



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Getting Over Yourself with Dean Inserra

Season 1, Episode 10 Transcript

[00:00:00] Announcer: Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast. We provide clear, practical biblical resources for discipleship. Here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:20] Darryl: Is trying to be “the best you” actually ruining you?

From “living your best life” to “self-actualizing,” “finding your destiny,” and “waiting on the best to come,” the contemporary messages of the world exhort us to believe that we are promised and entitled the biggest and best life can possibly offer. But is that actually what Jesus promises? Is that even close to the message of the gospel?

Getting Over Yourself is a call for Christians to reject these hollow messages of personal prosperity and to return to the humble truths of the gospel. You'll learn how to identify this insidious, popular theology in culture and churches and examine its devastating effects. And, perhaps most importantly, you'll learn how to combat it with gospel truth that leads to the abundant life Jesus actually desires for His people. Discover the beauty in losing yourself— and ultimately in gaining Him.

I'm pleased to welcome the author of *Getting Over Yourself* to the podcast. His name is Dean Inserra, and he's the founding pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, Florida. Dean is married to Krissie, and they have two sons and a daughter. Dean likes baseball, wrestling, and the Miami Hurricanes. Dean, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:30] Dean: Hey, thanks. It's really great to be with you. It's a privilege to be on your podcast. So thank you for having me.

[00:01:34] Darryl: I want to find out which baseball team you're rooting for.

[00:01:38] Dean: Yes, I'm a Chicago Cubs fan. How that happened was here where I live, WGN, based out of Chicago, at the local channel in Chicago, was a national TV station that carried the Chicago Cubs, and all their home games were at 3 p.m. So when I would come back home from school to my house here in Florida, before I go outside and play with my friends, the only thing on TV was the Chicago Cubs. So I would watch the Cubs and became a Cubs fan because of that.

[00:02:05] Darryl: You must have been thrilled to see them finally win the other year.

[00:02:08] Dean: It was wonderful. My dad, when I was a kid, sat me down and said, just so you know if you're going to choose the Cubs, you will be disappointed every single year. So it was great to fight, stay up really late that night and see it finally happened. It was great.

[00:02:20] Darryl: Somebody recently asked me the difference between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Chicago Cubs. And the answer of course, is the Cubs won something and to the Cubs are lovable.

Well, I really appreciate your book. I want to ask you the story behind your book. What led you to write this latest book?

[00:02:41] Dean: What led me to write this latest book was that I saw this type of theology and church notoriety and popularity that came with it continuing to increase without much attention. Not many discerning eyes have been willing to talk about it. Maybe a quick sarcastic tweet here and there, a social media post, but not enough actual discernment about what's being taught in what I call these new prosperity churches.

The church where I passed with a lot of college students and a lot of these university students, what would come into our town to go to Florida State University in Tallahassee. A lot of them were already believers and but what they were exposed to in the Christian faith was only these type of pastors, this new prosperity gospel, those type of books very prevalent and popular on Instagram and this was their context of the Christian faith. And we just really saw that we had to almost deconstruct — a different kind of use of the word — this faith that they had formed based on what they were drawn to via Instagram and social media and YouTube with these popular pop Christian pastors and what they really thought the Christian faith was.

So I said, wow, this is actually a problem and a growing problem. We haven't seen really the full consequences of yet because it's very new. It's over the last 10-20 years kind of in that range. So really trying to almost foreshadow what's coming and trying to do whatever we can to help divert people towards the Scriptures rather than this popular level Christianity we're seeing that's so prevalent on social media.

[00:04:13] Darryl: So you talk about a new prosperity gospel, but it's not the same as what people normally think of when they think of the prosperity gospel. We think of, "Send money and you will prosper and you'll be rich" and everything. That's what you're talking about. What do you mean by this new prosperity gospel?

[00:04:28] Dean: Yeah. So the old prosperity gospel still exists clearly, and that's the late night TV stuff. The guy wants you to be healthy and wealthy. You give money to this cause, and he's going to drop a new car in your driveway, heal your disease, those type of things. And that still exists, but it's always been very fringe. Now, don't be mistaken, it's very dangerous. People are oftentimes drawn to this, and they're really taking advantage of, so it's a serious thing.

