a high level of correlation. Your problem is not Evangelicals being identified in politics. The problem is Evangelicals voting the same. Thus, they get identified as a voting bloc.

To your question, I'm not sure that saving Evangelicalism as a word is really a worthwhile journey. As the world identifies less as being Christian, which is what's happening, the nominal Christians are dropping the term and they're becoming the none's, the none of the above. As that happens, we can reclaim Christian. That's a better place and space to be to talk about what it really means to be a genuine follower of Jesus, a genuine Christian, rather than to empathize the flavor that we are.
Now, I do see myself as an Evangelical. If you look at my Facebook page, it says Evangelical. That's the language. I'm on the board of the NAE. It's a word worth keeping. I'll defend the word. I'll describe it but, ultimately, I want to talk about myself as a Christian, a person who follows Jesus with my neighbors and my friends.

Isn't the point of the question, which is, how do Evangelicals become visible? Isn't the point of the question the way you become visible is – there are certain things you don't do. You don't retreat. You don't disengage. You don't enter into your own privatized bubble world that keeps you safe from everything that's around you.

The way you become visible and have a presence, if I can say it that way, is by moving in circles and engaging with people in the institutions of life in which we all function in one way or another. Hopefully, do so with a presence that is winsome, we've used that word a lot, but that also leaves no doubt that you care about the people that you're interacting with. Again, even in the context of sometimes being honest and challenging them.

Earlier, we were talking about we're becoming a minority. Some people have made the observation that what's happening to the church in the United States might be good. The reason it's good is because it puts us in the position of being more like the way the early church is. Sometimes, the church does better when it doesn't have power than when it does.

Every time the church has power, it tends to have done poorly with it. It's a question of how they exercise that. I buy into the Kuyperian vision that there are spheres of society. We should be intentionally engaging those spheres of society. We're at a seminary so this is one sphere, narrower sphere. But as you pastor churches, you want to encourage people to be godly lawyers and godly filmmakers.

That's why the faith at work movement is so important. Okay, let's see. We're on this side now.
Someone going out into the pastorate, and I'm looking for jobs if anyone hears of anything, how do you balance the fact that there are people who are, “We are Evangelicals. I have a flag. I even planted it in my yard.” Evangelicals, who are the people I'm trying to get a job from, and understanding that you're reaching a population that either, one, doesn't even know what an Evangelical is or what Evangelical stands for or, if they hear the term, they think they hate Evangelicals, which I've encountered a lot being from the Northeast. I can't use that term. How do we balance a population in the church that may really hold on to that while reaching some who think that label is a terrible, horrible, a very bad thing?

Where are you from in the Northeast?

Connecticut.

Woo-gee.

Where you're from, you're right, Connecticut, it's going to be a higher negativity. The Northeast is going to be particularly negative towards Evangelicals.

What I would say is the bigger concern is the former thing you mentioned. It is churches that just want to go to battle. It's really important to note that you're in this articulate, winsome environment. You're talking about engaging culture. There are people like Darrell and others teaching you to lead well and engage the culture well. That's not what people are learning.
People are not watching television shows that teach them that or news stations that teach them that. They're not reading websites that teach them that. They think that Godliness has been stolen from an America that's basically Israel in their mind. They think that if my people will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways that that's talking about them. They think that there was a compact that was described between the founding fathers and God. This is truly a city set upon a hill. These evildoers have snuck in and stolen their country. They're going to speak up and speak out and take them down. All of you hear that and hear how ridiculous that is. But I'm telling you, that's the constituency of Evangelicalism today.

What I would say is – I get it all the time. Why don't you speak up on this? Even on Ferguson, where I said we should listen to hurting African-American Evangelical leaders of why they have a different view. Because Fox News is on a 24-hour news loop basically saying that people who say that are Socialists or Communists, that's the response that I'm getting from the Evangelical constituency. It breaks my heart that Evangelicals are more influenced by certain websites and stations than they are by the Word of God. But that's a factual reality and you would be foolish not to think that. So, I would not rush in.

