Bob: We often talk about the Bible Belt as the place in our country where Christianity is thriving. Pastor Dean Inserra says that may not be accurate.

Dean: Bible Belt is somebody who loves Jesus, but they’re loving Jesus as more of a country music Jesus than it is the actual use of a Bible. This is somebody who wants enough of Jesus to be personally identified with, but not enough to be personally inconvenienced. So I would say a lot of Bible Belt folks don’t really have a saving faith; Jesus is just kind of part of life.

They all claim a church, even though they don’t go to one; and usually that means that’s their grandmother’s church and they go on Mother’s Day, because it means a lot to her—is what they’re told by their mother—kind of a pressure type of thing: “It would mean so much to your nana if you come to church on Sunday. Will you please come? It’s Mother’s Day.” “Of course! Yes, of course we’ll do that.” They’ll show up, see some friends, and never come back again until the next year.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, October 16th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. Depending on what you mean by the word, “Christian,” Dean Inserra says we have some people who are saved Christians and some who are unsaved Christians. We’ll talk more about what he means by that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You used a phrase—what did you call it?—a Chreaster?

Ann: Chreaster.

Bob: A Chreaster?

Ann: Yes.

Bob: I’ve heard—

Dave: Come on, you’ve heard of Chreasters!

Bob: I’d heard of CEO Christians. You’d heard of CEO Christians?
Dave: Yes, same thing.

Bob: Yes, “Christmas and Easter Only”—

Ann: Oh. Yes.

Bob: —that’s what CEO stands for. But that’s what you’re talking about—a Chreaster; right?

Ann: Right.

Bob: That’s also what Dean Inserra’s talking about, a little bit—that’s one of the categories that you talk about in your book, The Unsaved Christian. Welcome back to FamilyLife Today; good to have you here.

Dean: Thank you.

Bob: Dean is the pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, Florida.

This book—again, a provocative title—but you’re trying to get to the heart of the fact that there’s a difference between a person who says, “I’m a Christian,” and a person who really is a follower of Jesus.

Dean: Yes; and hopefully equipping the church to be able to reach these people, who I believe are probably the largest mission field in America—which are people that claim to be Christians—but the Christianity they claim is not the Christianity of the Bible. It’s sort of an American hobby or superstition type of approach.

Bob: In the mid-1970s, back before you were born, I remember the Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, who was running for President, who made a big deal about the fact that he was a born-again Christian. Well, it entered the vernacular. All of a sudden, people were like: “What does this mean? What is a born-again Christian?” There was a dividing line—do you remember this?—where people would say, “So, are you one of those born-agains?”

Ann: That’s exactly how they would say it; it was almost heretical.

Bob: Yes; it’s like, “…one of those born-agains,” like, “Are you one of those nut jobs?—one of those crackpots?”

In our day, I think there’s a little different phenomenon going on, which is, “Are you an evangelical?” and what that means to a lot of people is, “Are you a Donald Trump-supporting Republican?”
Dean: Right.

Bob: You talk a little bit about this in the book.

Dean: I do.

Bob: How do we deal with that? When a friend says, “So, are you one of the evangelicals?” how do you answer that in a way that gets through the clutter?

Ann: That’s a loaded question; isn’t it?

Dean: I’m ready to rock-'n'-roll on that one. [Laughter] The first response must be, “What do you mean by that?”—that’s not a cop-out. We have to; because it’s so confusing now: “What is evangelical and what is not?”

Somehow, over history, what has happened—when I read through it and look back, it seems like it’s a little bit of a/maybe during the Communist reign, where this kind of became a thing, where we equated being an American with being a Christian. Is that Christianity defined by the blood of Jesus on a cross and His resurrection?—no. It more is a sort of twist of marrying patriotism and this kind of idea of family values with this religious aspect that we call Christian.

It really is problematic—not problematic to love your country—I think that’s a wonderful thing. I think gratefulness is a Christian posture, so I think we should be grateful for the things that we have here in our country and for those who have fought to defend it for us.

At the same time, for many I call “God and Country Christians,” if they move to Poland tomorrow, it would drastically affect their faith; because their faith is so wrapped up in this sort of nationalism/this sort of patriotism that is not a Christian faith. They forget that the Bible was written before Thomas Jefferson’s great-great-great-grandparents were even born/before America was even a concept!—[Laughter]—not even sort of kind of a concept.

We just have to make sure we realize that this is a global faith. This is not some sort of—we use things like, you know, America being a city shining on a hill; but that’s—no, the church is a city shining on a hill; it’s not America!

