

Q&A1: Question and Answer with Jim Osman and Owen Strachan

JIM OSMAN: Let's begin with something that is on everybody's mind. I've been asked about this, and we need some clarity. How do you pronounce your last name?

OWEN STRACHAN: It is a Scottish last name. It is a Gaelic pronunciation, a subgroup of the Scots. And you pronounce it in two different ways. You can pronounce it [STRAW-khen], which is very masculine and which I would personally prefer. Or you can say [STRAN].

JIM: Which sounds effeminate.

OWEN: Thank you. Thanks, Jim. And so that's how—that's the Gaelic form.

JIM: OK, so you went with the Gaelic?

OWEN: Somebody went with the Gaelic. I don't know who, but I'm saddled with it, so yeah.

JIM: How and when—let's begin with your salvation testimony. How and when did the Lord save you?

OWEN: I grew up in a Christian home in coastal Maine. My mom is from a believing family. Her father was an elder at Grace Chapel in the Boston area, a well-known large church there. He did radar work for MIT for many years. On my dad's side, not a single Christian to this day except my dad. They met in college. My dad got saved in part through my mom's witness and raised my sister and me in a tiny Baptist church in coastal Maine, about forty to fifty people big. And it was there that I heard the gospel. And honestly, no joke, it was at Vacation Bible School, which, you know, is happening all over America right now. It was at a VBS that I remember—you don't necessarily know when the spirit regenerates your heart, but I remember hearing about Hell and thinking, “I deserve that for my sin,” and then hearing about Heaven and thinking, “I can only go there because Jesus died for my sins.” And so I think I was nine or ten. Probably five kids at a backyard VBS. Probably no one there remembers anything about that, but that's when I believe the Lord got a hold of my heart.

JIM: That's when you believe you were saved.

OWEN: That's when I believe I was saved.

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JIM: When were you baptized? You know, Baptist church, did they dunk you the next Sunday?

OWEN: I'm not entirely sure why it took me a while, but I didn't get baptized until college. I was not as confident in my profession of faith as I could have been, but I look back at my high school and junior high years before that and then into college, and I think I was apart from sin in a positive way, in a good way, by God's grace, but I had to really own it, and it took some time for me to own my profession all the way. It took some time for discipleship to happen. The discipleship that I would want to set up wasn't necessarily all there.

JIM: So did you say what age you were?

OWEN: I think I was nineteen when I was baptized.

JIM: OK, all right. Did you attend that Baptist church all the way through your childhood till you went to college? Your parents still attend there?

OWEN: It was First Baptist Church of East Machias, Maine. I attended it all growing up into college. The church no longer exists because like a lot of New England churches, it just dwindled and dwindled and then eventually was sold to a drug rehabilitation ministry about five years ago—the building was. And so my own home church literally today doesn't exist. And for years, Jim, I thought very hard and prayed and talked with my wife, my long-suffering wife, about going back to New England because of that darkness, because of watching things like that. My home church doesn't—I mean, that's a serious thing to say. It happens, but that's a serious thing to say. My home church does not exist anymore. But the Lord does not seem to have called me back to Maine, but at the very least, I'm very thankful that that church existed for a time and I came to faith through it.

JIM: Have you always had your current theological convictions? Because I would say, broadly speaking, you're in the theological camp that this church would be considered in. Calvinistic in its doctrines of soteriology, not necessarily eschatology. Maybe, maybe not Baptist, not pedobaptist. Have you always had those theological convictions? Growing up at a Baptist church, were you kind of raised and reared in a more Arminian setting?

OWEN: I was. I was raised in a Freewill, conservative Baptist church. So we weren't monkeying around with biblical errancy or miracles aren't real or anything like that. It

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was a “the Bible says it, we believe it” kind of church. It wasn't fundamentalist. There are some good fundamentalist churches out there, but it wasn't that, which is interesting to me. There was Christian liberty on a bunch of issues, and I'm really thankful for that looking back because it taught me both about, you know, conservatism, both about structure and order in the Christian life, so following what God teaches—obedience would be a clearer word, as I fumble here on stage—but it also gave me a category for liberty. And as I've gotten older, and we've even talked some about different heresies in the church and different systems that prey on people, I've realized a lot of people in conservative circles grew up where there was basically no liberty, and they struggle with that, and thankfully I had both structure, the call to obedience, but also the freedom of the gospel.

But it wasn't until I got to college and my college roommate liked a girl, and a bunch of us in this little circle, Baptist guys—we were all Freewill Baptists. We'd all grown up in conservative Freewill Baptist, northeastern places. And then this dude liked this girl, and she said, “I can't date you because my dad is a pastor, and if you want to date me, you have to read Jonathan Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*.” And so he said, “OK, I'll read *Freedom of the Will*.” So he read *Freedom of the Will*, he became Reformed, and then he came back to Bowdoin College, my main college, and he then launched into cage-stage Calvinist debates with us Arminians, the three Arminians in the group, and we fought him tooth and nail for like six months our sophomore year. And then I said, “All right”—I was the most kind of red-blooded. I'm like, all right, here we go. I'm going to read the New Testament, and I'm going to refute you, and I'm going to show you it's Freewill, the New Testament is. So I had biblical instincts, you know, but not the right ones.

