

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 155

David Limbaugh

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**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

**Guest: David Limbaugh (DL)**

### Episode Summary

This episode features a conversation with David Limbaugh, author of *The True Jesus: Uncovering the Divinity of Christ in the Gospels*. While the conversation naturally focuses on David's most recent book, we also get to know him, his spiritual journey, and his thoughts about academic biblical study and its place in the Church at large.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 155: interview with David Limbaugh. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing? I'm excited about the special guest we have.

**MH:** Absolutely. I think this is going to be a treat for our listeners. I've been looking forward to this one for several weeks, so we might as well just jump right into it.

Hi David! How are you? And thanks for being on the show!

**DL:** Great! It's an honor to be on with you. I've been an admirer of yours for a long time. Recently, I can presumptuously claim that you're my friend, as well. So thanks for having me on!

**MH:** Well, thank you. I think our audience is really going to enjoy this because on this podcast we make a big deal of biblical scholars who try to do stuff for the layperson. We don't want to exclude somebody like yourself. You're not a biblical scholar by training, but you are making a serious effort to bring sound biblical content to the average person in the pew. That's sort of the sweet spot of this audience. We care about people who want to do that. I thought after I read the book and did the blurb and all that sort of stuff that this would be a good interview for our audience, just to get to know you a little bit and kind of get a sense of what makes you tick and why you went into this. I guess that's a good place to start. Why don't you tell us a little bit about who David Limbaugh is: where you

were born and raised, schooling, career—all that stuff. Get that out of the way up front and then we'll transition into something a little more personal about your spiritual journey. But who is David Limbaugh?

**DL:** I was born in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in a family of lawyers. My grandfather was a lawyer and practiced until he was 104. I think he was the oldest practicing lawyer in the U.S. at the time. My dad was a lawyer, my uncle (still a lawyer) was a federal judge. Now he's retired and still working. My cousin's a lawyer/federal judge and there's a bunch of other cousins who are lawyers. My brother Rush (my only sibling), of course, chose a different path. He's smarter than all of us and has made more money and been more successful! I have a great relationship with him. We are the only two in our family. Our parents have passed away. We have a great extended family; we're all close. I still live in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. I have a wife and five kids. I'm 64 but my kids are young—from 24 down to 12.

**MH:** Wow!

**DL:** Don't laugh, you guys! Right now, I practice law part-time as an entertainment lawyer practicing in the area of negotiating contracts for radio, TV, and books. I write a weekly syndicated column. For 17 years, it was twice a week and now it's down to one a week. I've been writing books. This is the eighth book. The first five were on politics, the last three have been Christian-themed. This latest one, *The True Jesus*, was released April 10 and has done very well so far. And there we are!

**MH:** Can you share your testimony? How did you become a believer/Christ follower?

**DL:** Kicking and screaming!

**MH:** (Laughing) Shades of C.S. Lewis!

**DL:** Yeah! But that's presumptuous. I can't be in the same room or syllable or paragraph with him! But I was raised in a good church. I think it was a Bible-believing church, but I wouldn't know because I was so distracted and ADD or whatever it was (undiagnosed). I was such a scatterbrain. I don't think I was that interested. Even though I was confirmed in the church, I don't think I had a clue. I always believed in God. I remember asking my dad one time about why the communists didn't believe in God. It was so obvious to me—Romans 1. You look at the intelligent design and it's so obvious to me that there's a God, but I didn't understand God's nature. Specifically, I didn't understand the triune God, the God of the Bible. I didn't understand whether Jesus was God himself. I didn't really have the sense to pursue finding out. When I was in college, I studied philosophy. I majored in political science and minored in economics, but I was fascinated with philosophy. I had a humanities class and read AUGustine

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or AuGUSStine (however you geniuses pronounce his name)...

**MH:** We can't even get "Lah-gahs" and "Low-goess" right. (laughing)

**DL:** I can't even do that. Aquinas and... Paschal was my favorite. I studied all those guys and loved it, but I still didn't have a clue. So I fashioned God in my image, thinking that I know he's all-loving and all-powerful and all that, but I couldn't get over the age-old problem about why an all-loving, all-powerful God would allow evil. That's now a pillar of my faith, as opposed to a reason for my skepticism. But back then I couldn't get it. I thought I was some genius coming up with that originally—"I doubt that because why would God do that?" Not that I was smart-alecky about it, but I did think that I was an original thinker. The funny thing is that I was trying to make God or fashion God in my perception/conception and never really realized that I didn't have to reinvent the wheel. The Bible had revealed him to us. I just didn't take it that seriously.

I became a seeker. I started reading Josh McDowell books, Paul Little (*Know What and Why You Believe*), Norman Geisler books—probably even before I started reading the Bible. It was too intimidating to me. I didn't know where to begin. I did this on and off sporadically. There were so many seeds planted for me. A friend showed me a reference Bible and I went to this Bible/prayer study group (Christian Men's Fellowship, or whatever it was). They had a little card that you signed if you wanted to learn more about Christ. I signed up, amazingly. So some friends called (a doctor in town and another guy that were my friends) and we met in a small group and started going through this little booklet called "First Steps." It showed how Christ was deity, how he prophesied and all that. I think it was the Messianic prophecies that finally took me over the so-called intellectual hurdle. And once I overcame that and realized that there was overwhelming evidence to believe that Christianity's truth-claims were valid, then I later came to trust Christ. So I was kind of like Lee Strobel. It was a cumulative effect of the evidence, not some immediate epiphany for me.

