YHP123 Bible Truths.mp3

[00:00:04] **Dan Koch** Briefly, let me just remind you guys that my album is out under the moniker Havana Swim Club. It is sample-based indie dance music with some semi-tropical flair. We are listening to a little clip right now, and the links to Spotify and Apple Music and YouTube and all that stuff are in the show notes, so feel free to add it to your summer playlists or your study or work playlists. It's instrumental, so there's very few vocals and it's not that distracting. Now to today's episode with Heather. I explained quite a bit at the beginning with her, so I don't need to say much here other than that I love this stuff. I find her work so helpful. I hope that you will find it helpful as well. This actually makes two weeks in a row—last week with John Sanders and today with Heather Griffin, just talking with people who help me make sense of my experience of the world, the religious community I come from, etc. So you guys are in for an absolute treat, and I wish I could hear all this stuff for the first time again. OK.

[00:02:11] Heather Patton Griffin, thank you so much for joining me today. We're going to do a little more throat clearing than normal because it's hard to talk about how to think about the work that you have been doing here, right? Because you're working on a Masters. You're on your way to your kind of academic writing career, thinking career. But I think that what you're already working through is so interesting that I'm unwilling to wait for you to, like, do the proper book, you know?

[00:03:08] **Heather Griffin** [laughs] Thanks Dan. Yeah, I'm a middle-aged scholar, just finishing my master's degree, so I've lived some life before I went back to grad school and have mostly been doing informal ministry, ministering people, ministering to people that are like me. So I received a lot of help in my 20s by a church that was very trauma-focused before it was cool, and they were great at teaching practices. And I found that as I got older and moved away, I naturally gravitated towards helping people that shared a lot of the same struggles that I had when I was younger. So a lot of my work in graduate school is geared towards answering questions that have come up within pastoral care.

[00:03:52] **Dan Koch** Yeah, well that's a great way of kind of setting the stage for what you're talking about here, and I want to use a little analogy here for how people might think of this. So we're recording this on April 30th and last night was the NFL draft, and I know that because I'm a 49ers fan and they made this massive trade to get this third overall pick. But the first overall pick was this guy from Clemson, and everyone knew he would be the first pick. He played two years of college ball I think. When he was in high school, people started talking about him eventually being the number one pick in the NFL draft. I think of the work that you're doing now kind of like the Trevor guy's senior year of high school. I think that this stuff is going to be number one draft pick material in a couple of years when you've had time to make it official and, don't blush too much, but I'm so stoked about this project of yours. But it is early and you're working it out, and we're going to get through some of this terminology as you are making this thing coherent. I would describe it as, basically, a sociological map of evangelicalism, and the way that evangelicals interact with truth and communicating that truth to each other, and then the way that they're perceived by the outside world. It's a lot about epistemology. It's a lot about how we know things, and it's this awesome kind of map with a handful of these really helpful terms. Does that sound right to you?

[00:05:26] **Heather Griffin** Sure, yeah. It's only recently been on the horizon that I might pursue PhD work to write about these particular things. I've always thought about my interest as geared towards soul care, but the models of how we know and grow within soul care shape how we relate to our neighbors and how we think the world works. So in the ancient world, everybody thought that the way you understood the soul was going to be the foundation of how you understood how human life organizes. So a lot of the problems that we are seeing in white American evangelicalism have to do with these questions of how do we understand the nature of the human soul? How do we understand the mind, the heart, the body? How do we grow? So a lot of the things that I've been interested in for decades now have turned out to be incredibly relevant for these struggles that a lot of people are facing. A lot of the questions people are asking now is: how did this happen? Does it have to be this way? What happened to our witness? What do we do now? A lot of those things are relevant to questions I've been asking in the context of one-on-one discipleship, because these are playing out on a much larger scale.

[00:06:53] **Dan Koch** Right. There are two things that I love about that framing, specifically in terms of "this is coming out of pastoral care". Number one: the level of insight that I think you've got into what we might call the evangelical. It's both the mind, but it's also the social web. It's not just an individual thing, as people will see.

[00:07:17] **Heather Griffin** Right. It's our navigation system on the ground.

[00:07:19] **Dan Koch** Yes, exactly. I think your insight into that really, really rings true to my lived experience with evangelicals and within evangelicalism. So it makes sense that it comes sort of organically out of interacting with people on a one-to-one basis. And then also, I think you don't necessarily need to do a PhD. You could write this book and it will spread with a Masters. You know, if you want to go the proper academic route and get it all, fine, but either way, I know you're going to write this book eventually, and I'm excited to be talking about it with you early on before all that. So basically, you have a bunch of these terms that you have coined and we're going to go through them as a way of getting the layout of this map. The first the first one I want to talk about is you always capitalize the first letter of these terms to sort of—

[00:08:22] **Heather Griffin** It's an 18th century quirk.

[00:08:24] **Dan Koch** I love it. It actually is really nice because it shows the interaction of "Bible Truths" capital B, Capital T. So what are Bible Truths, Heather?

[00:08:35] **Heather Griffin** So I came up with the term Bible Truths as a shorthand for describing patterns in white evangelical evangelicalism that are derived from fundamentalism. So this gets to your epistemology interest. How do we know things? So it comes from this disposition where we see the Bible as this collection of facts—proof texting would come out of this. You could take verses out of context, make them into propositions and use them to build a logical argument. Most of scripture isn't actually organized that way, but there is a way of training ourselves and training each other to approach scripture that tends to look at things as atomized facts rather than as wholes. So a Bible fact would be some sort of scriptural nugget or propositional truth that people will treat as uninterpreted. If you're in a culture that leans leans towards Bible facts—which most cultures are a mix, you very rarely see something that is this extreme—you will see a tendency to treat scripture as if there is a plain reading that is uninterpreted. And there will be a suspicion of people who are reading scripture differently under the assumption that they're imposing some sort of agenda or cultural lens that is not there in scripture. Whereas my reading as someone who is accessing Bible facts is just, you know, pure clean eyes, I have no agenda. I am just reading with sincere faith.

[00:10:16] **Dan Koch** "Our church is just Bible-based" or "our church just reads the Bible". That's a perfect example of this Bible facts approach, right?

[00:10:25] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, and you'll often hear that when somebody is is tired of an argument and they just want to shut it down.

[00:10:32] **Dan Koch** Yes. So the the literary and scholarly term for this is the "perspicuity of scripture". Perspicuous means if you have it there in your language and you have, let's say, a seventh grade reading level or maybe even a fifth grade reading level, you can get it. You don't need anything else for God to speak direct truths to you through the plain text and a plain reading of the text, right?

[00:10:59] **Heather Griffin** Yes, it's a very populist understanding of scripture that could only come out of the Enlightenment. So the Enlightenment is in many ways elitist. You know, you still have these strong social hierarchies, but this idea that the common person possesses some sort of magical common sense to see reality the way it is is vastly appealing if you're somebody that has been lower down on the social hierarchy. And there's a good impulse that is underneath this. There's something that's true that's getting clouded with overconfident claims about our own ability to know. And I think the truth that's underneath this is that if you read the New Testament, it's incredibly subversive to Greco-Roman social hierarchies. You don't have to be born an elite. You don't even have to be born a man. You don't have to be born as a Roman. You could be a Scythian, you could be a Jew. You don't have to be born as a Jew. You could also be a Scythian or a barbarian—

[00:12:06] **Dan Koch** Or Samaritan, whatever. So there is a there is something about the Bible Truths. There's something sort of parallel to it that we would want to affirm. Something I'm careful to do is to not be elitist and to have a populist streak in me around things like prayer, direct experience of the divine. You know, there is a sense in which people with a lot of education can lord it over other people—can become jerks, can become sanctimonious, right? I'm guilty of this as somebody with a pretty good working intellect and who likes to spend a lot of time reading and thinking, you know, that's not the end. We're not the only people around, and God doesn't love us more than God loves people who are not into that stuff. So there is something good there.

[00:13:06] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, people that are intellectuals tend to be theorist. And I love theory. I love theory like I love a good map because I get lost easily. But you can know your way around a territory and not be particularly reflective about how you're moving around. So there are people in the world that are wonderful practitioners, that either don't have a particularly well-thought-out theory about what they're doing, but they're faithfully following Jesus, they're bearing good fruit. They're not getting published because they're not writing, and sometimes if they do have theories about what they're doing, they're not always the most helpful theories because our account of what we're doing has no necessary relationship to what we're actually doing.

[00:13:54] **Dan Koch** That is such a good and interesting point. Yeah, like if I were to interview some of these people you're describing—these people who really love God but who are swimming in some of these Bible Truth-type evangelical circles, the way they would explain what they're doing would be really unsatisfying to me and the listeners, because it's not actually what they're doing. Their description of what they're doing is not necessarily accurate. They're going to use the language of whatever people say around them and think that that's what they're doing. But they're actually maybe doing something a lot more complex and beautiful, right?

[00:14:29] **Heather Griffin** Exactly, which is why, in our efforts to protect ourselves from what has been harmful about certain theories or ways of naming the world, we need to be careful to not reduce people to their words because that will that will close us off from walking with people, observing, attending to what is helpful and what is unhelpful. It's its own sort of quest for certainty, just to write people off on the basis of theory.

