

Everyone Must Live Somewhere: Looking Outside the Christian House — Dr. Joshua Chatraw

For by which we can help others interpret their past. Of course, you might have to... Maybe attic Christianity isn't the best way for every conversation, for every person you talk to. But oftentimes, this involves stepping in and asking questions and being a good listener and trying to help them interpret their own past and how they've gotten to where they've gotten.

By the way, I keep mentioning Augustine because he's important in my thinking about a lot of things, but particularly this because of *Confessions* and his own deconstruction and then reconstruction. Really what Augustine's doing, the famous Augustine biographer, Peter Brown, calls *Confessions* an act of therapy. Augustine was, I think, through a midlife crisis, and he's looking back and he's kneading through the Scriptures to interpret his past. Often the type of ministerial work we will need to do is to help people interpret their past in light of scripture, their story in light of God's story, and to walk alongside them. If Attic isn't the metaphor, you're happy. I'm happy for you to rip that off. I stole it from C. S. Lewis, and he's not around anymore. So you're free just to use that. But if that metaphor is not helpful, then find another one, find another way to do it.

But that ministerial work of asking questions and helping people understand their past and reckon with their own past, I think is really important in these discussions of deconstruction. But now, I want to just point a little bit. This is where we're going in the third lecture. We're in between this Bridge lecture, which is we're going to main floor Christianity, which I've already gestured to. Just to mention a few things about that. One of the things about main floor Christianity is I want to say it's closer to the foundation, which is Christ. I was talking to somebody during the break. One of the things, another way you can imagine what I'm doing here, another metaphor is, part of what I'm trying to do, and this is general with just apologetics in any form, is I'm trying to clear debris away so that they can be open, be humble, and be open to an encounter with the risen Lord, that they can hear the gospel again freshly. I think main floor Christianity, healthy floor Christianity, is closer to the foundation and lives close to Christ. That's where I want to go. It's also capacious, it's roomy.

You meet some interesting characters down there. You realize this thing is bigger than our particular cultural moment, our particular era. It's been going for 2,000 years now. You meet some interesting figures that I can be helpful on their journey. Then you also learn where the load-bearing walls are. This is one of the challenges that I alluded to, is when everyone's saying this is the most important issue, or at least that's what they're hearing, just go back into history and say, Well, What are actually the walls of the house that are bearing weight that you better

not try to knock down or the whole house is going to fall? Or what are just walls that were in my attic or in my room? It's helpful to distinguish between that. Theologians will call this theological triage. One of the ways to do this rather than just every community deciding is to go back to things like the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. Not that they have any authority beyond the Bible. The Bible is the final authority, but they do, in a secondary way, help us learn from the collective wisdom of the past and these early Christians who were saying, yes, these are the central things that we must guard.

And the ancient wisdom, that Christianity is more than simply, so much more than simply propositions. It's not less than propositions, but it's so much more. The ancient wisdom of how to walk with God through life, ancient wisdom on how to live well. It really is offering a way of life. And I think that's what you'll see through the ages represented by main floor Christianity. That's where we're headed. But now we're walking.

In order to get there, I just want to say three things. One is, and this is by review, the big questions of life can't be proven or disproven. Another way to put this is we can prove with a certainty the shallow questions of life, but not the big truths, meanings, values, and significance. God, there's not absolute certainty, absolute proof for those things. We all will live somewhere that can't be proven to be true. This is what I'm getting at. We will adopt, we'll say this is more important than that. We'll make moral judgments, value, meaning. We'll live out a certain story. Third, we all decide on where we live for a combination of intellectual, existential, social, and emotional reasons. Again, going back to my opening comments, that belief and unbelief, where you live, where you decide to live is for a variety of different types of reasons.

Okay, and so now I want to go to looking outside the house. In the book, *Surprise by Doubt*, we talk about four different spaces, and these are four different spaces that people are often deconstructing into. In other words, once we said, Hey, you're going to live somewhere, then we look at four different spaces. The first we look at is called New Atheism. Many of you are probably familiar with this. It's had its heyday and pretty much died out. It was represented in the early 2000s by people like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens. We debated whether to have this as a space because it's actually not where most people are deconstructing into. And yet what we found is a lot of people, especially who are deconstructing from attic Christianity, they often end up pirating some of the arguments that are offered by new atheists, this anger towards Christianity, towards the idea of God. We explore that in the book. That's not where we're going to spend time today. I just want to mention some of these other camps. Open spirituality, we're going to spend our time in what I call optimistic skepticism for reasons I think you'll make the connection for...

You'll make those connections in just a second between this talk and my first talk. But just to mention, open spirituality is the label of where we felt like Rhett McLaughlin ended up falling. He's saying, I don't deny that there might... He went through an atheist phase and then said, I don't deny that there's not a God. In fact, I've chosen to believe in God, but not the Christian God. I don't believe in the resurrection. He's adopted this just general openness to spiritual things, though certainly not Christianity at this point, though his story is not done yet. Then mythic truth is represented. The figure we represent in this camp is Jordan Peterson. If you're interested in some of that stuff going on with Peterson, you can read about that. I think that's been a very attractive space for people who is Jordan Peterson and another figure by the name of Tom Holland have talked about who actually Tom Holland, not the Spider-Man, the historian. I did that enough in class and students were saying, Spider-Man? No, British historian. Basically what they're saying, the mythic truth is saying, Hey, we do live by stories, and they recognize the role that the Christian story has played in our imaginations and in binding culture together, and they think there's something there.

The way we describe this space is it's not actually Christianity yet for reasons that you can read about if you're interested in, at least from a worldview standpoint. It's a little bit different than C. S. Lewis's claim that Christianity is the true myth because it's the myth that became fact, that the resurrection actually happened. Although it seems Tom Holland might have, I think maybe, has gone over and converted. There's a lot going on with Jordan Peterson these days. I'll let you make that evaluation.

