

## **Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”**

**Hosts:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

**Episode 18 — Guest:** Chris Moles

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Elyse Fitzpatrick 0:06

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men on the value of women in the church, home, and society. We won't always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious. The Bible is true. And women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Welcome to the Worthy podcast. I'm Elyse Fitzpatrick, and I'm here today with my co author of the Worthy book, Eric Schumacher. And we're happy to welcome a dear friend of mine to the podcast today. He is a pastor, a speaker, a biblical counselor. And he's also from West Virginia, which means that I always have to sing Mountain Mama to him whenever... anyway. And so let me introduce Reverend Chris Moles to you, in case you don't know who he is. He is an ordained minister in the Christian and Missionary Alliance and senior pastor of The Chapel in Winfield, West Virginia. Chris is a certified biblical counselor and a trained group facilitator in domestic violence intervention and prevention. He's a contributor on the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statewide Intervention Curriculum Team. He holds a BA in Bible from Cedarville College and an MA in biblical counseling from Faith Bible Seminary in Lafayette, Indiana, and is pursuing a PhD from Evangelical Seminary. He's the author of The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Violence and Control in the Home. Thanks for being with us and being who you are.

Chris Moles 2:39

Oh, thanks for the introduction. I was slightly impressed. Thanks for having me, guys. It's great to be here.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:47

Yeah, so tell us Chris, just for people who don't know you, a little bit about your faith journey. And then also, I think of particular interest how you got involved with domestic violence intervention.

Chris Moles 3:01

I was raised in a Christian home. So one of the typical stories that you might hear my parents were believers and I came to know the Lord at a young age, although what's somewhat not so typical is where I was raised. I grew up in the heart of Appalachia, where I live to this day. We actually just moved back onto the family farm, my wife and kids and I live out here on the hill. And in that I was raised in the Appalachian Mountain religion, kind of an old school type deal. So I wasn't really with any type of mainline church or reformed church or armenian church. It was just church, very country, country as cornbread, I like to say. But it was in there in that environment with my family that I came to know Jesus, and then grew, you know, more and more in love with him. It was while I was at Cedarville (Go Jackets) that I was introduced to Biblical counseling and really found it to be an effective transition for me in ministry. It really suited me well and made a lot of sense to me, especially going into ministry. And shortly after that, beginning my ministry career, I was approached by a corrections officer - this is how things kind of wind into the domestic violence world. You know, my first year in ministry, I was approached by a corrections officer. I served in the juvenile crime for a while just as a faith based counselor, as a board member on the juvenile crime enforcement coalition. That eventually led to teaching life skills and parenting classes for drug offenders and just found myself providentially in corrections, having no background in criminal justice, theologically, really being more on the anabaptist side. Not wanting to be involved with the state, just finding myself as an educator. And fell in love with it. It was in that environment that I was approached about a new program they were starting. It's actually been around since the early 90s, late 80s - Batterer Intervention and Prevention, and I was asked to be a co facilitator. And one of the hallmarks of those type of programs is to have a male and female co-lead, leading a group of men to model your non sexual professional relationships, to model equal ownership of the group and leadership, co-leadership. And I jumped at it. This was almost 15 years ago, and I've been working with abusive men ever since. I found it to coincide well with my biblical counseling experience and graduate work. And God's just, I guess, decided to place me in this work. It's an unusual work. But if you can enjoy domestic violence intervention, I enjoy it. It's a great work high on justice and repentance and faith and care and comfort. So it's actually been a really good fit for me and I have a goal, just prayerful that we will see in our lifetime the church become the safest place on the planet. Unfortunately, we haven't been but I really think the church can be a safe place for victims, and a place that puts the perpetrators on notice.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 6:23

Great, great.

Eric Schumacher 6:26

I have a question right away from what you just described. So you described having these groups that you're facilitating, and I assume they are male groups?

Chris Moles 6:37

Yes. So I'm certified to lead both male and female perpetrator groups, and I work with both. Men, by and large, that larger groups, greater volume, and are more likely to be perpetrators.

