

Doug Smith ([00:07](#)):

Hey, leader, and welcome to another episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith, and I am your host, and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We're also recording live from the new reiturn.com studio. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here, and I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber. Know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you're subscribed there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's made a difference in your life, it would mean the world to me if you would leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify, or whatever app you listen to podcasts through.

Doug Smith ([00:45](#)):

That really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders. So thank you in advance for that. Well Leader. In today's episode, you're gonna hear my conversation with Pastor Derwin Gray. If you're unfamiliar with Derwin, let me just tell you a little bit about him. Pastor Derwin Gray is the founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church, a multi-ethnic, multi-generational church near Charlotte, North Carolina. Transformation Church has been recognized as one of the fastest growing churches in the United States. Pastor Derwin has been married to his wife, Vicki, for almost 30 years, and has two adult children. He played in the NFL for six years with the Indianapolis Col, Carolina Panthers. He's also the author of several books, including Limitless Life, the High Definition Leader, the Good Life, what Jesus Teaches About Finding True Happiness. God, do You Hear Me? And How to Hear our racial divide.

Doug Smith ([01:31](#)):

And in our conversation, today, you're gonna hear Derwin talk about how we can heal our racial divide. You'll hear him talk about how pastors can build multi-ethnic churches, how to deal with political idolatry and so much more. You're gonna love this conversation. But before we dive into that, just a few announcements. This episode of the L three Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Beratung Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at beratungadvisors.com. That's B E R A T U N G advisors.com. Securities and investment products and services offered through L P L Financial member of FINRA and S I P C, barong Advisors, L P L Financial and L three Leadership are separate entities. I also wanna thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers, they're a jeweler by my friend and mentor John Henne. And my wife Laura.

Doug Smith ([02:25](#)):

and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henny Jewelers and had an incredible experience. And not only do they have a great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out hennyjewelers.com. And I also wanna thank our new sponsor, reiturn.com and leader. Let me just ask you this. Have you ever had an interest in investing in real estate? Well, now for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit reiturn.com to learn more. That's R E I T U R N.com. Investing involves risk. Please consult a return offering circular if you're interested in investing. And with all that being said, here's my conversation with Pastor Derwin Gray. Derwin Gray, welcome to the L three Leadership podcast. I've been looking forward to this for a long time. And really just wanna start with you just giving a little bit about your

background. You spent six years in the NFL and now you're pastoring, uh, an amazing church. And can you kind of give people a brief summary of that journey in your life?

Derwin Gray ([03:24](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much, first and foremost for, uh, for having me. So I like to say I am a, uh, I don't know how I became a pastor, actually, <laugh>, um, you know, it's, it, it it's one of these things where, where God really sets you up. So I didn't grow up in a church background. I didn't know what a pastor was. I didn't, I didn't, I didn't know what a church was. Uh, so growing up, like there was this kind of like god awareness, but we didn't go to church. We didn't pray toge together, none of those types of things. And so pretty much football was, my God, I mean, I wouldn't have been able to say that, but a God is anything that you find affirmation, identity, significance, and purpose in. Hmm. And so that's what football did for me. So eventually end up getting a football scholarship to, um, to Brigham Young.

Derwin Gray ([04:14](#)):

So you got a black kid from a multiethnic environment going to B Y U, which is a Mormon, predominantly white school. And so I find myself there first semester, take some adjustments, second ES semester, meet girl in a track team, and, uh, man, that was 34 years ago and we've been married for, for 31 years. Wow. Come on. And, uh, ended it, ended up having a legendary, uh, career there. Got drafted to the N nfl and still at that time, worship and football was serving me pretty, pretty good. I was, I was really successful. Uh, but when I got to the nfl, I went from being a big fish in a small pond to being a minnow in the Pacific Ocean. And that first year was challenging. Second year was better. Third year I was a, I was, I was a team captain. I was contributing to the success of the team.

Derwin Gray ([05:03](#)):

Uh, but the end of that third season, so I'm 25 years old, and it's like, all right, is this as good as life is gonna get? Wow. So you got the girl, you got the money, you got the car, you got the career, you've done some cool things, but what you don't have is forgiveness. What you don't have is your father's love. What you don't have is emotional security. Um, I was, I was very insecure because I built, when you build your life on what the Bible calls idolatry, which is a false God, when you build your life on a false God, what happens when you can't do what it is to please that God? So football was my God, and my body in production was how I pleased that God to keep my job. What happens when you recognize that the NFL stands for not for long <laugh>?

Derwin Gray ([05:54](#)):

Wow. So, so like, what's one of the worst things in life? You're like, let's say I played 10 years and I was 31 years old. What do you, what do you, what do you, what do you do with the rest of your life? Hmm. And so the existential crisis of, is this as good as it gets? I need forgiveness. I'm insecure. Uh, was only overcome when a teammate for five years shared Christ with me. Uh, his nickname was the naked preacher. His real name was Steve Grant. And every day after practice, man, he'd take a shower, dry off rap a towel on his waist, and he'd share Christ <laugh>. And, uh, that's awesome. Over a five year timeframe of the life I built on sand being washed away, that's when the blood of Christ washed me away. That, that, that, that there was someone who loved me unconditionally.

