

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Lauren Turek

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week, you know the drill. I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. Today's episode? So fucking good. I'm joined by Lauren Francis Turek, where I ask her: How does the religious right shape U.S. foreign policy? Essentially, this is what happened: I was minding my own business and I saw this, like, church flyer about, like, a mission to Uganda. And then that made me think about, the religious right's links to U.S. government and actually not even, like, the religious right, just, like, the evangelical community at large's connection to government and legislation across the United States. That's where this came from. And then you were minding your own business, being our guest this week, who's fucking amazing, Lauren Frances Turek, who is an Associate Professor of History at Trinity University. She is a diplomatic historian by training. Her research interests include the history of U.S. foreign relations, religion, and the international human rights movement. She's also the author of *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations*. And what we want to know this week is: How do evangelical Christians preach U.S. foreign policy? Or even, like, how do evangelical Christians shape U.S. foreign policy and shape policy right here in the U.S. Lauren, how are you?

LAUREN TUREK [00:01:28] I'm good. How are you?

JVN [00:01:29] Good. I'm just chatting my ass off. I worked out this morning and I had, like, a really energetic little morning. And then sometimes it takes me a minute to settle into my body and, like, my mom does tell me that my conversations tend to be one-sided and I'm working on it in therapy, so I'm so excited that you're here and I really am excited to learn about this.

LAUREN TUREK [00:01:47] I am super excited to talk to you.

JVN [00:01:50] And thank you for sharing your scholarship with us and your work. And, like, y'all, this book, this work is amazing. So I want to start in the seventies because a lot of stuff happened in the seventies. It was a time. The seventies. You're minding your own business in Washington, DC. It's the National Prayer Breakfast. Who is sitting next to you and also who's in the White House?

LAUREN TUREK [00:02:11] Picture this. Okay, you're entering the space and you might be hearing songs from a choir. There might be a university choir singing. You're going over or you're looking for your table and you might find yourself seated next to some, like, big business or political leader from the United States or from abroad. So let's say it's 1974. We will go with, with Nixon.

JVN [00:02:31] Ah!

LAUREN TUREK [00:02:32] You might be sitting next to, like, Iowa Senator Harold Hughes, but you might also be sitting next to the Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the

ambassador to the U.N., Yakov Malik. And who knows who you might be hearing from! Like, there might be welcoming remarks from a big senator like Mark Hatfield, who's a Republican from Oregon. He actually presided over the 1980 prayer breakfast. Then you'll probably hear a bunch of readings from the Old and New Testament. Those would be from folks like the Secretary of Transportation or the U.S. Treasurer. You're going to hear hymns. You're going to hear a group prayer for national leaders, and then you're going to hear the keynote, which is an address from the President.

So 1974, President Nixon gives this keynote and he spoke a little bit about how he was trying to learn more about the religious convictions of President Lincoln and to think about his own religious upbringing and he said he shared the sense with Lincoln. So here's Nixon, 1974, the height of Watergate, comparing himself to Lincoln, saying that the United States has a destiny and the destiny isn't to conquer or to go to war with other countries—again, highly ironic given Vietnam—but to defend freedom and especially the freedom of religion. So he says, like, “We shouldn't be arrogant. We need to listen to God and be confident in, ” and I'm quoting here, quote, “Our moral strength and our spiritual strength and our faith in our national destiny. Because without America's strength, the world would not have the chance that it has for freedom and for peace and for justice in the years ahead.” So he's hitting all of these notes of American exceptionalism, this idea that the United States has a special role to play and that it's a champion of liberty.

JVN [00:04:11] Is that National Prayer Breakfast every year or is it, like, an Olympic thing where it's once every four years or something?

LAUREN TUREK [00:04:16] It happens every year.

JVN [00:04:17] So, like, every president, *theoretically*, like, every president, unless you're that poor fucker who died after, like, three weeks of pneumonia in the 1800s or whenever that was, most every president in, like, modern history, like, gets to do, like, their national prayer breakfast. And then also that made me think about, I wrote down, like, “long term senators,” because obviously, like, cabinet officials will often, you know, they may have, like, four, eight years in the sun and then they're going to, like, depart. But there are some senators I mean, Strom Thurmond, he died in, like, the early aughts, didn't he? But he'd been in the Senate since, like, the fifties, hadn't he?

LAUREN TUREK [00:04:50] He served so long. It's—it was—unbelievable.

JVN [00:04:54] A lot of senators are, like, really long serving senators. So, like, they are going to have these, like, you know, relationships that they're going to facilitate for years and years. And there's a lot of big money there, which leads me to that connection of, like, when it comes to evangelical influence, all of, like, the church tax loopholes. And church finances are closed. They don't really have to report. Is that right? Like, don't churches not have to report, like, their books?

LAUREN TUREK [00:05:21] They're tax exempt for a lot of, you know, a lot of the donations they get because they're, you know, religious or nonprofit organizations. So, we don't necessarily have all kinds of insight into what they're up to with that money.

JVN [00:05:32] So Johnson does all that stuff in '68, or, like, sixty, whatever, and then he doesn't run for reelection. And then Nixon wins and then he finishes his first term in '72. Then '74, we're at the National Prayer Breakfast. You got corporate people there, you got senators there.

LAUREN TUREK [00:05:46] Foreign leaders.

JVN [00:05:47] Foreign leaders, and they are just talking about how much they love Jesus and then intertwining, like subtle cues about patriarchy and, like, a woman's place and stuff?

LAUREN TUREK [00:05:58] What they say and what they kind of emphasize is that they're there to commit themselves to Christ and to communicate and to create this global network of elite leaders who are Christians. And so mostly they're doing these prayer breakfasts. But you can imagine you put all these guys—and then later some ladies but, it's mostly these white men—and then some foreign leaders and they're all in the room together. It's nondenominational, but these are mostly evangelical folks organizing it, and they have a particular interpretation of what the Bible says about social order and men and women and their relationship and anything else. And so you can imagine you get all these folks together in this room. They're making connections, they're networking, maybe they're not specifically talking about legislation, but if you have kind of met some other senator in this room and you feel like you have this spiritual connection with each other, you might be willing to go to bat for whatever thing that they might bring up in Congress.

