

Discovering the Power of God's Word

Featuring Dr. Matt Lucas

April 28, 2026

TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Welcome to the Wisdom and Influence podcast here at Cornerstone University. I have, one of our great friends of our university here. He is the CEO and president of Our Daily Bread Ministries, and also a, a fantastic career in higher education, Matt Lucas. Matt, thank you and for joining us today.

Matt Lucas: Very much appreciate it. Yeah, glad to be here.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You've been at C- to Cornerstone a few times speaking in chapel, yes?

Matt Lucas: You've been kind to invite me. I think I was speaking here during your Global Impact week next month.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's exactly right. And you spoke at one of our Wisdom Conversations in chapel and then Global, Global Impact, so thank you so much, Matt.

Matt Lucas: Yeah, thank you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I need to share a story with you about, the wonderful work that you do and you lead with so many, great team, not just in the US but abroad with Our Daily Bread Ministries, but the little booklet, Our Daily Bread devotional. Mm-hmm. Just this past fall, my son, who was graduating from Rockford High School here in Michigan, had some of his friends over at, to our home, and, and, and these were not believers. He goes to pub- went to a public high school. And, we always pray before our meals. Even when his friends are there, we pray and, and welcome them. And, and, after we prayed, a young lady who was there, said... looked over to my wife and me and said, "Do you guys read Our Daily Bread?"

Matt Lucas: Really? That's what she said, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And, and, we said, "Absolutely we do. We do read Our Daily Bread." We're so familiar with it. And she said, "My grandmother reads Our Daily Bread every day." Hmm. And my grandmother's been praying a lot for me." She paused, and then she started crying at the dinner table. This is the first time she'd ever come to our home. Hmm. She started crying. We got up, and my wife and I went over there and, and, and so put our hands on her shoulder and, and she said, "I'm just really struggling with my faith." Hmm. And we asked, "Can we pray with you right now?" And we did, and she opened up and shared a number of things with us, and- Wow ... and we were able to pray. And I just thought to myself, there's a grandmother praying for that lady, young lady, and this grandmother is being blessed by the Word of God- Mm-hmm ... through Our Daily Bread Ministries.

Matt Lucas: Yeah, that's great.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And it's a... It was just a powerful, beautiful testimony of this incredible ministry that you lead, and there's so much of it. It's not just a devotional. Mm-hmm. But I've seen the devotional in planes. Mm-hmm. I've seen people in planes read it and open it up, and it goes to the testimony of what you do, the power of the Word of God. So thank you for being with us. Thank you for what you do, Matt. Maybe you can share with us the origin story of Our Daily Bread. I, I'm aware of it, but I want our listeners to know how this started because it's such a beautiful, powerful story.

Matt Lucas: Yeah, so in 1938, M.R. DeHaan, so a Grand Rapids Dutch native- Hmm ... started, what was Radio Bible Class. Actually, it was Detroit Bible Class.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Detroit, yeah.

Matt Lucas: The, our origin story that I understand is that he actually was, he'd left the church at Calvary Chapel, Calvary Church here right down the road next to you. Hmm. I mean, had started that church, and, was doing some Bible studies in the community, and they were just growing. Hmm. And some people said, they took a bit off, they said, "You need to go on the radio." And so they went over to Detroit and got on, a local ra- radio station, and he did his first Radio Bible Class, and then it just took off from there. Hmm. And so quickly after that, we went over to Canada and, 'cause we needed a, a larger station, and, broadcast from there, and then- Hmm ... we started picking up stations all across the country and then around the world. Hmm. And it wasn't until 19... So this was 1938, so it wasn't until 18 years later in 1956 that the devotional which we're known for- Got it ... and we've since named our ministry after, Our Daily Bread, the devotional was first printed- printed And it was just really done as a way to engage people with the Radio Bible Class, as a way to continue the relationship. And even that, I was ... I look back at the early years of what that looked like. It's very different now.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Sure.

Matt Lucas: And then, but since then the ministry's grown. We ha- work all around the world. We have 700 employees that work in over, 30 offices, nearly 150 countries.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Wow.

Matt Lucas: And we work in about 60 different languages. Mm. While we're known for the devotional, what we really spend a lot of time working on is Bible engagement- Mm ... and across multi-generational, multi-media. And so yeah, it's been a blessing to be in the ministry, to be able to serve that way, and I'm the first non-family member to lead- ... the ministry. So there were four DeHaans, three generations, and in 2022 they invited me, probably, maybe they're asking questions about that now- as being the non-family member. But no, they've been gracious. They've been great. Rick DeHaan, the last president-

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, he speaks, he speaks so highly of you. Yeah. So congratulations to you, Yeah.

Matt Lucas: And he's currently on board. he's been great. And so yeah, it's just been a good, good experience.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm-hmm. it's, the word of God is powerful- Mm-hmm ... and sharper than any two-edged sword. Yeah. That's what we ... That scripture tells us. And the ... In, in, in your website you talk about the, the how research shows engaging the word of God for at least four times, right, a week- Yeah ... that there's a powerf- it's a powerful correlate to transformation. Here at Cornerstone we've been speaking about our, one of our, our chapel leaders speaks a lot about the importance of a, a biblically saturated student experience.

Matt Lucas: Yeah, I love that. Right? Yeah. A biblically saturated student experience.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So talk with us about what you're seeing, not just in the United States, but throughout the world, the stories of real serious engagement with the scriptures. And maybe you have some stories that, that have really blessed you and moved you- Mm-hmm ... with the word of God and the power it has to transform lives.

