

Truth Rising: Courage, Worldview & Faithful Living in Challenging Times

Featuring John Stonestreet

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TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Welcome everyone to Cornerstone University's Wisdom and Influence podcast, and I have a wonderful special guest with us today, Mr. John Stonestreet, the president of the Colson Center. John, thank you for being on our podcast here at Cornerstone University.

John Stonestreet: Hey, listen, it's great to be on with you. It's great to see you not that long ago up on the beautiful campus of Cornerstone. Grateful for that time to be up there and meet some more of the folks up there. Things look great. So congratulations on all that's happening there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: John, thank you. It was a great evening, and just so many great people from the community came for this wonderful documentary, Truth Rising. So I wanted to ask you right off, how is that going? Everyone who saw that evening here on campus at Cornerstone, just nothing but phenomenal feedback. Students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. I saw it, it was wonderful. So give us an update on how that's going, John.

John Stonestreet: Well, we've been really pleased with the response to Truth Rising, the comments that we're finding everywhere. It's streaming on X, it's streaming on YouTube. We have heard reports of watch parties at universities and churches and home groups and in homeschool groups, and really across the board. And the response is pretty consistent. That they're challenged by it, they're inspired certainly by the stories of courage that culminate in the documentary. And now the training continues. The Truth Rising documentary is really about identifying and articulating the challenges of this civilizational moment, as Os Guinness puts it in the documentary, and then also talking about what it means to be faithful to Christ, what that might cost, what that requires from his followers to do that. And then we have followed up the documentary with a study, and the study goes through what we think are the four pillars of being that kind of faithful follower of Christ in this cultural moment: hope, truth, identity and calling, and also goes deeper into some of the stories in terms of so we can learn from the people's lives around us.

So that's really what's happening, and we have Colson Fellows across the United States that are teaching small groups on that. We have the study being done in churches and home groups, also Christian schools. We have Christian educators all across America that are going through the Truth Rising study as well as the Truth Rising documentary. So we're pleased, and obviously we want more people to do it. But at the same time, it's been an amazing audience, it's been an amazing response to it, so we're really grateful to God for that opportunity.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, John, thank you. I mean, thank you for all that you do for so many, many years in the position you have of leadership at the Colson Center, and what a wonderful documentary and opportunity to talk about truly matters of just tremendous existential importance, right? I was just reading the other day an individual who came to faith several years back, and he made this comment and he said, "It's time for Christians to really take up the cross and start walking." That's the way he put it. Take up the cross and start walking. And I hear you talk about Truth Rising and the groups throughout, the fellows and so on, and the educational importance now of training people for the future. Give us your sense, John, as you travel throughout the country, as you speak at many places, sort of the temperature check of the church right now from what you can tell at these settings of the documentary and other conversations. What's the check on the church or what's the temperature?

John Stonestreet: That's a great question. I think that in some ways I'm really encouraged and in some ways I continue to be concerned. I actually was just in South Korea last week, and we have a Colson Fellows cohort there in Seoul, and it... For me, the Cold War is history, right? I mean, my earliest memory is Ronald Reagan being shot. And so I was really young, I think just a few years old, four years old, but I remember that, and I remember the Cold War and I remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, but the Korean War, I mean, that had happened in 1950 to 1953, but I tell you what I was really moved by is that we don't have another story like it where you have one peninsula, two countries with no ethnic difference, anything like that, really no geographic difference. The difference is in worldview. The difference is one embraced a communist, atheistic, no freedom, dehumanizing system. The other embraced at least an informed position informed by Christian beliefs like image of God and freedom and so on. And both of those systems took over a place that had been historically Buddhist or Confucian. Started at 1950, and now 75 years later, the results are in. You can see where each ideology, which each worldview got them. And it's basically based on the fundamental beliefs that each group had. Now of course, one was imposed upon, and the other was distributed, but it was... The contrast couldn't have been greater. I mean, up north, there's no birds because they eat them all 'cause they're starving. Down south, it's what many people call an economic miracle in terms of the growth and how powerful that freedom has been for that people.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Where does that come from?

