

Introduction: Welcome to Engage 360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life-changing truth of scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Hello again friends, you have reached Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. We're glad you're with us. My name is Don Payne, and this week we are going to tackle a tough topic that is often very little addressed, maybe even very little recognized. Let me set it up this way. It's not uncommon for individuals in this world. We inhabit to be stuck in situations that have conflicting values of great consequence, and to be forced to make decisions sometimes have life altering significance. And then live with the, the dilemma, the what-ifs the coulda, shoulda, woulda dimensions of those decisions that can haunt a person for a lifetime. Very recently, somewhat recently, these dilemmas have been captured in the phrase moral injury. We have with us as our guests this week, Brandon Young, Brandon, welcome to the podcast.

Brandon Young: Thanks for having me. Don

Dr. Don Payne: Brandon is a current student, had Denver Seminary, but is also a former army ranger who currently co-leads a group called Applied Leadership Partners with your partner Blaine Smith. Blaine himself as a former green beret. Their mission, if I can quote their website is to guide leaders to apply effective and sustainable leadership practices that build closely knit high-performing teams to excel in a complex world. Brandon is co-author of the Enriched Life Scale, which is used by the department of defense. And he personally has assessed, mentored and trained over a thousand Rangers and served himself I believe four rotations in Afghanistan. Is that correct?

Brandon Young: That's correct.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, Brandon. Not only welcome, but thanks. Thanks for serving all of us so well and for so long Brandon has agreed to be with us because he is currently giving a lot of attention to this category, this very troublesome category, we call moral injury. So, to launch this, Brandon, let's try to define this, this term or that I called it a phrase or a clause moral injury. What do we mean by that term? And how did we come by it?

Brandon Young: Yeah. So when we say moral injury, there's kind of a couple of layers to this or categories that we're talking about. This could be the injury upon, you know, the soul of an individual as related to trauma that they have experienced. This could be the kind of injury on somebody's soul because they have been put in a position where they have two deeply held values or ethics that must be chosen between. And you know, when you're in the stage of choosing between those moral values or those ethics, and you're confronted with two basically poor choices, because both of those choices in some way, conflict with your morals that is another way that moral injury can occur. And then another way that it can occur is when others, maybe who you are related to, or who have some measure of authority or control over you do things that are not keeping with

either the state of ethic or morals are. And the individual is now left in a place where they cannot trust others. Whereas in the previous circumstance they're left in a place where they don't know if they can trust themselves.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Now, how did you come into this kind of work? I know your experience in the army is related to this, but it, from what I understand moral, the category of moral injury has come to the surface, even as a field of research, largely with regard to combat veterans and some of the really gut wrenching choices that combat veterans are called upon to make in the middle of combat. How did you get into this?

Brandon Young: Yeah, so in 2014, so I had been out of the army for about five years at this point in time, you know, was a sales director for a large medical diagnostics company and was making this great money. And I had just prior to that, about two years prior, given my life to Christ, and I felt like I'm not where I'm supposed to be anymore. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. And right when I decided that it's about time, that I take a look elsewhere Blaine Smith, who is now my partner at Applied Leadership Partners at the time was the executive director of an organization called team red, white and blue. Team, red, white, and blue was helping hundreds of thousands of veterans reconnect to their communities through physical and social activity. And focusing on this idea of enriching lives. So Blaine says, Hey, what do you think about joining us? And I say, I have absolutely no experience in non-profit fundraising. And he says, we think you're going to be okay. And I took a jump and I joined him at team red, white, and blue. And what we were doing is we started to define what does this enrichment actually mean? Right?

And we came up with this enrichment equation, which was health, people, and purpose. So in order for somebody to have a rich life, they need to have these elements, right? Physical, mental health, spiritual health, they need to have sense of purpose. They need to have authentic relationships, people they can count on and sense of engaged citizenship. And what happened was, is we did all these events all over the country, right? So for the next four years, I was with, you know, Blaine and I were at team red, white, and blue. It was kind of an upstart when we started. And then it turned into 212 locations, 150,000 veterans. And as we were getting into these themes, what we started to realize is that, you know, look, mental health is critical, right? There's post-traumatic stress disorder that has its own set of symptomology. That becomes very difficult to actually live. That's oftentimes exacerbated by traumatic brain injuries. Oftentimes that's even exacerbated more by sleep apnea and all of these things are happening. And what we came to find out is that the more and more that we would sit with veterans and talk to them the more and more you'd take them out on a run, or you do yoga.