JVN [00:06:53] So do they just, like, trade numbers in the seventies because there wasn't, like, email and they would just kind of stay in touch if they—

LAUREN TUREK [00:06:58] They are writing so many letters to each other. So all of these files, the Fellowship Foundation, which is the organization that until literally a few days ago ran the National Prayer Breakfast and started it, their files are filled with letters to different leaders. And so if you attended, you would get a letter from their leader, Doug Coe. And you know, he might thank you for attending. He might start sending you books or articles to read. If you're, like, a foreign leader or a business leader, he might send you a letter and encourage you to start your own prayer group or a cell in your country so that you could connect with the other leaders there and then create these nodes of prayer breakfasts all over the world that are all in conversation with the Fellowship Foundation back in the United States so that you can create this truly kind of global connection of Christian leaders for all sorts of reasons. And so some of the letters are fairly rote. He clearly was sending out hundreds and hundreds of letters every week to these folks. But then he'd get letters back from different leaders. And my favorite story of something I've found in the archive is he was also trying to set up a cell in South Africa at the height of Apartheid. And the folks there are writing back, and they're talking to him about politics. He's, like, "Oh,

we probably shouldn't have you putting this in a letter because, you know, people later might read it and get the wrong idea about what we're about." And so he's, like, "So some of this we might have a call about."

JVN [00:08:18] Ah!

LAUREN TUREK [00:08:19] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:20] One thing that, like, I find myself thinking is, like, isn't there something about, like, separation of church and state? Is that just something we say and it's not actually in the Constitution or something or, like, what's the deal with that? Like, because it just seems like we're all up enmeshed. Like, I feel like my therapist would say, "This is an enmeshed relationship."

LAUREN TUREK [00:08:40] Yeah. So, the, the Constitution says that there cannot be an established church, so the government can't, for example, say that, "The Church of the United States is going to be the Anglican Church. They're going to get special preferences."

JVN [00:08:52] But all these Republicans are saying that we're a "Christian country under God and stuff," and that we gotta fuckin', like, that—, is that not what they're saying? It seems like that's what they're saying.

LAUREN TUREK [00:09:07] Oh, yeah! So many of these folks, that's what they want. And you even get that in that Nixon speech to the National Prayer Breakfast. I mean, he is suggesting that, yeah, "The United States is a Christian nation that has a mission from God to kind of spread U.S. values: democracy, freedom, whatever." Yeah. So their sense is like, "Well, this was a nation that was founded as a Christian nation. And so we need to lead the country in line with Christian principles." And of course, the founders, right, even if we're just thinking about the founders, the founders had all sorts of different beliefs. Religion is not—, you know, there's no like "God gave us this nation," in the Constitution. That's not there. They don't mention God, you know, any of that. In fact, they say that there shouldn't be an established church because they're worried about not just that the church might influence the government. Some of them are worried that if the government's involved, it will actually negatively impact the church.

JVN [00:09:57] But so it literally says in the Constitution that there can't be an established church.

LAUREN TUREK [00:10:02] Uh huh. Yup.

JVN [00:10:03] Yeah. And then it says, like, freedom of religion or something. So it, like, says that you can—, which you would have to think would also include, like, the freedom to *not* practice a religion, too?

LAUREN TUREK [00:10:14] Yes, absolutely. The idea is that you should be free to follow your own faith. So, again, that's where we get this idea that religious liberty, the freedom to practice your faith or to not have a faith that, that is a bedrock U.S. principle, which is key. But that doesn't mean, of course, that the U.S. is a Christian nation, which is where, you know, there's all of this debate. And it's, it is just an ongoing debate among folks. And it has been. I mean, we started to see a lot of this rhetoric in the sort of early republic, so early 1800s, where people were kind of trying to go back and say, "Oh, the founders believed this. The founders believed that." They're all different people. They had all different beliefs. Some of them were deists. So they're not even, like, orthodox Christians. I mean, Jefferson had his own Bible where he just cut parts out that he didn't like.

JVN [00:10:59] Cause that was, like, one thing where I was just, like, "Ah, is that just, like, not true?" So it is true.

LAUREN TUREK [00:11:04] So historians disagree. You know, I would argue that it's not a Christian nation, that it wasn't Christian at the founding and that we have always been a pluralistic society. That would be my personal take.

JVN [00:11:11] Yes!

LAUREN TUREK [00:11:12] And a lot of people were not, like, really good churchgoers in the day, like, they might identify as Christian. But there were, you know, church attendance was actually not that high in the early days. You know, the other side of that is that at the same time, Christians have had considerable power and they had considerable numbers. And so they have exercised that power in various ways in government over the years. But again, we're a pluralist society. My personal view is let's celebrate that pluralism and let people do what they want.

JVN [00:11:42] Yes. Queen! So you were just, like, minding your own business. And then you were just, like, "I want to become a scholar in, like, studying, like, the connection between, like, religion and politics, and, like, the history of it?" Like, how did you get into this field of work?

LAUREN TUREK [00:11:57] My dad finds this fascinating. He's like, "I don't understand how you're so interested in the history of religion when you, like, stopped going to church and you're an atheist now. I don't understand." And I'm like, "Well." So when I was in graduate school, I was really interested actually in Nixon's presidency and Nixon's foreign policy, and his policies around detente with the Soviet Union. And I was particularly interested in the folks who were mad about it because detente was all about relaxing tensions and—

JVN [00:12:24] Who's detente? I've never even heard of that person.

LAUREN TUREK [00:12:26] Yeah, okay. So in the seventies, it's a part of a goal to again, relax tensions with the Soviet Union because both the U.S. and the Soviet Union are spending so much money building up their nuclear arsenals to try to compete with each

other. And it's also a way to try to get some pressure on the situation in Vietnam. If they can get the Soviets and maybe the Chinese to exert some pressure on Vietnam, maybe the U.S. can get out of that bad situation without losing too much faith. So it's a kind of multifaceted foreign policy agenda. But a lot of people were really mad about it. Jewish activists are really mad about it because it involved improving trade relations with the Soviet Union. And they're like, "Listen, the Soviet Union is being horribly abusive to Jewish people. They're having, you know, these terrible policies. We shouldn't be doing anything with these human rights abusers." And, like, scientists and other people are opposed to it.

But I saw evangelical Christians were opposed to it, too. And I was, like, "Oh that's so weird because I always think of evangelicals as really being, like, domestic actors who are upset about abortion and prayer in school and whatnot." And I said, "Mmmm. This might have the makings for a good book." And as I started to do research, I found all of this really compelling information about the missionary work that they're doing and the way that they started to blend their evangelistic efforts with this human rights language, this anti-communist, pro-religious freedom language, to actually go out into all these other countries, engage in their missionary work, but then also be promoting certain policies, saying that they are going to lead to more human rights or more religious freedom in places. So even if they're going to places like Guatemala, where there's horrible, genocidal human rights abuses, they're, like, "Well, their sort of leaders there are going to be anti-communist. So it's going to lead to more human rights and more religious freedom." Or they're going to push back against policies in the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union that would normalize trade because they are restricting the ability of Christians there to evangelize. Or they're going to adopt a policy of gradualism in fighting apartheid in South Africa because they're worried if they move too quickly, the African National Congress will come in and be, quote, "communists." They're not. If they don't do anything, that they might not be able to convert people. So it's just, they're really engaged there.