JIM: You couldn't figure out how it is that Freewill Baptist and *The Freedom of the Will* by Jonathan Edwards, how this guy wasn't agreeing with you after reading that book.

OWEN: I could not. I could not. So I got to Ephesians and stopped and said, “You win.” True story.

JIM: Ephesians 1.

OWEN: Ephesians 1. I was done. In all seriousness, the Lord—that wasn't my conversion, but the Lord opened my eyes to the glory of the sovereignty of God, that it is not a bad thing that God is God, is divine, is sovereign. It's a wonderful thing that God is sovereign and divine and in control, and even in my life—I won't go on here at length, but even in my life, that's led me further as I've gone through life and there have been some

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struggles and challenges and hardships and trials. It's led me to realize God doesn't just *allow* hardships and suffering. God *appoints* hardships and suffering, and He does so for His glory and my good. So I'm so thankful He helped me discover all that because honestly I don't know how people who don't believe in the sovereignty of God make it through life.

JIM: Did that sort of conversion in your thinking happen before or after you met your wife?

OWEN: That was before. I was a sophomore in college when I became Reformed in my theology, and then after graduation from Bowdoin, I went to Washington, D.C. and interned under Mark Dever for six months, and then I interned at the U.S. Department of State for six months, and then I went to Southern Seminary in 2004 and I met Bruce Ware, the theologian, and I was in his discipleship group at Southern for two years. And in the second year, Dr. Ware and his wife pulled me aside and said, "We think you could be a good fit for our daughter." I went over there. I said, "Dr. Ware, I need to talk to you about my PhD, where I should do my PhD," because I had a bunch of men, Al Mohler and Dever and others, that said, "You should do a PhD." I didn't have a category for doing a PhD as a kid from Maine. My pastor didn't have a bachelor's degree. He had an associate's degree. And most of the pastors in Maine went to Bible college and that was it. And they were good preachers, and I didn't see any need to go further. But anyway, those men said—see, there's freedom with all this—but those men said, "Do a PhD." So I said, "Dr. Ware, I really trust you and look up to you. What should I do?" They had me over for dinner, and I went over, and they said, "So we've talked about your subject. Here's our subject: Bethany." And I said, "Tell me more." And so I did a PhD in Bethany and got married and I'm still enrolled in that program and still learning there. But yeah, we got married in July 2006.

JIM: How many of you know who Bruce Ware is? Have you heard that name? OK, how many of you knew who Owen was before I announced that we were having him here for a conference?

OWEN: That's humbling. Good.

JIM: Yeah. Well, you don't want everybody to know who you are.

OWEN: Hey, hey, it's humbling.

JIM: How many kids do you have? Three?

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OWEN: Three kids.

JIM: Ages and names.

OWEN: Ella is fifteen, Gavin is thirteen, Ainsley is ten. So girl, boy, girl.

JIM: You homeschool, private school, public school?

OWEN: We have done Christian school in the past to some degree, but they are all three currently homeschooled. We could do a classical or Christian school, but we are—oh man, you know what they don't tell you about homeschooling?

JIM: It's hard.

OWEN: OK, it's hard. Yes, thank you. But they also don't tell you about the flexibility, right? You know, it's like, oh, you've got to take ownership of your kids' education. That's really noble and good, but also you can go on vacation whenever you want, and it's great. And in all seriousness, I'm being a little glib, but like if I have a ministry trip, I'm not frantically emailing six teachers, "Can Gavin please have your permission"—this is my kid, by the way—but "Can *my* kid have *your* permission so we can go on a trip?" I'm like, we're going, you know? I email the director of Strachan Classical Academy, my wife, and we go, man. So we love it. It is challenging. It's a lot for Mom. It's a lot. It's a real sacrifice. My wife is a baller. She is a great wife and a great mother and I love her to pieces and there's crowns and treasures for the hard work she's doing. But we do—man, it's hard to give up that flexibility.

JIM: Speaking of challenging, what is the most challenging aspect of being a father and a husband? Since we're talking about gender roles, human sexuality, etc.

OWEN: I see how ministry families can have ministry be what you do professionally, and that can almost make it hard to do ministry in the home, so things like family discipleship. And over the years, the Lord has convicted me of the need to step up my game in going after my individual children to make sure they're not just in a ministry family and going to church and going to Christian stuff but I as the dad am discipling them in some form. I don't mean by that necessarily—I'm not the type who's like you've got to do formal thirty-minute family worship six nights a week. I don't see that in the New Testament, so I can't bind people with that. But I do think we're doing Deuteronomy 6 ministry, and so that's what I really am trying to do in this season. I'm trying to do some formal family worship stuff, yes, because that's good, but also like,

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OK, can I bring Gavin on a ministry trip and we talk about stuff in the car? I coached him in basketball this last year, and that was so positive because it gave us so much father-son time, and it was father-son time not with me going, “This is what you must believe; let me catechize you.” It was him and me having fun, and then that opened up all sorts—he liked it, so then we could have all sorts of meaningful conversations.