Dave: Hey, I think it’d be fun—at the end of your book, you list eight different cultural Christians. I think it’d be helpful for people—I’ll read your title, and you define it. You already did one of them, but let’s just start at the top. The first one you say is the “Country Club Christian.”

Dean: Yes; some people think of a country club—they think, “Snobby”; and that’s not what I mean by that. I mean the Country Club Christian is someone who is just a
member of the organization, and all they have to do is just pay their dues when it comes to the local church. They’re never challenged; their needs are catered to. The second their needs aren’t catered to, they’ll go move to another country club that lacks church membership, where joining the church doesn’t mean anything outside of just paying your dues. It has really impacted and allowed cultural Christianity to flourish, where being part of a church means nothing/demands nothing; nothing changes.

**Bob:** And if I pay my dues, I can use the facilities, from time to time, when I have a wedding, or a funeral, or something like that comes up.

**Dave:** You’re part of the club.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dave:** Yes; I just realized this could be hard to do, because you want to stop on each one of these and talk about them.

**Ann:** I know; yes!

**Dave:** So maybe let’s do them and then let’s go back if there’s something, Bob or Ann, you guys want to talk about.

The second one: Christmas and Easter Christian.

**Dean:** Here’s what you have to understand about Christmas and Easter Christians—is that, for them, there’s nothing really spiritual about the holiday. It used to be that way; but now, going to church on Christmas and Easter is no different than wearing green on St. Patrick’s Day; than eating turkey on Thanksgiving; than going trick-or-treating on Halloween; than giving mom flowers and a card on Mother’s Day. It’s just what you do as part of the celebration of that day, and there’s no religious significance whatsoever.

**Dave:** Wow. Next one, God and Country Christian.

**Bob:** That’s the one we were just talking about; right?

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dean:** Yes; someone who marries their faith to their patriotism. That’s really troubling, because that is so cultural. That would not work if you lived in another country. Your love for America should almost be a separate category, and it’s definitely also subordinate to your love for God.

The problem is—no one thinks they have an issue with that. This is going to poke the bear a little bit here; but go to an evangelical, very conservative church on what I call the high holy days of cultural Christianity—which are Memorial Day; Fourth of July;
Veteran’s Day; a lot of times, the Sunday after September 11. You will see a greater celebration than you saw on Easter Sunday. Oftentimes, I see uniformed military personnel get a louder ovation than returning missionaries from the mission field. That’s not to say we shouldn’t appreciate and care—again, gratefulness is a Christian posture—it’s really become problematic.

**Dave:** Right. Alright: Liberal Social Justice Christian.

**Dean:** Yes; that is somebody who really believes the faith is simply a humanitarian effort and, also, just this generic idea of love—not the love of the Bible—just this generic love that makes everything okay/everything permissible. You think the answer is just to love, love, love; but what they mean by that is that nothing is wrong. You’re never going to hear them talk about any of the moral issues we have going on in our nation, or in the church, or anything like that. “Everything’s okay; everything’s fine; let’s just love everybody.”

**Bob:** I saw a pastor on Twitter recently who said, “I heard someone recently say, ‘The message of the gospel is that God cares for the disenfranchised and for the marginalized people in our society.’” And the pastor said to his Twitter audience, “What do you all think about that?” How would you—what do you think about that?—is that the message of the gospel?

**Dean:** No! Those are implications of the gospel, and that’s where they get confused; they think that is the gospel. What happens, also, is they get what I think is really kind of ungodly bitterness and angst and attack towards people, who might have some affluence, or they become very envious—they attack people, like the 1 percent—rather than going: “Well, maybe God’s blessed these people,” and “Maybe they’re being generous with their money,” and “Maybe it’s been earned honestly.”

It really becomes—it can become an ungodly effort, but it’s all done in the name of Christianity. It just becomes very problematic, because it’s just as political as the right-wing people they criticize; it’s just as political.

**Bob:** Can I ask about the next one?—because I’ve used this phrase a dozen times, maybe more than that, in our church.

**Dave:** —not in your sermon.

**Bob:** I have in my sermon.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Bob:** I’ve talked about—

**Dave:** —talked about what it means.
Bob: The Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deist approach—and this is from Christian Smith, the sociologist at Notre Dame, who did this study. Explain what a person, who’s a Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deist Christian is.

Dean: I think this is probably the most prominent—

Bob: I think you’re right.

