

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 234

Apps and Art

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Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guests: Johnny Cisneros (JC)

Joseph Fioramonti (JF)

Episode Summary

Part 1: Johnny Cisneros – Bible Study Apps for Word Studies in Colossians

What are some of the best Bible study apps today? And how can you use those study apps to gain meaningful insights into the key words in Paul's Letter to the Colossians? In this episode, Dr. Heiser interviews his long-time friend and colleague, Johnny Cisneros. With his training in biblical languages and his doctoral studies in technology-enhanced learning, Johnny Cisneros is the ideal person to help you apply simple and powerful strategies to study the Bible. The discussion centers on introducing you to some popular Bible study apps, walking you through several examples of Greek word studies from Colossians, and finally, a special offer to the Naked Bible audience for **video courses** designed by Johnny Cisneros.

Part 2: Joe Fioramonti – Anno Domini

Joe Fioramonti is a long-time friend of Mike and the podcast. He's an artist, a professor, and an entrepreneur. His new business, **Anno Domini**, designs and hand-produces unique but traditional art prints. One-third of the proceeds goes directly to ministries that focus on persecuted pastors and Christians in dangerous parts of the world.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 234, Apps and Art, with Johnny Cisneros and Joe Fioramonti. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. We've got two great interviews, so let's just jump right into them.

MH: Well, we're glad to have back with us Johnny Cisneros. For you long-time Naked Bible Podcast listeners, way, way back in episode 125 (so over a hundred episodes ago), we had Johnny on to talk about some things he had created for studying biblical words—biblical languages—techniques, recommended tools, that sort of thing. That's his sweet spot. So that's why we're having him back on the show to introduce a few things that he is working on and, gladly, that he's marrying some of what he's doing to our series on Colossians. So Johnny, welcome back.

JC: Thanks so much for having me, Mike. This is fun. Fun to reconnect with you and the whole Naked Bible audience.

MH: Yeah, it's grown, so a lot of people won't know who you are. Johnny and I used to be colleagues at Logos Bible Software, which changed its corporate name to the Faithlife Corporation. Johnny has since moved back to the confines of California... [laughter]

JC: That's a nice way of putting it. [laughter]

MH: ...yeah, where he's from, and he's doing some other things as far as his income and his ministry, but he's still really heavily involved in creating tools for people who care about biblical studies, which frankly is the sweet spot of our audience. So, Johnny, I don't know how much more you want to introduce yourself, but we do want to get into the new stuff that you're creating, so I'll leave that to you. Do you want to add anything?

JC: Yeah! Just that I'm excited about being able to help people use technology and understand how to use so many resources that are available to us now, and to do that with a level head. To do that with a way that is fruitful. Not just productive, not just efficient, but I think how we understand technology and its role and how we can incorporate it into Bible study, and to studying theology in general, is something that doesn't get talked about too much. I'm hoping that through this episode, I can bring some insight to that.

MH: Yeah, and listeners should know, Johnny has a degree in Biblical Languages, and he's also in (you must be just about done) a doctoral program in... Is it Instructional Design, or is it some other technology?

JC: It's a Ph.D. in e-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning.

MH: Okay. Yeah, so Johnny has worked both sides of this. He's familiar with biblical languages and how to study the original languages, and then really, with his doctoral work, how to take that knowledge and marry it to technology in an intelligent, useful, coherent way so that people can get more out of their Bible. So let's just jump in here. You're working on apps. The notes that you sent me have something to do with apps. So I'm going to ask a question that only Mike

would ask, because he's Mike and isn't that technologically literate. What's an app? [JC laughs] For those people in the audience out there like me. I've had a phone now with apps for going on two years, so my anniversary is drawing nigh, but I confess, I don't use apps on my computer. I know they're there, but I do use them on the phone. But for somebody like me, what are we talking about? What is an app? How does it relate to what you do on a desktop or a laptop or your phone or an iPad? So let's just jump in there.

5:00

JC: Of course, the iPhone came out and then we started having this abbreviated form of the word *applications*, and we just call it *apps*, which isn't necessarily... It doesn't stand for *Apple*, even though they created the iPhone and created the platform for developing these new software applications that run on mobile devices, especially smartphones and tablets. But really an app is a software application, and that software application can exist on different platforms. It can exist on the web. It can exist on your computer as a specific executable file stored on your hard drive or solid-state drive, or it can exist on your mobile device, like a phone or a tablet. So when I'm talking about applications, I'm talking about the broadest sense, not just on a mobile device, but on the web, desktop, and mobile.

MH: Okay. So what are the more common or leading (more useful) Bible study apps today? Give us a few examples.

JC: Yeah. There are so many out there, and I think what's most beneficial when we talk about tools (because this is a common question people have)... "What do I use to study? What resources are out there?" Sometimes the temptation is to say, "Well, you know, there's actually 72 lexicons (dictionaries) that you could be using." [laughter] And it's just like, "Okay, I'm done." We never want the resources or the technology to be a roadblock for people. So instead of saying, "There are hundreds of applications out there and I'm going to give you an entire Excel spreadsheet of all of these applications [laughter]..."

MH: Yeah, with star ratings.

JC: Yeah, with star ratings and pros and cons and all that stuff. I figured I would just narrow this down to three of my favorites. And when I say these are the top ones, of course everyone's always developing new technologies and new platforms all the time, so what I'm just going to go with is, these are the ones that I've used and the ones that I appreciate, that I've benefited from the most. Of course, I think I'd want to start probably with what's most accessible. And by most accessible, I mean it's available on the web and can work pretty much in any browser, whether that's Chrome or Firefox or even Internet Explorer. Probably not Netscape [laughter] if you remember Netscape 3. Whatever...

MH: [laughs] I'll have to take that off my computer now...

JC: Mike, take it off your list [laughs], don't try it on that one. Yeah, the one that I would recommend, and this is great because it's free, and they're great people behind it... I know Andy, who is the CEO of this particular Bible study tool and resource. It's called BlueLetterBible.org. And if you go to www.BlueLetterBible.org, really, this is a comprehensive one-stop shop for resources and study guides and devotionals to help you understand the Bible better. They have a really great approach with introducing you to a verse of the day. Sometimes it's just difficult when you go to a new tool or a new piece of technology or some other website. You can get overwhelmed. "Where do I start? What do I do?" And they've got very helpful resources here, just beginning with, "Hey, here's a verse with a hyperlink." You want to go from that verse to this hyperlink, and then get into your study, you can start there. You can also use it to search the Bible for verse references if that's the way you want to navigate through it. Maybe you can't find quite where Ezra appears in the Bible. But this is a great way to get into it. You just search Ezra 1:1 and you get taken straight to that particular point in the Bible. You can search for a bag of words. So when you're looking for things like, "Okay, I'm looking for places where "beast" and "image" occur. Where would I find that in the Bible?" You can also search for things like phrases. So if you're looking for "image of the beast" or as we find in Colossians "image of the invisible God," maybe you're thinking, "Where was that place in the Bible where I read that, but I can't remember now?" So BlueLetterBible.org is a great resource that you can get immediately into. They have a number of resources that can complement the Bible, too. Anything from commentaries to encyclopedias and topical indexes. This is something that I would recommend would be highly useful. If you're searching even for things on *topics* like "What is faith? What is love? What is hope?" These things that... "Only these three things remain." If ever there was a study tip from Paul... [laughter] "Go for these three!" If nothing else, look at these words; look at these topics. And a site like this is going to be incredibly valuable.