John Stonestreet: It comes from believing that certain things are true, and not just believing it, but living on that truth. And that's what the Christians in Korea are concerned about as their government is fiddling around now with really progressive ideas, like oftentimes ours has in the past. Do we believe, do Christians believe that we are salt and light? That this salvation thing is not just personal and private, but it is personal, but it's based on public truths about who God is, the kind of world we live in, the kind of creatures that human beings are. And do we have a responsibility to courageously live out that truth? Not just privately agree with it, but to actually order our lives because it's a way of both loving God and loving neighbor. And none of these are new concerns. These are the things that Schaeffer talked about, and that Colson talked about, and that you've talked about for years now. But man, you see the consequences up close and personal in a small confined space like the Korean Peninsula. And I think we've seen the consequences and just kind of one crazy event to the next, which seems like has been the story of America for the last decade or more, that we are disoriented, and the answer is truth. The answer is truth with a capital T. The answer is putting our feet firmly on what is true. And that's going to be the, I think, the question for the church moving forward. It's, I guess it's not really different than the question before, but that's where we're at.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, John, and so thank you. I mean, it's interesting. I remember years ago when that book came out entitled A New Kind of Christian. The Brian McLaren book, A New Kind of Christian. I was a brand-new faculty member back then, another university, and this book was making

the rounds, and all of a sudden I met a lot of individuals in Christian academics or at Christian universities who all of a sudden believed that that was the redemptive book we needed, that the church needed. And I remember reading it and thinking, "No." Post-modernism is not the solution to the ills of the church. We need to be obedient to the scriptures, to the gospel, and live it out faithfully and seriously. That's the solution, is not jettisoning that for post-modernism. But I've seen this over and over and over in my young life of new movements that come, and it's easy for Christians who are either hurt, bitter, disgruntled, frustrated, to jettison the faith and say, "It doesn't work. We've tried it, but it doesn't work, so we've got to try this new thing," right? Whether it's a new kind of Christian or whether it's, as some have said, the warm embrace of socialism. Right? That somehow we... That's the solution. And it's so easy to jettison truth with a capital T or the Christian worldview, found in the gospel and the scriptures, to go after these new sort of itching of the ear, tickling of the ear, as it were, philosophies, and the consequences are disastrous.

John Stonestreet: So to share with our listeners, I think of our students, I think of men and women in the church—the courage, the fortitude that's needed, the study that's needed because we're at a critical moment in our country right now as the winds of socialism are being fanned, right? That somehow this is the thing we need. It is astonishing. I mean, I think people of a prior generation who were able to see the conflict between these kind of basic visions of life, even if it didn't maybe go as far as Stalinism or something like that, but you were still able to see that the contrast there between two different systems of belief, are surprised. But it's what happens when you have a generation that's raised without history. It's what happens when you have a generation that has been taught that the ideas of certainty, anything that you're certain about is wrong, and that you can't actually, in some cases, believe what's right in front of your eyes. You have to believe in ideology. I remember Chuck Colson often saying, "We should never underestimate the human capacity for self-delusion." And I think that's the Romans 1 description of the human condition, right? Which is you lose sight of God, and pretty soon you forget the difference between the creator and the creation, and then you worship the creation instead of the creator, and then you just lose touch with reality altogether. So it's surprising, I think for a lot of us to see a Mamdani or something like that just directly quote one of the most brutal fascist leaders of the 20th century in his inauguration speech, and no one really bat an eye about it.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. I tell you what it does, it underscores the mission of Cornerstone University. It underscores how significant it is for parents to be equipped to give their own kids the education. And we can't assume, we cannot assume that we're swimming in the same cultural waters, that our young people have the same understanding of truth or just even basic words. What we mean and what someone else means when we use the word freedom or love or truth or God or man or woman. We have to be really careful and we've got to take our time and go back and rebuild those foundations. Sometimes if you are thinking poorly, the most practical thing you can do for someone is help them to think clearly.

John Stonestreet: And you're not going to get to courage without clarity. You might get a different kind of courage. It's not the courage you want. It's going to be hubris. It's going to be some form of activism. I think the educational system in America has been more committed to raising activists than raising people who know what's true. And so when you say, listen, this is what Cornerstone is committed to, people know the truth, people love the truth, people live out the truth, that's the kind of vision that needs to be protected at all cost. We mentioned the Truth Rising documentary, and you mentioned the New Kind of Christian. I remember that book too. I haven't thought about that book in a long time. It caused some stirs, right? Some waves. It caused a huge stir. I was at a Christian college at the time too, and it compelled an awful lot of people. But what it makes me think about is, in the Truth Rising documentary we told a related story. We told the story of Jack Phillips, the baker in Colorado, who refused to bake the

cake for a same-sex wedding, but still treated the people who were asking him with great love and respect, and what he got in thanks was 13 years of attacks from the state of Colorado.