**MH:** I think the way you describe it is kind of important. I can certainly relate to some of that later on. I became a Christian when I was a teenager, but I wasn't seeking anything. After the fact, you sort of go through questions. You hit this or that thought. Even today, it just kind of... I don't know what the right word is... not startles me, but troubles me that people have this dichotomy in their heads that faith and reason are somehow incompatible. Your faith *should* be reasonable. It's not a synonym; faith is not a synonym for being irrational. I think the way you put that is really important.

**DL:** Can I say something? That is so true, and it bothers me, too. Yes, faith is essential because it's something more...

**MH:** You don't have all the answers. You have to trust.

**DL:** And it's also more than intellectual assent. "Believe in Christ" means trusting him. So you have to take that step, even if you already believe. Just because I believe the propositions of Christian faith doesn't mean I'm saved. That's what I meant before: "the demons believe and shudder." You have to put your trust in him for the remission of your sins and for eternal life. So faith is required, but faith (as you said) isn't synonymous with suspending your critical faculties. So yes—it's supported by the evidence and supported by reason, but faith is something more.

**MH:** When did you decide to start writing in the Christian arena? What led to that, and who do you imagine when you do that? Who do you imagine is your reader—what kind of person?

10:00 **DL:** It's interesting... A minute ago, I started to jump ahead (which I frequently do in my stream of consciousness proclivity). I was so excited when I discovered (embarrassingly) that the Bible is the Word of God. I'm holding it in my hand. I can access the Word of God anytime I want. For half of my life (at that point a hundred percent of my life) I didn't realize that. For the first 30 or so years, I didn't know that. Even when people said it, it just went right over my head and didn't register. So now I really believed it's the Word of God and I was excited! I didn't have an epiphany to become a believer, but I had an epiphany about that! I became excited and wanted to learn and inhale it as fast as I could. I looked for shortcuts—anything. I wanted to have an injection. I wanted to mainstream it—mainline it—so I could become an immediate scholar. I just had a thirst for it. I found out that books about it helped a lot, which is why I wanted to do that for other people.

So let me fast forward. Because of my excitement that grew out of what was originally my skepticism and now this epiphany about it being the Word of God, I want to share that excitement. I'm so passionate about this because I think people—even some believers—take that for granted. But I think there's so many people situated where I was who don't quite get that, and even if they do get it they kind of halfway get it. I might have been saying this in another interview the other day. Two things amaze me: one is that people are as incurious as they are about amazing things—the important issues in life. We go around and never even think or we think, "Oh, I'll think about this later." I was even talking to somebody who I expected was a Christian the other day. I'll get to that later... If it's *true* you can't just put this... But I also understand that the world tugs at us and I forget. Day to day, I don't sit there and think about Christ every five seconds. When I'm doing book interviews I do, but you get absorbed. We're human beings in the world. My point is that I write for people that I think are where I was who would greatly benefit from a book like this, because I would have. So I write what I wish I would have had access to. That's who I want my books to be tailored to.

**MH:** Yeah. I can tell that, just having read some of your material and listening to you (and on other shows, too). I want my audience to hear it because that is the sweet spot for this podcast. I often say I'm just no longer going to protect people from their Bible and lines like that. What I mean by that is I just think laypeople are regularly underestimated when it comes to a thirst for content. But it has to be awakened. That's the hard part. I remember as a professor sometimes I would use shock-value in the classroom to essentially take somebody and disabuse them and the whole class... that "what you know may not be so." Just as a wake-up call, but making clear that "I'm your friend. I'm not hostile to your faith. I'm doing this to you because you need to wake up and start thinking about these things and start building a comprehension for this thing you say is inspired, this thing you call the Word of God. Do you really believe that or not? If you did, I'm with you. If you did, I would think that you might be more interested in it."

**DL:** And more enthusiastic! Let me tell you how I know that I have a platform and an audience. I have people tell me, "Man, I've never seen a book like this. You're the first to..." Well, I am so *not* the first person! There's so much good out there, so much great literature out there, so much great apologetic and evangelical literature that people are not exposed to. I just happen to be blessed with a platform to be able to act like I'm the first one they've ever... I don't necessarily present it that way, I'm just saying... But it's a great thing for me to be able to reach people that other people, for whatever reason, don't reach. I don't know what it is, but I think we all have our platform. I write a political column and I kind of straddle the two worlds (the faith-based world), so it's just a really gratifying thing to me that I can reach people who just don't have access for some reason to this literature written by people who are far superior to me.

**MH:** Between you, me, and all the people listening to this, I think part of the blame for this can be laid at the feet of what happens in so many pulpits on a Sunday morning. Jesus has become a cosmic life coach.

**DL:** YES!

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**MH:** He's become just another one of these stories. He's no bigger than the story. It's like Sunday School in an endless loop. Now we're sitting here in the same old sermon but we're getting the stories with adult illustrations. Nobody ever challenges their audience, assuming that, "Well, I can't get into content because then I'm not relevant." Or "I can't get into content because then that'll bore people." You know what? Let 'em get bored! (laughs)

**DL:** Yeah! Another thing, Mike... I have a pet peeve of this, too. Seeker-friendly churches are great to get people in, but just getting them in isn't enough.

**MH:** It's a place to start the conversation.

**DL:** It is, but you've got to go somewhere beyond that... I won't say it's pointless, but you've really got to go beyond that. One thing we don't do in discussions (it seems)—and there's a fine line here—we don't talk about sin. We don't talk about our depraved state. And part of that is we're afraid to turn people off toward church. I understand that. I understand that you don't want Christians to come off as scolds and turn people off like we're holier-than-thou. But on the other hand, we must be convicted of our sinful state to believe we need to repent and to be drawn to Christ. Why would you lean on Christ as a savior if you don't think you need a savior? I think we overlook that sometimes.