Derwin Gray ([06:43](#)):

Someone who would forgive me, someone who would grace me, someone who had mercy for me, someone that I could belong to unconditionally. And so I fell in love with Jesus. That was 19 97, 19 98,

signed African contract to play with the Carolina Panthers in Charlotte. I get injured. I only play in three games and I'm on injured reserve for the rest of the year. Alls I can do is rehab my knee and read the Bible. So in that time, it's like God was pulling a pacifier of football out of my mouth and weaning me off of finding my identity and significance and purpose from football to finding it in him. But still, I had no idea that I was gonna be a pastor. I grew up as a compulsive stutterer. Um, and so eventually in the fall of 99, um, I re I re I retired from the nfl and my wife and I were like, well, what's next?

Derwin Gray ([07:40](#)):

Well, we didn't know, but I got invited to speak at a youth event. And I argued with God and I cried to God and said, why would you send me? I'm a stutterer? And I just, since God said, if I can raise my son from the dead, I can raise your tongue to talk. Wow. You have to go to see it happen. Faith, like love is an action. So we went to this little old event and a bunch of kids came to faith and people started calling me to speak. And, uh, my passion for Jesus, for lost p people in the church began to grow, started a master's program in divinity. Um, eventually got a doctorate in New Testament, and we planted transformation church February, uh, February 7th, 2010. And God has blessed us immensely. Wow.

Doug Smith ([08:27](#)):

Uh, question outta curiosity. Your, your wife, you guys met, you know, before you got led to the Lord. Was, was she a believer the whole time and just hoping that you would get ahold of God or did she come to Christ with you? What did that look like?

Derwin Gray ([08:38](#)):

Yeah, she was, uh, she was more lost in me, man. <laugh>. Yeah. Yeah. Um, neither, neither, neither one of us had a clue of the, of, of the gospel. And when I say the gospel, I mean, none of us had the, had a clue of the good news of Jesus and what he accomplished and what that meant and his love for us. So she actually came to faith about six months or so before I did. Hmm. And so we were pretty much on a similar trajectory. And both of us came to faith through our friends at work. There was a woman at work who shared the gospel with her. And then my teammate, Steve Grant, the naked preacher, shared the gospel with me. And so we're very big into every follower of Jesus is a missionary, and your mission field is where your feet are.

Doug Smith ([09:28](#)):

That's so good. I wanted to talk to you just about that. So this is actually funny. So, uh, I've known who you are obviously and followed you, but for somehow there was a disconnect. Like I did not know you were the evangelism linebacker, uh, <laugh>. So, so when I was researching, I saw, because I remember that video, I don't know when that came out. Uh, and if, if you're listening to this or watching this right now, and if not seeing this just YouTube evangelism linebacker, and you'll see Derwin <laugh>. But, um, one just on that video, is that, is that when you arrived in life when that went out? Or do, do you regret being that now that you're the evangelist?

Derwin Gray ([10:00](#)):

Absolutely not. Come on. Absolutely not. I, um, I remember back in 2004, um, I got a phone call from a college student from the university, uh, it was, uh, Montana State in Bozeman. And they said, Hey, for Campus Crusade, we wanna develop this character for some vi videos we wanna do called the Evangelism linebacker. It's based off of Terry Tate, the office linebacker. And I was like, well, what do I, what do I gotta do? He goes, you get to tackle p people who don't evangelize. I'm like, lemme get this.

Right. I get to tackle people and I don't go to jail for it. <laugh>, Nope. Let's do it. So, uh, we filmed that in 2004 and still to this day, people love that thing. And, um, even though it's meant to be slapstick and humorous, there is a sense of importance and urgency to, to it. What's interesting, Doug, is nearly half of millennials think it's mi nearly half of millennial Christians say it's wrong to evangelize. Hmm. That's a recent study from Barna. So there's a huge disconnect because the Jesus of the Bible commanded that we evangelize, commanded that we share our faith. And so, um, I think we're gonna have a resurrection of the evangelism linebacker, cuz I'm actually getting ready to write a book with Naf Pet NAF Press on the topic of evangelism.

Doug Smith ([11:29](#)):

Wow. Well, I do wanna touch base on this. So, you know, you're a pastor, you get the opportunity every week from a pulpit to get to share Christ with people. Uh, that's not the majority of people, right. And so, uh, there's a lot of people they wanna make a difference. I'm curious whether it was, you know, the naked preacher, what is it the people who don't have a platform like you have can do in everyday life? What was so attractive outside of maybe his body about the, the naked preacher that really ministered you and enabled you to do Christ? And how can people connect the dots there and, and do that in their own life?

