



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Early Church History with Perry Edwards Season 5, Episode 4 Transcript

[00:00:00.280] - Announcer

Welcome to the Gospel for Life Podcast. We help churches make disciples. Now Here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:03.640] - Darryl Dash

Welcome back to the Gospel for Life Podcast.

Well, here's something I've noticed. Many of us in the church today really don't have an understanding of church history. We have a vague knowledge of a few key events, but the rest is just a big black hole in our minds. We suffer because of this. Theologian Thomas Oden writes:

Beware of the "evangelical" who wants to read the Bible without the historic voices of the church, who is only willing to listen to his own voice or the voices of contemporaries in the dialogue. Evangelicals have usually been the losers when they have systematically neglected the saints and martyrs and consensual writers of the earliest Christian centuries.

We really do lose out when we don't have a good grasp of Church history, and that's why we need to pay more attention to this subject. That's why I'm so glad to talk to Perry Edwards today. Perry is the pastor of Living Way Baptist Church in Chipman, New Brunswick, Canada, and he's written a great new book called *Introduction to Church*

History: The First 500 Years. It's such a helpful book for anyone who is new to church history, as well as somebody who just wants to brush up and get a fresh perspective on the topic.

[00:01:32.680] - Darryl Dash

I'm so excited to talk to Perry today about this excellent new book. Perry, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:38.220] - Perry Edwards

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

[00:01:40.220] - Darryl Dash

Perry, how did you become interested in church history?

[00:01:44.170] - Perry Edwards

Well, I suppose like everybody else that trained for pastoral ministry, I took the courses that are required in your degree to... You usually have four courses. You have the early church, you have the part of the 1,000 years that nobody knows anything about, you have the Reformation, and then maybe Baptist history, depending on where you study and what your tradition is. That's where it began. Michael Haykin was my church history professor back in the day, and so he planted some seeds there, and I started to see this growth for this love growing for church history. But I think it really began to take off in 2005 when Carey Outreach Ministries asked me to begin teaching with their ministry. The first course they asked me to teach was early church history. At that moment, I took a deep dive into it, and that's when I really began to study more deeply, more systematically. It just grew from there. Now it's a lifelong love and a lifelong commitment to studying the early church in particular. It. But there's obviously other times in history, church history that I love as well.

[00:03:05.600] - Darryl Dash

Anyone who's heard Michael Haykin teach church history probably has picked up on his zeal for that topic. It's impossible not to be interested in it after listening to his lecture.

[00:03:16.140] - Perry Edwards

Yeah, that's true. It hasn't diminished in him over the years either. He loves it as much now, if not more than he always has.

[00:03:22.170] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, he's phenomenal. What would you say to somebody who says, We don't need church history. We just need the Bible. Church history is really a luxury that we don't need. It's okay, but we really don't need to understand it in order to live today as a Christian.

[00:03:38.290] - Perry Edwards

Well, I think I would... I remember years ago I was talking to a man, and he had argued that very thing. I don't need to study church history. But as I was talking to him, I noticed that he was using the term Trinity, and he was talking about the dual nature of Christ and the two natures, but one person. He was using all of this theological language. I said to him, You do realize that the language that you're using is language that we have inherited and language that was established in the first 500 years of the history of the church. We're standing on the shoulders of those who have come before us. We're not reading the Bible in a vacuum. We're not in the first century reading the Bible for the first time. We're reading it on the shoulders of those who have come before us. That's certainly one thing I would say, that all of our theological language, it's been handed down to us. We didn't invent it in our time. So if we're to understand our theology, I would argue we need to understand how that language was used in its original context.

[00:04:45.840] - Darryl Dash

Yeah, it really does betray a misunderstanding of church history. Your introduction covers many of the reasons, and I really appreciate it, the clarity that you used in

answering that question. Perry, why did you choose to focus on the first 500 years? Or is this just the first of a few books that are going to be coming out?

