Emmett: Hey, Dunker Punks. Thank you so much for tuning in for another episode of the Dunker Punks podcast. I have not been shy about saying that the Dunker Punks podcast episodes produced by Jerry Crouse from the Warrensburg Church of the Brethren have been some of my very favorites. Jerry always approaches his interviews with curiosity and with grace and with a real vision for uplifting young adult voices and perspectives, for which I am truly grateful. And I should say, that the audio quality of Jerry's episodes is just so good. I guess that's what happens when you partner with a local university to do the recording. As a listener, I really appreciate that, as a host who has a little bit of a cold right now and is recording on my laptop in the middle of a somewhat loud city, uh, I really wish that I could emulate it myself. I apologize that I can't. Thankfully, today's episode is no exception of that quality I've always come to expect from Jerry's episodes. Jerry is joined by Nathan Rittenhouse, who is on the pastoral team at New Hope Church of the Brethren in West Virginia, and is also a speaker with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. He is also a Fellow with the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics. He also happens to be a young adult in the Church of the Brethren, who, as you can tell, has an impressive background in theological training and thought.

Nathan joins Jerry to talk apologetics. What makes the Brethren unique, and his hopes and fears for our tiny denomination with a different way of living in the world. I hope you enjoy. I think you will.
Jerry: Hello Dunker Punks. My name is Jerry Crouse. You’ve heard me before. I'm a 62-year-old father of three young adult children, Steven, Jacob and Christy, and husband to Becky Bail Crouse for the past 33 years. I'm also a member of the Warrensburg Church of the Brethren here in Warrensburg, Missouri. I'm on the pastoral team there and a counselor and assistant cross-country coach at Warrensburg High School. And, like you, Dunker Punks, I'm a follower of Jesus. Today I'm really excited to be interviewing Nathan Rittenhouse. Uh, Nathan's family and mine have had connections over the past three generations and through the church of the Brethren. Though a generation apart, Nathan and I each spent our college years at Bridgewater College, where we were long distance runners for the Eagle's cross country and track teams. (Nathan: Whoop Whoop!) I'm, a 1979 graduate of BC and Nathan is a 2009 graduate, I think. Nathan is married to Erin. They have four children in their family. I believe, in 2015 Nathan earned his Master of Divinity degree from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston.

I invited Nathan to participate in this interview for really three specific reasons. One: He's a young adult. Two: In addition to serving as an itinerant speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, Nathan’s grown up in and currently helps provide leadership on the pastoral team for the New Hope Church of the Brethren in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. And thirdly, I just trust, respect, and am inspired by Nate. I value has many gifts, his passion for serving Christ and the church, his sense of humor and wonderful way with people, and his wisdom. I think that we Dunker Punks will be blessed by hearing some of Nathan's thoughts, ideas and vision. So welcome to this podcast, Nate. Would you please share something about yourself to help us learn to know a little more about who you are.

Nathan: Sure, Yeah. Thanks for having me on the show, Jerry. It's a lot of fun. And hello, to the Dunker Punk world out there. Um, yeah, I, I think I, I really enjoy the life that I have because of its randomness. And so I do get to travel around a bit globally and speaking colleges and universities, but then get to be deeply embedded in a community here in the mountains of West Virginia. Ah, went to Bridgewater, double majored in physics and philosophy and like to tell people I got my physics and my metaphysics tangled up and that resulted in theology. And then lived in England and Texas and Massachusetts for a while and then finally made it back home. So yeah, as Jerry said wife, four kids. Um, we enjoy the great outdoors. Hiking, biking, camping, big garden, greenhouse, chickens, bees, uh, enjoy that. Enjoy the beauty of the earth and the richness of it. Um, probably those who know me well, uh, know me in the context of, or the fact that my local church is a formative part of who I am. And so part of a, a growing and very busy, uh, congregation. Um, there are five bi-vocational pastors in our congregation that rotate me through, between three meeting places. And so, it's a lot of fun. It's a glorious mess, as my grandfather likes to say, um, and I, I tell people we have, ah, casserole stains on our theology, but at least that means we're doing it together. So that's the, a little bit of the background of, of who I am and where I'm coming from.

J: Great, thanks, Nate. Would you be willing to talk a bit about why you're involved in the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and then specifically, what it means to you to be an apologist?

