



# **GOOD FAITH** **READ ALONG**

*David French on Embracing  
Faithfulness over Effectiveness,  
The Dual State, and Your Sphere  
of Influence.*

A COMPANION GUIDE TO GOOD FAITH EPISODE 215

Something about our recent conversation with David French has clearly resonated—with you and with us.

We've heard from so many of you who shared the episode with friends, discussed it in small groups, or returned to it more than once. Thank you for that. When an episode travels this way, it's usually because it's helping people name something real.

David gives language to the two realities many of us feel we're living in right now—what he calls the dual state—and offers a framework for understanding our place within it. Not a list of instructions, but a way of seeing: how power operates, why chaos feels uneven, and what faithfulness might look like when clarity is hard to come by.

Because these ideas feel so important for this moment, we wanted to slow things down. This read-along is an invitation to walk back through David's ideas, expand upon them, and sit with a few guiding questions about discerning what faithfulness looks like where you are.

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# SO, WHAT IS THE 'DUAL STATE'?

David describes the 'Dual State' as 'the existence of parallel realities.' Taken from Ernst Fraenkel's *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship*, Frankel used the theory to describe the rise of Nazism in Germany. To be very clear: We are not Nazi Germany. We can see echos from Frankel's theory and Germany in the 1930's and 1940's, but in no way is this an exact parallel. So, what are the two realities?

## THE NORMATIVE STATE:

"The normative state is the world most of us live in—the world of ordinary legal rules, procedures, and precedents. It's what allows many of us to say, 'My life isn't different. My experience isn't different. Why would you say I live in an authoritarian country?' I can create a business. I can speak my mind. I can post whatever I want. None of this is impacting me. For most people, political changes don't seem to matter because they haven't seen sweeping legal, political, or cultural changes in their own lives."

## THE PREROGATIVE STATE:

"The prerogative state is like the tip of the spear. This is where you have arbitrary authority—where violence goes unchecked by legal guarantees. As Ernst Fraenkel said, the key is that the prerogative state doesn't immediately or completely overrun the normative state. Instead, an authoritarian figure creates a lawless zone that runs alongside the normative state. And that is so clearly what is happening right now."

# WHERE DO WE SEE THIS ECHO IN AMERICAN LIFE? RENEE GOOD.

David argues that in this present moment, *we live in a world where life feels normal for most people—unless you interact with power in a negative way.* Then you can enter the prerogative state: a zone of unrestrained authority.

This is where, as Christians, we can begin by admitting our fallenness. Many of us are deeply privileged and live primarily in the normative state. *From that place, it's easy to look only within our own experience and remain unaware of the full reality of the prerogative state.*

And while we should cultivate empathy and care without having to experience the prerogative state ourselves, we must acknowledge this truth: *the move from the normative state to the prerogative state can happen to any of us, at any time.* David points out that this is exactly what happened to Renee Good in Minneapolis:



*"I use the example of the Renee Good shooting because, when you watch the video, it's clear that she believed she was in the normative state. The interaction is calm and casual—the way most of us interact with law enforcement most of the time. She says, 'I'm not mad at you, dude.' Her spouse even says something like, 'We don't change our license plates—you'll see us again.'*

*But the officer was operating in the prerogative state—a state where he does what he wants. He violated basic police training practices, including getting in front of a car during a detention. The entire sequence violated best practices. And then, in the confusion the government itself created, she was shot and killed.*

*And this is what's happening more broadly right now: for large numbers of Americans, life still feels normal. But if you cross the administration—or interact with it in a negative way—you can quickly slide into that second state, where authority does what it wants, when it wants, to whom it wants. That is the prerogative state."*

# **YOUR LIFE MAY FEEL NORMAL, BUT THE PREROGATIVE STATE CAN QUICKLY EXPAND TO YOUR ZONE, TOO.**

**One of the most unsettling truths about living in a dual state is how easily we can move between its two realities. As power expands, what once felt distant can begin pressing into the very spaces where we live and work. David is clear about why this happens. The prerogative state does not remain contained.**

**The prerogative state is greedy and ambitious. It will always seek to grow, because when people enjoy impunity, they do not like limits.**