Derwin Gray ([11:57](#)):

Yeah. So what I would say, number one is if the only time I'm sharing Jesus is when I preach on Sunday, then I'm a fraud. Oof. And so I, um, I share often about where my Jacob's well is in John chapter four, Jesus talks about Jacob's, well, where he meets the woman at the well. And he shares that he's the living water with her. So I have several coffee shops that are my Jacob's. Well, and so what I do as I'm walking into the coffee shop, I pray, um, Lord, will you open up an opportunity for me to share the gospel with someone that does not know Christ? And so that's not just for Sunday, like I actually think people who are not pastors have a greater influence to affect lost people. Because lost people often don't come into a church until they have a relationship with someone who's a part of the church.

Derwin Gray ([12:53](#)):

And so that's why we tell our congregation that we're all missionaries. All of us are on mission. And so the desire to share your faith flows out of the satisfaction you have in Christ. The greater you're satisfied in Christ, the greater you're gonna want everybody to be satisfied in Christ. Like my hope and my prayer is, I hope one day Christians are evangelistic the way Michael Jordan fans are concerning him being better than LeBron James. I mean, they will give you every statistic in every category. And you go, well, quote to me second Corinthians 5, 4 14, uh, well hold on a second. You know all these stats about Michael Jordan and how he's better than LeBron James and you're trying to evangelize me to convert me to believe in Michael Jordan, but yet you don't know scriptures to convert people to come to Jesus Christ who hung on the cross. And so our affections are just all outta whack. You know, it's, it's, it's not like Michael Jordan's going to give you money, but yet Jesus is gonna give you salvation. Jesus is gonna give you the Holy Spirit. Jesus is gonna give you mercy. Jesus is gonna give you kindness. Like we have so many Christians who are addicted and attracted to the wrong things.

Doug Smith ([14:13](#)):

Yeah. I want I want to talk about that And just real quick, cuz I know the book's not out yet, but I think, is it called Sent or Send? Yeah.

Derwin Gray ([14:20](#)):

Uh, so right now the working title is sent s e n t. And that's a, that's really in the gospel of John Jesus says, multiple times the Father sent me. And so in essence, because we're the body of Christ, how is Jesus gonna be sent to our neighbors if he's seated at the right hand of the Father right now? Well, it's through us, his people. He is sending us on mission. And, and I'll just say this, we have to move evangelism from sounding like a used car salesman to an orphan who's been adopted by a good father. And you're inviting other orphans into the house to have dinner to meet your dad.

Doug Smith ([15:05](#)):

That is so good. Um, we'll look forward to it and we'll share that when the the book comes out. You've, you've mentioned idolatry a few times. You talked about, uh, football is an idol in your life mm-hmm. <affirmative> and people just making idols outta the wrong things. I heard a message you did recently on, um, politics in the church. It was called, uh, turn from Political Idolatry to Kingdom Politics. And clearly we, we live in a nation where politics is an idol for people. And I'm just curious, um, can you talk about your view of making politics an idol and the culture which, which we live? Cause I thought it was such a timely message and we'll put a link to that in the show notes as well so people can listen. But I just want you to challenge leaders.

Derwin Gray ([15:39](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Let, let, let me, let me give us something to think about. The Church of Jesus Christ is 2000 years old. American politics in their current iteration is maybe 60 years old because the Democrats and Republicans switched allegiances during the Civil Rights movement. A lot of times people will say the Republicans are the ones who freed the slaves. Well, it's cuz they were considered liberals back then. So the, the Southern Democrats were the conservatives and then they switched. But here's my point. The church has been around for 2000 years. Politics in America the way it is right now, let's just say 300 years, even though it's not for the overwhelming majority of the Christian faith, like over 99.9% of Christians have never been a Republican. Wow. And have never been a Democrat. So if you are filtering your faith through Republican politics or democratic politics, that is idolatry.

Derwin Gray ([16:50](#)):

Also. 99.999% of all Christians who've ever existed around the world have never been Christian. Most Christians around the world are not Republican or Democrat. I was recently in Norway with my wife. They have 11 political parties. They think American Christians have lost their absolute minds the way we filter everything. We read the Bible through political lenses instead of reading the Bible and implementing the Kingdom of God. And so it's very logical and very reasonable that you could have Christians who say, I'm not pro L G B T Q, I love PE people, but I don't affirm that I'm not pro-abortion. However, I vote Democrat because of this, this, and this. And you can have people who go, you know what? I don't agree with President Trump's rhetoric and his, uh, immature attitude, but man, he done some really good things. Boom, boom, boom. And as followers of Christ, we should be able to go, man, vote your conscious.