But this new prosperity gospel is really cool. It's really hip, it's not cheesy at all. It's trendy, it looks really great. It is very it's well liked on Instagram, savvy, very attractive, and the messaging, rather than God wants you to be healthy and wealthy, instead it is that God wants your dreams to come true. He wants to basically unlock this potential deep inside you for you to go and accomplish great things. So God serves more as a life coach more than a genie. The old prosperity gospel is more of a genie that grants you these wishes and brings you stuff. This God more exists as a life coach and encourager for you to be able to go and take on the world and go accomplish all the things that you want to accomplish.

And what's really troubling is this only really makes sense, this messaging, in an affluent Western culture. It doesn't really make sense anywhere else. How can this be a theology if it only really applies to a certain group of people? And usually they are young adults that are attractive to have wealthy parents and then position them to go accomplish these things that the world would say are amazing things.

Now again, there's nothing wrong, and more power to any believer that wants to go make lots of money or go move to a big city and have a great house. I think all that's wonderful, but we think that God's purpose in your life is for you to do that and that's why he exists. I worry, not only are we following a version of God that we've made up and we've constructed, but also we're setting up a

generation for major disappointment with God when all their dreams don't really come true.

In this new prosperity gospel, the bad words and a heresy are things like an ordinary life or just a mundane, a simple life, a basic life. Those are frowned upon as being not God's best for you. When I read the Scriptures, I see that God's best for you is not defined by this world. It's defined by following Christ and all that comes with that. So I just think we really need to talk about these kinds of things. It's truly an issue that we're seeing facing the younger generation of Christians.

[00:07:01] Darryl: So from what you're saying, you've described a younger generation of Christians, you described Instagram and social media. So this seems to be a fairly new phenomenon affecting a particular age group. Would that be correct?

[00:07:13] Dean: It definitely is, and that's why we still don't fully even know what the end results of this is going to be for the church and for Christians because it has existed fairly recently with the rise of this kind of platform-driven Christianity. Where the celebrity matters, and the savviness matters, the creativity, the branding, where you're seeing Christians spending more time talking about personal branding, then almost any other issue of their lives, like that's a significant kind of tenant of their lives as their personal brand.

And when I see the Scriptures I see he must increase, I must decrease; that Jesus is concerned with, our heart. He is concerned with our faithfulness, and he wants to be part of his mission, not the mission of ourselves trying to create some brand.

But here's what makes it interesting is that what the new prosperity gospel is doing is it's taking these type of selfish measures, but sprinkling Christian language on top of it. So we're saying things like, "God wants me to do this," and, "God size-dreams" and, and God out of context, Bible verses and sprinkling them on top of these things. That makes people feel like it's okay on the surface. It doesn't sound heretical or anything like that. It sounds just Christian enough to be okay. That's allowing a lot of believers to be really taken in hook line and sinker, as we would say down here, by this type of belief system.

[00:08:33] Darryl: Is this affecting one corner of the church? We tend to think that there's a branch of the church that's more doctrinal and cares more about theology. Is that corner exempt? Or do you see that infiltrating almost every branch of Christianity?

[00:08:47] Dean: I think it has the potential to definitely infiltrate every branch, every single segment or tribe or camp of the Christian faith. Because really the main kind of driving force of this belief system is that God just wants you to be happy, like that's the goal, but God wants you to do more of what makes you happy. And I think that goes back to the garden of Eden, right? Where we think that oftentimes we could go around God, not to him, for all the things we're looking for in our lives with purpose, fulfillment, meaning, belonging. That I have to go and chase these other things rather than rest in the reality of who I am in Christ instead.

And again, I'm not trying to say that it's wrong to go pursue things for yourself. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is we believe that is God's purpose for us and the Christian life is going after those things. I think that's the problem.