**DAVID FRENCH**

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:**

- **What state are you primarily living in right now? What state do other in your community live in?**
- **If you are living in the normative state, how might God be calling you to love, notice, or advocate for those who already live in the prerogative state?**
- **What would it look like for you to open your eyes more fully to the suffering around you—without becoming overwhelmed or falling into despair?**
- **Where might you be tempted to assume that “this could never happen to me”? What does that assumption reveal?**
- **How can awareness of the dual state deepen your empathy rather than harden you—or lead you to turn away?**

# SO, IS ANYTHING ACTUALLY DIFFERENT AFTER MINNESOTA?

It's understandable to wonder whether this moment will really lead to change. After so many catalytic weeks with little follow-through, hope can feel risky. But instead of asking what might shift nationally, David invites us to look closer—to the quieter changes happening in the lives of people around us. Real change rarely comes all at once. It happens a few people at a time—often when we're paying attention, and when we make room for others to change without fear or humiliation.

David describes these moments as off-ramps—small but meaningful opportunities for change that don't happen all at once:

**“A few people at a time are taking an off-ramp. Imagine driving out of a big city at rush hour—the roads are choked with cars. But at every exit, a few more peel off, until eventually the road begins to clear.”**

Many of us are exhausted from trying to persuade people we love. After years of high-stakes arguments, it's easy to become what After Party language would call a combatant—someone others no longer feel safe approaching with their questions or doubts.

A recent Saturday Night Live sketch captures this dynamic perfectly. A mom nervously tries to tell her kids she may have changed her mind about the current administration. Before she can finish, she begs them not to react—not to celebrate, not to say “we told you so.” But every small admission is met with exaggerated judgment. Eventually, overwhelmed and embarrassed, she backs out entirely: Fine—I take it back.

It's funny because it's familiar. Some version of this scene has played out in countless living rooms—or never happened at all, because the cost of changing one's mind felt too high.

**WATCH: 'MOM CONFESSION'**



# BE A SAFE PLACE WHEN SOMEONE TAKES THE OFF-RAMP

The question becomes: *are we a safe place for people to land when they begin to change their minds?* Even if we intend to respond with kindness in the moment, it's often the years of prior conversations that have already communicated whether we are someone others can trust. This is why starting with the how of politics—rather than just the what—matters so much.

Who in your family, friend group, or church community might be quietly looking for an off-ramp—someone they can talk to as they begin to reconsider what they once believed?

When someone takes the exit, they don't need another lecture—they need a place to pull over and catch their breath. *Be the parking lot they're relieved to find.* That kind of presence doesn't happen by accident; it's worth preparing for. When someone comes to you with a changing perspective, be ready—not with perfect answers, but with humility and grace.

## HERE ARE A FEW DISPOSITIONS WORTH HOLDING:

- **Acknowledge the courage it takes to speak up:** Recognize that it may be difficult for someone to come to you at all. Thank them for trusting you enough to share, and—where appropriate—ask forgiveness for any ways you may have reacted poorly to them in the past.
- **Name your own fallenness:** Be honest that you don't hold every correct opinion, and that you, too, have changed your mind—and will likely need to again.
- **Remember God's omniscience:** We rarely have 100% certainty, and we never will. God alone sees clearly and completely, and God is gracious with our limited understanding.
- **Extend grace before agreement:** Acknowledge why someone may have held the views they did, given their experiences, fears, or sources of information.
- **Practice open, patient dialogue:** Listen carefully. Respond thoughtfully. Love as you would want to be loved—especially if the roles were reversed.

# OKAY, BUT WHAT SHOULD I DO IN THIS MOMENT?

To be honest, dear Good Faith friend, we hear this question all the time: “Okay—but what do I do in this moment?” It’s an important question. And *it’s one we often try to outsource—to a favorite writer, influencer, politician, or podcast host.*

The voices you trust can help you think more clearly. They can offer wisdom and perspective. But they are not you. They don’t live where you live, work where you work, or know the people you know. They don’t share your particular callings or your specific spheres of influence.

David doesn’t offer a checklist in this episode. Instead, he offers something more enduring: frameworks for thinking faithfully about what your next move might be—right where you are. *Here’s a few frameworks to think through:*

## START FROM FAITHFULNESS, NOT EFFECTIVENESS

David names a tension many of us feel but struggle to articulate: “*Behind the question ‘What can I do?’ is often a deeper question: ‘What can I do that I know will work?’*”

As uncomfortable as it may be, that second question is the wrong one. We don’t know what will work. There is no guarantee that a donation, a protest, caring for a stranger, or a hard conversation with someone you love will lead to lasting change. That uncertainty is part of the moment we’re living in—and part of the tension we’re called to hold.