And we would be side by side, you know, doing something in the conversation would start these themes that could not be explained by the psychological paradigm that we were operating under the PTSDs, the TBIs, all these things kept emerging. Like survivor's guilt. I feel so guilty, you know, that my buddy

died and I didn't, or I feel guilty that I didn't pull the trigger in this situation. And I don't know what that led to all of these themes of guilt and shame started to surface. And we really started to take a more keen interest on that. And we worked with organizations that are out there like Headstrong, you know, which, you know, originally started out as some research stuff, done at a Columbia University where they really started to talk about what's going on here at the moral level. And so that's where I first became familiar with it. And then what I found on is that over the summer as I was taking pastoral care and counseling with Chaplain Eva Bleaker. We also had a lot of lectures by Dr. Jan McCormick who is very well known in the military chaplaincy circles. She probably wouldn't want me to say this, but I always tell people, she basically wrote the book on military chaplaincy.

Dr. Don Payne: So in fact, she did write the book on that.

Brandon Young: Right. So we were getting all of these lectures over the summer and just to kind of bring it forward to where we are today. And meanwhile, my son was in US Army, basic training. The war in Afghanistan was drawing down, a lot of my friends, you know, fellow comrades were starting to reach out and I'm reaching out, you see a lot of chatter that's out there, you know, and this hurt that is lying underneath the surface is just kind of coming up and out. And, you know, we were confronted with it. And in that time also, we had a lot of lectures with Dr. McCormick teaching us all about moral injury.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm glad you mentioned that because I actually have a definition. I think this may be her published definition of moral injury. She calls it the injury or wound to the soul experienced as a result of a traumatic event, a disruption in an individual's confidence and expectations about his or her own moral behavior, or other's capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner. Or the injury or wound in the soul that results when two deeply held ethics or beliefs collide and must result in choosing one ethic or belief over the other. That really captures for me a lot of life circumstance that are involved in, in positions of influence. It just from a leadership perspective it's been clear to me for a long time that leaders are often called upon to make decisions from a range of menu options if you will. All of which are bad, including doing nothing right.

Brandon Young: Which is a decision.

Dr. Don Payne: Which is a decision. And anything you do given the conflicting variables involved in these decisions is going to somehow either hurt somebody or make you look bad in somebody else's eyes or leave you with the realization that, to some extent you did something that was far less than ideal. I mean, to be euphemistic about it. And of course this has become very acute in military combat experience, and it sort of spreads out to many life circumstances.

Brandon Young: Yeah, absolutely. And the thing that you just said that I think is important than to pick up on is and when you make those decisions between a host of poor choices and you know that someone's going to be hurt no matter which way

you go. What then do you do with your shame for hurting somebody else? And oftentimes we cover it up, we run from it, we hide from it. We want nothing to do with it. And it turns into this, this demon lying in the dark that nobody wants to talk about because you can stack a whole lot of deception around what happened instead of just facing, you know, confronting actually the hard choice that you had to make and why you chose to make that choice.

Dr. Don Payne:

You know, it's interesting that of all of the ways in which we might try to assuage that sense of guilt or shame, few of them ever turn out to be very effective. And I suppose we all may live with this in one way or another at various levels, I suppose, even in an example like, well, I had no choice, right. Or I did the best I could do, you would think that that might give a person a certain measure of comfort, but it still recycles.

Brandon Young:

Absolutely. I mean, you would, you would hope, but you know, the question is, do we live in a culture that accepts you know, do we live in a forgiving culture? I would say, no, we live in a pretty unforgiving culture. Right. And so, you know, if there's no ability for engagement and forgiveness to occur, statements, like I made the best decision that I could with the information that I had at the point in time. That's true, but it doesn't help because if, if it's going to be bumped up against yeah. But, you hurt me, you know, you fill in the blank, however you want to answer that statement. Right. And I can't, how could I ever forgive you for what you did to me? And how could I forgive myself? Right. That's another thing that, you know, the moral injury I was reading you know, I was really confronted with this early in my family, you know, in many ways, the story of my family is the story of my service. They're so commingled, you know, in the, in the military. And for me, you know, when, when the towers fell on 9/11, I was already a squad leader in the second ranger battalion. So I was a staff Sergeant. So I was in control of a nine man ranger assault squad, right? Special operations unit, worldwide deployable within 18 hours.