N: Hmm. Yeah, so I think um, the first one is I'm involved with, uh, RZIM, because God has a sense of humor. But, more broadly speaking is I've always loved, um, big questions, questions of life. I think ideas have deep significance to the way that we process and view and
experience the world, and grew up in a family and in a church that really encouraged sort of pushing the boundaries in the margins and thinking and wrestling with big ideas, and saw that as a, as a safe thing, something to be encouraged, not something to shy away from.

J: Hmm.

N: And, uh, just had a lot of friendships and connections of people that had big questions about life. Uh, specifically then, when it comes to questions about the church and about the Gospel, about the life and the teachings of Jesus, it's a real privilege for me to travel and work with young people as they, they wrestle through those kind of big existential, uh, questions of life. So, part of it is just the way that I'm wired. I think it's nice when the Lord can use our quirks. And so he opens the doors for us to, to do these things. An apologist is a spinoff of a phrase there from 1st Peter, 3:15 that talks about always being prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have. But to do that with gentleness and respect and the idea there in 1st Peter, I think, is that any time that uh, Peter's referring to hope he's talking about what God has done in the world through Jesus Christ. And so, uh, the being prepared to give a reason for the hope it's an apologia, not apologizing, “Hey, sorry I'm a Christian”, but to give a reason. Uh, Paul does this before Felix and Festus, of, he's put on trial, sort of, of “Why would you believe these things?” And then he gives his, his apologetic there. So it's a, it's a response to, and the, the thing to remember there, I think for, and that the Church of the Brethren has been good about, is living our lives in such a way that people would say, “Well, what's different about you? Why do you have hope in the situation?” Um, then we need to be thoughtful about the response that we're going to give when people notice that difference. So that's the short definition. An introduction into the world of apologetics.

J: Yeah, that's helpful. Thank you. Um, kind of going down the direction of some of the ministry that you're engaged in or have been engaged in. I know you've spent a lot of time on university campuses engaging with students on issues that are important to them. Would you be willing to reflect for us a little bit on what you've heard to be the key spiritual issues and questions of college aged young adults today, in the United States?

N: Sure, yeah. Um, I like to, well and this ebbs and flows, depending on, um, it seems that our cultural moments are shifting faster than perhaps they have in the past. And so, really, there are cycles of questions and different things pop up depending on what's happened in the news. But I like to say that the s’s are always big, so sex, science, suffering, suicide and significance would, would show up in one form or another in most of our public conversations. The big shift, though, probably, is in the way in which the questions are asked. And so they're, they're not necessarily asked in a logical, um they’re not looking for a reason. They’re not looking for a syllogism so much as more of a pastoral, they’re asked more from an existential perspective than a logical one. So instead of saying, for example, you know, why would a good God allow evil, which is a big question. Good thing to think about. Um, I think a question that recently came up in one of our young adult Q and A’s was, um, “If I'm gay and I was raped, is it my fault?”

Now, when you look at that, that's a question of abuse. It's a question of power. It's a question of identity. It's a question of, um, false guilt. It's a question of, you know, and we could go on and list about 15 other things that really need to be hashed out in more of a pastoral
counseling in the context of the community-type situation. Um, and so those are, those are questions, where do you think you breathe, breathe a prayer and say, “Lord, help me respond to the part of this that most accurately needs to be said.”

J: Hmm

N: Um, and because of the depth of questions like that, I think it's important for us to remember that um, God's plan for evangelism, his Plan A is the church. It's a confident Christian in the context of their own community. That is the best witness for Christ, and so as apologists, we kind of show up and try to answer our questions and point toward resources and connect people with communities. But the real, uh, Ministry of the Kingdom, happens in the local church. And so apologetics is a, a supplemental vitamin as it were, to the main course of what God is doing. Um, and so it's, it's fun to be part of that, but we don't want to take ourselves too seriously either. And recognize the depth of, you know, those, some of those questions you have to live with and wrestle with, and they're better um, discussed over dinner than they are from a podium and a platform. So, uh, to try to live with that balance well, is an issue of discernment.

J: Hmm. Okay. And so, one of the things you find is encouraging, young adults if are not already a part of it to become a part of a faith community, or community that can offer that support and can engage in those conversations.