Do what you can do. *Pay attention to what’s happening in your city. Learn how local decisions are made. Discern whether you’re called to protest, advocate, give, or show up quietly and faithfully where you already are.* But do so without demanding certainty about the outcome. History reminds us that far more movements fail than succeed.

# START FROM FAITHFULNESS, NOT EFFECTIVENESS

This is hard. David is honest about why: *when we act and it doesn't work, we make ourselves vulnerable. We risk loss, disappointment, even harm. And yet, the Christian calling is not to guarantee success—it is to remain faithful.*

In choosing faithfulness over effectiveness, we join a long line of witnesses. As David reminds us, the founders didn't know their efforts would succeed. Rosa Parks didn't know. Dr. King didn't know.

It was risky. The outcome was uncertain. They were faithful anyway. Let's join them.

## WHAT WILL YOUR DESCENDANTS SAY YOU DID?

Have you ever asked what your family believed during moments we now see with painful clarity—slavery, Nazi Germany, or other defining political crises? History invites those questions. And often, we ask them with the benefit of hindsight and moral distance.

One day, your descendants will ask similar questions about you. Not just what you believed, but how you lived—what you risked, what you tolerated, and where you chose to stand. David suggests we turn that lens forward. Not as a demand or a checklist, but as a framework for discernment: live now in a way that will make sense later.

That doesn't mean doing everything, or doing the same thing as everyone else. It means acting with enough clarity and faithfulness that your life tells a coherent story—one your descendants can point to and say, this is where they stood.

# DISCERN FAITHFULNESS IN YOUR CONTEXT

As we consider what there might be for us to do in this moment—something our descendants could one day look back on with pride—the question quickly becomes more personal: *What might that look like for me?*

The answer, of course, will be different for each of us. We don't share the same gifts, talents, callings, or roles in the world. So, what are yours, and how might you use them?

David frames this as thinking about individual choices within individual situations. For him, that discernment is shaped by his vocation and platform. As he puts it: *“Could you imagine if my grandchildren grow up and ask, ‘What was he doing back then?’ And the answer is, ‘Well, he wrote some killer columns about NFL football and Stranger Things’? That would be a bit of a cop out.”*

Let's name reality: David French has far more public influence than most of us. So the *invitation here is not comparison, but reflection*. What is your day-to-day work, and how might it intersect with this moment? What capacity—time, attention, relationships—do you have that could be offered for others rather than kept to yourself? Who around you might you be able to engage, encourage, or support in a more thoughtful way?

The list could go on, but here are a few things to think about within your context and sphere of influence as you chart your way forward:



# FINAL THOUGHTS FOR YOU:

None of this is easy, clean, or quick. In days marked by tension, uncertainty, and real grief, we're invited to keep asking what faithfulness looks like right where we are—and to remember where our hope ultimately rests.

As David reminded us at the close of the podcast, faithfulness has never guaranteed immediate results. Many who opposed slavery and Jim Crow never saw the fruit of their labor, yet we honor their faithfulness because, over time, it made change possible.

Even when our efforts don't "work" in the short term, we are still part of a long story of imperfect faithfulness—one that sustains the church and helps sustain the world. May we take our place in that story with humility, perseverance, and hope.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Where do you feel most tired or discouraged right now—in the culture, in politics, or in relationships with people you love? What has made hope feel risky?
- The idea of "off-ramps" suggests that change often happens quietly and gradually. Where have you seen small shifts—in yourself or others—that you might have overlooked?
- Think about someone in your life who thinks differently than you do. What might it look like to stay attentive to them—not to persuade, but to make space for honest questions?
- David frames faithfulness as participation in a long story, not a guarantee of short-term results. How does that reframe success or failure for you?
- What would "imperfect faithfulness" look like for you in this season—one small step, posture, or practice you could take?
- As you look ahead, what helps you stay rooted in hope rather than urgency or despair?
- Where do you sense God inviting you to trust Him with outcomes?