Eric Schumacher 6:49

And so you mentioned the importance of having male and female facilitate that group. One of the first things came into my mind is, I know pastorally, when we hear about working with abuse victims in the church, if the survivor's, a woman, it's often recommended that you bring in a woman as you give any pastoral care that she can be working with, feel safe with. Is there value in bringing in a woman as you work with a man? Who is the abuser?

Chris Moles 7:19

Oh, absolutely, I do recommend when possible. I prefer what the label is psycho educational. But really all it is, is the idea of group-based interventions that have an educational component. I often in the biblical counseling realm, say, men need information, transformation, and reformation in that order. And the information involves helping them understand what they've done and put it in perspective. Transformation, of course, is the application of the gospel. And then reformation is to put off and put on. I think, group based approaches are best. But I have recommended to biblical counselors, where couples doing co-counseling together, I think are highly effective. For one it really guards the male counselor from collusion, because abusers are very good manipulators. They really target soft spots in the counseling to try to get you to agree or to understand what they're going through, quote, unquote. Having a female perspective balances that out. And that modeling is huge. Because for a lot of guys who are abusive, not all, they've never really seen a man defer to a woman or share leadership with a woman, especially in a professional setting like that.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:36

Do you find in the local church, that some of the ways that women are thought of and characterized, do some of those maybe misogynistic ways play into maybe Christian men who think it's okay to abuse or maybe they don't even think they're abusers? I'm not sure I'm framing that very well.

Chris Moles 9:05

I think I can speak to it. I mean, that I think the quick answer is yes, I think in our world, and I'll just, I'll just lay the blanket out there being a complementarian male in evangelical Christianity, I do think our

theological approach lends itself - I'm not saying that we promote it - but I say it makes it easy for our churches to perpetrate or conceal acts of abuse for a couple different reasons. One, complementarian theology, when not nuanced, is incredibly dangerous. And I think it's okay to say that on here.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 9:45

Yeah, please do. Say it.

Chris Moles 9:47

Okay. So I think what we've got in a lot of our churches, is we promote biblical submission without thoroughly acknowledging the complexities of biblical headship or we define biblical headship by the kingdom of the world standard, which I think is a huge miss, rather than the kingdom of God standard. If Jesus is the standard by which we understand headship, leadership position, or even power, then Philippians 2, John 13, Matthew 20, Mark 10, they should all speak to our interpretation of headship that Jesus modeled it, you know, he did not consider equality with God something to cling to, right? And he actually modeled in John 13, again through serving the disciples, and he commanded it to the sons of Zebedee and Mrs. Zepedee, depending on which passage you read, in Matthew 20, or Mark 10, where the rulers of the Gentiles lord power over and he forbids it among his people. It cannot be that way among you. So, within complementarian circles, I think if we approach headship as an authoritative, top down power-over model, then not only are we misrepresenting Jesus, we're actually putting women in incredibly dangerous situations, as well as robbing them of their God-given right to to co-lead and coexist as co-heirs with men in leadership positions. Now, that doesn't mean that we have to change all of our theology. All I'm saying is, we should let Jesus dictate it to us. And I think women would be a lot safer. So to answer your question, in a long way around the barn now, I do think that complementarianism is the answer. I think it has the theological framework to not just protect women, which is the word we use, but to empower women, which is a much, much better phrase to me, I think, because I think the idea of men or women functioning in compliment is far superior to negotiation, compromise, and fairness. But the problem is, I think we've adopted a power-over model, rather than Jesus's power under.

Eric Schumacher 11:59

I'm so glad that you said all that, because I don't understand why there's complementarians who don't want to admit that our system of theology lends itself more readily to abuse. I mean, I'm reading through a woman's book who's been abused in the church, and it's an egalitarian setting. I mean, that can happen there. But given that most domestic violence happens from men to women, anytime I think that you're giving some kind of leadership role or authority to men over women, even in limited contexts, sin is going to abuse that. And if it's true, I think Satan has a particular interest in trying to

mess that up and use it for wicked purposes. In your line of work, as you help victims of violence and abuse, what have you discovered about how those reports are handled in the local church and what needs to change?