[00:15:05] **Dan Koch** Fantastic. Heather, I love that. OK, but nonetheless, as a theory, Bible Truths is pretty shaky and doesn't actually really line up with the text that we are actually given.

[00:15:20] **Heather Griffin** It doesn't, and it gives people a false security because it's a kind of contractualism. Most of these things come out of a human desire to keep ourselves safe in a world that is very unsafe, in a world where people are not always trustworthy. So if you subscribe to a very simple view of scripture where "if I'm sincere and I read scripture, I'm not interpreting it, I'm just getting it basically as it is", if that's not actually what's going on and if our interpretation is shaped by how we've learned to relate to people through our families, through our culture, our language—if our interpretation is shaped by our church tradition or just by the modern world, then we're going to end up with certain conclusions and we're going to trust people that have that same formation. The explanation for why someone might agree with us is that they must be sincere as well, and their common sense must be operating correctly. It's rooted in this desperate fear that, A: we're going to get it wrong; God is going to be mad at us; the stakes are high, and, B: this fear that somebody is going to put one over on us.

[00:16:32] **Dan Koch** So you've already hinted at the next two terms kind of in that description; let's take them one at a time. The first one is Sanctified Common Sense. You said common sense earlier. So what do you mean when you talk about, again, capital S C and S; what is Sanctified Common Sense?

[00:16:51] **Heather Griffin** Sanctified Common Sense is a term that I occasionally do see in 19th century evangelical Sunday school and missionary publications. I don't know how widespread it was, but it comes from this concept of common sense that was wildly popular in the US in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it's this expectation that your common person basically sees reality more or less as it is. You don't need to have a fancy education to be fit to vote, for instance. So Sanctified Common Sense has built another layer on top of that, that this person with their "common man common sense" is a sincere believer in Jesus and therefore has experienced some sort of transformation as part of that relationship that makes their common sense even more accurate.

[00:17:48] **Dan Koch** So that's the sanctified part. Before we go to that, I do want to drill in on that sanctified bit, but there's actually an interesting point along the way there. You're talking about how this enlightenment idea of common sense related to voting, right? So at the beginning, anyway, any landholding, white male, whether or not they are educated, any of those people can vote, not just people born into high families or whatever. You can already tell how American this is, right? This is in our blood. That is interesting because it is a different explanation for democracy than I think has become more popular in the 20th century. Looking back at the founders, which was the explanation that I got, was something more like "the reason we have democracy is not because the common people see everything. It's more because that keeps elites from messing with the common people too much. So it's a check on their power that if they go too far, some large enough percentage of people will recognize that it's hurting them and will vote them out." But that's a different mechanism, right? That's actually a very different argument. They only have to see the world clear enough to know that it's screwing them over. They don't need to actually understand the mechanisms of government. Maybe as the world got more and more complex—we've got atomic weapons, we've got the Cold War and international diplomacy, we've got all these things that are undeniably complex—we're no longer saying the average person gets them. We're going to start saying the average person at least understands their own interests well enough to vote someone out that's against their interests. I don't know if you've thought about these two sort of arguments for that, but I noticed that as you were speaking.

[00:19:48] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, it doesn't start out with this hyper-confidence that we see all of reality, but it is an attempt to widen the scope of enlightenment, access to what I call a Magic Knowledge Receptor.

[00:20:07] **Dan Koch** I might need to add this in. Is this a capital M K R?

[00:20:11] **Heather Griffin** Oh yeah, capitalize all of it: Magic Knowledge Receptor. I've been using this for a few years and evangelicals are not the only ones that do this. One of the things that I think is very important for the people that are starting to deconstruct for the first time to understand is that just because they leave evangelicalism doesn't mean that the problems and and the vices that have deformed American evangelicalism—it doesn't mean that they've left those things. Those things have still shaped us. And those things are also part of the wider American culture. So this hyper confidence that there is some capacity in us that basically just receives reality as it is, people will use different terms for this based on their group. So my Magic Knowledge Receptor might be reason, but it also might be intuition or authenticity. Common sense is a big one. You'll still see this more among conservatives. They'll talk about common sense and reason. Progressives will sometimes talk about reason as well. Empathy is a huge one on the left.

[00:21:18] **Dan Koch** Empathy is a Magic Knowledge Receptor.

[00:21:21] **Heather Griffin** Empathy is a Magic Knowledge Receptor. It's this capacity we have to access reality and to relate properly to reality. So if you if you go on the NPR website and pop in "empathy" as a search term and look at how the word functions, empathy is going to save us all. [laughs]

[00:21:42] **Dan Koch** Yeah.

[00:21:45] **Heather Griffin** So, I mean, we we tend to think of the Enlightenment as rooted in reason, but there's different enlightenments, and they all go back to this idea that we have some sort of internal knowledge receptor that corresponds to the structure of reality. And this actually goes much further back. This goes back to Greco-Roman philosophy and the idea of the Spermatikos Logos. You have this bit of fire in you that is made of the essence of God that makes us capable of reason and speech.

[00:22:15] **Dan Koch** Yeah, I was I was thinking Plato and Socrates and how through the work of philosophy—which was closer to people following a rabbi, or monks following a religious leader—you could open yourself up to the forms. But you've got something in you that lets you see that stuff for what it really is, and that would be a little different than what we're talking about in a more modern Western culture where we think we can do it immediately. They would put a lot of work into doing that, but they did think there was something in them that led to that.

[00:22:53] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, their understanding of whether your intellect could harmonize with the structure of the cosmos was much more contemplative and it was much more character-based. So you couldn't do that if you were a vicious person. By vicious, I mean like if your character was shaped by vices. You had to be a virtuous person. So you're right that when this pops up in the modern period, eventually what it becomes is this confidence that the person that I am now can see reality well enough, more or less as it is.

[00:23:33] **Dan Koch** First of all, take me back to Aristotelian days when it comes to this question. I'm far more convinced that it takes virtue and good habits and whatever to see the world clearly. Just a quick application in talking with people; I'm training to be a therapist and having conversations, especially with friends around boundaries with immature parents or other people in one's life, and some of these people, especially if they are evangelicals and highly steeped in this world, they really do see the world quite poorly, I think. And they are convinced that they see it through God's eyes. So to say, "hey, I have a boundary" or "I'd like you to join me in therapy" or whatever, if they're not into it, it's like, "why are you going against God? I see the world." And then the person, my friend or whatever is left there going, "I'm pretty sure you don't". It becomes a nonstarter because it's so deep. It's about what we see and how we know it and how much confidence we have. And if the stakes are so high, as you said, if God's going to get mad at us if we don't police the fort, and if somebody seems to have an interesting or intriguing idea, they might be deceiving us, that might be the enemy—

[00:25:00] **Heather Griffin** Because Satan masquerades as an angel of light, Dan.

[00:25:02] **Dan Koch** Exactly. And the heart is deceitful above all things. So, those things keep from engagement with some other way of knowing or some other facts or something like that, and it becomes almost intractable.

[00:25:18] **Heather Griffin** Right. So with Sanctified Common Sense, because it encourages us to be extremely confident in our capacity to view scripture according to some sort of plain meaning and see all of reality as it is because we have sincere faith, it makes it very difficult for us to learn and to troubleshoot our practices so it collapses maturity to what people in power in a particular community can achieve. Because if you basically have everything you need right now to figure out what's going on, your perception is only going to be as good as your current level of maturity.

[00:26:03] **Dan Koch** Will you say that again about "it collapses 'what can be done?' into 'what can be done by those currently in power?'" That phrase jumped out to me. It made me think of the John MacArthurs and John Pipers of the world. It's like if those guys can't sort it out, then no one can, so we'll just we'll just keep the same authorities. We'll just go back to the Wayne Grudem systematic theology book like we don't need a new one. That's where I went. Is that kind of what you're saying?

[00:26:38] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. Alright, why don't we go ahead and talk about Sincerity Culture and we'll build up to that. So Sincerity Culture is this over-evaluation of our own sincerity. So because of how we talk about faith, faith is this means of salvation. How do you know if you have faith, you know? Well, what do we have faith in? We have faith in Jesus as revealed in scripture. So how do I know if I mean it enough? You, of course, get confirmation from the people around you that are telling you that you're either doing it right or not. But if you have the correct beliefs and you mean them as hard as you can, that's got to be it.

[00:27:28] **Dan Koch** Right, because there's no external marker. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. OK, so I can't look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart, and so how do I know what God's seeing? Sincerity in your view, basically "does that work for me? Well, I really mean it."

[00:27:48] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. It's an intensifier of faith. The inner witness of our own sincerity tends to be treated as a stand-in for the Holy Spirit or as evidence that the spirit is working as long as your sincerity is directed towards the right Bible facts.

[00:28:08] **Dan Koch** This makes sense of the critiques on sites like the Gospel Coalition and others of these kind of deconstruction journeys and the interviews that Pete Enns will have or Rachel Held Evans while she was with us that,

"well, these people are following some kind of a journey, sure, but we're not going to count that sincerity as authentic." So their authenticity doesn't matter because it's not sincerity toward the right Bible Truths.

[00:28:42] **Heather Griffin** Exactly.

[00:28:43] **Dan Koch** It's some other more nebulous, Oprah-like sincerity, like "true to yourself," And for someone in this world, being true to oneself is bullshit. It's worthless. "True to yourself" is true to the Bible Truths. That's what "true to yourself" is. That's what God wants from us. Anything else is a potential deceiver to take us off of that path.