Derwin Gray ([18:00](#)):

But instead, what we've done in America, families have broken apart, um, churches have broken apart based on who you vote for. Um, and I'm, I'm old enough to remember Doug, when a man by the name of Donald J. Trump said, we're gonna do operation warp speed, and we're gonna create a vaccine for Covid. Like, he was the one who said, we're gonna do a vaccine for Covid. And then people who followed

him were like, yay. I, no, you know, and, and then like I'm old enough to remember when the Republican Party was about family values, was about financial responsibility. I remember all those things. And next thing I know, it's turned into a populous movement of like street brawlers where the president's son says, if we follow Jesus advice to turn the other cheek, we wouldn't be in power. And I just, I, and so I think what we have to do as the church is we have to, um, implement the kingdom of God and understand common grace and challenge the cultural idols.

Derwin Gray ([19:14](#)):

So when I speak to Christians in Norway, they go, pastor, help me understand why you not want free healthcare for everyone. Like they think it's utterly asinine that we as Christians would not want free healthcare. And of course it's not free, it comes outta your taxes. They go, why aren't you guys willing to do that? I said, I am. Like, like I I think that would be awesome that that, you know, but my point is, there's some Christians who think promoting free healthcare is like of the devil. And then since I'm here, why is it that when President Biden said, we're gonna forgive \$10,000 in college debt for students? Oh, that's socialism. But when the government does P P P loans, it's not. So I think political idolatry is very blinding. It's very ugly. And then what it's doing lastly is generation Z and younger millennials are going, I want nothing to do with that. Hypocrisy.

Doug Smith ([20:24](#)):

You, you talked about in the message you mentioned it can be blinding. I also think just people have blind spots. You know, there's probably people listening to this saying, well, like politics is an idol to me, <laugh>, what are, what are some signs and, and ways that people can tell that they may have made politics and idle in their life?

Derwin Gray ([20:40](#)):

The only person who's not blind is Jesus. So I wanna, I want to be aware of potential blind spots that I have. So that's number one. Number two, person wins. You almost have like this salvific joy. Uh, I remember when President Trump won, and uh, there were some older white men in a coffee shop that I know, man, I had never seen those men so happy in their lives. And then, and then when President Biden won, I saw 'em again and they were just so depressed. I mean, they were just so depressed. And I'm going, guys, wait a second. Like, why are you so Well, America's going down the tubes now. And it's like, wait a minute, hold on. Hold, hold on. Are you not happy that unemployment is at like 3.2%? Like, do you know how low the Yeah. And it's like, hold on, hold on.

Derwin Gray ([21:36](#)):

You're putting your hope in the wrong thing. Now, in saying this, I vote, I vote number one because I'm an American citizen and it's my right number. Number two, I vote because there's a history in our nation where black Americans were denied their constitutional right to be able to vote. We were lynched, our church were bombed. Uh, um, we were, we were, we, we had dogs unleashed upon us. So I vote, but I recognize that that's not my supremacy of my action in the kingdom of God. I've gone to Washington DC to advocate and I and and advocate for immigration reform. If people saw what it took for immigration to take place, you would be blown away. It's designed for people not to be able to come into our NA nation, but we need strong borders. Like border strength is important. It doesn't have to be an either or. Like I can care about life in a womb and a migrant child's ability while at the same time saying they're systemic injustice. It doesn't have to be one camp or the other. The kingdom of God is outrageously beautiful and glorious and perplexing to political idol ideologies.

Doug Smith ([22:55](#)):

I thought this message was so, so profound. Um, I know there's a lot of pastors that listen to this and you know, pastors have had a really tough couple of years. Uh, do you have any advice cuz the, the pastors that I talk to, you know, they're like, no matter what I say, it's never enough. And no matter what I say, it's always too much. Do you have any, any thoughts when it comes to pastors on addressing politics in the church?

Derwin Gray ([23:16](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, so what I would say is whenever you address political idolatry as a hobby and not a holy habit, it's gonna come off wrong. And here's what I mean. Um, the things I've been saying at Transformation Church during this crazy time is what I was saying when it wasn't crazy. So our church actually grew tremendously through all of this chaos because I didn't say anything that hadn't been said before. Way before George Floyd, I had been brokering conversations between the police and the church and the African American community. Cuz as a black man, I've always known once again, it doesn't have to be a either or it can be a both. And, and so when you talk about these topics as a hobby, what you catch the fish with is what you keep the fish with. And so what a lot of my white pastor friends did when George Floyd was murdered is they immediately went to, uh, George Floyd racism. And a lot of their white congregants were like, wait a hold on, wait, wait dude, what do you, what do you, what do you like getting woke? Like, what are you saying? Like, what are you doing? And a part of it is like, this shouldn't have respectfully what happened to George Floyd is not the tip of the iceberg for racism and systemic injustice in America. It's not even close.