So I think that any Christian can be tempted and be lured into thinking that the purpose of God is my happiness, my agenda, what I want at this moment. It can be expressed in a lot of different ways. Where the segment inside — it really is a popular messaging of this “Christian” (I would put “Christian” in air quotes) kind of idea really is targeting that young kind of doctrine-light kind of person who likes to say that. Let's just talk about they want to talk about, like they're finally talking about brokenness, they just don't want to talk about sin. They are not going to talk about repentance, they're going to talk about a comeback, that God wants to take your setback and turn into a comeback rather than simply resting in the gospel. They want to say the best is yet to come And by that they don't necessarily mean life with God.

I would hope that living with walking with Christ and life with God that your marriage would be different, but your parenting would be different. Your relationships to be different. Obviously the best is yet to come. We think about Heaven and the new heavens, the new earth and what's to come for believers for all eternity. That's not what they're talking about.

Usually what it means is a church growing numerically. It means your personal platform expanding. It all really does go back to this idea of your brand going full throttle to what you want it to be. And I'm just really bothered by it, as you can tell, to the point where I wrote a book about. It's not all critical, but it helps us to see, okay, here's what this is, here's the messaging, here's the marketing, here's what their church services look like. But also hear the real solutions to what it means to choose Christ instead of these things,

[00:11:12] Darryl: Dean, where did this new prosperity gospel come from? And why is it growing? Why is it sweeping through the church at such a rapid rate?

[00:11:20] Dean: Well, so, I'm going to answer the second question first. Why it's growing is because it's really intoxicating and it's really easy because you can go to a church, the message is going to be about your potential, and about how God wants to do a greater thing through you. And by that again, we're not talking about the Great Commission, they're talking about your personal ambition. So, you can leave church every week feeling really great just about you and have an emotional high.

I mean, that's what a football game does for us, what going to a great concert does for us, or going to see the Raptors win the championship. That's what Kawhi Leonard, that's what that does for us, right? So what again, I want our people on Sunday mornings who are part of City Church, I want them to leave feeling good, but I want to leave feeling good about Jesus and what Christ has accomplished for them and what that means for their lives. I want them feeling really good about that, not just about just themselves on their own. And it's kind of messaging where the cross and resurrection, yes, they believe in those things, but they're not really necessary for their faith because they're not even anywhere near a central component of the message.

And that's not me being some kind of like watchdog gospel-centered tribe stickler. I can do that and I'll admit that. Instead, it's just the messaging, it's just not dependent upon the work of Christ and where it comes from.

And I've been even in writing the book, I really try to go, okay, what are the roots of this? And I think it's all kind of collaboration of certain things, I think Instagram, elevating and allowing Christians to show themselves and present themselves just like the world does — hey, look at me, I'm here too, I think it's some of the end results of the church growth movement, which was very much life coaching, life principles, maybe those get boring after a while. So rather than just the life coaching to be about how to better my situation, I want life coaching on how to make my brand get bigger.

And then another thing — and I don't know if you're comfortable naming names here — but I think the bridge between the old prosperity gospel and the new prosperity gospel is Joel Osteen. Why I think that is his theology is much more old prosperity gospel, but how he comes across isn't as fringy or strange as that movement can appear, because he is much more polished, much more professional, a very good speaker, a very clear writer, and he's very inspiring. And he's not weird on the surface, I know somebody unbelievers who watched Joel Osteen, and they like him. And the reason is because he makes them feel good, right? So he's different than the old prosperity gospels.

Again, it's not about getting you to give to this cause necessarily, but it has the theology of that with everything the new prosperity gospel wants. So basically, you could say the new prosperity gospel is a cooler, hipper, better dressed by the standards of 2021 young people, almost follow-up to Joel Osteen. He was almost like the godfather of it.

[00:14:24] Darryl: And it's all over now, You see in our area, we've got these hipster churches where everybody goes, and they're known for, "You're going to have a great experience there, you're probably going to experience people."

[00:14:35] Dean: Exactly. That's the word. That's our favorite word. Experience.

[00:14:38] Darryl: Toronto Life had an article about the hippest churches in Toronto right now, and it was that it's like, these are the churches where you're going to go and it's going to be great music and a great message and you're going to walk away feeling good about yourself. It seems to be everywhere, even in a post-Christian city like Toronto. It's still present here.