Here's the thing. I agree with most of what they would say. It's the pathway they want to get there and the way they're articulating it that's not helpful. President Obama is not a Muslim. President Obama is not part of a secret cabal. I get that President Obama does – most Evangelical groups, the vast majority of Evangelical Christians are dissatisfied with President Obama. He's the president of the United States. I teach my kids to pray for those in power. I'm thankful that he's a good father. I think that's important. Whenever I say stuff like that I get hammered. Why? Sometimes the hatred of progressive views is greater than the call to love your neighbor for many Christians.
What I would say is I would be winsome with them just like you're winsome with the world. I'd put my hand on an arm and say, “I get the frustration, but just so you know the ’50s weren't the dream time you thought they were. You should've been African-American or Latino in the ’50s or a woman in the ’50s. They weren't the dreamtime you thought they were. Let's recognize the world is broken. Brokenness is more evident now. Let's speak gently and lovingly and clearly and firmly. Let's do so with a lot of Christ and the grace of Christ being evident in our speech.” So I would speak to them. Recognize that you have to bring them along too.

Dr. Darrell Bock

It's actually a major task because there is a lot of anger and frustration. There's a lot of complaining from Christians. What I think you see in the model of Jesus is his attempt to minister to people regardless of where they come from or how they're about. He sat down and went to a meal with the Pharisee just as much as he went out with the tax collectors and sinners. What you do is model and show your concern and you talk less about it.

Okay, over here.

Moderator

I have a question from the sound guy in the back.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

The guy of 92 denominations?

Audience

This is a surrogate question so don't look at me. [Laughter] How do the well-endowed mainline seminaries play into all of this? They're in influential places and have a lot of money typically but do you see their influence decreasing or staying the same? How do Evangelical seminaries take over in prominence and influence as time goes on or will they?

Dr. Ed Stetzer

I don't know. The Liberty University guy, that will be the easy question. What have you got? You don't know how to take that.

I would say that mainline seminaries, most of whom – you've got to remember, when you think of mainline seminaries, you think of the University of Chicago, things of that sort. Mainline seminaries don't have much influence outside of their own spheres.
Evangelicals have taken over theological education in the United States. Of the ten largest seminaries in the United States, I'm trying to remember, is it eight of them, it depends on how you count some of them. I guess I probably shouldn't name names that I'm not sure are Evangelical. But the vast majority, I mean, 25 percent of students in the Association of Theological Schools are at Southern Baptist seminaries. So, 25 percent of the whole are at Southern Baptist seminaries. Let alone, seminaries like Gordon-Conwell or here or whatever.

What I would say is they're still seen as the place of gravitas. They're still seen as the intellectual elite. For me, I have four seminary degrees. I have two masters and two doctorates from three different seminaries, none of which would be among the academic elites. What I would say is, I think there are places that are friendly towards Evangelicals. Duke is friendly to Evangelicals. Yale can be friendly to Evangelicals. I do think it's good.

Everyone knows students come out of Dallas with that beastly four years. We're going to stick it to you and make you take 17 semesters of languages. Everybody knows that you guys are beastly here. So there's a real respect for the students and their preparation. They could, to the degree that they want to. But I would say I don't think you're going to – this wasn't your question. I don't think you're going to take over those seminaries because their structures just wouldn't allow that.

Will the Evangelical institutions have the clout? No. I don't think Evangelicals are seen as serious academically or intellectually. So, I don't think they'll have the clout in their own institutions alone. Wheaton certainly has academic leader on the board there. Certainly, I wouldn't say that Wheaton would ever have, through the perception of, for example, the mainstream press be seen as a Notre Dame.

\textit{Dr. Darrell Bock} \hspace{1cm} You just injected the factor that I think the question ignores that's actually important.

\textit{Dr. Ed Stetzer} \hspace{1cm} You're kind of rebuking the guy's question.
No, no, no. Here's the point. There's a perception about which schools represent Christianity. When the media gets asked theological questions, they don't go to the Evangelical seminaries even though that's where the majority of the theological students are. They go to the Ivy League schools or they go to the main denominational seminaries.

With their eight students each.

The really amazing thing is if you ask what outstanding seminaries in New York City, we were talking about this in my office, you think of Union New York. It's almost a defunct seminary in terms of how it's actually functioning. But that's where people will go. Why? In part, because of the geographic proximity of a reporter being up against a deadline, who rubs shoulders with these people, gets to know them. He needs an answer to a question before the deadline at the end of the day. So that's where he goes.