Matt Lucas: Well, I think w- we're just ... We have, we have chapel once a week. We gather together, spend time. Today we're looking at leadership through the l- lens of shepherding. but in that we were sharing a story, our, the, one of our leaders was sharing a story, a, short, testimony from one of our readers who had discovered, like your, the story that you told- But so in finding a, a, just one page of Our Daily Bread in a, in a cell, in a prison cell, and- Mm-hmm ... actually the mess- He had just lost his wife, and the message that day was about dying in Christ, and, that just became the spark that lit him, or lit the spirit within him that the Holy Spirit moved to actually lead him to saving the knowledge of Jesus Christ. So- Mm-hmm ... we hear stories like that around the world. it's a blessing to hear that. So I, I... It's easy to become inoculated- Right ... to a story like that, 'cause we just hear so many of them- Right ... just where God's word just shows up in strange places. What I think has been interesting as I travel around the world is the hunger for God's word in places where there is low access But high demand. So United States, when you, different quote, different statistics, people own on average seven to nine Bibles. so we are, we are saturated with God's word- Mm ... at least it's present on our bookshelves. Yeah. and then with our cell phones, you could have any number of different versions at your h- at your fingertips. If you had YouVersion, you could have, hundreds of different versions of the Bible just ready to go. But the challenge is we're not actually engaging God's word. Outside of the- Mm ... particularly the Western world, there is high demand but low access, where we are high access and low demand, and that has been interesting to see where that hunger is and the fact that, people are willing to do a lot of times just about anything to be able to get access to God's word and allow it to be transformative. So o- one of the things we're doing in Africa right now, is we're doing a literacy program that trains people to be able to read for the first time, starting with English, but another also in their native tongue. But then, but doing that as an access to God's word- Mm ... because oftentimes when, we take this for granted in the West, particularly coming out of the Protestant er- Protestant, stream of thought like we have in Cornerstone, in our Daily Bread Ministries, where God's word was the foundation- Yeah ... of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ, like being able to have access to God's word. We've taken that for granted here, where we often think that, hey, that's just easy to have, where people who... That actually was the thing that was the catalytic for people to be able to say, "Hey, what does it really mean to have a personal relationship? What does it mean to have an individual conscience before the Lord?" Yeah. What does that mean? So giving people access to God's word by teaching them to read- Mm ... and then pointing them back to scripture so they can read it in their own language is something that's really near and dear to our heart. And then to see the hunger once people can read, to quickly want to go into God's word and say, "This is, this is my Bible. This is my ability to read God's word on my own."

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: What do you think, in your experience and research that you and your team have done, would explain the low demand, high demand variable, right? what, what do you... A- a- and it can't be just one thing, I'm sure, but what do you see, what are the, what are the contributing factors to the low demand, high demand?

Matt Lucas: Well, yeah, actually, that I don't know if we've done research on that specifically. That has been a question we've asked ourselves. My conclusion that I've drawn from my own anecdotal experience is familiarity breeds contempt. Mm-hmm. Mm ... when I think you have easy access to something, it becomes something you take for granted- Mm ... and I can see that in all aspects of my own life. so there is a sense where that has taken, taken root. Mm. when you know the value of God's Word

and how it's impacted you, and that you don't have it, you're willing to do a lot to secure it. I think often about North Korean Christians. You hear reports all the time of North Korean Christians who are in prison- Mm ... for their faith, and the lengths they will go to be able to have access to God's Word, and how people have memorized portions of scripture, and how they will recite that to each other, how they will find a passage of scripture, a page of John, and they'll go to the latrine 'cause that's the only safe place to read it. Like, that's just a different environment- Yeah ... where, here we are in the West where God's Word is just, in some ways ever present, but also completely absent- Yeah ... because we've, stuck, put it on the bookshelf. So yeah, definitely I think familiarity breeds contempt, in that kind of space where we think, "Yeah, I can get it at any moment, so is it necessary? Is it really necessary for my daily bread?"

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. Right? So. Right. I'm sure Ross Douthat from The New York Times. Mm-hmm. And he, some of the work he's done recently in the last few years- Yeah ... on decadence. Mm-hmm. Right? And I'm wondering if that's part of the problem, whether it's in the West or in countries that are very advanced economically, prosperous. Mm-hmm. Do you think there's a relationship there between what I'll call sort of the decadence of, of a well-developed country, and thus the low-demand piece? Mm-hmm. If there is, I'm wondering as other countries become more developed- Should we expect that, and hopefully not, the same thing to happen there? What do you think?

Matt Lucas: Yeah, I think that's true. I think you could see that even in the Old Testament. So this morning I was reading in the Book of Amos, and, the second half, I think it was chapter five, where Jesus- where God says through the Amos to the people of Israel, "Seek me and live." He actually says it three times in that chapter. And that is a, so you're thinking about Israel. I mean, it's, I think Israel's just like an interesting test case in this. And by the time Amos is writing, Israel's at the tail end of... They're about to go into captivity. They don't see that. We can see that in retrospect. Mm ... Amos is calling them back to repentance, calling them back to a, a righteousness that they've taken for granted. And the, so the, to go back to your idea of decadence, there is this decadence that is kind of manifesting itself where they've, where the people of God have started to love the blessing and not the- Right ... not the Father who's given it to them. Yeah. So I think there's definitely some truth to that about what happens there. I think the decadence is probably a obstacle that can lead to it, that lead, to lead to, a a, a treating of God's word that, have familiarity breeds contempt. But for me, I think it's the deeper issue of, are you, can you seek the Lord even in prosperity, right? Right. That's really the issue, and I think that's what gets lost- Hmm ... as we no longer seek the Lord. So I think when I look at the world, I look at the church, particularly in the West compared to, outside the United States, and even in Europe, there is, a different sense of where scripture holds its place- Mm ... in the church, a different perspective on discipleship, different perspective on what it means to be in church rather than not, rather than just going to church, being the church. I think those types of things have been lost, particularly in the West, where we've kind of taken our eye off of what is central, which is, I think, God said it well, "Seek me and live." We started to seek our comfort. We started to seeking what are other things that seem to point to success. Sometimes we start seeking success itself, right? Every pastor in the United States, the first question that he gets asked is, "What church," "What's the name of your church, and how many people go there?" And that usually becomes a marker of your success, right? Sure. So if you have a church of 50- You're a failure ... and somehow, yeah, you're not- You're a failing pastor ... yeah, you're not being successful. And if you have a church of 5,000, well, that's a successful church. Mm. And, and there's definitely a desire to grow. I mean, that is the call, right? To go and make disciples of all people. But when we treat success that way and we measure it based on the numbers or other things that the world would call success, rather than the depth of, the spiritual depth of the people, I mean, how many of those people, how many of those 5,000 people in a church that size would say that, that guy would say s- he would not be saying to them, "Seek me and live." Mm. It might be 5,000, he's still calling them to, "Seek me and live," where in a church of 50,