[00:14:57] Dean: That's what draws, because you can be post-Christian, because the message doesn't really require much Christianity. It's going to be slick. They're going to talk about God talk about being saved. But Jesus is presented more as the one that's going to help you be an overcomer of whatever is happening in your life, and you just kind of get rid of the negativity in your life or what's holding you back. And really it's designed for Jesus to make you a better you, and that's how it's presented. I could see that being popular in any kind of culture, from the Bible belt where I live in the deep South, the United States, all the way to a post-Christian city like Toronto,

[00:15:35] Darryl: So didn't help me out because I should be growing my platform if I want to write books, and I think there's a godly way to do that. And yet this can easily cross over to, "I need to create a brand." I'm never going to be that hip pastor, but I think the heart is very deceptive where you can begin to flirt with that yourself. So help us out. How do we sort out our motives and make sure that we're not falling into this false gospel?

[00:16:00] Dean: Yeah, so the irony is not lost on me. I'm having a book called Get Over Yourself that I'm promoting around North America. Right? So that again, the irony is not lost on me.

I think it goes back to motives. I want to check my heart every single day. Like what am I trying to accomplish? And here's what happens in the new prosperity gospel is like we talk about Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist. Jesus comes on the public ministry scene. If anyone had a platform — he was a very

kind of interesting individual, it looks eccentric, John the Baptist — but he certainly had a platform. People were being confused and thinking they were being baptized into John's name. So if anyone had anything to lose by the standards of this world by Jesus coming, it would be John the Baptist in that moment.

And what is John's response? He doesn't say, hey, there's the life coach, there's the motivator, there's the dream tester, there's the visionary. He said, "There's the Lamb of God." And then as you hear the Messiah has come, the long awaited one, he is here, he's the point, he's the message. And then he says, guess what? He's got to increase because of who he is, and I have to decrease now. Any Christian I know would be okay with saying that Jesus has to increase. But in the new prosperity gospel, we're all about Jesus increasing. We just want to do it with him. Just take me with you.

Like, yes, Jesus increased, but I want to increase to the thought of us decreasing. We have really not much interest in that whatsoever. So it goes back to just motives like, like who is Jesus? What is his? Who is he and what actually was his purpose? What does it mean to actually follow him, and how do I reconcile what I'm saying and promoting with his call to pick up our cross and follow him? And there's just no place for that in the new prosperity gospel/

There's no context for suffering either. So if you go through suffering, the message of the new prosperity gospel is not, "Maybe this is what Jesus is doing to mature you," like James chapter 1, or to make you more like him, Romans chapter 8 verses 28 to 29. Instead, it's God wants to give you this setback in your life to give you a comeback. He's got greater things in store for you. It all kind of goes back to that.

So I think that for people that want to avoid that messaging, but also want to get the good news out to people to be heard through a podcast, a book, a preaching ministry, whatever it might be, look at the messaging, and look at the motive. Like, who am I talking about? Who am I promoting? What is my ministry really based on? And then second, what is my motive behind it? It's about me increasing or is about the message going out? And what message? Not that God wants to make you healthy and wealthy, like the old prosperity gospel, or that God wants you to live your best life now, like the new prosperity gospel, but this is who Jesus is, and he, well, here's exactly what he claimed to be and what he came to do, and let's give ourselves. He is worthy of our lives, his glory is our reward, right? The greatest blessing of God is God himself.

And that's what I would like to when I have conversations with some people that come out of new prosperity circles, I say, what do you think is the greatest

blessing of God? That's not a trick question, I just want to know. And very rarely do they actually say God himself, that God himself is the greatest blessing, the fact that he gives us himself. He usually wants to do with this material things in this world, which are certainly blessings of God. I want to be thankful for those things. I live in a suburban area and I live a pretty comfortable life like by the standards of this world compared to many people, but I don't believe that is what faith is about. I believe the facts about Jesus, and I want to preach a message that would translate into any city, in any circumstances, in the situation of any believer, anywhere in the world.