**MH:** Well, the reality is if we don't do that, we're lying to people. We're not telling them the truth. I understand it, too: "We got you here and now we don't want to drive you away." But the reality is we should think like we owe people the truth because we do—especially if it's theological truth. If we turn around in one breath and say, "What you're doing here is self-destructive, it's sin, and this is how God looks at it" and then we turn around and we are the person that helps them in crisis or in some practical way, it's going to be hard for them to justify being angry at us or looking at us like we're just a bunch of kill-joys here. If one hand is doing one thing, the other hand is doing the other. Again, the problem has been that we brow-beat people. I think it's largely unintentional. People in the Church have passed off relational responsibility in very practical ways to the institutional church or even the government or something like that. If Christians were present in the lives of the seeker—of any lost person—in really tangible, positive ways and were at the same time telling them the truth, I think that wouldn't be comfortable for them but they'd have to deceive themselves to say, "This person is only trying to brow-beat me. This person is only trying to make themselves holier-than-me." I think that's harder for people to do if you're present with them in other ways.

**DL:** Yes. One way to avoid the kill-joy message would be to admit that you're sinful, too. We talked about this off the air. You can be a regenerated, born-again, a person who is saved and justified and working on your sanctification (or allowing the Holy Spirit to work in you on your sanctification) and still acknowledge that you're not sin-free and you're not going to come close to being sin-free. So when you talk about our sinfulness, you're not saying that you're less sinful than the other guy. We have to recognize our inner Satan. When I first became a believer, I talked to one of my mentors who had a PhD or M.Div. or whatever from Dallas Theological Seminary and I said, "I don't understand why I see my sinfulness even more acutely." I used to drink more (I don't drink anymore) and he said that could actually be a good sign that the Holy Spirit was working on me and convicting me because I could see my sin more clearly. That was kind of affirming for me. I didn't use it to justify becoming more sinful! I'm just saying that I think we have to see our sinful state. I don't know where you sit on that.

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**MH:** I agree. We do lots of heavy content on the podcast and I write academic stuff, but at the end of the day, I like things to be pretty simple. To me, this just boils down to the fact that you've got to tell people the truth and you have to tell yourself the truth. You have to have some transparency here. At the end of the day, people will see that. They may not be comfortable with it, they may not acknowledge it, they may resist it... People react different ways. But if you don't do those things like talk about sin... Why else have a discussion about a savior? If you don't talk about that and if you don't hear that from your pulpit with a reasonable amount of regularity (not every week or something like that, because then it does become kind of a brow-beating, defeatist thing)... But if you're not doing that, you're just not telling people the truth. It's not very complicated.

So let's talk about the book, now that we have a little bit of a background for you. It would be hard to miss your passion for doing what you do here. We wanted to make sure that was communicated (that was important to me, anyway). But what about *The True Jesus*? What was the idea behind this book? In other words, give us the point of conception—that aha moment where, "Boy, I just have to do this!" What problem were you trying to solve with this book, *The True Jesus*?

**DL:** *The Emmaus Code* was the second Christian book I wrote and it was about finding Christ in the Old Testament—the foreshadowings, the prophecies, the typology, the covenants fulfilled and perfected in him, and it was also an intro to the Old Testament at the same time, in a sense. I wanted to pick up where that book left off and do an intro/survey for laypeople of the New Testament. So I started researching and writing it, and after I had gotten the introductory chapters done, I was going into the basics and doing a little bit of apologetics (because I believe to talk about the New Testament, the people I'm going to be talking to or reaching are going to have questions about the authenticity and reliability of it)... So I wanted to repeat a little bit in a chapter about the reliability of the documents (that much apologetics). That's about the only conventional apologetics I have in this book... Talking about the Intertestamental Period—the silent period between the end of the writing of the Old Testament (the book of Malachi, around 400 B.C.) and when Christ entered human history around 3 A.D or whatever it is. I talk about the Jewish messianic expectations, what the land was like, what the people were like, and the providential confluence of events that made the spread of the Gospel easier, such as the Roman peace, the Roman roads, the Hellenization of the entire culture (where you have Greek culture and language spread throughout the Jewish infrastructure that facilitated the teaching in the early Christian churches). All those things and more came together and made the time ripe. I think it was God's sovereign design that Jesus came when he came. It was the time in world history for Jesus to come. As I finished that and did an overview of the whole Old Testament genre, I began to talk about the Gospels. I had to figure out a way to synopsise the four Gospels. I didn't want to do a survey that was just all 27 New Testament books—a little bit about each—because I thought that would be dry. It's great for a seminary student or great for other people who just want to learn these basics (who wrote them, when they were

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written, who they were written to, structure, and all that kind of stuff). I do want people to know that, but I realized that just wouldn't be enough to interest who I perceived my reader to be. So as I was trying to figure out a way to consolidate the Gospels in about 50 pages so that I'd have the rest of the book to cover the other 23 New Testament books (Acts and the rest...). No! This was a joke! I was really concerned. I couldn't do this. There was no way I could accomplish what I set out to accomplish. So I called the publisher (who has always been great with me—Regnery). They didn't even question it. They've come to trust me and I totally trust them. "Okay, we'll narrow the focus to the Gospels." And then I had to figure out how I was going to do this, too, because I didn't want to just do Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in a disjointed study. I decided to harmonize them all without harmonizing—because that's a fool's errand—but to consolidate them into one running account, roughly chronologically. You can't do that perfectly (we can get into why that is). There are 250-some events. You and I talked about this. You know how much I love Logos Bible software, where you are an instrumental part—this Biblical Event Navigator. I used that and a bunch of other books to make sure I didn't miss any event. I put all the events (and mostly the words of Jesus, especially the long discourses verbatim) and then had a running commentary where I drew on all the "greats" throughout history—the Church Fathers and the leading thinkers through Christianity all the way up. I included that with every event, with the goal of introducing people to the Gospels and to give them a jump-start on their study or accelerate their learning if they already know about it. The ultimate goal is to get them to read the Gospels for themselves because books about the Bible and about Christ are great...