[00:29:07] **Heather Griffin** Right. And it's important to recognize that these concerns do make a lot of sense. If you look at the historical enemies of evangelicalism. If you look at New England transcendentalism in the 19th century, that's where a lot of our modern concept of spirituality develops. And there is this hyper-confidence in what has become a more progressive knowledge receptor—that my authenticity gives me access to the ground of reality. And just as there is a lack of awareness within fundamentalism that our cultural location shapes our interpretations, shapes our desires, shapes everything about how we interpret reality, there can be a naivety on the other side in progressivism that assumes that if I am authentic enough, I'm going to more or less see reality as it is and the problem is these other people.

[00:30:09] **Dan Koch** Yeah, there's a kind of secular Sanctified Common Sense or New Age transcendentalist Sanctified Common Sense. That's so interesting. Can we do a couple of minutes on "if we had to choose", I don't think we should have to choose between one of those two, but if we had to I might still choose the the secular version because at least it's got fewer pre-commitments to it or something like that.

[00:30:41] **Heather Griffin** I don't know that it does, because you're always going to end up expressing this and exploring this through communities that are helping you narrate it. So the commitment to individualism is very strong there, just as it is in its own way in fundamentalism, because, again, I am only contracting in fellowship with other Christians that see reality based in the same firm foundations of their Sanctified Common Sense and they're coming to the same conclusions that I am. Ultimately something within us is the guarantor of reality.

[00:31:17] **Dan Koch** Yeah, that's so interesting. I want to spend a minute on that bit. I just want to concretize this a little bit here. I know people like this—mostly I'm thinking of friends' parents—who are really steeped in this evangelical world. And yeah, some of them really do have a very hard time interacting with anybody—family members or outside—who have not come to the same conclusions with their Sanctified Common Sense about the world. And they might even distinguish between "friends" and those with whom they fellowship. They could have a "friend" who's not a Christian, but there's a real hard line there because anything that a "friend" brings to the table is going to be suspect if it doesn't line up with the Bible Truths all agreed upon with our Sanctified Common Sense in our little community.

[00:32:21] **Heather Griffin** These are questions that everybody goes through in terms of who can we trust. Who can we let in to shape us?

[00:32:29] **Dan Koch** Yeah, and that's why this is basically a conversation about epistemology, right? And one thing that I've noticed change in myself over time is I've had a drastic change in the type of qualifications that it takes for me to trust someone. I'll give an example in more sociopolitical terms, and this is where I know that I diverge from a lot of my listeners, but when I start to pick up a real strong activist vibe from a thinker, I start to discount them. And that is because of various understandings I've come to about political and moral psychology and the extent to which I think this person might be in an echo chamber. Therefore, if they can't tell that they're in an echo chamber, then what else can't they tell, and how much are they discounting the views of those with whom they disagree? And so they drop in my estimation, but that would be different than how I was raised. What I was raised with was, "if I can tell that someone's really on fire for the Lord", for instance, "then I will take them more seriously" and "really on fire for the Lord" is just a religious version of political activism. That's a very similar type of quality. So I've actually come to discount the quality that I was raised to really value in a person.

[00:33:52] **Heather Griffin** It sounds like your concern with both groups is in this expectation that our zealous attachment and affirmation of true things should transform the world if we tell other people about it. So you don't actually have to know how to do anything. You just have to believe the true things and be willing to tell other people about it. That doesn't tell us anything, necessarily, about your character or how you came to believe those things or how you behave differently as a result of your beliefs. And it doesn't tell us whether you're somebody that can help. That's that's the great danger with people that are very wounded by fundamentalism. They have the same extreme needs for self-protection from authoritarian intrusion as their fundamentalist parents and communities that they're reacting against. And so there can be a sort of recreation of a purity culture in progressivism. And this endless need to—

[00:35:00] **Dan Koch** Police the boundaries.

[00:35:01] **Heather Griffin** To police the boundaries and to go after people that disagree with you. It doesn't make us into people that can build a better world. It doesn't mean that we are now people that can help, because now we are really the people that see the true things and made them so hard, because when knowledge is really easy and everybody has access to it, and you share the true thing with somebody that is in darkness and they don't see it, it doesn't land, then what can you do? What's left? Because if their Magic Knowledge Receptor is working properly, they should just be able to receive the truth right now as it is whether they trust you or not, and they should trust you because look at how sincere you are.

[00:35:51] **Dan Koch** I wonder, can we apply this lens of what we're talking about here to highly active woke social media posting? You know, the person who is posting two to five stories a day on racial justice and has been consistently since George Floyds death. Not that there's anything inherently wrong with that, but there's often a disconnect, and I'm actually starting to see some really interesting conversations around this coming from, for instance, the black community on the difference between a "white ally" that just posts a lot on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook versus the kind of actual sacrifices that many white people need to be willing to make for things to change. My favorite example is always public school funding. It's very, very hard to get largely white neighborhoods with very well-funded public schools for their children to be willing to vote for any kind of thing that would share that funding and have it less linked to property taxes. My guess is that the vast majority of people who are doing these postings that have children in public schools are not also advocating for, or voting for, measures that would reduce their child's school's funding. Anything that I have ever posted about racial justice—and I post less than the type of person I'm describing, but I post about it—none of those posts have cost me one dollar or one iota of my own privilege. I still post about them sometimes because I get emotional and I want to express myself, and that's a good human thing to do. I think that what you're talking about is a possible lens to look at this where it's a similar perspective as the fundamentalist evangelical, like, "here's the truth. I see it. Why can't you see it?" And that's the main thing is the truths that we obviously see.

[00:37:56] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, that when our consciousness is transformed, and we all believe the true things with all of our authenticity and sincerity, when enough people believe the true things, the world will transform on its own. It's this idea that society is an aggregate of individuals and their beliefs, and to get people to share posts isn't that hard, but like you said, to get people to actually do the unsexy work behind the scenes of shifting systems, that's way more difficult than people proclaiming their sincere beliefs, which may be true and helpful, but the transformation of knowledge does not, in and of itself, lead to transformation of character or of our patterns of living in the world.

[00:38:49] **Dan Koch** It's not nothing, though, right? It's not completely unrelated. Like I think about climate change, for instance. The opinion on climate change is shifting more and more towards people realizing it's a bigger and bigger deal. And it is true that if, let's say, at some point 80 percent of Americans understand that there is a lethal threat 20 years down the road for billions of people, then that will have effects on policy. It will have some effects, right? It's not unrelated, but it isn't the quickest way to getting the kind of policies we need at the governmental level, nationally and internationally, to reduce carbon emissions.

[00:39:32] **Heather Griffin** Right. And part of the danger of being formed in a culture—and this is not just evangelicalism, this is really all of white America—in which we are encouraged to be incredibly overconfident about our ability to see reality is that we tend not to slow down and learn from authority. We tend not to slow down and look

at who's been actually doing the work already and how can I learn how to support that? Because if you already see clearly, then you're only going to pay attention to the options that are currently on your radar. Well, what what if some of the more helpful stuff is not stuff that you would know how to look for?

[00:40:12] **Dan Koch** Well, that one just seems to be a human problem to me.

[00:40:18] **Heather Griffin** I mean, it's a human problem, but we institutionalize it pretty badly.

[00:40:23] **Dan Koch** It's a bigger problem for American individualists than other folks.

[00:40:28] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. There are cultures that can take this into account and can train people to be humble and to be aware that we have to learn from people that know how to do things, and that the marker of whether there's somebody we should listen to is not just "do they believe the correct things", but "what difference does this make in their actions, and what effects did their actions have in the world?" So part of the challenge with Sanctified Common Sense and with Sincerity Culture and evangelicalism is that it collapses the ceiling of maturity to what people within the community can achieve, which is usually just being white, middle class, employed, vaguely genial. You are allowed to be angry if it's against liberals, but just basically pleasant. You don't have to necessarily know how to do anything else in the world other than what your average Joe can do.

[00:41:32] **Dan Koch** That is so interesting. I'm sitting here, obviously not an expert on this, but I want to try contrasting it with the black church and how, in that community, my sense is that pastors and other community leaders of any kind are tested by their actions more, maybe because it's a natural result of those actions being more needed in a poorer society, in a society that has to be more tight-knit and take care of each other because the larger systems are not for them. So I don't get the sense that there's so much emphasis on ideological purity in in the black community. And, you know, I'm not in the black community, but I feel like there's something to that. Do you have any thoughts there?

[00:42:21] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. I think it would depend on the black church tradition and on the local congregation, so there is a lot of diversity under that umbrella. I see what you're talking about, and I think it does have to do with the greater awareness of interdependence and a greater valuation of wisdom. If wisdom is not just propositions and sincerity, then you do have to care about, "does this person know how to take care of the sick? Do they know what to do if somebody dies? Do they know how to pray for you when you're in your deepest pain?" Also, there tends to be more of a vetting system within cultures that have a strong valuation of wisdom, so you apprentice people. Before they turn you loose to pray over somebody, you've got to be standing next to the deaconess for 10 years while she prays. And sometimes she prays for you, and then through that process of being prayed for and observing wise, mature people pray, you learn what to do and what not to do.