N: Yeah, that's a great question. So, somebody asked me one time, you know, “Is there a hunger and a thirst for righteousness on the college campus?” And I was thinking: “No, not, not really.” Um, but what there is a massive hunger and thirst for is real stability and legitimate hope. Those are the two uh, ultra-rare commodities in our culture and probably just within humanity in general, if you think about the category of hope, I mean, that's the foundation of all of our superhero themes and political campaigns and financial investments. And, you know, I hope, I hope, I hope. Or seeking some sort of, uh, steadfastness and stability that we can get our, kind of get a bearing, understand what's happening around us. And so, with those being things that are rare in their true forms in the world, it's really something that the Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to. Um, Christianity has stability and hope in spades, as it were, um, this is our game. And so it's an invitation into a stable way of seeing, kind of the continuity of a, framework sort of, for origin and meaning and morality and destiny, that's intellectually satisfying, but also, um, existentially pleasurable as it were. Um, but then makes sense of, of the big questions that we have about life and I would argue, is true.

Uh, so, there's a sense in which those uh, foundational and underlying cravings of the human heart are things that I think the, the buying power as it were. And the reason that the Gospel sticks around, will continue to, and will endure, are because it really speaks to the big questions of life at their, at their root cause.

J: Hmm. Well, talking about the church, um, as the vessel for that Good News and the community in which we find our grounding and support and are able to navigate the challenges the, of life. Let, let's think a bit more specifically about the Church of the Brethren. I know that there's a good bit of anxiety by folks in the church about what is perceived to be differences in theological understanding and biblical interpretation in the Church of the Brethren. What are your insights about this situation?
N: Yeah, so that's, um that's a good question, in my initial thought, there is that anxiety is an interesting choice, and it might depend on the age of the person that you talk to. Um, and I appreciate it, and maybe we'll talk about this later kind of the multi-generational depth and beauty of the church. But as far as anxiety goes, that's not really, a response that I have to what I think is going on in the Church of the Brethren. And so much is it's sort of like, you know, do you have anxiety about, you know, the Czechoslovakia, uh you know, breaking up, that already happened. So I'm not worried about it. Uh, I think for a lot of the folks in the dozens or so congregations that I'm connected with, anxiety isn't the word, I think uh, disunity isn't something that surprises them. I think it's something that's probably been seen to have started generations ago, maybe, and we're coming into the, the natural outworking of some of those differences. So I don't think there's anxiousness as far as, I'm, as far as I know among the people who really feel like we haven't been unified for quite a long time. And I think, you see that in the fact that you know, we've kind of now prided ourselves in “the Brethren are not of one mind” or um, even a recent, you know, it was years ago when we said, you know, now the authority of annual conference goes back to the district, so we're sort of making structural shifts here that say we're not really as unified as we once thought we were. Um, and lot of people would, of course, like you mentioned kind of point that back to a paper that's a little bit ambiguous about what our standards of biblical interpretation are. I think for me it's not anxiety as much as it is a lament (J: Hmm) of, of recognizing… So, I’ve bounced around between a couple seminaries and multiple states and, hmph, country or two, and, I think the church of the Brethren has a voice that really needs to be heard and is missing in a lot of the American Evangelical, um, concepts of nation in the church and a lot of things. And so, I'm, uh, lament, I think works better for me as I think about what's happening rather than anxiety.

J: That's helpful. And Nathan, maybe, to build on that a bit…

N: Yeah.

J: What's your vision for the Church of the Brethren? As you imagine, (N: Ya (laughter) as your hope for the church?

N: Yeah, all right, let's, let's wipe off the chalkboard here and uh, start from scratch now. I, so there's an interesting little idea, and this is in Dale Brown's, uh, Another Way of Believing. Probably most of the listeners would be familiar with that where, I forget the exact wording he talks about the Brethren being a group of people who are on the verge of, or who do, prioritize unity over truth. And that's sort of a fascinating, I think that came out like 2005. And that's a question I think for us to, to ask ourselves is, “Are we really, a “unity at all costs” group of people?” Um, and so I think, in order to answer the question on the positive of “Where do we need to go?, a little bit of a diagnosis is helpful in my mind, to say that it does seem that we're striving for unity.