Derwin Gray ([24:51](#)):

It's not even, uh, a man tragically lost his life, but that's not even close to what's causing so much of the racial, uh, uh, uh, am amne between people. And, and so, but what a lot of my white pastors did, friends did, it was such a hobby that when they got into Stewart, it wasn't a habit for their church. And I had friends le lose thousands of people, millions of dollars. Um, and so what I would say is make sure you're steadily feeding people a well-balanced meal. So when this comes up, it, it won't, it won't, it won't be a thing. A a pastor friend of mine, he's pastors church for 30 years, multi-site church, cutting edge, um, predominantly a white church. And we were talking, he goes, pastor, he goes, my heart is broken. He's like, these are people, I married them. I married their children, I buried their dead.

Derwin Gray ([25:53](#)):

They've said they love the church and I speak out against racism and they leave the church and they're calling me woke. And they're calling me a li liberal, like, like, what did I do wrong? And so the first thing is always compassion. And he said, you know, pastor, I'm, I'm really, really sorry that you've experienced this. And I I said, what I think happened was because you hadn't been teaching this year after year after year after year, they were used to a diet and their spiritual appetite rejected it. And they believe their late night cable more than they believe you. And so that's why I'm like, listen man, I'm, we've, we have bigger churches than we've ever had. More multi-site churches than we've ever had, but yet we have more conspiracy theories in a church than we've ever had racial division in a church than we've ever had. So like, what exactly are we doing? Like being like, like, like what exactly are we doing?

Doug Smith ([26:58](#)):

Uh, I wanna hit on that. Your, your latest book is actually called How to Heal Our Racial Divide. Um, now that we're on this topic, and, and I'll just leave this really, really open-ended, you know, why, why did you write this and, and what can leaders get out of it?

Derwin Gray ([27:11](#)):

You know what Doug, the reason why I wrote the book is because I seen the church just being to just being torn apart. So, uh, it came out in, um, 2022. Um, but man, I seen the seeds of it right after President Trump. Things that I normally would say from the pulpit, that was straight Bible, there would be pushback and it would echo certain things that many people in the political idol can't would say. And I said, man, I have to write a resource number one, that is biblical number two, that is theological number three, that is gospel centered. Number four, that it's culturally aware. And then number five, here are practices that you can actually do. Because what I seen was a lot of my white pastor friends were like, pastor, you're, you're, you're, you're, you're right. We need to change this. This is wrong.

Derwin Gray ([28:04](#)):

But they would go read sociological books. They wouldn't read theological books. I don't have a problem with sociological books, but sociology cannot heal a theological problem. Only a theological cure can heal a theological problem. And so Jesus was left on the sidelines. In this discussion, everybody's talking about critical race theory, they're talking about this theory, and I'm like, all right guys, can we just go back to Bible 1 0 1, Genesis 12, God tells Abraham, I'm going to give you a family that's made up of all the families of the earth through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The nation of Israel comes the nation of Israel. Disobeyed Jesus is the seed of Abraham. And so Jesus lives a perfect life, dies on the cross in a place of humanity, raises again. He not only forgives our families, reconciled to God, reconciled to each other, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, embodying the kingdom of God on earth.

Derwin Gray ([29:11](#)):

Our unity shows the Father sent the son our love displays that we're disciples of Christ. Easy peasy. Simple. I mean, literally that's like literally first century Bible 1 0 1. But what do we do? We've turned Jesus into a self-help coach and five ways to heal your stress. Four ways to get your dream, and da da da da da. Like, let's, if, if we just teach the Bible story, it's there. Like case in point, Jesus, a Jew goes to Samaria to meet a Samaritan woman. The Samaritan and Jews were in a ethnic feud for 700 years because in 7 22 BC the northern tribes are taken in the Babylonian captivity. Out of that becomes the um, um, Samaritans, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman, he's the living water. Her life is transformed. But here's what it's important for us to understand. What is a Samaritan, a Jew and a Gentile in one body? What's the church supposed to be? A Jew and a Gentile in one body? What was a Samaritan woman? A woman. What's the church? A bride in that message is ethnic reconciliation through the living water.

Doug Smith ([30:30](#)):

So good. So talk to, talk to leaders listening to this now. How can we be part of the solution when it comes to healing our racial divide in our country, in our everyday life?

Derwin Gray ([30:40](#)):

Well, something that Rick Warren told me, which is so true, the greatest season is preparation for the season. And so what I mean by that is before you try to go and change the world, let it let, let the message change you. What I would say is leaders get my book, how to Heal our Racial Divide By 10 of

them. Read 'em with the most influential people in your church and then start doing small groups. Start doing sermons on it. And it starts as a mustard seed and it spreads. But so often, um, there are people who go into a battle and they're not prepared. Um, respectfully, what a lot of my white pastor friends do is they go, man, we're gonna be a diverse church. You know what we're gonna do? We're gonna hire some black musicians and we're gonna invite some of our black friends. See we're a black church or, or we're a multi-ethnic church. No, you're not your bowl of vanilla ice cream with a few caramel and chocolate chips in it.

