WEEK 01 · AN EIGHT-SESSION BIBLE STUDY · FOR YOUR GROUP

Contend in Love

Josh Howerton and Philip Anthony Mitchell on Live Free, opened into eight sessions

"...contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

"And have mercy on those who doubt..."

JUDE 3, 22

Josh Howerton Lead pastor, Lakepointe Church, Dallas

Philip Anthony Mitchell Lead pastor, 2819 Church, Atlanta

Live Free with Josh Howerton September 23, 2026 · 1:49:01

BEFORE YOU LEAD

Pastor Josh Howerton of Lakepointe Church in Dallas sat down with Pastor Philip Anthony Mitchell of 2819 Church in Atlanta for almost two hours. They talked about the grace that pursued Mitchell and the call that made him a preacher. They talked about preaching, the Word and the Spirit, and Islam. They talked about the return of Christ, public attack, anxiety, and the man in a prison cell who thinks God is done with him.

Some of it will move you. Some of it will make you uneasy. A few claims will need checking. This study takes all three seriously. Scripture is the authority here, not the podcast, and not this study.

Each session moves the same way. **What Was Said** summarizes that part of the episode with quotes, word for word. **Into the Text** sets out the passages in full with a short commentary and, where the Greek or Hebrew opens something up, a word study. **Go Deeper** gives cross-references, a Bible story, a moment from church history and a book. **Hold It Carefully** names the real tension and where faithful Christians disagree. Then five questions for the room and one thing to practice before you meet again.

A 60 TO 75 MINUTE PLAN FOR GROUPS

5 min	**Welcome and pray** Ask one person to pray for the group by name. Read any care note in the session aloud before you begin.
8 to 12 min	**Play the clip** Each session lists one clip. Queue it before people arrive. Preview Sessions 1, 5 and 8 alone first.
5 min	**What was said** Read the summary and the quotes aloud. Ask: what did you hear first?
20 min	**Into the text**

Read each passage aloud, a different voice each time. Read the commentary. Stop after each passage for one minute of response.

10 min — **Hold it carefully**
Read it through. Let people disagree. Keep the tone of Proverbs 18:17 and Ephesians 4:15.

15 min — **Discuss**
Pick three questions if time is short. The last question is usually the one that matters.

5 to 8 min — **Practice and pray**
Read the practice aloud. Name who will do it. Say the memory verse together. Close in prayer.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

QUOTES

Every quote from Howerton or Mitchell matches the transcript word for word, including the stumbles people make when they talk. Timestamps read mm:ss under an hour and h:mm:ss after, and each one opens the video at that moment. The transcript comes from the video's automatic captions.

SCRIPTURE

All Scripture is quoted from the ESV. When the speakers quote a verse from memory or from another translation, the study says so.

CHECKING CLAIMS

Statistics, laws and history mentioned in the episode were checked against primary sources, listed at the end. "Listening with Discernment" includes a table of the episode's main factual claims and how each one holds up.

FOR LEADERS

Sessions 1 and 8 touch suicide and anxiety. Session 5 is about Islam. If a Muslim friend might attend, tell them ahead of time what the clip says, and invite them anyway.

SESSION 01

Kept Alive

A shotgun, a bottle, an unlocked door, and a bathroom floor where God showed up.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
03:18 to 13:30	05:04 to 10:55	Psalm 40:2

A CARE NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This session includes Philip Anthony Mitchell's account of two nights when he wanted to end his life. On one of them he sat with a loaded shotgun in his lap. If you are thinking about suicide, or you are worried about someone who is, call or text 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.) at any hour. You can also chat at 988lifeline.org. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

Leaders: read this note aloud before the clip. Afterward, check in privately with anyone who went quiet.

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell grew up in Queens, New York, the son of believing parents from Trinidad who ran a small ministry in their home. The Scriptures "never registered." He wanted community and went looking for it far from God. His mother moved him to North Carolina, and for years he ran his own life his own way. God never stopped pursuing him.

At twenty-four he had an apartment, a car, money in the bank and a girlfriend he loved. He was empty. One night he sat on the floor with a shotgun and a fifth of Hennessy, trying to get drunk enough to pull the trigger. His door was unlocked. The woman who did his hair walked in, sat beside him, took his hand, and said nothing. Six months later he was back in the same place. This time his girlfriend came home from a car crash, put on gospel music, and lifted her hands to thank God. He crawled into the bathroom and yelled at God: if you exist, meet me here. God did.

That night he felt conviction about sin for the first time and moved to the couch. Days later a stranger, a preacher, put a Bible in his hand. On April 14, 2004, reading Proverbs 3:5-6, he sensed a call to pastor. He ran from it for four years, served other men for eight, and planted his first church in October 2012.

> "I had all of the trappings of worldly success, but I had no peace."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 06:54

> “sometimes people don’t need our words, they just need a ministry of presence.”
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 08:04

> “God met me in that bathroom on the floor over a toilet seat.”
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 09:19

INTO THE TEXT

PSALM 40:1-3

1 I waited patiently for the LORD;
    he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
    out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
    making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
    a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
    and put their trust in the LORD.

Read the verbs in order: waited, inclined, heard, drew up, set, put. The one in the pit does one thing. He cries. God does the rest. Mitchell’s story follows the same order. He did not climb out of that apartment. He yelled from a bathroom floor and was lifted. Notice too how the rescue ends. A new song goes into his mouth, and then “many will see.” In Mitchell’s case the new song came first as someone else’s gospel music. Now millions hear his story. Rescue is never only for the one rescued.

> **WORD STUDY: “PIT OF DESTRUCTION”**
>
> The Hebrew is *bôr shā’ôn*. A *bôr* is a pit or cistern, the kind Joseph was thrown into. *Shā’ôn* usually means a roar or uproar. Psalm 65:7 uses it for “the roaring of the seas.” Picture a flooded pit, loud with rushing water, where your own shout is lost in the noise. The ESV translates the sense (“destruction”). The Hebrew gives you the sound.

JOB 2:11-13

[11] Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each
from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They
made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. [12] And when
they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept,
and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. [13] And they sat with
him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw
that his suffering was very great.

Job's friends are remembered for their bad speeches, but they began well. For seven days they sat on the ground and said nothing. The trouble started in chapter 4, when they began to explain. The woman who did Mitchell's hair never explained anything. She sat down on the floor next to a man with a shotgun and held his hand. "Sometimes people don't need our words," Mitchell says. The Bible agrees. Silence is not the absence of ministry. Sometimes it is the ministry.

JOHN 5:24

[24] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.
He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Mitchell says he "knew I had passed from death to life," and he uses Jesus' phrase. Look at how he knew. It was not the feeling in the bathroom. It was what happened that night and the days after. For the first time he felt that sleeping with his girlfriend was wrong, and he moved to the couch. Then he wanted the Bible. New life shows up as new hatred of sin and new hunger for God's word. Feelings come and go. Those two signs stay.

> **WORD STUDY: "HAS PASSED"**
>
> The Greek *metabebēken* is a perfect tense of *metabainō*, "to cross over, move from one place to another." The perfect tense describes a completed act with a lasting result. The believer has crossed over, and still stands on the far side. Jesus does not say "will pass" or "is trying to pass." It is done.

PROVERBS 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

Mitchell quotes this from memory [09:55] in older wording, with God speaking in the first person ("I will direct your path"). It is the verse over his call. For a man who had spent years trusting his own understanding, "do not lean on your own understanding" was not a slogan. It meant letting someone else steer. The promise is not that the road will be easy. It is that God will make it straight, able to be walked. Mitchell then ran for four years. The verse waited for him.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES	Ephesians 2:1-10 (dead, then made alive); Luke 15:11-24 (the father runs to the son "while he was still a long way off"); 2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 18:16-19.
A BIBLE STORY	Jonah 2. A man at the bottom, "the deep surrounded me," prays from the belly of a fish. He had run from his call too. God answers anyway.
CHURCH HISTORY	In 386, Augustine of Hippo sat weeping in a garden in Milan, unable to break with his old life. He heard a child's voice chanting "take up and read," opened Paul's letters to Romans 13:13-14, and was converted. He tells the story in *Confessions*, Book 8. Like Mitchell, he was the child of a praying parent (his mother, Monica) and a long way from home.
A BOOK	David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963). A country preacher goes to the young men of New York, and a young man named Nicky Cruz meets Christ. It is a story of the same pursuing grace Mitchell found, told sixty years earlier, a few miles from Queens.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

1 A testimony is not a template

Mitchell felt a "strong presence" fill the room. Many believers never have a moment like that. Timothy knew the Scriptures "from childhood" (2 Timothy 3:15). Lydia's heart was opened quietly by a river (Acts 16:14). Salvation is measured by trust in Christ and the fruit that follows, not by how loud the moment was. Tell dramatic stories. Do not make them the standard.

2 Presence helps, and it is not enough by itself

Mitchell is honest here. Of the woman who sat beside him, he says: "that kept me alive in that moment, but it didn't sustain." [08:11] Six months later he was back on the floor. A friend's presence can carry someone through a night. Getting through the months after takes more: follow-up, community, and often a doctor or counselor. Christians have always used physicians. Luke was one (Colossians 4:14). Asking for professional help is not a failure of faith.