Okay. And I had been there for four years Kelly, who would become my wife, who is my wife now, and I had been engaged to be married. Her mother had cancer. She had had chemotherapy on the 10th of September on the 11th of September, which was her birthday. She sat there watching the towers burn on television, you know, and she asked me, are you going to get involved in this? I said, yes. And then shortly thereafter, she went on hospice care. She went home on September 17th. She had a day of clarity. We called the justice of the peace over, got married. Cause Kelly and I were supposed to get married in December. Judy died two days later and I deployed about six days later for my first trip. So I'm in Jordan now and I have about 30 days and I call home after 30 days. And Kelly says, I'm pregnant. So I'm like, of course you are. Fast forward, nine months later. I'm listening to my son, get born from an Iridium satellite phone in Bagram, airbase, Afghanistan, while Kelly is delivering Jaden in Seattle Washington. And if you back up a couple of months prior to that, for me, where a lot of this started to really fester is I was in a position where I had two families that I had to choose between.

Kelly, my family, my new family, and my ranger family, and I had grown up, my dad had taken off on us when I was 11 years old. And so, you know, I never, I never wanted to be absent as a dad. And that's the first thing that I was. But the truth is I chose that, you know, the truth is, is that it didn't, it wasn't, but a 15 second conversation between my platoon Sergeant and me in the hallway, you know, we're ramping up and we're going, yes, I know, you know, we need you. Yep. I'll be there. And I lied about it. And I went home and told Kelly, they're sending me to Afghanistan with the unit. I have no choice in this. It doesn't matter what I say. And that may very well have been true, but it doesn't actually matter because the truth is I was going to be damned if I wasn't going to go to war with my Rangers, that's what I had been trained to do. That's what I was prepared to do. That's all I ever wanted to be, was a soldier. And they're in starts the roots of this moral injury, you know, inside of me. I had two families to love and care for one family, moms just passed away. Pregnant. Dad is not present because mom is gone and now, you know, she's hurting, husband's gone in the war. The other family, I'm a leader. I'm responsible for these Rangers. You know, it's on me, I'm 23 years old. And that was the situation that I was confronted with. I was 23 years old and that's a situation I was confronted with.

Dr. Don Payne:

Yeah. Yeah. And that there no easy moral calculus to work on that kind of a situation to simply make it go away. And one of the reasons that I think we, we need to be paying attention to this, Brandon is that in Christian environments like ours, where we have a very, very high regard for divine revelation, authoritative revelation, moral absolutes. You know, values that theologically, we hold deeply and dearly that that seems to bring with it, this sort of sidecar, if I will, if I may. This sidecar assumption that we ought always to be able to choose from clean options, right and wrong, and you simply do the right thing. Now, of course, we can put some, I'm going to be just bluntly, honest here, we can put some nifty theological language to this. Like, well, of course, under the Spirit's guidance or in keeping with the word of God, now all of those are true. And as we start to navigate the, the weeds, the sometimes torturous weeds of life's brokenness, we're just rather bluntly confronted with the reality that many of the decisions we're called on to make at a lot of different levels are not clean options. They're dirty options. Or they're at least mixed and jumbled. Full of trade-offs. Yeah. Full of trade-offs. And that's why, even though this, this conversation is maybe in its most acute form with combat veterans, it kind of spreads out into all areas of life for people who are making decisions about all kinds of things. On a daily basis.

Brandon Young:

Absolutely. I mean, and even, even though it is, you know, the acuity of let's call it where we are right here. Right now, it is September 13th, 2021. 2 days ago, we had the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Right. We just exited Afghanistan, you know, with all the stuff that happened there, August 31st and yes, it's acute, you know, we're looking at moral injury and it's timely because it has, you know, elevated to the surface of the consciousness of a lot of the veterans, which frankly only represents less than 1% of the population of Americans actually served in Afghanistan or Iraq over the last 20 years. Right. But I think what we

know as followers of Jesus is that when we, when we dig into scripture and we can see these illustrations, you know, whether it be you know, you and I were talking earlier, Rahab and the spies, or whether it be you know, the parable of the talents, these are windows that can be opened up that expose eternal truths. So I think that we're looking at moral injury through the lens of combat veterans right now, and more acutely through the lens of 20 year war in Afghanistan. But the reality of it is the other 99% of people in American culture who didn't to Afghanistan probably have some feels around Afghanistan, around the war.