And so I was really surprised and fascinated by all of this overseas activism that they're doing and the way that they're using human rights language in this time period of the seventies, when the international human rights movement is really exploding, that they are articulating this particular view of human rights that is narrowly focused on religious freedom. And because of the Reagan administration, which really embraces this, that sets U.S. human rights policies in significant ways. In 1998, the evangelicals are key players in passing the International Religious Freedom Act, which sets up an office within the State Department to make the promotion of religious freedom a key part of U.S. foreign policy. When Trump was president, Mike Pompeo put together a Commission on inalienable rights that argued that promoting religious freedom and property rights were the key goals of U.S. foreign policy and should be elevated above all other human rights concerns. So all the stuff that the evangelicals are doing in the seventies and eighties that I was writing about in my book, they're, they're still sort of active in that way. And so it's still shaping our policy agenda abroad in really significant ways.

JVN [00:15:35] Yeah, Pompeo's scary.

LAUREN TUREK [00:15:36] Oh, he's terrifying.

JVN [00:15:41] So if we want to understand American evangelicals' global influence, we need to understand American evangelicals. How do you define evangelicals and evangelicalism in your work?

LAUREN TUREK [00:15:53] This is such a good question, and I actually wrestled with it a lot as I'm writing the book, because religious historians and Religious Studies people, they debate this all the time. And that was the big question I would always get. "How are you defining 'evangelical'?" I am a historian of U.S. foreign relations. That's what I primarily see myself as. So I didn't want to get, like, too bogged down, but I obviously wanted to be clear about who I was talking about. So what I did in trying to figure this out is I looked at all the definitions that were out there. You know, there are some famous ones from scholars like David Babington and Mark Knoll, but there's this sociologist Mark Shibley, who offered what I think is the easiest definition for me. He defined, and I'm quoting, the term evangelical as "a broad group of believers who have had a born again experience resulting in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, accept the full authority of the Bible in matters of faith, in the conduct of everyday life, and are committed to spreading the gospel by bearing public witness to their faith."

And I like this definition for a few reasons. It's really capacious, but it's also simple. It gets at both practice and belief, and it accounts for all the diversity of that that exists because evangelicals practice in all sorts of ways. And evangelicalism is pretty individualistic. It's not hierarchical like the Catholic Church, and it gets at the evangelism part, like, going out into the world is super key for understanding what evangelicals are doing in their missionary work. And so we have all these different expressions of evangelicalism. It varies by race, by region, by culture. And so this is nice and broad. You know, you can look and see, "How are different individual groups or leaders channeling that particular faith and kind of using it in their missionary work." But that's really how I was thinking about it. So it's those three key things. And for me, the "going out to the world" part to spread their faith is really important for understanding their foreign policy objectives.

JVN [00:17:42] The only part that I was like, [PAUSES], like, gave a face to is, like, "accepts the full authority of the Bible."

LAUREN TUREK [00:17:49] Yeah.

JVN [00:17:50] They are picking and choosing, honey, because—

LAUREN TUREK [00:17:53] It's contradictory!

JVN [00:17:54] Yeah. It's interest.

LAUREN TUREK [00:17:55] Full authority of the Bible. That is not necessarily thinking that the Bible is literally true or inerrant, which is what distinguishes fundamentalists from evangelicals.

JVN [00:18:04] Wait, what's that mean again?

LAUREN TUREK [00:18:06] So fundamentalists tend to have the idea that the Bible is inerrant. It's literally true. There's no question about it. Fundamentalists share beliefs with evangelicals, but not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. And so not all evangelicals will think that the Bible is literally true about everything, but they do think that it is the authority that they should look to for guiding their life.

JVN [00:18:27] To me, there's an aspect of, like, trying to legislate your faith. Or, like, trying to, like, impose your faith or your view on the world, on to other people who don't share your view and, like, legislate it as such. Like, when we're seeing, like, these, like, anti-trans bills and, like, you know, investigating parents for child abuse if a kid is, like, dressing in a way that they think isn't right.

LAUREN TUREK [00:18:50] Or trying to pull every book off of a library shelf because it talks about LGBTQ+ issues, like, anything, like, that, it's, like, let people read what they want to read. Let people do what they want to do.

JVN [00:19:01] Yeah, so it's, like, trying to, like, legislate with your faith feels like something that, like, sets them apart. But so anyway, what are some of the early instances of missionary work abroad and, like, what principles and, like, scriptures, like, were guiding, like, "Oh, we're really going to go like, spread this whole thing?"

LAUREN TUREK [00:19:19] U.S. evangelicals start doing missionary work really early. So they're going out as early as the 1810s.

JVN [00:19:24] Oh fuck!

LAUREN TUREK [00:19:25] They're going to places like India.

JVN [00:19:27] No!

LAUREN FRANCECS TUREK [00:19:27] Oh, yeah. They had missions in what's now Thailand and Singapore and Liberia. They're going to the Middle East. By the 1840s, they're in China. So they are doing this. So I think one thing that's important to, to distinguish is that there's a really long history of evangelicalism in the United States, but there's a turning point in the thirties and forties where we start to see neoevangelicalism, a new evangelicalism. So that's when we get, like, the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Religious Broadcasters, and they're very specifically trying to make a break or distinction between themselves being really outward looking and somewhat ecumenical within evangelicalism, not really with other Christians, but within their own, they're trying to distinguish themselves from fundamentalists who are very—, more inward looking, not so kind of... worldly, isn't the right word, because none of them want to be worldly, but cosmopolitan, we'll say.

So the forties and fifties, we start to see this new evangelical movement grow. So these are, like, Billy Graham. He's going to start Christianity Today, which is one of these big evangelical magazines. He's a key figure. We're going to start to see all sorts of organizations come up around this. They are going to be going out to do missionary work all over the place. And you asked about key scriptures. I think the, the most central one is the great commission. You know, this is described in the book of Matthew and in a number of other places in the Bible. But basically Jesus and the disciples go to Galilee and they go up this mountain where Jesus tells them to go. And, you know, Jesus comes and he says, "All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you, and I am with you always to the very end of the age." So that's the idea. That you need to, if you are sort of a, a Bible believing Christian, you have this responsibility to go out and tell everybody, make disciples of all nations, or bring the good news to all nations. So "evangelical": the root of that word in its original is about bringing this good news, sharing the gospel.