Um, however, when unity becomes the goal, the minimum becomes the standard. We say, “What can we all compromise down to?” And we all agree with. So immunity becomes the goal, the minimum becomes a standard, and when the minimum becomes a standard, it lacks the level of discipleship, to which I think Christ is calling us to be provocative witnesses in the world. And so there's a little bit of a challenge there. Also, I struggle to come up with good
examples of unified groups that don't have a clear structure of authority. Um, except for like maybe a school of fish. But they're all unified by their fear of a predator, and that's not a model we want to follow. And so, even for the compelling vision process, I think it's important that we recognize that that came as the byproduct of a query about the authority of Annual Conference.

So we have to, we need to wrestle with that and think a bit philosophically about what would, what would even structurally be a compelling vision? So maybe, maybe for me, this is where the anxiety comes in. But, so the question is, how do we justify our own existence? I drive past two Presbyterian, a Methodist, and a Baptist Church on my way to church on a Sunday morning. Um, and so what is it that is a uniquely Brethren, Church of the Brethren vision for church that makes me drive past those with something else. And so basically, um, let me give it four or five thoughts here.

The first one is that we're Christian, and then that should shouldn't need to be said, but I think it's important for us to remind ourselves. I was looking at um, some 1908 bicentennial speeches about what does it mean to be brethren in the 20th century. And they started off by saying, “Look, we are orthodox Christian. We believe in basic things about Scripture, about the trinity, about atonement, about the resurrection, virgin birth, that so let's remind ourselves that we fit squarely within that.” There's a lot more there, but it is that um, we're not just followers of Jesus. We believe in the Holy Spirit and God the Father also, we’re not dispensationalist. In our interpretation, we don't believe that the teachings of Jesus go to the future. But I think we also need to remind ourselves that the teachings of Jesus don't belong just to the past, either. So we fit in there, so I would put it this way. So we want to be Christian, as our vision. That's the obvious one.

Then the second one is, and I found a lot of helpful thought here from Stuart Murray's book Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition. And so I would challenge us to revisit and think about what an Anabaptist interpretation of Scripture looks like. And he outlined six, um, and I'll just give them to you, and we could do entire podcast on each of these. But one is the Scripture is self-interpreting. And that's an attempt to have more of a democratic process on who is allowed to interpret Scripture. You don't need a PhD in first century you know, Greco-Roman art, in order to be able to understand Corinthians. You know, it's uh, there's, a, levelness there that Scripture interprets itself, um, for necessary intents and purposes. It's Christo-centric. We care about what Jesus said with his feet still on the ground. He didn't show up just to die for us. Um, third is the relationship between the two testaments. I think there's a ton of confusion in the world about how that works out within the Christian world, and we have good clarity there. We need to be cognizant of the interaction of the spirit in the Word, I like his little phrase “pneumatic exegesis”, um, is a good one and then Number five is congregational hermeneutics, that we recognize that the authority of the church is rooted in the body of believe, believers gathered around the text under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is where true church authority lies. And then the 6th one is a hermeneutics of obedience. Um, and so I think, for me a vision that recaptured some of those, those fundamental concepts of the way in which were interpreting Scripture is different. And just to kind of point that into our past is, you know what, um starting Heifer Project is not that radical. Uh, washing feet is not that radical. What's radical is reading Scripture in such a way that you can't see any possibility other than to wash each other feet when you get there. And so, we have these historical things that have been deeply true to us in the past because of, off of an interpretive conviction, not a tradition.

Now, consistent conviction across multiple generations looks like tradition, but it isn't. Ah, and tradition without conviction really isn't worth a whole lot. And so, I think there's some
soul searching for us to do there on our, um, interpretive framework, because that's where we're going to be different than a lot of our Christian brothers and sisters in the world. And I think a voice that we can bring clarity to. That being said, with the interpretation, some of that sounds a little serious, but, what my vision of the church and I'm skeptical of anybody who says, “Well, here's the vision for the Church of the Brethren, because this is how my church does it, and so that's the vision for everybody else.” Um, that's not the way I want to go. I want a vision of a church who is challenging me and calling me to be more like Christ. Uh, you know, when you were in college and running track, they didn't put you on the track and say, “OK, Jerry, run a lap. Okay, that's the new standard for everybody.” Uh, no you wanted a coach who was gonna push you and challenge you and inspire you and make you run harder and faster and be stronger. And so that's what I'm looking for in a church, is a church that has a standard that's higher than me that can push me into that.