You remember when all that happened, just like I do. You remember how many Christians told him he should have just baked the cake? That Jesus would have baked the cake? I think about what God did to use him to protect religious freedom, freedom of speech. We wouldn't have got the 303 Creative decision if we hadn't first got the Masterpiece Cakeshop decision. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who I think has been there on Cornerstone campus, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yes. Yeah, she was here.

John Stonestreet: She talks about Jack and his story as being a part of the story of how God drew her to himself. And you also have other stories of people who have come to believe in what is true because of his courage, and I'm just like, "I'm really glad he didn't listen to all those pastors that told him that Jesus would have baked the cake." I really am. And so our question's got to be that, right? Which is how... where does that courage come from, that moral clarity at a time of ambiguity? And that's my concern. I will tell you, you're seeing in the last couple of years even Christians and Christian academics come out attacking the concept, the principles of the Christian worldview, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. Having all these problems with the Christian worldview, and I think to myself then if the truth of God and the truth of the gospel inherent in the Christian worldview, we're not going to talk about that, what are we going to talk about then? Right? And so these fundamental institutions, the church, churches, Christian universities, I mean, these are pillar institutions. When those start going and drifting, right, then you have a lot of young people and a lot of people in the pews that don't know where to go and what to do, and it's so easy for them to fall prey to, the scripture says, any wind of doctrine, right? That pushes them everywhere. So, and I appreciate what you said about clarity, the importance of clarity and just helping people think rightly about these things. And that's the role of Cornerstone and other schools and homes and churches. But let's talk about that, your work and what the Colson Center does in helping homes and helping churches, because it starts there oftentimes. I think when we get young people here at Cornerstone, they've had 18 years already of some kind of education at the church, at the home, at the school, and we're receiving that now. And we have to then think about how much retraining, how much re-educating, how much do we have to do in the next four years to prepare that young man and woman to be a Christian influencer, right? An influencer in the world for Jesus Christ. And you get... It's a wide spectrum. A wide spectrum, right? So share with us the work that you have done, that the Colson Center has done, and what you're seeing now in not just the churches, but in our homes. In the homes of Christians, of American parents.

John Stonestreet: Well, I tell you, the most important thing I've seen, I think, is that we can't, we should never stake our hope on something that somebody tells us is historically inevitable. Because all the accusations that we're going to be on the wrong side of history there, this is where the world's going. A lot of those people you mentioned earlier who are apologizing for aspects of the Christian worldview, it's because I think they've succumbed to this idea that we have to either capitulate or we have to be justified by the wider culture. Just a generation ago, we were talking about the rise of the nones, and now we're hearing stories of quiet revivals. Some of the new atheists are themselves now talking about Christianity being good for the world. And look, I'm not saying our hope should be on these news stories either. Our hope is in the fact that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and that's the true story of history, and I think we have to have that backdrop. And that's been an essential part of the Colson Center's mission. We're doing a lot of reflecting right now as an organization. It's the 35th anniversary of BreakPoint, a program that Chuck Colson founded. It's the 10th anniversary of the Colson Center as a separate organization, the 250th birthday of America, and so we're doing a lot of kind of like, what has

God done? And when we think about what we're really trying to do, it's basically helping Christians keep the story and the moment straight. There's a challenging moment that we live in, and Christians who lived before us lived in challenging moments, and Christians who come after us will have their own challenges in their own moment. But what God has given us is the true story of reality. We sum it up in creation, fall, redemption, restoration, and many people know that as a theological framework. What we really are seeing is God using the Colson Center to help people have that as their prescription glasses, their lens, the thing that they're seeing the world through. And when you start there, then hope is not based on things getting easier or things changing. Hope is based on the resurrection of Christ, which already happened, and the Kingdom of God, which is sure. And what we're trying to do is help Christians think about their faith in that public way. We're not saying that faith isn't personal. It is personal. That's one of the best parts of how God's revealed himself in scriptures, that he revealed himself as a person and not an energy or a force. And in the person of Christ Jesus, who's the most compelling figure who ever lived, and still lives.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yes.