[00:19:35] Darryl: That's that's so rich, it's so much better than material stuff for sure. So you and I probably buried a lot of people, and you realize a lot of that stuff, as much as life is to be enjoyed — I love Ecclesiastes that keeps saying enjoy life. It's all a vapor. You're going to lose it all, but still enjoy it. But at the end you're going to lose it all, and living in that tension of, “Yeah, God's blessings are all around us, enjoy them, but don't live for them.”

[00:20:01] Dean: Don't. Exactly. And don't equate having God's blessings with having God, like that's one and the same. And I worry that those things were taken away tomorrow. Here's here's what I worry about. So let's say like the platform person that's really popular or whatever it might be, could they make it pastoring a church in a small town where nobody knows their name while being fruitful and making disciples in that small town, would that be enough for them or for the followers of the new prosperity gospel, here's what worries me. Could they attend a church that didn't have an amazing experience? Like could they make it like if they got relocated because their husband or wife moved their job, or they just got opportunity somewhere, they had to go take care of their elderly parents and had to go to name that small town in Toronto tomorrow, but they didn't have a church that had the hip, big boom experience, inspirational TED talk communicator, would they make it, could they thrive in a church like that? If the answer is no, we have to ask the question, what is our faith really about? Like what?

And again, our, our church, we have, we have a big church, and we love good sound system and good lighting, and we love our band, and it's rock and roll and all those kinds of things. But if we lose those things, but we still have a mission and a message, will our people still be able to fully love their church? And I would hope so. Because if not, we have to ask, what are we winning them with? Because what you win somebody with, you win them to. So if we win someone with a new prosperity gospel, we win them to a new prosperity gospel. And if those elements are taken away, is anything left to stand on faith wise? I'm worried about that answer.

[00:21:46] Darryl: In the beginning of the book, you mentioned somebody that you observed. You watched his ministry and it began kind of solid but drifted eventually into this sort of new prosperity. And there is a subtle drift. So I want to ask you, I guess two questions. How can we prevent that drift in our ministries? What can pastors do to lead their congregations away from this believe-in-yourself religion?

[00:22:14] Dean: So I think the drift for this person I specifically was referring to happened by influences who, all of a sudden he started listening to and being influenced by. I'm not trying to say we shouldn't have an echo chamber and shouldn't have different opinions and different phases. But who is primarily influencing us in a pastoral world? That's another pastor of the church. Always said it's going to turn into I want to be like that, I want to have that. It's almost like a lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes. I want to feel that, I want to have that from 1 John chapter 2, kind of that idea where it happens in a church context. So the influences started happening for the leadership role, and they start going, wow, look at what they're doing, let's start messaging that way and be that way, and that's inspiring, and those type of things. And then the other side of it is the pragmatic side.

So how we avoid being that? It's to shepherd our people away from this. We can't do everything in the name of pragmatism. It's not always bad to be pragmatic, but when that's the driving force, that's the lens we see things through, that's how churches begin to drift down that road. It's almost like an “if you can't beat them, join them” kind of mentality. And I think that's what to be really careful of, that it's not pragmatism that drives everything we do. Because again, what eventually happens — I don't see these guys like denying doctrines or denying things, they become silent on them. So I call it atheological in the book, like you just don't know what these guys believe, but you just have no idea whatsoever, because they just don't talk about it. Why? Because that might be offensive. That might be controversial. That doesn't have a great life application point principle, those type of things.

So when things just completely become in the name of pragmatism, that is when I begin to go, “Uh oh,” and get a warning flag that goes up when we start to see people drift in that direction. And for our congregation then for ourselves, I think what is it that drives us? Like, are we ashamed of the Scriptures? Are we kind of embarrassed to be Christians? Do we not think the Word is enough? What are we avoiding these hard subjects to simply because we think we know better?