JIM: Explain what you mean by Deuteronomy 6 ministry just so everyone doesn't have to read the entire chapter and then—what are we talking about?

OWEN: Yes, so in Deuteronomy 6 the Lord God calls Israelite fathers really, but both fathers and mothers, to train their kids in all the normal activity of life while you're in the field, while you're on the road, while you're at home. And so I think we're not under Deuteronomy 6 in an old covenant sense. We're in the New Covenant now. But I do think that that informs Christian fatherhood and motherhood a lot. The New Testament doesn't say you've got to sit everybody down at night at 7 p.m., but we should I think be having these conversations and trying to disciple all throughout life.

JIM: Yeah. You have been busy as long as I've known of you and followed your ministry publicly, privately. You've been busy. You write probably a book every eighteen months. You're in the speaker circuit for G3 ministries. You're speaking at national conferences, a lot of regional conferences. You speak all over the country. You're the head of a seminary. You're teaching classes. You're a professor. You have your doctorate. How do you balance the demands of family life and ministry life with a schedule like that?

OWEN: You just asked about what is a challenge, and that is a real challenge, and I don't mean that in a silly way. I mean it is a real challenge because it feels like there is a lot of ministry to do. Jesus says in John 4:34–35 the fields are white for harvest, and He also says the laborers are few. I was thinking about that with Evan's presentation. The laborers are few. So I'm not what the church needs. I'm not the one anyone's been waiting for, but there's a lot of need out there. And like honestly I'm just going to cut it straight here for a minute. Unlike the sexuality stuff that we're talking about, there aren't a lot of guys in my generation who really talk about that stuff, and I in some corners have a bit of a reputation I think for being like a tough talker or something. But part of that is because there aren't a lot of guys who will clarify doctrine. And I'm not in this to yell at people and win Calvinist fights. I'm in this because the sheep need the truth of God, and God seems to have called me to that role.

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And that's part of the Maine background. In Maine, I think there were like two Christians in my high school of 160 kids. So that's like a 0.05% rate. And then I went to Bowdoin College, which is kind of like a Dartmouth or something like that. It's intellectually tough. And there were like twenty kids who would show up for the intervarsity Christian meeting on a weekly basis out of sixteen hundred. So I am used to being in a lot of darkness with the wind in my face. And I think that shaped me. I think God put me in that to call me into this.

JIM: At a young age.

OWEN: Yeah.

JIM: Where do you currently serve in ministry? Explain what you do.

OWEN: So I'm in a moment of transition, but I have for the last three years been the provost of a small seminary in Arkansas called Grace Bible Theological Seminary. And I've taught theology at that school. And the school has about eighty students. Before that I was at Midwestern Seminary, which is where I crossed paths with Evan. And that was a very different school. That was like four thousand students. And I ran a PhD program and taught theology. So I went through a major job change, and our family went through a major life change in moving to Arkansas.

Now I'm actually changing jobs again three years after coming, I think by the call of God. And I'm—you guys know James Dobson. He started Focus on the Family. But then he started a different ministry in 2009 called the James Dobson Family Institute (JDFI). And they have a radio program called *Family Talk*. I don't know if anyone has heard it. I'm seeing some nodding heads. It's a very good program. Anyway, *Family Talk*. I would have a few differences with Dobson on some things, and I'm not changing on those matters, but anyway, Dobson has been a bold voice in the public square on a lot of tough issues. And I started doing some writing and stuff for them three years ago. And I just got named to be senior director of the Dobson Culture Center. So that's going to be my new full-time role. It's going to be a remote role. And I'm moving my family to Louisville, Kentucky to be near family. And then I'll work remotely. JDFI is in Colorado Springs.

JIM: So earlier I talked about everything kind of crashing down on you at the same time. That's all happening right now while you're coming out here to minister with us.

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OWEN: I told Jim I signed the rental truck moving agreement from the Atlanta airport today. And the amount of money I signed my name to from the Atlanta airport was a little staggering. It is good business moving books and T-shirts. I'm in the wrong line of work here. But no, the Lord is giving us a lot of grace. It is an intense time for my family and for me, if you out there can pray for me. And if you would be so kind as to pray for my voice. It's been just an intense season for us. We've had a lot of meetings and stuff because we're leaving and we want to leave well, and we love many people where we are in our church. And it's just been a ramped-up season for me. I lost my voice earlier this week. So I'm praying that God will give me strength while I'm here.

JIM: So I want to ask a question of clarification on that because James Dobson is typically not known as hanging out in our theological circles. More Arminian, more kind of a political wag, not necessarily theological wag. You being named to that center, to direct that center, when I heard that on the phone with you a couple of weeks ago, I instantly thought, obviously one of two things is happening. They're bringing you on because they want a distinctly theological cultural engagement voice there that is of your theological camp or they have no idea what they're getting when they ask you to come and head that up. And this will be about a year. And then you'll be moving somewhere else and looking for some other place. So which is it? How do you navigate that? What's going on there that some guy like Owen Strachan would be welcome at—yeah.