John Stonestreet: But it's also important to realize that the faith is personal, but it's not private. And many people have this privatized view of faith, that it's just about their own wellbeing, maybe their own eternity, but not about how to think about everything, how to understand and live in light of everything. So our goal is to help Christians have that kind of clarity that only a Christian worldview can bring, a confidence in the Christian worldview, and the courage that comes naturally if you know that Jesus Christ is risen and Jesus Christ is Lord, then you can pretty much settle it from there and say, "God, what do you want me to do?" And that means we've got to believe the right things, but also love the right things and live that out. So that's what we're committed to, and I gotta be honest, I'm probably more encouraged now than I have been in terms of the hunger that Christians have. They want to know more. They want to go deeper. We have 1,700 people right now that are studying with us for the year in the Colson Fellows program. It's a remarkable thing to see doctors and nurses and educators and retirees and empty nesters and homeschool moms and CEOs and doctors that say, "I want to know more about my faith, and I want to know how my faith should inform every area of my life." And they're learning and reading and studying together in communities all across America, even around the world. That's one of the reasons I was in South Korea is one of our fellows' groups over there. And you think about that and you say, "You know what? God has his church everywhere." And if we can be a part of that, man, what an honor it is. I felt the same way being at Cornerstone. What a wonderful group of people that were there for the Truth Rising film, and you could tell they wanted that. They were hungry for that sort of thing as well.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: They were hungry. Very thirsty. Man, they were, weren't they? Yeah. That was exciting.

John Stonestreet: It was great. So thank you for doing that, and you kind of feel like you're part of something fun and meaningful, which is even better.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You know, John, I came—my family and I immigrated to the US from South America in 1980. And I remember January of 1981, Ronald Reagan being inaugurated, right? And I'm on TV watching it. I'll never forget this. In a little humble apartment in Rochester, New York, my father's watching it, and The Battle Hymn of the Republic is being played on national TV during the inauguration of Ronald Reagan. My father looks at my brother and me and said, says this, "Pay careful attention to what you're watching because you're watching history being made." That's what he said to us, right? And I've never forgotten that moment and all the moments that came after that. I remember where I was when he was shot, in school, right? And the kids running around saying, "The president's been shot,"

right? And then I remember the fall of the curtain, you know? The Iron Curtain and his speech. And I remember as a young person thinking about the greatness of America, right? I'm an immigrant—we're immigrants. My father brought us to the land of opportunity, he said. The greatness of America. Here we are celebrating the 250th now, and it's been a moment for us to reflect. We're celebrating 85 years as a university, Cornerstone University, this year, and the 250th for our country. So we've thought long and hard about how do we reflect on our past, what God's done for us at this university, as a part of a great country—the greatest country, and what do we need to be saying and talking about now for the future as well, because we're at a crux of a very important moment.

So I wanted to talk with you about that because one of the things that's been interesting for me as an immigrant is to see how many native-born Americans have a problem with America. Right? And how many native-born Christian Americans, Americans who are Christians, also have a problem with it, right? I've immigrated, and I love it. And not to say—it's... Of course it's not perfect, nothing is but God's kingdom, but it's been not just interesting, it's caused me a lot of consternation to see this. Right? That the very people who are part of this DNA of this nation are struggling with it, Christian and non, and especially, and many times, oftentimes Christian. They don't know what to do. They don't know how to handle it. So in the fall we had some conversation on campus with some of our students, and I'll never forget one of our students came to me and said, "Mr. President, we really need your help in helping us to think about this." "We get bombarded all the time," he said, on Instagram, TikTok, you name it, on messages against this nation, against our country, and we just don't know how to always respond to all this stuff, right? So I thought that maybe you and I can have a conversation about this because I'm a big believer that this is the place that God has given to us. And we are to seek the welfare of the city to which he has brought us, right? That wonderful passage in Jeremiah. And how do we love our neighbor well and love this country well? And it's interesting that there are people in the country now arguing that, well, the story of America is contested. You really don't know which story to believe. But there are some things that are not contested about it, John. So maybe you can talk to us a little about that, because it's not ambiguous. There are some fundamental biblical principles at the core of this nation's founding and roots that we have forgotten or we want to ignore. And our greatest faults are when we're not in consistency with those principles.