3 Speak about suicide with care

Mitchell's story ends in rescue. Some stories do not. Scripture never names suicide as the unforgivable sin, and families who have lost someone need comfort, not verdicts. If someone in your group has lost a person this way, let them lead how much is said.

4 God used people who were still unfinished

The girlfriend whose worship broke him open was living with him. The woman who saved his life came by to do his hair. God does not wait for tidy people before he uses them. Neither should we.

DISCUSS

01 Mitchell had "all of the trappings of worldly success" and "no peace" [06:54]. Where do the people you know look for what he was looking for?

02 When has someone's quiet presence carried you through a hard night? Why is it so hard for us to stay silent with someone in pain?

03 Psalm 40 moves from the pit, to the rock, to the song, to "many will see." Which line describes where you are right now?

04 The first sign of new life Mitchell names is conviction about sin, not a feeling of joy. Why does that matter for how we think about assurance?

05 Mitchell says the woman's presence "kept me alive in that moment, but it didn't sustain" [08:11]. What does it take to walk with someone after the crisis night is over?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Name one person who is carrying something heavy. Sit with them this week, in person if you can, and say less than you want to. If you are worried about their safety, ask them plainly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" Asking does not plant the idea. If the answer is yes, stay with them and call or text 988 together.

He crawled into a bathroom to yell at God. God was already there.

SESSION 02

The Hidden Years

Ten years of preaching to a small room, a holy moment at an empty tomb, and a new definition of success.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
03:18 to 04:51; 13:30 to 21:00; 24:55 to 30:32	26:45 to 30:32	2 Timothy 4:7

WHAT WAS SAID

Howerton notes that "the internet" found Mitchell about three years ago. Mitchell pushes back on the idea. He and his wife planted a church with ten other believers in October 2012 and preached "in obscurity" for ten years, through betrayals and hard years. He admits there was vanity and jealousy in his heart then, and he spent a long time wringing it out.

In December 2018 he and his wife toured Israel. Outside the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem he wandered into a gathering of Portuguese-speaking believers. Through an interpreter from his tour bus, their leader told him a large part of the church in America "is dead and is dying" and asked if he would go back and do something about it. He said yes and fell on his knees while they prayed. He calls it "an Isaiah 6 moment": he saw God's holiness and received a charge to "cry aloud and spare not." From then on he saw Scripture as God's word written, "his voice written." Four years later, before a vacation, he sensed God telling him to leave the old ministry behind. His wife told him at breakfast she had sensed the same thing on the same Thursday morning. They launched 2819 Church in January 2023. He preached through Matthew for three years.

Later [26:50], Mitchell says he has had to redefine success. He quotes a line of Howerton's back to him: pastors who stay faithful never make the news because "nobody talks about planes that land safely." His goal is to finish like Paul, and his reward is to lay his crown at Jesus' feet.

> "I don't think there's any such thing as a overnight success in the kingdom."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 03:33

> "You know why these things don't make the news? Because nobody talks about planes that land safely."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell**, quoting an earlier clip of Howerton · 28:09

> "I actually look forward to the day when I will first see the feet of Christ"
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 29:24

INTO THE TEXT

ISAIAH 6:5-8

5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of
a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6 Then one of the
seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the
altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is
taken away, and your sin atoned for." 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I
send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Isaiah's call comes in a set order: he sees God, he sees his sin, he is cleansed, and only then is he sent. The coal touches the exact place he confessed was unclean: his lips. God is about to make this man a mouth for him, so he starts with the mouth. Mitchell describes the same order in Jerusalem. First "the supreme holiness of God's nature," then the charge to speak. A call that skips the first half produces preachers who are bold and not broken. The order matters.

> **WORD STUDY: "I AM LOST"**
>
> The Hebrew *nidmêtî* comes from a root meaning "to be cut off" or "to be ruined." The King James renders it "I am undone." Isaiah is not describing a mood. He is saying that in the light of God's holiness he is finished. That is where every true call starts.

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is
laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me
on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Paul writes this from a Roman prison, near the end. He does not list churches planted or crowds reached. He names three things: fought, finished, kept. This is the plane landing safely. Notice who else gets the crown: "all

who have loved his appearing." The reward is not for famous apostles only. It is for ordinary believers who wanted Jesus to come back.

> **WORD STUDY: "FIGHT" AND "CROWN"**
>
> "I have fought the good fight" is *ton kalon agōna ēgōnismai*. The noun *agōn* is a contest, the word for an athletic event or a wrestling match. The same family of words shows up in Colossians 1:29 ("struggling") and Jude 3 ("contend"). You will meet it again in Sessions 3 and 4. The "crown" is a *stephanos*, the wreath given to the winner of a race, not a king's diadem.

REVELATION 4:9-11

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the
throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated
on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the
throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for
you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Mitchell's hope is taken from this scene: to see Christ's feet, then his eyes, and to throw his crown at them [29:24]. The elders do not keep their crowns. They were given them in order to give them back. That changes how you hold every reward in this life, including platforms. Anything God gives, we are holding for him.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES

Zechariah 4:10 ("whoever has despised the day of small things"); Luke 16:10 ("faithful in a very little"); Matthew 25:21; Galatians 1:17-18 and 2:1 (Paul's quiet years before his public ministry).

A BIBLE STORY

Joseph was seventeen when his brothers sold him (Genesis 37:2) and thirty when he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:46). Thirteen years of pits, slavery and prison came between the dream and the day. Read Genesis 39:20-23 and look for the phrase "the LORD was with Joseph."

CHURCH HISTORY

Charles Simeon became vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, in 1782 and faced years of hostility. Church wardens locked the pews against his hearers, and students threw things at him in the street. He stayed for fifty-four years, until his death in 1836. His long obedience shaped generations of English preachers.

A BOOK

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (1980). A study of the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120 to 134) for people who are tired of instant everything.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

1 Hearing God

Mitchell describes God speaking to him in specific words: leave the old church, preach Matthew, stop bringing outlines into the pulpit. His wife sensed the same word the same morning. Charismatic-leaning Christians expect God to guide like this. Reformed-leaning Christians hold that Scripture alone is God's infallible word and treat impressions with caution. Both can agree on the guardrails Paul gives: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Impressions are tested by Scripture, by wise people who know you, and by fruit over time. Mitchell shows some of that restraint. He did not tell his wife first. He waited and let the word be confirmed.

2 A sweeping verdict

The man at the Garden Tomb said a large part of the church in America "is dead and is dying." That may be true of many congregations. It is also a stranger's verdict on millions of believers. When Jesus judged churches in Revelation 2 and 3, he did it one church at a time, with specific praise and specific rebuke. Our warnings should be as specific as his.

3 Obscurity is not a waiting room

Mitchell's story can be heard as "be faithful in secret and God will make you known." Sometimes he does. Most of the time he does not. Hebrews 11 ends with believers who were "destitute, afflicted, mistreated" and "did not receive what was promised" in this life (11:37-39). Hidden faithfulness is not the price of a platform. It is the Christian life. Mitchell himself says this: the reward is Christ, not the size of 2819.

4 "Unpolished" and untrained

Mitchell grieves that he has no seminary degree. Training is a gift, and he says he would love to go. It is also not the qualification. The council in Acts 4:13 saw that Peter and John were "uneducated, common men" and "recognized that they had been with Jesus."

DISCUSS

01 Mitchell admits "vanity" and "jealousy" in his heart during his hidden years [04:14]. What does jealousy look like in ministry, at work, or online? How do you wring it out?

02 Isaiah saw God's holiness before he heard "Whom shall I send?" What goes wrong when people get the sending without the seeing?

03 "Nobody talks about planes that land safely." Name someone you know who landed the plane. What did they do in ordinary weeks?

04 Mitchell ran from his call for four years [10:25]. How can you tell humility from running?

05 If the elders give their crowns back, how should that shape the way you hold what God has given you now?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Write a note by hand to someone who has served faithfully for years without notice: a nursery volunteer, a retired pastor, a small-group leader, a parent. Tell them one specific thing you have seen them do. Mail it or hand it to them.

The elders do not keep their crowns. They throw them at his feet.

SESSION 03

Word and Spirit

Preaching as a dying man to dying men, the gift of being unpolished, and a divorce the church needs to end.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
21:00 to 24:55; 30:32 to 45:54	36:41 to 39:40 and 42:30 to 44:20	Colossians 1:28

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell anchors his preaching in Colossians 1:28. He preaches as though each sermon could be his last, or the last one someone hears. Howerton quotes the Puritan Richard Baxter: "as a dying man to dying men." Mitchell wears a bulletproof vest on tour because of threats. Before he preaches, he kneels at a chair and thanks God for finding him usable.

He confesses that he feels his preaching is "unpolished," and he grieves that he never finished seminary. Howerton answers: "I hope you never become a polished preacher." He tells how critics called Charles Spurgeon "vulgar" because he talked like a working man, and how Spurgeon said those people belonged to him.

Asked where his theology comes from, Mitchell says he has been shaped by two streams: Spirit-filled churches and churches serious about exegesis. Howerton explains the terms. Exegesis draws meaning out of the text. Eisegesis reads your own meaning into it. Howerton then reads R.T. Kendall's line about "a great divorce in the church between word and spirit." Mitchell explains why he wears only black: since Israel, it has been "a daily funeral" for his old self.