JVN [00:21:31] So we've learned, I think on Getting Curious pod and Getting Curious TV show about, like, eugenics, pre-World War II and then post-World War II and, like, how before World War II, like there was, like, Eugenics Weekly and like, eugenics is this very like openly talked about thing that wasn't so, like, taboo. And then after World War II, they were like, "Oh, wait, people just use this."

LAUREN TUREK [00:21:51] "Oh, Nazis."

JVN [00:21:52] Yeah. Like, so then they were saying how, like, post-World War II things became rebranded as, like, the American Family Council or, like, AMFR or whatever that acronym is [American Family Association]. And this idea of, like, "Okay, let's emphasize nuclear family. Let's emphasize, like, all of these other kind of dog whistles," that don't sound bad, but it still was, like, "You know." Because in the forties and fifties, like, what's the relationship between, like, Christianity, integration, racism, and, like, eugenics in the United States? Like what are the Billy Gramms and what are a lot of these, like, religious leaders saying about segregation? What are they saying about, you know, because, I mean, interracial marriage wasn't even legal until, like, the sixties. So I'm curious about, like, what their views on those things were.

LAUREN TUREK [00:22:33] So it varies because of course we're talking about a bunch of different groups. But what I think is very interesting is the National Association of Evangelicals, they would kind of release these big statements, statement of conscience, whatever their view is. And in the, in the fifties, they have a statement on human rights, which is actually about civil rights. So they're mostly talking about domestic civil rights. I mean, they basically take this, like, "colorblind" look where they're, like, "Everyone's a children of God." They're of course still white supremacists, right? There's no way to really get around that. The idea of a "colorblind" take is one that is, frankly, white supremacist because it dismisses this long history of structural racism in the United States. Like, you can't just say, "Well, race isn't a thing. God sees everyone the same." It's like, well, the United States, the entire country is built on the labor of enslaved people and their

continued oppression. So no, we can't just ignore race. During the Civil War, there are a lot of evangelicals who were using biblical arguments to support slavery. It actually split a lot of these evangelical denominations. The reason we have "the Southern Baptist Convention" is because the Southern Baptists split off from National Baptists during the Civil War.

JVN [00:23:36] Oh.

LAUREN TUREK [00:23:37] And so, you know, there are folks who are arguing against segregation based on their Bible beliefs, like "Racial mixing is communism." You know, and they have this sort of anti-communist bent, seeing that as anti-God. You can look at signs from some of the protests against the civil rights movement where they suggest that desegregating would be somehow anti-biblical. I mean, people—because the Bible is malleable—people will use it to justify whatever their belief is and because they're, like, "Well, I'm a Bible believing Christian. My interpretation is biblical." So you had a lot of variation within evangelicalism. There were some folks who used their faith to really advocate for integration, Right. Like, many of the Black churches are, you know, within those traditions, although they don't all necessarily identify as evangelical now because of the relationship between evangelicalism and white supremacy. But of course, those churches are really key for pushing for civil rights in this country. But, you know, you also have a lot of these white supremacist southerners—and others and northerners—who are using their faith to argue against integration.

JVN [00:24:39] So in your book, you write that the 1970s marked a new era for evangelicalism. So what's happening in the U.S. and abroad that brings in this new era?

LAUREN TUREK [00:24:48] There's a few key things that are happening in this particular time period. So I'll start with what's happening at home because we've already touched on it. So some of what's happening is that there is this rights revolution happening in the United States, and it's not just for Black Civil Rights. We're also seeing the rise of the movement for feminism, for Gay Rights, for Elderly Rights—we sometimes forget about that one—for Asian Rights, Indigenous Rights. This is a period where a lot of people are galvanized around the idea that they have been dealing with this oppression for too long, and it's time to make changes to the way the country is organized. Many evangelicals react to the social changes, the cultural changes of this time. It's also the, you know, sixties. We're starting to see ideas about free love and just, you know, new organizations for the way families are put together. People are growing their hair, all these sorts of things that cause some evangelicals, politically conservative evangelicals, to feel like their way of life is maybe under siege.

You know, one of the things that happened during the era of Civil Rights is that in the South, instead of integrating, some states closed their public schools and they opened private what were called "segregation academies." These are Christian schools that would only allow white students. Well, by the time we're getting to the sixties and seventies, there are court cases that are going to challenge whether those schools should be getting tax exemptions if they're actually continuing to segregate, because we're now well after

Brown v Board [of Education]. Well, this is going to put a lot of these folks into an area where they feel concerned about changes that might come. They're worried that they might take away prayer in school. And then, of course, we get landmark rulings like Roe v Wade. Interestingly, before this, a lot of evangelicals were not super concerned about abortion necessarily. It was really a Catholic issue in the fifties, forties, fifties. It starts to become an issue in the seventies as all this other stuff is changing. It seems like a way to mobilize politically. So this is where we get a kind of rise the religious right over the course of the seventies. So that's one piece of this.

At the same time, there are some big global changes happening. The mainline Protestant churches, they are starting to realize that their history of missionary work is tied up in colonialism and imperialism and especially cultural imperialism. And they're starting to get uncomfortable about that. So they start to pull some of their missionaries out or to refocus their missions onto what's known as social action. So helping the poor, providing medical care, that sort of thing. So they're not as focused on the evangelism. And evangelicals, because of their faith that they need to be fulfilling Jesus's great commission, they are very concerned about that for a number of reasons. One of which is that all of the population growth they're seeing and predicting is in parts of the global south, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia, where people may not have exposure to Christians, there may not be that many Christians. And if people are going to leave the mission field, well, they better come in and get into it.

So in 1974, Billy Graham and his Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, they put together this huge global conference in Lausanne, Switzerland. And it's not just like they're bringing evangelicals from all over Europe, but they also invite evangelicals from Africa and elsewhere to talk about "How can we evangelize the world by 2000, by the year 2000?" Everybody's submitting these papers to talk about different strategies, like, "How are we going to reach urban people? How are we going to reach people in Africa? How are we going to reach people in Vietnam," whatever it is. And they come and they debate. And what's interesting is at that conference. Some of the evangelicals from the Global South are like, "Hey, American and Western European evangelicals, you guys are cultural imperialists. We don't want you sending missionaries." And there's this huge fight that breaks out.

JVN [00:28:29] Ooh.