[00:43:30] **Dan Koch** I've been thinking about wisdom traditions a lot recently and thinking of them in terms of human evolution, mostly cultural evolution—not sort of like pre-biological humans, but we've been biologically human for about 200,000 years and thinking about wisdom traditions in the context of survival and how in a situation like that, when your life is so much more precarious, your tribe safety and provision is so much more precarious, the wisdom of the ages over time is just— You know, it's true that a stupid teenager who doesn't listen to elders can get in a drunk driving car accident and they can die, but a lot of times they don't die because cars are very safe and there are a lot of buffers to learn from one's mistakes. If you drink too much and you have to have your stomach pumped at a party, most people don't die from that. They get their stomach pumped. Or the old gag of, "I can't drink tequila because the first time I got really wasted was on tequila and now it makes me sick". I used to hear that one in my 20s from people all the time. There are so many more buffers around making mistakes as a young person now, but if you're a Maori tribesman in 1150, you're just going to die and you might even get your family killed. Right. Because you might let in a wild boar that doesn't only gore your stomach, but gores your sister's stomach, and the need for wisdom when survival is much more precarious—if that's true, then you take a poor community versus a wealthy community, and of course, it's still safer maybe than it was to be alive in 30,000 B.C. but in a poor community, it's not as safe as it is in my community. And the wisdom there is going to be more valuable and we sort of lose something. We certainly lose something epistemologically by not needing the wisdom traditions so much because our technocratic solutions are sort of buffering things for us.

[00:45:46] **Heather Griffin** Well, I would say that these common sense cultures, that give us this overconfidence in our immediate ability to perceive reality if we are sincerely believing the right things—that is a type of tradition, and it's not a fruitful wisdom, but it is an attempt to guard people from error. It's not a successful one.

[00:46:12] **Dan Koch** Yes, you're right, but it's exactly the same motivation, right?

[00:46:15] **Heather Griffin** Yeah.

[00:46:16] **Dan Koch** But we might say the dangers are less about physical survival, and they are about spiritual survival. You said earlier the stakes are high. God could get mad at us. We could be out. We could be the goats in hell, and someone's going to get one over on us. So it's probably, psychologically speaking, the same module that we use to keep our tribe away from wolves and other warring tribes and extreme weather. But we're just now applying it to Satan and hell and the forces of evil.

[00:46:51] **Heather Griffin** And you have to have a narrative about why other people don't see the same thing. So you have to have a pretty strong sense of enemy, even if you wouldn't use that term; you have to have some scapegoats. Here's a different way to put this: if knowledge is easy, and somebody refuses to receive the true thing that I sincerely tell them, what is wrong with them? They must be particularly bad or they're just not elect.

[00:47:30] **Dan Koch** If those are your two options, depending on your theology, you might lean one way or the other, right?

[00:47:37] **Heather Griffin** Right. But where do you go from there? I mean, you get to write that person off or eventually just alienate the relationship because you're not actually forming trust with them; they're not going to trust you any more than you trust them.

[00:47:54] **Dan Koch** This is what's so sad about this to me—and I would include the kind of progressive fundamentalist mindset that we've been talking about as well—that we have evolved these modules for protection, and they have worked because we're here, but they're just not true anymore. It is not true, I believe, that the person who leaves fundamentalism for some other pasture is dead to God and in danger of bringing souls to hell with them, so it's sad to have this system—this way of being and moving around in the world—lead to so many broken relationships, chances that people could still be close to each other.

[00:48:44] **Heather Griffin** One of the things I appreciate about your podcast is that you are so careful to honor that people in these systems are not cartoon villains that know that they're deceived, that know these things aren't true, and are just lording their power over people. That's really not what it's like for most people in those worlds. People are trying to do the best that they can and they're trying to be faithful, and there's often a misplaced integrity, and it can be very hard to sort through what is really Jesus. So it's not like people don't know Jesus; Jesus still shows up in all sorts of places where people don't have great doctrine and don't have great practice, and if we associate the work of Jesus—things that we know are him—if we associate that work with the structures of the community that we're in, then it feels like we're being disloyal to Jesus if we start to push back against these structures, particularly if these structures, say you can't have access to Jesus unless you believe it exactly this way, because the Bible clearly says this. So part of what happens is the world becomes very small. If we are really confident that the people that we are now, at our current level of maturity, can access reality as it is, because the goal is not to let anything in that could harm us. That's a good goal, but do we actually have the wisdom to discern what is and is not helpful or harmful? A lot of our strategies to protect ourselves actually let harmful things in and keep helpful things out, so we all build these walls. But when we think we see reality as it is already, then you don't have to care about history, because anybody with Sanctified Common Sense in history, of course, saw things the way that I do.

[00:50:53] **Dan Koch** That is how we can so easily say, "it's just the early church" and then fast forward to us in 2020 in our Bible church.

[00:51:00] **Heather Griffin** Exactly, and that's why that's what you have to have a strong anti-Catholic polemic and a lot of fundamentalism [laughs].

[00:51:07] **Dan Koch** Right, because you have to take out 1,500 years of church history—or 1,200, whatever you want to call it—you have to really discount those 1,200 years there or else your story doesn't work anymore.

[00:51:21] **Heather Griffin** Well either the church had to just be uniformly, cartoonishly bad in keeping people from scripture because if people had scripture all the sincere people would have seen what we see, or everybody—

[00:51:34] **Dan Koch** Which ignores the fact that they just weren't literate.

[00:51:36] **Heather Griffin** Exactly; you have to be literate.

[00:51:39] **Dan Koch** We didn't have a printing press yet, that's a better explanation, but yeah.

[00:51:44] **Heather Griffin** Or there is just something so wrong-headed and obtuse about Catholics who now have access to scripture but don't see what we see. You have to have some sort of "other" that is willfully blind and obtuse to the truth. It is really true that we can deceive ourselves. There's no part of our perception that is not agenda-laden. We all have a way we need the story to turn out. So part of what happens, if you've been in a community that oversimplifies knowledge and growth, and you've been invested in this for all of your adult life, and your kids are growing up, and they start to express some resistance to what you believe or the kids or not alright—the kids are struggling, the kids are drinking, the kids are having sex, the kids have eating disorders, the kids are not flourishing—what do you do? Because if knowledge is easy, think how shameful it is to get it wrong. And where do you go from there?

[00:53:00] **Dan Koch** It explains why, often, the behavior is just like copious Facebook article forwards and email forwards. Because what's needed is not on this view, a conversation to meet as equals, to parse out ideas, to be curious about each other—that's not what you need. Like, "look, it's not this stuff's not hard, kids. You were raised with the truth. It's easy to see it. I'm going to forward you emails that explain it again, and that should do it. There's anything else that needs to be done."

[00:53:35] **Heather Griffin** "One more John Piper sermon should take care of it". Yeah, because growth is really easy. So you never actually have to experience transformation as long as you agree that the sins that you're struggling with are bad and periodically rededicate your life or do whatever, as long as you continue to believe the right things. If you never overcome the things that you're enslaved to, you're still basically fine, and that will be narrated as "some things just don't get better until we go to heaven", We understand how those habits develop, because in growth there is often a process, There can be times where it doesn't feel like we're getting better, but when you when you get to adulthood and you look around your church community and nobody is getting better—or the people that do seem to be getting better can't tell you why they were getting better or what you can do to also get better in any sort of helpful way—which doesn't mean that there isn't real growth happening because, again, Jesus is showing up.

[00:54:44] **Dan Koch** Of course.

[00:54:46] **Heather Griffin** But the way that we narrate our growth and our freedom will often be through these testimony tropes. "So I just finally trusted God enough and hated my sin enough, and I got better."

[00:55:01] **Dan Koch** It's Sincerity Culture. So another one of your terms that relates to Sincerity Culture is Evangelical Insta-Trust. I feel like we've been dancing around this, but can you define that, please?

[00:55:15] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. Evangelical Insta-Trust is this expectation that people who don't know us—don't know our characters, have no experience of us—should just go ahead and trust us. They should let us into their lives; they should divulge personal details about themselves; they should let us speak into their struggles. I've been in church communities where they have used the phrase, "trust is given; it's not earned."

[00:55:46] **Dan Koch** Where does this come from? What's the motivation behind this assumption?

[00:55:51] **Heather Griffin** I think it's the assumption that if I am an authority in the church, my character has already been vetted. That would be nice if that were true, but it's it's not often the case; the standards of vetting are only going to be as good as the standard of maturity in the community, and if anybody can get a maturity badge if they believe the true Bible facts with an appropriate amount of earnestness at around the age of 25, then that's not a great vetting system.

[00:56:28] **Dan Koch** Yeah, it's so interesting that that does kind of tie in with the low church approach and the, not necessarily, seminary needed, and this idea that—which I always defend on its merits because we don't just need elites all the time—that's not what everybody always needs. We need pastors who are just like regular Joes—Joes and Janes—that can relate to those people and help them flourish and get through life

[00:56:59] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, I mean, ideally our elders should be wise and mature people with a track record of fruit, fruit and growth, who have great practices and really rich descriptions of those practices, but if you have to choose between a good practitioner and a good theorist, I will take a good practitioner every time. I care much more about what you do than about your ability to describe it. [00:59:47]-[0.0s]

[00:59:47] **Dan Koch** So taking this Evangelical Insta-Trust to the—I pick on boomers so much, but the email forwards or the Facebook video forwarding in the Messenger app or whatever—these these sort of missiles shot back at the younger folks. That's not the only version of what we're talking about, but that's just the one I tend to think of because it's so common these days, especially with such an emerging divide along generational lines around anything sociopolitical or theological, and especially the theology around the sociopolitical issues like homosexuality, climate change, whatever. So how does Evangelical Insta-Trust play into the email forwarding? Is it like, "look, I'm your uncle, or I'm your 'insert family friend or family member here', and I've been in a church for 20 years so what I forward is true", is that kind of how it's operating?