Derwin Gray ([31:47](#)):

One of the ways that, you know, if you're a multi-ethnic church who shapes with authority through preaching and leading the action of the church, and that's not about affirmative action, that's affirming the right action. Here's another thing. A lot of white brothers and sisters will say, well, we want the church to be multiethnic, but minorities don't come. My question is, why don't white people go to minority led churches? I actually had a conversation with a gen gen gentleman and I said that to him cuz he is like, well, why won't black people come to our church? And I said, well, why don't you go to a black church? And he looked at me like I had 12 heads. Like, that's not even a thought. Through the multi-ethnic church round table that we've done for eight years now, we've trained over 600 leaders in gospel centered, multi-ethnic missional church.

Doug Smith ([32:41](#)):

Yeah. And so you, you also wrote a book on this subject, how to build a multi-ethnic church. And as you said, you do these round tables, and again, we'll include links. If you're a pastor listening to this, uh, who's interested in attending, we'll put a links to that. But what are some practical things? You have a multi-ethnic church. What are some practical things that you've done that has enabled you to be multiethnic?

Derwin Gray ([33:01](#)):

Yep. Yep. And so, uh, I'm gonna, I'm gonna be a tad bit snarky here, please. So please bear with me. Theo Theology's always practical. Yeah.

Derwin Gray ([33:11](#)):

Theology's meant to be practiced. So as a result of our theological convictions, the first thing is how we understand the gospel shapes, how we communicate the gospel, the churches we get is because of the gospel we preach. The gospel we preach is the churches that we get. And so we believe Jesus not only forgives sins, but he creates a family with different colored skins. Jesus declares us righteous, therefore we see each other clothing the righteous of of Christ. Um, our leadership team is ethnically div diverse. Our music team is ethnically div diverse. Um, we, we, we do not use language like we're going to help the poor. No. The poor can teach us about what it means to walk with Christ. We're partnering with the poor. Um, and, and so, you know, we've, we at the end of the day treat everybody like Jesus died for them because he did

Doug Smith ([34:10](#)):

So good. Um, anything else you wanna say on that subject before I transition Another way?

Derwin Gray ([34:16](#)):

Okay. What you got?

Doug Smith ([34:18](#)):

Yeah, I, I just talking about leadership, you know, I know the leadership comes with immense weight. There's painful seasons. I'm just curious, I love asking leaders, how do you deal with the pain and pressure that comes with, with leading a church for any large organization?

Derwin Gray ([34:31](#)):

Yeah. Well, early on, not very well <laugh> early on, um, not very well at all. Um, over the, over the years, I've learned to center myself on this rollercoaster by remembering Jesus can do so much more than I can ever do. Also, what I think is a big deal today, if I look back a year later, I see that it's not so keep your head when everybody else is losing theirs. Remember who is sovereign. And Al also, the greatest thing that I can do is to be prepared as best that I as I can be. But I have to be through the Holy Spirit's power, a none anxious presence. If I'm anxious, so is the team. If I freak out, so is the team. I have to model self-control, which comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Doug Smith ([35:36](#)):

Hmm. I've, I've heard you talk about you love to fish, right? Is that your hobby? One of your hobbies?

Derwin Gray ([35:41](#)):

It's my main hobby, my man

Doug Smith ([35:44](#)):

<laugh>. What role have hobbies and, and even the Sabbath played in your life in resting and and was that hard for you to learn? Or is that something that just came natural?

Derwin Gray ([35:52](#)):

No, it was, uh, it was very hard for me to learn. It was very hard for me to learn because you really think you're more important than you are. And one of the ways that I keep my self importance at bay is, I'll often say from the pulpit, or I'll say in meetings or even say to myself, is I'll say, listen, in eternity, the Father, son and Holy Spirit, were not going, oh my gosh, I cannot wait until April 9th, 1971 because at Robert B. Green Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, Durwin Gray's gonna be born in Woohoo is gonna be awesome. Like, like I'm really not that important. Like, like, like Jesus is the big deal. And so by taking a day of rest, what I'm saying is, one Lord, I trust you to complete what you have called me to complete. Number two, the Sabbath is not a day of being bored. It's a day of delight. It's a day of recharging. It's a day of creative imagination. And so for me, fishing has always played an important role in my life. It reminds me of me and my grandmother. Uh, years ago I was in a pastoral care class and the professor teaching said, draw a picture of your happiest childhood memory. And most people think, well, as an NFL player, you're gonna draw one of you playing football. And instinctively what I drew was me and my grandmother fishing under a tree.

Doug Smith ([37:25](#)):

Hmm.

Derwin Gray ([37:27](#)):

And my grandmother, uh, she really protected me and took care of me. My, uh, mom was 17 when I was born. My dad was 19. And, uh, you know, there was some substance abuse issues. There were some

mental health issues mm-hmm. <affirmative> and my grandmother really protected me and really shielded me. It was a really chaotic environment. Um, matter of fact, when I was about 42, 42 through about 45, so this is seven years ago, there was a season where, um, I was angry at how I was raised. When I looked at the dysfunction, when I looked at the toxic, um, there's a reason why physical health and mental health is not as good in areas of, in, in, in context of stress because cortisol and adrenaline is always going and your body had made for those things. And so, um, I worked through that by God's grace to say, man, they just did the best that they could. But fishing reminds me of the good days with my grand grandmother. And so I pray, I sing. I don't, I don't, I don't even have to catch fish to have fun, <laugh>.