Uh, so I think the Anabaptist interpretation, on the hermeneutic side. Then it needs to be combined with the Pietistic concept of sanctification, or maybe a realistic sanctification, in the sense that we set a trajectory of Christ-likeness for ourselves without, and of biblical definitions, without that being a definition for where we are, rather a statement of the trajectory on which we’re on. And so, I mean, if you want to do that the other way around, there’s a group of people for you to be part of its called Mennonite. You come up with a list of these of the biblical teachings and these are what you want to do if you want to be a member, and I've appreciated the Church of the Brethren has said this is the standard which Christ calls us, come fellowship, be part of us, and we're growing and we're preaching in this direction. And to me, that seems to be the more Biblical pattern. The, the declaration of a destination is what happens that are at a baptism, not a litmus test of certain rights or acts that we follow. Um, so that, that leaves the challenge there, and it gives clarity for the direction in which we want to grow. But it isn't falsely manipulative outside the context of the power of the Holy Spirit, which we have to recognize that our salvation and our sanctification is not a method. It's not a system, it's an act of God. He's the one who wills and works within us to accomplish these things.

I think Stephen Dintaman’s critique of the Anabaptist of, of vendors, Anabaptist Vision is a good one there; that we need to recognize that we’re dealing with an interactive God here who empowers and equips and calls. Um, so, so that would be the fourth one, then, would be, that it's not a system, we rely heavily on the Spirit. And then the fifth one in my vision for the Church of the Brethren, and I've said this um, even on district stuff that I've been working on or other things is that the very likely, um, things will fall apart here. I, not to be pessimistic, but I have, have low confidence based off of what I've seen from the compelling vision process so far that that's gonna work out. I think where these issues will come as we try to restructure and different groups kind of band together. On the other side of that, um, is that I need to recognize that the vision of the Church of the Brethren that we… de… adopt collectively might be one that I don't fit in. And so I'm, I'm aware that in the things that I'm working on, that as I'm part of the communal hermeneutic that I might see, you know, it we're structuring a church, that my congregation and that I personally don't fit in, anymore. Um, but I need to have the confidence before Christ that what I'm doing is the right thing there.

And so, I want to step back. I think in the vision from the unity at all cost and prioritize truth, um, because it does matter what we believe, again it's in Dale Brown's book where he's talking about, you know, the student who comes into Bethany and leaves and said, “You know, you could be Brethren and believe anything you want.” Uh, and he isn't totally impressed by that ‘cause, there are things we believe that our distinctive, there is clarity there. And we need to have
those, um, things that we say, “No, these are true for us. The body has spoken on this. We've collectively discerned this, and this is the direction we're going.”

So those are just some initial thoughts there that I think aren't novel. They’re recapturing, um, things from our past without looking backwards. This isn't retrospective. It's not retrograde. The kingdom is advancing, is moving forward. What God has for the church is ahead of us. Um, moving backwards is not the way to go. But the underlying stability of the life of Christ and the things that he taught, I think, leads us to some of these core principles that, uh, even having some robust discussion around would be really helpful and life giving for the future of the church.

J: Well, thank you, Nate. I think that you're inviting that robust discussion and you're contributing to it. The Dunker Punks movement was initiated by young adults in the Church of the Brethren. The podcast was created, as I understand it, to provide a forum for young adults to voice and hear different perspectives and questions, hopes and dreams about spiritual issues in their lives and in the life of the church. As you begin to move toward concluding our discussion today, what would you like to share with our young adult Dunker Punk listeners?