OWEN: Yeah, that's a very good question. It is—I don't remember which one of the options it was, but yes, it is that I am a conservative Christian voice in the political realm in the public square. And that's where—I overlap with Dobson a good bit, but that's especially where their mission overlaps with my work. JDFI is the ministry. You can look it up. I just put on my social media a link to all of this. So if you look up my name—it's in the booklet—Owen Strachan Twitter, you'll get my account. This is very—this is not the way to do this, but I need like a QR code on my hand. Just scan this code. Anyway, but there's a website you can go to, and I'm doing a new weekly newsletter and those sorts of things. And so what we're trying to do with this new venture with the Dobson Culture Center is we're trying to equip the church to be salt and light in these evil days and extend Dr. Dobson's legacy in terms of marriage, the family, religious liberty, human dignity, culture of life, those kinds of things. And that's what I'm speaking to. I'll be doing articles, videos, resources, and that sort of thing to try to help Christians, exactly what I'm doing at this conference. I'll be trying to do a lot more of that through this ministry, just like Dobson did in his own way for decades.

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JIM: What church do you attend now?

OWEN: I currently attend Grace Bible Church in Conway, Arkansas.

JIM: What kind of a church is it?

OWEN: It's a Reformed Baptist 1689 church.

JIM: OK. Large, small?

OWEN: Medium. It's medium to large, I guess. It's about 400, 450.

JIM: And what's your role there? Do you serve as an elder there?

OWEN: I haven't been an elder. I am a care group leader, so put that on your CV. I lead a care group, and my wife and I have loved doing that. I've been an elder in past days and hope to be an elder at a church going forward.

JIM: How much do you preach in your home church?

OWEN: I haven't preached a whole lot, in part because of a speaking schedule. I typically preach or speak one to two times a month. I try to watch that carefully, but I haven't preached a whole lot at my home church.

JIM: How did you decide to go into full-time ministry? Evan had a seizure and was listening to Jim Elliot.

OWEN: I don't have any—I wish I had something so cool and Jim Elliot was involved. That's like the Christian gold standard right there. When I was a freshman in college, I got—yeah, this is my exciting testimony. I got cut from the basketball team.

JIM: Why is that?

OWEN: I couldn't even make a Division III basketball team is what I'm trying to say to you, as a five-foot-seven, overheated point guard from Maine. So I got cut from the team, and as we were talking about earlier, I was a Christian, but basketball—this is silly, but it was kind of an idol for me. And in all honesty, I was trying to find my identity in it. And so when I see young people who are Christians perhaps or maybe are grappling with Christianity and they're struggling with identity issues, I understand that because I tried to find my identity in being a good basketball player, and I was never satisfied. You know, I was living under law. I was living under performance. So I got cut, and I was like,

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I was just devastated. And then I went to church. I went to a midweek church at my college church, Berean Baptist Church. And the speaker was my youth camp speaker that I'd known all growing up. And he preached on blind Bartimaeus crying out to Jesus as Jesus passed by. And he was like, "This was Bartimaeus's shot." He was—Bartimaeus was not in a great position. He wasn't going to be able to follow Jesus all around. This is it. The Messiah is here. Like the Messiah of Heaven and earth is ten feet away from you. And your moment's now. And he cried out to Him and received his sight. And I was like, "That's me." I think I was a believer, but I need to live for the Lord. I need to find my joy and my identity in Jesus.

So that kick-started two years of very intense growth, study, prayer, preaching, and so on. And then my college roommate, a different one than the Jonathan Edwards *Freedom of the Will* one, my other college roommate, went to Washington, D.C. and came across Capitol Hill Baptist Church under Mark Dever—this is twenty years ago—and told me about it and said they had a pastoral internship that would pay you, pay you to go there. So I applied and got in and went to Washington, D.C. in 2004 and trained under Dever, and it was just explosive for me. It was so formative. And I was like that's what I want to do. But I thought I was going to be a pastor because when you're in seminary, nine of ten guys, or nineteen of twenty, are going to be a pastor, and so that's the norm and that should be the norm. But Mohler took an interest in me, and other theologians at Southern, and they were like I think you should do the PhD. And then when I did the PhD, I got called to teach at Boyce College and then Midwestern Seminary and then Grace and on it goes. So the Lord redirected me from the way I thought I was going to go.

JIM: So it wasn't a single moment of calling, it was just kind of you pursuing what interested you and what people suggested was a good fit for your ministry, for your giftedness, your capacity.

OWEN: I'm an impatient guy, and I've always wanted the Lord to give me—remember MapQuest? You would print out MapQuest and you would have twenty-nine different directions. Those were good days, weren't they? Because the iPhone, the screen goes out and you're like, "I don't know where I'm going!" But anyway, the MapQuest days when you printed out the two sheets and you had twenty-nine—that's what I want. I want to MapQuest Christianity. And the Lord has frustrated me because He's never let me know what's coming. He doesn't let any of us know. But it's been a spiritual battle

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for me to trust Him in that respect, and it's been really good for me because He has just led me with turn-by-turn directions.