I still remember a conversation I had with ABC News people in which I said to them, when you talk about religion in the United States, you've got to go outside the Northeast to understand what's going on in America. There's just no other way to do this. I said to them in the same breath, I understand when you're under pressure why you contact the person that you know.

We need an Evangelical seminary in New York City.

Among other things.

Darrell Bock, I think you and I need to move to New York City and start an Evangelical seminary. We'll call it Dallas in New York City.

That probably won't work. The point here is that one of the reasons you're dealing in all of this, and this is the solution to another reality that Ed was alluding to earlier, is the narrow casting that you get. What you get is narrow casting on television. Everybody's listening to their own tribal voice, if I can say it.

The more news channels we have the more tribal we get.
That's exactly right. They're not even making the effort to listen to what the other side of the argument is. They're simply engaged in reinforcing where they already are. In the process, there is no real conversation that ever happens on a substantive issue in this country because of the way we're interacting with each other. No one in personal relations would ever think about relating to someone this way if we were talking about how I teach my kids how to interact with somebody on an issue. So we're completely dysfunctional in that regard. And you ask why doesn't it work? It doesn't work because we haven't managed it in society in such a way that we actually are able to have a conversation with our neighbor who's very different than we are. That is a requirement in being able to live with one another in a structure which is set up to have all kinds of people be my neighbor.

Let's hear from somebody who doesn't have facial hair. Let's skip over there. We'll come back to you in a minute, Liberty guy. There are three kinds of people in the world, men with beards, boys and women. Anyway, go ahead.

First off, there's been a lot of great information. I feel like I'm trying to drink from a fire hydrant.

I'm sorry about that.

That's good. It's good. My question has to do with taking all this information about Evangelicalism and translating it into how does that look in evangelism? A lot of my family are not believers. One of the things I'm noticing in hurdles with having conversations about the Gospel is that there are always stereotypes and preconceived notions that they have. So it's not so much throwing new truth at them but rather undoing untruths that are already there. Can you speak to some stereotypes that Evangelicalism has and how do we go about portraying authentic, genuine identity in what we're about in portraying the Gospel?

tell me your name.

cara.
Dr. Ed Stetzer

Good question, Cara, and one I'm passionate about. Most of my family aren't believers. For thirty years I've been sharing the Gospel. Simultaneously, Cara, there are two factors. Many more than this but two, let me just address. One is the misperceptions. What do we really believe? And sometimes, then there are the correct perceptions of what we do believe that is rejected. Both of those have to be addressed.

I recently flew down to meet with my dad who is not a believer. When I say he's not a believer, I'm not saying he's a Lutheran or something. Sometimes, when you're with our people you've got to say it means he's really not a believer. So there are some misperceptions. I talked to my dad about what it means. Why did Jesus die on the cross for our sins and in our place? His perception was, maybe as an example, maybe as a good person. Maybe Evangelicals think that you're all dying and going to hell and most of you are not good enough. So, I address the misperceptions.

For my dad, he had correct perceptions. He just had different beliefs. Ultimately, for him, he doesn't believe that sin is cosmic treason; it breaks the relationship. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Since he has no pre-suppositional belief in the Bible, let's look at Romans. Let's go down the Roman road. Roman road would mean nothing to him. Both of those have to be at work.

What I try to do, in any evangelistic conversation is to deal with some of the misperceptions that are there if they have them. Then I try to maybe undermine some of their perceptions or disagreements with that. I find Tim Keller's stuff really helpful on this, how to undermine some of the arguments, defeater arguments he calls them. You might Google Tim Keller defeater arguments if you're so inclined. I think that's necessary today.

When Darrell was a kid in the '20s, if you said to somebody, you need to be saved. People would say you're right, I do. When I first became a Christian I was a young man and I came home. The first one I witnessed to was my dad. This is 1977. We grew up Irish Catholic. The Catholic Church was really the church we didn't go to. We knew where it was and we didn't like Protestants. But I had become a believer. I go to my dad. I say, dad, are you saved? My dad says saved from what? I said, I don't know but you need to be.
In a world of the '50s, if I said are you saved, people would've got that. Today, those words are 15 definitions away from having any meaning. Saved from what? What does it mean sin? What does it mean to be dead in our trespasses and sins? Why did Jesus die on the cross for our sins in our place? We're a harvest oriented people in an unseeded field. Think on that for a second. We think the standard Evangelical pick up line for the last 30 years is, “If you were to die today…”

Dr. Darrell Bock: Oh no, don't go here.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I can't go here?