[01:01:10] **Heather Griffin** I mean, there's certainly the expectation that they should be trusted and that they have some sort of authority there, because their community has often explicitly given them authority or tacitly given them authority. If you get the maturity badge, if you are treated like a wise elder—whether you actually are or not—there's this incredible sense of pseudo-dignity that we can get from that. That's a really nice, comfortable world to be in. "The world is explainable and small and I'm a master of it. I know everything that I need to know." So, again, it's this idea that "if I sincerely believe true things and I share them with you, you should be able to receive them".

[01:02:01] **Dan Koch** Let's say the child or nephew or niece or whoever the person is—let's say they send something back, and they send back a counterargument or something—how does the elder interpret the response that they got? Is it that the younger person has not earned the membership, the maturity badge, the Insta-Trust badge, and that's why the counterargument—how much of it is that? How much of it is this fear about the stakes being high and God being displeased or being deceived? How do you think about those two? Those seem like two possible factors here, both of which are within your view, but separable from each other.

[01:02:56] **Heather Griffin** I think by the time someone is sending out the John MacArthur, John Piper sermon emails, the person to whom the email is addressed is already outside the circle of trust. They are already seen as deficient somehow in their faith. So the most common explanation for why someone has stopped trusting the beliefs of their evangelical or fundamentalist elders is that they have been led away by their feelings into liberalism or they just love their sin.

[01:03:34] **Dan Koch** Yeah, it's either that they want to not stop sinning or they have caved to liberal culture.

[01:03:40] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, the feelings thing is really big.

[01:03:44] **Dan Koch** Yeah, I'm counting feelings under "caved to culture" because you could describe caving to culture as a purely intellectual exercise or a purely peer pressure exercise or whatever, but tied up with liberal culture

is a feelings culture, so part and parcel of caving to culture is giving in to your feelings—not just doing what's expected of you by your liberal peers.

[01:04:15] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, evangelicals and fundamentalists—depending on the stream; it really does vary—I would say evangelicals that are more formed by fundamentalism tend to have this hyper-confidence about their minds—that somehow their minds are less deformed by sin than their feelings. Sometimes they'll space that out with mind versus heart, and most people are not stable in their scriptural interpretations here, but in the 19th century, we increasingly began to associate "heart" in English with "feelings" and to break that up with "mind" as "brain" and to treat those in opposition. And tat goes back to some older platonic oppositions, but we read that back onto scripture. So in the 19th century, you'll start to see readings of Jeremiah with "the heart is deceitful above all things" to police people that are talking about their feelings. Where you wouldn't have necessarily seen that before, the anthropology was more unified, so if you have a problem with your feelings, you also have a problem with your mind. So you get you start to get these extreme reactions back and forth, but people disagreeing with Sanctified Common Sense—which is, of course, sincerely aligned with the Bible facts—is evidence that they must be deceived by their feelings, which, of course, you never have to listen to. Your feelings will deceive you. But that also lets the people in power in communities baptize their own anxieties as discernment.

[01:06:00] **Dan Koch** Oh, my gosh. "They baptized their own anxieties as discernment." Heather, that's a phrase. Underline that one.

[01:06:14] **Heather Griffin** Think of the gatekeeping that goes on where Albert Mohler sternly will take any any Christian view that he disagrees with and say, "did God really say..." as if we're about to go down the slippery slope? There's this way of talking about outsiders as "liberals" and "people that are no longer one of us, and maybe were never really one of us" and so you learn through this repeated Pavlovian training—and a lot of evangelicalism—to dread ever getting anything wrong doctrinally, to ever disagree with the scriptural reading of your elders—which of course is not an interpretation, it's just what the Bible says—because you know how you'll be talked about. And again, the stakes are so high because they're going to hell as eternal conscious torment, as plainly seen in scripture. So for me, that feeling lives in my gut—this type of anxiety and of fear that was instilled in me, of 'being a liberal' was the term that was most frequently assigned to it. And so that made me afraid of asking certain types of questions, and I was not around mean people; I was around really kind people that absolutely meant well.

[01:07:41] **Dan Koch** That's my story, too.

[01:07:42] **Heather Griffin** They were trying to help me.

[01:07:43] **Dan Koch** I couldn't admit to myself that I was really a liberal Christian until I started contemplative practice, and that direct experience of the joy and peace of God flooding me in prayer, in meditation, was the necessary thing I needed to be able to admit that, yeah, I'm theologically liberal; I am, in the classic sense of it, a liberal Christian. Before that, I was like, "well, I'm a Christian who just thought about hell a little differently" or "I think maybe I'm thinking about gay questions differently" or "maybe I don't need inerrancy quite the same" or "(progressive revelation) that will solve my Canaanite problem". Once I felt so assured of God's acceptance of me—because why would I have that feeling? Why would God give me that feeling commensurate with these intuitions, these theological intuitions, if those were going to send me to hell? It doesn't make any sense—then I finally was able to go, "oh, OK, this is who I am. So I'll just do this well, and I'll be open to arguments, but I can admit it now.' It's kind of surprising to me now how long that took to admit that because this anxiety was by, again, generally good people; I had very few nutcases in my life—a handful, and they were mostly in school and not church—but it goes so deep that that implicit anxious message is communicated about as well as anything is ever communicated to anybody.

[01:09:31] **Heather Griffin** It is a very successful shaping of the affections.

[01:09:35] **Dan Koch** I was thinking of another example. You mentioned Albert Mohler, but also all of this stuff around Elissa Childers and other people's emerging careers on warning signs that your church is becoming progressive. That feels like a perfect example of baptizing their own anxieties as discernment, as spiritual discernment, because it's interesting that stuff only works for people because they all already agree. Because they don't really have an

argument. There's never an argument about the truth claims. They don't ever say something like "here's why progressive Christians are wrong". They have a couple of things; they can quote verses, they can talk about church history, and they can quote previous Christian thinkers that are approved within whatever circle they're in—

[01:10:34] **Heather Griffin** Fairly selectively.

[01:10:35] **Dan Koch** Fairly selectively. Everybody loves Augustine. Everybody can appeal to Augustine—some people, Aquinas; other people, Calvin—but there's never an argument on them other than maybe an apologist, like a William Lane Craig, who's arguing for something a lot less specific than these more evangelical leaders are arguing for. There's never an argument about the data or the scientific facts or a philosophical argument; it's just an appeal to the text and to the history of the interpretation of that text. That's kind of it. It's really the only weapon they've got, because it's really just about anxiety, about getting it wrong and fear of God judging, and fear of being led astray by things that are not approved within the Sanctified Common Sense of these Bible Truths that we all are sincere about.

[01:11:38] **Heather Griffin** And it's the goodness of God. It becomes bound up in our ability to see clearly.

[01:11:43] **Dan Koch** What do you mean by that?

[01:11:46] **Heather Griffin** In a lot of these traditions, there's charismatic versions of this that I feel less comfortable describing; I am a charismatic, but I'm from an Anglican tradition which doesn't look quite the same as Pentecostal traditions. Within most of the fundamentalist-inflected forms of white evangelicalism that we see, they're cessationists. They don't believe that the Holy Spirit does much of anything other than help convict you of the truth of the Bible facts. So if you're confronted with the prospect that you've gotten something significantly wrong, and everybody that you trust and recognize as someone who also sincerely believes the Bible facts has also gotten this wrong, where do you go from there? Because the goodness of God is then at stake in that. It's not like people haven't meant it hard enough. Often they have been doing the best they can to trust God and not trust what they see and not trust their own feelings and not trust the world. They've been doing everything that people they trusted told them to do in the name of Jesus, and all of that made sense given what they believed in—the options that were visible to them from their magical common sense. So if you've been doing that for 20 or 30 years, and somebody tells you that you that you may have gotten it wrong, the whole thing falls apart if you consider that. That's too scary, because what do you have to replace that with?

[01:13:31] **Dan Koch** When sincerity is the main mechanism—sincere belief of the Bible Truths—it presents a particularly hard problem for people who have fallen away from the faith that you really thought were Christians at the time. This becomes a particular anxiety, right? "How is this possible? Could I lose that sense?" How do you look at that phenomenon of anxiety about former Christians who've fallen away?

[01:14:04] **Heather Griffin** There's often not a lot of difference to distinguish between your average—I don't want to be a jerk; tell me tell me if this sounds too harsh. When we identify with somebody that is like us, and then they change, it's a threat to us—especially against this context where you don't necessarily see a lot of transformation. So if the standard of maturity in your community is to be sincere about the right Bible facts, and once you are sincere about the Bible facts and this manifests in your life as basic, white, middle class, flourishing,—you have you have your suburban home, you have your marriage, you go on in the occasional mission trip—what else can be asked of you? There's not like a whole lot of chasing growth past that.