Chris Moles 13:12

So I mean, the knee jerk reaction, Eric, I mean, the the gut reactions to say they've been handled poorly. Now, I want to couch that or caveat that with I've been in this work specifically within the church for over a decade. And I have seen great improvement, like, you know, even when I wrote the book, was published in 2015, I think prior to that, within the conservative Christian world, maybe had two other substantial works probably both by Leslie Vernick. If you consider that that the Christian conservative Christian. Most works within the Christian world, were not just the egalitarian but primarily evangelical feminism, which had some good things to say, but we just will not talk about it. But now you have works by people such as Darby Strickland and Sydney Millage the Holcombs. The new Church Cares project that I was a part of for the Southern Baptist, Joy Forrest - you have a lot of wonderful conservative Christian advocates and counselors who are now speaking to this. So we've come a long way. But we're really not there yet. I think one of the things that really gets us in a trap is our desire to mutualize. And I think part of that is and I'll just go for it. We'll just say all the controversial things! I think marriage has become this generation's Sabbath. We have elevated marriage above, in the same way that the Pharisees elevated Sabbath, above people and we've made it so restrictive and so central, that marriage has become idolatrous in many ways to the church. And we Seek marriage restoration, which is a beautiful, wonderful thing. But I'm just going to suggest that if marriage restoration comes before restoring someone to God, then we're just setting it up for failure. And so when abuse is presented in the church, one of the knee jerk reactions from pastoral ministers and counselors is often to focus on it as a marriage problem. And abuse it not a marriage problem. No more than childhood sexual abuse is a sexual problem. It's not. It's rapacious. Or that child abuse is a parenting problem. It's not. This is about one person using power to control, coerce demean, or destroy another. And so I think if we could just get our proper perspective on what is happening, that will allow us to shoot at the right target. But unfortunately, this marriage at all cost approach has actually doomed us on two fronts. One, we don't properly care for the people involved. And then two, we actually set the marriage up for failure because marriage cannot possibly be sustained under those type of false status or false guise.

Eric Schumacher 16:11

I think that's so interesting what you said about marriage, because just as I look back over my lifetime, if it feels like in the 80s and into the 90s, you had this big emphasis on marriage and family. And then in the 2000s through 2010, as I was leaving seminary in 2002, like the big conversations where biblical manhood and womanhood and church polity, and that's in my Southern Baptist circles. But both those have to do with authority. And they're good discussions, they're healthy discussions to have and they're important. But it's only been in the last few years that abuse has been brought to the table as a matter

of discussion. And in a lot of places, I'm seeing conversation about abuse and about women as a political issue or a social justice issue. And so I hear and feel from people like this isn't something we should need to talk about, because that's what the world is doing out there. And it's really sad, because I think we have some theologies propped up in a way that, as we've discussed, can be used to abuse. And then we've silenced abusers by saying they're liberals or their social justice warriors. Are you seeing that?

Chris Moles 17:39

Oh, yeah, absolutely. But that goes back to this notion of the kingdom of the world versus the kingdom of God. Just because the kingdom of the world has identified something as a problem doesn't mean that we're not called to address it as well. And just the example that you use, and let's just use #metoo as an example of this. I was a outspoken supporter of #metoo, I commended my friends who #metoo'd, and I had many more friends who #metoo'd then possibly did not or could not #metoo. That's because this is an epidemic, violence against women, is a pandemic, really, that we've never truly addressed. So back to the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. I think what we're seeing, or what we should be very articulate in saying is the kingdom of the world does address this, but they stink at it. They address it horribly. And I think the evidence of that is the political responses that you see, and I won't name names, but I think it's apropos at this time, just to say, we love to believe women as long as they politically align with our agenda.

Eric Schumacher 18:53

Or theologically?

Chris Moles 18:54

Yeah. And so you can be a victim as long as you advance my political party and my political position. Well, that's absolutely another power over kingdom of the world response. God forbid, we would get on board with that, rather than saying, women are made in the image of God. And when someone violates another human being physically or sexually, it's an assault on the image of God. Not to mention the other things we could talk about relationally, emotionally, all, I think which encompass the image of God. But I think that is a big problem that why would we let the world handle this when they stink at it?

Eric Schumacher 19:33

Yeah, the handling that you just mentioned, that's a further abuse of the victim. And we've denigrated them. You said you're useful to me as a tool to my end.