And, so I don't know how these churches are going to stand as things continue to get more difficult. I just don't know how they're going to make it when — and

I don't even mean numbers and those kinds of things, but in terms of just relevance, and it's an overused word. But when you just begin to just echo the world's message and the changing culture that we're all in, I mean eventually why would I go to church there? I could just watch TV. I just do an inspirational message on YouTube. There's not actual real substance happening, and I think eventually we just gotta go, it's not going to work. And the things are being pragmatic. That's what's so funny is will this work in the long run, because they're not going to have much that's differing from the message of this world.

[00:24:58] Darryl: So, talking about preaching in the book, you quote Christopher Wright. And I love this quote, he says, "We ask, 'Where does God fit into the story of my life?' when the real question is where does my little life fit into this great story of God's mission." And I love that reframing, because often church can be about here's four tips of how God can make your life better this week, or five ways your marriage could be better this week, rather than asking how can we, in a Psalm 8 way see ourselves as being insignificant, and yet somehow God has chosen us by his grace to play an outsized role in his mission, which might mean suffering, but it's amazing that God even takes notice of us, never mind wants to use us.

So how can we actually lean into that? As I hear you talk, by the way, I'm struck with how you have to misuse Scripture a little to preach this false gospel, right? You have to you have to talk about slaying the giants of your life, which I mean that passage in 1 Samuel has got nothing to do with about slaying cancer and financial debt and everything in our lives. But it almost seems like we take these Scriptures and try to twist them and make it about how God can fit in our lives.

So talk to us about how we preach and cast a vision for living in God's greater story rather than twist the Scriptures into ours.

[00:26:17] Dean: So what's missing a new prosperity gospel churches is biblical theology. It's just not there. There's just no emphasis or care about how the Scriptures fit together and the whole storyline. It's the way you're going to get David and Goliath completely off base is by not having any kind of biblical theology and seeing everything as isolated events that tell us a moral story rather than an entire harmonious storyline that tells us about who God is and what he's done for his people.

So what's sad is that is what gospel centrality really is, and what's sad is they have no interest in because that just seems like maybe elementary or kind of like a new thing for new believers. Oh, I know all that stuff rather than seeing the beauty of actually being the deep things of God, the entire story of who he is,

that he wants us to know has revealed himself does to the Scriptures and how he works.

So sometimes it's kind of debunk it for them as it comes. Do I want people to have better marriages? Of course. So I want to take different passages, like our church right now is going through the Bible in a year. It's a different kind of approach for us. We love going verse by verse, the books of the Bible. But this year we're doing an overview sermon of every book of the Bible, 66 books in one year. Sometimes we'll do two books together like two weeks ago Jeremiah and Lamentations together because they flow together for the same story. We did Judges and Ruth together as an example. So what we did with this is we actually had to stop and camp out for a minute Jeremiah 29:11, which is one of the new prosperity gospel church's favorite Bible verses. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans to prosper you, to give you a future not harm you," those type of promises. So we just kind of use that as something to give you a high school graduates, right? God knows the plans he has. Of course God knows the plans he has for you. You and I both believe the sovereignty of God, right? But what does this mean in this context, while he's talking to people who are in exile in Babylon about what faithfulness looks like, at this moment in this city and this time of their lives? And then what God has in store for his people for the long term, ultimately fulfilled the coming of the Messiah. When people in the new prosperity gospel and are quoting Jeremiah 29:11 in the Babylonian exile, and God's people are nowhere near their minds, like all they're talking about in that context is you and you're going to go accomplish whatever you put your mind to because God has your back, and he knows the plans he has for you, we're missing this amazing story that lets us know how God has been dealing with these people and how he's going to deal with these people for all eternity, and we're just totally missing out on these things.

So there's a discipleship crisis, because our people are not learning the Bible, they're learning isolated stories of really this, that the goal of it is some kind of moral principle you can take away. I think application matters a lot, I think there're personal things you should take away from the Bible, but when you first approached the Bible —back to that Christopher Wright quote —"Okay, where what to say to me? Where am I in this?" Rather than saying, "What does it say about God? And how does that matter for me?" There's a shift that needs to happen from one to the other, and then I think we'll begin to not see the Bible is boring, I think we'll be able to be captivated by every part of the Bible. You'll struggle through Leviticus a little bit like anybody does, but when you see the glorious grand narrative of God. So for our people, but at our church, it's been so amazing to see our members and to see their guests they bring go, "Oh, wow, I just never, I never saw how God was working in this book. I just kind of saw it as a bunch of history or just a bunch of names and cities and in laws. I

didn't see God's hand. I understand how, how Jesus makes sense to me now, from the Old Testament based on this. And, and now, when I read the New Testament, I'm really completely different than I did before. I see how the Bible fits together." There's no category for that in these new prosperity gospel churches, and that should concern us a lot.