LAUREN TUREK [00:28:30] There's this wonderful theologian from Latin America, C. René Padilla. And he's like, "We should be focused on breaking the chains of man slavery in the world. We need to be making sure people aren't impoverished. How can they receive the word of God if they're starving?" And he's like, "We need to focus on that instead." And the Western evangelicals are, like, "That sounds good. But also we have to evangelize." And so they come up with all these kind of strategies for how they're going to evangelize people in different cultural groups. So, like, they're cognizant of this critique of cultural imperialism, and they know that it's a problem, it'll make it harder for them to evangelize if they are seen as imperialists or bringing white supremacy. And yet they still think that they

have the answer and that really they should still be going out and evangelizing everywhere because God told them to, you know, they have to go out and spread the word.

JVN [00:29:16] Well, because they really feel—and I mean, I felt like this, too. I grew up in the church and, you know, really super into it. But, like, you feel like you have to convert people because if you don't, they're going to burn in the fiery pits of Hell. And if you don't save them, like, they're going to burn in the pits of Hell, and then what's going to happen?

LAUREN TUREK [00:29:30] For eternity!

JVN [00:29:31] Yes, forever!

LAUREN TUREK [00:29:32] Yeah, they really believe that what they are bringing is eternal freedom.

JVN [00:29:38] Yes!

LAUREN TUREK [00:29:38] Eternal freedom. And so for them it's, like, "Well, yeah, things might be kind of shitty in your life here. Like, maybe, you know, you're living in a country that has bad human rights abuses, but if you are converted and you believe in Christ, you will have eternal freedom, spiritual freedom in this glorious heaven. So we're giving them something even better than food." Which is, you know, what?

JVN [00:29:59] Okay, so it's, like, really, Billy Graham's like, is he kind of the one who's really, like, galvanizing this whole, like, "Wait, if people are pulling back for missions, like who's going to evangelize?" Because the places that are growing the most is, like, the Global South. And so..."

LAUREN TUREK [00:29:11] One of the interesting things about evangelicalism is that it's super dispersed. So there's all sorts of different leaders. There's a lot of folks doing kind of complementary things at the same time and overlapping. He is a really well known leader. He commands a lot of respect among evangelicals, so he's able to bring a lot of them together. But there's other folks, too, who are writing at this time. You know, you've got leaders of seminaries like Fuller Seminary. Televangelists who are into this, Pat Robertson. So there's all sorts of different Christian leaders. But this International Congress on World Evangelization is, I think, a really important moment. And he is the leader of that. So his organization is spearheading that, that movement. And that's one that then continued. There were a number of other meetings that happened throughout the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s. It's the Lausanne movement. And it sort of has continued, directed by a number of different individuals from other countries as well, to make sure that there was leadership from the Global South.

JVN [00:31:08] So was there anyone else who was, like, leery of, like, the U.S. more led, like, evangelical push? Like, was anyone else like leery and not having it?

LAUREN TUREK [00:31:18] So evangelicalism, we often associate it now with political conservatism. There were social justice, left-leaning evangelicals, like, Sojourners and Jim Wallis are evangelicals who are more on the left, not with every social issue, like, they're still anti-abortion, you know, of course, but they are more on the left on other issues. They were critical of some of this, again, on that cultural imperialism issue. And they were particularly critical when these evangelicals are going in and lending support to horrible dictators. Catholics in Latin America and elsewhere are very critical of this evangelical push, mainline Protestants. So there's actually a lot of criticism of some of this around the world. And there are, of course, secular activists who are concerned about what these folks are up to. Organizations like Samaritan's Purse, they're essentially an NGO, they're distributing— theoretically distributing—aid to people in parts of Africa. But they also, of course, have a religious and political agenda. You know, they are influential in sort of promoting some of this really virulent and horrible anti-LGBTQ legislation in some of the countries in Africa, at least sort of lending support to it. And so you've got pushback from secular NGOs, you know, Amnesty International and others who are saying, like, "What is going on here?" So there's a range.

JVN [00:32:34] So with the missionary projects, like, who's funding that? Like, is that just, like, the churches pay for it?

LAUREN TUREK [00:32:39] Yeah. So they're raising money in their local churches. The denominations have mission boards that are also raising money. Some of these televangelists are raising money if they think there's a project that they want to fund. So it's all over. But it's internally, largely internally funded. And they were really pioneers of direct-to-mail. So they get into this early and they're sending out letters and appeals. When missionaries would go abroad, they would send home these elaborately illustrated newsletters to their home denominations to get continued funding for their activities, be, like, "Here's all the great things we're doing. We planted this many churches or reconverted this many people, and we're building a school and an orphanage and please keep sending us money." And so they would get money that way, again from home churches or their denominations.

JVN [00:33:23] Do we need to make, like, Unitarian Universalism really fierce and, like, launder a bunch of money within the Unitarian Universalist Church and, like, do really great think tanks that, like, lets everyone, like, live and let live more as long as we're, like, protecting people that need to be protected and stuff, you know, I'm saying?

LAUREN TUREK [00:33:38] Again, there are like left-leaning Christians who I think are trying to push back on this and of course, like, different Jewish organizations. I was really excited to see some Jewish organizations filing lawsuits about this horrible, like, anti-abortion legislation where they're, like, "Hey, this goes against *our* faith traditions. What is this?"

JVN [00:33:54] Yeah. We'll see how that plays out. What do other, like, faiths, like Muslims, Jewish people and, like, Hindu people and Buddhists, like, what do all those faiths say about this Goddamn National Prayer breakfast? Do they ever want to go and be, like,

"We're going to come and do our fucking thing as well, actually. We're going to come worship as well with our people, actually. We'll see you there, Billy."

LAUREN TUREK [00:34:19] [LAUGHS] There are certain Jewish organizations, like AIPAC has some of that appeal and power for politicians. They're not representative of all Jewish objectives in the United States. And there are groups now that are set up to try to do more advocacy on behalf of Muslim Americans and others, but they just don't have the same reach, I think, because the numbers are smaller of these evangelicals. But actually it's interesting, like, Jewish organizers in Congress actually inspired some of the evangelical lobbying on certain foreign policy issues back in the seventies. So evangelicals are watching some Jewish activist groups to see what they're doing, to see how they can use some of their methods to try to get some of their policies put in place.

JVN [00:35:00] What about Mormons? Because they really love a missionary.

LAUREN TUREK [00:35:02] It's so funny you bring that up, because what I was going to say was the LDS church actually sends more missionaries than anyone else. I think they have around 70,000 missionaries out at any given time. That's actually, like, everyone has to go.

JVN [00:35:16] Because don't they teach a language in, like, three days? And like all these, like Mormon, like people, they work, like, for the FBI, to, like, teach people languages real fast and stuff, which is like I thought was a joke, but it's actually true.