And probably also have a lot of fields and are confronted day to day with different decisions that feel like I got to make a choice between a bunch of bad choices here. And so I think what my hope is that this is an opportunity, you know, for us to, to raise this to the surface, because I mean, take a look around us right now. You know, we have a cultural moment right now where I think the injuriousness of the way that we are living is felt writ large, you know, talk about moral injury. We live in a culture right now that has embraced relativism. You mentioned moral absolute earlier, you know, just a few moments ago in the conversation. The fact of the matter is, is that whether you're here or whether you're in Afghanistan, which I can attest to, because I've done both, people basically know what right and wrong is. And we have this moment where, you know, we're confronted with all this relativism and we're trying to figure it out and that's coming, you know, banging up against what we feel inside our heart. That sense of, I just don't feel right about this.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Relativism, pure, true relativism. That's an oxymoron, isn't it? True relativism. But pure relativism would actually give one. And out on all of this, there would be, there would be no real basis for the kind of guilt and shame we're talking about in a relativistic world, but intrinsically we know.

Brandon Young: Right. Because, and I love that you said that because the reality of it is then why is there so much shame and guilt in the world, right. Yeah. If it's all, if everything goes, what's the problem. And that's what I see, you know, unfolding all the time, you know, in front of us. I think we all see it.

Dr. Don Payne: Because we have that innate sense that there, there, there is such a thing as good and bad, there is right and wrong. Even though in, you know, the brokenness, the almost incalculable brokenness of the world, we inhabit, those things can get so tangled that it's hard to discriminate sometimes, but they exist. Right. They're things, they're real things. And so I love the way you put this Brandon that, that combat veterans are really kind of a, a window of sorts into something that's always been there and that everybody lives with in some way that that's just sort of a diagnostic window, because it is a very acute form of it. Let's talk a little bit about what this maybe helps us see that has not previously been as visible to us, even if it's been there. What is looking through this diagnostic window of moral? What kinds of things is this helping us pay attention to now with the broader populous with everybody?

Brandon Young:

Yeah. I think what it can help us pay attention to is honestly how much hurt is actually out there that needs, you know, to be loved. Right. One of the biggest things that, one of the biggest verses in things that Jesus said in his life has really stuck with me during this time, which has come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I think what this time gives us, the opportunity to do is take a look around us to see who are weary and heavy Laden right now and needs rest. And, and you think about, what does that mean? What does it mean to be, you know, weary and burdened, right? We carry the burdens of everyday life. We carry the burdens of our decisions and those leadership moments. We carry the burden of, you know, how did I hurt one person, whether I was, you know, trying my best to do the right thing, we carry all these things. You don't have to be, you know, a soldier standing at the gates of [inaudible] international airport in Kabul to know what that feels like. And to know that you're carrying something, right. I mean, I think about my mother, single mother of three, working four jobs, you know, to keep three kids alive, that's a host of bad options. Can I be there for my kids or can I work so that my kids can stay in their community, well I have to work to stay in the community?

So now I can't be there for my kids. I mean, how many single parents out there are holding this kind of, you know, weariness and this burden? And I think that what it allows us to do, you know, just with that small example, there, again, these are all, you know, examples, they're all illustrations of the human condition living, you know, in a corrupted creation, right. But what are we doing about it? What are we going to actually do about it? Right. And we live in a world where we all carry this little pot thing in our pocket, and it's really easy and I'm holding up an iPhone right now. And it's really easy to run away to hide, you know, to or, you know, to be a, you know, social media warrior and lob comments, you know, faceless comments out at people. You know, you can see it all the time. People arguing at each other, there's so much hurt occurring right now, all across the board. And so to me, what I think it says is, you know, if we take it through the veteran example, okay. Just a small example. Yeah. 1% of the American population right now, this moment that came and went in the news cycle, you know, back on August 31st, because the reality of it is that's what happened? You know, it, it came back up on the new cycle towards mid August and right after we withdrew it's now on the backend, we've already moved on it's September 13th and we've already moved on.

Dr. Don Payne:

We're not thinking about it that much anymore. Right?