Dr. Darrell Bock: Go ahead. I'm going to follow up.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: “If you die today, do you know for sure that people go to Heaven or to Hell?” One of the coolest things about my job is that if I have a question about something, I can actually poll on it. I actually asked, does anybody really think that way, if they were to die today? Let me show you real quick. This is why I keep my computer handy. It's my ADD kicking in at any moment and so I want to be ready. We actually polled I think it was 1000 Americans. Let me see if I can pull it up here. What we asked them was, how often do you wonder if I were to die today do I know for sure – I'm bothered. I can't find this. I usually can find this much more quickly.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Can I fill in while you're looking?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah, go ahead.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Another element to this question is, we have, and Ed has already alluded to this, a language that we use that's very theological. We have to de-theologize our language and explain it so that people get what it is we're really going after. Let me use an example. A big word for us is sin, only that's not how it's heard. When you say the word sin, what most people hear because of their background is SIN. It comes over with all kinds of negativity. But it's driving at a concept that actually most people buy. They just don't think about it. If you change that to the word dysfunction, which I grant it's not the same thing, but at least we're in the ballpark.
"Dr. Ed Stetzer" It's Joel Osteen, right?

"Dr. Darrell Bock" That's right. If you change the word to dysfunction and you get people to ask the question, is your life dysfunctional? You actually get a confession. People actually will acknowledge their lives in a confessional because they'll acknowledge they have problems in their life. Sometimes they mismanage their lives. They know it. Now, if I can get a person walking down that road and then about three-quarters of the way down say, you know what the scripture calls that oftentimes? Sin. I'm in a completely different place.

"Dr. Ed Stetzer" You're starting further back in the evangelistic conversation.

"Dr. Darrell Bock" That's right. You're working your way towards some level of mutual understanding so that you can move towards some level of substantive engagement.

"Dr. Ed Stetzer" That's good.

"Dr. Darrell Bock" It isn't to shy away from saying I'm never going to use the word sin. It's to build the bridge so that when you get to the concept, a person is actually in the position of being able to grasp it.

"Dr. Ed Stetzer" Let me throw some numbers around because it makes me feel better. By the way, I know I stole the phrase harvest oriented people in an unseeded field from a guy named Chuck Kelly, just for full disclosure. Here's the poll we did with 1000 Americans. How often do you wonder if I were to die today do you know for sure I'd go to Heaven? I was stunned that 20 percent of Americans wonder that every day. I'm like really, are we polling hospital wards and military units about to deploy?

"Dr. Darrell Bock" Were these unbelievers who were being polled?

"Dr. Ed Stetzer" These are all Americans. Eighteen percent of Evangelicals say they wonder every day, if I were to die today would I go to Heaven?

"Dr. Darrell Bock" That's why they're Evangelicals.
Dr. Ed Stetzer  

Here's the thing. The e-people have used our data too so it's all good. They're not mad at us. They were at first but anyway. But when you ask it a little differently, back to your point Darrell, start not at Heaven and dying but at meaning and purpose, the numbers shift. Look at the screen. How often do you wonder how can I find meaning and purpose in life? To the point where actually now, we'll compare them. The nevers are down and the dailies are up. For me, starting at the right place, dealing with misperceptions as you addressed but also dealing with correct perceptions but disagreements and then it's ultimately a question of trusting the Spirit to work. It's not easy.

I come from a family of lots of non-believers. My mother comes to Christ first. Later, she gets married and then migrated into Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodoxy, like a lot of Evangelicals did in the '80s. I didn't, obviously. But the rest of my family are not.

I was here at lunchtime and there are people from Pantego Bible Church here. They have a church plant at a Pantego Bible Church. I met the pastor. He comes to me at a conference I was speaking at. He says are you related to Bill Stetzer? I said, yeah. I have a Bill Stetzer. He goes to my church. Oh, that's not the same Bill Stetzer. I can assure you. It turns out it's my uncle who comes to Jesus in his 50s at a church plant in Texas. We moved out of New York City with all of our family. I would have never guessed. So, right now, there's my uncle and I both get to evangelize my dad. In God's goodness and grace, he's at work.