John Stonestreet: Right. Now, the problem isn't the principles themselves, but I think we underestimate as Christians just how much the critical theory mood has taken over. I think cultures get in moods just like our teenage kids sometimes get in moods. And moods take over. And when I was in college as a Gen X-er, the mood was relativism. And I think maybe some of us Gen X-ers who are now parents of teenagers and young adults have missed the fact that it's moved on into a new tyranny of relativism. There's a moral absolutism on a completely different moral framework that is being funneled into our kids' hearts and minds almost from every different direction. And it's kind of blinded our ability to tell the difference between up and down and right and wrong. I remember 25 years ago when we were first starting to teach Christian worldview, and I was starting to speak on it and so on, I would use the hypothetical, and of course, I didn't come up with it, I borrowed it from the people who taught me worldview, which is if everyone determines their own truth, and up can mean down, and right can mean wrong, and boy can mean girl, and it... I, it occurred to me that last week, that last one was the topic of a Supreme Court decision. You know? It's not a hypothetical anymore.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. Right. It's not a hypothetical anymore. You're right.

John Stonestreet: And the only way to enforce that sort of crazy relativism is through a new form of absolutism, tyranny, and that's the critical theory mood. So you start seeing everything through the lens of the oppressed and the oppressor, and you predefine who the oppressed are and who the oppressor are, just based on not categories of moral decision-making, but of categories of identity. Race, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, things like that, wealth and immigration status, things like that. And then you do that kind of crazy intersectionality game where you add it up, and that's the moral judgment on our nation. But you've already predetermined that really America is then what's wrong with the world. Listen, I am not going to tell you for one second that America hasn't had its problems. But I am going to tell you that a much better framework for understanding it is that America was given aspirations from the very beginning, and when we've pursued those aspirations, we've been the greatest nation in the world, part of the most life-giving and freedom-offering civilization in the world. And the aspiration is articulated in that statement. The Declaration, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all are created equal." That is a remarkable statement. It is a statement without really parallel in national and international documents, and it wasn't true on the ground, but it was an aspiration based on a vision of what it means to be human.

And when you ask what are some of the ideas that need to be preserved, it's not these kind of silly identity categories that don't really get to the heart of who we are and don't really give us a grounding and free moral agency, or even more, give us a means of forgiveness. I mean, look, if your guilt is because you're white, you can't get forgiveness for that, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You're always a criminal.

John Stonestreet: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're stuck. Right. Or if you're male or if you're straight or whatever else. I mean, these aren't things to apologize for. And that next line that they're endowed by their creator. So you start with an understanding that we are the recipients of the gift of what it means to be human, and that what it means to be human is something that's shared internally. Think about what a crazy statement that is. It's not self-evident that we're all equal. It's self-evident that we're all different. So our founders are saying something profound, which is that the most essential thing about us is not extrinsic, something that we don't share, our height or our color or age or sex or anything like that. It's something we all share intrinsically. That implies immediately that there's a creator, that there's a spiritual aspect to who we are, of course, and Christianity is the one that has the explanation for that, that we're made in the image and likeness of God. So much flows from that. It settles out, for example, how we understand human dignity and value. It settles the question of slavery up front, even if the nation hadn't settled it. It talks about freedom and the dignity of work and how that would inform an economic vision for citizens that have moral agency and also upward mobility. It also settles the family relationship as being primary to the state relationship. And man, have we not been having that fight now for the last decade? Do kids belong to the parents or do kids belong to the state? I mean, that explains a lot. And these come from... The way that America framed it is that it was from a very unique understanding of the human person, and it's why it brought so much good. So listen, we don't have to rationalize the things that we got wrong, but we also shouldn't apologize for the things that were given to us. Rather, we should commit ourselves to stewarding them. I really appreciate something that Os Guinness has told me a number of times, is that you have on the one side right now people that just think everything that America does is bad and America itself is bad, and then you've got the others that are often crying out, make America great again, without ever really articulating or knowing what made America great to begin with. That I think is something that Christians can provide. And by providing that, we can also offer moral leadership. And man, what a way to love our neighbor. By clarifying that, which is why I think a lot of the work we do begins with clarity, and I think a lot of the work you do begins with providing that clarity.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. One of the things I saw years ago, I remember, and this is a challenge I've seen in, for young people to deal with, is the inconsistencies or fallacies of human beings, even great human beings, right? And somehow because they're inconsistent or they've made errors or they've sinned, we must throw everything out that, everything out they've done or said or believed in. And we

have this sort of false view that because you weren't consistent in the principles that you hold onto, the principles themselves must be bad, too, so we throw them away. And it shows two things. One, the importance of living faithfully what God's given us to do, right? I mean, that speaks louder than words. But then what advice would you give to parents, churches or young people to deal with the reality we live in a fallen world, and even, yes, heroes fall.