Brandon Young:

No, but the reality of it is people like me have been thinking about it for 20 years every day. You know, I talked to a friend of mine you know, a short while ago who was telling me, you know, about a decision that he made in combat, where he did not pull the trigger. And he could have, but he didn't because he had a host of two bad choices. Do I treat this casualty that we just took? Or do I engage this person who could be an enemy? I'm not sure he could have been the one that clacked off, you know, the, the improvised, explosive device. He made a split decision. He chose to treat the casualty, right. This person has

thought about that moment, at least three times a week for the last 12 years. And so that's what I think, that's what I think the opportunity for us to do is right now. So you take that as a small example right now, he and I have sat down, we've talked through some things, you know, and, and, you know, we come alongside, you know, people like this and, and show them love. And, you know, maybe I, maybe I have a different perspective. I do have a different perspective on that.

And we talked through that because we know that in split-second decisions, we're trained to look at hands and see if there's anything there. It wasn't there, nothing was there. Okay. So you probably made the right choice actually. And that validation, right? We need to be validated in some ways or affirmed for making a difficult choice between two poor options by people who love us and who come alongside us. And so what does that tell us right now about what we can do with moral injury in the greater scheme of things, how many people are hiding right now in plain sight, managing their reputations, because that's what we're trained to do with social media. We're rewarded for it. Just make sure you get as many followers and likes as you possibly can. Yeah. You know, let me post my perfect moment of my life. Now, I'm not going to show you the fact that I had a meltdown with my kids. You know, it's all reputation management. And, you know, when we think about the hurts that we accrue through our lives, and then how we try to cover it, that's a brand of deception, but we have to cover it because we have to be perfect. Right? I mean, we see that all over the place. We see it in our churches and we see it out in the community. Nobody's immune to this.

You know, my wife and I serve at a marriage ministry called re-engage at Mission Hills Church right here in Littleton. And one of the things that we always encourage people is you can stop managing your reputation here. We're going to come alongside you. You know, it's going to be God's spirit. God's people. God's word we're going to dig in is going to be focused around Christ. We're going to ask you to stay in your circle and you need to speak about yourself, not what your spouse did, because by the way, like 75% of the people are coming in and saying, like, fix my spouse. Right. And we're going to stay committed to this. And we walk through this stuff and the amazing thing, and the power that happens when people stop managing their reputation and they actually tell the truth, you know, this is what happened and ask for forgiveness. I'm sorry, will you please forgive me? Instead of the deception and hiding your now taking, you know, your heart and putting it, laying it at the foot of the other person and asking them to forgive you, you've just put the control in their hands. That's the kind of stuff that I think we can be looking at and doing, regardless of the circumstance is stop managing our reputation, we all have these personas. I can't have a relationship with a persona. I can have a relationship with a personality with a person. I can't have one with a persona.

Dr. Don Payne:

Yeah. You know, as I was preparing for our conversation, Brandon, it was going through my mind. What does this illuminate for us theologically and pastorally? And you've already hit on a number of those things. And it occurred to me, or



the question rose in my mind, whether in broad strokes, many Christians may have a sort of formal theology of the fallenness of the created order of the fallenness of human persons. But we may not come to grips. We may not have come to grips with the depths of that fallenness, the depths of the brokenness, that constitutes even the situations in which we have to make these gut wrenching choices that create moral injury. Yeah. now that's not merely to underscore how bad things are. That's really to highlight the, that's a backdrop against which Christ's redemption is then highlighted as perhaps showing us that we need redemption even more deeply than we know we need redemption. We need reconciliation of even more things than we maybe thought we needed reconciliation. And it makes me wonder as I've wrestled with this kind of thing, now that the phrase moral injury is a relatively new thing to me. But what we're talking about is been something I've wrestled with for decades.

And it's to me that when we make these decisions and we do the best thing we know to do at the time, and maybe have a range of bad options we're choosing from, we choose the one that is the best option or the least bad option. And that that's affirm to us, and that that is meaningful and helpful. I wonder whether we still need, and are invited to offer ourselves up to the Lord for forgiveness, even for things that were inevitable for us to receive his forgiveness and his grace and his reconciliation even when we did the best that we could do, because we showed up into a situation where we were forced maybe to do evil. You know, again, even if that was the best thing we could do. We did somebody wrong. We hurt somebody. And Lord God have mercy on me. Right. Cause I'm a sinner, you know, I mean, that, that just speaks to the, the vastness of the dimensions of our need for grace and mercy and forgiveness and reconciliation, and the vastness of the offer of that, it's there.