> "I want to warn, I want to teach, and I want my preaching in the end to present as many people as possible mature before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 21:35

> "I hope you never become a polished preacher."
>
> **Josh Howerton** · 30:37

> "I want to do my best to be an echo of what God has said and not put things in there that's not there and not take things out of it."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 38:11

COLOSSIANS 1:28-29

28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul's preaching has one subject ("him"), two tools ("warning" and "teaching"), and one goal ("mature in Christ"). Warning without teaching turns into scolding. Teaching without warning turns into a lecture. Then verse 29 does something surprising. Paul toils and struggles, and the energy is God's. That is Word and Spirit in one sentence: a man working hard at proclamation, powered by a strength that is not his. Mitchell quotes the goal slightly differently ("mature before our Lord"). Paul's phrase is "mature in Christ." Maturity is not graduating from Christ. It is growing further into him.

> **WORD STUDY: "WARNING," "MATURE," "STRUGGLING"**
>
> *Nouthetountes* ("warning") comes from *nous* (mind) and *tithēmi* (to put). To warn is to "put something in mind," to confront someone with the truth for their good. *Teleios* ("mature") means complete, grown up, having reached the goal (*telos*). *Agōnizomenos* ("struggling") is the same athletic word family as 2 Timothy 4:7 in Session 2. Preaching is a contest, and the strength for it is borrowed.

NEHEMIAH 8:8

8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Howerton cites this verse as he describes Mitchell's style: "Line by line and he gave the sense" [15:01]. It is a classic picture of expository preaching. The exiles have come home. Ezra reads, the Levites explain, and the people understand. Read on to verses 9 to 12. The people weep. Then they are sent home to eat, drink and "make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them." Clear teaching of God's word does not leave people cold. It makes them cry and then it makes them glad.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

[1] And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Corinth loved polished speakers. Paul refused to be one. He came "in weakness and in fear and much trembling," which sounds a lot like a preacher kneeling at a chair and wringing out his anxiety before he stands up. Paul's reason is not that skill is bad. It is that faith built on a speaker's skill is only as strong as the speaker. Faith built on the Spirit's power holds. This is Howerton's point to Mitchell, and it is good news for every nervous Sunday school teacher.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:5

[5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Kendall's "divorce" has an answer here. The gospel came "not only in word," which means it did come in word, with content, truth and argument. It also came "in power and in the Holy Spirit." Paul does not choose. He also adds a third thing that neither stream owns: "what kind of men we proved to be." The messenger's life is part of the message.

> **WORD STUDY: EXEGESIS AND EISEGESIS**
>
> John 1:18 says Jesus has "made him known." The verb is *exēgēsato*, from *exēgeomai*, "to lead out, explain, set forth in detail." Our word "exegesis" comes from it. In a real sense Jesus is the exegesis of the Father. "Eisegesis" (from *eis*, "into") is a modern coined word, not a biblical one, for reading your own ideas into a text. Howerton's definition at [37:42] is right.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES

Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16-17 side by side. One says "be filled with the Spirit," the other "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Both produce the same fruit: singing, thanks, and mutual encouragement. Word and Spirit were never rivals.

WHAT THE SPEAKERS WERE QUOTING

Baxter's line is from a poem in *Poetical Fragments* (1681): "I preach'd, as never sure to preach again, / And as a dying man to dying men!" Spurgeon's real reply to a newspaper that called him "vulgar" reads: "I am perhaps vulgar, but it is not intentional, save that I must and will make the people listen. My firm conviction is that we have had quite enough polite preachers, and many require a change. God has owned me among the most degraded and off-casts. Let others serve their class; these are mine, and to them I must keep." Kendall's words, from *Word & Spirit* (2019): "When there is a divorce, sometimes the children stay with the mother, sometimes with the father. In the divorce between the Word and the Spirit, you have those on the Word side and those on the Spirit side."

CHURCH HISTORY

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a physician turned preacher, defined preaching as "logic on fire." He was a Word man who longed for revival and wrote often about the Spirit's power. His book *Preaching and Preachers* (1971) remains one of the best on the subject.

A BOOK

R.T. Kendall, *Word & Spirit* (Charisma House, 2019). A short book by a man who has lived in both camps.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

1 Small corrections, offered in love

This guide tests what friends say too. Baxter lived from 1615 to 1691, so he was a 17th-century Puritan, not 16th. Spurgeon's "vulgar" quote in the episode is a paraphrase. His real words are above, and the phrases "highways and byways" and "let me be vulgar" are not in them. Kendall did not directly follow Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel (Glyn Owen served in between), and his background is Nazarene and Southern Baptist, not Presbyterian. Howerton also says Spurgeon "died early in his 50s." He died at 57. None of this changes the point. It is a small practice of Acts 17:11.

2 "Unpolished" can become a costume

Plain speech is a gift. Careless preparation is not. Mitchell is a hard worker: he studies cultural context, background and original audience, and he uses Logos Bible Software. The problem with polish is not clarity or craft. It is performance that points to the preacher. Some preachers dress down to look authentic, which is its own kind of polish. The question is always: whom does this point to?

3 Word and Spirit people both have a case

Christians who put the Word first fear that claims of fresh revelation will drift from Scripture, and church history gives them good reason. Christians who put the Spirit first fear a church that knows about God and does not expect him to act, and church history gives them good reason too. Kendall's hope is that each side learns from the other. A group that includes both is not a problem to manage. It is a gift.

4 Symbols are personal

Mitchell's black clothing is a private reminder of Galatians 2:20, and he presents it that way. Outward symbols help some believers. They also can become badges. Jesus warns against "practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). The inward reality matters more than the wardrobe.

DISCUSS

01 Colossians 1:28 includes warning and teaching. Which does your church do better? Which do you receive better?

02 What is the difference between "unpolished" and "unprepared"? Where do you see each?

03 Where are you tempted to read your own opinions into the Bible? Give one honest example.

04 Were you raised in more of a "Word" church or a "Spirit" church? What did it give you? What did it miss?

05 Mitchell wears black as "a daily funeral" [45:02]. What daily practice helps you remember that you have been crucified with Christ?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Read Colossians 1:24-29 three times this week. The first time, ask what it says. The second time, ask what it meant to the church in Colossae. The third time, ask what it asks of you. Before each reading, pray one sentence asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you.

The Word and the Spirit were never meant to live apart.

SESSION 04

Contend

Jude's hard word, the laws that worry these pastors, and what happened to the churches of the East.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
45:54 to 50:40; 56:25 to 1:01:40	46:47 to 50:10	Jude 3

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell's new book is called *Contend*, from Jude 3. Howerton reads the verse, then reads Mitchell's own promotion of the book, which names three threats and a deadline.

Mitchell explains the first threat. Some ideologies and "political streams," left unchecked, will pass laws that "inadvertently muzzle the scriptures." Faithful preaching will be called hate speech. Governments will threaten to remove churches' 501(c)(3) tax exemption or shut them down, and preachers will have to choose between faithfulness and giving in. "we're not there yet but we're headed there" [48:32], he says, and he sees it happening in other countries already. Howerton adds "already happening" and one word: "Canada."

The second threat is deception online: people mixing crystals, mystics and psychics with Jesus, and influencers and athletes speaking for God "who have never read the Bible." [49:58] The third is hostility toward Christians worldwide.

Later, Howerton sums up his view: "if godly people won't contend, godless people will." [56:37] Mitchell reminds listeners that Christianity began in the East, not the West. He has walked through the ruins of the seven churches of Revelation in Turkey. Turkey was once Paul's home base and is now almost entirely Muslim. What happened? Howerton answers: "A lack of contending."

> "policies that could eventually muzzle the scriptures, satanic delusions running rampant on social media, a growing hostility toward Christians globally."
>
> **Josh Howerton**, reading Mitchell's post about the book · 47:03

> "They will pass legislation and laws I think that would inadvertently muzzle the scriptures"
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 47:56

> “Christianity is not a western faith.”
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 57:35

Which law is he talking about?

Mitchell does not name a law, bill, court case or country. The only specific references in the exchange are Howerton’s one-word interjection, “Canada” [48:14], and Mitchell’s mention of the “501c3” [48:17].

Canada. The closest match is Bill C-9, the Combatting Hate Act, which received Royal Assent on June 18, 2026. It repealed paragraph 319(3)(b) of the Criminal Code. That paragraph, in place since 1970, gave a defence to anyone who expressed “an opinion based on a belief in a religious text” in good faith. The final law also adds a “for greater certainty” clause. It says nothing in the hate-propaganda sections prohibits “a religious … statement made in the course of a discussion, publication or debate, if they do not wilfully promote hatred against an identifiable group.” Prosecutions still need the Attorney General’s consent.

The United States. Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code exempts churches from federal income tax. Its “Johnson Amendment” (1954) bars exempt groups from campaigning for or against candidates. No U.S. law removes a church’s exemption for preaching biblical teaching on marriage, sexuality or anything else. The fear rests on a legal theory from Bob Jones University v. United States (1983). That decision let the IRS deny exemption to a school with racially discriminatory policies because they violated “fundamental national public policy.” At the 2015 same-sex marriage argument, Justice Alito asked whether that rule could apply to religious colleges. The Solicitor General answered, “It is going to be an issue.” It has not been applied that way.