10:00

MH: And Blue Letter Bible has multiple versions, correct?

JC: They do, they do.

MH: So if you remember a phrase or something in the version you're using, chances are they're going to have it, and then you can search it in that version.

JC: Exactly. Many of us now, it's hard for us to be able to compare translations. But comparing translations is actually one of the most valuable things you could do in studying. Because one translation may have it worded this way, and that's the way you've always read it or interpreted it, and it's just helpful to bring alongside another translation where you can say, "Hey, you know what? Wow, this is also a fairly literal translation, but they rendered the word this way." And it causes us to pause or think or reflect on something that we may not have otherwise observed in a passage or a chapter, even. So that's incredibly valuable. And of course, if you were to purchase all of these different

translations, you would be spending quite a bit of money... You can perform a dropdown...

MH: Yeah, and it's clunky flipping through pages.

JC: Oh, yeah.

MH: There's just no reason to do that now.

JC: Right. Very, very different times. So that's Blue Letter Bible. Really, really helpful. The next one, and this one isn't known very well... It has its roots in a very academic but honorable endeavor. And that is www.StepBible.org. And STEP stands for Scripture Tools for Every Person. This comes out of Cambridge University. They have a thing there called Tyndale House. And in fact, Mike, you and I have worked with Dr. David Instone-Brewer.

MH: Yep. David, yep.

JC: Dr. David Instone-Brewer is a rabbinic scholar. He studies *all* kinds of things around the customs and life of Jesus' time. And he has been the director and has spearheaded this particular development of this tool called StepBible.org. And what's unique about this... They actually don't have any commentaries—you know, those types of resources that explain or describe what a particular word or verse means. They're going into just the Bible, and they have this interactive concordance type of approach. Typically, when you use a concordance, it will tell you... I'm looking up this word (let's say it's "love") and every place where this word "love" occurs in the Bible, you're going to see a verse reference for that. That's your concordance. When you're looking at *this* type of resource, they have the Bible in front of you, so they're very Bible-centric, and as you hover over different words in a passage... We're looking at, let's say, Genesis 1. And I'm going to hover over the word "said." "And God said." When I do that, it'll highlight every other time that same word occurs in that chapter. And so, there are times where, as you're reading through something, it's kind of hard to tell what's repeated—what's a theme. A theme is something that is important, especially at the time of the biblical authors... They would use repetition. If it was repeated, that suggests that this could be important. This is something that you should take note of and watch for. Of course, they weren't writing in chapters and verses, so sometimes the chapters and verses create these artificial boundaries for us as we read through the Bible. But being able to highlight over a particular word or, in this case with STEP Bible, what they allow you to do is you can even hover over the verse number. And of course, when we look at the verse numbers in the Bible, it's helpful for navigation. "Everybody open your Bibles to Genesis 1:1." Everybody navigates there. But with STEP Bible, what you can do is, they've created a pop-up for every single verse reference. And what you can see in the pop-up...

MH: Yeah, I'm looking at it now. That's pretty sweet.

JC: Isn't it crazy? It's incredible, right? All the viewers are like, "Wait a second! I'm driving!" [laughs]

MH: You hover over the verse number, and it lists the words in the verse and tells you in the pop-up window how many times that word occurs in the book (in this case, Genesis) and in the Old Testament. So that's pretty neat.

JC: Yeah, isn't that wild? And if you hover over it, as well, you can get to those different words, too. So if you not just hover, but you hold it...

15:00

MH: Yeah. They're live links.

JC: Yeah. They're live links. And they open you up to a brief definition of the word. For example, "heaven," coming out of Genesis. And it gives me a range of meanings there. Heaven as the sky: the visible heavens, the abode of the stars. Heaven as the visible universe: the sky, atmosphere. And then heaven as the abode of God. All of those different senses of how the word is used are right there in a sidebar pane. This is... I probably sound so excited and giddy about all of this stuff, but it's just incredible. You and I, even 10 years back going through school, people were flipping through these paper lexicons and paper dictionaries that weighed at least five pounds. And as you're going through it, you're trying to sift through all of these different references to other literature just to get at something like that—something as useful as that—to understand, "Wow, so this Hebrew word for heaven has these different senses to it. It isn't just one thing over here, and it's always that thing everywhere else. It can have different meanings." And it's so helpful to understand that as you go through the Bible and realize, "Okay, this is used in a different sense." And how can the context—how can the other words that occur around this word inform how I understand its meaning here?

MH: Yeah, and you don't have to open another book (or books). You just point, and there it appears. He's put a lot of thought into this design. That's kind of nice.

JC: Yeah. They have done incredible work on this. And when you navigate through the resource and the tool, all the cross-references are listed there. That's another thing that we've become so accustomed to in the print Bibles that we have—the cross-references. But of course, there's only so much room you can fit on the page, and you still have to navigate back and forth from those different places. And here in these types of tools, within a click you can see the verse reference pop up and read the verse while you're still in whatever chapter you're studying at that point. There's a number of other things that can be done with STEP Bible. It doesn't have quite as many resources—study commentaries and encyclopedias. That's really not the purpose of it. It's more of a tool specifically designed for the Bible. But I find it incredibly valuable when I want to look up just

quick statistics. Where else is this word used, and how can I understand it better? And where else can I go in the Bible to understand it better?

So that's Blue Letter Bible, STEP Bible, and of course the last one is one that's kind of near and dear to the two of us [laughs], and that's Logos Bible Software. Having worked there as long as we have, and I did, that's another tremendous tool. It's a lot like Blue Letter Bible... I would say it's almost a combination of these two free resources.

MH: Yeah, because if you have an account (and accounts are free), if you have books on there, you'll have your books and some of the utility we were just talking about with STEP Bible.

JC: Yeah, exactly. These three resources, the great thing about them is they all have... The first two are free, and the third one, you can purchase additional resources if you want to, and you can purchase an entire (what they call) base package that includes a set number of resources in different categories, like dictionaries and encyclopedias.

MH: And you can access all that online, too. It doesn't just live on your laptop or whatever. You can access it online or on a tablet, or whatever.

JC: Yeah. That's the thing that I've done now. I've been working almost exclusively from a web browser. And being able to access these tools on the go or from my phone... They're usually mobile optimized, so that you can even access the tools to the full extent via your tablet or via your phone. With Logos Bible Software, of course, you have the desktop version; you've got the web version that you can access through the internet. They also have a mobile application. So that's helpful to know, too. There's a mobile app that you can download. You can create a free account. Blue Letter Bible, I forgot to mention, also has a mobile application. And that's another great thing that you can just get into. I don't have to sit down, log into my desktop machine, wait for it to start up. Our phones are usually with us all the time, and it's a great way to get into Bible study. And the tools are so robust now. Even on a phone, it's incredible what you can do.

MH: Mm hmm. So what do you suggest for people, in terms of strategy or techniques... (I don't know which of those words applies better.) What do you suggest for integrating study apps and technology into their own study?

JC: Yeah. So any time we start talking about things like technology, there's almost this feeling that—or it's implied that—technology is replacing something, fundamentally. And sometimes, it's *displacing* something which usually has a negative connotation. We've worked with professors who have come in and filmed entire courses, and the question that they may have is, "Is this going to replace me?"

20:00

MH: [laughter] Does anyone need me now?