[00:05:03.610] - Perry Edwards

Well, I would say I probably started my first love was the Reformation. But I think that's true for a lot of evangelicals because the Reformation, the Protestant reformation, is so important in our own history. I think John Calvin, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, all of the big reformer guys, I would say they were the guys I really loved first. Even more modern like C.H. Spurgeon and even George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, and all those great evangelicals. Those are the biographies that I read, and those were the first guys that I absorbed with church history. But then as time went on, you hear something like Calvin was the greatest patristic scholar in his day, and you're like, Well, what does that mean? Then you realize that he valued the early church fathers, and he drew on them very deeply. Then you start realizing, Okay, well, I can't start with the Reformation, I need to go back to the early church even to understand what took place at the Reformation. The church didn't begin in the 16th century, but sometimes I think we have that impression as evangelical. I started going back when I realized that these reformers were rooted in a much more ancient time, and that, of course, was the early church.

[00:06:24.540] - Darryl Dash

Some would argue that we have a lot to learn from the early church. We live in an increasingly pagan society. Back then, it was pre-Christian. Now, some would say it's post-Christian. But certainly, we're experiencing greater opposition against the church and Christianity. What do we have to learn from very early church?

[00:06:45.580] - Perry Edwards

Well, I think there's a number of things we can learn from the early church, even in terms... There's a number of things that could be said. One, we can think in terms of the persecution that they experienced and the way in which they stood up under that persecution. We have many, many examples in the early church of people who are faithful to the point of death, even after experiencing great suffering, suffering that we just don't understand. I think on that level, when we read those stories and we begin to appreciate the suffering of many of our brethren and the early church, that should

strengthen our own resolve to stay true and to stand true to Christ in our own day. If persecution comes to us, then I think the early church can help us to strengthen that resolve. That would be one thing. I also think theologically that there's nothing new under the sun. We know that. There's no heresy today that didn't rear its ugly head in the past. I think by studying the early church and their response to the various heresies that they were dealing with in the first hundreds of years, it helps us today.

[00:07:56.190] - Perry Edwards

We're not reinventing the wheel. We can maybe refine some of our thinking and say things in a different way. But ultimately, I think the early church addressed most, if not all, of the issues that we're facing today.

[00:08:11.560] - Darryl Dash

What about the apologists for the faith that you cover What can we learn from them today?

[00:08:17.810] - Perry Edwards

I would say the same thing. When you look at them, they're dealing with... I mean, Justin Martyr is dealing with pagans misunderstandings of the Christian Church, and he responds by giving a clear understanding of what the church believes, and he makes it clear that the accusations that are being made against the church are not true. I think the approach that Justin Martyr takes when he deals with men like Celsus and others who are attacking the church, I think we can learn from his method and his approach. The issues will be different. They'll be, I think, worded different and different clothing and that thing. But I think we can learn from their method and their way of dealing with the accusations made against them in their time.

[00:09:09.400] - Darryl Dash

Perry, I don't know if you've run across believers who just have misunderstandings about church history based on Dan Brown or popular literature. They read that their church council got together and picked and chose which books of the Bible to include. How have you dealt with that in your own ministry of helping people actually understand

the truth of how the early church functioned, how the Canon was formed, and that thing?

[00:09:34.580] - Perry Edwards

Well, I think we should teach it. I think that whether we use a Sunday school class or a teaching class at another time during the week, I think that we, as pastors, not only should take the time to read and to understand the early church and other stages in the history of the church as well, and have classes like Sunday evening. We don't have a Sunday evening service here, but I used to have a Sunday evening service, and I used Sunday evening for about two years to teach early church history to the congregation. You're able to deal with all of those sorts of things in that context. It also makes your illustrations when you're preaching make more sense to your congregation as you're drawing from the early church as well... I just think we need to realize that a Sunday school class can be used for teaching church history, or an evening service could be used for teaching church history because we're really teaching the Bible as we're talking historical theology here. We're really teaching the Bible and how it was understood and developed over time. I think that's the approach I've taken, and I think it's an effective approach.

[00:10:39.410] - Darryl Dash

I've heard Mark Dever even use church history sermon illustrations. Yeah, really powerful way of, rather than looking to a football game or something that's happening right now, look to an incident in church history, which really serves a dual purpose then, introduces people to church history and then helps illustrate the point he's trying to make.

[00:10:58.870] - Perry Edwards

Yeah. I also think that we just need to put books into the hands of our people and encourage them to be reading church history so that they can grow on their own. We just need to... I mean, there's nothing that irritates me more when somebody says, I hate history. I don't like history. Okay, you may not like history, but there's lots of things you don't like that you could take the time to cultivate a love for them. This is one of those things that you need to dive into. I think books, and there's all sorts of good

materials on YouTube where you've got all sorts of great church historians that have put together great courses you can plug people into. We just want to create a culture in our churches, I think, where people understand the importance of church history.