LAUREN TUREK [00:35:25] No, no. Yeah, they're very much out there. They're actually, their numbers dwarf really any other of these Christian groups. So they're all over the world doing their evangelism and trying to bring people into the LDS church which, yeah.

JVN [00:35:38] I think we need to start, like, the church of the divas, [LAUREN LAUGHS] and it's like more of, like, a queer church where we just, like, worship, like, cool ass energy from people who are most often divas. There could be, like, a board of divas that could be like Tina Turner, Beyoncé, Michelle Kwan, like, the divas who I'm really into and then we just, like, preach human rights and stuff?

LAUREN TUREK [00:36:01] Yeah!

JVN [00:36:02] And, like, nondiscrimination and, like, for everyone to get, like, equality and, like, teach people that, like, other people getting their equality isn't an attack on your freedom. I think it would be a really fun church. I think it would be really fun. And I also think that we could crash that National Prayer meeting with really great choreographed dances and then, like, individual counseling and therapy for the people there. So basically, churches are funding these projects. And we really, we need to do a separate episode on, like, church finances because I think that's, like, super interesting on, like, what is that about? So what technology and tactics did missionaries use to spread their gospel? Was it really, like, the direct-to-mail thing?

LAUREN TUREK [00:36:47] So the one thing that I found that was really interesting about these evangelical groups is that they are the earliest adopters of every technology. So when radio becomes a thing, they immediately recognize that it's going to be a useful tool to spread the gospel, and they start setting up radio networks, not just in the United States, but elsewhere. So they set up a radio network really early on in Latin America, and they are broadcasting there in Spanish and elsewhere, their gospel message. It was really hard for them to evangelize in communist countries. So, for example, in China, they can't evangelize. They can't evangelize freely in Russia and the Soviet Union. And so they set up these radio stations in areas outside of those countries that are really powerful. So they have some of the most powerful radio transmitters in the world. And so they're able to broadcast their message in the languages that people speak in these different countries really widely so people can tune in. When television becomes a thing, they set up TV networks and they have a big TV network in Quito and elsewhere. When tape recording becomes a thing, they'll start speaking scripture in different languages into tape recordings that can then be passed around, and they speak at transcription speed so people can write down scriptures of the Bible if they're in a country where they can't get a Bible.

And then there's also really low tech stuff. There is an amazing documentary by a filmmaker named Adele Horne. It's called *The Tailenders*. And so there are all of these different groups like the Wycliffe Bible Translation Service that would go out and they would try to translate the Bible into every language, including some really, fairly small language groups and Indigenous groups. And in some cases, they're going to parts of the world where there isn't electricity or some of this. In the film, there's this amazing moment where she shows how they made a record player that you could play manually, like, you spin it with a pen or a pencil and it will play. And so these Bible translators would go, they'd try to work with Indigenous speakers to learn the language and then translate it. And then they would send back, like, these portable record players or tapes. They were doing this in Mexico and all the different Indigenous languages in Mexico. They'd send tapes back for people to play on their, you know, Walkman back in the eighties or whatever.

And so what's interesting, of course, is translation is tricky. So not everything translates, but they're doing basically anything they can to do this. And my favorite, favorite find in the archives about this: in the seventies, satellite radio becomes a thing, like, they start to have these satellite networks. And the head of the National Religious Broadcasters is writing about how evangelicals really need to mobilize these satellites. And he has a section in this book, *The Electric Church*, about how, "What if the angel from Revelation is actually these satellites. And so what we need to do is get our own satellite so that we can share the word of God. And so what if it's not a literal angel, but our angel is this satellite technology that could broadcast the word of God to everyone on Earth? We should get one and name it Revelation or Angel or whatever." It's amazing.

JVN [00:39:42] Oh, honey!

LAUREN TUREK [00:39:44] So they're, like, on the cutting edge. Like early bulletin board systems, the early Internet in the eighties and nineties, they're there. It's everything.

JVN [00:39:50] One thing that we learned that I just thought was so interesting, we did an episode with Dekila Chungyalpa, and she was teaching us about, like, faith-led, like, climate change initiatives. And one thing she said was that, like, 80% of people identify with, like, some sort of faith, And so that, really, I was just writing down, like, you know, the political connection that this has to, like, voting and how politicians, like, really have, like, a particular line to thread, you know, around, like, what their faith is. And we've seen that whenever there's been, like, a president with, you know, like—it was, like, Kennedy was like such a big deal because, like, wasn't he, like, the first, like, Catholic president?

LAUREN TUREK [00:40:30] First Catholic! Yeah. They literally thought he was going to be taking orders from the pope. He had to basically reassure people that wasn't the case. And if you look now, they'll do polling and they'll say, "Would you ever vote for an atheist politician?" And it's no, the answer is no. People will not vote for you if they think you're a non-believer.

JVN [00:40:46] And so that's, like, such a delicate line, like, when there is political overreach by churches. And then that made me think, "Well, why is that?" And then I'm going to go on a little tangent here, but stick with me. I want to hear what you think about it. So I have read and heard, that our psyches are really formed from, like, 0 to 7. What are we doing when we're 0 to 7? We're, like, with our families and a lot of us are going to church. So a lot of our, like, earliest, you know, memories. And we've also learned on this podcast that the first time you hear information, the first time, your brain thinks it's right, whether it is or not, so, like, that's always kind of, like, your truth. We learned that in our misinformation episode. But so when you're getting people so young and you're flooding them with this stuff so young, it really gets their language in them from an early age. And especially when, like, the intent is to "change hearts and minds" and, like, get them to think and believe the way that you believe. Because if you don't, "you're going to burn in the fiery pits of fucking hell," that's a pretty motivating line. It's why a lot of people, like, don't question these things and just kind of get in there. And it's, and it's everything. Around marriage, procreation, like, how you should live, how you should look, how you should act, how you should believe, how you should worship, how you eat—all those things. A lot of it's really wrapped up in the church for whatever way, like, your family kind of identifies, whether it's more on the left, more on the right, whatever. It's just very early. And so I think it's really interesting when you think about why that is so hard for people to change or see things differently, because we are just in our faiths often very young, and even if it's not 0 to 7, it's, like, young, like, you're impressionable, you're young, and then you run with it.

LAUREN TUREK [00:42:22] Absolutely. Yeah.

JVN [00:42:23] [SIGHS] Ah! So what are we going to do, queen? Um, no. [LAUGHS] I kid. Okay. So then it's like that one lady, that fucking Phyllis Schlafly or how do you say her—?

LAUREN TUREK [00:42:32] Schlafly! Yeah. So yeah, it's S-C-H-L. Schlafly.