**MH:** But it's not the same as...

**DL:** Not even close. The goal is to send them to the Gospels and have them partake of the Living Word and meet the Living Son of God there.

**MH:** I should step in here and let the audience know that David and I had a few conversations about the Event Navigator, and you actually found an error—something that had been omitted! (laughs) We had to go back and fix it. This was a pretty detailed—close attention to detail—sort of thing. We were happy about that. Of course, we were glad that you were using the tool and for quite a long time.

I want to get back... On the heels of what you've just described, let's think about the title. You have "True Jesus," and then the subtitle. As an academic, the subtitles always tell you what's going on. The subtitle is "Uncovering the Divinity of Christ in the Gospels." Why the choice of "True Jesus?" In other words, who is the false Jesus? And why the subtitle?

**DL:** This is a two-pronged answer, and I'll make it quick. The false Jesus is the Jesus that's depicted in the culture as a hippy skipping through the tulips who is indifferent to sin, intolerant, all he cares about is diversity and bringing peace.



Christ said verbatim (and I quote him) that he didn't come to bring peace, he came to divide brother against brother, mother against son, daughter and father and all that... in-law against in-law. He gave us the most exacting moral standard known to man in the Sermon on the Mount. Elsewhere he told us "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect." He used a whip of cords to drive out the money-changers from the temple. He was not indifferent to sin. He told the Pharisees they had external attributes of righteousness but they were internally corrupt. And so he was not this guy that just preached tolerance, and he didn't bring peace. Now, he will bring peace in his Second Coming. In his First Coming, that wasn't what he was about, in my view. So I wanted to make clear that we don't want to teach or present a Jesus that isn't the true Jesus. We don't want our Jesus to be conformed to the culture; we need the culture to conform to Jesus. That's number one.

Number two: Jesus is fully God and fully man. Full admission: I wasn't the person who came up with the subtitle. It was one of the editors. I think, in retrospect, that it's deficient because it's not just about uncovering his deity and divinity. It's discussing his humanity and his deity—his dual nature. I think that cults throughout Christian history that have favored one over the other (or excluded one or the other)—though I think in this day and age that the main one they exclude is divinity. The Docetists and the Gnostics went the other way, but today we mainly deal with that. It's essential that people understand Christ's deity. It's one of the things I didn't understand. He emphatically asserts his deity in the book of John and elsewhere, and I want to be emphatic about that. I want to be dogmatic about that in a winsome way because anybody who thinks he doesn't is reading with blinders on. We could go into the ways he does it, but I want to assert that emphatically here.

**MH:** What was the hardest part of producing the thing you wanted to produce? What was the biggest nut to crack? When you got into it and you decided to focus on the Gospel content, you had the roadmap at this point, but what was the biggest obstacle?

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**DL:** Mine was more of a pragmatic/practical obstacle. I'm not saying I'm organized in my life, but when I write books I'm pretty organized and I'm constantly thinking, "Okay, can I do this in the length of book I want to do it?" So every time I discuss an event (and I pretty much know quantitatively how many events I have to cover), and when I've covered a third, have I covered a third of the pages that I want to have left? You can talk about how that might be artificial. Yeah, of course it's artificial because I know readers are not going to read a book much longer... mine are already pretty long and comprehensive. I can't go on forever. So my talent (this is true and you can tell from listening to me talk) is to find a way to be succinct. Being comprehensive is easy, but figuring out a way to condense what you want to say and still have it make sense—that's the challenge. I just have a desire to flood the reader with everything because I'm so excited about everything I've read from Spurgeon to Heiser, and I want to share

that stuff. And Aquinas and Augustine (to Heiser). I want to expose it. I love it when I read Whitefield (the Great Awakening preacher who Benjamin Franklin was mesmerized by). He had a stentorian voice and he could mesmerize three thousand people at a time and they could hear him. I wanted to share him. The editor took my big quote about how important it was to focus on Christ in the Bible... they took Whitefield out in the introduction and said, "We need this to be snappier. You need..." And so I said, "Please, sir, can I put it back later?" and he said yes, so I put it back later. (laughter) So editors are great. They help you mold it.

I probably didn't answer the question in the way you expected. I have an issue with wanting to get everything I can in without it being too long. In other words, being as comprehensive and succinct at the same time as I can.

**MH:** I had a similar issue. There was *Unseen Realm* and that was sort of my baby, and then they wanted me to produce *Supernatural* for the average person in the pew. My instructions were real simple: No arguments, don't give alternative viewpoints to anything, and no footnotes. That was really difficult. My brainstorm of a method (if you can call it that) was I literally sat down and thought, "Okay, I've got these five chapters. What was the word count there? Okay, I'm up to 10,000 words... how can I make that 1,700?" It was just things like that. That was difficult. That was really difficult because you always feel guilty about not putting something in. You feel inadequate. You feel like you're stealing some experience from the reader or you're being incomplete. At the end of the day, you just have to have someone (an editor is typically the person) who comes to you and says, "The person you're writing this for isn't going to miss that because they don't even know that it's missing. They will focus on what you say, and if you say it they're going to be predisposed to believe it. You're the authority figure to them. This is not an academic exercise." With your background being law, you've got to nail every statement down, you've got to justify it this way and that way... I get that entirely. That is an obstacle. That is a hurdle to get beyond that's real. That's not contrived. That's real.