INTO THE TEXT

JUDE 3-4

3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it
necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the
saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this
condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our
only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude wanted to write a warm letter about salvation. Love made him write a hard one. Look at verse 4, where the threat comes from. It is not Rome. It is not a law. It is people who "crept in unnoticed" to the church and turned grace into permission. Jude's first battlefield is inside the church, among people who use Jesus' name. That fits Mitchell's second threat, the social-media teachers mixing Jesus with other spirituality, better than his first.

> **WORD STUDY: "CONTEND" AND "ONCE FOR ALL"**
>
> *Epagōnizesthai* ("to contend") appears only here in the New Testament. It adds a prefix (*epi*) to *agōnizomai*, the athlete's and wrestler's word from Sessions 2 and 3. It means an intense, sustained struggle on behalf of something. "Once for all" is *hapax*: one time, finished, not to be added to. "Delivered" is from *paradidōmi*, "to hand over," the word for passing down a tradition. We do not invent the faith. We receive it, guard it, and hand it on whole.

JUDE 20-23

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy
Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that
leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out
of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Here is how Jude says to contend. Build yourself up. Pray in the Spirit. Keep yourself in God's love. Then have mercy on doubters, pull people out of the fire, and show mercy even to those whose sin you hate. The word "mercy" shows up three times in four verses. Jude's contending is not a posture of anger. It is a firefighter's work.

ACTS 4:18-20

18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But
Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather
than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

This is the scenario Mitchell fears: authorities order preachers to stop. The apostles do not riot or sneer. They answer calmly, put the question back to the council, and keep preaching. When they are beaten for it, they leave "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). The line between faithful and disobedient is drawn at one place: when obeying people means disobeying God.

REVELATION 2:4-5

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Jesus says this to Ephesus, a church famous for testing false teachers (2:2). They were good at contending and had lost their love. Mitchell names this pattern when he asks what happened in the East: "believers abandoned their first love." The warning cuts both ways. A church can die from compromise. It can also die from orthodoxy with no love left in it.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES	2 Timothy 2:24-26 (the Lord's servant "must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone"); 1 Peter 3:15-16 ("with gentleness and respect"); 1 Timothy 4:1 (Mitchell's "doctrines of demons" and "seducing spirits" [49:00] echo its King James wording); Galatians 2:11-14 (Paul contends with Peter to his face).
CHURCH HISTORY	Hagia Sophia in Istanbul was the greatest church in Christendom for nine centuries. It became a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453, a museum in 1934, and a mosque again in 2020. John Chrysostom, whom Mitchell names, preached in the church that stood on that site before it, as Archbishop of Constantinople (398 to 404). He was exiled for confronting the empress. He contended, and it cost him.
A BOOK	Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (2008). A historian's account of the thousand-year golden age of the church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and how it died.
ANOTHER BOOK	J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923). A classic example of contending for the faith against a threat from inside the church, written with clarity and without cruelty.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

1 Is the legal threat real?

Partly, and it depends on where you live. In Canada, the religious-text defence is gone. The law still requires "wilful" promotion of extreme hatred, and its supporters say that shields sincere preaching. Critics answer that removing the defence invites complaints, investigations and self-censorship, which can muzzle preachers even without a conviction. In Finland, member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen was acquitted twice over a Bible-verse post and a 2004 church pamphlet on marriage. In March 2026 the Supreme Court acquitted her on the post but convicted her, 3 to 2, over the pamphlet, and she has appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. In the United States, the First Amendment gives strong protection to religious speech. No law revokes tax exemption for preaching doctrine, and in 2025 the IRS itself proposed loosening the rules on sermons (a federal court dismissed that case in 2026 on procedural grounds, and it is on appeal). Mitchell's "we're not there yet" is accurate for America. His "we're headed there" is a prediction. Faithful Christians weigh that prediction differently.

2 The strongest case on the other side

Supporters of hate-speech laws point to rising violence against Jews, Muslims and other minorities, and to the way words have prepared the ground for violence before. They argue that a religious label should not shield real incitement. Christians can grant that concern and still argue that the state should not judge the truth of doctrine. Making the strongest case for the other side is not a surrender. It is how Proverbs 18:17 says wise people listen.

3 What happened in the East is not one story

Howerton's answer, "a lack of contending," is part of the truth. Revelation 2 and 3 warn that lampstands can be removed. History adds more. There were the Arab conquests of the 7th century, centuries of special taxes and legal limits on Christians, the Mongol invasions, and the genocides of Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Christians from 1914 to 1923. Many of those believers contended to the death. Two of the seven churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, received no rebuke at all from Jesus, and their cities are Muslim-majority today. Loss is not always proof of unfaithfulness. Sometimes it is the cost of faithfulness.

4

Contending is not the same as quarreling

The same apostle who fought the good fight wrote that the Lord's servant "must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone" (2 Timothy 2:24). Contending is aimed at error. Kindness is aimed at people. We need both.

DISCUSS

01 Jude wanted to write one letter and had to write another. When has love required you to say something hard?

02 Jude's main threat is inside the church. Why is that harder to face than a threat from the government?

03 Mitchell describes people "merging crystals and mystics and psychic behavior" with the kingdom [49:17]. Where do you see that mix in your feed, or in yourself?

04 Howerton says, "if godly people won't contend, godless people will" [56:37]. What does contending look like for someone with no microphone?

05 Smyrna and Philadelphia were faithful, and their cities are Muslim today. How does that shape the way you explain decline, in the East or in your own town?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Before you post, comment or argue about faith this week, run Jude 20-23 as a checklist. Am I building up? Have I prayed? Am I keeping myself in God's love? Am I showing mercy? If the answer to any is no, wait a day.

Jude tells us to contend. Then he tells us to have mercy. He does not let us choose one.

SESSION 05

Clear Eyes, Open Hands

Violent extremism is real. Muslims are our neighbors. This session holds both and does not blur them.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
50:40 to 56:25; 1:01:40 to 1:08:29	50:40 to 53:50	Matthew 5:44-45a

A NOTE FOR LEADERS

Preview this clip alone first. Some in your group may have Muslim family, coworkers or friends. Some may have suffered at the hands of extremists, or come from countries where Christians are killed. Name both at the start. Ask the group to speak about Muslims the way they would if a Muslim friend were in the room.

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell describes "another monotheism that is almost an antichrist monotheism." [50:19] It is one of the fastest-growing faiths in the world, he says, and there are "fringes of that ideology that is radical and hostile towards Christianity." [50:33] Howerton asks if he means Islam, and Mitchell answers, "I'm talking about radical Islam" [50:52]. He warns that, "for the sake of inclusion," America keeps "giving away seats in office" until that ideology gains enough power to bring in Sharia law. Howerton points to "1,400 years of history." Mitchell says the ideology "has conquered the east," "most of North Africa," is "conquering" Europe, and is "encroaching on our shores." He tells about a pet python that sat still in the corner of its cage until the rat felt safe, then struck.

Later Howerton traces "one covenant, two boys," Isaac and Ishmael. He reads John 16:2 as a prophecy that the final enemy will be religious, not atheist. Mitchell points to the beheaded martyrs of Revelation 20:4. Howerton applies Galatians 1:8 to Muhammad's first revelation. They read Ezekiel 38 as a list of Muslim nations plus Russia. Mitchell reads a list of Islamic beliefs about the Mahdi, a figure in Islamic end-times teaching, and says it describes the biblical Antichrist. He concludes that "the persecution of the saints I think will come at the hand of Islam."

> "until that ideology has enough political power to introduce Sharia law in America"
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 51:40

> "I just gently want to say I love you. You are wrong."
>
> **Josh Howerton**, to listeners who think Mitchell is overreacting · 52:02

> "What religious belief takes delight in decapitating the heads of people?"
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:03:58

INTO THE TEXT

JOHN 16:1-3

1 "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. 2 They will put you out of the
synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to
God. 3 And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

Howerton's point is sound: Jesus expected religious people, not only irreligious ones, to kill his followers and call it worship. Read the verse in its setting, though. "They will put you out of the synagogues" shows who Jesus meant first. The first people to fulfill this were zealous religious leaders of the disciples' own day. The clearest example is Saul of Tarsus, who says he persecuted the church "violently" out of zeal for God (Galatians 1:13-14; Acts 26:9-11). Then Jesus met Saul on the road. The verse that warns about religious killers also contains the diagnosis: "they have not known the Father, nor me." That diagnosis is the start of a mission, not the end of one.

WORD STUDY: "OFFERING SERVICE"

The Greek is *latreian prospherein*, "to offer *latreia*." *Latreia* is religious service, the word used for worship in the temple (Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1). Jesus is saying the killers will think their violence is an act of worship. That is exactly how jihadist groups describe their attacks today. It is also how Saul thought of his, and how some Christians have thought of theirs.

GENESIS 21:17-18

17 And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and
said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where
he is. 18 Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great
nation."

Howerton is right that the covenant runs through Isaac, not Ishmael (Genesis 17:19-21). Genesis 16:12 also says Ishmael will live "over against all his kinsmen." But read the whole story. Ishmael's name means "God hears" (*yishmāʿēʾl*), and the angel says it twice in one verse: God heard. God rescues the boy in the desert, blesses him, and promises him a nation (17:20). Whatever you conclude about the conflict between their descendants, the God of the Bible is not the enemy of Ishmael's children. He hears them.