it might be 50 who are really deeply- Mm ... rooted in God's word, deeply know him, and are actually seeking him on a regular basis. Which one is probably where the true health is, right? Mm. So I think sometimes we look at the measurement in the wrong place. so yeah. And so decadence, I think, is probably definitely an obstacle or definitely something that can create a challenge, but I think it's usually- Something that is preceding that that's usually causing that, causing the problem that we're seeing today.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, as you mentioned some of the scriptures you were reading, I'm, I'm reminded last year of going through the passages of the transition of leadership in Israel's history- Mm-hmm ... from Moses to Joshua, and that very jarring passage where we're told that Joshua passed on, and all those that were Joshua passed on, and then a whole new group came who did not remember- Mm-hmm ... the word of God, did not remember the commands. Yeah. Didn't remember any of those things. And it reminded me of, I think w- it may, it may not have been the wisdom conversations that you were a part of. It was another one I think we did, where we cited data from Pew, that they had discovered that one of the key reasons why the Christian faith is not being passed on to future generations and their work was that the parents were not sharing it with their children. Correct. Yeah. Right? That was jarring. I thought, "What?" Mm-hmm. As a Christian parent, that would be the first thing you'd wanna do, I would think. But they, they, they discovered that. So in, in your work, and, and what have you seen in terms of not just a biblical engagement, but are you involved in this or are you seeing others partner with you to also create sort of those either micro-cultures or micro-communities e- even within the homes of- Mm ... of that nurturing, of passing this on, right?

Matt Lucas: Yeah. No, I'd say... Well, actually, we just received a grant last year from the Lilly Foundation. It was 1.25 million grant to... The title of the grant application that we made was Nurturing Young Disciples. Mm. So how do we actually work with churches to actually bring children into the faith in more intentional ways? Mm. And so we developed a program, worked with a number of organizations and churches to test that and- Yeah ... explore some things. So that's been something that I think other people, like the Lilly Foundation, has been interested in. Mm. We've been a part of that. We were one of, I think there was 50 other grant recipients for that. So I think there's people are aware of this challenge. What I noticed when I came to Our Daily Bread Ministries that I noticed after the first year, so I came in 2022. So I'm reading these letters that come in on a regular basis, and I was noticing a demographic, conundrum that was surprising. So the great gener- the, the Silent Generation and the Boomers, you could see the stories that they would tell, and they would tell the story like, "Hey, my mom... The reason why I'm reading Our Daily Bread today is because my mom, 50 years ago..." And they would tell the story, like it was just rehearsed over and- like, it just became this litany. I could just hear it over and over again. They would tell this. So if you were in the, y- age 80, 70 60, you could see these letters coming in. But then all of a sudden, like, we just wouldn't see it in my generation, Gen X. Mm. That just wasn't the story that they're telling. They might write in a different story if they would write in. We wouldn't see as many from Gen X. But I was just noticing that there wasn't the story of when they, when we would talk to someone from Gen X, their story was not about how theirs had been passed on. It was very individualistic. Mm. And they were, none of them were telling a story about how they passed it on to their children. So when we get down to the Millennials and Gen Z, we are seeing just this very different conversation about how they see their faith. Now, Gen Z's interesting. We're starting to see them talk more about this- Sure, yeah ... and I think some Millennials have been more intentional. Mm-hmm. And they're, and h- those who are, even though Millennials have been the least likely in America to be, that group of people to be, c- to confess faith in Christ, but those who are have been much more intentional about their faith than my generation, and we're seeing that. But I still think there is something missing. And not that Our Daily Bread Ministries is, "Here's the devotional, do that," but I found it interesting because the Our Daily Bread was such a low entry point- Mm. Right ... for setting up a pattern, and

oftentimes people used Our Daily Bread as a starting place, and they would move on to something else. So I've heard pastors, I mean, in fact, there's a famous church out in California who talk about, Our Daily Bread, calling it, our daily, our daily crouton. Our da- And yeah, I mean, it, it's, it's humorous.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh, you're right, to your point, low, low barrier to entry. Yeah. Sure.

Matt Lucas: And it's like, well, and I, and I thought, well, one, I thought, One that kind of says something about the Christian faith, like, hey, the, the way that we approach- Hmm ... other ministries is like, hey, how do we look for weaknesses? We've never professed for the devotional to be a- The end all ... really deep and end all deal. Right, right. Like, that's not the point. Right. And if that was, that's, then you're missing, you're missing the point. At the same time, I think often pastors- Hmm ... and I think, this is true in higher education. I've seen higher education, I've seen this with faculty members, I've seen this with pastors, we wanna replicate ourselves. And say, okay, hey, the ideal- Yeah ... the ideal student is the student who eventually becomes someone who ... I was... My doctorate's in English, is to be someone who loves and is passionate about English the same way I am. Well, that's not really what most people are going to do. Yeah. Same thing, in pastor. We wanna tr- we wanna recreate someone who's got a mini MDiv, who can work with Greek, and can do word studies, and do all this, and that's great. There are some people who are motivated that way. But most people in the church, that's not how they engage God's word. And really, God's word is alive and active- Right ... and it is sharper than two-edged sword. Yeah. You don't need all that. Like, those things are helpful- Sure ... but God does speak through it. So I think we've kind of created this situation where we've over-professionalized- Mm-hmm ... the Christian faith, or at least engaging scripture. So, I would say, so with, the pastor, I never had a chance to do that, say, yeah, okay, one, yeah, that's funny, Our Daily Crouton. you're missing the point. Yeah. Two, that's really a little bit arrogant to want to denigrate another Christian ministry. Yeah. Like, like, how does that... Like, what are you really trying to accomplish with that? Three- There is a pathway for someone to eventually go deeper in God's word, and my guess to you, Pastor, you probably started at some point at a very low bar. Right. There's very few really driven intellectuals- Yeah ... who will, like, say, "Hey, I'm gonna come to my, reading the Bible in a very deep way right off the bat." Right? There's very few C.S. Lewises, right? But we hold that bar up as like, hey, that's like, that's what it looks like. So I would say there's, I- I'm kind of saddened by that, when I hear stories of people who have found God's word and it's just a little bit, right? I think about the Ethiopian eunuch- Yeah ... reading Isaiah and going, "I have no idea what this looks like. What does this mean? How do I, how do I engage with this text?" Right? And then along comes, Philip, runs alongside the chariot, says, "Hey, let me explain that to you," gives a brief explanation, and then he's off. There's no, we don't know how long that eng- engagement looks like. Mm. it was enough for the Ethiopian eunuch to say, "Hey, I wanna be baptized." Yeah, yep. And then to say, "I can go back and I can explain what I've been told." Does he truly understand all aspects of the Old Testament that he could, he turn around and be... Does he have an MDiv? No.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, when you think about the s- the thief on the cross. Definitely. One interaction. One interaction. Right? One qu- and one comment- Mm ... and one question and, and he was saved. I mean, it's powerful.