[01:15:09] **Dan Koch** Yeah, evangelicals do not become oblates of local monasteries and get a daily rule of life that they follow; there's a low ceiling in a lot of these—

[01:15:22] **Heather Griffin** There's a very low ceiling of maturity, so it's not unusual to be struggling with anxiety or depression or a compulsive sexual behavior or drinking or struggle with eating disorders or just be in a lot of pain or struggling with the effects of abuse. And to be trying to follow Jesus, to be doing everything you've been told to do—and you can do this for decades and you get to a point a lot of times in your 30s or 40s where you look around and you realize, "I don't want to be like any of these people that are 10, 20 years older than I am. I don't want their marriage." Especially when you find out what their marriages are actually like. Now, that's not everybody in the

church; there are usually one or two marriages that are really solid and loving, but when you get to the point where you don't want to be like the leaders, that starts lurking behind your head. Some other things tend to be going on there. A lot of people with kids are taught to narrate the stress of their marriage in their 20s and 30s, when their kids are young, as "it's just a season" and their marriage starts to take on a lot of wear and tear and they're not growing the way they thought that they would be growing, even though everybody is sending them the message that they're doing everything right. It's really scary when you get to that point, and you start to see people fall away; their marriages fall apart, they lose their faith. And these are often people that we were fairly close to. And what do you what do you do with that? Because if you were actually close to this person and know some of their struggles, you probably identify with some of them. And there's just not the resources in the community to move on. If you're afraid of your doubts because you've been taught that doubt is bad, and you've never been taught how to pray or connect to Jesus in those doubts, and you often don't want to pray because you think Jesus is mad at you, and you don't want to read scripture because Paul always sounds angry, then what do you do? It's not just that that marriages fail or people fall away; it's that you don't see them get better afterwards. Or when people do reconcile, it's often not in a healthy way and you're like, "this has been kind of papered over and rushed."

[01:18:00] **Dan Koch** It would make sense that somebody in that low place, having seen that around them, they have a choice, and it's not so simple, but you either expand things out—you break down some of those walls and you look to other ways of knowing—or you dig deeper into your sincere commitment to Bible Truths and you become more of a zealot around that stuff.

[01:18:28] **Heather Griffin** Well, there can often be very understandable reasons for that. A lot of the pushback against purity culture now does not tend to take into account how destructive their parents' sexual experiences were as Boomers.

[01:18:46] **Dan Koch** Oh, totally. '60s and '70s sexual culture, right. That's why that generation was so receptive to purity culture—because it seemed like the alternative. Of course, now we can say, "well, there is another alternative," but at the time, yeah— There's really good accounts of this, in Annie Dillard's writing and nonfiction authors who are that age, of how there became a culture, especially on the left, of so much drinking and so much sleeping around. And these are parents of children. You know, they see some of that. That kind of experience might be parents in the '50s and '60s and then they try and emulate something like that with the "free love" stuff and it doesn't work. Sexual communes were not a stable force in society. It did not work for 99% of people.

[01:19:54] **Heather Griffin** So many women that were gaslit into sleeping with men in order to express their liberation.

[01:20:00] **Dan Koch** One of my favorite things to do is to look at the dudes in that archival footage of hippie "love ins" and whatever, and be like, "80 percent of those dudes just want to get laid and they are putting on bell-bottoms and doing what they got to do to get laid." I don't know what the motivations are for the women, but I think about that in terms of ancient temple prostitution religious things. These "religious beliefs" or "cultural beliefs"—I'm using big air quotes here—are very convenient for these libido-driven males, having been one in my 20s and in my late teens. I'm sure a lot of ancient Greek men "genuinely believed" that they needed Athena's help by having sex with a temple prostitute. I'm sure they were very, very devout, just like those hippie dudes in 1968. I don't know.

[01:21:01] **Heather Griffin** I think it's a mixed bag. Most cultures outside of the West have tended to treat drugs and sex as a means of connecting with the spiritual realm, and people do have experiences that are not really nameable in these sort of reductive terms of "I only want to have sex" but I do think that's probably going on with some people. I'm totally interested in how purity culture and reactions to it are going to keep the pendulum swinging back and forth. Alright, so you're in fundamentalism. You see somebody you identify with fall away. What do you do? Most people are just trying to hold on to Jesus in whatever way they can. Often people that leave are not instantly becoming healthy, flourishing people, and they're not necessarily becoming different sorts of people. They will often have all the vices that they accumulated within their fundamentalist formation and just have a different narrative attached to it. That's pretty common. A lot of the times people that are inside are recognizing this isn't healthy either. But everybody that they trust is telling them to interpret it this way. It's not like other options are visible; there's often a binary choice here: I'm either a Bible-believing evangelical, which usually means some sort of fundamentalist evangelical tradition, or I'm

a progressive liberal. There's nothing else that is on the radar. If you're confident that you see reality as it is, you're not going to ask yourself, "what is it that I don't know how to see yet?"

[01:23:01] **Dan Koch** Right.

[01:23:03] **Heather Griffin** We become open to different things through trust—either by trusting different types of people who embody a way of life that looks much more like the Jesus that we already know and recognize, or we radically lose our trust with the people that we have submitted to in the past.

[01:23:29] **Dan Koch** We've got about 15-20 minutes left, and there's a few more ideas that your lens makes an interesting sense of, so I want to make sure we get those. The first of these is persecution. This is obviously a massive issue in American evangelicalism today. I grew up with it constantly. "We're constantly under threat of persecution." "They all feel persecuted now." Of course, this is nothing like the kind of persecution that has happened to Christians in other countries—and still does sometimes—but it has so much power culturally. How do you see this "persecution complex", if we want to call it that?

[01:24:09] **Heather Griffin** I think there's a few layers to that. Again, if knowledge is really easy, and I am somebody that sees because I believe all the correct scripture, I believe all the Bible facts, I believe them sincerely, and you should be able to see too if I tell you the true thing and you refuse to—and you not only refuse to see the true things, but you're trying to order our society in ways that contradicts them—that's persecution. So we tend to go really quickly to violence—either imagined violence against ourselves or legitimate violence against other people—because if someone won't see what's left, you've got to defend yourself.

[01:24:59] **Dan Koch** Yeah, you shake the dust off your sandals and you set up a fortress.

[01:25:04] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, but also the function of a lot of the treatment of outsiders is to keep out threats to one's identity. If there's not this huge distinctiveness between yourself and the people in the world—because the standard of maturity is just to be white, middle class and sincere—the only difference is your doctrine. You can't afford to be that close to your pagan neighbors that are also white, middle class and sincere, and just not Christian? You can't afford to see people getting better with therapy when you're not getting better from biblical counseling.

[01:25:48] **Dan Koch** Right, you have to discount it.

[01:25:52] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, you have to discount it. If you're not maturing, and if you're not continuing to grow in ways that are obvious to other people—in ways that actually make your faith compelling and draw people to you because you're like Jesus and people want to be around Jesus because he's amazing—if that's not happening, then there's no sense of moving forward in your own life. So to see yourself as persecuted, there's a lot of work for you in terms of maintaining a self image. If you're persecuted, you must be worth persecuting. It must be because you're like Jesus and the light hates the darkness.

[01:26:37] **Dan Koch** That is a great little turn by thinking of it as persecution, and you don't have to come up with this on your own—you see that a couple of people around you are calling it persecution and you subconsciously go, "oh, if it's persecution, then that is proof that I am sincerely holding on to the Bible facts."

[01:26:59] **Heather Griffin** It also means "I'm not the problem. It's not that the world is rejecting me because I am unlike Jesus, despite sincerely believing the Bible facts."

[01:27:08] **Dan Koch** "It's because I am like Jesus."

[01:27:09] **Heather Griffin** Yes! And imagine that you've been doing this for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years. Maybe your children have fallen away. Maybe your grandchildren have fallen away. That's got to be sad; that's got to be anxiety-inducing. There are lots of fundamentalist churches in the country where their Sunday schools basically function as places for people, whose children have lost their faith, to just be sad and to get reassurance from each other that it's not their fault. "It's just the world." It's just "people were led away by liberals," rather than "no, I'm an

emotionally immature person, and I've been that way my entire life, and I've hid behind the church. I've selected for people that would treat me as if I were much more mature than I actually am, and my children were not interested in that. Because I associated that with Jesus, they're not interested in Jesus because they don't want to be like me, and I keep telling people that I'm like Jesus." People cannot deal with that level of shame. You can only handle shame if you've seen people come back from it and be restored and move on. But if knowledge is really easy, it is really shameful to have gotten something wrong. You're either stupid or you're morally deficient—.

[01:28:39] **Dan Koch** Or you're evil.

[01:28:41] **Heather Griffin** So we end up being judged by those standards. If nobody in your community is maturing in substantial ways, you don't have this pool of testimony, from your wisdom tradition, to deal with "so-and-so really had this big blind spot, but in their 50s they really turned it around and repaired the relationship with their kids and they're so much healthier now." That's pretty rare. Sometimes you see it, but it's notable because it's so rare, and that's sad.