[00:11:46.210] - Darryl Dash

Let me ask you about the creeds. I remember preaching on, I forget even what creed it was now, but somebody in the church asks a question, Wait, we're Scriptural people. We're not creedal people here. We believe in the authority of Scripture. So why should we be studying a creed? Of course, we were studying scripture through the creeds, but how would you answer that to somebody who says, We don't need the creeds today, and there may be just something from the past that we can look at, but not really important for the church today?

[00:12:17.470] - Perry Edwards

Yeah, I would argue that the creeds are the early creeds. If we talk the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene creed, the Chalcedon Creed, I would argue that these are an accurate an accurate summary of what the Bible teaches on the subjects that they're covering, the Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, and all those early theological issues. I would say that God has given teachers to the church and their gifts to the church, and lots of them are dead. He didn't just give the teachers that are alive. The Bible tells us that teachers are a gift to the church. So why would we ignore teachers from the early church who have taken the time to just boil all this down for us to give us a clear presentation of the gospel, or at least aspects of the gospel and the nature of God? I don't think we can truly understand without the creeds, if you know what I mean. I believe that the Bible is our final source of faith and practice. Don't get me wrong. But I think we need to understand that God has raised up teachers for the past 2,000 years to help us understand what that actually means.

[00:13:35.190] - Perry Edwards

I think the creeds are part of that.

[00:13:38.290] - Darryl Dash

That's very good. Perry, I want to just go through a few of the areas that you cover in your book. Constantine is a controversial figure today. Some people see the acceptance of Christianity to be a good thing. Other people see it as being a very negative development in the history of the church. Overall, how do you evaluate it?

[00:13:59.330] - Perry Edwards

I think it's a combination of both. I mean, let's just focus on one thing that Constantine did. Constantine made Sunday a day of worship. He encouraged the soldiers to go to church. He basically made it a holiday for a holy day for worship and for church gathering. That wasn't true for the first 300 years of the church. People worked on Sunday, and they gathered in the evening or the morning. We even see that in 1 Corinthians, when Paul rebukes them for not waiting for people to come to the Lord's Supper and that thing. But I think that that has been really good for the Western world up until about 30 years ago, when we decided that having Sunday as a common pause day for society wasn't a good thing. I would argue that some of those things were really good for the Western world. Christendom, with all of its problems, which arose out of the Constantinian era, I would say, is the foundation in part of the Western world and all that the Western world has produced. I think that a lot of good came from that, but I also believe the other side that there were a lot of things that were not good, like the church and the state relationship where you have kings and emperors who try to impose their will upon the church and all the problems that come with that.

[00:15:29.690] - Perry Edwards

I think that separation of church and state is a more Biblical understanding of these things. I mean, even the Reformation. You've got old Zwingli, the great reformer, drowning baptists. You know why? Because of Constantine and that relationship between the church and the state. I think that that is negative, yet I think there's lots of good things that came with that as well in the Western world.

[00:15:51.640] - Darryl Dash

Let me move on to the Church Fathers. Dave Robinson, who you might know here in Toronto, a pastor at West Pit Chapel, really is a man who values the Church Fathers. Yet I would think that most people in our churches really don't know anything about them, or very little about them anyway. Why is it important that we pay attention to the Church Fathers?

[00:16:11.280] - Perry Edwards

Because we're influenced by the thinking of the church fathers today. Origen, for example, with all of his problems, he is very influential in the area of hermeneutics today. I would say if we're even to understand some of the methods that we use for interpreting the scriptures, allegorical methods and things like that, then it's helpful to know origin and the way he approached the scriptures and his tripartite division there and in his interpretation. I would argue we need to know origin for that reason and for other reasons. Irenaeus is important because he's the most orthodox, I would say, of the Church Fathers. He also, in terms of the canon, in his writings, quoted most of the New Testament in the second century as authoritative. So he's very important, even, in our understanding of why we believe the 27 books are the New Testament books that we should be reading. Tertullian on the Trinity. If you want to understand the Trinity, I think that Tertullian is somebody that you need to spend some time with. Some of his arguments are brilliant, and some of his illustrations are just so enlightening and our understanding of the triune nature of God.