JIM: How did you come to serve at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW)? You're stepping into big shoes with Wayne Grudem and John Piper.

OWEN: Yeah, definitely. I was writing on my blog. I started blogging because of Mohler, because he was blogging, and I loved seeing Al Mohler—this was a little different than Dever doing the expository preaching that you do and others do. I saw Mohler do something different. I saw Mohler do what Francis Schaeffer and Cornelius Van Til and apologists and other figures like that did, and that was take the culture and what it's thinking and take the Bible and smash them. And I watched Mohler do that on his radio show and stuff. I interned for him, and I was like, you can do this? Like I know about the pastor thing, but you can do this? You can be a thinking Christian and that's good? Like people want that? So I wanted that, and I started blogging about manhood and womanhood. And then I get this call out of the blue in late 2011 that CBMW was kind of, some of the energy behind it—I'll put this carefully—had diminished, and they wanted like a young guy. And I was a young guy. I was like twenty-eight years old. And so they hired me to be the executive director. I wasn't planning on this, but I took it over and by God's grace we kind of turned it around financially and it grew and we started getting fire from a lot of people because we kind of came back online and it was a very formative—it was a hard time, but it was a formative time for me.

JIM: How long were you there?

OWEN: 2012–2016. I became the president of the organization, which was truly intense for me, in the second half of that.

JIM: And you were married by that point?

OWEN: I was very much married, yes.

JIM: Did this issue of gender, human sexuality, complementarianism, egalitarianism, biblical manhood, womanhood, etc.—did that become a special interest to you through the influence of Mohler and Dever and your time there in crashing together culture and Christianity?

OWEN: It was Mohler. He wrote a good bit about manhood. He did a booklet called *From Boy to Man: The Marks of Manhood* that you can find online. It was a three-part

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series. It was excellent. And I was like, I was just all in on biblical manhood because growing up in New England, there wasn't a lot of strong manhood. It was very much kind of a feminist context, especially the academy that I was in. And there were a lot of women preachers in New England and that sort of thing. And I was never drawn to that. I always knew that was wrong biblically. And then I go to Southern Seminary and I see Al Mohler, in this kind of Winston Churchill way, standing against culture, but doing so respectfully and thoughtfully and with the gospel at the center. And again, I was just like, that's what I want to do. So over the years, the Lord has done a lot of work on me because I'm no perfect guy in ministry, you know. The grace and truth balance of John 1:17 is hard to hit. It's easy to be a truth guy or a grace guy. And the Lord's done work in me to convict me, and I think I'm growing into more of the balance, but that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to speak and call a spade a spade but at the same time hold out the hope of the gospel.

JIM: You grew up in a Freewill Baptist church, Arminian to the core. Were you exposed to Independent Fundamentalist Baptists at all in that neck of the woods?

OWEN: I was.

JIM: A little bit of the legalism side of that?

OWEN: Yep.

JIM: Recently, for those of you who don't know, Owen has a podcast. Tell them a little bit about the podcast.

OWEN: I have a podcast called *Grace and Truth*. That's aspirational, as I was just talking about, because I'm trying to be like the post-it note that you put on the dashboard—"be a Christian as you drive this car." It's hard for us. I want to hit that grace and truth balance. My podcast is on the Salem Podcast Network, the large conservative network. And on the podcast, I try to tackle a blend of theology and culture. That's just my thing.

JIM: Yeah, but recently you've done a series with Tom Buck on the subject of Gothardism and Bill Gothard's influence in Christianity, sort of the legalistic side of that. Gothardism was huge here in North Idaho for a long period of time, especially in the early years of my spiritual walk, formative years. I went to a Gothard conference and had a lot of that influence there. Talk to us a little bit about what you learned about that. Were you ever exposed to any of that? What were some of the dangers that you've talked about in your podcast?

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OWEN: A lot of my work in a kind of Mohler-influenced fashion has been to try to understand what is hitting the church, what Satan is slinging at the church in terms of systems and ideologies, and grapple with that and get your arms around it and then communicate that to the church so the church understands the system and then communicate the truth and the grace that God gives. And so I did that with wokeness, like we were talking about that. This book, *The War on Men*, I did that with toxic masculinity. And with Gothardism, that's been a recent one where I'm like whoa. I've been dealing with like Beth Moore in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). I wrote a blog when not many guys wanted to speak against Beth Moore preaching on Mother's Day, for example, and I got a ton of heat for it in the SBC. I don't regret it because I was dealing with soft complementarity like five to seven years ago. So much of that. Like people saying they're complementarian but then kind of softening things with women preachers and stuff. So I thought, oh man, that's where the threat to the church is, the softness, the squishiness, the liberal stuff.