Matt Lucas: So yeah, so how do you ignite that? Yeah. So that's what we're really interested in. So our mission is to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable- Yeah ... and accessible to all. We're not trying to be a mini MDiv. Now, we can do that with our ministry, and we've done that. Sure. We have resources that do that. So, so that would be... So, going back to your question is how do you pass it on? Like, what I was missing, when I was hearing so many stories of people saying like, "When I would do our daily bread on the way to school with my kids every day." Yeah. Or, "My parents did this with me, and that is why I'm reading scripture 20 years later." That discipline is built over these small interactions rather than a story of, "Hey, let's open God's word as a family." And I'm not saying that. That's important,

to open God's word. That might speak to some, but my guess is that as you go, and finding ways where God's word can be, can enter into the conversation in a meaningful way is probably more memorable than, and probably is easy to take with you when you first start. Right? Think about your own... I think about my own journey. I won't speak for yours, but, I grew up in a Christian faith, and said, "Okay, now how do I make this my s- make this my own?" And I remember opening the Bible and thinking, I remember I'd seen my mom's Bible, all the highlights- Right, right ... and the notes- Right, right ... and things. And if you see my first Bible, this, my attempt to try to mimic that. And there is something beautiful about that. I still have that. My mom recently gave it to me, and I was looking at that. It's a King James Version Bible. It was given to me when I was in third grade, and, like, that wasn't a great birthday gift as a third grader. I was like, "Like, why do I have this?" And so it sat- Yeah ... on my desk- Yeah ... for quite a while, and, but eventually I knew, okay, I need to pick this up. Mm-hmm. And, but I really didn't know what to do with it. And my mom- Yeah ... who was relatively new in her faith, wasn't always quite sure how to disciple me. Yeah. So I'm, I'm mimicking my mom, and there was something beautiful about that mimicking. But what I really needed to mimic was how does she pick up the Bible and just read it, not what do I see at the end and what's the result. Mm. And so again, what would probab- And not a criticism of my mom. My mom loves the Lord. She prays for me every day. Love her. Mom, if you watch this, love you, appreciate you. She's dealing with cancer right now. Mm-hmm. But what, what I, what would, what would be transformational for a third grader, fourth grader, fifth grader, is give me something that's accessible. Show me- Yeah ... what that looks like, and let me see that in your life so that I can begin to actually replicate that. Yeah. So I think that's where, whether it's Our Daily Bread or some other devotional or whatever, I think parents miss that. We turn this into, okay, we've got to turn this into a mini-sermon. Or, yeah, or a- Yeah ... mini-devotional of that kind, prepared. So- Yeah ... speaking of this, one of the things we've done- Mm ... is we recently purchased the Immerse Bible. So it's a reading Bible. It's designed specifically as a reading Bible. We d- we did more than just take out the chapters and verses. We reordered the canon around so that the books cohere in much more of, chronological way. Mm-hmm. haven't changed the text. and just really made it a reading experience. So looking at Harry Potter- Right? So how do we w- replicate that type of reading experience that feels like a book to be read rather than something to be studied? Mm. So I saw your Bible on your, on your desk over there. That, that Bible looks as something to be studied. Mm. Right? You got your footnotes. Yeah. You got poems in the margins, and that's great. There's a place for that. But historically, what most people did with Scripture is they... Well, actually, they just heard it. Yeah, that's it. They just heard it. They just listened to it. Right. They actually let it cons- let... And then, or they just, or it was read to them, or they read it- Yeah ... and they were trying to make sense of it. So we purchased the Immerse Bible as a way to engage people and say, "Hey, just read it." Like, just let the Word of God speak for itself. So even at our ministry, we talk about this a lot. Some people, we have great leaders in our ministry. Not everybody feels comfortable being a teacher of God's Word. And if you can imagine, and I, I know this is true in higher education, right? I mean, the, the coin of the realm is how great of a teacher you are. And in a Christian university, it's how well you can handle the Word of God. Mm. And those who can handle it well have a little bit more influence than those who don't. So I was a provost in, at a university in, on the West Coast, and I just remember talking to faculty saying, "I don't always wanna speak up in faculty meetings because the Bible department- ... is there," right? "And I don't wanna say something that puts me..." Or- Right ... I would hear students say, "Well, I feel a little uncomfortable because I watch my faculty member, and, like, the way they handle God's Word, it's, it's a little intimidating," right? Yeah. And there's some truth to that. So I think for us, what we're trying to... So what we started do- even at our ministry, we got people in our ministry, we got some people, we have PhDs, Harvard, Divinity School- Mm ... and Duke and other MDivs. We got people from Cornerstone and Calvin who have got their, completed their master's and doctoral programs, people really well-trained. but we also have people who are like, "That's, that's not my gifting," but they have to lead their teams. Sure. And so one of the

