

John Boyd. Ace fighter pilot. Real-world, cutting-edge aircraft designer. Teacher of the already elite. Ground-breaking strategist. Antagonistic military misfit who ultimately helped change that very military. Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer, captures his truly unique story engagingly and exquisitely.

Colonel Boyd was a complex, fault-ridden, yet still amazing man, someone who impacted multiple spheres that he was appointed to in unusual ways, several times while being a virtual outsider with regard to those spheres. This podcast episode is eleventh in a series on Boyd—go listen to the first ten!

But this very last episode on Boyd is really very different. That's because it's really about the efforts of Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer. You just heard a little blurb about Coram at the start of this episode that has always been included in my intro to the podcast episodes about Boyd. That's because the impact of John Boyd has been exponentially amplified to key audiences by Coram, who saw the value of telling a story very much worth telling. And that's why the title of this podcast is "Linking to the Past."

Here's the deal: what we think we know and rely upon about people and events and history, whether a century ago or just earlier today, can be framed by, say, a grandfather or an aunt telling a family story. Or a news reporter crafting some news on climate change. Or Martin Gilbert writing about Winston Churchill. Or a gossipy next-door neighbor whispering to us about the goings-on nearby. Or a documentary maker like the highly popular Ken Burns who has shaped millions of Americans' views of complex, uniquely-American topics like country music and baseball and the Civil War and national parks. And Burns has done that in all his films by intrinsically shaping by his choices of what is worthy to report on and what is not.

All these information providers collectively forge a vast kaleidoscope, a whirling mix of data, information, news, opinion, debate, preaching, teaching, fiction, nonfiction, slander, propaganda, truth, and deception. As for you and me, our chosen mix of these various sources work to shape our understanding, whether verbally or in books or podcasts or through TV broadcasts—you name it!

Robert Coram is a contributor to that vast kaleidoscope of options through his calling as a novelist and nonfiction author of more than a dozen books, and in one of those, he chose to chronicle the life of John Boyd. And, in my opinion, Coram did a whole lot of things wisely—he captured my close attention as a reader and he also made me want to pass on my take of critical parts of his telling of John Boyd's story.

In short, what Coram did was create some important *linking to the past*, a critical element of what I strive to do to be relevant and impactful in everything I do: from consulting to business and nonprofit executives, to teaching students at the university level, to passing key insights to my seminar-viewers and podcast listeners at whitestone.org, to my overall running the race of a life well-lived for Christ.

Now, in an earlier podcast in the Daniel series, I spoke to the other end of the spectrum, the reality of *linking to the future*. Daniel did exactly that in several ways, all empowered by the Holy Spirit: immediate interpretations of dreams and writings on a wall, for example, and certainly his detailed prophecies that have both been fulfilled and not yet completely fulfilled for the modern Bible reader. Talk about relevant! I encourage you to listen to that Daniel podcast where I spoke to our reality as believers ourselves linking to the future, especially regarding our witness of the gospel of the Kingdom of God—in every sphere we are called to. All said, we believers have the privilege of opportunities for linking to the future!

Now, let's gain some context for *linking to the past*. Hey, we know the ultimate, perfect linking to the past is found in the Bible. Let's start with accuracy: every word of the Scriptures God-breathed, all truth! But just as important, what God provides in the Bible is 100% God-selected for relevant publication. Second Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." So, from Adam and Eve to Abraham to Joshua to King David and Israel...from the prophets to Jesus and His Church...from the Gospel writers to Paul and Peter writing to believers, we find

that God is very big on linking us to the past for—you got it, our teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness! Whoa! And, of course, we find extraordinary insights come from these Scriptures—yes, insights about God the Father and His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit—but we also see the victories and faults and foibles of people and their families, of kingdoms and nations, of ascending institutions and failing institutions, of zealous religious groups. It's amazing: the rich, intertwined layers of revelation from the Bible are endless!

And then, of course, today we find ourselves in an era of an extraordinary mix of rapidly expanding knowledge and big-time events—new stuff, like technology and innovation and pandemics! When you have the Bible and you live in this era, well, then...just why do we need to bother linking to the past?

Well, that answer is simple and direct: the authentically relevant past indispensably informs the present and the future—again, starting with the Bible. But part of our mandate as citizens of the Kingdom of God is that we proclaim the gospel in the kingdoms of this world—in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our communities. So, to do that well, we must sign up for a never-ending quest for reality-based understandings of key parts of our society: the institutions, the governments, the businesses, the regulatory environments, the ever-changing, always-tangled web of culture.

Enter author Robert Coram. This writer is an engaging researcher who reveals a deep appreciation for key elements that inform his readers, keeping it enjoyable, with a highly satisfying focus on the unvarnished reality of complex events. So, what are Coram's elements of delivery? Superb stories. Great stories within those stories, each with a point made. Military traditions. Relevant technical issues that undergird and enliven the narrative. Colorful personalities and backgrounds of the significant players in the narratives. Astute capture of meaningful human achievement, ambition, failings, and tragedies. Harmful bureaucracies. Power wielded. Authority thwarted. Real risks for real stakes—for the country, for military service branches like the Air Force and the Marines, for taxpayers, for individual careers, for the unaware people downstream to all the drama, people who will pay a price for the direction of unfolding events, like pilots risking their lives. Wow—that's a narrative of ambitious scope...and well done, too, Mr. Coram!

Now that might be compelling in and of itself, regardless of where it happened, like, say, Indonesia or Uganda. But here it's the U.S., the most powerful nation on earth. It's a long tale encompassing the Vietnam War era and beyond. It's about real messiness at military institutions that are sometimes portrayed as uniformly, unquestionably devoted to decisions with valor and with little regard for personal ambition. And, currently, the most powerful government in world history is relentlessly centralizing administrative power in the hands of government officials in many areas, even down to detailed personal behavior about individual citizens wearing masks and attending worship. Coram's narrative looms large!

The essence is, Coram astutely chronicled a genuinely ultra-competent risk-taker like John Boyd. Coram chronicled Boyd's willingness to risk a whole lot engaging powerful people in a country founded on freedom and more than a little rebelliousness, but now in a country, sadly, where self-perpetuating bureaucratic institutions of every stripe are becoming pervasive! Well, then, with Coram you get a very strong story about human nature, power, clashes, and revealing instances of national-level stewardship—or lack thereof! Boyd is truly a unique subject of this biography relevant to every student of committed, sacrificial stewardship. And Coram is one of the few who could astutely relate multiple layers of this unique slice of American history. Yes, Robert Coram gave his readers a very instructive *linking to the past*.

Countless books and billions of words not worth reading occupy the shelves of libraries and bookstores. Our task as stewards in every part of our lives is to find the Robert Corams who are writing about the John Boyds of the world, giving us linkings to the past that help us forge ahead both better equipped and with greater confidence. Pray today that the Holy Spirit, the teacher of all things (John 14:26) directs you and your team to key sources that link you to the past in order to best serve Jesus Christ. *Linking to the past!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Linking to the past is one of the most important dimensions of the Bible. Give several specific examples of Bible stewards who sacrificed popular perception of their day for the reality of stewardship for God. Discuss how those examples help inform us today.
2. Linking to the past informs our linking to the future, just like the reality of human sin in the past completely informs the future. What institutional lessons from Old Testament Israel can we use to avoid pitfalls for the 21st century church? Identify and elaborate.
3. With regard to your workplace impact, are you linking to the past well, accessing valid history that is relevant to your position, your vocation, and your future? Give examples: authors, book titles, publications, podcasts. What authors and what sources should be added to your personal list?