[01:29:13] **Dan Koch** You want to have a church community where, ideally, those are the testimonies as opposed to every testimony being about when you became a Christian and then you learned the Bible Truths and you sincerely believed them. Then what do you need sanctification for? There are no real steps above that. So we just go, "is your business flourishing? Do you have enough money to send your kids to college? To own your home? OK, then I guess you got it."

[01:29:41] **Heather Griffin** If you're a white middle class and married and financially stable and you believe the true Bible facts sincerely, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Why aren't people wanting to be like us?

[01:29:52] **Dan Koch** Something you said there made me want to transition into the next question, which is: What is the relationship between this way of being in the world and spiritual abuse? How do you think about that?

[01:30:06] **Heather Griffin** Well, I think that it gives people overconfidence in their ability to assess what is going on in somebody's life and to help them move forward, so a lot that falls under the heading of spiritual abuse tends to be well-intentioned but clueless. So there's a few levels here. Let's start with "well-intentioned but clueless". With "well-intentioned but clueless", you are somebody in leadership at a church, and you may or may not have gotten seminary training, but even if you got seminary training, they didn't teach you how to do pastoral care, and you should just be able to figure it out by knowing what is true in scripture and sincerely believing it and helping people apply that to their lives. So we do a lot of harm to people and double down on it by pushing through the boundaries and people's souls well beyond the level of trust we have actually with them. Sometimes this happens because we train people to open themselves up to anyone that seems sincere and is in authority, so that's a recipe for disaster, and a lot of harm can happen in those contexts. And I could see why sometimes we would call that spiritual abuse, especially if you're not allowed to say, "this is harmful. This actually was not helpful. This made things worse." If you're not allowed to say that, because whatever spiritual advice was given was based on biblical truth, then to push back against that is to doubt the Bible rather than to say, "this was misapplied." So other aspects of spiritual abuse: it makes us really terrible judges of character. There's this sort of "stand-up guy culture" in a lot of fundamentalist-shaped evangelicalism where any bro that earnestly believes the Bible facts and is sincere and claps you on the back is it worth putting in the leadership, so you can mistake a fairly low level of charisma and earnestness for spiritual health. That's part of how you get a predator into leadership. Also, these traditions are not great at helping people deal with their emotional baggage because they're so dismissive of feelings and treat them with contempt a lot of the time. So you get people who are very gifted and may love Jesus, but they're just so damaged and they're keeping themselves busy through ministry and avoiding dealing with their stuff. And wherever they go to deal with their stuff anyway, they've exhausted the wisdom of the community, which is believe these things they believe in sincerely and tell other people about these things.

[01:33:14] **Dan Koch** And then if they do find a therapist and they start working on it, what people in therapy end up doing is talk about the work that they do in therapy because it has such self-evident value. I've been thinking recently that flourishing is its own kind of proof. So that person or that pastor does that—they start talking in that way. They start using some different words. All of a sudden the congregation starts backing away. If they continue down that

road, they will fire them and find a new pastor who doesn't talk like that and make them think that maybe they have to go to therapy, which would contradict their entire meaning system.

[01:33:51] **Heather Griffin** Right, their sense of dignity—Their sense of safety. Because if the world is overwhelming to you, it's really nice to hear that you already have arrived and that nobody should ask anything else of you. You already have everything you need.

[01:34:03] **Dan Koch** So powerful.

[01:34:05] **Heather Griffin** So people can't deal with that shame. So it's not just the anxiety that we baptize as discernment; it's our own fear of shame.

[01:34:14] **Dan Koch** Well, I was just thinking about how another angle here is the type of spiritual abuse that comes from the group and that being shunned or shamed by the group can easily come about if the group all sort of sees things the way you've described. And then you start going through something different, you start asking questions—well, yeah, they're going to gaslight you. Yeah, they're going to shame you for asking questions because you're basically tugging at the threads of the entire thing. And so then you're going to have that group harm and that group pressure.

[01:34:48] **Heather Griffin** It's so threatening because people will persevere in these systems, partly because they do know Jesus and Jesus is really kind and shows up even if we're doing some messed up things.

[01:35:02] **Dan Koch** Of all this description that we've talked about off of people in their midlife not growing much and all that stuff, statistically, they're still doing better than their counterparts outside the church— maybe not in the more fundamentalist churches, but just take your median evangelical in church—the social science data is strong. Their marriages last longer; they report themselves as happier; they have better sex lives; their children are less likely to use drugs, be promiscuous, have risky behaviors. There's all these benefits. They're real—by the time this comes out, the episode on that will have already aired—so it's not like these people have nothing to latch on to. They've got just enough evidence that the whole thing is, in fact, correct. It's not enough evidence to really prove it, but they can they can keep it going in their own minds.

[01:35:54] **Heather Griffin** They can keep it going, and there's not a whole lot of incentive to look for more because everybody that is struggling should be able to access what they have and achieve this level of flourishing as well.

[01:36:05] **Dan Koch** There's an internal explanation that explains other problems that is, of course, false, but matches well enough with what they see—or is plausible enough, given the other things, that they'll stick with it rather than questioning the entire frame.

[01:36:22] **Heather Griffin** Yeah, but it's also exhausting to be in church leadership.

[01:36:27] **Dan Koch** It's a hard job.

[01:36:29] **Heather Griffin** It is a really hard job, and people are doing the best that they know how to do. So when people start asking for more. Saying, "where is the help? Where is the transformation? Where is the growth?" It not only feels like they're questioning Jesus, but like they're questioning you. And if you have been sacrificing your own family to work way too much at church, and you have been shutting down your own needs and concerns, it's really easy to resent people who are not being a good sport and not making the same sacrifices that you are and suppressing the same things, in the name of Jesus, they are suppressing. Because, again, our own dignity becomes bound up in having gotten it right, and God's goodness become as bound up in having gotten it right. So if you've been burning yourself out—harming your own relationships for decades—to consider the possibility that there may be more, and you have not only been doing without in your own life, but using the name of Jesus to encourage other people to do without as well—think of how angry you would feel at God just to consider that. What tools would you have to deal with being angry towards God in that system anyway?

[01:37:59] **Dan Koch** I'm sure people can imagine what you're saying, the difficulty of this, but if you want to take a non-religious example, it's like admitting that you were a shitty parent and that your kid is a drug addict because you were awful. That's true of some number of parents, where they use drugs in the womb and then they use them when the kids were around—and of course, there are systemic reasons for all that stuff; I'm not about simply blaming, but like what percentage of parents, who genuinely contribute to their kids ruined lives, really come to terms with that and really admit it? The ones who go to AA, maybe. So whoever ends up in NA or AA, they will admit it, and everybody else pretty much never will. It's it's a massive ask for some people.

[01:38:48] **Heather Griffin** If you don't have a community that can help you connect to Jesus in that level of shame and can help you come to a place of restoration where you can repair your relationships as much as possible, you can't tell the truth about yourself. So the main areas where people cannot deal with their shame, is having messed up their children and having failed in their callings in some way. People will sacrifice their children to the family idols, in the name of Jesus, every time rather than go there. It's not like they don't love their kids—they do—but when their own identity and the goodness of God is bound up in having already gotten it right, and you have no idea where you would go if you hadn't gotten it wrong—because the only thing visible is the sort of caricature of liberalism; nothing else is visible because you're expecting that if there is another way, you would already see it as the person you are now, because you should have knowledge of reality if you are sincere and you're trying harder to mean it more. You are trying hard to trust God as best you can.

[01:39:58] **Dan Koch** There's more to be said on the spiritual abuse question. I want a little bit of time to think about it. Maybe you and I, down the road, can do a Patreon episode a little shorter and we just hone in on that question with some more specificity.

[01:40:12] **Heather Griffin** I'd love to.

[01:40:12] **Dan Koch** One more thing I'd like to ask you, though, before we're done here: do you have any ideas on conspiracy theories? I want to broaden this beyond just conspiracy theories, like specific ones about the Covid vaccine or whatever, but that kind of conspiratorial thinking—really gullible end times stuff; conspiracy theories; certain very questionable information sources; disembodied ones; ones that are not just from people in the congregation, but that are coming at you from the internet. Does your lens have anything to say to that very evident and very troubling culture in a lot of corners of evangelicalism?

[01:40:58] **Heather Griffin** Absolutely. It is tied with this hyper-confidence and our own ability to see reality. It's tied to this tendency to treat our own anxieties as some sort of alarm system that something has gone off in reality. So then we start scanning the world for something that fits the size of our fears and insecurities and anxieties. If whatever lands happens to place us as some sort of clear-thinking hero who is among the few who see clearly, there's a lot of pseudo-dignity in that. So what that pseudo-dignity can do is explain away why we have not achieved success in our relationships or our jobs, in the way that we thought that we should based on being a stand-up guy or stand-up gal that sees clearly—that means the true things hard enough—it can let us evade our own shame because it's a martyrdom fantasy. It will eventually be revealed in the end times that I saw clearly, and everybody who didn't listen to me will feel so bad.

[01:42:13] **Dan Koch** It's almost like if somebody inhabits this world that you're talking about, but let's say they end up inhabiting it more successfully—like they live in 1990s Alabama and they live and die and most of their community stays within their mostly fundamentalist Christian frame. That person might be less incentivized to believe other conspiracy theories because they actually didn't end up having all that much dissonance.

[01:42:46] **Heather Griffin** There's not a whole lot of the outside world that has to intrude in, whereas the internet really changes that.