JVN [00:42:37] Schlafly. She, like, is actually from, like, really close to my hometown. I'm from Quincy, Illinois. I think she—

LAUREN TUREK [00:42:42] Really?

JVN [00:42:43] —ran for Congress, like, right in Springfield, Illinois, like really close by. So but then we get into Reagan and he is really potent. Like, what are the you know, prayer meetings like with him? Like, that's pretty fucking hardcore, right?

LAUREN TUREK [00:42:56] In 1983, he goes and gives this talk to the National Association of Evangelicals. Like, he actually goes to speak to them. And part of the speech is about how he's, you know, really kind of, of course, attuned to their domestic concerns. So he gives a lot of anti-abortion stuff. But he's also talking about how the United States has this, again, very much echoing some of what Nixon said, this idea that the United States has this divine mission to spread freedom of religion everywhere. And he talks about what a threat the communist world poses to religion. And he's really speaking the language of evangelicals. He's really getting in there and saying, "We have this mission to get out there and be able to spread democracy and religious freedom everywhere." And he connects those and conflates those two.

JVN [00:43:38] Do you get the sense that religion was really missionaries' end game? Like, Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham, or was it, like, wielding power? Was it power or faith or was it both?

LAUREN TUREK [00:43:50] Okay. So I think this is a great question because—and I will say with the caveat that, of course, it's impossible to know for sure what's motivating anyone. I would say, for rank and file church members, the folks going on these missionary trips and doing this, for them, I suspect they're true believers. They really think the goal is to convert as many people, that they really have that true belief. When we get to people like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson and some of the religious members of Congress, those are cases where I think it is more difficult to tell whether it's genuine belief or political agenda or a merging of both where they're looking for power. And I think for folks like Falwell and others, that power is very seductive. And, you know, I think even for Billy Graham, he gets to be the kind of preacher to all the Presidents. It must have been very appealing to be there with Nixon, with Ford, with Reagan, to be there with all the presidents. I think there's a seductiveness to that power.

JVN [00:44:48] Was Billy Graham the one on the 700 club?!

LAUREN TUREK [00:44:51] 700 Club is Pat Robertson.

JVN [00:44:52] Are we talking about him? Is it that asshole?

LAUREN TUREK [00:44:55] We can! We can talk about him.

JVN [00:44:58] What's his fucking deal? What's his goddamn deal?

LAUREN TUREK [00:45:01] So people like Pat Robertson, they're on your TV every day. They're asking for money. They're bringing all sorts of guests on. And they are very influential to people. And I think that's a way that they are building this power. They're getting, you know, huge numbers of people to call in, to pledge money. So they have these really big lists of folks that they can then send political advertising to, and then they can ask all of those folks to send letters back in the day to their Congress people to demand that they do X and Y. And of course, we also have members of Congress who are evangelical and who are going to be really receptive to these types of moral and moralizing political agendas. So, Pat Robertson, it's, like, get people to call in. And he doesn't just do it on domestic issues. He does this for foreign policy issues, too.

Those are the folks who I think would like to see their aspects of faith put into policies in the United States and abroad. Especially as we get to the eighties and nineties, because evangelicals have spent this period of time feeling like their life approach or whatever were under siege, they then want to start to see policies put in place to reflect the America that they want to see. And so that's where once you've amassed this power as a religious right and you're starting to have influence in politics, I think it's again, they get into that. And they're, like, "We might be able to, you know, make sure there's prayer in school and we want to try to outlaw abortion," and all of these things.

JVN [00:46:20] When I was going through my really terrible, like, 2012, I accidentally asked for help from this, like, evangelical born again lady who my family was friends with. And then she got me into Paula White, who I was really listening to her, like, DVDs. And she really—, I was like, "Yes, Paula!" And then I realized that she was, like, a raging homophobe—

LAUREN TUREK [00:46:38] Oh no!

JVN [00:46:39] —nightmare from hell. But she was, like, praying over Donald Trump at that National Prayer Breakfast. Like, he was really, you know, in bed with, like, the evangelical right. And it seems like there's, like, some, you know, brewing of them going with Ron DeSantis now, you know, whatever. What does this story tell us about how non-state actors shape foreign politics, like, corporations and churches? What does this whole story say about that?

LAUREN TUREK [00:47:06] Yeah, I mean, I think one thing that for me that is really significant is that we should remember that global politics, global diplomacy, war, peace, etc., that is not just happening at the level of state-to-state relations. It's not just your ambassadors and your diplomats communicating with each other. There are so many different organizations operating right now that have a global reach, and they can affect politics on the ground in countries all over. So, you know, Amnesty International, as an example of a human rights organization that has had an enormous influence on global politics for a very long time. But a lot of these evangelical groups that I study, especially these missionary groups, they're going over, they're doing their evangelism. They are changing politics on the ground in some of these other countries in substantial ways. And

what's really significant is for people on the ground, it's not always clear that these folks coming in with these NGOs are not representatives of the U.S. government.

JVN [00:48:02] Mm!

LAUREN TUREK [00:48:03] These are people from the United States. And in some ways that can sort of blend things and you think, "Well, do they represent the United States?" Well, of course not literally, because these missionary groups are not allied with the U.S. government, although there are some human rights and foreign aid groups that are Christian, like, World Relief or, or others of that type that actually do funnel some U.S. AID money. They take some of that money, though they're not supposed to evangelize. They're supposed to just use it for foreign aid matters. But they are acting as a kind of middleman in a way. So things on the ground get kind of blurred there. There's a number of sort, of examples in my book where I talk about the way that evangelicals are acting in these foreign countries that's actually changing, changing what's going on there.

JVN [00:47:48] So, yeah, what's happening with, like, evangelicals, like, today? I feel like we got up to, like, Reagan and then, you know, the nineties weren't great. That was, like, DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] and then, like...

LAUREN TUREK [00:47:57] Then a Republican takeover of Congress, all of that, yup.

JVN [00:49:02] Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House. So then he got caught, like, fondling young boys after like fucking passing DOMA and being a big ole fucking Republican. And then he was, like, a goddamn fucking pedophile son of a goddamn bitch from hell—who also came from Illinois, so he can get fucked infested with a sandy fist of Satan because he is a son of a bitch. But what is happening with the evangelicals now? I mean, they're shaping policy here in the United States a lot. I mean, in Missouri, they just passed a ban on, like, women lawmakers in Missouri can't show their arms.

LAUREN TUREK [00:49:30] What they can wear!

JVN [00:49:32] Yeah. It's, like, crazy. So it's happening right here in the U.S. So not that we're doing that much better or anything, but what is, like, evangelical status abroad? Domestically? Like, what's happening now?