Brandon Young: Yeah. I totally agree with you, you know, the idea of this calculus that we make between, you know, poor choices and I'm going to choose the least poor. Right. The, the, do that least amount of damage. Right. That's great. And it's a great philosophical lens by which to look at, you know, a decision, but it still doesn't change the fact that you may be carrying that hurt.

Dr. Don Payne: I still did what I did.

Brandon Young: I still did what I did. Right. Yeah. I still left my wife to deliver and carry a baby on her own. Now I still had duty, you know, to my country and to my men, but I still did that. And it's still, you know, hurt. And so what do we do with that? The other thing that, you know, that I think is important for us to look at is, you know, okay, so, so what, right? So we feel bad. So what? What do we do with that? Reconciliation? You know, the word that you use reconciliation, you know, which is, I mean, that is that's Christ. I am, I'm coming for you. I am coming for you. Right. And the offers here, if you will just, you know, accept it, if you will lose your life, you will gain it. Right. The point of, I think a lot of, what can we do right now with this is, I think it's aimed towards that reconciliation. I think it's aimed towards, can we start unpacking some of this stuff in a way and ask God

to help us so that we can get through this together? Not apart. Like how do we actually do that?

Dr. Don Payne: That's really where I'd like us to kind of close the loop on this, Brandon and you've already pointed us in some of these directions. But if you, if you had to sit before pastors, other ministry leaders, or friends who have friends who they suspect may be managing the persona, what are the two or three most important things you would tell them about how to spot this? Or how to move into the lives, move alongside the lives of people who have been morally injured?

Brandon Young: A couple things. So, first of all, I think belonging is the start. Belonging is a powerful lubricant to begin the relationship. And what I mean, when I say that is, you know, you're in your, on the team, I don't know your story. I don't know what you did. I don't know what happened over in the war or what happened in your marriage or anything like that. But here, here you belong here. You are loved. We're not going to do it perfectly, but we're going to do it in earnest. So I think number one is belonging, right? Number two is trust. And there is no shortcut to relationship that leads to trust. Period. There's just no shortcut. You know, my partner Blaine, and I talk a lot about a model that we think about for trust and we call it care. It's a silly little acronym. We're both army dudes, acronyms are a thing, right? We roll deep on acronyms, but it's a way to build trust. And it stands for candor, authenticity, reliability, and empathy. If you can operate with somebody with candor, right. A proactive brand of honesty, candor is not a license to be a jerk, right? Well, that's just, I'm a candid person. No, it's a proactive brand of honesty, right. That kind of eliminates the deception we talked about, right. Authenticity, be who you are and let other people be who they are, wherever they are. It goes back to that belonging piece, reliability, right? Say what you mean and do what you say. And then empathy, understanding that, look, my partner says this all the time and I really love it when he says this. He always says, you know, people say all the time, like I can never imagine how that feels. And he says, try it, try to imagine, try to imagine how that person feels. Try to imagine how that single parent feels right now. You know, try to imagine how that veteran feels right now. Just try.

Dr. Don Payne: You'll get further than you would if he didn't try.

Brandon Young: Yeah, exactly. So the belonging and the trust, you know, are two big things. And then I would just say, the last thing is show up. That's what needs to happen right now. If you look, if you're a pastor you know, if you're a member of a church if you're not one of those people and you're listening to this and you're a person that's just out there in the community and you know, a veteran, I'm going to talk specifically about veterans right now. Okay. Show up, reach out. And what that looks like is this Don, Hey, do you want to grab a cup of coffee? Hey, you want to go for a walk? Want to go for a run? Hey, I'm going to go for a hike. You want to come with me? Be present and welcome them into what you're doing, or just come alongside them. And don't feel the burden to have the answers because you don't, and we're not expecting you to. I think that's

what we can all do is, you know, there's not a single veteran out there that expects a civilian to just all of a sudden, you know, illuminate, you know, make meaning out of their entire war experience. That's not realistic, frankly, Don, there's not a whole lot of veterans that are expecting another veteran to help them unpack, meaning, you know, that's happening at the soul level, right? Every one of us has got to take that journey where we ask those hard questions. And if you're a veteran listening to this, ask those hard questions. If you're a human being and you have a heartbeat and ears listening to this, ask yourself questions, what is it that you're ashamed of?