Dean: —and one that extends outside the south. It’s easy to think cultural Christianity is a Bible Belt issue, but really it’s a nationwide issue when you understand this. Again, it’s a God, who is very vague; He’s very generic; He’s not really involved in the affairs of men and women; there’s no sovereignty; there’s really no sin; there’s no punishment for sin/no judgment—again, this generic “Big guy upstairs” kind of God, who wants us to be good people and who wants us—we can go to Him for superstitious kinds of reasons. It’s, again, that kind of “Jesus take the wheel” idea. There’s more to it than that, but that’s kind of the big snapshot picture.

Again, we make sure, as Christians, we’re clear in these conversations that our God is not vague; He’s not generic. He has made Himself known—the Hebrews, Chapter 1, starts out the letter by saying that, in the past, He has spoken to us by the prophets, through the law; now He has spoken to us by His Son; so there’s no understanding of God apart from an understanding of Jesus Christ.

Bob: Yes; the shorthand I’ve used is: “There’s a really nice God, who made everything. He wants you to have a really good life and, if you’ll just keep some rules that He’s laid down, everything will be cool,”—a lot of people think that’s the gospel. That’s not the gospel; that’s the moralistic, therapeutic, deistic gospel; and it’s not a saving gospel.

Ann: We had that conversation with my dad, for years, of him saying, “I am a good man.”

Bob: Right.

Ann: And he was; he was a good guy. When we would explain the gospel of—there is no one that’s righteous; we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; he would say: “But I am so much better than that guy over there that says he a Christian! He’s not moral in the least.” It was this back and forth, and I think so many people think that: “I’m a good person. Yes, I believe.”

Bob: When you’re having that conversation—because I’ve had this conversation, as well, and I’ve failed at this in the past—we have to keep in mind that, when we talk about the gospel and the need for Jesus, the other person is often hearing us say, “I’m better than you.”
Ann: Exactly.

Dave: Yes.

Bob: So, when they say, “I’m a good person,” they’re trying to say, “You’re good; I’m good, too.” We have to go into this saying: “Look, I’m no better than you. In a lot of ways, I’m worse than you. I just recognize I need Jesus, and I think we all need Jesus.” It’s really easy for them to get defensive and go, “Are you saying I’m not a good person?”

Ann: —and “And are you judging me?”

Bob: Right; what’s the next one, Dave?

Dave: The next one is the Generational Catholic.

Dean: That is part of my story. I was not raised a Generational Catholic, but my whole entire dad’s side of the family is Generational Catholic. These are very difficult people to reach, because being Catholic is the goal—not the gospel, not God, not the Bible, not Christianity—just being Catholic.

My grandfather, an Italian Catholic—we went to the Notre Dame/Miami football game in 1990 in South Bend, Indiana. It was the grandest trip; it was really neat/really special. My grandfather and I had never had a spiritual conversation, ever. We go to South Bend. Right when we get there, we go into the cathedral; it’s so beautiful. We go into the cathedral, and he’s wanting to say a prayer. I’d never heard my papa talk about prayer in my life. He knelt down and said a prayer.

So we’re walking back out, on the way to the stadium; and I said, “What did you pray for?” He said, “Well, I prayed for the game today.” We’re driving back; and I asked him—I said, “Papa,”—that’s what I called him—“why do we like Notre Dame?” He said, “Because we’re Catholic!” I went, “Oh! Okay!” That was the end of the conversation.

Well, years go by; I’ve come to faith in this time. I’m an adult by this time; and we’re sitting down, years later. He’s almost 90 years old at this time. We’re watching Notre Dame football. (To this day, when they come on, I remember him. He died about ten years ago. It brings memories, instantly, of my grandfather—again, great man; World War II veteran.) He randomly, in the middle of the game, asked me a question—he goes, “Why aren’t you Catholic? I’m Catholic; your dad’s Catholic; your uncles are Catholic.”

I said, “Papa, my dad’s not Catholic! Go across the room and ask him. My uncles aren’t Catholic; one is a professing atheist—like he has Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins books on his bookshelf; he’s a proud atheist. My other uncle’s agnostic!” He said, “No, they’re not; they're Catholic.”
I said—okay, I’m not going to get in a fight with my 90-year-old grandfather—“But, Papa, they are not Catholic. You can go call them right now, and they will tell you.” He insisted, and the conversations went nowhere; so I just ended it.

But here’s what I learned that day—for a generational, nominal Catholic, *being* Catholic is more important than *believing* Catholic.

**Bob:** So, let me ask you—with some folks, who are listening to us, right now, who say, “I am a born-again Catholic,”—you’re a Baptist preacher—is that an authentic category? Are there born-again Catholics?

**Dean:** Yes, I believe so; but I believe a true born-again faith would eventually have to lead themselves away from the Catholic church—not to the Baptist church—I’m not saying that’s the right way.