[00:17:32.780] - Perry Edwards

It's not that there's not some error mixed in with what these men are saying because clearly there is. But the influence they've had on our thinking today and even our church practice today, I think, is profound.

[00:17:47.780] - Darryl Dash

Later on, you cover the monastic movement. Recently, we've seen a renewed interest in the monastics and even a new monastic movement. Do you think that it has anything to teach us to?

[00:18:01.150] - Perry Edwards

I do. I will say this. I covered the life of Antony in my book. I summarized it. I read Antony's life on at least a yearly basis. I'll sit down. It's not a long read, but I read it. Not because I believe that everything that is said is true. I think some things are not true. But I am deeply challenged by the story of Antony, a man who gave up everything to follow Jesus Christ in the way that he understood what that meant. I'm challenged by that. I'm gripped by reading the stories of these early monks, and it causes me to think deeply and ponder and question my own commitment to the Lord. Have I given up everything for Jesus? What does that look like? I do think that they can challenge us in that way. I also think that we can't understand even the present-day church without understanding monasticism. Everything else, I think monasticism has influenced everything. Like you said, there's a renewed interest. My son spent the winter last year six months in a monastery in the States because he also is pursuing, Well, what does all this mean? There's a monastery in Nova Scotia that I've gone down and spent some time there as well just to get to know the Eastern Orthodox monks to find out what's going on there.

[00:19:35.520] - Perry Edwards

I do think as the world becomes smaller and as Eastern Orthodoxy becomes more influential, that we have to, as evangelicals, get to know the monks and to get to know the early monks that we can minister to these people and reach out to these people. Because if you're a pastor today, you've got some young people that are playing with Eastern orthodoxy and even Roman Catholicism. I think knowing the monastic movement and the early monastic, early monks help us in effectively dealing with these particularly young men.

[00:20:10.890] - Darryl Dash

It's interesting you mentioned young men. I am really seeing a lot of young men being drawn to the richness of the historic church and really tired with the shallowness they perceive within the evangelical church. A shallowness that doesn't need to be there, but they're longing for more. I think you're dead on there.

[00:20:29.900] - Perry Edwards

Yeah, it's interesting, and I think that's exactly what my son would say as well. I do think that, as they say, evangelicalism has run from shore to shore, and it's an inch deep. I do think that I think the experience of many people... For example, if you're raised in a health, wealth, prosperity environment, I can see why orthodoxy would be appealing to you because of the shallowness of that movement. But this I find fascinating. Justin Martyr, in, I think, his first apology, he actually gives a description of a worship service in the early second century. When I read that, I'm actually really encouraged because it almost looks identical to the worship service that we have in our church on Sunday morning. I'm not saying we're tracing ours back to that, but the earliest worship services were not the high liturgical services you see in orthodoxy. They were simple services with the reading of scripture, the singing of songs, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the preaching of the word, the eating of a meal, all of those things that are essential parts of the Christian life. You see that in the earliest stages of the Christian Church.

[00:21:47.660] - Perry Edwards

Everything else is developed over time.

[00:21:52.470] - Darryl Dash

Later on, you trace a little bit of the beginnings of what we would recognize as Roman Catholicism. How soon did that appear in the early history of the church?

[00:22:03.840] - Perry Edwards

I think the seeds were planted very early. I looked at Ignatius, and Ignatius, of course, was the first one to talk about the monarchical type bishop in the church. So rather than having elders and deacons, he had deacons, elders, and bishop who was over the elders. I don't think he introduced, and people will say he introduced it, but when you read Ignatius, he writes in such a way that most of the churches already accepted this as a valid structure for leadership. That's the beginning, right? There were no bishops that were over a large area. They were over their individual church. But then in time, Irenaeus, in the second century, spoke very highly of the bishop in Rome. By the time you get to Jerome, he's speaking of the bishop of Rome as somebody who should give

deference to his opinion. He was very big on that. Leo the Great, fifth century, many believe that he was, should be rightly called, the first Pope. He very much, his teaching, very much developed the centrality of Rome and the Popes who was really beginning to develop. I'd say the seeds were planted in the early second century, and then they grew off in different directions as we get up into the fourth and fifth century.