Dr. Darrell Bock  

Here's why I really dislike this, if you died today would you go to Heaven? Think about what that actually communicates theologically about what the Gospel is ultimately about. The Gospel is ultimately about escaping a place, a very warm and uncomfortable place and living somewhere else at some time in the future forever and ever. It totally discounts the fact that I'm made in the image of God, that I'm here to actually function in relationship to God now, not just in the future and I like to say there are really two ways that message gets interpreted. It's either the Jimmy Cagney way. You dirty rat. You shouldn't be doing that and you try to set up the Gospel that way.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  

Jimmy Cagney really resonated with the room.
Dr. Darrell Bock: I know. That's why I used the illustration. Actually, when I do that illustration I do it two ways. I do the Jimmy Cagney illustration. That's for the over 45s.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: The over 65s.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I do explain it's my parent's generation.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: For everybody out there that's black and white on the screen. That's Jimmy Cagney.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That actually is the picture I show because I want them to connect with the past. Then I use the picture of the matrix, Neo. What's Neo doing? He's dodging bullets. The question about the Gospel is basically how do I dodge the bullet of going to Hell? I'm asking myself, is that what the Gospel is ultimately about? When we poorly translate what our theology is by asking a question that works for us but doesn't work for the person we're asking it to, we actually do a lot of danger, even in setting up the conversation we want to have because we're taking them ultimately to a place that although has a slot for us isn't really the place where the Bible is trying to take people, which is to reconnect them into an ongoing, vibrant relationship with the living God.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: So in your matrix salvation plan do you say do you want to take the red pill or the blue pill?

Dr. Darrell Bock: No, because that politically puts us in a bad place.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: That's a good point.

Audience: Thank you guys so much.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Thank you for being here tonight.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Did we lose the Liberty guy?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Stand up. Come on, on your feet.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That may be an indication our answers are a little too long.
I was going to ask how to bring the Gospel to the Northeastern pagans.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

Did you say the North Easter based –

Audience

Northeastern pagans.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

Oh, okay, good deal, so my people. Are you also from the Northeast?

Audience

One of the Connecticutians.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

Oh, that's right, woo. I remember that.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Do me a favor. When you evangelize them, don't call them pagans. That's point one.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

But here, the pagan pool works for us. I would say that in church planning and evangelism in the Northeast, you're going to have to recognize your scene as outsiders, particularly the farther up you get in the Northeast, the more outsider-ish you are. Go for, plan to stay a while. Show and share the love of Jesus to a broke and hurting world. Show that you have been changed by the power of the Gospel and that change is worth sharing. Ultimately, those who invest their time and their lives in the Northeast are some of the best people who are pastoring and planning churches in the Northeast.

Audience

I've noticed sometimes that the Evangelical conversation in America can get mired in on itself and become insular. I was curious as to whether there are insights from the majority world into Evangelicalism that would maybe just shed some light on or make us think differently about how we're going about some of these things.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Go for this.
Dr. Ed Stetzer

I don't really think we need to listen to the rest of the world. I think it's going so well here. One of the realities is my PhD is in missiology with a specific focus on Western culture. So I end up with sitting on stages talking to people like Darrell Bock and asking questions about North America. When you talk about the state of Evangelicalism I can show you the numbers here. I would love to show you the numbers around the world.

We have an office in Brazil. We do research in Brazil where there are just amazing things that God is doing. There's always weird stuff too anywhere. Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism is not something that I or probably any of you would be excited about.

It's not Pentecostalism which I'm very – I preached last Sunday at church on the way in Van Nuys California, Jack Hayford's former church, just to different things. There are always aberrations in all these things that we wouldn't be excited about but what an amazing thing God is doing.

We are seeing in Central and South America – the most Evangelical country in the whole hemisphere is now in Central America, far more than us. It's just amazing to see what the Lord is doing there.