N: Yeah, great. A few things just to, I think for us to keep in mind. Um, one of those is, is, and I kind of alluded to is that, uh, uh, the Kingdom is here and is coming is ahead of us. And it's not something that we're trying to dig out of the 1950s. Um, however, that being said, I think we need to, in our young energy respect the nostalgia of our elders and those who have gone before us and have lived in different eras and times. Um, and so there are there are, there are things that have been lost that, um, were good. For example. I've never been to Annual Conference and been like, “Man, that's a lot of fun. I wish I had brought all my family.” Um, you know, there was a time in which people went on vacation to Annual Conference because it was fun. Um, it's right for people to lament a change in atmosphere around that sort of thing, and maybe it shows up in music or different things. But the multigenerational interaction, if we can preserve, um, I think there are lots of things that we’re passionate about as young people that when I look at, you know, say something, maybe like the climate, ah, you know, it's easy to forget that my grandparents, your parents were protesting the use of DDT in Ecuador in the late sixties. Um, talks about, you know, sexual revolution. So anybody who was ministering through the sixties probably has some thoughts on that. We're talking about New Age, mysticism and spirituality. Um, my grandparents had 700 hippies spend the night with them one year, um, spread out over a year, discussing animism and all kinds of stuff. So we have some older voices in the church, and there things from our past that we can grow from, but we can't, we can't be caught up just in a mutual, kind of um, buming off of our ancestors for our spiritual passion and say, “Well, you know, I was part of the church who used to do this. And we have Dan West, so that makes me awesome.” Well, it's a couple steps removed there. Um, it's about what Christ is doing in our own lives. And so we need to balance and respect that. Um, and I think appreciate that there's nothing new under the sun, and that actually gives me a lot of optimism there, um, for the church moving forward. Does this say we don't have to totally reinvent the wheel? We do have some really good resources, even from within our own history that speak a lot to that.

But, um, let me, let me since we have a minute or two here, let, let me let me tell a story that I think illustrates what I'm trying to say here, Um and that is that, when I was a kid, my youngest brother Abe had sheep, took care of the sheep, fed the sheep, helped them move around, did all the sheepy, shepherd kind of things. I was not part of that. And so the sheep did not trust me. It was mayhem. If I tried to do anything with the sheep and Abe could go out and
say, “Come on, ladies, let's go” and they would all line up and follow him wherever. And that was great. Um, and as ah, the uh, young fence post philosopher, I would sit and watch: when the shepherd calls, the lambs followed the shepherd's voice. But the lambs didn't follow the shepherd because they knew the shepherd. The lambs were following the shepherd in the master's voice because they were following the old sheep who are following the master's voice. Um, and so they were following their mothers. They were following the elders who went before them in the direction of the master, um, without themselves actually knowing the master's voice. And I could never quite figure out when the moment was that it clicked for them that the master called and the youth responded because they knew the master's voice, not because they were following the old sheep ahead of them. Uh, and I think the exact same thing, um, can be a challenge for us if we've grown up in the church and in the Church of the Brethren, that we know the way of Jesus we know how to do the work camps and the disaster trips and NYC and what to be part of. And, um, and the question we have to push ourselves is, “Am I following an old sheep in front of me?” which could be totally helpful if you're just new and trying to figure this out. There's a real biblical model for that. But there comes a point in which we have to be able to discern the master's voice in the midst of the chaos around us, and I think that's where the spirit can move. And I think one of the hallmarks of the spirit is creativity, as we think about how to faithfully apply. What it… excuse me, …what it is that Christ is calling us to in that, so uh, if you're not sure where you're headed, get an old sheep. But don't get comfortable stuck behind the old sheep. Um, if you can, if you can balance that out well. But let's make sure that we aren't just bumming off of our elders’ experience. We have to understand what motivated them to do the things that we’re proud of in our church history. Um, but we can't totally be confined by that going forward.

And so I think uh, that's a, a good caution for me. Speaking to myself here, is to really deeply appreciate the multi-generational interaction we have, the collective wisdom. I mean, if you're in a room with 20 people who have been studying Scripture for 20 years, you have 400 years of biblical, (laugh) study in that room. How do we capitalize on that as young people and squeeze all of that out there to see what are the stabilizing and core principles of a, a life well lived for Christ. But then maybe what are the new things that we can take as far as the application of those to our time in our culture moving forward. And I think there's ah, uh, a uh, a ton of fertile soil there for, for generating great things, um, for the future of our church.

[Background music begins]

J: Thank you for sharing your thoughts, stories, vision and faith with us today. I also want to take a moment to thank Dr. Travis Garrison and the University of Central Missouri studio for facilitating the audio recording of our visit this evening. And um, for you, Nate doing some of the recording on your end in West Virginia. I wanna offer a word of thanks to the Warrensburg Church of the Brethren for funding our session and to the Dunker Punks podcast team for providing us with this opportunity. Nate, would you be willing to wrap up our conversation by offering a prayer?