**DL:** Can I tell you something else? When I'm doing this (and this is also an admission of a beleaguered writer when you're in the middle of a fatiguing book and working every day, violating the Sabbath and 24/7)... Sometimes I think fatigue leads me to say, "I'm going to summarize this section. I'm going to gloss over this." Because I've got to move on! I can't dwell on everything. Part of my mindset (my peace of mind) in writing is getting it down on paper—even if it stinks—and then edit it later. Well, part of that process in the initial phase (the first draft), I've found that sometimes just to get beyond a hurdle I would give short shrift to certain things. But the beauty of it is, when I'm going back I'm doing a checklist and saying, "Wait, I did not cover something to explain part of it!" That's the great thing when you go back. So I go through checklists and I check myself and sometimes I'm surprised that I left that something that I considered important on second glance. So that's an admission of my process of studying

and researching and writing and I hopefully catch 90-percent of those inadequacies as I go through it. You're never going to perfect it. The Bible is such a depth of riches, and you can't hope to synopsise it adequately. You've just got to do the best you can.

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**MH:** That's true. It really is true. This next question might be a bit of an apologetic bent, but you spent a lot of time on the *True Jesus*. We want to encourage you folks to read the book. I've read the book. David was kind enough to ask me to blurb it on the back, and if you read my blurb I'm actually serious about what I say in the blurb. This is something that... You made the comment earlier, "I'm writing books that would have helped me" at whatever stage you were at. I could see myself in that and also when I read the book. I read *Emmaus Code* (your earlier book) after the fact. I don't know if you recall this, but I put in an email that this would have been a great book to assign to an Old Testament intro class at a Bible college or something. It shortcuts things that you need to know. I felt the same way about this because my first experience when I actually became a believer and started reading the New Testament was that I found four different versions of the life of Jesus a little bewildering. I plowed through it; I read it. You get something different out of each one—I understand that you can't help but do that, but I just found it bewildering. I thought it was great to just streamline it, tell it as it is, put it together as best we can. That's what the book is, so I highly recommend it (just like I said on the blurb) to somebody who finds that confusing. Maybe you have a friend or relative that just wants to know something about Jesus. This is the perfect book for it. Having said that, if someone asked you, "Hey, David, why do you think we have four Gospels? What's the value in that? God inspired this thing... Why would he do this four times?" How would you respond to that?

**DL:** In fact, I do include that in the text and that's why I'm so emphatic that this book is to be a primer and to get your feet wet. To learn a lot, yes, but not to substitute for the Bible—to inspire you to read it. We need four Gospels. God decided. Just like Mozart told the Austrian emperor in *Amadeus*, "It's not too many notes, it's exactly the right amount of notes" when the emperor criticized him for having too many notes in one of his works. The Gospel is four different perspectives because God determined that this would be the right way to do it. As Irenaeus (the early Church father) said, you need four Gospels like you need the four directions of the wind. So Matthew emphasizes the kingly aspects (at least a lot of scholars say he does), Mark emphasizes the suffering servant, Luke the humanity, and John the deity. We need all those emphases. Of course they all talk about all aspects, but they emphasize different ones. I just think that's phenomenally great. It gives us a different idea. We see him from a different angle with each one of those. It so enhances our understanding. But I think a book like mine or like other help books gives you the overview first so you're a little less intimidated, then when you read the Gospels you don't need to go back. You get the big picture before you start. I don't mean to suggest that you need any book at all. God gave us the Bible. But he also created human beings and he

inspired us to be teachers and to be relational as Christians and he wants us to have pastors and Sunday School teachers. So I don't think there's anything wrong with saying that these books about Christianity and helpful books about the Bible are anything that detract from the Bible itself. There's nothing wrong with us helping each other get a jump-start on our knowledge base. I just think it's part of it because God created human beings for whatever reason—relations, love—and we reflect him to the extent that we can help each other learn about him and about the Word. So we definitely need four because he said we did, but also because I think it enhances the authenticity of the Scripture. If these guys got together and everything was pat and there were no differences—not even alleged contradictions or inconsistencies, we would suspect that they colluded, just like we would suspect witnesses that didn't deviate at all from their rendition of the facts. We know reality is such that human beings don't see things exactly the same. God chose to deliver his Word to us through human agents. If they had done it perfectly, they would all be God, too. They're human and we get it through their human perspective. That makes it more real for us and actually more credible, in an ironic way.

40:00

**MH:** When I taught New Testament Survey a couple times, I used to illustrate it in a way I think students could get it immediately. If I got four papers from among those of you in this course and they were all identical, what do you think that I would think? (laughter)

**DL:** That's excellent!

**MH:** Everybody *knows* what I'd be thinking, and I'd be right: somebody wrote this and then the rest of you copied off that guy. I think it is helpful to emphasize that there's wisdom in presenting it the four ways. I think the whole idea that each writer is intelligently doing something to you... They have an agenda (and that's not a bad word). In other words, they have a specific audience in mind. That's what they do. For the sake of this discussion, I like the fact that it's streamlined here because a lot of books about the Bible are sort of text-bookish. But when you do what you've done in this book (at least in this part of it when you start to actually get into the story), you present it as story. I know there's commentary in there, but it's not overwhelming. You need some commentary in there, obviously, to propel the thing. But there's a real advantage to presenting the material as story. I think that's good for today's audience, I think just generationally. There's something about the human condition/mindset that attracts us to storytelling. I think it's a really good approach for doing that.