What is it that you don't want anyone to ever find out about? I never wanted anyone to know that I, the guy who was left as an 11 year old boy left my baby boy, before I even got the chance to, you know, see him enter into the world. I was ashamed of that. I even wrote it in my journal from Afghanistan. I am so ashamed right now, right? Nobody but Christ can help me, you know, men that wound nobody, but God can help be the solve that puts that over, you know, that hole in my heart. And I've got to be willing to surrender that to God and stop trying to do it on my own and manage my reputation and be perfect, you know, all that kind of stuff. And so my encouragement is come alongside people show up and be present, be their friend, just be there for them. And you just might be blown away by what happens. Final kind of thought on that. Dawn is this weekend. I had the chance to run with the Colorado Run for the Fallen, right? So what we did, they did 115 miles. My wife and my son, and a good friend of mine and me joined in on Sunday, we ran the last 35 miles with them. Not all of them just want to be clear. I only ran 16 of them, but my son crushed it. He put in 25 miles, no joke. And so we're in the RV, you know, the support van and there's a guy there and he's a civilian and he and I are talking to each other.

And you know, I just tell him, like, I just asked him like, hey, I said, I really appreciate you being here, you know, with all of us, as we honor all these fallen service members, why do you do it? Why are you here? And he just said, I appreciate the service. I appreciate the service that anybody does. You know, he said like, I'm a meat cutter in a market, you know, like another buddy of mine is a meat cutter. And you know, he goes and serves his neighbor like he's serving. I appreciate anybody who has a heart, you know, to serve somebody else. And if I can just show up and be here with you guys and just make sure that you know that I see you, like, I don't know, maybe that'll be good enough. And I said to him, you know what, my favorite part of these kinds of events are. He said, what? I said, you civilians, who are showing up just to be with us because the truth is we've been holding this for 20 years. This is not just a flashbulb moment on the screen, you know, and on the news. And that's what I really want people to know who are not veterans or somehow connected to the military. You know, establishment, don't just move on from this, don't move on from this because you know what? This is a cultural moment for us. As a country, I reject any kind of commentary that says the last 20 year war in Afghanistan was meaningless. I reject that. You go stand in front of a gold star mom, and you tell her that this was meaningless.

You know, you come alongside people like me who have so many friends who I've lost and tell me it was meaningless. It wasn't meaningless. That's not true. If you find this meaningless, you're not doing the work. You need to have the courage to not run and look away from whatever you're holding related to this war, whatever shame or pain that you're holding, right? Because, oh, by the way, the military just represent, is it just representation of the United States? That's all we are. We're a reflection of our country. And 93% of the American population has never served in the military. That's okay. You don't have to serve in the military. You're serving in plenty other places you're serving. You've been serving your whole life. You've been serving Christ your whole life. Don. There's plenty of ways to serve. Right. And 20 years we've got five presidential administrations that have had, you know, they're saying this, we have a whole country that has been in on the voting process and has been a part of this. If you find this meaningless, ask yourself this question, are you looking away? Are you looking away from, from your part that you played in this? And I don't say that to shame anybody. Cause I'm going to say it again. You're in, you belong. I'm with you, you're with me, right. I'm not perfect. You're not perfect. None of us are perfect. It's fine. I still love you. I don't care who you voted for. I don't care what your political ethos is. I love you, right? Challenge yourself to find meaning in this and do that by not looking away, but figuring out what just happened here?

Dr. Don Payne:

Brandon, you've taken us to places we need to think about for a long time. Thank you friend. Thanks for your service. Thanks for your insightful articulation of really, really tough matters that are ultimately going to point us back to the only source that can give us any, any genuine healing through redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for that.

Brandon Young:

Amen. You're welcome.

Friends, thanks for spending some time with us today. This week on Engage 360. As many of you will know, our mission statement is to train men and women to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of scripture. And I think our conversation today with Brandon Young has been a really good example of that. We're grateful for you spending time with us, and we'd love to hear from you. You can email us our addresses podcast at [denverseminary.edu](mailto:denverseminary.edu), and we'd love for you to check out our brand new website as well, just released last week. And we've got a fresh new look and lots of great resources there. It's at [Denverseminary.edu](http://Denverseminary.edu), thanks as always to Krista Ebert, our ever faithful and competent sound engineer for all the good work that she does. And we will look forward to talking to you again really soon. Take care of friends.