Go to Africa. In the last century you cannot overstate the movement towards Christianity. The great story, often untold story is the Christianization of Africa. Again, people say, “What about the aberrations?” There are always aberrations. Don't spend your life saying what about the aberrations. Rejoice in what God is doing.
In Asia, what a remarkable turn, how God has used, for example, the Chinese diaspora in such a wonderful and powerful way. Missionaries who were not having a whole lot of great success until Mao Tse-tung threw them all out and then the diaspora becomes, with the exception of Taiwan, becomes this outbreak of opportunity. Then, back in China and the Chinese government in its way breaking away from the missionaries actually forced indigenous autonomous churches that then would multiply to the point that one of the great success stories of Christianity in the world is probably right now what's going on, depending on how you count and who you listen to, fifty, eighty, hundred million Christians to the point now where it's actually becoming uncomfortable in some communities. We've got to take down all these crosses that are showing up. That's not a sign of a country that is not growing when the government says there are too many crosses in this town. Let's take them down. We could continue.

When you look at globally – when you go outside the West and you look at the rest, not in all places – Japan is a counter example. At the beginning of the last century, five percent of Japan self-identified as Christian. At the end of the last century, ten years ago, one percent of Japan identified as Christians. So it's not a success story everywhere.

But, historically, Christianity has a rooted geography-ness that changes. It was certainly rooted in Jerusalem, then, perhaps, to Antioch and then to Rome and then to Moscow and then to Europe and then to England and then to UK. I think the center of Christianity is now in the global South and in an emerging expression in the Asian context. I thank God for it.

When Evangelicalism here has a cold, it impacts the whole world. I don't think it's healthy that we have a disproportionate impact on global Evangelicalism but we do. You look at the top Christian selling books in Africa. They're written almost all by Americans. Christianity Today just did a story on that. That's not all good but that's also a great, I mean, it's not going to go away.

Pentecostalism is larger around the world but the Assemblies of God is the powerhouse around the world that people listen to, the Church of God Cleveland that people listen to. I think we have to recognize that we have a responsibility to steward here. But thank God for what he's doing around the world.
We're doing research now in multiple continents and multiple countries and it's just neat to see what the Lord is doing. It's not where I spend most of my time. I wish it was. But God has a call on my life to be a missiologist to Western culture. We haven't even talked about global missions. What I try to do is also recognize that one of the ways the church here is going to be the kind of church it needs to be is be less about itself and more about God's global mission anyway, to listen to global voices and then also to be engaged in God's global mission. Thank you for bringing that in.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Your global voice's question also rises what I think is a wonderful opportunity for students who are here. Somewhere around ten percent of our campus is international.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* I was surprised at how diverse it was. Are they international students or do you also have a lot of diversity?

*Dr. Darrell Bock* There is internal diversity too but it is a lot of international students.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* It wasn't that way when I was here ten years ago.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's right. The place is changing.

*Moderator* You have time for one more student question.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Okay. There's an important point I want to make.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* In other words, sit down.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's this. You have an opportunity to talk with students whose experience of Christianity comes from outside the Western bubble. I would take advantage of that opportunity. Sit down with some of the students who are here from other countries who not only have experienced Christianity in different context but who can look at the Christianity that you've experienced from both the outside and the inside with outside lenses. That will be a very beneficial experience for you to engage in that relationship.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* Amen. It's good work. I thought we had more time, dude in the green tie.
We've got mic questions and then we're going table to table.

Oh, we've got to do that weird table to table thing they told me about. I'm excited about that.

This will be quick. It seems, at least in a Western North American context, a lot of Evangelicalism is running off of really shallow, at least in the local church context that I find myself in, it's running off of theology that's run off of bumper stickers and coffee cup cute little clichés and things like that. But when it comes to especially things that you see in culture –

Just for the record, I work for Life Way so we're not opposed to those things.

I used to work for Life Way too. We used to be co-workers. You just didn’t know it.

I felt that. I think we bonded right there.

It was good. And so, especially with a lot of the ethical issues that we recognize, these are really complex. How do we, especially as pastors and Christian leaders, help our people to think more well nuanced and critically and not just made broad statements that aren't really accurate or they're straw men, on one hand? Then, on the other hand, how do we help people who don't even care about thinking in those categories think that way?

The second question is harder than the first one. If someone doesn't want to go there, it's very hard to take them there. It's a very simple answer. Other than, all that happens is you, perhaps, hope and pray that they end up in a circumstance in which they are forced to confront the complexity of what it is that they're dealing with and they can't walk away from it. But other than that, it's very, very difficult.