JC: Yeah. Does anybody need me anymore? “We’ve got you on video, so you’re done. You can retire.” We usually think of technology as something that’s going to replace or displace—having this negative connotation. But actually, the use of technology (no matter what it is, whether it’s a Bible study or something else) occurs along a spectrum. To use a very popular definition of technology, technology is what was invented after you were born. [laughs] So if we’re working with that definition, we can understand that it occurs along a spectrum. And that spectrum is summed up in a simple term that we use in education called SAMR. SAMR stands for Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, or Redefinition. And I hope your listeners are still with me because this will make a little more sense once I explain it.

We usually think of technology as a substitute. It can be a direct substitute, and there can be no change at all. So if we are integrating an application like this into our Bible study, that can be at a very, very basic level of having a digital scan of a print book. A digital scan of a print book is no different than the other version, other than that it’s convenient. Now we don’t have to carry around something that’s physical. This lives in some other medium. We can carry it around in our computer or our phone, take it around with us. But since it’s a digital copy (a scan even), it’s really just a picture, and it doesn’t afford us anything that the print version already had other than it’s more convenient. When we think of augmentation, this is also a substitute, but the difference is there’s a functional improvement. We’ve all experienced this. If you have any e-books or digital books, something like a Kindle device, books that you’ve purchased from Amazon, you know that that has a sense of augmentation to it. It’s the same content that you would find in the print version, but now you can highlight. Now you can look up a definition. Now you can even search the resource. So now we’re moving from substitution to augmentation. And then the other way is modification. So modification would say the technology allows you to redesign the task. So when we read our Bibles, we usually say, “What’s going to be the verse of the day?” Or we might say, “I’m going to read through Ephesians,” or “I’m going to read through Colossians this morning, and I’m going to read straight through from chapter one to chapter four (or six in the case of Ephesians).” Well, if we’re introducing technology into this, maybe we aren’t reading in such a linear fashion. Maybe we aren’t going from verse one over here all the way to the last verse of the Bible. Maybe the technology, because we have all these hyperlinks, allows us to quickly check references, allows us to quickly look up where this word occurs elsewhere in the Bible, and *then* we return to the rest of the book. Well, I’m describing really... We do these things almost subconsciously, but I think it’s always helpful for us to be aware of these different categories, because when we think of, “How do I use technology?” it doesn’t have to be something that is mystical or confusing. How many times have... I think we all have said, “If only technology would work,” [laughter] when trying to do something...

MH: Yeah, I pretty much say that every day.

25:00

JC: [laughs] It thwarts our plans. And the last category is redefinition—thinking of approaching Bible study in a completely different way than perhaps you ever have before. When I think back to going to Barnes and Noble and pulling off a resource like *Vines Expository Dictionary* and saying, “Okay. Well, I guess I’m going to find a word I want to study, and then I’m just going to start reading this article...” And when we think of these digital tools, we can completely redefine how we go about studying, or we can take the same *principles* we’ve understood that incorporate good study, like reading the passage in context, but now we can go far beyond that by being able to navigate around the Bible quickly. We can go much further than we would otherwise. And so, those are some ways that we can think about, “What does it look like for us to include a software application into Bible study,” and realize it’s okay to be along these different spectrums, too. So there isn’t something where, “If you’re at the augmentation stage, using a Kindle version, hopefully you get to modification, and you get a larger crown and...” or something like that. [laughs]

MH: Right, right. Yeah.

JC: It doesn’t have to occur that way. But it’s helpful to know where we are across the spectrum and to say, “Hey, this is where I’m at right now. I’m great with that. This is working for me. And maybe I want to explore using one of these tools, and just see what it would look like if I took the same approach that I have right now in reading the Bible? But I just happened to do it with this tool.”

MH: If people get used to... On the one hand, if they tinker with some of these things, there’s a discovery element here that they... They can discover that they can get some sort of information... Something retrieves information for them and delivers it to them really quickly. There’s the discovery of how you can gather data. Then there’s the discovery of what you can do with it, or what a particular tool... how it presents it to you. I would recommend to people, tinker with these tools. Just play with them. And after a while, you’ll begin to identify certain kinds of tools with particular tasks that you find useful. Like in my case, since I have Logos on the desktop, I’ll use what we call Passage Guides, specifically because it will gather information quickly like, “Where is my passage referenced in some other ancient literature?” or “Does my passage reference some item in other ancient literature?” “What are the parallel passages?” I don’t have to go hunt for things. And I just know that if I’m going to drill down somewhere, those are two things I just want to know. I want to know if it’s in Second Temple literature. If there’s any touch-point there. I want to know what the parallels are, what is out there in the other material. I might want to know, “Is there a significant textual variant going on here?” I think people need to experiment with tools just so they get a better idea of the kind of data—the kind of information—they can get to quickly. And then they’ll begin to identify what they can retrieve—the destinations

they wind up in—on their tablet or phone or their desktop. And those things will bubble to the surface, the ones that are useful for tasks that they'll do in Bible studies. So tinkering is important.

JC: Yeah, I think that's a really good point, that sometimes when we think of studying, it's something that's so serious. [laughs] Like, you know, everything...

MH: I'm going to get graded on this. [laughter]

JC: Yeah, yeah. It's like everything can go wrong, and you're one step away from heresy or something. [laughs] And I think...

MH: Yeah, "Did I do it right?" [laughs]

JC: Yeah, and we miss out on what you've highlighted here, which is *having fun* and *playing* at this, and realizing that every time we come to the Bible, whatever tool we're using, that the purpose is the same, and that is to know God and to be known by him. And to cherish the fact that we can read these words in our own language, whatever the medium. And understand something about his being and his likeness, and as we do that, knowing that he's working through his Spirit to help us conform to his likeness and to his image. To me, that is something that, when it's there and it's in front of us, in a sense, all the pressure's off. We're not trying to, "Oh, gosh..."

30:00

MH: Yeah, and sometimes, you get... It's a profitable "study," if all that you learn is that, "Oh, well, there's a tool that I can use." And you sort of get lost in it. We've all had this happen to us, whether it's something in the software at work or on your own time. You just get lost in something and you don't really accomplish what you thought you were going to accomplish. Hopefully you're not guilted into Bible study, like, "Well, that wasn't real Bible study, because I can't write a paper on that topic now." Sometimes, just discovering something that's useful that you're going to wind up using a hundred times is so much more worthwhile. And to me, that sort of thing is Providential—you find something that's going to stick with you. I think we do really need to get away from this notion of, like we're being graded for something. And we joke a lot in the office that the goal of Bible study shouldn't be getting a spiritual buzz. "I came away with a feeling now, so I'm going to get points for that," or "I did it the right way." None of that is the point. The point is development, it's discovery. Things like this—just getting to know scripture better, and through that, getting to know the Lord better.

JC: Yeah, exactly.

MH: It happens in different ways. You can't just stick it in a mold, and then that's that. Then rinse and repeat. [laughs]

JC: Yeah! It has to be fresh. Keep it fresh.

MH: So we've been going through Colossians. You noted to me when we had a conversation about doing another episode that you've been thinking about Colossians and applying some of what you're doing to Colossians. So we've talked about word study in some of these different tools—drilling down on different words. So give us an example. What's a key word that you might pick out from Colossians to apply some of this to?

JC: So key words are interesting because when we think of a key word, it doesn't have to do with how many syllables or how many letters are in the key word. Sometimes, we say, "Oh, justification must be important, because..."