[01:42:53] **Dan Koch** It does. It's kind of like a universal force that questions, whether or not people want it, their Sanctified Common Sense of Bible facts. Because now, all of a sudden, "there are Muslims somewhere and they hate us and there's footage of them and—what's that mean? The world is much bigger. People are sending me these articles." To what extent is the system, that you have laid out here, basically conspiratorial or sharing the kind of

epistemological assumptions that conspiracy theories do and the kind of basic structure of "the world is big and scary and complex, so instead of that, we will give a simplified answer that then calms our anxieties." To some extent, that describes the whole thing we've been talking about. It's not exactly the same thing, but it's not dissimilar.

[01:44:01] **Heather Griffin** Easy knowledge over-promises and under-delivers every time. It doesn't actually make you into somebody that could live in reality well—which doesn't mean that there aren't people with a fundamentalist sort of belief system that have nice parents, and have secure attachments, and do well at their job, and life basically works well for them, and they're not out there destroying the world—but if you're coming into those communities and your relationships are not healthy, that's going to shape how you can connect with Jesus—how much you're benefiting from what is good in the system, and there's not going to be a whole lot of help for you. You're going to need somebody else to be bad so you can be good. And because the outside world can invade our bubbles, it's not like we can just stay around people physically that are just like us. You can kind of do that, but the internet introduces the fact that there are people out there who do not see things the way we do; you can't you can't just avoid that, and the normal rules of civility break down. In real, embodied day-to-day life, most of us learn not to treat people the way we do on the internet, but now that's actually starting to break down. Now the Internet has become a sort of formative social context that that shapes how we treat strangers in real life.

[01:45:35] **Dan Koch** That's a perfect segue into the last question I want to ask you, because one of the things that has become clear to me—and I think most religious and political science onlookers over the last 10 years or so—is that our sociopolitical identity is now upstream of our religious identity for almost every American. There are exceptions—and I look to and love those exceptions, and I try and interview them because it's becoming more rare—but one way of thinking about what we've been talking about here is that this is a fundamentally religious system that you're describing. But if our religion is downstream from our sociopolitical identity, how do you make sense of that—first of all, you could disagree with me, but assuming you agree that religion is downstream from politics now for most people, how does that play in? Are we talking about a fairly small percentage of people who truly live out the model that you're describing, and a larger group of evangelicals, to some degree, live it out and we could recognize it so that it wouldn't impact the large numbers? Or do you see some other kind of relationship there?

[01:46:57] **Heather Griffin** I'm not sure if I'm understanding you clearly. Let me try and respond and you tell me if I'm not getting to what you're asking. I think that the most extreme voices are going to be the people that are most afraid and are, therefore, trying to control their worlds—keep them from breaking down. Everything feels threatening right now; it's been a really scary year for everybody. But I also think because you don't need to really take history seriously, if you're somebody that already sees reality more or less as it is—what could somebody from the past do other than confirm what you already see is a common sense person. The only people you'll listen to from the past are people that seem to be agreeing with you, so there's not this historical window to look at how, say, the Republican Party has interacted with evangelicals and fundamentalists in the second half of the 20th century onward. There's just this assumption that because this has always been the way things are in my lifetime, this is the way that things should be. Because if you can't imagine any other way, and you have been encouraged, at least tacitly, to assume that you already see reality the way it is, then you can't get out of this marriage between the Republican Party and right wing politics and fundamentalist Christianity. It seems inevitable. Part of the gatekeeping and the shaming within the community is like that. If you begin to question things, they will assume that you're pro-abortion.

[01:48:47] **Dan Koch** That's really good. I had my own thought about it that's a slightly different tack. I wonder what you think of it. One way to make sense of it is that it's not that religion is downstream from politics, necessarily, for this type of person. It might be more like this: there is so much anxiety that they are trying to deal with because the Sanctified Common Sense is not working; their children are leaving the church; society is changing. There's a lot of whiplash around a very quick public opinion change on gay marriage, for instance—the fastest ever recorded that anybody knows in American life on such a big issue, a 20 point swing in eight years, which is just incredible, from 40% to 60% approval during Obama's tenure, roughly—that then goes into a mode where we are persecuted in the way you're talking about it earlier, and therefore what we need is something to fight for us or fight alongside us, because it can't be that we were wrong. It must be that the world is increasing in its power. And so we will go with someone like Donald Trump because that that assuages our anxiety. We're going to fight back about the Bible Truths that we see with our Sanctified Common Sense. And so in that sense, it's not so much that religion is coming after politics; it's that the religion is stunted in the way you've described, where the ceiling of maturity is so low that Trump's

worse, but he's not all that worse from the kind of people that we consider to be meeting that minimum threshold of viable Christian maturity. We're not looking to a Pope Francis to be beyond us and pulling us forward or—you know, we don't have a very wide scale of religious and moral growth. So he doesn't look as bad as he looks to people who are genuinely looking at the Henri Nouwens of the world and the Mother Teresas of the world.

[01:51:04] **Heather Griffin** Especially because he signals a rhetorical style that is rooted in common sense populist politics.

[01:51:13] **Dan Koch** 100%, yes.

[01:51:15] **Heather Griffin** He very much flatters the common working man, at least in his rhetoric, so that's going to resonate. We've we've been trying to do that; this is somebody that is sincere, and if he's angry and rough, well, he's sincere and rough about the right things. There's this overconfidence again that if you just have somebody that believes the right things, they should be able to execute it, because you collapse any distinction between intention and impact.

[01:51:44] **Dan Koch** Yeah, that's a consequence of your thought that we didn't quite enumerate specifically, but yeah—intent and impact, if it's all about sincerity, they are one and the same thing.

[01:51:54] **Heather Griffin** Right. If somebody claims an impact from something that I did that was sincerely intentioned, it has to be a problem with them because I'm seeing the world as it is, so I should not only identify what should be done; I should be able to execute it properly, and it should bear the fruits that Jesus said it should bear. So there's a sort of contract that "you're supposed to be transformed by my sincerity." It's so much easier to have an enemy and be angry—because anger makes you feel like you're in control and makes us feel powerful—than to feel sad and afraid and ashamed because if the world shifts on what the church is always taught, one possible strategy would be to look at what sort of fruit are we producing? Are we understanding this properly or are we living this out properly? Our Christian communities, places of such flourishing and attachment, that if we're asking people to be celibate their entire lives, their relational needs will be met and they'll get to be part of intimate relationships and communities. Are we embodying an alternative that anyone would find compelling? That's a lot harder to do than just assume that "what I have should be enough, what's wrong with you? Clearly, the darkness hates the light." But we don't actually know how to grow, and to acknowledge that would be to open up this whole big can of worms, because it's not like we selected for communities full of vibrant people that can help us walk through this. Nobody around us knows any more than we do. And we wouldn't we wouldn't know how to recognize somebody who could do differently, because the only people on our radar are liberals and other people like us.

[01:53:54] **Dan Koch** That's the consequences of the the sharp boundary and the low ceiling of moral development, right?

[01:54:01] **Heather Griffin** Yeah. A lot of the people out there that are teaching people how to pray and connect with Jesus and walk in maturity—they're just being quiet, and they don't have time for this stuff. They're just doing the good work and producing good fruit, and they're not flashy. If those people aren't on your radar, don't assume that you would know how to find them. So, Jesus, if you are who you say you are, could you shape my receivers and shape my navigation system—to help me find people that know how to help? Help me recognize them and help me build trust with them, because it's so scary for me to hope.

[01:54:47] **Dan Koch** Heather, what a fantastic conversation. This is one of my favorite chats I've had in a long time. I am going to have a link to your your Twitter for people in the show notes. Anything else you'd like to say?

[01:55:03] **Heather Griffin** Jesus knows how to help. He already does, and it's OK if we don't know what to do. And he can handle that we're disappointed. He can handle that we're afraid. He can handle that it is hard for us to hope and trust him. Because he knows how to get through to us. He knows how to get through the particular barriers to trust that we have, and he actually wants to show up in our lives.

[01:55:29] **Dan Koch** I love your pastoral heart combined with the theory. I think it's a really special combo, and I'm so excited for you to keep doing work in this area. I really am.

[01:55:38] **Heather Griffin** Thanks, Dan. I would also say there are more options in the world than a form of evangelicalism that assumes that we can see the Bible clearly and the sort of caricature of liberalism that people imagine in that world. There are more options than those two things.

[01:55:58] **Dan Koch** I hope that this whole entire podcast is an argument for that. And that's what it's trying to do. I'm right with you on that.

[01:56:07] **Heather Griffin** I would love to talk to you again sometime about what we do if we're coming out of that world, and we don't know how to pray or read the Bible, because we're expecting God to be angry at us, and we hear scripture in an angry tone because there are some practices that could be really helpful for that.

[01:56:28] **Dan Koch** That's a really good one. Some of the challenges around what you might call "reconstruction after trauma", right? I'll make a little note about that, because I think we should talk more about spiritual abuse and recovering from that. We should do another one and we'll try and hit on that as well.

[01:56:50] **Heather Griffin** Fantastic. Dan, I really enjoyed getting to talk with you. Thank you so much for having me on here.

[01:56:55] **Dan Koch** It was excellent, thanks.

[01:56:57] **Heather Griffin** Cool. Take care.