[00:30:12] Darryl: So you mentioned, you've got young people who come to the university there and end up in your church that have been raised or, or at least they bought into this self-made believe-in-yourself religion. How do you disciple them into the true gospel?

[00:30:28] Dean: So it begins by helping them see what the gospel is the gospel is not. Again, it's not all critical, it's not like or set up, there's bashing things the entire time when they get exposed to the actual gospel of Jesus Christ, like gospel centrality. I mean, that's some kind of cliché kind of way. Actually, I just talked about like how the Bible, really how God really speaks to his people through the story of the Scriptures and how every page is about points us back to Christ and about how God is the agent of our salvation from start to finish. I mean, like even before the start, we can't even comprehend. You almost can see their faces make this sort of, "Oh," and you'll see people go, "That's not what that what I grew up, not what I heard before. Like this is the true gospel."

We had a guy who came to our church named Jake. He came as a university student from bigger city here to Tallahassee, and his exposure to things of the Christian faith was what we're talking about, all the new prosperity gospel, name those five celebrity Instagram famous preachers, those kind of little quotes with dramatic backgrounds, and perfectly branded. That was kind of the faith he had. Church is an experience, that that type of idea. And the first time he ever came to our church, he jokes that he thought now and now he jokes, but he said he thought we were mean. And I said, "Oh no, I don't want to come across as mean. Was our tone bad?" He said, "No, it had nothing do with any of that. You were told me that was a sinner, needed repentance and that God ultimately was more impressed with his glory and with himself than he was with me, but that God loved me at the same time." So he said that just started rocking his world.

And he started going, wait a second, I have been going to all these, this church experiences, and this conference, this Christian concert and all these things and never really had heard much of that before. I was more just told that God was a big, huge fan of me, and that God wanted me to live my best life, and then some good things like that my best life was not going to be in my past, the past things I had done. And some things that were good, like he wasn't living in sin anymore, thank God those type of things he did get positively from his past

church experience. But the faith was really kind about an emotional high and a feeling in the moment, and about him being happy.

And when he first heard the gospel, he thought we were mean because we talked about sin and repentance, but now that he knows the Lord and is walking with Jesus, it's like it's like scales came off his eyes, and he gets to actually live in joy that God is enough, that Jesus himself is the blessing, right? And that's just been a total game changer for him. By seeing what the real thing was, he got to see the fraud of the other thing.

So we don't have to go up there and beat it up every week. We do mention it in certain contexts. At he got to see the real thing and go, wait a second here, I've been duped by this other stuff. And I tell that story in the book a little more detail, but that's a win of helping somebody who is coming here to go to the university having their eyes open to the joy of actually following Jesus rather than some kind of Americanized North Americanized, affluent, Westernized version of the Christian faith.

[00:33:38] Darryl: Is this version of the gospel just a North American thing? Or do you see it in other continents or places around the world too?

[00:33:47] Dean: The new prosperity gospel is very much in North American and western thing. You'll see it in Western Europe as well. It's very, very much a Western thing, and it very much belongs to a more affluent, and by affluent, it doesn't mean you're a millionaire but affluent by the standards of the rest of this world. So the old prosperity gospel is in third world countries. Sadly it's infiltrated some of the poorest areas of the country such as that, I guess that offers some kind of hope for poor people, just like a good luck charm or lottery ticket or where it might be. This new prosperity gospel is very urban, and by urban, I don't mean that like in a racial context, I mean more like a big city hip kind of context, very urban. It's very much a lot of these people were actually raised in evangelical homes and it's almost kind of like a way to still be in the faith, but kind of rebel a little bit against Mom and Dad's church. It was traditional and in their eyes boring. And I think it's also why you're seeing some people return back to more liturgical forms of worship in the younger generation as because I think they're just kind of getting burned out by everything always being an over the top show, and they just want a little more of a participatory service or it's not all eyes on the stage. I want to transfer able to recite Scripture with my church family, and pray with my church family and those types of things. But I do think, to answer a question not too long ago, I do think it largely is a western, more affluent context. For sure.