MH: [laughs] It's a long word. And I don't quite understand it. I have to go look it up; it must be... [laughter]

JC: Yeah, right? But there are different criteria for determining what could be a key word. We talked about this earlier. A word that's repeated. Whenever the biblical authors are using a word repeatedly, even when it's used with different senses, sometimes there's something going on there, where they're trying to draw some ideas together or maybe there's even a contrast. So people are going to want to look for repeated words throughout a passage. Another thing is, part of this can be a little subjective. If a person were to say, "This word's really familiar to me, but when I think about it, I actually don't know what it means." Because sometimes, words in our language are so common.

MH: Like "cute." [laughs]

JC: Yeah! Or "nice." What did somebody mean by that? I think of that when I look at Colossians, and I imagine you've gone through these couple of words already. Think of the word "mystery." Mystery—do we know what it means? "I don't know. It's a mystery!" [laughs] It would be a good word to pick, just because there is some misunderstanding around it. The word that I think of—that comes to mind, partially, because Colossians is all about the supremacy of Christ... And when you think about the supremacy, I'm thinking of that verse, Colossians 1:15, where we see the word *eikōn*, which is translated in most translations as "image." If you use, depending on what pronunciation scheme you're using for Greek, you may have the Erasmian, which is "ay-cone" and you may have the modern, which is "ee-cone." And if you use the second one, you can think, "What does that word sound like?" Mike, you probably know. What does that word sound like?

MH: Yeah, "icon," or something like that.

JC: Icon. So this is where it becomes a little more difficult for us as people who are trying to understand these words from an English translation in our own language, because immediately, we can think of how that word is used in our

language today. And it's a little bit of the tricky stuff when it comes to word studies, because once you get to the Greek, there are so many words in English that are based off of Greek that we can assume that the meanings are also the same, too. So when you think of words like *bios* in Greek, which can be translated "life" in English. And then you think of another word in Greek like *logos*, which is translated typically "word." But we see those two Greek words come together: *bio logos* or biology (study of life), and so "Ah, there we are!" You can see all of these connections between English and Greek, and sometimes that can help us to understand what a word in English might mean or the history of that word, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's the *meaning* of that word. And we look at something like *eikōn*...

MH: You picked an interesting example, because even in English you come across something in Colossians about "image of the invisible God" that's going to take your mind back to the Old Testament. And sure, you're dealing in English. Image in the New Testament; image in the Old Testament. But that's actually a worthwhile thing to realize, because then you *can* use tools to... If you're in Colossians, what's the Greek word for this? And you can ask yourself... There are a lot of people in this audience who are reflexively going to say, "Well, I wonder if that's the Greek word that the Septuagint uses to translate the image language in Genesis." And so it generates a question, and hopefully it doesn't stop there. That's a great question, but people need to be familiar enough with tools that can give you an immediate answer to that. And then when you see those connections, your thinking about Old and New Testament began in English, which is uncertain for the very reasons you're talking about. But now you actually know that there's something going on there. There's some connection. An ancient Jew writing in Greek used that word for that Hebrew word back there, so there must have been some kind of resonance between there—at least, potentially there is. So you're on to something; it's not just a guess based on English. [laughs] "That word happens to be in my English Bible in both places." It's a little bit more substantial than that.

JC: Exactly. And you raise such a good point there, because when it comes to doing these types of studies and looking up a Greek word like *eikōn* for "image," the tendency is to say, "Let's limit our study just to this passage or just to this chapter or book." And really, what the tools are going to allow us to do is to quickly navigate to the Old Testament. But also what's fascinating in this respect is navigating forward to the end of the New Testament when you look at how this word is used, especially in Revelation. "The image of the beast." Obviously, the referent is different. It's not referring... [laughs] Jesus is *not* the image of the beast, but the same word is used there. And we're talking about this likeness. And when you look at what's happening in Colossians and talking about the supremacy of Christ, and how that's contrasted to the image of the beast and everything that this entity does and is about—all contrary to the character and image of God. You wouldn't necessarily get that just from looking in Colossians alone, but by doing just a very quick search (either through STEP Bible or Blue

Letter Bible) about “Where does the word ‘image’ appear also throughout the New Testament?” And of course, we know the roots of Revelation come from the Old Testament. So it also points us back there, too, because of the whole creation motif.

MH: Yeah. You’re going to wind up back there in Genesis. When you can just navigate in a very simple way, hopefully to people doing Bible study, they’re going to wonder, “I started in Colossians and now I’m thinking about Genesis. Did the writer want me to do that?” [laughs] “Was there some planning behind that?” I think the answer to that question often is, “Yeah. He wanted your mind to go back there, so mission accomplished.” What might that mean? What might that indicate?

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JC: Yeah, it’s fascinating when you can bring those two things together because you start to see that these words are also related to themes. Sometimes we mistake a word for a theme, but sometimes we also don’t realize that these words are also part of other bigger themes in the Bible. “Image,” for example, being tied to the phrase, “Oh, you look just like your Dad.”

MH: Yeah, “spitting image,” that kind of thing.

JC: We have these types of phrases, even in English. But to also realize, we have this language of “image” and “likeness,” and when we have the other language here, the “firstborn,” what is this suggesting? “The Son of God.” And particularly in Revelation, we hear that phrase, “Son of Man,” and how that title is in contrast to this beast. It’s that creation language that’s being used all over again and realizing that this imagery that’s being used in Revelation about a beast coming up out of the sea... This is almost anti-creation imagery! Because where did the beasts appear in Genesis? They appear on the land...

MH: Yeah. And if you’re in a creation text, you’re going to wind up in other creation texts. And if you have good tools (and enough patience), you’re going to wind up in Psalm 74 and all that weird ancient Near Eastern chaos imagery, and you’re going to wind up in Daniel. You wind up in Daniel with the beast that comes from the sea, and that’s going to take you back to Psalm 74 and some of this other stuff with ancient Near Eastern background in Genesis 1. It’s just going to... You’re just adding layers constantly. Obviously, I’m going to be that one that says, “That’s really useful.” But I think when people study scripture, they shouldn’t be intimidated by that. It’s like, “Oh, I’m going down the rabbit hole. I’m never going to come back! I forgot what my first question was!” [laughs] Okay, well, take notes, or whatever. But this is how scripture is. This is how it behaves. It’s just going to take you to different layers and different levels. It’s the peeling the onion metaphor. That’s good, because the biblical writers wanted you to experience that because there’s just a whole lot to think about. Nothing is written or occurs in a vacuum here. It’s surrounded by other stuff.

JC: Yeah, I think that's the important distinction that, when you integrate the tools into things like this, that expectation of saying, "My Bible study is a bus route." [laughter] "It takes me from downtown to the Civic Center." And really, when you start getting comfortable with the tools and you're jumping around from, "Okay, so the word is used here, but it's also used over here, and then it's used back over here, and it's tied into this word," it becomes this sort of safari.

MH: There's a lot more stops.

JC: Yeah. But really, you're on an exploration. And there's a lot of freedom in that. And you used this word earlier, which I love. It's the freedom to discover. When you're getting into the Bible and getting into different words and themes and seeing where they occur and being able to meditate on those and add to layers of understanding... Sometimes in our culture, I think particularly the Western culture, if I've heard it once, I know it. If I've... "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I know that." People use those words like, "I know that," when really, what they're saying is, "I've heard that before." It really doesn't mean they *know* it. It just is, "Yeah, yeah. I'm familiar with that. I've heard it before." And what tools like this allow us to do when looking at scripture this way and being able to jump back and forth in between passages quickly and try to gain understanding, is add these layers of understanding of things. "Maybe I didn't see this before, but now I'm seeing it, and I'm seeing this connection between "image" and "sonship" and then over here, "creation." And all of this being tied together in some fascinating, meaningful way to communicate something about God I didn't understand before.