[00:23:30.690] - Perry Edwards

Then after we leave the fifth, sixth century, you see for a thousand years the full development, I think, of the Roman Catholic Church leading up to the Reformation. It's very early on, I think. But I will say this. I think in our own churches we would agree with Ignatius. I think that a lot of our... I'll just say I'm a Baptist. In the Baptist churches, we have deacons, we have elders, we usually have a pastor. Even when we want to say that he is one of the elders, which he is, we still recognize that he is a lead elder, and we almost have that pastor, elders, deacon model. I think it's almost a natural way that we move that you have an individual leader, but in cooperation with other spiritual leaders with them. If you look at the church in Jerusalem, in the Book of Acts, James, pretty dominant guy. When they had the first, if you want to call it the first ecumenical council over the Gentile question, he was the last guy to speak. When he spoke, the council was over and I'm like, Well, that's interesting, isn't it? Even the apostles had stopped talking after James spoke.

[00:24:40.290] - Perry Edwards

I thought maybe even in the early church, we had a little bit more of this than we think.

[00:24:44.450] - Darryl Dash

That's interesting. This might be the most important question I ask you. Do you say Augustine or Augustine?

[00:24:53.720] - Perry Edwards

I say Augustine, but most of my friends, they laugh at me for doing it because they say Augustine.

[00:24:59.420] - Darryl Dash

Sometimes it feels like we live at the end of a certain period of civilization with the social cohesion, breaking down the upheaval around the world. Augustine certainly lived through a similar period. Are there any lessons that we can learn from him watching the end of the Roman Empire and the upheaval that he experienced?

[00:25:24.760] - Perry Edwards

It's been a long time since I read the City of God where where he has that great tome where he compares the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of God. It's been a lot of years since I've read that particular volume. But I'll say this, the one thing we can learn from it, maybe not specifically from Augustine, but from his experience, that let's resist the temptation to say that Jesus is coming next month. Let's resist the temptation that because things are really bad and it looks like Rome is going to be sacked, and it looks like in Augustine's case, he was at Hippo, and he actually died when the vandals were, when the Barbarians were at the gate, as you probably know. But let's resist the temptation to say that we are in the final, final days because they believed it, Augustine would have believed it. They thought this is it. The Roman Empire is collapsing. It's over. Well, that was what, 1500-plus years ago? So let's resist that temptation. Rather than sitting back and waiting for Jesus to come again, which we are waiting for, don't misunderstand me, but let's not allow that to lead us into a place of passivity.

[00:26:39.400] - Perry Edwards

But let's serve the Lord as though he's not coming for another thousand years, and that all of this confusion is something that may be indicative of Jesus is about to come, but it could be a thousand years before Jesus comes. I think we can resist that temptation. We should resist that temptation to become alarmist.

[00:26:58.440] - Darryl Dash

At this time. Perry, one of the parts of the book I really appreciate it is the glossary in which you outlined false teaching in the early church. You go through all these different terms that are unfamiliar, and yet the heresies and false teachings that you described there are very prevalent within the church. Maybe the answer is, I was going to ask you

which ones are maybe more or ones we need to pay attention to today? Maybe you're going to say all of them, but are there a few that especially stand out as important for us to consider today?

[00:27:28.580] - Perry Edwards

That's an interesting question. I haven't really thought about that. That's an interesting question. I think modalism certainly is one because I know that where I'm at anyway, there is an entire denomination of churches down here who deny the triune nature of God. They believe that Jesus is divine, but they deny the triune nature of God. Certainly in my context, I find myself thinking quite a bit about modalism because I talk to modalists on assembly regular basis. Some of the pastors in town are modalists, even in this small little town of 1,200 people where I am. So certainly, modalism, I think, would be one of them. I've got them in front of me here. I'm just thinking what to... I think we're always, I think, in Arianism, obviously. I mean, we're dealing with pseudo-Christian cults that deny the deity of Christ. Arianism in the last 150 years, maybe in a different form, but has had a huge resurgence. That certainly is important. There's so many, even in the evangelical world, people are questioning the Trinity. They're questioning the dual nature of Christ. I would say that all of those heresies that the early councils were dealing with, we have to be familiar with them because I just have this sense that all of these heresies are popping up once again.