[00:35:14] Darryl: I mean, I want to ask you a couple of more personal questions as we wrap up. What are you learning right now?

[00:35:19] Dean: So what I'm learning right now that I'm seeing become a reality in my life is the content, the title of this book. Like what it really means to get over myself. And where I saw that play out was during COVID and where I live. We're really open now in terms of the city and churches are back open and restaurants, schools and everything. Our governor of our state of Florida said, Hey, the vaccines here. So he likes to say live like we've had our vaccine, just to give some context of what it's like here.

But before that, we weren't having church services, and that came out of nowhere. It was like all of a sudden, and I found myself just kind of having pity parties and thinking my world was over and kind of poor me, and woe is me. And what happened in my church that I pastor and, and I just kind of learned that God's just. Yes. God hears our prayers. Yes, we can lament. Some of my lament wasn't some kind of spiritual lament. It was more just like a pity party for me. And I am just learning, hey, you're a steward of this. This is not designed so you can be fulfilled by being a pastor, are being fulfilled by leading a church as an elder. This is about God's glory. If God's glory is going to be through COVID or God's glory is going to be a gazillion people in the building for Easter, this is not about you. God's going to get his glory regardless.

That's been a big thing for me in terms of what I'm learning is just that constant, this battle of this, this thing here.

You talked about how the guys who are gospel-centered guys come from a Reformed persuasion like I do, but like how do we make sure that we're not caught up in the new prosperity gospel? And I think the answer is that be very aware that you can be. So that the new prosperity gospel is not, "I was going to get caught up in these preachers or this Instagram version of the faith." I was even get caught up in, "What about me? Where am I in this? Well, why aren't I going to preach in front of a crowd anymore? Why is this confidence in speaking at getting canceled?" Just ridiculous things. In my head, I'm having these little pity parties and I'm learning that this is about God's glory, about faithfulness, and about being his people more than it's about me advancing anything on myself. So really, I'm like preaching to myself, I'm not drawn to those creatures, but I can be drawn to that mindset, and God's just humbling me through that.

[00:37:38] Darryl: And what's encouraging you right now?

[00:37:40] Dean: I'll tell you what, the local church, I mean, truly that has been lifeline for me, the local church and really seeing what it looks like for people to

love their church because they love their Savior. And our church is going through the Bible in a year, not just in preaching, but we're actually all reading to the Scriptures on a reading plan, the M'Cheyne plan together and people are actually doing it. That's been really neat. So that's encouraging. I get so much life out of being a part of the local church, like not just on Sunday. Being around church members just truly fires me up. So my family loves local church like that truly, it's not some like pastor answer. Maybe that's why I struggled so much too. Some of my own, get over yourself kind of things, but all of a sudden we couldn't meet anymore. I think I went through some depression as well, and because I love not just a job, I'm saying I love the local church. If I wasn't the pastor, I would love the local church. And so that's that's what gives me a lot of life.

[00:38:33] Darryl: In your book you write about your desire to see “well-meaning believers move from a self-focused Christianity to one fueled by, centered on, and passionate about Christ. What better god than the only God, what better hope than our Savior, what better calling than the one to come, to die to ourselves, and to be with Him forever?”

That is a great desire. That's my desire too. Let's pray that would happen, and let's work to make that happen.

So thank you for your book. I really appreciate it. Thank you for your ministry and for joining us today.

[00:39:02] Dean: Thank you, and go Blue Jays. I hope you get back in town pretty soon.

[00:39:05] Darryl: I can't wait. Thanks, Dean.

[00:39:08] Dean: Take care. Thank you.