I believe that, eventually, someone who refuses to leave the Catholic church is doing so for one of two reasons: one, the heritage of being a Catholic is more important to them than they realize it is, maybe even towards idol; or they think they’re being a remnant and staying in it as an evangelist—I’m just saying that’s probably not the best method.

**Dave:** Interesting. We have a lot of people at our church that go to our service on Saturday night and mass on Sunday; because they really still feel, “I have to continue to do both.”

**Ann:**—and also to please family.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Dean:** That’s the main thing.

**Bob:** You know, this kind of conversation brings to mind conversations I’ve had with people in our church, who say: “I’m going home this weekend to be with my mom and dad. Dad’s sick; we don’t know how long he has. We’ve had conversations about faith before, and my parents insist that they’re Christians. I have questions; I wonder if they are, and yet the conversations we’ve had have seemed to go nowhere.” We pray for them and pray for what those conversations should look like.

If you’re coaching somebody, who’s headed into that situation, what’s your coaching for them?

**Dean:** Well, one, I want them to have some confidence that faith the size of a mustard seed is faith that’s acceptable to God. You know, what gets us to Jesus is not a huge faith, but our huge Savior. That’s really important to remember. It could be that they really do believe that Jesus is the only way, and have repented of their sins, and believe
the gospel; and we need to trust God with that. Mustard-seed faith—they might not have been discipled—but at least, the conviction of who Jesus is—the criminal on the cross, “Please remember me in paradise”; right?

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dean:** He appealed to Christ, not to himself; that’s what happened there.

But for the one that truly is concerned, going, “I’m telling you, they think they know; they don’t know,” I get that; I came from that—I have lived that life. This is urgent. Don’t be afraid to sit there and plead—like: “Dad, that’s not what this is. You keep going back to the fact that you’re a good person; you keep going back to the fact that you’ve done good deeds. I need you to understand that those things are rubbish compared to knowing Christ. Those things do not get you into heaven.”

I’m not trying to give an extreme answer there; but those kinds of situations, where it really is literally life or death, don’t be afraid to go in there and say: “Look, I don’t want to talk about anything else. I’m here because I love you, and I’m here because I need to make sure that you are clear on who Jesus is and what He’s done for you.”

**Bob:** Do that humbly.

**Dean:** Yes.

**Bob:** Do it full of grace and full of love and respect. Don’t come in, thinking that you have to wield the Bible, and preach at him—

**Dean:** Yes.

**Bob:** —but it is urgent.

**Dave:** It’s truth and grace.

**Dean:** It’s truth and grace.

**Dave:** It’s that balance.

Alright, the last two are big categories; maybe hit them both real quick: Mainline Protestant and Bible Belt.

**Dean:** Yes; Mainline Protestant I call the “Watered-Down Word.” Many mainline Protestants just don’t have the Bible, so we need to reach those people. It’s not sheep-swapping; it’s evangelism. They have a cross above the choir, but they don’t preach it.

**Bob:** And Bible Belt?
Dean: Bible Belt is somebody who loves Jesus—let me tell you what—but they're loving Jesus as more of a country music Jesus than it is the actual use of the Bible. This somebody, who wants enough of Jesus to be personally identified with, but not enough to be personally inconvenienced. I would say a lot of Bible Belt folks don’t really have a saving faith. Jesus is just kind of part of life—it’s like America, and their favorite college football team, and their job. If you had a jersey that had patches on it for different things of life—like a Boy Scout uniform that has different patches—being a Christian is just a patch on it; it doesn’t really mean very much at all.

Those are people that we reach a lot of. What happens there is—the light goes on; they’re actually exposed to gospel preaching—because they go, “Oh, that’s not what I’ve been doing my entire life.” It’s someone who—again, very vague God; very vague Jesus—but very pro those things. They all claim a church, even though they don’t go to one. Usually, that means that’s their grandmother’s church, and they go on Mother’s Day because it means a lot to her—is what they’re told by their mother, kind of a pressure type of thing: “It would mean so much to your nana if you came to church on Sunday. Will you please come? It’s Mother’s Day.” “Of course! Yes; of course, we’ll do that.” They’ll show up, see some friends, and never come back again until the next year.

Bob: Are you getting pushback on this book on this message?

Dean: You know, not as much as I thought I would. I’m getting a lot of, “As I read your book, I had all these people come to mind.” I’ve been told by others—the book has done—it’s helped them create a category that didn’t exist before.

Dave: That’s what I was going to say. You know, reading it makes me think there’s a whole mission field that you often don’t think about that is huge. You know, you sort of get excited—like, “Man, I can be an evangelist to love people that need to be loved.”