things we talk about is we talk about Bible engagement practices. Mm. Not how to study the Bible, like Bible engagement practices. So we're just trying to replicate different ways that you can actually just engage, so you can walk in with no preparation and just read the Bible in community with different ways and different historical ways that's been done so that you can just engage God's word and let God's word to speak for itself. Mm. Personally, that's what I'm really passionate about. So I know I'm going on here, but we just did something just back, back in January. It was powerful. So we do this across the entire ministry. All 700 employees once a month, each team will get together and they will, they have their devotional time together and they do prayer time, but once a month everybody will do one Bible engagement practice. And so we did this practice called Dayenu, which is rooted in, Jewish history and Jewish tradition, where you recite the story of the Exodus. Mm. And you can see this play itself out. So you're talking about Moses and Joshua. You, at the end of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy really is, is a recitation- It is ... of what's just happened- Yeah ... the first four books, right? Yeah. Here's a story Moses tried to capture as Moses saw. Mm. So, we looked at, and you see this throughout the Torah, you get these recitations of what's the story of God's faithfulness, right? Yeah. So there's this practice that's developed in Jewish tradition where they call this Dayenu. They do this usually around, the Passover meal, and they will tell the story of the Exodus. And at each moment they will stop and say, they'll say, "Dayenu. so if God would have only have taken us out of Egypt, that would've been enough." "If God would've only taken us out of Egypt and got us through the Red Sea, that would've been enough. If God would've taken us just through the Red Sea and had met us at Mount Sinai, that would've been enough." And so it's just this story of like this progression of like God's being faithful over and over and over again. And so as a ministry, we just started like, what does it mean for us- Mm ... to just replicate that practice? And tell our own story as a ministry, as a family. And so it wasn't this long, we just, we, here's his practice, here's his passage of Exodus. You can see, and then you can take that same and you can turn it into a prayer. How would you take that same prayer into your own life? And it becomes a very easy and accessible way to engage scripture without having to go into what is, what's the historical context here- Yeah ... what is the word choice and what's- Right ... what's, how does this fit into the Torah? Like, all interesting things, but man, there's just a story of God's faithfulness and that just this recitation of y- and, yeah, God's faithful, and that would be enough even if he stopped there. Mm. And I just think about my own life. I've got so many places where if God would have just had just the gratitude- Mm ... like there's so many things. If he just, just meeting my wife- Mm ... that would've been enough. Mm. Giving me six kids, that would be enough. Mm. Giving me some grandchildren Like he, he could have stopped so long ago Amen. Amen. Amen. Right? Yes. So I think those moments, I think we've lost the beauty of scripture that it sh- it's right there, it's on the surface And I wanna be careful 'cause I'm not saying that there isn't depth, and there's great richness in this, and we don't wanna just say that the surface meaning is what's important. We don't wanna be just, become these literalists that just, But we don't wanna professionalize it to the degree that we- Yes. Absolutely. And I think that's... So I would say in the West, there's just been a profess- over-professionalization that-

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm ... going back to your conversation about decadence, so, you can see I'm get animated about this. I'm kind of- It's beautiful. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Talk to us about engagement in, in today's college student. I know you've had some initiatives. We, i- in the beginning, several years ago, we, we partnered together, and, and actually I'll be giving you a call 'cause I have a few other ideas I wanna run by you and your team about this, but tell us what you've discovered, what you've seen. Mm. W- because it's a, it's a very different generation, different group of, of folks. I speak to one of my children who has said to me, "Dad, I just, I, I don't wanna... I wanna engage, but give me this little bit." Mm-hmm. "Don't give me this little bit." Mm. And part of it's also the culture and the internet and the bite-sized information and the speed of information that's coming, that sometimes we just wanna look at one little, tiny thing, but the word of God is powerful. Yep. Just the shortest verse, Jesus

wept- Mm-hmm ... is powerful. Yep. Right? So what have you, what have you and your team learned about college students, high school students, the younger generation, engaging them with scripture?

Matt Lucas: So we've got a team called Reclaim Today- Mm-hmm ... led by, Daniel Day, who's done a phenomenal job. He spent a lot of time studying particularly late millennials and Gen Z, what's actually happening in their life choices, seeing scripture. And we actually spent, before I got here, in 2022, I think it was started in 2021, they spent an entire year before we actually produced even our first piece of content- Mm ... just doing the research. So, I'm not gonna do Daniel Day's team justice- ... I think 'cause... And they've actually, I know they've spoken to your faculty. They did. They, they've spoken to a lot of found- Spoke at chapel, and- Yeah ... we did, yeah, it was wonderful. Let's run it. Yeah, a number of foundations have reached out to them and actually have come 'cause they've been tr- a lot of foundations are looking to try to engage the next generation. Sure. They've seen them as, resources, ABHE and CCCU, so the, Association of Biblical Higher Education and the, College, or Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. They've spoken at conferences there. So they've really gone deep on this. So what we've seen, with this, with particularly with Gen Z, we, it's become news. Like Gen Z, there's, there's this revival- Yeah ... that's starting to happen. It's been interesting. Ryan Burge, who writes a lot about, religion, recently was on a podcast, saying, "There's this quiet revival, but we're not seeing it in the numbers in church yet, so is this really revival?" So that's an interesting question. Sure. He's kind of... I think he's problematized this quiet revival for at least for me personally. 'Cause it is a good point that we're not seeing a surge in- Church ... church. But I think that also speaks a little bit about what's going on with this generation. Or what's going on in the church. Or what's going on with the church.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's a very good point. Yeah.

Matt Lucas: so I think what we're seeing, but we are seeing there is a sense of wanting to, as you go, like, how does Scripture, how does God, and there- therefore Scripture, fit into the everyday aspects of my life? How does that, what does that really look like? I think there's a much more utilitarian, interest in what's going on with Scripture. What does this actually mean? And it's very individualistic- Mm ... which is a very American-centric way, and there's some problems with that. But at the same time, there's a sense of community. Gen Z is this very- Yeah, absolutely ... like, "Hey, how does this speak to community?" So going back to the Immerse Bible, what we found is that the Immerse Bible has been really interest- the Gen Z have been the most interest- Hmm ... in the G- into the Immerse Bible because some of it's not my parents' Bible- ... attitude, right? Every generation. But there is a sense of the immediacy of the text where I'm not trying to study this, this feels like a written document to be read and consumed. So yeah, I, I think that's what we're seeing with, with that generation. that I think the other thing that we're seeing with Gen Z, While they are known for being digital natives, there is a desire to have a break from the digital experience, and there's actually a greater demand for print. there's a recognition, either consciously or subconsciously, that I get distracted- Mm ... on my digital device, and I'm wanting to put it away. So while we see people doom scrolling, and that's just be kind of, I go out in public and I see Gen Z people in the, restaurants or, young kids, young kids to me. Like, and I do it, too. I've been guilty of it, being in a restaurant and I'm consumed with my, with my phone. There is a sense of wanting to set that aside much more than I would say even Gen X, where generation I'm from, and saying, "How do I create space?" I'm watching this with my children. Mm. I've got f- five of my daughters are, would be, Gen Z or late, late millennials, and they have probably better... They're thinking more intentionally about how to create boundaries 'cause they want a space that is not digital. So what I, what we're trying to do around all that is we're trying to create spaces where we invite people digitally where they are every day- Mm ... meet them on social media, and then pull them through in a Bible engagement journey that might probably ideally would take them away from the digital space and into something