**DL:** Thank you.

**MH:** I think it was just a good decision to do that, as opposed to some other thing.

**DL:** It was organic. I didn't plan on doing that. That's what interesting about it—I really didn't plan on it at all. It kind of developed as I was doing it.

**MH:** Aren't those the best things to look back on?

**DL:** I think so, when it works out, anyway!

**MH:** Yeah. Before we transition to some of what I'll call "reflective questions" in the last third of our discussion, in a sentence or two... Somebody comes up to you in church (your average person in the pew) and they mean this with a straight face. They're not trying to be sarcastic or pick a fight. "Mr. Limbaugh, why should I really care about seriously studying the Gospels or the Bible? Why should I do that?" What would you say?

**DL:** Scripture is the power of salvation and is its own apologetic. While I'm an advocate of conventional apologetics (meaning the defense of the faith through various avenues), I think the best apologetic is the Bible itself, even though I concede that it can be intimidating. If you read the Bible with an open mind and a seeking heart... That's a big qualification! That's a real condition, especially for skeptics. But if you knock, the door will be open. If you seek, you will find. That's a promise. I think the Bible contains claims that it has the power of salvation, so I think there's no substitute for openly reading it that way. To the extent that I can inspire people to go to it directly after they've done this (or partially done it or even read the introduction), then I will feel like I've done something that's constructive. So the Bible (and the Gospels, specifically)... This was kind of an epiphany for me, and it's another of those embarrassing things where I found the Bible was the Word of God. As many times as I've read the Gospels and the Epistles and Revelation, I always preferred the Epistles because I just love theology. I've come to conclude, when I'm really forced to study the Gospels as intensely as I was in preparation for this book, that in no other place do you encounter Jesus unfiltered. You see what Paul says about him and all, but when we read Jesus' words directly (no editor) and we witness his deeds as described through the human agents through the power of the Holy Spirit, we encounter the living Son of God. We realize that he is so sublime, so perfect, so unique, that no fiction writer could have possibly concocted this creature because they would have had to have been perfect to do so. And none of us is perfect. Yet these four inadequate, relatively unschooled Gospel writers came up with a depiction of a perfect human being and it just jumps off the pages. That *itself* is an apologetic that I get goosebumps about because, again, I'm only thirty years into this. Some of you guys that have been around seventy years are probably bored with it. But I'm still excited with those revelations!

45:00

**MH:** I think you'll find it's an endless fascination. I get asked that a lot, like, "Aren't you bored with this? Don't you know...?" and it's like, I don't know a fraction of the things I really want to know! (laughing) I understand that. Boy, I could go a number of different directions with that. I wanted to say that you're a lot nicer in

answering that question than I would be! (laughing) I'm just more cranky! Sometimes I get that question and I don't say this (at least I try not to say it), but if I know the person asking me this is a Christian, my first inclination is to say, "It's the Word of God. Why wouldn't you want to know that?" But again, people have to be... I've learned experientially and in my own case, that people have to be awakened to the fact that there's all sorts of interesting things here to think about that, for whatever reason (and I can't think of many good ones), Christians are sheltered from. They're not encouraged to dive in. I just think it's a shame.

**DL:** I agree. From my background of skepticism... I will say it's because it's the Word of God, but that's kind of (as my law professors say) a bootstrap statement. I'm assuming that a person that asks me that question (not you because you're asking for me to respond to other people) doesn't totally get that or doubts it a little bit. So if you'll notice in my answer, I'm saying you'll find out. If you didn't know it already, you're going to find out. If you really, really immerse yourself in it, it can't help but be the Word of God because it describes God in a way that human beings couldn't describe him in the Gospels. And I just love that. But I agree with you that people are amazingly incurious about it. If it's the Word of God, why aren't they more curious and excited and jump into it more often than they do? Even the competing activities and interests of the world... why don't they more often partake of it?

**ML:** Even your thing about (like you just said) to the person who just needs to jump in and it's its own apologetic... To me, what I think of when I hear you say that is how Jesus had this uncanny knack of always telling people the truth. In other words, even if it was painful. Even if it was just a punch in the nose, he would always tell people the truth. But at the same time, for some reason they just kept wanting to go back. In other words, they saw in him... He could tell the woman at the well, "You're right, this isn't your husband and you've had five of those!" He could just tell people what they needed to hear, even if it was uncomfortable. But there was still something about him that was... "endearing" is not the right word, but people still wanted to be in his company. That is really remarkable.

**DL:** He could be winsome while he was insulting. It was amazing!

**ML:** Yeah. I don't know how you imitate that. When I hear you say that the portrayal of Jesus is going to be its own apologetic, that's what I think of right away. You more or less have to be a person who every decision you make is the right one. Every word you choose is the right one. How do you pull that off? Again, if you're making it up (and you've got four versions of it), you're going to mess up somewhere! (laughs) But with this portrayal, they could all draw on the same common experiences. Again, that's what pops into my head when you say it's its own apologetic. How many people would say, "No, I don't want someone in my life who tells me the truth but I know still loves me?" How many people would actually say that? You'd have to be insane to not want somebody like that—

somebody that you know is in your corner but they will tell you what you need to hear.

50:00

**DL:** But also, who could come up with such gems of wisdom on the spot? That "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's." Who could do that? [00:50:00] I don't know. It just blows me away, the things he said.

**ML:** With complete regularity and consistency! (laughing) I hear ya.

Well, let's broaden the discussion a little bit in the time we have left to just biblical study in general. If you want to go back to the Gospels for the sake of the illustration, but just generally... You've had some exposure to biblical scholarship at this point. You're several books into it now. I have to ask you this as you've been exposed to what biblical scholars do and produce. What has been the biggest irritation?