[00:28:46.680] - Perry Edwards

Satan is not a very creative guy. He's always doing the same stuff over and over and over and over again. It seems to me it's the same heresies. I'm going to go back and say all of them because I'm going to settle there.

[00:28:59.200] - Darryl Dash

Well, as I was reading over that list, I thought, Man, we really need to brush up on these and even include these in our teaching. As we're correcting false teaching and teaching what scripture teaches, we need to make our people aware of what historical heresy is.

[00:29:15.590] - Perry Edwards

Yeah, I think so. We also need to be humble ourselves, which is why I have these... I made sure I had the definitions open in front of me in case you start asking questions, because even sometimes I get these names all mixed up in my head.

[00:29:29.980] - Darryl Dash

Glad you're not the only one. I think even pastors are in danger of unintentionally embracing what turns out to be heresy, which is pretty scary.

[00:29:38.880] - Perry Edwards

Well, it's funny that a couple of weeks ago, I got together with a couple of pastor friends of mine and some other guys, and we were just sitting around talking. One of the pastors, good, solid, orthodox guy, and we're talking about the Trinity. He said he made the comment that the Trinity has three wills. There's the will of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He's going on in waxing, eloquent, and everybody's sitting listening to him. I called him the next day and I said, Brother, you do realize that the Orthodox position is that there's only one will in the Trinity. There's three persons, but there's only one divine will. He was so embarrassed because he was waxing eloquent on this. He's not a heretic. He just didn't realize. Then he immersed himself into making sure that he used proper language. So it's important. Even seasoned pastors, we make mistakes because we don't use our language maybe as precisely as we should.

[00:30:34.150] - Darryl Dash

Yeah. Modalism has certainly come up. I remember Michael Haykin writing an article, "And did the Father Die?" I don't know if you remember that one.

[00:30:42.600] - Perry Edwards

I don't remember that.

[00:30:42.990] - Darryl Dash

The deacon prayed at communion saying, “Father, we thank you for dying upon the cross.”

[00:30:47.800] - Perry Edwards

Oh, yes. Yeah, I've heard that. I've had to talk to deacons about that. But I've always seen that as just a slip.

[00:30:54.700] - Darryl Dash

Perry, is there a favorite period within the first 500 years of the church's history for you?

[00:31:01.540] - Perry Edwards

You'd have to obviously say the Book of Acts, but let's set the Book of Acts aside and let's say beyond that. I wouldn't say that there's a specific period. I must say I am enamored with monasticism. I will say that. Not that I want to be a monk, but I do find it just so out there that it's mysterious, and so I'm drawn to that. Sometimes I think to myself, we like to criticize monasticism and things of that nature, but if you had, let's say, 50 pastors, evangelical pastors in a room today, and you took those 50 men and transported those 50 men back to the fourth and fifth century AD, the truth of the matter is none of us would be Baptist. None of us would be Presbyterians. A few of us would be Abits in a monastery. Some of them were crazy sorts, would probably be solitary monks in the desert of Egypt. Most of us would be priests. Some of us would be bishops, and we'd be functioning in the world in which we lived. I've had people deny that. I've said to people that. No, no, no, I would have seen the truth.

[00:32:08.150] - Perry Edwards

I said, Let's get some historical context here. If we were born and raised then we wouldn't be thinking the way we think. I find monasticism fascinating. I'm not even opposed to the idea of monasticism. When you think, for example, of Columba, who he went, he was an Irishman, and he and eleven of his friends went and they set up a monastery on the island of Iona, which is just off the Coast of Scotland, 12 guys wanting to serve God faithfully remain celibate, and they evangelized all of Scotland and brought

the Gospel of Scotland. I'm like, Is there anything in the Bible that would say to me that if you had a dozen men or whatever number you want to choose to say, We're going to live celibate lives and we're to give ourselves to the service of Jesus and the service of a particular community? I don't see anything in the Bible that would say that's a wrong thing. I don't personally have a problem with that idea. But I think as protestants, we have a hard time coming to grips with that because of our history and obviously our reaction were reactionary people, protesters were Protestants.

[00:33:19.130] - Perry Edwards

But to answer your question, monasticism, I guess, is an area that I really find myself drawn to pondering and meditating on.