that is less, there is more, there's less distraction. so that's one of the things we're trying to explore. We're working, we just got a grant from, Cornerstone Foundation, to start that. We've got to really build on that. We have a conversation with a couple others right now- Mm ... that we're looking to do. we're building out kind of around this idea called Joshua 1:8. Mm. where Joshua talks about, so I should have this passage memorized, but talk about consuming God's word and making it- Yes ... part of your daily life. Yes. And we want to use this specifically around Gen Z- Mm ... and how do we work with Gen Z and actually design something that meets particularly those who are, who are Chri- who are not Christians, but are curious about the Bible, but, suspect about Christians, and those who have recently come to faith in Christ but aren't reading the Bible. So that demographic, and how do we engage them with scripture in a way that would actually bring them along. So we're actually doing studies right now, so bring me back a year from now. We'll be able to- That'd be cool ... tell you what we've learned. But that's- Yeah ... we're really trying to study that very specific situation, context. How do we bring them on? But we do know this, to summarize, we do know it's probably gonna be digital and print. It's gotta reduce distraction. We know that it's gotta have a strong reading component. It's gotta be more reading and less study- Mm-hmm ... as an experience. We're thinking about using the books of Luke and Acts together. Mm. Because what's ... There's some interesting things about Luke and Acts. One, it's the only ... It ... One, Luke writes more of the New Testament by word count than any o- than the, than Paul. Mm. So he writes more of the New Testament by words. He's the only non-Jewish writer of the New Testament. Mm. So you're not Jewish. Mm. I'm not Jewish, and Cameron, who's off the clock, he's not Jewish. I mean, most Christians, they are Jew- so here's a Greek- Yeah ... writing about the Chri- so like that, he's, he's speaking to us. And with Luke and Acts, you get the entire story of the New Testament. Like, it, it is a compelling narrative. Yeah. Right? So that's kind of where we're kind of going with this generation. We're trying to see how does that engage them. we gotta do some more research on where are those entry points and where are those barriers. but yeah, we're doing some, some interesting things. We still early in, early days for us in what those conclusions are. But yeah, we'll hope- a year from now, hopefully we'll have something for you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Great. Tell me other areas in, in, of the ministry, how you measure success. how do you do it? Engagement is this, it's ethereal, right? Yeah. And so talk, talk to us about i- in measuring engagement and the success of it and thereafter. How, how are you conceptualizing, operationalizing that thing?

Matt Lucas: Yeah. Well, you're, you're speaking ... I know in higher education, this is the question I was asking, how do you know that you've actually had an impact? And- Yeah ... I think historically, most Christian ministries, and our daily bread ministries has been true, you, you measure impact by tonnage, right? So how many, how many, whatever, how many Bibles are out? How many thing ... how many numbers of daily devotionals have you sent out? Yeah. in an analog world, you can, that becomes, that's probably the only thing you can do. Sure. You spread it out. You broadcast as much as you can, and see, and hopefully something sticks. I think in a digital space, you can start asking different questions. and I think we're starting to do that. So the question for us right now is Bible engagement journeys. Mm. So you quoted earlier, we know that people who read, reflect, respond to scripture four or more times a week are more likely to experience spiritual growth and less likely to experience temptation or to succumb to temptation. You might experience more temptation, but you will less likely to succumb to temptation. Well, that's an interesting research finding, and that's held true across generations- Mm ... across ethnic groups, and across geographic regions across the world. We haven't studied everyone, but it's held up over and over again, so we call it the Power of Four. So that's an interesting finding. So how do you get people, right? You can't manufacture c- we can't manufacture Christian growth. Yeah. But we can create more Holy Spirit opportunities- Mm ... to do that, and the way you create those opportunities is have people engage scripture. Yeah. In fact, of all the spiritual disciplines, it's the only one that we see