**DL:** It's interesting. I used to find the injection of Greek or Hebrew without any explanation to the lay reader very frustrating. The more I've learned (I haven't learned much about the original languages) the less confused I seem to be. That's true with anything when your learning curve increases. But I can't really say I'm frustrated with that because if it's truly an academic work, they are talking to other academics, usually. Now if it's an academic work that is designed for a broader audience, I think sometimes they ought to watch themselves against showing off and trying to just appear scholarly. (laughter) So I think sometimes they could relate better and explain things a little better. There's another thing that's a little irritant (but I don't get irritated in that sense because I'm so in awe of you guys, just like I used to be in awe of law professors and I defer to your scholarship—not that I agree with everything the conservative view and conservative scholars say). But sometimes what bothers me is I find a problematic passage and in the commentaries I sometimes find that they're absolutely omitted. They just dodge the question! (laughter) That's a shocker to me, honestly.

**MH:** Well, get used to that! (laughing)

**DL:** I will say this, not to stroke you, but you have a way in your writing of bridging that gap. You're completely scholarly, but yet you can communicate on the lay level, as well. I wanted to say this earlier. You're *Unseen Realm* is such a great, unique contribution. Not that I'm any expert. You know I asked you questions about it: How did you come along and you're the first guy to see this? And you said you're not. Academics talk about it, but it's rarely talked about in the lay field. I think people ought to read your book (both aspects of it, both versions of it that you described) because it's really fascinating. That may be a little beyond some people. They've got to get their feet wet with other things. But I think it's a different grid that you read the whole Bible through. I'm not saying you have to wait. It's a fascinating study.

**MH:** Thanks for that. This is my audience, so the listeners here... Boy, they're going to get it when you say that there's a frustration element with people skipping this or that or not drawing attention to things that really need it. That's what we try to do. Everything in Scripture has a role to play. It's in there for a reason, so why skip it? Another general question that doesn't have to be restricted to the Gospels: What have you learned about Jesus during the whole process of this book and the other ones that surprised you? What's the most surprising takeaway?

55:00

**DL:** I've probably already covered this, but I can't just make something up for the sake of a different question. I think the thing that surprised me... I wasn't surprised by any specific story because I'd read the Gospels many times before. But it is a truism that the more you do read, that every time you read something you catch something differently and you wonder if you were asleep the last time you read it because you have this new insight that isn't anything brave on my part, but that's the thing that I love about the Living Word. It does speak to you actively. It's the same Word—an inviolate, immutable Word—yet it speaks to us on different levels if we need that each time we read it. That's something I can't even articulate adequately. That's one thing. But the other thing is an overall, generalist point, which is what I said before. This is the repetitive part. I realized in a far more profound, deep way just how unique the Gospels are to giving us Jesus unfiltered, and how much more appreciation I have for the Gospels relative to the other books than I had before. Who am I to prioritize these books, but I am a human being and I can't help but have favorites and least favorites and whatever. Whereas I was so into the theology before, now I just love watching Jesus at work and sitting at his feet and listening to him teach. As your co-scholar, Lynn Cohick, talks about in some of his courses, he always combines his teachings with his actions so that he's the ultimately efficient teacher. He doesn't waste energy. When he's doing something, he's always teaching in the context of his actions. I'm probably not articulating that, either. Anyway, Jesus blows me away in a way that he hadn't before because I'm experiencing him on a different dimension. I don't mean that I wasn't blown away by Jesus before. That's the danger in making such a statement. I've just gone from 99 to 200 percent now, that's all.

**MH:** I follow. So when you're not doing research for one of your books, what do you like to read? Or conversely, if you do read biblical stuff (theology or general interest) on the side, what do you like to read there? So what do you like to read in general and do you ever just read theological material that's not for a book?

**DL:** Oh yes, yes! Lately it's like there's never a time when I'm not either researching and writing a book or reading foundationally in preparation for a book. So there's almost no longer that time while I'm on this fast-track. But yes—I've been reading theology on and off for 25 years. I love reading all those—Packer's *Knowing God*, all the great... I could name them: J.C. Ryle, Spurgeon,



all of them. The preachers and writers. And also Systematic Theologies. I read them, but I don't read them cover to cover. I used to read... what do you call the stories that Max Lucado and those kind of guys write—the uplifting kind? I love Chuck Swindoll and the way he tells his stories. But I mostly err on the academic side because I'm just fascinated by theology and apologetics (big time on apologetics). Reading other things, I like action books (just like I like action movies), mysteries, spy books, that kind of thing—whatever else can entertain me mindlessly. I don't want to ever watch TV or read a fiction book that is too taxing. However, I do love historical fiction. This one guy (Robert Harris) who wrote this trilogy on Cicero... I can't believe how awesome that is on taking you back to the environment of the Roman Empire at that one point in time when Cicero lived. I would recommend that. So I'm not always serious, but I feel like if I'm going to read (as opposed to watching TV), I want to learn something. Reading is a little bit of work. We do it all the time, but if I'm going to read, I want to grow. I have this hunger to learn about theology, and I'm also obviously passionate about politics, so I read that constantly.

**MH:** Last question, and this is kind of the obvious one: what's next? Have you accomplished what you wanted to achieve when it comes to Jesus studies? Is there more of that, or is there something else in the biblical orbit that you're thinking about doing?

**DL:** I want to continue... Though I narrowed this to Gospels, I did it with the idea that they would let me go on in the New Testament and complete the New Testament, whether it takes one or two more books. So I'm going to start the next book with the Book of Acts and however many of the epistles (maybe all of them)—maybe that and Revelation. I just don't know how daunting that is going to be. It all depends on how I structure it and how big a net I undertake to explore it. There's no limit to the depth you can go into. I've got to find that sweet spot, that balance (as you described it) where I can be broad and deep enough at the same time. So I don't know what the scope will be, and I presume that I will determine that organically as I get into it, just like I did with this one.