[00:33:29.390] - Darryl Dash

You might have already covered this, but talked to a pastor who is maybe not familiar with church history as much as he should be and wants to help his church understand it as well, learn himself and communicate that love to the church. Where should he begin?

[00:33:45.210] - Perry Edwards

I would say that he should buy a good book on church history. Church History in Plain English by Shelly is good. I've benefited from that. Gonzalez is obviously a superb church historian. Anything he writes is is worth reading. I would get a good summary of the 2,000 years and maybe start with a smaller one and just build the skeleton in your mind and then continue reading after that and developing your understanding. As you know, when you teach something, you have to know it. Commit yourself to that. Read some church history, get the general idea, and then commit to teaching whatever stage of church history you want to start with. It could be early church or Reformation history, whatever you feel most comfortable. Commit and say, For the next 12 weeks, I'm going to be teaching on this. Well, that forces you to spend two or three days of the week before you get there just to make sure you know. That's what I would encourage them to do. Start with an overview, commit yourself to teaching a period you love, and then build from there.

[00:34:52.500] - Darryl Dash

Good advice. Let me ask you a couple of personal questions, if that's okay. You're a pastor, you're a writer, you sound like a busy guy. What has God been teaching you lately?

[00:35:07.710] - Perry Edwards

That's always a very difficult question to answer. What has been teaching me lately? I just got back from Tanzania, and I took a picture when I was in Tanzania. I stood there with a bunch of pastors, a couple of them from Kenya, some Tanzian pastors. Our skin color was all different shades. We put our hands next to one another and we took a picture of it. You have really dark skin and lighter skin like mine and different shades in between. One people, one race, one God, one Lord, one Savior. It was just a really stark reminder to me that the Spirit of God is one globally. There's one Jesus for every culture, every people, every nation. That may seem like a basic point and a basic truth, but Jesus being the only way to God. That's something that in the last number of weeks anyway, was really pressed upon me. The same spirit I have is the same spirit my brother has on the other side of the world who's serving God, that God is one, that God is triune, that God dwells on the hearts of his people globally. Those are things that I guess recently have just been pressed on my heart.

[00:36:27.440] - Perry Edwards

I'd also say I'm just, again, reminded of the importance of daily Bible reading. With all the reading we do, with everything we do, just sitting down and reading three or four chapters of the Bible every day, I don't care what method you use. Just find a method that works for you and read three or four chapters every day because ultimately that's God's word speaking to us. I would say that God's just been pressing that you never grow out of that, right? If anything, I have to keep going back to that basic one-on-one. I'm sure in your book, How to grow, you emphasize the reading of scripture and just that one-on-one basic read the scriptures. That's the most important thing to me.

[00:37:11.180] - Darryl Dash

It is the most important thing. Studies say that it is the number one practice as a believer that is correlated with growth. I would absolutely agree with that. That's good. These are discouraging times, arguably. I talk to a lot of pastors who are feeling discouraged. What's encouraging you lately?

[00:37:29.480] - Perry Edwards

Well, last night we had a music... My church is like a church plant, really. It was a rejuvenation, but a church plant too, it's very small. But last night we had a music practice and there was a 50-year-old woman who plays the guitar, who made a profession of faith about six months ago, and we baptized her. Last night was the first night that she's now getting involved in the music team. That encourages my heart. Sunday morning, there's a guy who's been coming to the church for a couple of years now, young guy, not a Christian, but he comes every two weeks because he works every second Sunday at the mill, but every two weeks. We've gotten together and whatnot. Then on Sunday, he looked at me walking out the front door and he said, I'm ready to go deeper. I want to go deeper. That encourages my heart. We got together on Wednesday and talked about what does that mean, going deeper. I'm encouraged by those small blessings because there's lots of discouragement and... The other thing I'd say too, that I keep my eye on, people talk about a post-Christian world. We're not a post-Christian world.

[00:38:36.490] - Perry Edwards

I don't even use that terminology. We're post-Christendom. We're a post-Christendom world. We will never be a post-Christian world. The church is bigger today than it was yesterday, and the church will be bigger tomorrow than it is today. So when we keep our eyes on the fact that we are not little empire builders, but we are part of the kingdom of God, and that the kingdom of God is continually growing and will continue to grow until Jesus comes again, I think for me anyway, that's helpful when I'm discouraged when I look out and see 20 people sitting there listening to a message that I poured my whole life and soul into. Those little things encouraged my heart and even that bigger theological understanding that we're part of a bigger kingdom and that the church is continuing to grow, the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Every person for whom

Jesus died will be saved in the end. Nobody will be lost that God intends to save. Those things encourage me.