GALATIANS 1:8-9

[8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. [9] As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Paul's first target is Paul himself: "even if we." He is not predicting one future religion. He is setting a test that applies to every message from every source: an apostle, an angel, a famous preacher, a podcast. Muhammad's message, which denies that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross, fails that test. So do other messages that claim angelic origin. Galatians 1:8 is a warning for all time more than a prophecy about one man. Used that way, it protects us from more than one error.

LUKE 10:25-29

[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [26] He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" [27] And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." [28] And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." [29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answers with a story in which the hero is a Samaritan, a member of the religious group his hearers most distrusted (John 4:9). The lawyer wanted a category of people he did not have to love. Jesus gave him none. The Muslim family on your street, the Afghan driver, the Somali nurse, the Turkish shop owner: each is your neighbor. None of them is an ideology. Whatever we believe about Islam's history and future, Jesus has already told us what to do with the person in front of us.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES	Matthew 5:43-45; Revelation 7:9-10 (a great multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages"); Acts 9:1-19 (a religious persecutor meets Jesus); Romans 12:17-21.
THE PERSECUTION IS REAL	Open Doors' 2026 World Watch List counts 388 million Christians facing high levels of persecution and discrimination. It records 4,849 Christians killed for faith-related reasons between October 2024 and September 2025. Nigeria alone accounts for 3,490 of those deaths, much of it from Islamist militants and armed groups in the north and Middle Belt. North Korea, an atheist state, ranks first. Pray for these believers by name and by country.
CHURCH HISTORY	In 1219, during the Fifth Crusade, Francis of Assisi crossed the battle lines at Damietta, Egypt, to speak about Christ with Sultan al-Kamil. He went unarmed. He came back alive. It remains one of the boldest acts of Christian witness to Muslims on record.
A BOOK	Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (2014). A devout American Muslim tells how he came to faith in Christ through a patient Christian friend. It is honest about Islam and full of love for Muslims.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

I

Two truths, kept separate

Violent jihadism is real. It has beheaded Christians on camera, burned churches, and killed thousands of believers, especially in Nigeria and the Sahel. Christians should say so plainly, pray for the persecuted, and support them. It is also true that about two billion Muslims live on earth, and most of them are not waging war on anyone. They are neighbors to love and people Christ died to save. Mitchell uses the words "radical" and "fringes." As the conversation goes on, the qualifiers drop away and "that ideology" stands for all of Islam. Keep the qualifiers.

2 "Sharia law in America"

The Constitution forbids any "religious Test" for public office (Article VI) and bars the government from establishing a religion (First Amendment). No U.S. jurisdiction has adopted Sharia, and it could not lawfully do so. Pew estimates about 5.5 million Muslims in the U.S., under 2% of the population. The strongest case from the other side: Muslim Americans who run for office swear the same oath as everyone else. Christians who want religious freedom for churches must defend the same freedom for mosques, or they give it up for themselves. Fear about the future is not a reason to deny a neighbor's rights today.

3 "Conquering Europe"

Muslims made up about 4.9% of Europe's population in 2016. Pew projects 7.4% to 14% by 2050, depending on migration. Europe faces real questions about immigration and integration. "Conquering" is not an accurate description of those numbers. Islam's rapid global growth (21% from 2010 to 2020, per Pew) comes mainly from births, not conversions or conquest.

4 The Mahdi and the Antichrist

Howerton says he got this material from John MacArthur. A 2011 MacArthur sermon does contain a nearly identical list. The idea is most associated with Joel Richardson's *The Islamic Antichrist* (2009). Checked against Islamic sources, the list is mixed. Hadith do say the Mahdi will rule seven years. They describe a truce with the "Romans" (Byzantine Christians), not a treaty with the Jews. No canonical source puts him on a white horse. In Islamic teaching the "powerful prophet" at his side is Jesus (*ʿĪsā*), who kills the Dajjal, Islam's own antichrist figure. Many evangelical scholars, including fellow premillennialists, reject the Islamic Antichrist view. Among their reasons: the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2:4 claims to be God, which no Muslim would do. Hold this as one speculative reading, not as settled prophecy.

5

Other details

Abraham lived about 4,000 years ago, not 5,000. Most Muslims today are not Arab and do not descend from Ishmael even by tradition. Muslim sources date Muhammad's first revelation to about 610 and do record his fear afterward. Khadijah reassured him, and her Christian cousin Waraqa identified the visitor as the angel sent to Moses. Ezekiel 38 does name peoples from lands that are now mostly Muslim. "Rosh" as Russia is disputed (the ESV reads "chief prince"), and China is not mentioned. Revelation 20:4's word for beheading (*pelekizō*, "to behead with an axe") described a Roman punishment. John's first readers knew Rome as the power that beheaded Christians. Islamist groups behead Christians today. They are not the only ones in history who have.

Christians have a record too. The Crusaders massacred Jerusalem's Muslims and Jews in 1099. Honesty about our own history does not weaken our witness. It makes it believable.

DISCUSS

01 Mitchell starts with "radical Islam" and "fringes," then shifts to "that ideology" [50:52 to 51:40]. Why do those distinctions matter when we talk about real neighbors?

02 Ishmael means "God hears." What does Genesis 21 show about God's heart toward Hagar and her son?

03 Saul of Tarsus is the clearest New Testament example of John 16:2. How should his story shape the way we pray for people who persecute Christians today?

04 Which claim in this part of the episode would you want to check before you repeat it? How would you check it?

05 Do you know a Muslim by name? What would it take to share a meal with them this month?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Pray each day for Christians in Nigeria and for one other country on the World Watch List. Then pray by name for one Muslim you know. If you do not know one, visit a Muslim-owned shop or restaurant, learn the owner's name, and go back.

Clear eyes about the sword. Open hands to the neighbor. Jesus asks for both.

SESSION 06

While It Is Day

A countdown clock, leaves falling off a tree in Queens, and the difference between urgency and alarm.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
1:08:29 to 1:18:00	1:08:33 to 1:12:19	Matthew 25:13

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell compares the church age to the countdown clock preachers see on Sunday morning. When Christ ascended and promised to return, "a clock was put on humanity." [1:08:50] No one knows the day or the hour, but every day brings the return closer. So he preaches, prays, leads his staff, and talks to unbelievers "like a man running out of time." He wants to "increase the number of virgins with oil," a reference to Jesus' parable in Matthew 25. At death, he says, everyone will agree about theology, and it will be too late for many. There is no purgatory and no praying people out of hell.

Asked for signs, he uses an image from New York: when the leaves fall, you buy boots, because winter is coming. His "leaves" are the rise of Islam, nations talking about a shared currency, the move away from cash, talk of a "10 nation confederacy," and nations discussing an "identity chip" without which you could not buy or sell. He points to Noah, mocked until the rain came. Then he names the people who worry him most: not atheists, but churchgoers who think they know God and will hear, "I never knew you." Echoing Ezekiel's watchman, he says he does not want their blood on his hands.

> "I preach like a man running out of time."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:09:58

> "In death, we all will have perfect agreement around theology."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:11:14

> "I'm concerned for the people that's going to sit in your services on Sunday and mine with a false insecurity"
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell**, he means false security · 1:17:01

MATTHEW 24:36-39

36 “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son,
but the Father only. 37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.
38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in
marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood
came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Mitchell reads this passage well [1:16:12]: people will be “going about their daily life.” Look at the list. Eating, drinking and marrying are not sins. The danger Jesus names is not wickedness here. It is being “unaware.” The flood generation was busy with good things and never looked up. Jesus opens by saying no one knows the day, and he means it. The right response is not calculation. It is attention.

MATTHEW 25:10-13

10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in
with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also,
saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ 12 But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’
13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

In the parable, all ten virgins fall asleep (25:5). The difference between the wise and the foolish is not who stayed awake. It is who brought oil. And oil cannot be borrowed at the last minute (25:9). That is Mitchell’s concern for churchgoers. You cannot live on someone else’s faith, your parents’, your pastor’s or your spouse’s, when the door closes. Readiness is not frantic watching of the news. It is a real, present relationship with the Bridegroom.

EZEKIEL 33:6-7

6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people
are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his
iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. 7 "So you, son of man, I have made a
watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give
them warning from me.

This is the passage behind Mitchell's "blood on my hands" [1:17:41]. Notice the limit on the watchman's job in verse 7: "Whenever you hear a word from my mouth." The watchman does not invent alarms. He passes on what God has said. That is a heavy responsibility, and a freeing one. Our job is to warn faithfully about what God has clearly said: judgment is coming, Christ is coming, repent and believe. We are not responsible to decode every headline.

> **WORD STUDY: "WATCHMAN"**
>
> The Hebrew *tsōpheh* comes from a verb meaning "to look out, keep watch." It is the man on the city wall who scans the horizon. He does not fight the battle, and he does not cause it. He sees and speaks. The same root describes prophets on watch in Isaiah 52:8 ("your watchmen") and Habakkuk 2:1 ("look out to see what he will say to me").

ACTS 1:6-8

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the
kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father
has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon
you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of
the earth."

The last question the disciples ask Jesus before he ascends is about the end-times calendar. He does not give them one. He gives them the Spirit and a mission. Every generation of believers is tempted to ask the disciples' question. Jesus' answer has not changed: that is the Father's business, and yours is witness. Mitchell's best instinct follows this answer: urgency that turns into evangelism.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES

2 Peter 3:8-10 (delay is patience, "not wishing that any should perish"); 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; John 9:4 ("night is coming, when no one can work"); Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 24:6 ("See that you are not alarmed").