N: Absolutely. Father, I give you thanks for another day of life. And I know that you have each of us, the speakers here and those who will be listening to it on whatever day they listen to it. You've given us life for a purpose that we would glorify you with it and be good to our neighbors and to steward well the blessings that you've given us in the way of Christ. And we thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for the fact that you gave yourself to redeem us from all
wickedness and to purify for yourself of people that are your very own, eager to do what is good. We ask that by the power girl we spirit you would make these things known to us that you guide and direct us and give us the ability to hear your voice and to follow you well, and that in doing so, we would be a group of people who would bring glory to you with our lives, even our thoughts and certainly our actions. And I pray this in Jesus name by the Spirit, Amen.

J: Amen.

John 10 says, “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he was brought out his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice, but they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from a stranger because they do not recognize that stranger's voice.” In Jesus’ time, it was common for the shepherds of different blocks to keep their sheep together in common pens at night for safe keeping. But that posed a problem for the shepherds when the morning came. How do you sort your sheep back out when the sun rises? After all, they look pretty similar, and they're kind of notorious for following whatever is in front of them. And we all know the dangers and the follies of counting sheep. But the solution was simple. The sheep knew the sound of their shepherd's voice. All the shepherds had to do was call out to them and the correct sheep would know to follow, and the rest wouldn't think anything of it. Maybe they'd even run away at the strange voice. It was a way of keeping the flock whole but keeping the sheep safe. Sheep knew to whom they belonged, and they knew who to stay away from. Be it another shepherd or be it a thief, sneaking in over the side of the pen to steal some of them away.

In the scripture, Jesus identifies both as the shepherd whose voice draws us in with the comforting and familiar sound with which only his voice could strike our ears. But Jesus also identifies as the gate of the pen, through which the sheep may exit and enter passage and through which the legitimate teachers and safe keepers and other shepherds come to tend to us. Nathan adds a wonderful wrinkle to that classic scripture. The seasoned sheep of the flock have come to know the shepherd's voice over time, but the lambs of the flock aren't born with an innate knowledge of their shepherd. What they're born with is an instinct to trust their mothers, and the natural desire to know and follow the adult sheep around them who know the lay of the land and understand, through experience, who to trust and who to stay away from. At some point, we have to become the seasoned sheep, the ones at the front of the flock who know the sound of the shepherd’s voice and follow it to safety. We have to be the ones with a firm sense of the trajectory on which our baptism has set us. We have to be the ones who draw from Scripture the courage of conviction, the certainty of sorting out our shepherd's voice from all the other influences that may call us with harsher tones where the thieves that would sneak it over the side of the gate to steal us in the night.

But, we ought also to have the humility to recognize that that certainty comes with a lifetime of training and experience, that that comfort and faith comes from having trodden in the steps of our ancestors and the elders of our church family. Sometimes it's okay to be that lamb that finds certainty not in the disembodied voice of the shepherd ringing above the flock, but from the sheep right beside us for right in front of us knows the way on who wishes for our safety.

I am grateful to Nathan and Jerry for coming together to speak a little bit about Nathan's career and his perspective on our little church that has a whole lot offer to the world. It is
inspiring to hear from a young adult who is doing great things, who has a platform to speak to people around the world about our remarkable shepherd, and the great pastures that await us if we follow his warm and loving voice. I thank Nathan, for taking the time to share his wisdom, his hopes, and his caution. And I think, Jerry, for making space for Nathan to speak, and I thank you Dunker Punks for listening. We'll see you again with another episode in two weeks.

The Dunker Punks podcast is produced by a team of sheep and lambs, following The Shepherd's Voice and following one another. This episode was created by Jerry Crouse and interviewed Nathan Rittenhouse. I am your host Emmett Witcovsky-Eldred, Jacob Crouse edits the show and created our music. Kerrick van Asselt creates graphics for the show on social media. Dan (transcription note: Dean) Feasenhiiser transcribes our episodes. Suzanne Lay manages production, Arlington Church of the Brethren hosts and sponsors the show. And On Earth Peace provides ongoing outreach and production support. You can find all of our archives and previous episodes on iTunes or online at Arlington dot org slash DPP (Arlington.org/dpp). Connect with the show on social media by searching @DunkerPunksPod or you can contact us by email by emailing us at DPP @ Arlington COB dot org (dpp@arlingtoncob.org). We thank you again for listening, and please tune in for our next episode, which comes out in two weeks.