Chris Moles 19:47

Which is where they were in the first place. And here's what I mean by that. I often instruct counselors and pastors and people that I trained one of the bigger mistakes that we make is we become someone's rescuer. We become someone savior. You know, victims don't need you to control them. They already have someone doing that he's much better at it than you are. So simply telling victims what to do is counterproductive. We need to be offering resources and support and opportunity. The same is true with the Savior. Victims don't need a savior, they don't need us to come in to rescue them. That's what Jesus is there for. He's a much better savior than we'll ever be. Again, we're there to be brothers and sisters who confront evil, and hold people up very similar to what can't remember the address, maybe it's 1 Thessalonians 5, where Paul talks about helping the weak, and it's the idea of holding on to the weak and holding off the cause of their trouble. And that's our role. But unfortunately, we have used people in far greater ways sometimes or worse ways than their abuser did, by making it political, by making it a scene, by making it a means of advancement or awareness, rather than focusing in on care and confrontation.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 21:00

Thank you for that, Chris. And I just want to say, I've heard you on this topic numbers of times and I love your heart for women. I love the way you're laying down your life. I love the fact that you're willing to take heat; I know you have. Thank you for that. Thank you. It's very encouraging to me, Chris, it really is.

Chris Moles 21:24

Listen real quick. Any heat that we experience as men standing up for people that we love, or women in particular, pales in comparison to the actual pain and suffering that victims of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse experience on a daily basis. So the real heroic people in the story are victims who've navigated this alone, right, without brothers and sisters standing in the gap for them. So I appreciate that Elyse. But I did want to make this point, that feeling heat is something the pastor's avoid way too often. Feeling heat for this risking, your church for this, risking your livelihood for women and children in particular, is only a small glimpse of what they're experiencing on a daily basis. And so we've really got to jettison this self-protectionism that some pastors are experiencing, not wanting to dive into the deep end of the pool. Because you know, once this stuff is over, Best Buy's going to be hiring guys. The midget league is going to need referees; you'll find a way to make money. If you lose your church over standing up for the vulnerable, then Jesus is absolutely going to take care of you. And he's also going to take care of the church. Wink, wink. So back to you in the studio.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:45

Thank you, my brother. I want to jump off our notes for a minute. Because this is a this is sort of a recurring theme that we hear that, well, you know, you're only wanting to talk about women, you're just aping the culture by talking about women. And, you know, Eric and I have been doing a lot in social media of late just talking about, you know, there's more than one side to the slippery slope, that sort of thing. You know, you can slide down into misogyny just as quickly as you can slide down into liberalism. But you know, I loved what you said: if the culture has identified a problem, then there's nothing that would say that in the church, we can't speak to that problem. It doesn't mean we're becoming the culture. It means that we're seeing what they're seeing. And a lot of times, they're very case wise, they see things in ways that we don't see them. And so, you know, as part of the #metoo movement myself, the way that I am not going to say names, but the way that guys have said, Oh, yeah, you know, it's just #metoo those women, they just, they're just wanting to get whatever power, whatever. They're being like the culture. When Christian women say this is how I was sexually assaulted. And then Christian men say you're just being like the culture. Paul says that what you're supposed to do is forget what lies behind and press on to what God's calling you to so just forget about it. I'd like to forget about it. Right? So we can talk about things that are going on in the culture and not be sliding down into liberalism. For crying out loud.

Chris Moles 24:57

Yeah, I mean, if our response to Harvey Weinstein, is somehow liberal, as if Harvey Weinstein represents Christianity, are you kidding me? This is about power. And you said it well. Wrestling power from each other. Why are we so concerned with power in the Christian church? I mean, where did we get that idea that we're supposed to be pursuing power? I mean, you know, Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would come with his disciples, and they would be his witnesses, his martita, his martyrs, here, there and everywhere. So why are we so concerned with wrestling power from each other, rather than sharing life with each other? In a power-under, service-oriented way? And scene. Sorry, go back.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 25:49

How have you been. and I think I know the answer to this, but I want to hear it. How have you been received in churches where you've tried to help? And what has surprised you the most, what churches have surprised you the most? And what has discouraged you the most?