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MH: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Well, the last time we talked, way back in episode 125, you had created Studying the Bible with Word Studies. I can't remember if that's exactly the title of the course or not.

JC: Yeah, you got it.

MH: Okay. And so I'm assuming that you've come up with something new. There are a lot of people who took advantage of that (the word study course) and obviously that's still up there. It's still available. And personally, I highly recommend it. I get asked all the time, "Can you tell us how to study the Bible?" Well, I can do that conversationally, but here's something you can actually go to that doesn't require you to spend thousands of dollars on a huge software package. I mean, if you want to go out and buy Logos, by all means, do that, because it's wonderful. But the bar is not that high. Johnny has made something that is really, really, really useful for doing word studies. But have you added anything else to the repertoire here to what people can use for their own Bible study?

JC: Yeah, I've created a new course. And this has been a long time coming. It's a course called *The Mission and Message of Jesus*. So what I realized...

MH: This *is* a long time coming. You used to talk about this back when you were still at Logos.

JC: Yeah. This is something that I worked on when I was at graduate school. I wanted to create a resource that gave people this big picture interpretive lens through which they could understand what Jesus and his purpose was about, even going back to the themes in the Old Testament, and how that informs his teachings. So I organized this around six units. But if I were to take a step back, just one here, and say, really, what are we doing with these courses is, I realize that folks, when they go to a church or a Bible study, they may leave and say, "Where else can I go to learn about this type of stuff?" It used to be... It was this way for us, for sure. They say, "Go to seminary. Go to grad school if you want to learn more." [laughs] And you're thinking, "Oh, boy. How much is it per credit unit to take classes?" [laughs]

MH: "Yeah, no thanks. And I get to quit my job and leave my church, too. Sure, sign me up!" [laughs]

JC: "I have to leave all the relationships I have." It's difficult to say to folks. You've attended this study. Maybe you've gone to a conference or two. And then they want to learn more, but it's way out here. They have to take a 12-week or a 16-week course and they may or may not be interested in getting credit for it. So I'm looking at this and seeing there's this gap in between what people are gleaning from in church, and then what's available out there at a graduate level institution and saying, "what can fit in this space?" It's a course, it's dedicated time. It's the stuff that we've learned, but distilled into a couple of hours. So you don't have to sit through weeks and weeks of a lecture. You can take this type of course at your own pace, on demand. It's video-based, so you can pause, rewind, all those types of things. Especially when it comes to things like word studies, because people will say, "I wish I knew what the tools were." And then once they get the tools, they say, "I wish I knew how to use the tools." [laughs] And often times, what we see in any type of software training is people going through the menus and the buttons. So here's what the menus are. Here's what the buttons are. But they're not actually showing a process. They're not showing, "Here's an approach *you* can use, and you can use it with the tools you already have available, and you can follow through and get something meaningful from this." So with the word studies course, it is exactly that. I've mentioned the tools (Blue Letter Bible and STEP Bible). I use those same tools in this video course, and then I show the process of going through a word study. You can, in a sense, look right over my shoulder as we go through a word study on the English word "spiritual," which is one of those that's so misunderstood with how we use it today in *our* language. But that's one that I go through.

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For The Mission and Message of Jesus, I realize, when we're looking at words, oftentimes, it would be so helpful to have the entire context of the Bible in mind

when we're studying these individual words. Because you and I just went through this process where we said, "'Image.' That makes me think of 'son,' and that makes me think of 'creation.'" Immediately, you're rattling off Psalm 74, all these different connections. How do you get there? And it would be something where, of course, you have to read through the Bible multiple times, and if it takes you five years to read through the Bible, that obviously is a lifelong endeavor. You're going to be reading through... Five times takes you 25 years. How could you get a jumpstart? How could you get a fast-track? And I'm not saying there are really any shortcuts to understanding the Bible or knowing God, but how could we also help get people "onboarded" with that?

MH: Yeah. There are certainly ways to speed up the process—to save time. And people can actually make better use of their time.

JC: Right. And part of that is by identifying the themes. If we can say, "Here are some of the most prominent themes in the Bible, and these themes are threads that can be traced all the way through the Bible, and if you trace them all the way through, you're going to have an understanding of why Jesus said what he said." I mean, it's very odd for someone to say, "You're going to see the coming of the Son of Man." [laughs] Just like, "We're asking you who you are, and this is how you respond, of all things?" But when you understand what he's saying, and what that term (the Son of Man) means, that it's not just something that was made up by the New Testament writers... They didn't make it up. This comes from the Old Testament. It's rich in meaning. And you can see that it has associations with divine origins in the context of Luke. It looks like Jesus is using his authority to restore people, not oppress them—people who are suffering at the hand of a beastly humanity, which in this case were the Pharisees, ironically. And yet, Jesus is also rescuing us from our own beastliness—the beastliness being the part of us that wants to use people to our own advantage or take advantage or oppress. We see this at the individual level, but we also see it in society. And looking at Jesus as this person whom Yahweh is going to vindicate and show that he was indeed righteous even though the religious leaders of the day didn't believe Jesus to be so... But it's all of these things tied up. When you see these themes throughout scripture (and there's a study plan—a reading plan—together with it), you can start to get an understanding of the big picture and how these things all work together. And integrated into the Mission and Message of Jesus course are also in-depth word studies that build upon what was already shown in the How to Study the Bible with Word Studies course and help people get even more practice (if you want to use that word) or more time just understanding, "Oh, this is the process. This is the kind of insights that I can gain when I have an understanding of the context of scripture."

MH: Yeah, you know, people who... In this audience, a lot of people have read *Unseen Realm*, or the lighter version, *Supernatural*, or some other book that I've written. And I've often said to people in presentations at events and whatnot that what we're doing here is not magic. *Unseen Realm*, essentially, is about showing

you breadcrumb trails. You can use the whole “thread” theme going through the tapestry of scripture, breadcrumb trails, this is what you’re talking about, that you have to be alerted to, “Hey, there’s a trail here and I need to follow it.” And at some point on the trail you’re going to hit things that you just intuitively... or you guess correctly... It’s a drill-down point. You spend more time. But patterns are important. Tracing threads. Following breadcrumb trails. That’s where you get a lot of this sense of interconnectivity. For this audience, this is what I do in *Unseen Realm*. It’s not magic. It’s just that these things have been dropped and planted and sown into scripture by the biblical writers intentionally to lead you in how to think about something. So the enterprise really is finding those things and then looking at them in their own context, and we have the tools to be able to do that.

JC: Exactly.

MH: Yeah, so this sounds really useful. I would expect no less, with my experience with you, and just all that courses through your mind about how to use technology in Bible study. I’m hoping people realize, this is a long conversation between you and me going all the back... I don’t even want to think about the number of years. Probably 10 or more years.

JC: Yeah, 10 years.

MH: Because I’ve been at Logos for 14. Yeah, this is like a 10-year conversation of doing this sort of thing, so I’m glad you can share a little bit more about what you’ve created. So where can people find it?

JC: People can go to the website www.BibleWordNerd.com. That’s all one word. There are no spaces or hyphens.