A BIBLE STORY

2 Peter 2:5 calls Noah "a herald of righteousness." Genesis does not say how long he preached or built. The "hundred years" Mitchell mentions is an old inference from Genesis 5:32 and 7:6. What Genesis does say is enough: "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him" (6:22).

CHURCH HISTORY

William Miller, a Baptist lay preacher, taught that Christ would return around 1843 or 1844, and his movement settled on October 22, 1844. Some followers left crops unharvested and gave away property. The next day became known as the Great Disappointment. In 2011 Harold Camping repeated the mistake with May 21. In 1970 Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* linked the ten horns of Daniel 7 to the European Common Market. That group reached ten members in 1981 and kept growing. Every generation has had sincere believers who read the leaves too precisely.

A BOOK

Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (1977). Four evangelical scholars make their case and answer one another.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

I

Urgency is biblical. Date-setting is not

Mitchell does not set a date, and he says plainly, "The scripture says we do not know the day nor the hour." [1:09:06] Living "like a man running out of time" fits John 9:4. It goes wrong when it turns into anxiety, or when it lets us neglect long obedience. Jesus told his servants to "engage in business until I come" (Luke 19:13). Plant churches. Raise children. Plant trees.

2 The millennium is a place where believers differ

Mitchell states that Jesus will return "to establish his millennial kingdom here on earth" as a fact. That is the premillennial view, held by many evangelicals. Many other Bible-believing Christians hold amillennial or postmillennial views and read Revelation 20 differently. That includes much of the Reformed tradition, Augustine, and many Lutherans and Anglicans. All three views confess that Christ will return bodily, raise the dead, judge the world and make all things new. Hold that center firmly. Hold the sequence humbly.

3 The signs, checked

Cash use is falling: about 14% of U.S. payments in late 2025 were made in cash (Federal Reserve). No nation requires an implanted chip. The UK announced a mandatory digital ID for right-to-work checks in September 2025 and dropped the mandatory part in January 2026. The EU's new digital identity wallet is voluntary for citizens. BRICS has eleven members in 2026 and no common currency. We found no formal "10 nation confederacy" in the news.

Revelation 13 describes a mark tied to worship of the beast ("the name of the beast," 13:17). Its first readers faced the Roman emperor cult and trade guilds that required pagan loyalty to do business. Many faithful Christians read it as also pointing to a future ruler. Either way, its center is allegiance, not technology. Watching tap-to-pay for the mark misses the point, and Jesus said, "See that you are not alarmed" (Matthew 24:6).

4 His deepest concern is his best one

The strongest part of this segment is not the signs. It is Mitchell's fear for people in church who are not in Christ (Matthew 7:21-23). That warning is clear in Scripture, and it applies to every one of us before it applies to anyone else.

DISCUSS

01 "I preach like a man running out of time." What would change in your week if you lived that way? What should not change?

02 In Matthew 25 all ten virgins sleep. What does that tell you about what "ready" means?

03 Why do you think date-setting comes back in every generation? What does it do to people when the date passes?

04 In Acts 1, Jesus answers a timing question with a mission. How should that shape the way you read the news?

05 Mitchell is most concerned about churchgoers with false assurance [1:17:01]. How would you know if that described you? Who could you ask?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Write down the names of three people who do not know Jesus. Pray for each of them by name every day this week. Then ask one of them a real question about their life, and listen to the whole answer.

Night is coming. It is still day. Work.

SESSION 07

When They Revile You

A hard Holy Week, a text from his daughters, a feast on a bad day, and the discipline of sorting criticism honestly.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
1:18:00 to 1:33:58	1:18:35 to 1:23:45 and 1:25:02 to 1:26:57	1 Peter 4:14

WHAT WAS SAID

Howerton asks how Mitchell handles public opposition. Mitchell says being a target for ridicule is new to him, only the last three years. Then he tells about his breaking point. In 2025 his church had just moved into a new building. He had not slept, and he was frustrated with the sound. Preaching on that stage for the first time, he told a story from his teenage years in New York. "I did not frame the story right and uh my words hurt a lot of people" [1:19:38]. It happened during Holy Week. The backlash was so heavy that he left his family for a few days and sat on the floor of a room with water, a legal pad and a Bible.

On Thursday his daughters sent a group text: "we know your heart and we know your character and we love you" [1:21:04]. It gave him strength to get off the floor. He realized that Jesus had heard "hosanna" and "crucify him" in the same week, and he thanked God for letting him share a little of that. He draws a line: if he is criticized for a mistake, he will apologize publicly. If he is persecuted for righteousness, he will rejoice and pray for his enemies.

Howerton tells of the day he woke up as an international negative trending topic. He came home to candles, his favorite meal, and his wife quoting Matthew 5:11-12, then saying, "So tonight we feast." [1:26:26] Every man, he says, "marries a launchpad or a lid." He goes to Psalm 86 in those moments. He suggests that God often grows a ministry after its leader is falsely accused. The talk turns to the "celebrity pastor" label. Howerton describes finding Mitchell praying alone before events. Mitchell says his ministry is "a cross that I carry," and he wears two crosses as a reminder.

> "within the span of seven days, he knew what it felt like to be loved by some and to be hated by others."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:21:42

> “But if I’m persecuted for righteousness sake, I got to say, ‘Lord, thank you that you allow me to suffer for the name.’”
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:23:35

> “Every man either marries a launchpad or a lid.”
>
> **Josh Howerton** · 1:26:45

What the 2025 controversy was about

Mitchell does not describe the sermon in the episode, so here are the public facts. On Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025, preaching on Matthew 22:15-22 and submission to authority, he told of being stopped by police as a teenager in Queens. He said, among other things, “Stop blaming white cops for the killing of Black kids. Instead, teach your Black children to be obedient to authority.” Many Black Christian leaders objected, pointing to people who were killed by police while complying. Days later he apologized publicly: “I understand the framing I used about Black children and their relationship with police was and is harmful. I know that Black people have been killed by the police when being both compliant and noncompliant.” (Source: Christianity Today, April 2025.)

INTO THE TEXT

MATTHEW 5:10-12

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil
against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for
so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Both men lean on this passage, and it is theirs to lean on. Read the conditions closely. The blessing is for evil spoken “falsely” and “on my account.” Criticism that is true is not persecution, even when it is harsh. Criticism that is about us, not Christ, is not persecution either. This is exactly the line Mitchell draws. Apologize for the mistake. Rejoice in the persecution. The hard part is that one storm often contains both.

WORD STUDY: "BLESSED," "FALSELY," "ON MY ACCOUNT"

Makarioi ("blessed") describes people God favors, whatever their circumstances look like. *Pseudomenoi* ("falsely") is from the verb "to lie." Our word "pseudo" comes from it. *Heneken emou* ("on my account") means "because of me." Two small phrases hold the whole promise. Take them out and the verse becomes a license to treat every critic as a persecutor.

1 PETER 4:12-16

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though
something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings,
that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the
name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let
none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers
as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Peter gives the same test with a sharper edge. Verse 15 lists ways Christians can suffer for their own wrongdoing, and the list ends with "meddler," someone who oversteps. The question to ask in any storm is: am I suffering "as a Christian," or for something I did? The honest answer is often "some of each." Peter's word for the first is rejoice. His word for the second is, in effect, repent.

PSALM 86:14-17

14 O God, insolent men have risen up against me;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.
15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant,
and save the son of your maidservant.
17 Show me a sign of your favor,
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Howerton quotes this from memory and says he will "butcher" it [1:28:00]. His "vindicate your servant" is closer to Psalm 26:1 ("Vindicate me, O LORD"). The psalm is worth reading as it stands. Notice verse 15. David does not base his plea on his own innocence. He bases it on God's character, quoting God's self-description to Moses in Exodus 34:6. That is a safe place to stand when you are attacked. You do not have to be fully right to ask for help. You only need a God who is "merciful and gracious."

PROVERBS 12:4

4 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.

Howerton's two lines about marriage [1:26:53] sound like this proverb: "Steel in our spine." "Not poison in our bones." His wife's feast and Mitchell's daughters' text did the same thing. They spoke to character, not to the controversy. They did not say "you were right." They said "we know who you are." Every believer under fire needs people like that. Every believer can be that for someone else.

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES	Acts 5:40-42 ("counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name"); Romans 12:14; 2 Kings 6:15-17 ("those who are with us are more than those who are with them"); Luke 9:23; Philippians 3:10.
A BIBLE STORY	2 Samuel 16:5-14. As David flees Jerusalem, Shimei follows him, cursing and throwing stones. Abishai offers to cut off his head. David says, "Leave him alone, and let him curse." He trusts God with the verdict. Some of what Shimei said was false, and some of it touched real guilt. David does not sort it in the moment. He lets God sort it.
CHURCH HISTORY	In 1887 Charles Spurgeon warned that the Baptist Union was drifting from Scripture. The "Downgrade Controversy" followed. He left the Union, was censured by it in 1888, and lost friends. In 1891 he said, "This fight is killing me." He died the next year at 57. Faithfulness under public attack is not new, and it is not free.
A BOOK	Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* (2012). A short book on 1 Corinthians 4:3-4: "It is the Lord who judges me," which frees you from both the critics and the fans.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

I

Not every critic is a persecutor

Mitchell's own summary is honest. His words "hurt a lot of people," and he apologized. The storm that followed contained fair criticism from people he had wounded and cruelty from people who wanted him gone. Most public storms are mixed like this. The discipline is to sort them honestly, with the help of people who love you enough to tell you the truth. The danger for any leader, famous or not, is to file all criticism under Matthew 5:11 and never under Proverbs 12:1 ("he who hates reproof is stupid").