Doug Smith ([38:37](#)):

Wow. Do you have a, do you have a favorite fishing story or any, what's the biggest fish you've caught?

Derwin Gray ([38:43](#)):

<laugh>. Oh man. That, that's unfair cause I got like a thousand. So, um, one of my, one of my bucket lists was to fish in Spain. There's a river in Spain called the Ebro. And the Ebro is known for a giant species of catfish called the wells. And so I finally got to go, we helped plant a church in Madrid, Spain. So we went and ministered to the pe pe people there. And so we had a day to ourselves. And so me and the pastor went to Fish Toro with a guide, and we went, um, during a time when it was hot, it was August and it just wasn't the best time. So they said, you know, we may catch a Fisher or two. So it was pretty slow. And man, I hooked into one and, uh, it was, it was nearly five foot six tall. Wow. And, uh, we estimated probably 110 pounds. And man, I felt like a kid all over again. It was great <laugh>. And um, our fishing guide said, congratulations, you caught a small one.

Doug Smith ([39:52](#)):

Really? Yeah. Cause Oh

Derwin Gray ([39:54](#)):

My goodness. Cause typically they're probably about a foot longer and about 80 to 90 pounds heavier. <laugh>. So

Doug Smith ([40:02](#)):

How long did it take you to reel end?

Derwin Gray ([40:04](#)):

Oh, like 25 minutes. It was, it was ridiculous. It was, it was awesome. If you go to my Instagram at Durwin I Gray, um, you can actually see the picture of the giant catfish. And of course we, we let it go. And so that, that, that's my most recent fun fishing trip.

Doug Smith ([40:24](#)):

Oh man. That's awesome. Um, we're talking to leaders, talk to leaders about longevity. You're certainly not at your finish line, um, but you've been in ministry for a long time and, uh, I'm sure you've seen being in ministry world, so many leaders have fallen and and not finished their course. What advice do you have for leaders when it comes to character development and, and keeping their call so they can make it to their finish line?

Derwin Gray ([40:44](#)):

That is leadership. Leadership is the development of your, of your, of your character. Because if you're not developing your character, you're le le leading, you're a fraud. And eventually that's gonna be exposed. And so what happens is the more gifted you are, the more better looking you are. The more talented you are, the longer you can get away with being, uh, uh, not a person of integrity. You can cover it up longer, but eventually, uh, you'll be found out. And so what's scary about 2023, Doug, is this is an era where it's easy not to have integrity. Cuz you can just go, well, that's not true. It didn't happen, and just move on. Wow. And people who have a vested interest in your success will follow along. It won't, it won't be until you cut off their vested in interest that their eyes will be open and go, oh wow, this person's a fraud.

Derwin Gray ([41:46](#)):

So what I would say for me, number one is I define leadership as not simply influence, but I define leadership as becoming what you want others to be. Wow. And for me, that flows out of the words of Jesus. So Jesus tells his disciples, he says, um, you don't lord it over like the Gentiles do. So he is speaking of the Romans. The Romans were barbaric, the Romans were oppressive. And he's saying, if you really wanna be a leader, rap a towel around your waist. And, um, I say this and I hope it comes across the right way. I see a lot of Christian leaders not wanting to wrap towels around their waist, but turn their congregations into fan clubs. Yep.

Doug Smith ([42:35](#)):

How can, how can leaders guard themselves against that? Because I think naturally, I mean, we do live in a world where everyone wants a following, they wanna build their following. And, and again, pride and ego can want that. Is there any ways that we can protect ourselves?

Derwin Gray ([42:50](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Proverbs 4 23, guard your heart, <laugh> for the wellspring of of life. So, so the first thing is this. It's, it's, it's, and let me just talk to pastors here. And I, and I know not everybody's a pastor, but it, it translate, this is for me, what is there for Derwin? Great. A boast about the life in me that makes me born again is the Holy Spirit, the gospel that saves me as belongs to Christ. The glory belongs to the fa fa Father, the word of God is God's, the people belong to God. The spiritual gifts I have belong to Holy Spirit. What is there for me to boast about? What, what's, what's there to be arrogant? What what have I done? Nothing. Big deal. And so that's number one. Number two, when it says, guard your heart, be careful with disappointments, because a lot of times we don't mourn our disappointments and we allow them to add up like an unpaid bill.