LAUREN TUREK [00:49:41] It varies. There's a lot of stuff happening. You probably read about the insurrection that happened in Brazil earlier in January. A number of the people who were there trying to overturn that election and put Bolsonaro back in place, those were evangelicals. So we're seeing some echoes of our own January 6th there. We're seeing, you know, again, folks are still doing this evangelistic missionary work. There's still efforts to plant churches. So that hasn't changed. That's still happening.

JVN [00:50:07] But also I do really like those, like, things I see on Instagram and TikTok about, like, the King James version of the Bible or whatever, like, the 1940, like, translated

one. And how maybe, like, the Aramaic versions, like, from, like, in the thirties, but in, like, as in, like the zero thirties, like....

LAUREN TUREK [00:50:22] Yeah.

JVN [00:50:23] Thirties, you know, Common Era. Like, maybe they were nicer in Aramaic and really it was the translations and it was, like, opportunistic translations that they, like, used in, you know, to make us hate each other so much.

LAUREN TUREK [00:50:33] Yeah.

JVN [00:50:34] Because maybe Jesus was cuter and nicer than that! I feel like he was.

LAUREN TUREK [00:51:38] I mean, there's so many different translations, too. Like who's doing the translating? How well are you doing it? Yeah. There's all I mean, this is this sort of ongoing debate among scholars of the Bible, which, yeah, I find that very interesting.

JVN [00:50:49] As someone who looks like a whitewashed, 16th century version of Jesus themselves. I would just say that I feel that this is *not* what he meant. And we should really just be sweeter to people and stuff. Ah! So...WTF. Is awareness the first step? Like, how do we track this stuff? Like what, what the hell are we going to do going into '24? Like, have you seen any, like, potent antidote?

LAUREN TUREK [00:51:15] It's so tricky because, you know, one of the things that we know is that debunking doesn't necessarily work for a lot of these folks. Even when they say the most ludicrous things about vaccines or anything else. You know, giving them real information doesn't help. They just double down. So in a way, I think what we need to do is instead of trying to change that sort of fringe right, I think we need to be speaking more to the moderates who get wishy-washy about everything and try to change the narrative about what is happening. You know, I think so much of the narrative is this "both sides"-ism. And it's, like, "No, there is no both sides here. There's one side that is clearly very fringe." So I think we need to try to be building up our strength on the left and elsewhere to just push back against this.

JVN [00:51:56] And voter suppression is a thing. It is definitely a thing. And also, though, when we look at voter turnout in Florida and Texas, specifically in 2022.

LAUREN TUREK [00:52:08] It was really low.

JVN [00:52:09] It was really depressed in Florida, it was also depressed in Texas. But I don't think that voter suppression and the people who don't have access to voting because of said suppression makes up for the margins of the people who just did not come out. And it wasn't a racial thing, it wasn't an age thing. And actually young people did show up more, but not enough in Florida and Texas. I mean, we had the one bright spot in Florida that, like, first Gen Z congressman whose name I need to remember because he was amazing.

LAUREN TUREK [00:52:34] I mean, I think the other thing is it's not just at the national level. It's not just electing people to Congress. We also have to be doing things at the state and local level.

JVN [00:52:42] We're huge into state leg. on on Getting Curious. We really do need to galvanize state legislators. But I do think that it's, like, you're so right and that it's, like, not about convincing people who are firmly opposed, but it's, like, galvanizing the people who think that their voice doesn't matter. Because for whatever reason, we have like 50%-ish of the electorate who doesn't think their voice matters and who doesn't think that their turnout is going to influence anything. And I think that's where we do have an opportunity, like, to help people understand that have been oppressed and have been marginalized, that your voice does matter and we need your help in galvanizing your voice.

LAUREN TUREK [00:53:16] I also really genuinely think that the political activities of these evangelical groups that I write about has been turning off younger members of those congregations. And so we're starting to see demographic shifts in who is a believer in which type of church that they follow. So we're seeing young evangelicals leaving their evangelical churches and going to more theologically and politically liberal churches or leaving the faith altogether. And I think that will continue. And I think it's because they associate evangelicalism with this political agenda that the right has had. They very fairly associate it. It's not like an unfair association. I think that will continue. I think it's going to continue.

JVN [00:53:56] Giving the floor to you one more time. Is there anything that we would just be remiss that we didn't talk about? Was there any, like, dramatic, like missionary thing that ever happened?

LAUREN TUREK [00:54:04] So there are some hostages taken. There are some missionaries. This happens, too, with Catholic nuns. Some of them get kidnaped or killed. But interestingly, there's evangelists in other countries that get arrested. And thrown, like, in Russia, they're arresting people for sharing the Bible, for educating their children. They would throw them in work camps and everything, it's—, forced psychiatric care. It's again, there's some terrible stuff happening there that—, legitimate infringements on religious liberty that are really scary.

JVN [00:54:31] It's interesting how, though, that duality is, like, weaponized by some people on the religious right to, like...

LAUREN TUREK [00:54:37] Yes.

JVN [00:54:38] You know, to say like, "Christians are getting persecuted. So we need to have, like, absolute rule elsewhere." You know? It's, like, that, that's just interesting.

LAUREN TUREK [00:54:46] Well, there's persecution everywhere. I mean, there's there's a huge amount of Muslim persecution globally, you know, thinking about what's happening with the Uyghurs in China.

JVN [00:54:52] Yes.

LAUREN TUREK [00:54:53] They're all over. I mean, persecution is a problem. There's all sorts of human rights abuses. I think my thing is we shouldn't be elevating one type of persecution above others. We should be focusing on protecting people, allowing them to live the way they want, to live freely, safely, and to make sure that everybody has enough so that nobody is in a position of want. I mean that should be the human rights goal, I think.

JVN [00:55:14] Lauren Francis Turek, I had so much fun talking to you. You are amazing. Her book, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence On Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* is out. You must read. You must follow. We're going to put all the links for people to follow you in the episode description, Lauren. You're the best of all time. Thank you so much for sharing your work and coming on *Getting Curious*.

LAUREN TUREK [00:55:36] Thank you so much for having me. It was so much fun to talk to you.

JVN [00:55:39] Ah! You've been listening to *Getting Curious* with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guest this week was Lauren Frances Turek. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is *Freak* by Quiñ. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, please, honey, introduce a friend. Tell someone you love it. Post about it on socials. We so appreciate it, and we so appreciate our beautiful community of listeners. Thank you so, so much. And if you want to follow us on Instagram and Twitter, we're @CuriousWithJVN, our editor is Andrew Carson. Thank you so much, Andrew! And *Getting Curious* is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.