2 Does false accusation lead to growth?

Howerton suggests that God often grows a ministry after its leader is attacked, as a kind of vindication [1:28:10]. Scripture promises that God will vindicate his servants (Psalm 37:5-6; Isaiah 54:17). It does not promise the vindication will be visible growth in this life. Stephen was falsely accused and stoned (Acts 6 to 7). Hebrews 11 honors people who "did not receive what was promised." Growth is not proof of God's approval, and shrinking is not proof of his judgment.

3 Sharing Christ's sufferings, carefully

Mitchell's prayer, thanking God for letting him feel a little of Holy Week, is tender and biblical (Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). It also needs one qualifier, which he supplies himself. Jesus was hated without cause (John 15:25). We never are, fully. Our sufferings always come mixed with our own faults. That is not a reason to refuse comfort. It is a reason to receive it humbly.

4 "A cross that I carry"

Mitchell insists that his platform is a burden, not a prize. That can be true, and he says God has also blessed him through it. Every believer with influence, however small, should ask how to carry it without self-pity and without self-promotion. Both are ways of making it about us.

DISCUSS

01 Read Matthew 5:11 slowly. Which two phrases limit the promise? Why do they matter?

02 Think of the last time you were criticized. What part was fair? What part was false? Who helped you sort it out?

03 Mitchell's daughters wrote, "we know your heart and we know your character" [1:21:04]. Who are the launchpads in your life? Whose launchpad are you?

04 Howerton believes false accusation often comes before God grows a ministry [1:28:10]. Where does Scripture support that? Where does it complicate it?

05 How can you tell a cross you are called to carry from self-pity?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Send one message that does what Mitchell's daughters' text did. Make it specific, about the person's character, with no advice in it. Send it to someone under fire, in public or in private.

He heard "hosanna" and "crucify him" in the same week. He knows.

SESSION 08

Jars of Clay

Two preachers admit their anxiety. Then one of them turns to the man in a prison cell and the mother at the sink.

EPISODE	CLIP FOR GROUPS	MEMORY VERSE
1:33:58 to 1:48:46	1:43:08 to 1:46:16	2 Corinthians 12:9a

A CARE NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In this session both pastors describe long stretches of anxiety. If anxiety or depression is heavy for you right now, tell someone in your group, and talk with a doctor or a licensed counselor. If you have any thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.), any time of day or night.

WHAT WAS SAID

Mitchell says he still struggles with insecurity and feelings of unworthiness. For years he saw God "like a boss" and a "taskmaster," and he has to remind himself he is a son. Howerton says people often tell him they are praying for him to stay humble. He asks them instead to pray that he stays confident. Both men say they walk off stage most Sundays sure they "blew it." Howerton names it: the agony between the sermon God gave you and the one that came out of your mouth.

Then the conversation gets more personal. Howerton says he had eight months of "very extreme" anxiety attacks around preaching in 2019, and a milder version has come back now. Mitchell says he dealt with preaching anxiety for all of 2025. He would lie on the floor of his prayer room and pray one word, "restore." Howerton wonders if some of it is spiritual, and some of it is a soul trying to absorb "three lifetimes" of promotion in three years. He fears it could be a thorn in the flesh.

In his last question, Howerton asks what Mitchell would say to the listener in prison, in the military, or on a job site who thinks God could never use him. Mitchell's answer ends the episode, before he prays over Howerton.

> "in every great preacher, what they feel is the agony between the message God put in their heart and the one that came out of their mouth."
>
> **Josh Howerton**, quoting an unnamed preacher · 1:36:13

> "You can either let the things that you've done be a coffin that buries you or be a classroom that teaches you."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:44:21

> "And your ministry is wherever God has your feet, that is your mission field."
>
> **Philip Anthony Mitchell** · 1:45:22

INTO THE TEXT

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a
thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming
conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said
to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will
boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For
the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and
calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Howerton reaches for this passage, and he says he does not want it to be the answer [1:42:15]. That is honest. Look at what Paul's thorn does. It keeps him from pride after great revelations, and it comes through "a messenger of Satan." It is spiritual and painful at the same time, and God uses it anyway. Paul prays three times for it to go. God says no, and gives him something better than relief: grace that is enough, and power that shows up in weakness. We do not know what Paul's thorn was. That silence helps. Whatever yours is, the promise fits.

> **WORD STUDY: "THORN" AND "MADE PERFECT"**
>
> *Skolops* appears only here in the New Testament. It can mean a thorn or a pointed stake, something small that works its way in, or something large that pins you down. "Made perfect" is *teleitai*, from the same root as *teleios* in Colossians 1:28 (Session 3). God's power reaches its goal, its full expression, in weakness. Weakness is not where his power fails. It is where it finishes its work.

ROMANS 8:15

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Mitchell's confession is one many believers share: "I saw God as like a boss and it's like a taskmaster." [1:34:50] A man who came to God after years of running his own life learned to serve him like a good soldier. Paul names the problem exactly. A slave serves out of fear. A son serves out of belonging. "Abba" is the Aramaic word a child used for a father. Jesus prayed it in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). The Spirit puts the same word in our mouths. Mitchell's own conclusion is the right one: "I'm a son before anything else." [1:34:58]

1 KINGS 19:4-6

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.

Elijah collapses right after the greatest public victory of his life, fire from heaven on Mount Carmel. That matches what Howerton describes: anxiety that came in stretches when, in his words, God "just did this." Look at how God treats him. No lecture. Sleep, food, water, a touch. Then more sleep and more food, because the road ahead is too long for him (19:7). Only after that, at Horeb, does God speak. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a weary servant can do is eat, sleep, and let someone care for him. God is not embarrassed by our bodies. He made them.

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Mitchell tells the man behind bars that Paul has "seen the back of bars" too [1:44:38]. Here is Paul in chains, and the gospel is spreading through the soldiers assigned to guard him. Paul was jailed for preaching and Mitchell for crimes, but the principle holds for both. No place is outside the reach of the gospel, and no person there is useless to God. Mitchell's list goes on: the office, the job site, the campus, and "the stay-at-home mom" praying at the sink. "I'm talking to you right as you're cleaning the dishes and mopping the floor." [1:45:34]

GO DEEPER

CROSS-REFERENCES	2 Corinthians 4:7 ("we have this treasure in jars of clay"); Psalm 51:10-12 ("Restore to me the joy of your salvation," the prayer behind Mitchell's "restore"); Colossians 3:23-24; Jeremiah 29:7; 1 John 2:20, 27 (every believer has the anointing).
WHAT HOWERTON WAS QUOTING	"This poor lisping, stammering tongue" [1:36:28] is not from a psalm. It is from William Cowper's hymn "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood" (1772): "Then in a nobler, sweeter song, / I'll sing Thy power to save, / When this poor lisping, stammering tongue / Lies silent in the grave." Cowper lived with severe depression most of his life and still wrote some of the church's most trusted hymns. We found no source for the line about "agony" that Howerton thinks may have come from T.D. Jakes.
CHURCH HISTORY	Spurgeon suffered deep depression for most of his ministry. He gave a lecture to his students called "The Minister's Fainting Fits," in *Lectures to My Students*. He told them plainly that the strongest preachers were not spared it.
TWO BOOKS	Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows* (2014), short and gentle, for anyone living with depression or loving someone who is. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (17th century), the letters of a monastery cook who learned to pray among pots and pans.

HOLD IT CAREFULLY

1 Spiritual and physical, not either/or

Howerton suggests part of his anxiety is spiritual: people "bring their demons" to church, and preaching is warfare. Scripture agrees that there is a real spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12). Anxiety also has causes in the body, the mind and life circumstances. Neither pastor mentions doctors or counselors in this segment. This guide will. Seeing a physician, a licensed counselor, or taking medication is not a failure of faith. Elijah needed sleep and food before he needed a word.

2 Be slow to name someone else's thorn

Paul learned what his thorn was for after praying three times and hearing from the Lord. Job's friends were quick to explain Job's suffering and were rebuked for it (Job 42:7). Howerton applies the idea to himself, carefully. It is a humble way to hold your own pain. It is a harsh way to explain someone else's.

3 Humility and confidence are not opposites

Howerton's request, "would you please pray for me to stay confident that maybe that's my bigger struggle" [1:34:21], is wise. Biblical humility is not thinking poorly of yourself. It is thinking rightly of God and receiving what he says about you. Paul could say "I am the least of the apostles" and, two sentences later, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

4 Every place is a mission field, and work itself matters

Mitchell tells people their ministry is wherever they are. That is true. It can also be heard to mean that work only counts when you are evangelizing or praying during it. Colossians 3:23 says the work itself, done "heartily, as for the Lord," is service to Christ. Mopping the floor well is not just a backdrop for prayer. It is part of the offering.