that is the most predictive. Prayer has a little bit of predictiveness to it. The other spiritual disciplines, we don't see any predictive aspects. So- Mm ... going to church, fasting, worship, listening to Christian music. Are you gonna listen- Well, the Word, the Word, the Word. The Word. Yeah. That is the most predictive. Okay, so for us as a Bible engagement ministry it's like, okay, that's a great finding. Okay, how do we- Yeah ... how do we drive down on that? So what we're trying to measure right now is what we call Bible engagement journeys. We're in the early days of developing this, where we are wanting to create starting points. So the devotional is a big starting point for us, for people, as I was saying earlier, might start there. Then how do you move them through different development phases of their Christian walk and their Christian faith so that they are actually disciple makers, right? And so that's what we're studying right now. We're stitching together journeys. We've ki- we've used our research to group people into four big categories. So we've grouped the entire wor- 8 billion people into four categories. Which is a little reductive- ... 'cause we know people are a little bit more complicated for, than that. But for us it's a, it's a int- it's a helpful heuristic, right? Yeah. So one, we have everybody... so those who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, so whether they're different religion, atheist, agnostic, or have a... We're seeing a lot of people in the West just have a complete- have an incorrect view of, of, of Christianity, of, of Christian faith. Okay, we call them, we internally, I'll use, I'll use insider baseball language, we call them P1s, okay? Persona one. P2s are people who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ- But aren't reading the Bible four or more times a week. Mm. And the reason why that matters is because P2s who ha- have, profess faith in Christ but aren't reading the Bible, when you look at the behaviorally, statistically there's no difference. Mm. They look exactly like a P1. Okay, so they're- they've got a faith. They- they profess faith in Christ, but we want them to go further. Yeah. So P3 would be people who profess faith in Christ but are actually reading the Bible four or more times a week. Like, that's the thing. We wanna get to the four times a week. Mm. But that's not where we wanna end them, right? P4 are people who are Christians reading the Bible four or more times a week and discipling others. Mm. And we dis- we define discipling at this point having a spiritual conversa- a spiritual conversation that points them back to Jesus and helps them to grow once a month. Okay? So, like, that's the minimum. We gotta do more research on what we really wanna define discipleship, but we're using that as kind of the- Yeah ... as the baseline. Well, you can put eight billion people into one of those four categories, right? And so then the question is, once they're in, then, so a journey for a P1, it's like how do you move a P1 who doesn't know Jesus- To know Jesus and from knowing Jesus to reading the Bible, right? Like, how do you move them along that journey? So we're developing Bible engagement journeys that meets people at each one. So when I was talking about Joshua 1:8 and the Gen Z initiative, we're asking questions like, well, how do you use the Bible to someone who's interested in scripture but doesn't know Jesus? How do you engage them? And people who are f- who have faith in Christ but aren't reading the Bible, how do you engage them? That's a different conversation than I'd hope for me and you, right? Sure. I mean, I think we're... I, I hope both of us are beyond the P2 category, right? How do you... The questions I'm asking, and even as I'm asking today as a 54-year-old male, white male in America living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I, I'm asking very different questions than my, my brothers and sisters of Christ in Sri Lanka. Yeah, right. So what does that look like? So those are different questions we're asking. S- what I give to a 54-year-old Matt is different than what I would give to a 20-year-old Matt, and a Matt that didn't know Jesus at, whatever age. I was a young kid at that point, but another person, right? So those are the questions we're asking. So that's the Bible engagement journeys, and we're trying to develop them and then actually measure what happens. Now, here's what's been interesting. So we've tested this. Okay. Okay, getting to your points, so a long setup here. So we actually have had taken people through the research-

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You're an academic at heart, so-

Matt Lucas: I know, you can hear ... so we're, we're... This is great. I know. Yeah. This is funny, 'cause my, my, my employees, they go, "Yeah, Matt, you are such a professor." This is great. Okay. So we've done the research. We've kind of mapped them through, and we've s- actually started using the research and identify where P1, 2, 3, and 4- Mm ... and ask people to take a, engage a survey instrument, and then based on that, we will recommend content to them. And as we've done that, we can tell, okay, hey, you're a P1, P2, 3, 4, and then we've actually started recommending content. Now, here's the beautiful thing. As we've done that, we've actually been able to track how long they've actually engaged that content- Mm ... and how they've moved along. And we've seen everyone that we've done this with- Mm ... and we've done it with a pre... We got a, we got a couple thousand now in our sample size that we've been, piloting this with now, go on at least a two-step journey. Mm. They've read... They've, they've taken that, they've read, and then they've made a move. Wow. And for us, okay, that's a win, and now we're saying... And actually, some of them are, like, going two or three steps. So now what we've done is we overhauled our entire tech stack. This has been a huge investment, and we're in the process of being able to store all that data that we have about individuals, be able to track them anonymously just on their IP address, and then to be able to actually continue to offer them content and then be able to say what content's working and what's not working, what's working for this demographic, this P1, this P2, this age group, and then what actually moves people, and more importantly, not just gets them to consume more content. Yeah. Right? We're not a p- we're a publishing ministry, but at a more deeper level, we're a Bible engagement ministry. We want them to grow in faith in Christ. So how do we move them through transitional periods, right, so or transitional moments? So how do we take someone who doesn't know Jesus to the place where they actually profess faith in Christ? Like I told the story earlier about the prisoner. Like- Yeah ... that's a- Yeah ... that's a huge moment. Oh, of course. Okay, then how do you take that person and say, "Okay, how do we help you develop this discipline of reading God's word?" Mm. how do we help you actually start discipling? Now, I think over time we'll probably have more categories. Sure. But, so that's what we're thinking. It's a lot of work. It's a, it's a, it's an expensive- Mm ... engagement to really develop technology to be able to do this and then to restructure the entire organization to be able to track it. but yeah, that's what we're in the middle of, we're excited about, so hopefully, in a year or two we'll be able to tell you- Sure ... "Hey, there's some people who are on Bible engagement journeys. This is what's going on." My vision one day is to be able to say, "Hey, in the state of Michigan, this is what we're seeing, what we're looking at these trends, and we can actually see what are actual felt needs, what is actually moving people further- Yeah ... what's actually becoming obstacles," so we can report to the church and just give that information. And at the, at the heart of who we are is we've been a, a ministry that tries to give as much as we can away for free. Mm. So I know there's been a lot of organizations that have kind of entered into the space who are for profit, who are trying to do this and trying to use- Sure ... the church as a place to be able to provide services for them, and you see them as a customer, and that's fine. There's, Chris is in there. But for us- Yeah ... we want to be able to say, "Hey, we'd like to give this away for free," like tell you as a pastor what's actually happening in your church, in your region, and then how you could actually meet their needs in a more intentional way.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Wonderful, Matt. Thank you. That's beautiful. Another question I have for you, I just, Throughout my, my journey, my, my experience here in the US, we immigrated in 1980, my family, from South America. So I came into a church in Rochester, and it took me... Rochester, New York, and it took me years to understand what I'll call the sort of interdenominational culture wars- Mm-hmm ... within evangelicalism broadly understood, right? I, with it, for years, I, I didn't understand all the conversation, coming from another country and realizing I've been dropped in the middle of this sort of jungle, right, and all the stuff that was pulling in different directions. But one of the things that became clear to me, growing up and seeing church and going to churches and hearing was, and you alluded to it a little bit when you talked about Our Daily Crouton, right? Mm-hmm. So this conversation that, and we