MH: Aptly named. [laughter]

JC: Yeah. They’re going to be able to check out both courses there. And as a special for the Naked Bible audience, I’m creating a coupon that will be “NAKEDBIBLE2018,” and that will be the coupon code you can use for a good-sized discount on the two courses.

MH: Wow. Well, thanks for being on with us and catching up a little bit, too, at the same time.

JC: Yeah. Thanks so much for having me on the show, Mike. I really appreciate it. And hope your audience got a lot of value out of it.

MH: Thanks.

JC: Thanks so much.

MH: Well, today, we're talking with Joe Fioramonti. Joe is formerly (in his case, this is good) a professor at the University of Baltimore, where he spent five years. He's now in St. Augustine, Florida, at Flagler College. He's a graphic design professor, so he's got a mix of being an academic and being an artist. He also owns and directs a small brand consulting firm called Dark Square. Joe and I have known each other for a number of years. He has partnered with me in my own branding and messaging for a while now—several years at least. It's almost nine years ago that he offered to help me consolidate my various sites and organize them into something more centralized. He's the guy behind the design of drmsh.com. So we've had a pretty long-term relationship. But we're not here to talk about that. [laughs] It's not sort of a Memory Lane kind of episode. What we want to do is, we want to talk with Joe today about a new project he's working on that may be of interest to the podcast audience.

Now, I've said before at events, and maybe once or twice on the podcast, that one of the things needed for the future of the Church in a post-Christian (or really an anti-Christian) environment or culture, is entrepreneurship. There are a number of reasons for that. Since I think that way, and I think that's going to be really important for the future of the Church in terms of hiring people and having people who make money to help ministry in the future when we come to a day when we can't have non-profits and the culture tries to squeeze anything Christian out of relevance, people like Joe are going to be important. So consequently, from time to time I want to have people on to highlight either businesses or ministries whose owners are invested in my content—what we're doing here at the podcast—and also who want to do something intentional for the kingdom. So Joe's latest business that we're going to talk about today fits that mold. It's called Anno Domini, and it lives at www.AnnoDomini.design. It's structured intentionally (we're going to talk about that) so that one-third of the proceeds go specifically to the persecuted Church. He's going to be talking about what the business is, but basically, it's business designs and traditional prints. It's something that's more upscale, not what you would have found in Family Christian Bookstores or things like that. This is much more professional. So I'm going to let him talk about it. So welcome to the podcast, Joe. Good to have you on.

JF: Thanks so much. It's great to be here. Obviously a long-time fan, so it's good to actually be on the show.

MH: Yeah, yeah. So why don't we start with some of your backstory, which has a number of dramatic twists and turns to it. I'd like to start there and break it up a little bit, because there are several aspects to this. First, I'd like the audience to hear your personal story—where you came from, how you came to the Lord—and then we'll move on and talk about how you came across my content, and

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then of course drill down into what we want to talk about today. So tell us your personal story. Where do you come from, and how did you come to Christ?

JF: Absolutely. So I grew up in a small town called Greenwood Lake in upstate New York, about an hour north of the city. I was raised Catholic. So I grew up in the church. I still loosely associate myself with the Catholic Church and will go to mass from time to time. I really like the history and the tradition. But I always had a passion for God and for the Church and for the Lord. And I always had a passion for art. I was really, really good at it from a young age. I was able to draw better than most of my peers, even as a young child, and teachers kind of saw that and encouraged it. So I'm going to interweave my professional history with my Christian history, because they really go hand in hand. I had a close uncle who became born again and left the Catholic Church. At 16, he was my sponsor for my confirmation, even though he wasn't still in the church. He challenged me. He said, "Have you ever actually sat down and read the Bible?" And I grew up going to Catholic school, learned even a little bit (a very, very little bit) of Latin in the Latin mass, and was an altar boy and all that, but I hadn't actually sat down and read it. So I said, "No." So I sat down and I read it. And I've been reading it ever since. I've probably gone cover to cover between five and seven times. And it's become a passion and it has really informed my life, but also my work. I went to art school. I went to Alfred University in upstate New York. It's just a phenomenal art school. And I learned so much there. I used to say that I was going to school to be a starving artist, and then I lived the dream after school. [MH laughs] I very much embraced that. I moved out to Los Angeles after school and I was doing a lot of art, but also a lot of music. I also did a lot of music when I was in college. I lived in my car, and literally ate out of garbage cans for a while. And that sounds really bad, but I look back and see God's provision there. I worked a lot of minimum wage jobs. One of them was working at a deli making sandwiches, and we weren't allowed to take food with us when we left. But to keep people from stealing out of the dumpsters in a big city like Los Angeles, they were all locked off on a strip full of restaurants. Because I worked there, I had a key to it. So at the end of my shift every night, I actually ate really, really good food from some very nice restaurants after work. Even though I was digging them out, they were wrapped up nice.

MH: Wow.

JF: And God took care of me during that season. It was an incredible learning experience, but I'm glad it's over. I wouldn't want to do it again.

MH: Sure.

JF: So that's the early creative stage. After roughing it for a while as an artist, I went back to school to get a teaching minor at Alfred. And I taught high school art for about two years in upstate New York in a couple of different schools in that two-year period of time. And New York state requires that you get a master's

degree in order to maintain your license within five years. So half that period had passed by and I really had to start looking at programs and get serious about that. I had already taught myself a lot of the software for graphic design and I taught myself enough code to get by making websites in the summer to compensate my teaching salary and help pay off college loans. And graphic design just seemed like a really good fit. So I started looking at programs. This is probably a longer story than is warranted for the podcast today, but through a series of events, I ended up going to the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). I have a Master's in Fine Arts in Graphic Design from SCAD. So that's a terminal degree. That opened up a lot of opportunity for me. I could get much more influential, higher paying jobs as a professional designer with an MFA, but I could also teach college with an MFA. The academic community doesn't require quite so much of artists. We're able to get by with a master's. So that's how I ended up teaching college. I taught at an art institute in Charleston for a couple of years and eventually landed at University of Baltimore, which was a great experience, and I'm excited to be starting at Flagler College here in just a couple weeks.

MH: Wow. So how did you come across me and my content? That happened somewhere at some point in there. How in the world did that...? I know you're going to say it's a fortunate thing, but it might be kind of a crazy thing, too. You've given me bits and pieces of the story before, but your story just has so many turns to it. And I like stuff like that, because I like Providence. That's a big thing with me. Yeah, just as much as you can. Hit the high points, or the low points—however you want to characterize that.

JF: Absolutely, yeah. And the Providence always seems to come out in hindsight. It's always little things afterwards. You can see it and you're like, "Wow, God really picked me up and dragged me kicking and screaming through these chapters." But with your material, I was in grad school, and a real passion of mine by that point in my life was helping the Christian community with its communication skills. To this day, I'm still kind of taken aback by how behind we are as a culture and a community in communicating. We dominated for centuries. The Catholic Church was a just powerhouse of art and (I don't use this term necessarily in a bad sense) propaganda, just getting their message out, and helping people understand.

MH: Right.

JF: And we've lost that, and I'm very interested in the history of what theologically or even philosophically turned and when and how we ended up here, but that's where we're at. So when I was in SCAD, that was a big part of my focus—how to learn these skills and get good at them and use them to help organizations and churches that I share values with do a better job.