1:00:00

**MH:** I'm not suggesting that you extend it into two books, but something to consider is something that sort of feels like a biography—a synopsis of Paul's letters that acts like sort of a "Life of Paul" and then maybe use that for the hub of the spoke and then go off into all the letters. There actually are some recent tools that try to do that in academic form (that try to create a synopsis of that), but Paul's story might be a good early church...

**DL:** You may not believe this, but that's one of the things I've thought about! Acts kind of gives you a historical structure of where Paul went. It's not complete, but you could logically do Acts with the Pauline letters and then cover the rest of the epistles and Revelation. They have agreed to let me do two more along these lines. And then they said, "Shut up and get back to politics." (laughter) They didn't really say that, but I know they're probably thinking it.

**MH:** I would think these are doing well enough to make them less irritable!

**DL:** They've been great. I'm just kidding. See, here we are showing the sausage factory as we speak.

**MH:** Off the top of my head, here. If you left off the epistles of John, Revelation, and Jude (the General Epistles are a different critter, so I'm not quite sure what you'd want to do there), but if you did focus on Acts and Paul, then you could do the "brothers of Jesus." You have Jude, you've got James... maybe there's enough to do something there with General Epistles. You could actually focus on John. We did Jesus, we did Paul, maybe we could pick up Peter and the rest of the apostles and do their story, but then link into the epistolary literature from that perspective.

**DL:** That's a really good idea! Don't tell anyone you told me because I'm going to claim it was original and eventually erase this podcast as to that aspect. But no—that's a great idea. The only problem with that is that I have to figure out how to then cover the rest of it. I don't want the next book to just be mostly Revelation because that'll just freak people out and I'll probably be institutionalized if I just talk about Revelation.

**MH:** It's such a hornet's nest. It gets its reputation for a reason. So maybe when you're set to retire and become a recluse or something, you can pretend you're John on Patmos or something.

**DL:** Well, if I get to the point where I don't care if my books sell anymore, I could write one on Revelation. (laughter)

**TS:** David, before we let you go, I'd like to know about your trip to Israel. You were just over there. I was wondering if you were over there for pleasure or business/research. How was your trip?

**DL:** I went with Frank Turek ([crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org))—a friend who is a Christian apologist and has that ministry. We also had Eli Shukron, the Jewish archaeologist who led the discovery of the Old Jerusalem digs. He discovered the Pool of Siloam again. I don't know how to pronounce that, even after hearing him pronounce it. He had a heavy Hebrew accent or heavy whatever-Israeli accent. We went all over the place—Old Testament and New Testament, all around the periphery of Israel. We went to the lower reaches, Masada, En Gedi, Jericho, Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee, Tiberius...

**MH:** Did you take a dip in the Dead Sea?

**DL:** Yes, I did! I did float and I threw away the swimming trunks because I wasn't about to wrestle with the salt in them. That was just the cost of doing business. It

was pretty funny. I got baptized in the Sea of Galilee because we didn't ever stop at the Jordan. I'd never been baptized as an adult and I thought that would be kind of cool. Infant baptism is one thing (and I don't get hung up on that theology), but I thought it'd be cool to have my bases covered both ways. (laughter)

**MH:** A lot of people do that. When they're over there, they do that. That's not uncommon. That's kind of neat to do, though.

**DL:** Except I had to take my shirt off and it was on film. Now, that's not good. (laughter)

**MH:** Oh, well. Like you said, the cost of doing business!

**DL:** There you go. But the trip was phenomenal and there's going to be all kinds of video and still photos on Frank's website (crossexamined).

1:05:00

**MH:** Well, thanks for visiting with us today. I think our audience will really appreciate your enthusiasm for what you do, your contribution to the Church (which is significant). I just want to encourage everybody if you haven't read either *True Jesus* yet or any of David's other books, I think they're well worth the read. If you have friends, family members (especially if they're kind of at the beginning of their journey as a believer or they're a seeker and just wondering), this is good material to put in their hands. It's going to be something that isn't surface level but is also quite readable, as well. So thanks for taking the time and being with us today.

**DL:** Thanks for having me on and thanks for your friendship and mentorship and your patience when I ask you questions. Sometimes in your emails you go into great detail. By complementing you, I'm not buttering you up so you'll do it in the future. This does not incur some obligation on your part, but I do want to thank you for that. It's been a great blessing to me, and I'm serious about that. Your audience ought to know... No, they shouldn't know how accessible you are because then you really will be overwhelmed, but you've been great and I want to thank you for it personally.

**MH:** You're welcome.

**TS:** All right, Mike. That was a great interview with David. I enjoyed it and I look forward to reading his book!

**MH:** Yeah. As I mentioned, it's well-worth the read. Even if you have some Bible under your belt, it's just nice to read it presented as story. He does enough research that if there's something you might want to drill down on later, he'll usually alert you to that. I think it's a good option for people, whether they're believers or people who are new to the whole subject of Jesus.

**TS:** Sounds good. Well, Mike, next week we're going to get into the temple language of Ezekiel 40 and on. We're going to break it up into two parts.

**MH:** Yeah, two parts. I'm not sure how we'll break it up, but I feel we're going to have to do that. Basically, it's going to be chapters 40-48. I'll find a way to address that in two episodes.

**TS:** Looking forward to it! We appreciate David Limbaugh coming on and we just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast. God bless.