Chris Moles 26:09

I would say, overall, I've been received very well in churches. Be honest. And and I've said this publicly, I said this a couple years ago at the pretty big biblical counseling conference. I think my mentors in this



work, and people from the domestic violence perspective, Christians who have mentored me in the domestic violence world, were not necessarily men. In fact, very few of them were men. Most of the people that brought me into this work, that trained me in this work are women. Some very wonderful women that have gone one. I mean, from an unbelieving standpoint, Ellen Pence passed away in 2012. I never got a chance to meet Ellen face to face. But she was a tremendous benefit to me. From her work at the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project. From a Christian perspective, Cathy Kroeger, from Gordon Conwell, she's with the Lord now. Her work, although theologically we may not have completely aligned, was a tremendous benefit to me. And the list could go on and on and on of women who've kind of championed this. I bring that up because this is one of the things about churches that I wish was a little bit different. I think I'm well received in churches, especially within conservative churches, largely, in part because I am a man. It's a little easier for me to get on the platform. It's a little easier for me to say these things. And quite frankly, it's kind of like the gift of tongues in the book of Acts. Everybody heard in their own language. It's kind of like people hear, or men hear a little better from a man. And that can be I'm not saying that's overt misogyny either. It could just be part of the collective socialization of men. It just could be part of the air that we breathe and the water that we swim in. But I think that would be one big thing. I've had very little pushback from the institutional church. In fact, I've been well received for the glory of God. Different denominations, too. Just last year I spoke here in West Virginia, actually to our West Virginia Southern Baptist Convention. And then the very next week, I was at the Southern West Virginia Regional Nazarene Pastors Training Conference. So just being received has not been a problem. I think the thing that has surprised me, if that was the right part of the question, Elyse, was how pastors and church leaders become activists. And what I mean by that is they'll receive just enough training to be dangerous. I think it surprised me how quickly people will consider themselves experts if that makes any sense. It's like, okay, I heard Chris for 50 minutes at a training conference. So now I'm ready to start domestic violence ministry, which is incredibly dangerous. And I'm not sure why that happens. But that's one thing that surprised me is the amount of running ahead, jumping the gun with some dangerous responses. Then what was the last part of the question?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:25

What is discouraging to you?

Chris Moles 29:30

Are you ready for this? The lack of female leadership or the lack of female voices. I do a lot of consulting for churches. And I think one of the things that breaks my heart is that here's a victim, usually a woman, again, it can be the other way, but we're talking about what's normally being presented. Usually a woman being brought before her ecclesiological leadership, right, coming before the church board to talk about her abuse, this happens quite a bit, or the presbytery or whatever the the board is. And there's no other female present, or no other female voice, or a case is presented to a church. And it's gotten to the point that they've got to make some church discipline decisions. And so the elder board is

talking about it, and there's no female voice. And I think that's been super discouraging for me. I don't think someone has to change the church polity to care well for people. But I do think you need to cover our blind spots. And if you're making life-altering decisions alongside of people, and it involves aspects of power and control and abuse, it, it benefits us to have female voices. That's why I always promote building teams that include ladies who were advocates or counselors in the room, giving us insight from a victim perspective, again, using the the gender specific, and I just, I think it's not only unfair, I think it is unreasonable. The other side of that is I always promote team building. So I encourage them to there to be a female counselor, a female advocate involved in the case. And one of the things that we found that's happened more often than not in church discipline cases is a wife in particular will be in an abusive relationship. She'll seek the church's help. They'll spend two years practicing some weird form of Matthew 18, that is entirely inconsistent with Jesus's words. And at the end of their dragging their feet, she grows impatient. She doesn't want to live like this anymore. She divorces her husband, and then they discipline her. And so how many times have we seen that? And how irresponsible is that of us to basically entice or tempt her into that process and then punisher because of our lack of swift response, or following 1 Peter 5, for instance.