Derwin Gray ([44:01](#)):

And what happens is, as they add up like an unpaid bill, bitterness begins to build up. When bitterness builds up, there's this entitlement that comes about, well, my wife isn't doing this, so I'm entitled to this. Well, I'm belief and, and disappointment creates this bitterness. So it's important that when there's disappointment to go blessed of poor spirit or, or blessed of those who mourn for they will be comforted. Take those disappointments to God. Go see a therapist, have other mature pastors pour into you, speak to your spouse about it. Do not let a bitter root come up. And then thirdly, like, don't compare. Do not compare. Bigger is not better. Better is better.

Doug Smith ([44:49](#)):

That's so good. And yeah, a few years ago, the fall of 2020, I had a, I had what I call a mental breakdown. It was the result of a lot of things. And basically what you just said, I had to go through a process, went to therapy, a bunch of things. And one thing my, my therapist said to me, that was so good, he said, I've had a lot of loss in my my life. I lost my mom when I was 17. My sister died of a heroin overdose, all these different things. And, and I thought I had grieved those things. I'm walking with God, you know, Hey, I have peace. Um, but my therapist just said, Doug, you can't, you can't say goodbye to something you never said hello to. And he had me go to all the grave sites and write letters to everyone I've lost. And I just realized I've never <laugh> mourned a grief in my entire life. And I can't tell you how life changing that was. And so just thank you for sharing that with leaders. I I just wanna speak to the fact that I know that to be true.

Derwin Gray ([45:35](#)):

Yeah. Well, and thank you for being vulnerable and sharing. American theology does not have space for Jesus'. Theology that says, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. What's interesting, Doug, that word blessed and Greek is the word. And so we run away from mourning, which means we're running away from happiness, which comes from the comforting presence of God. God can't comfort that, which we don't bring to him to comfort us with.

Doug Smith ([46:08](#)):

And this is huge. And, and again, <laugh>, we're hitting on all of your books it seems like, but you wrote a book called The Good Life. And what I loved about it was it was the exact opposite of what you would think and you actually used to be attitudes as the way to a happy life. Anything else you wanna, we don't have time to cover the whole book, but anything you wanna share about that book and, and more of that message?

Derwin Gray ([46:26](#)):

Oh yeah. That, that, that was, that was the divine paradox that if I can sum up that book, is Jesus is like, I'm gonna give you the keys to happiness, but you've gotta take them and unlock the door and walk in. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> happiness is about becoming the person you were created to be. Happy are the peacemakers for they will be called sons and daughters of God. Happy are the merciful for they will see God. Happy are the poor spirit for theirs as a kingdom of he heaven. Jesus is actually saying, you truly can be happy, but it's not the way you think. And it's a deeper, richer happiness that your face can be shedding tears, but your soul can be smiling.

Doug Smith ([47:15](#)):

I love it. Well, uh, we're gonna dive into the lightning room now, but uh, for those listening we've mentioned several of Erwin's books. Uh, we'll include links to all of them, recommend all of them check out his sermons on his church and, uh, lots of resources out there for you. Um, so with the time we have left, just a bunch of fun questions I ask in every interview. The first one is, what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Derwin Gray ([47:37](#)):

Uh, the best advice that I have ever received was from my late mentor Alan Bacon. And, um, basically I was telling him how tired I was from going out and speaking and traveling and sharing the gospel when I came home. I wanted to rest and it was my wife's job, you know, to take care of the kids and let me rest. So I told him all this stuff and the advice he gave me is he said, son, if you going out preaching a gospel

makes you too tired to love and serve your wife and kids, then you need to stop preaching a gospel because that is the gospel.

Doug Smith ([48:13](#)):

Woo. How'd that feel?

Derwin Gray ([48:15](#)):

Uh, it sucked. But it was the best thing, <laugh>. It was what I needed to hear, and it guides my life and ministry. Now,

Doug Smith ([48:21](#)):

What are one or two books that have made a significant impact on your life, either recently or all time that you'd recommend?

Derwin Gray ([48:28](#)):

Um, all time. The book that I would recommend is Conformed to His Image by Ken Boa.

Doug Smith ([48:35](#)):

Well, pastor Derwin, this has been phenomenal. Thank you so much for taking the time to invest in me and everyone that will listen to this and hopefully we'll get to do it again someday.

Derwin Gray ([48:42](#)):

All right. Awesome. Thank you.

Doug Smith ([48:44](#)):

Hey, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Pastor Jerwin. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him in links to everything that we discussed in the show notes l3leadership.org/373 and leader, I want to challenge you that if you wanna 10 x your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join in L3 Leadership Mastermind Group. Mastermind groups are groups of six or 12 leaders that meet together for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last eight years. If you're interested in learning more about launching or joining group, go to [L3leadership.org/masterminds](https://l3leadership.org/masterminds). And as always, I like to end every episode with a quote, and today I'll quote Dave Ramsey who said, success is just a pile of all the mistakes you've made, and you're standing on it rather than buried under it. So good. Well, leader, I hope this episode encourages you know that my wife, Laura, and I love you. We believe in you and I say it every episode, but don't quit. Keep leading the world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.