John Stonestreet: Yeah, yeah. But that doesn't mean that the principles have to be thrown out either. Well, I mean, part of it is that we just got this question in from some of the programs that we did, from somebody who'd clearly been hurt by something in her past. But she said, "I don't know how you Christians can trust the Bible, when the Church has been such an awful punisher of women and protecting predators and men." And you know what? I can give you three or four stories of Christian leaders and churches and even Christian communities that protected sexual predators and allowed victims to be victimized longer than they should and refused to bring the perpetrators to justice. But what I answered was: if you don't have the biblical understanding of being made in the image of God, male and female, you don't have any real reason to think that sexual victimization of women is even wrong.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. And this is why I think it's important for us to be able to articulate in a philosophical and apologetic way that sort of reality.

John Stonestreet: If you don't think humans are made in the image of God because of the evil that exists in the world, and so you're just going to say, "Well, God doesn't exist," and the whole story of the world is an evolutionary story, well, then you've just explained away any sort of fixed category of right and wrong, which was your complaint to begin with. The fact that we think evil is evil, we experience evil as being evil, and not just inconvenient. As C.S. Lewis said, something that should not have been done and you know that it should not have been done requires a certain kind of universe, and that certain kind of universe requires a moral framework, and that moral framework requires someone to put that moral framework in place. And I think we've got to help kids think about that before they just jettison it.

I think it's also important, and I think there's some really remarkable recent scholarship done on this, that Christianity actually has been a force of good in the world like nothing else. When you think, for example, of pushing freedom to more people, helping the poor. We used to fight over whether to help the poor. Now all we argue is how best to help the poor. We all agree on that. Well, where does that come from? 'Cause that doesn't exist everywhere. Protecting the weak, taking care of the disabled. And I don't mean that—find me the place where we've ever done any of that perfectly, but you can trace back where that idea that we ought not have slaves actually came from. And it doesn't come from Islam, and it doesn't come from Eastern religions, and it doesn't come from atheism. It comes from a very specific framing of the world. I think Tom Holland's done incredible work on this recently. When you talk about hospitals, you don't find the first Buddhist hospital of Tupelo anywhere. You find the first Methodist and the First Baptist and the first, fill in the blank with a million other denominations and Christian expressions. So there's a reason, because of what we think about the human person, even the sick one. What we think about the human person, even the child, even the woman, even the immigrant, even the slave.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And that moral framework, which we might complain about, is what gives us the reason to begin with to think about these things.

John Stonestreet: I mean, and no other worldview has the moral framework for any of these things. None. Not at all.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And so that leads me to ask you this other question. I mean, there's a degree... I mean, at the very core of what we're talking about is what I'll call a certain kind of spiritual rebellion against God, against what is true, right? It's in our culture, it's in our institutions. I mean, I'm mindful of what Paul says, you don't wrestle against flesh and blood, right? I mean, there is a spiritual rebellion push against... There's a lot of what I call metaphysical rebels out there, right? That exist. And so I want to ask you to talk with us about the role of prayer in the work that you do and the work that others do, how important that is, because it's one thing to say it, right? We should be praying. It's another thing to do it, and another thing to do it fervently, right? I'm mindful of Jesus's parable in Luke 16 where he says, "When the Son of Man returns, is he going to find faith on the earth or not?" Right? And the widow who keeps knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking, right? And I mean, some of the things we're talking about, we have responsibilities to act, to clarify, to defend, to articulate, right? But then there is also the backdrop that God is, has to be at work. He must be at work because we're talking about spiritual hearts and minds here. So just share with us what you're seeing in that space of prayer and the importance of it, John.

John Stonestreet: Well, I think many people have been talking about how it seems like things are changing, where we went through a time of the modern age that Charles Taylor, the great philosopher, called a secular age. And he used the term disenchantment to describe it, right? This basically seeing everything in technical, scientific terms, everything horizontally, nothing vertically with anything supernatural or spiritual, much less a God, and that seems to be changing. There seems to be a re-enchantment that's happening. Rod Dreher and some others have written about that. Now, that can be good and that can be bad, right? In other words, spirituality can take a lot of forms, and we're seeing it take a lot of forms for good or for ill. But I think you're exactly right when you talk about the spiritual underpinnings of this.