What I have learned in getting my arms around Gothardism, because a bunch of people in Arkansas were very much influenced by it—I mean, that's where the Duggar family was based, and the Duggar family was really the export internationally for Gothardism. And let me just say that Gothardism didn't get everything wrong. And there were a lot of good people who embraced Gothardism to some degree because they were told it was good and sound and faithful. And so I want to be careful in how I handle it. I think there were genuine Christian families who loved Christ who nonetheless embraced Gothardism. So with that said, it is not a good system. It is a twisting of Scripture. And it really is a system where Gothard's opinions reign supreme over even the Word of God. And Gothardism really approaches the Christian life from a fear-based paradigm and tells you that you need to be under the umbrella of authority and authority structures and if you get out from beyond the authority structures, you're going to be in a really bad place. It anchors you in that instead of anchoring you in the gospel of grace, which is what the New Testament does, where you're not living according to a fear-based paradigm as if God is going to get you if you listen to secular rock. No, instead, you know the goodness and the mercy and the kindness of God in Christ, who shed His blood for your sins and has brought you to the Father, and now the Father actually loves you.

JIM: He's pleased with you.

OWEN: The Father's pleased with you. Like, what a thought. So many Christians—this is so tragic. So many Christians, because of Gothardism and legalism and other systems—

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this is the problem from the Right. Beth Moore's a problem on the Left, one of them. This is Andy Stanley and others. This is the problem on the Right. And it's a real, vicious problem. And it traps people in a system where God the Father basically is angry with you if you don't have the perfect quiet time or if you don't say the perfectly cheerful word to your husband and if you don't wear the ankle-length skirt. And we have freedom in some of those things. And there can be some good principles of modesty, of course, but that system is a legalistic system. So I've tried to respond to that and help Christians understand, yes, we can offend the Spirit, we can grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), we should live our life to please God, and God hates our sin, even as a believer, but fundamentally, Christians are loved by God, forgiven by God. God has His smile upon us.

JIM: Yeah. If people want to follow you on social media, what's the best way they can do that? Where are you at?

OWEN: Where am I at? I am on Twitter or X. You can just Google my name, Owen Strachan X, because my name is weird, so I'm not going to try to give the handle. And if you Google Owen Strachan Instagram, you'll get that. I'm on Instagram as well. And I'm on Facebook.

JIM: You post on Instagram under a different handle. You have a ministry to young men and boys, kind of like a Christian art of manliness type of an influence on Instagram, right? Is that a big thing?

OWEN: No.

JIM: Do you post there often?

OWEN: I have done more in the past, but my current one is @profstrachan. That's my Instagram handle. And I did something called [Be] Ready. That's what you're talking about, [Be] Ready. So yeah, that's where you can find me.

JIM: And I would encourage you to follow him on social media. Owen always posts things that are worth reading. They're good. They're culturally engaging. They're always strong, clear, and you get a lot of heat from people, but it's a voice of one crying in the wilderness, and it's a good follow. I'd recommend it.

OWEN: That's kind.

JIM: What are your hobbies or non-ministry interests?

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OWEN: Well, as I've now told the group, I love milkshakes. You can do fewer and fewer milkshakes as you're in your forties. It's like seeing a comet. Like hmm, I don't know about that, buddy. Once in a while. Count the cost. I love, you know, I love family time. I really do because we've gotten to do, as the kids get older, you know, we can do family vacations. So we've done a bunch of those. And we love doing that. We love going to Colorado. We love going to the ocean. So that's a hobby. I love Winston Churchill, as I've already alluded to. So I read Churchill biographies. And I love Western films. If anybody wants to talk to me at any break about the movie *Tombstone*, I'm down. I do love film. I love the movie *1917*. And then I love hip-hop. I've done a hip-hop album. Ask Phil Johnson if he's done a hip-hop album. So I love hip-hop.

JIM: So growing up in the—well, you'd have grown up in the nineties basically, when you were kind of coming of age, right?

OWEN: Yeah.

JIM: So your emphasis or your interest in culture and things that are affecting culture in the church, that kind of bleeds into observing what's going on in the culture in terms of music and film and other things, arts.

OWEN: Yeah. I mean, we could even do a rap snippet in this very conference at some point.

JIM: Right now?

OWEN: We could do now or we could do another time. I mean, I don't know. It doesn't have to be *now*.

JIM: You choose. *I'm* not doing anything, but you—

OWEN: If they come tomorrow—there's a Q&A tomorrow, right?

JIM: There's a Q&A tomorrow.

OWEN: If they come tomorrow and they want it tomorrow, if the people want it.

JIM: How many of you want it tomorrow? Yeah, there we go.

OWEN: All right. Some of them are like, “Not tomorrow. We're not coming tomorrow.”

JIM: What five books have most influenced and shaped you?

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OWEN: Oh, wow. I love books. My wife is like please stop buying books because we just are out of space. So that's a very hard question to me, but—

JIM: Do this one then. Give me a list. Start naming the books where when you read them, it was paradigm shifting. It was like, “I never thought of that. This just put me on a whole new level, opened my eyes to something profound.”

OWEN: Yeah, there's a biography of Jonathan Edwards by George Marsden called *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* that had that effect on me. I read it in college, and it just gave me a vision of the God-centered life because Edwards had such a big God. He had the scriptural God, I would argue. And so that shaped me.

JIM: Have you read Martyn Lloyd-Jones's biography of Edwards?

OWEN: Do you mean Iain Murray's?