Eric Schumacher 32:07

That's great, Chris. Thank you for that. We're gonna come back here soon with Chris Moles, and ask him a couple more questions. And, Chris, I'd really like to have you speak to, in the middle of COVID and sheltering, a woman is in an abusive relationship in her church or in home, and the abuser is there in the home with her. Let's talk about what she should do. So listeners, if you've been benefiting from these conversations, we hope that you will rate us and review us and share us. And if you'd be interested in helping to cover the cost of producing this podcast, please go to our Patreon page. And we would appreciate you becoming a donor and you get some extra perks there, some time and conversation with Elyse and I. You get more for your money out of your conversation with Elyse than with me, but I'm there to make sure the Zoom works. And you get extra questions, little tidbits from our podcasts, you get to see all the bloopers that Chris has said so far. So feel free to check out our Patreon page. We'd love your support. Chris, a woman sheltering at home with her abuser. What should she do? What should her pastors do?

Chris Moles 33:36

Yeah, well, you know, it would be unfair, and I think dangerous to give kind of a blanket. Here's what I do, right? I'm often fond of saying if you've seen one case of abuse, you've seen one case of abuse. They share many commonalities, but there are so many complexities and specifics within that, that we'd want to be careful. I think you're right, to raise the red flag during quarantine. At the time of this recording we're still sheltering in place and isolation is a pretty common tactic among abusers. And basically what we've done is we've isolated victims through the rule of law. So we've actually helped many abusers in that case. Along with that the stress of lack of work, lack of opportunity, just being in the home

together, it can exacerbate the situation or escalate it to a point of physical force, sexual coercion, experiences that maybe the victim hasn't had up to this point, or perhaps it's just exacerbated those common experiences. So I would say for pastors, just be aware that criminal domestic violence, those arrestable offenses in your community are probably at a higher rate during quarantine than they were prior. And so reports of domestic violence in your community may be up. And so connecting with local law enforcement, shelter agencies, you may be able to serve your community through benevolence through safe housing cooperatives are things that you can do with your community. In regards to intervention, understand that any intervention can lead to escalation. So anytime that a pastor or small group leader or a friend chooses to intervene on behalf of suspected abuse or disclosed abuse, you could put the victim in more harm than good. And so being wise in your response is important. Following victim wishes, as much as possible, is important. If the victim discloses to you, and they do not want to call the authorities, which I would recommend, if you don't witness the violence, you don't have to, in most states, call the authorities and know your state and local laws if you're a pastor. But it's important to understand that if you were to report something, and the police do nothing, it could put your friend in more harm, a greater harm. So kind of understanding your role as a resource, giving her options, recommendations, suggestions. And if she decides to stay in the situation, or not to receive those resources because of her perceived risk, don't feel bad. You've still done good work, and you can be ready and available and just let her know, hey, when you're ready, if you want to talk, I'll still be here. And so those are some things that pastors can do. I think rushing has been one of those poor responses that pastors have done. Probably one of my favorites that I hear a lot is we're going to take the biggest, baddest deacon, and we're gonna go scare that guy. And I just think that's foolish. Because I think it reinforces the worldview. If I can take a big deacon that used to be a biker, and I could scare that husband then what I'm saying is, power and control and fear and threat are effective means. They're good. And I'm basically reinforcing your worldview. I would rather be a Galatians 6 type of confronter or who confronts sin with gentleness, leaving the consequences to God, understanding that a man reaps what he sows, and not being tempted in the same way, not wanting to respond to the same tactics of the abuser, but to be gentle, but firm. And I often tell my counselors that we say really hard things in winsome ways. And I find that to be a much more effective approach than, you know, bringing in the calvary and sounding the guns and storming the castle as it were.

Eric Schumacher 37:47

Elyse, you want to ask him one more question for our podcast Patreon supporters.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 37:52

Sure. So I've been listening to different people talking about abuse, and people who are serial abusers. And one of the things that I've heard a pastor say recently, is that he doesn't believe that someone who serially abuses his spouse or his children can possibly be a true Christian. And I know a lot of times guys will say, you know, they'll just come back to the church and say, yeah, I just lost my temper, and they

know all of the right things to say and all of the lingo. I mean, what do you think? Do you think that people who serially abuse a wife, anyone - can they actually be true Christians?

Eric Schumacher 38:42

So thanks for tuning in to the Worthy podcast. If you'd like to hear Chris answer that question, head over to our Patreon page for details. And please join us next time on the podcast.