There's a wonderful book coming out, I was able to read it ahead of time, from the one and only Carl Trueman, called *The Desecration of Man*. And it's interesting where we've seen so much of this rejection of religion and spirituality over the last 30 years become more than just a mocking or a disinterest in spiritual things. It actually became an act of desecration. If you think about the trans movement, the need to transgress, the need to push moral boundaries, and even the need to desecrate the human person, all that's really spiritual, right, in nature. Which brings us to the question about prayer. And I... Look, I certainly agree that Paul's about as clear about how prayer is warfare as anyone else. We oftentimes say, "Well, other than praying for you, what can I do for you?" As if prayer's not doing something. And prayer's absolutely doing something. But I believe that not only because I went to seminary and I'm supposed to believe it, but I did. But in the Truth Rising study series that we have developed to follow up the Truth Rising documentary, I tell the story of a woman that I met when I was in high school, and was a big knucklehead, I gotta tell you. I mean, I was a dork. I was not a good kid. I was a deacon's kid. You just kind of fill in the blank. And there was an old woman at our church that I met against my will who prayed for me for eight years. And I think back about the changes that took place in my life over those eight years and... the plural of anecdote is not data, but you can't convince me. You could hold a gun to my head, and you will never convince me that this woman did not change my life, and I only knew her when she was homebound. So she wasn't out there, like, pulling levers. She wasn't out there, like, writing letters of recommendation for me or connecting things or getting me out of trouble. What she was doing was praying. And I think about the incredible gifts that God has given me in my family, in both the family I grew up in and now the family that I have the privilege to parent, and with my wife and our marriage and our friendship, including a lot of friends in your neck of the woods there in Grand Rapids and in the larger Michigan area. They're my friends in the summer, not really so much in February. It's too cold up there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: We need friends in February in the cold.

John Stonestreet: You need some friends up there in February. But I, how do I explain that? How do I explain that other than the goodness of God? And somebody who was praying for the goodness of God over and over and over was Mrs. Buckner. And if that's true for an individual, it's true for communities. It's true for praying communities. God says it's effectual, right? When we do it. And I think we have underestimated how secular we've become. I remember in college, a buddy of mine saying, "Most Christians are just secularists with a twist." Our worldview's secular, and then we kind of decorate it with Christian stuff. And as we are unworking our secular captivity, to borrow a phrase from Nancy Pearcey, then we're re-embracing a new worldview, a new vision, and that's going to result in new habits and new behaviors, because they're true and they're good and they're beautiful. And prayer's going to be one of those things. And obviously there's differences when you talk about charismatic views of this or liturgical views of this, or dispensational views of this, or all the other adjectives we put in front of our theology. But at the end of the day, what we believe is that there is a God who has personally made himself known to us in holy scripture, in the world that He made, and how He made us, and ultimately in Christ Jesus. And in Christ Jesus has rebuilt our ability to go to God and given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who oftentimes prays when we don't know what to say. I mean, that's all the stuff we know.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's a lot, John. That's all... If that's all we had, that'd be enough reason to do it all, right?

John Stonestreet: Yeah. Yeah. So that's how I see that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: John, thank you for spending a good chunk of your afternoon with us. It means a lot. And John, thank you for all that you're doing. I remember as a young married man listening to BreakPoint and Chuck Colson, and he had such a profound impact on my thinking and my life as a young married man in college. And I know that part of why I do what I do today was because of Chuck and what he wrote about and what he did. And so I'm so grateful to him and the center and all that you're doing, and thank you for spending this time with us. Blessings to you, my brother, and hope to have you on soon and see you again soon, John.

John Stonestreet: Well, listen, I'm such a fan of what you're doing. I'm such a fan of Cornerstone. Chuck was as well, and I've heard that a lot. God is... It's just such a privilege to be a part of that story that God started writing in Chuck's life. And that also brings me into good relationships, including with you and with Cornerstone as an institution. So godspeed, and thanks so much for having me on.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Pleasure, John. Thank you. Thank you all for listening. Thank you so much.

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