Ann: I’m imagining that some listeners are thinking, “Wow, am I an unsaved Christian?” What would you say to those listeners, right now, that are maybe doubting and wondering?

Dean: I would ask them: “What do you base your idea of being a Christian upon? If you are claiming to be a Christian, what is the basis for that? If your basis for that are answers other than the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf, you might not be. I don’t say that to make someone doubt, but just to be clear.”

Cultural Christianity, if it could be defined in just a sentence or two, is: “A Christianity that is not dependent on Jesus Christ.”

Bob: You’re not saying, “Memorize the right answer and then you’re okay.”

Dean: No.
Bob: You’re saying that has to be the basis for everything you think, believe, and live.

Dean: Yes. Am I appealing to myself, and my heritage, and my actions, and my background, and my resume—we’ll call it my religious resume—or am I appealing to Christ?

Bob: I would say you might want to get a copy of the book—right?—and read a little bit more!

Dave: Yes!

Bob: We appreciate you writing the book, being here, talking with us about it. Thanks for your time.

Dean: Thank you for having me.

Bob: Again, I want to encourage listeners—go to FamilyLifeToday.com to get a copy of the book, The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel, by Dean Inserra. You can order the book from us online at FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get a copy. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-358-6329—that's 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, I sometimes wish that those of you who are supporters of this ministry—those of you who, not only listen to this program, but help make this program possible for other through your donations—I wish you could come and spend a morning sitting in our call center and taking phone calls from listeners, like you, who are calling, not just to request resources, but to talk about how God has used this ministry in their lives. I wish you could sit in the correspondence area, with the people who are getting the letters that are sent to us, or I wish you could interact with people at Weekend to Remember getaways/the events that we host.

Every time I have the opportunity to do that, I’m reminded again that God’s Word is powerful and that, as we are faithful to share it, here on FamilyLife Today, God is using it in some pretty remarkable ways in people’s lives. In fact, I have to tell you—I’m always astounded when I talk to people, who say, “I had this specific issue going on in my life, and I got in my car, I turned on FamilyLife Today, and that’s what you were talking about that day.” I go, we can’t engineer that; but the Holy Spirit can.

I say all of that just to say, “Thank you,” to those of you who are helping us expand the reach of FamilyLife® through our daily radio program, our website, our events, our resources—all that we do to try to effectively develop godly marriages and families. We appreciate your partnership in expanding the reach of this ministry every time you make a donation.
If you can help *FamilyLife Today* with a donation today so that we can continue to expand that reach, we’d like to say, “Thank you,” by sending you a copy of Dennis Rainey’s book, *Choosing a Life that Matters*. It’s our thank-you gift when you go online at FamilyLifeToday.com and make a donation, or when you call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” You can make a donation over the phone, and we are grateful for your financial support.

I hope what we’ve talked about this week has caused a lot of listeners just to pull back and go, “Am I a culturally-conditioned Christian or am I somebody who’s actually following Christ?” We have the president of FamilyLife with us, David Robbins. That’s at the heart of what we’re all about; isn’t it?

**David:** No doubt; I think my head is constantly shaking right now; because I’ve been shaking my head this whole time, because this is why FamilyLife exists—it’s one of the key reasons. We want to be a part of helping people truly know Jesus, passionately, and follow Jesus, and help them help others do the same. We absolutely are committed to the flourishing of families and strengthening marriages everywhere.

But when it comes down to it, our ultimate goal is that people would know the gospel and follow Jesus, because He is worthy of following. He’s worthy of all of our lives. In our culture today, the family reveals so often our need for Jesus—at least, it does in my life, Bob!

**Bob:** Right.

**David:** Family issues can be some of the most important in leading to real, gut-level, honest conversations about who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf. Don’t get me wrong; our concern for strong families isn’t just a prop—we care about that. We want to see families drawn together in a world that so often drives them apart; but we think that best occurs in the context of growing closer to Jesus, and we really are called to seeing God rescue and reconcile families in Jesus.

**Bob:** Yes; the issue of our sanctification—our growing in Christ—the place where the rubber most often meets the road is: “How are we doing at home?” If we can live out the gospel in our homes, we can live it out anywhere. I agree with you; thank you, David, for that.

Now, tomorrow, have you ever stopped and thought, “Our family is a mess”? I mean, I think we’ve all felt that way at one time or another. The good news is that means we’re like families in the Bible. Ron Deal has looked at what the Bible has to say about families and messiness. We’re going to hear from him tomorrow about how, if your family’s a mess, then you’re normal. Hope you can tune in for that.
I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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