[00:39:39.700] - Darryl Dash

Perry, I was with a group of pastors in Saskatoon recently, and a lot of them pastor small churches. A lot of them work other jobs, secular jobs to be able to make a living, and then they pastor on the weekend. I feel like some of them are discouraged because pastoring a small church is hard. Pastoring in an area where you feel like there's not a lot of traction is hard. What encouragement would you give to a small church pastor who feels like maybe it's more work than they thought and they're not seeing the results that they would like?

[00:40:13.700] - Perry Edwards

It's interesting, when I was a young man, and I don't know if this is a common experience, I think it is. But when you're a young man and you read the life of Spurgeon and you go to seminary and you have these big dreams of being very influential for the kingdom of God, and you go through school and then you come out of school and maybe you become the pastor of a small church because you're just glad somebody actually wants you. You become a pastor. The pendulum was way over here and going to be greatly used of God. Then at least in my own experience, then the pendulum swings in the opposite direction and after a few years of ministry, start thinking, Well, God can't use me at all. I don't know. I just don't know how God's going to use me. But then the pendulum, eventually, it gets to the middle where it's supposed to be, and it settles. You come to the realization that God has given to me all of the gifts that are necessary to complete the task that He has given to me. He's not giving me more gifts, and He certainly hasn't given me less, but He's given me everything I need to complete the task.

[00:41:20.380] - Perry Edwards

The truth of the matter is, more than 90% of the churches in this country are between 50 and 150 people. Most of us have small churches, and we just have to accept the fact that this is our task and that God rewards. He's not going to say, Well done good and successful servant. Well done good and well-known famous servant. He's going to say,

Well done good and faithful servant. Be faithful in the small things, be faithful in the work that God's called you to, and live to hear those words, Well done good and faithful servants.

[00:41:54.510] - Darryl Dash

I really appreciate that. Perry, how can people find out more about you and this book?

[00:41:59.240] - Perry Edwards

Well, I mean, they can email me if they want to know more about me, but I don't mind talking with people. But the book is sold on Amazon. So if they go to amazon.ca. or .com — if you're in Canada, .ca, and the book is there. It sells Kindle as well as hardcopy, softcopy. I mean, obviously, I would encourage you to buy it and read it and give it as a Christmas gift to somebody.

[00:42:23.820] - Darryl Dash

Are there more books coming?

[00:42:26.060] - Perry Edwards

Yes. Once you get the bug, you have the bug, right? But I'm toying with what to do next. I mean, part of me wanted to do something on monasticism and the rise of monasticism. I also love the Reformation, but there's so many books on the Reformation, but that doesn't mean there's not room for another one. I also have done some work on a man named Charles Tupper. When I did my Master Theology, I had done my thesis on Charles Tupper. He is a maritime Baptist pastor. There's been no book. There's been chapters in other books, but there's been no actual biography written on him. I've done a lot of research, so I'm thinking possibly that as well. I've got several irons in the fire, as you can appreciate, and I'm seeing which one's hottest. That's the one that I'll... It reminds me of... Do you remember Gerald Griffith?

[00:43:13.710] - Darryl Dash

Yes, I do.

[00:43:14.540] - Perry Edwards

I took homiletics from him at Toronto Baptist Seminary. Not because I was already in the ministry several years, not that I felt I needed it, but I just wanted to sit at his feet and listen to him tell stories. He told a story one time. Somebody asked the question, How do I determine what I should preach on a given Sunday? He just smiled and he said, Well. He said, You just reach up. You start squeezing the fruit and the fruit that's the most ripe, you pick it and that's what you preach. I always stuck with the, and I guess in writing a book, there's lots of fruit. I'm going to pick the one that's ripest, and that's the book that I'll write. When it'll happen, I'm in process, but it certainly is a desire.

[00:43:58.480] - Darryl Dash

I'm really grateful for you and this book and your ministry. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for sharing your love of church history with us. I'm really grateful.

[00:44:06.590] - Perry Edwards

Well, thank you for having me. It was a good time, and I really appreciate it.