JIM: No, you're right. Iain Murray. Iain Murray wrote Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Edwards. Iain Murray's.

OWEN: Yes, I love both of those.

JIM: Iain Murray's biography of Edwards.

OWEN: Yes, and I actually love Murray on Lloyd-Jones. That's one of my favorite books as well. So I'm going to steal that, thank you. I wasn't thinking of that. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*. I love Packer. As a theologian, I love how Packer does theology. He doesn't do it to speak above the heads of people. So many theologians in the seminaries and colleges, they want their fancy little group, and they want to speak above Christians, and they're not really in Scripture that much. And my goal—I'm no perfect theologian, but my goal is to be like Packer, who is a man of Scripture and could care less about his academic reputation. He was a brilliant man. He didn't get everything right. He was a brilliant man. So *Knowing God* is a very readable book. It's sold two million copies. A theology book! And that's just wonderful to help people. Piper's *Desiring God* was very influential on me because it rightly recovered joy in the Christian life, kind of like we were talking about, riffing about a minute ago. Reformed people, conservative people have a hard time being happy. They think they're sinning if they're being happy. And so Piper recovered some of that for me.

And then the last book, William Manchester's biography—you can tell I like biographies—William Manchester's biography of Winston Churchill. Manchester wrote a

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trilogy called *The Last Lion* trilogy, and the second volume is called *Alone*, and it's Churchill in the thirties when he was just about the only figure who was boldly and bravely saying, "Germany is not stable, and Hitler is a bad man, and what he is doing is not going to be good," and nobody listened to him, and he was hated, and he lost just about everything he had. And even though he wasn't a Christian, I have drawn on that example and found it to be true in the church. All these men have good salaries founded on the truth of God and the Word of God, and yet there are massive ideologies targeting the sheep, and they can't be troubled to say anything. And so I am no Churchill, but Mohler introduced me to those books, and Dobson loves Churchill, and I love Churchill, and I want to be like Churchill in that way and just tell the truth, hopefully in a loving way (Eph. 4:15), no matter the consequences. That is my goal in my life and ministry, to tell the truth no matter what it costs me. John Knox said one man with God is in the majority, and that's right.

JIM: What books have you written?

OWEN: I've written a few books. I've published about twenty books. I've written *Christianity and Wokeness*, *The War on Men*, *Reenchanting Humanity*, *The Colson Way*, *The Grand Design*. I've written a few books.

JIM: What books are you writing now? What do you have in the making?

OWEN: I don't have a project right now because I just had a conversation with my wife because I have to clear my writing projects with my wife because if I don't, I could end up sleeping outside. So I clear my book projects with her, and she has rightly advised me in feminine love to not write right now with all the changes that are going on. Because another thing I do is I take too much on, even as you might have perceptively been noting.

JIM: Had you started a book before you asked her that?

OWEN: No. You know what, do you know what I want to write? I want to write a book called *Plant Gardens* because in Jeremiah 29, the exiles are going into Babylon, the Israelite exiles. They're in a horrible place. Israel has crumbled into nothing. And to the Israelite exiles, God does not say either take over Babylon, just launch an effort, Christianize Babylon—there's a lot of energy today in the Christian community, including in Idaho, to Christianize America and to overcome Babylon, overcome America and make it Christian through theonomy largely. And that is not at all what God says to the Babylonian exiles. He doesn't say take it over, but He also doesn't say build a shed.

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JIM: A monastery.

OWEN: Yeah, build a monastery in the hills and do nothing. What He says to them instead is plant a garden, build homes, have sons and daughters, and raise them. And it's beautiful. I don't think we're the Babylonian exiles. It's not one to one. We're not in the old covenant. These things matter greatly. But in terms of a vision for what you do when you're in darkness, and not some darkness, not a little darkness, a lot of darkness, God says do the most counterintuitive thing. Don't leave and don't attack Babylon exactly. Plant a garden. Like what? Plant a garden? Plant a garden. A garden is not planted, is not cultivated in a night or a month or a summer. That's a twenty-year project. But that's what God said to do, and I think that's what we do now. We plant gardens here. We stay here. We're not called to Christianize America. We're also not called to head for the hills. We're called to be salt and light, which is very similar to that, plant gardens. It's Jeremiah 29. Read it in your devotions and see how it strikes you. I was reading it in my devotion—I'm going way too long, I'm sorry. But I was reading it in my devotions, and it jumped out and bit me. It was so beautiful. Plant gardens?

JIM: So there was a book published a couple years ago. Was it Rod Dreher?

OWEN: Yeah.

JIM: It was basically the Christian monastic movement for today kind of an idea, right?

OWEN: *The Benedict Option*.

JIM: And then on the other side of that spectrum is the Christian nationalist movement, which is the opposite of that. And by the way, he was alluding to Doug Wilson, in case none of you caught that, when he's talking about Idaho and a big thing here in Idaho, because Owen's been going back and forth on social media and in the public square on the subject of Christian nationalism and how that's not what we are called to promote.