DISCUSS

01 Howerton asks people to pray for his confidence more than his humility [1:34:21]. Which prayer do you need more right now? Why?

02 Mitchell used to see God as "a boss" and "a taskmaster" [1:34:50]. Where did your picture of God come from? What does Romans 8:15 say to it?

03 Both men describe anxiety that came in waves, even in fruitful years. What helps you when anxiety rises? What part do doctors, counselors and friends play?

04 "A coffin that buries you or a classroom that teaches you" [1:44:21]. Is there a part of your past you are still treating as a coffin?

05 Where is your mission field this week? Name the actual places and people.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Write down the five places where you will spend the most time this week. Next to each, write one person's name and one short prayer. Pray it as you walk in.

The kitchen is a mission field. So is the cell block. So is the desk.

APPENDIX A

Listening with Discernment

How to receive a sermon, a podcast, or this study without swallowing it whole or spitting it out.

ACTS 17:11

11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

The Bereans were listening to the apostle Paul. They still checked. Luke calls that noble, not suspicious. Notice the two halves: "all eagerness" and "examining." They did not choose between openness and testing. They did both, and they did it "daily," as a habit.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Paul guards against two errors in one breath. Do not shut down what God may be saying. Do not believe everything either. Test it. Then keep the good, even when it came from a source you would not have picked, and drop the rest.

PROVERBS 18:17

17 The one who states his case first seems right,
until the other comes and examines him.

A podcast is one side stating its case, often well. That is not a flaw in podcasts. It is how they work. Wisdom waits to hear the other side before deciding, especially on political and religious questions where the stakes are high. Proverbs 18:13 adds a warning: "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."

SEVEN HABITS FOR LISTENING WELL

1 **Separate testimony from claims**

"God met me on a bathroom floor" is a testimony. Receive it with gratitude. "Islam is conquering Europe" is a claim. Check it.

2 **Read the verse in its chapter**

Before you accept how a verse is used, read the whole chapter it comes from. Ask who wrote it, to whom, and why.

3 **Find the number at its source**

Statistics travel far from where they started. Look for the original report: Pew, Open Doors, the Federal Reserve, the text of the law.

4 **Hear the best version of the other side**

If you cannot state a view so that its holders would say "yes, that is what we think," you are not ready to reject it.

5 **Sort what is clear from what is speculative**

Christ will return: clear. Which nations make up Ezekiel 38 in 2026: speculative. Hold the first with both hands and the second with an open one.

6 **Watch the fruit, including your own**

Does this teaching make you love God and neighbor more? Or does it make you more afraid, more angry, and less likely to share a meal with someone different from you? (Galatians 5:22-23.)

7 **Love the speaker while you test him**

These are brothers in Christ who have given their lives to preaching. Testing what they say is not disrespect. It is what the Bereans did for Paul.

THE EPISODE'S CLAIMS, CHECKED

HOLDS UP matches primary sources **NEEDS NUANCE** partly true, or true in a narrower sense

NOT SUPPORTED no good evidence, or it points the other way

Hostility toward Christians is growing worldwide 47:03

HOLDS UP

Open Doors 2026: 388 million Christians face high persecution and discrimination. 4,849 killed for their faith (Oct 2024 to Sept 2025), 3,490 of them in Nigeria.

Laws will "muzzle the scriptures"; preaching called hate speech 47:56

NEEDS NUANCE

No law named. Canada's Bill C-9 (2026) repealed the religious-text defence but protects religious statements that do not "wilfully promote hatred." No U.S. law revokes tax exemption for preaching doctrine.

Islam is one of the fastest-growing faiths 50:19

HOLDS UP

Pew (2025): fastest-growing major religion from 2010 to 2020, +21%, mainly through births.

Islam is "conquering … all of Europe" 52:28

NOT SUPPORTED

Pew: 4.9% of Europe's population in 2016; 7.4% to 14% projected by 2050.

Muslims gaining office could "introduce Sharia law in America" 51:40

NOT SUPPORTED

No U.S. jurisdiction has adopted Sharia. Article VI bans religious tests for office. The First Amendment bars an established religion. About 5.5 million U.S. Muslims (Pew, 2026).

Turkey is "98% Muslim" 1:00:50

HOLDS UP

CIA World Factbook (2025): 99.8% Muslim by affiliation.

Five of the seven churches in Revelation received warnings 1:01:20

HOLDS UP

Smyrna and Philadelphia received no rebuke.

Isaac and Ishmael, "5,000 years ago" 1:02:16

NEEDS NUANCE

Abraham is usually dated about 2000 BC, so about 4,000 years.

Beheading points to one religion 1:03:58

NEEDS NUANCE

Jihadist groups behead Christians today. Revelation 20:4's word described a Roman punishment. Other regimes in history have beheaded Christians too.

Galatians 1:8 was fulfilled by Muhammad's revelation 1:04:57

NEEDS NUANCE

Paul's words are a test for every message, including his own, not a prediction of one man. Islam fails that test.

Muhammad was afraid after his first revelation (AD "600") 1:04:30

HOLDS UP

Bukhari 3 and Ibn Ishaq record his fear. Traditional date is 610.

Ezekiel 38's nations are all Islamic except Russia; China is mentioned 1:05:08

NEEDS NUANCE

Most named peoples map to Muslim-majority lands today. "Rosh" as Russia is disputed. China is not named.

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in Russia 1:05:23

NEEDS NUANCE

The Muslim share is growing through births and migration. No census or Pew source confirms "fastest-growing."

The Islamic Mahdi matches the biblical Antichrist 1:06:14

NEEDS NUANCE

Some points match hadith (a seven-year rule). Others do not: the treaty is with the Romans, and no canonical source mentions a white horse. It is a minority reading among evangelicals.

Society is moving away from cash 1:13:34

HOLDS UP

About 14% of U.S. payments were in cash in late 2025 (Federal Reserve).

Nations are discussing an "identity chip" to buy and sell 1:13:57

NOT SUPPORTED

No nation mandates implanted chips. Digital ID programs exist. The UK dropped its mandatory plan in 2026, and the EU wallet is voluntary.

Talk of a "10 nation confederacy" 1:13:47

NOT SUPPORTED

No such formal talks found. BRICS has eleven members and no shared currency.

Noah preached for "a 100 years" 1:15:25

NEEDS NUANCE

A traditional inference. Genesis does not give the length.

Baxter was a “16th century Puritan”; Spurgeon died “early in his 50s” NOT SUPPORTED

22:15 35:14

Baxter lived from 1615 to 1691 (17th century). Spurgeon died at 57.

Spurgeon’s critics caused the Surrey Gardens stampede 35:32 NEEDS NUANCE

Seven died on October 19, 1856, after someone cried “Fire!” Contemporaries believed it was malicious. The people who did it were never identified.

“Vindicate your servant” is in Psalm 86 1:28:02 NEEDS NUANCE

Psalm 86:14-17 matches the rest. “Vindicate” is from Psalm 26:1 and 43:1.

Turn the same tools on this guide. If you find an error, tell the person who gave it to you. That is the Berean way too.

APPENDIX B

Memory Verses

One for each session. Say it together at the end of your meeting, and carry it through the week.

SESSION 1 · PSALM 40:2

He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

SESSION 2 · 2 TIMOTHY 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

SESSION 3 · COLOSSIANS 1:28

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

SESSION 4 · JUDE 3

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

SESSION 5 · MATTHEW 5:44-45A

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

SESSION 6 · MATTHEW 25:13

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

SESSION 7 · 1 PETER 4:14

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

SESSION 8 · 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9A

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

A PRAYER FOR THE GROUP

Father, you heard a boy named Ishmael crying in the desert. You heard a young man yelling on a bathroom floor. You hear us. Thank you.

Lord Jesus, you are the faith once for all delivered. Keep us from adding to you and from leaving you. Give us the Bereans' eagerness and their care. Make us people who read your word slowly, obey it quickly, and hand it on whole.

Holy Spirit, end the divorce in us. Where we have Scripture without fire, set us burning. Where we have fire without Scripture, anchor us. Fill us, and let the word of Christ dwell in us richly.

We pray for the 4,849 brothers and sisters killed for your name in the year Open Doors last counted, and for the families they left in Nigeria, in the Sahel, in North Korea and in places we cannot name. Comfort them. Strengthen the church there. Turn the hearts of those who kill, as you turned Saul's.

We pray for our Muslim neighbors by name: the ones on our street, at our jobs and in our kids' schools. Let us be the Samaritan to them before we ask them to believe anything. Show them Jesus.

We pray for the people we know who are sitting alone tonight with something in their lap they should not have. Send someone through the unlocked door. Send us.

We pray for preachers who walk off the stage sure they blew it, and for mothers at the sink who think no one sees. Give them grace that is sufficient, and power made perfect in weakness.

When they revile us falsely, make us glad. When they criticize us truly, make us humble. Give us the wisdom to know the difference, and friends who will tell us.

Keep us awake with oil in our lamps. Keep us working while it is day. And when the Bridegroom comes, let us look first at his feet, then into his eyes, and lay down every crown we were ever given.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is coming soon. Amen.

Sources and further reading

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HELP

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RECOMMENDED READING FROM THIS STUDY

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Josh Howerton and Philip Anthony Mitchell and their ministries did not produce this study and have not reviewed it. It is written by Cross + Covenant for personal and small-group study.

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