Your first question is a very interesting question. I'm going to hand that part of it to you.

I don't know. Tell me your name.
Dr. Ed Stetzer

 Audience

Chris.

Dr. Ed Stetzer

Chris, my former co-worker. Did you get fired for stealing or what happened? You don't want to tell me. That's all right. It's not a problem.

 Audience

[Unintelligible]

Dr. Ed Stetzer

I understand. I can look it up. I can look up your employment record. I'm doing it right now.

One of the things that I think when you leave seminary – I think I may be disagreeing with you, Darrell – I think you're going to have to get used to most people are thinking in complexity about other things other than their faith. Thus, you're going to have to be okay with the fact that when you want everyone to wrestle with – when you first start pastoring, you'll get out there and say when you really think through this and wrestle through this, people think of wrestling things in their home, with their kids and at their job. They just want to love Jesus. Know that you've thought it through and go on together and trust the Lord.

That's one of the things that, for me, I came out of seminary thinking we've got to help people address complexity. There are always some but I find that as a pastor most people don't want to sit around with you and address the complexity of cultural engagement or theological opinion or whatever it may be. They just want to know how to love Jesus. How do I reach my friends so they love Jesus because I've got a lot on my mind already? What I would say is, I'm almost saying prepare to be disappointed. What I'm saying is prepare to love a people who really love the Lord but don't love the complexity the way you love complexity as a seminary student or a professor.

I sat across the table from a plumber in my first church. His name was Dale. What he said to me was – I was in the inner city of Buffalo New York working with the urban poor – you try to make everything so complicated. I just want to live for the Lord. What do I need to do? I said you need to understand who you are in Christ. I actually really think you do. I wasn't being flippant. The Gospel is not you do. The Gospel is Jesus did. He said so I need to understand these things. Then, I need to really genuinely live it. I said yeah. He said so why do you make it sound so complicated?
Since that time, I've decided that – I recognize there are some people that really want to wrestle through the complexity, some people want to live for Jesus and to know what they need to know and live for Jesus from there. I think it's okay to be either. One of the rude awakenings that I think a lot of students find when they leave a seminary environment is that a lot of people just don't think the way they've been thinking for the last, I say three years but not in Dallas, for the next four years.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Hopefully.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**

Yeah, hopefully, on a good journey. My exhortation is make sure that you're constantly holding up for them the beauty of doctrine, the beauty of theology. But also recognize that people are going to take it in in different ways and different paces for where they are. If they love Jesus and they understand the Gospel and they're seeking to live for him, that's pretty good.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

We may or may not disagree on this. I think that that is a good word in the sense of don't take away from a person their central focus that their goal in life, if they're there, is to please Jesus. The flip side of it is the moment they hit a crisis, what they often do is they call you or they write an e-mail and they're looking for help. The short answer to your question is this. I don't think this is a difficult concept to grasp; it's a difficult concept to execute and there's a difference. We live in a fallen world. A fallen world is a messy place. It is a complex place. It's the nature of being in a fallen world that introduces the complexity of what we're after.

If you can develop the skill of going there a step at a time as opposed to giving them the entire fire hydrant all at once, like we've done tonight, if you can develop that skill of working in simple steps towards an appreciation of the elements of complexity and you show how that connects to the actual complexities of life, people will take that journey with you one step at a time. The mistake that is often made is that we try to deliver too much all at once as opposed to a step at a time.

You have a rare privilege as a pastor to get – for example, I was sitting across the folks at Bent Tree Fellowship, which is one of the places I go to church. It's a complex story. They're in the midst of a series on Hebrews in which the pastor has planned to take 38 weeks on Hebrews.
Dr. Ed Stetzer: Sweet mother of pearl.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right. Now, on one hand, you go what a luxury to be able to go that slow. But, knowing the pastor as I do, what he is doing is introducing the complexity of life one simple step at a time to where people can appreciate how, and he's talking about how messy life is and that kind of thing. But he's doing it in a very positive way while reinforcing their core commitment to who Jesus is and their love for Jesus at the same time.

There's a way to combine these things but it isn't going to be the way it happens in the classroom where I've got five or four minutes to unpack something that has been debated for 400 years. That's not happening well in that kind of environment.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I like your answer better. So, I think we do disagree or did. But I think I like your answer better.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Thanks.