OWEN: And those guys, the Moscow guys and others affiliated with them, they have a boldness about them. They have a joy about them. They have a plan for darkness. They certainly see some things in Scripture. Wilson has some commendable emphases. He's a unique figure. He's a gifted man. But I do not see in the New Testament the mandate to Christianize the nation. We are a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). *We're* a holy nation. *We're* the Christian nation. That doesn't mean we don't seek to be influential where we are in tons of ways. I'm at the Dobson Culture Center to try to help Christians be salt and light in a small way. But it does not mean that the Great Commission—this is really where we get

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into the disagreement. The Great Commission is not “theonomize” Sand—is this called Sandpoint?

JIM: Sandpoint.

OWEN: Sandpoint. Like get old covenant law and Sandpoint. We should make good laws here and that can be out of the basis of biblical law, but that's not our mission. Our mission is not furthermore to make Sudan Christian. Our mission is to get Bob from accounting to understand the gospel by the grace of God and saved and join this church. That's the Great Commission advancing. A single sinner repenting is the kingdom of God advancing. That's what God has told us He's promised to build. That's what Jesus said He's going to build. Nations are going to rise and fall. We should be salt and light here, but nations will rise and fall. Don't give up on them. Be salt and light. But don't put your hope in this country.

JIM: Yeah. What books are you reading right now?

OWEN: I am reading a book about Christ and Israel by Brent Parker that's in my book bag at my very nice Bonvoy hotel here in town. Wow, is this hotel nice that you have, the Marriott. And I am reading—this is left field—I am reading the biography of Rose Ingalls Wilder. Did I get that right?

JIM: I think so. Laura Ingalls Wilder?

OWEN: Laura Ingalls's daughter. This is my wife's area. Laura Ingalls Wilder?

JIM: You getting in touch with your feminine side?

OWEN: Oh my word. I just lost all the cred, whatever cred I had.

JIM: And after that, don't tell me you're doing *Anne of Green Gables* as well.

OWEN: No, no, no, no, stop, stop. I actually—we do love those. Those are great stories. And that's near from where I'm from, the *Anne of Green Gables* stuff. But OK, anyway, let's stop. OK, I'm reading about Rose, Laura's—whatever her name is—Laura's daughter, because living in Arkansas, you're only four hours from where they all lived in Mansfield, Missouri. Does anyone know what I'm talking about in here? My wife read all these books to the kids.

JIM: We watched *Little House on the Prairie*.

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OWEN: OK, *Little House on the Prairie*, thank you!

JIM: Yes.

OWEN: Let's try to recover this. And so we did a family trip to the Ingalls home. And then there was a book there that talked about Rose, and it turns out—this is like literary criticism hour now—it turns out that Rose shaped more of Laura's books than most people know. Because Laura was more of a straight-ahead writer, and Laura had a very hard life on the prairie, right? I mean, a very hard life. And so Rose gave the stories more of a narrative focus and hopeful emphasis. So I don't know why I'm reading it exactly, but I'm reading it.

JIM: I thought the answer to that question was going to be far more interesting than it actually was.

OWEN: Did anyone find that interesting? Did anyone—there's like three women who found that. . .

JIM: Three women, yeah.

OWEN: See me at the break.

JIM: The guys have all fallen asleep.

OWEN: Yeah, the guys I lost.

JIM: So quickly—I don't want to keep people too long here.

OWEN: Yeah.

JIM: Just a couple more questions. What are some subjects that interest you that you have not studied that you plan to study in the next, say, five years?

OWEN: I just started sweating over the Laura Ingalls Wilder stuff. I'm sorry, I'm like literally sweating now. What are some subjects I want to study in the next five years?

JIM: Yeah.

OWEN: I would like to write a book about planting gardens if the Lord would lead. For a theological study, I would like to write a book entitled *The Self-Revealed God* because in the theological world, there are a bunch of debates over the Godhead and who God is and theology proper and there are theologians who are emphasizing, and some of them

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are gifted and have some good thoughts in some areas, but overall they're emphasizing a kind of vision of God that accords with Thomas Aquinas. And Thomas Aquinas argued that the simplicity of God as a theological doctrine means numerous things, but one of them is that God does not change in any way, and what that meant practically for Aquinas and others is that God doesn't have interpersonal interaction with people. So when you're reading God going back and forth with Moses, that's not really a conversation that actually interpersonally occurs. And so I'm very interested in defending the biblical God who is not *in* the creation like in pantheism at all, but—we hold to the Creator, creature distinction—but the biblical God, the self-revealed God of the Bible, loves His people, hates sin, shows grace, engages us, is patient with us as a Father, as we've been talking about. So I'd like to write a book defending the biblical doctrine of God.

JIM: Excellent. All right, well that is it for our time here tonight. So tomorrow morning, doors open at eight? Is that correct? Is that what the thing says? And there will be some breakfast-type snacks out there on the table for you, so. . .

OWEN: And the first session is comparing the literary achievements of Rose Wild—just kidding—versus. . . It's not what it is.

JIM: A critical review of the difference between *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little House on the Prairie* by Owen Strachan.

OWEN: Yeah, we'll forego that one.

JIM: All right.