Another piece to this whole puzzle is I was a huge Chuck Missler fan for years, and I learned so much through his radio program. I guess I came across him on the radio on my commute to work years and years ago. So when I came across your stuff, a friend knew that I was interested in Missler and really interested in the Bible, ultimately. What impressed me about Chuck was that he delved into all this stuff that nobody else would talk about, and I would read it and be like, "What the heck does that mean?" Missler was a guy who would get into that and try to address that. Part of that was some of the alien stuff, which I'm not super-into or interested in. It *is* interesting—don't get me wrong—but I don't spend a lot of time in that area of research or study. But somebody knew I was into that kind of stuff and said, "You really need to check out this UFO conference that this guy is speaking at. The other two, they're okay, but this guy Michael Heiser is really, really good, and he's Christian. You've got to check that out." And I don't even know what it was, it was some Roswell conference that you did...

MH: Probably Ancient of Days, yeah.

JF: Maybe. I don't think it was a Christian event. I think it was two other secular guys. Anyway, I heard your stuff and I heard you talk on it, and I was like, "Whoa. I've got to find out who this guy is. And I just started looking up other interviews you had done and some stuff you had written back then. I don't even think you had any major books out. You had the Two Powers in Heaven, or... It was basically your doctoral work (I think) online, and a pdf or something like that.

MH: I probably had the Sitchin site. All that stuff.

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JF: Yeah, the Sitchin stuff was interesting, but not super-interesting to me at that point. But the other work you were doing was just... I loved Missler, but you took it to a level where... He just didn't have that expertise and background and the language expertise that you had. I always appreciated about him that he always said, "Don't take my word for it. Go out and read it and study it for yourself and pray about it. Don't take my word for it." You had a similar approach. You really impressed me with how you said, "This is what we know. Anything else beyond that is kind of speculative or may be informed by tradition, but here's what the original text material we have says, and this is what we can conclude from it, and here's other pieces that you might be able to say could be true, but that's it." Just the level of intellectual honesty that you brought to the conversation was very refreshing, and I find it difficult to come across—difficult to find. So I was hooked. Then I looked at your material online, and it was great, but it was kind of tough to get around and find all the things you were doing. You were, at that point, just winging it with WordPress installs for different topics you wrote about. So I sent you an email and you got back to me, and that was it. We worked together and put it together.

MH: Yeah. Now, you've told me before that what I do with scripture (basically trying to convince people to read it in light of its own context as opposed to

imposing some other context), that that's analogous to what you do and want to do. Can you explain that a little bit?

JF: Yeah. I find the work that I do analogous to your work in two ways. One, understanding context of the ancient Near East and when these books were written and how people understood them—what are the other influences that are directing that kind of information and the styles and all that. I'm a graphic designer, brand consultant, whatever, and...

MH: It's media.

JF: Yeah, it's media. And people tend to think about it as making things look cool or pretty or professional. (Tack an adjective on.) But really, when it's done right, it's communication. And in order for that communication to take place, you really have to do a tremendous amount of research to understand how people are using certain visual symbols. What do certain combinations of colors and typefaces mean? What's the history of the typeface you're using, and how is it understood? The reason anybody understands anything is their experience with it. The reason we all know to stop at a red light is because we experience being told that and seeing that. If you drop somebody from another planet at an intersection, they wouldn't know what to do. And it gets very complex and dynamic how these systems work and collide with each other in different sub-cultures. But I tell my students that probably 80-percent of the work I do never sees the light of day. It's research. It's figuring out what combinations of colors and fonts and photographs and typefaces and all these things... when you put them together, how are people going to understand that? And sometimes it looks trendy or cool. More often than not, it should. But sometimes it doesn't. I think the more important thing is understanding these really complex systems of context and how people are interacting with symbols and the meaning they're deriving from it, so that you can get a message to them more effectively.

And so that's the first dynamic that I see. You're really helping people do that with the Bible. You're helping them understand all these other cultural factors going on that lets them have a better, richer, deeper understanding of what the text actually says that modernity doesn't have to offer. When I'm working with businesses, putting together a brand campaign or some kind of a marketing plan, we're looking at, this is trendy right now in television and music and also in design, and here's what's going on in politics, and here are some of the colors that are being used, and oh, there's this historical thing that comes into play that's still kind of shading how people see this particular thing. We're looking at all these things and testing them in focus groups, and trying to figure out, "Alright, we want to get our message across without any *faux pas*, without any coloring from other events or things that are out there. How do we differentiate from competition? It's getting that context and helping companies be more effective in their communication. So that's a big part of it.

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The other part of it is, you talk so much about being God's imagers. And that's another dynamic to what I do. I'm working with companies on their brand (their type palette, their color palette, a bunch of rules about how to treat their logo). But I'm creating images or logos. (I love that parallel of the logos—the word of God.) I'm doing this for organizations. I'm helping them come up with that word—the name of their company or the mark of their company—the image of their company that represents their value set as an organization to the world. So that's just another little dynamic there that I think is related to the work that you do that I find really fascinating.

MH: That's interesting. So let's shift to talk about this new thing that you're into. Because I know enough about it to know that what you've just said... There's a lot in what you just said that has gone into this new thing called Anno Domini. Of course, it's Latin for "the year of our Lord." Tell us about the new concept—the new project, the new business. Describe what it is. What's the work? What are you actually doing? What does it look like? How are you making things? What are you making?

JF: Absolutely. So Anno Domini is a side project that stems from my need to get off a computer. I spend easily 80 hours a week staring at this machine. And I'm a fine artist at heart. That's where I started. So this is a fine art endeavor. It's traditional print-making. So there's a hands-on quality that is really beautiful and rich and it's so much more than a computer printer can really give you. It's the hand of the artist in the work. So it started off as a way for me to get off the computer and relax and clear my head a little bit. It just comes out of me. When I'm doing art for myself, it just ends up being Christian in nature. So for now, they're prints. These are designs that I've created. There's different subject matter that I cover that's very traditional and it certainly has a Catholic flair to it. It's just part of my creative DNA and my history growing up. But it's very traditional. These are block prints that are made in the style... kind of a hybrid of some contemporary techniques along with very, very traditional techniques that are about 500 years old. So I have an intaglio press, which is a hand-pulled, big metal cylinder. And I cut these designs into a big block of wood.

MH: You really are going back.

JF: Yeah. They are handmade. And then you ink the block and you put it on top of your paper, and you crank it though. And the result is a really nice black and white and I just mean that in an A-B kind of way. The ink is black or blue or whatever, and then the paper is whatever color it is. But it's a very simple, elegant design. It's got this third dimension of being pushed into the paper that it just has a completely different quality. And it's kind of come back (this style and some of these traditional printing methods) in recent history, especially in things like wedding invitations or special events. There's just a values connection that a human being made this. It's not mass-produced. [MH laughs] I can't print 5,000 of them. I mean, I *could*, but it would take me forever.

MH: Right, right.

JF: You know, the block itself takes hours and hours to design and to cut, and then each print individually takes about five to 10 minutes apiece. So they're limited; they're special. And there's just a really nice physical quality to them that you have a hard time finding...

MH: Give me some examples of what you are printing. What's the subject matter?

JF: Absolutely. So the one that I'm really excited about, that I've been working on for years, getting the design right, and it's really helped me perfect the technique a little bit are just four Gospel representations. So you have the tetramorph: the lion, the ox, the eagle, and the man. And there's different traditions on which one is assigned to which, and I've done a ton of research on that. It's really fascinating how Irenaeus assigned them first to the Gospels. They show up in scripture as early as Genesis when Jacob is naming his 12 sons, and Augustine came along and he shuffled them and said, "No, they belong with these Gospels." So I picked one tradition that I tend to lean towards, too, and each Gospel has that particular ensign for the Gospel—the name of the book. And then underneath, in historically set typography, you have every single name and title for Jesus that shows up in that particular book.