still have it today, that some, some of the approaches we use are so thin, people will argue as a critique, that it dishonor God, it dishonor the richness of the Bible and so on. And I'm thinking of the critique you receive about Our Daily Crouton, or I've seen this with some of the recent campaigns with He Gets Us. Mm-hmm. That critique, right? Yeah. And, and, and I'll say, I'll share this story because I remember two years ago, I found a copy of Knowing God, J.I. Packer- Mm-hmm ... in Spanish. Oh, wow. Right? And I sent it to my father, who I don't think he's a believer. at the time, he was about 88 years old. and I sent it to him in Spanish hoping he'd read it, and I called him one day, and he had been reading it. And I said to him, "Dad, what do you think?" And he said to me, son, very erudite, very eloquent. I really... I mean, it was just really high-level stuff," he said. "But I'm more like the thief on the cross." I just care about having a simple faith." I've never forgotten that conversation. Mm. And I was on a panel with some pastors, maybe two months later, and some university presidents, and they were talking about the, what I call the, the complex theological gymnastic they want to ensure their campuses and their students have. And I remember I raised my hand. I said, "May I share with you a story about my dad?" Yeah. And I said, "We can't forget the simplicity and beauty of Jesus and the faith." Mm-hmm. Right? But I've seen this trend in America- Mm-hmm ... that we, we tend to criticize the means, but we're also critiquing the person in some ways. Yep. Right? But the reality is there are a lot of people like the thief on the cross- Mm-hmm ... who we just need to get them engaged- Mm ... in a simple kind of way and get that conversation moving, which I, which is what I appreciate about what you're doing in the ministry and what you've shared, because there are a lot of people who will get lost with the rest- Mm-hmm ... or are frustrated- Mm ... or discouraged or upset with it, right? And, and, I think what you're saying, it's, it's an important call for us to remember, even at a university- Mm ... the importance of the beauty and the simplicity and the elegance of the faith and not getting lost in all the other important things. Mm-hmm. Really important, but the simplicity of being, having childlike faith.

Matt Lucas: Yeah, I think, like kudos to you for saying that to your, your father. I mean, knowing God's great book, w- my, when I first read, heard this story, I was like, "What are you gonna go with?" I was like, "Hey," right? It was like, wow, it was transformative. One, if that, if that had been the story that, hey, he read that and like now I wanna read 12 other books- Yeah, I know ... by J.I. Packer, that I wouldn't have been surprised because it's amazing what the Holy Spirit can do. True. He, my father taught me something in the garage of my house when he said that to me. Yeah, I know, but what, but I'm saying on the flip side, so- Yeah ... on the flip side, he responds like, "Hey, I would like to just, I'm the thief on the cross," it's amazing what the Holy Spirit can do. Yeah. Right? I think too often we want to put the Holy Spirit in a way that like, here's been my story- Yeah ... I don't wanna replicate that. I think the, for us as a ministry, I think the story that we should always remember, I, I love the deep theological- Sure ... arguments. You need to have them. Of course. You need to wrestle with them- Of course ... because you need to contend with the, for the faith. You need to contend with your faith. You need to work through doubt. Mm-hmm. You need to work through difficult questions. If we don't have people doing that- Yep ... we have a problem. Yep. We also need to recognize that not everyone's there, nor do we wanna make everybody into that, and we wanna meet them there. And the goal is a journey for all of them. I've watched people, I've been in, in higher education. I've watched faculty members who are giants in the faith intellectually, but not their heart- doesn't match their head. Hmm. And I've watched, I've been in meetings, I'm just like, wow, like, I know what you teach in class or I know the w- your reputation, but how, like, this is playing itself out and how you're demonstrating your Christian faith in this moment doesn't match- Hmm ... what you've professed. Hmm. Now, I mean, I, I'm just thinking this inside, I mean, I, I'm guilty of that, too. Sure. So I've watched big heads, small hearts. Hmm. Hmm. I've also watched people who have huge, huge hearts, right? And little heads. And little heads. Yeah, yeah. Right? Right, right. I mean, the ideal is to be both- Sure ... but each person's wired differently and where they are in their faith, and the goal is not to say, "Hey, you need to look like this." It's like, you're here. How

do, how does, how do I come alongside you and allow the Holy Spirit to, for m- the Holy Spirit to work through me- Yeah ... to help you move? And as He's doing that through me, what's also changing in me, right? So for us, it's been really important to really keep a very humble perspective on this. Hmm. So yeah, we're not, we don't wanna, we're not trying to be all things to all people. There's great ministries out there that go... We're not, we're not a seminary. Hmm. Although we do do pastoral training, we're not trying to replicate that. Hmm. That's not, that's not our job. There is a great spot in the Christian community- Yeah ... in the c- in the Kingdom for that work to be done. There's also a place for Our Daily Bread Ministries, and the BibleProject, and YouVersion, and American Bible Society, and on, and on, and on. Like, there, there's a place for that. And what we really need to do in the Christian faith is, like, hey, how do we recognize those strengths? Yeah. And how do we recognize what God is doing to bring people on? Like, I could criticize all those- Of course ... all those different ministries- Of course. Yep ... and miss, and be true. Like, yeah, those, there are shortcomings, and miss what actually is the beauty that God is doing- Mm ... in and through them, and the witness that they, proclaim in that space. So yeah, I, I agree. it's a challenge in the, in the Christian faith right now in, in our society. I, I, again, going back to your earlier conversation, this is what, when I'm outside the United States I don't see it, particularly when I travel out through Asia and Africa. When I do see it, it's usually been imported in. Mm. I remember I was in Indonesia, and I just ran into some major American the- This is back in 2008 to 2014. I was running into these major American arguments- ... that were theological, that were, denominational, playing themselves out to Indonesia, and some of it was like, yeah, there's some good points there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: But it's like, man, we, we've imported the wrong thing. Yeah. Or we've exported the wrong thing- Yeah ... and they've imported the wrong thing. Yeah. And yeah, it's just, it's sad to see. That, I think that's the danger. Matt, thank you so much- Yeah ... for being with us and all you've shared. May the Lord bless you. We'll have you on again, and I'm sure we'll see you just in a few weeks.

Matt Lucas: Oh, g- yeah, I'm looking forward to it. Matt, thank you so much. Blessings to you.

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