MH: That's pretty cool.

JF: They look really nice, and I've gotten a great response from the people that I've shared them with online (friends and whatnot).

1:20:00

MH: You've actually sent me... I can't remember which one. I don't know if it was one or two of them—samples. They looked pretty sweet. When we went to Israel, we actually saw some of this kind of stuff in some of the churches, which is kind of obvious that you'd run into it there. But the evangelist, i.e., the gospel person... and depending on where you were, there would be some visual symbol or sign that would be associated with it. So you actually do run into it in these very ancient contexts. In the Holy Land, of course, is typically one of the churches.

JF: Yeah, absolutely. It's all over the ancient world. It's all over the Bible. They show up from literally Genesis right through to Revelation, and half the books in between it. So it's a fascinating study in symbols and how they've changed and evolved over the centuries.

MH: How many do you have on the website?

JF: Right now, we have the four Gospel prints up there, so people can see those. And we also have digital versions, as well. So I've created digital versions, and the idea is that if somebody wants to spend a little extra money on a more luxury kind of an item—a really nice handmade print—they can do that. But if it's a little out of budget or you wanted to buy all four and that was a little pricey, there's a digital version that is a very nice production, as well. It doesn't have that third dimensional quality of getting pressed in the paper, but they're very nice prints. And they're a little more accessible, a little less expensive. So I wanted to reach a couple of different price points because I think people would just enjoy to have them as a talking piece to bring up a conversation about the titles of Jesus in any particular gospel, and their faith.

MH: Now, the prints that you have for sale... Of course, the goal that you've mentioned to me in our conversations about this, which of course has led to having you on the podcast, was to raise money for the persecuted Church, and you have a particular model for doing this. So what's the plan?

JF: Yeah. I'm calling it the policy of thirds. So the idea—the concept, the business model—is that any art sold through this little venture called Anno Domini is split into thirds, where one-third of the money will go to the artist doing the art. And my hope is to have other artists involved in the coming months and years so it's not just me. I'd like it to be more of a thing than just my artwork. A third will go to the organization to help with how it's run and organize the overhead of doing some marketing. Art supplies are really expensive, so one-third will go to that. But the important part, and the reason I took this out of a hobby that I did to something a little more ambitious, is I want one-third of all profits to go to helping the persecuted Church. So the idea is... You're friends with John Loeffler, and I've known him for years. I helped him with his site and his branding quite a while ago. He and his wife are very involved with helping the persecuted Church and so I've spoken with them and the idea is to use this as a way to raise money for different cases that arise. There are always stories in the news of some pastor who is in jail, and it takes money to get them out of there and to a sanctuary country. It's something they've been very active in, and they're very helpful in helping me find good organizations to partner with and to donate money to.

MH: Yeah, I know, he's put a lot of time into this. When I was out at the last Missler conference, I met John, and I've since been on his *Steel on Steel* show a couple times. But at the conference, and then off the air at the show, we actually talked about some specific (and I'm not going to give geographical locations here)... Listeners should know that this isn't just theoretical help. John has been directly involved in putting people in safe houses, that sort of situation, moving them around—pastors. Unfortunately, some of them get caught. They get arrested and they languish in prison, like we've been hearing about in Iran lately. But John has been directly involved in moving people like that around, and there is an expense to it. He has to either use his own money or get in contact with

people. I know with Miqlat, our nonprofit, I've told him, "Look, if you need X,Y,Z dollars to move somebody around, or whatever it is, you know we're out here now," since we have met. So it's very... What he does is really (in a very concrete way and in a number of settings) boots-on-the-ground kind of stuff, but it takes some resources to do that kind of thing. And he has vetted a number of people in various places to do this kind of work. So it's legit. This stuff happens. And resources are necessary to help these people.

JF: Yeah, absolutely. John and Carol do fantastic work. I've been impressed with the stuff they do. And I don't even think they talk about it a whole lot. And it's just amazing. This is something I enjoy to do. I feel so incredibly privileged to help. I read the New Testament and the really truly blessed people are those who are suffering for the gospel. I can't even begin to imagine the situations that some of these people have lived through and have stayed faithful through, and for me to be in my garage making artwork, just doing something I love, and to be able to give a portion of that to helping their situation, it's really humbling.

MH: Yeah. It's important that you know who the people are on the other end. It's not just going to overhead or something like that. But that's pretty important. So that's just something as I do events and talk to people, I love to meet people who are doing off-the-radar kind of ministry. When you get somebody off-the-radar like that, it really is more focused in that way. So I kind of look for that sort of stuff. So when I met John, it's like, "Oh boy, here's another one that's really worth keeping an eye on and contributing to."

Now, how do you hope to get other artists involved? There might be some artists in the podcast community. How are you going to try to do that? Wave the flag, I guess, or hang the shingle (if you want to use that metaphor) to alert people that you're out there and you're looking for good artwork that can fit in with this model. So how are you going to do that?

JF: So right now, it's an extremely small operation. It's me and our friend, Rich Baker, who is helping me with some of the operational stuff. And so, there is a page where people can submit their artwork and some context for what their history is and how they think about their art and how it fits into our mission to help the persecuted Church, and also some of the historical techniques of producing art that Christianity just has such a rich history with. So we'll see. This is kind of the big kick-off. I've had the set-up for a little while, but we've been talking for a while about doing this interview and putting it out there, because you have bigger reach than I have with just my little website. So we're going to see what happens. There are guidelines on the submission form as to what we're looking for. So there are a lot of great artists out there. There are a lot of great Christian artists out there. I don't want to sound like I'm downplaying all Christian artists out there with some of my comments earlier. I think we need to do a better job of putting ourselves out there and communicating as organizations, but that's not to say that there aren't fantastic artists out there doing really wonderful work.

MH: Yeah. The art community isn't the place you'd look for serious Christians, so this is a good outlet.

JF: They are out there, and they're doing fantastic work, and my hope is that this becomes a place where some of us can get together. We are focused on historical techniques and making sure there's good thought behind how they're doing their work and what it means, and how that ties to the mission of the organization and the history of the Church and art, because there's a lot there and it's very rich. We're probably not looking for experimental video artists. And I love that stuff. That was what my undergrad experience was all about—new media and very avant-garde stuff. But this is much more rooted in history and the tradition of the Church.

MH: So why don't you share the website once more as we wrap up, just so that people are reminded where to go and to tell their friends where to go.

JF: Absolutely. It is www.AnnoDomini.design (so it's a "not com," it's not a dot com). It's a dot design. And there's a link on drmsh.com. Seeing as how I have access to do those things, I put a little banner up last week.

MH: Yep, it's up there.

JF: We've seen a little bit of traffic, yeah.

1:30:00

MH: Good. Well, thanks for coming on with us to introduce this, and hopefully people will not only visit to get interested in it, but will actually buy things and submit things so that you have more to work with here.

JF: Absolutely. I really appreciate you having me on the podcast.

MH: Thanks.

JF: Thank *you*.

TS: Alright. Well, we appreciate Johnny and Joe for coming on to the Naked Bible Podcast. Please go support their endeavors, if you would. Next week, we're going to jump back into the third chapter of Colossians. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.