But I want to spend time today on optimistic skepticism. One more caveat to say this. I am using specific people not to pick on these people at all. For a variety of reasons, I respect them as writers and as thinkers. But it's helpful, I found, sometimes to be very specific, not to pick on anyone, but so that we're not caricaturing someone or we're not caricaturing everyone in a group. The reason I'm being specific in these talks is to have a real example that we can see and look at and think with. At the end of the day, of course, I'm going to critique this view, but I think that's just I'm happy for people to critique my view, too, as well.

Let's step inside now and let's go into this space called Optimistic Skepticism, represented by the New York Times best-selling author, Biblical scholar Bart Ehrman. His popular writings are framed by his own journey from what he calls fundamentalist Christianity to evangelical Christianity to agnosticism with, as he puts it, strong atheist leanings. In other words, to use the metaphor that I've been using today, he grew up in an attic Christianity. By his own telling, Ehrman began losing faith in the Bible while attending graduate school. Over time, his misgivings turned into major problems. His journey is told as a coming-of-age story of hard-earned unbelief. In this sense, it's very similar to what I said about Rhett earlier. In fact,

Rhett talks about on the podcast of reading Ehrman's works as he's going through his deconstruction and they being very powerful in his story. Ultimately for Ehrman, they culminated in facing the fact that, as he puts it, the Bible probably isn't what he thought it was. For Ehrman, the floodgates opened and he came to see the Bible as a very human book filled with errors.

While Ehrman's departure from his earliest fundamentalist views of the Bible shook him, in his telling, it wasn't the breaking point, actually. That came when in his own words, "I could no longer explain how there can be an all-powerful God actively involved with this world given the state of things." In other words, he had certain misgivings about the Bible, and yet he stayed a Christian, but it was ultimately the problem of evil.

Now, I just want to say I'm actually very sympathetic with Ehrman's struggles. In fact, Hudson and I were on the way here and we sat down and we met a new friend. Our new friend who was Catholic, he said, I believe in God, but I do have a question because he asked me what I did. I'm going to this group to talk about doubt. Doubt about what? Doubt about God. He's like, Oh, I've got a question for you. I get this occasionally. He said, I have a family member who used to believe in God, and yet she's experienced real evil and suffering in her life. I waited and he said, What would you say to that? And I said, Okay, let's talk. And I'm very sympathetic. In fact, what I didn't say is, Yeah, let me tell you exactly why your family member's child got that disease, because I know. I didn't say that. In fact, I'm not startled when people admit that they can't answer this problem. Instead, the more I've reflected on human suffering and evil, the more I'm taken aback when someone claims they can. Often the way that some, I think, well-meaning Christians approach the question, shirks its difficulties. I've read all the theodices, I'm well aware. But what sometimes happens in trying to justify God, they overreach and try to justify too much. When an answer, answer to the problem of evil does that, I can refine myself. I have to admit, having a Ehrman-like skepticism. Consider another quote, "Christians don't, nor do other believers in God, as far as I know, really know why God permits evil." Now, just think for yourself, who do you think said that one? It's not me. I don't quote myself. Well, Maybe I have, but I try not to. It's a guy named Alvin Plantinga. You might know, you might have heard that name. Let me fill you in. Alvin Plantinga is probably the most significant, or he's at least one of the most significant Christian philosophers of the 20th century. He's what you would call a skeptical theist.

He believes in God. He's not skeptical about God. He's skeptical about full-out theologies, about full-out attempts to respond to the question and justify the ways of God. Now, he's written his own books on this. He's actually written one of the most important books on free will in relation to this question. But he doesn't even think he has fully given a reason of why God permits evil. It's interesting, isn't it? Here you have two good thinkers, I mean, two intellectuals, two

academics, and they're both saying, Well, we don't really know the reasons why God permits evil. And yet one says, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. And the other one says, okay, I'm still a Christian. So what's the difference? I think there's two problems.

At least I would suggest there's two problems in what I would say is Ehrman's posture. Not necessarily the quote, but the posture behind it. Number one, there's an overconfidence in our own capacities to understand and solve. Now, people, as moderners or late moderners, people today commonly assume that if God exists, all his cards are on the table. With confidence in our own cognitive powers, we moderns assume there is no divine idea that we should not be able to grasp.

Notably, we as believers can display a similar overconfidence in our ability to answer the question of why evil? Now, I want to suggest that we've probably all seen this or maybe we guess that we've seen something like this. Speaker strides up to the pulpit and claims to have the answer for evil. The answer seems tidy. It makes us feel good. We go away, heightening our expectations. You think, Okay, the expert apologists have solved the problem. Then one day somebody says, Did they really solve it? They begin to grow out of those solutions. In fact, one of the reasons why I'm using this as an initial test case is because I think this extreme confidence, this sense that we've mastered the things of God, can spill into all parts of our life as moderners. You live in, perhaps, living in safe suburban lifestyles, unconsciously going about our days and we feeling as if we have a pretty good handle on things, and then a pandemic hits. Or we get the cancer diagnosis. We're faced with the reality that life is fragile and we don't have the control that we think we have. In response, we frantically try to control as much as we can.

But the result is that we are burned with this deep sense of angst. We're left confused and even angry. For we don't know how to cope with what we face. We don't know how to deal with our own vulnerability, our own humanness, our own mortality. I think all of this can be rooted in a delusional view of our own capacities. This misplaced confidence in our capacity to reach into the heavens has metastasized in our world today. And yet, evil and suffering and death are old, old, old problems. Previous societies wrestled with them emotionally and intellectually, yet their struggles led to lament. That led to anger, not doubt. Read the Psalms. There was confusion. Read Job. These authors wrestled with God, but their suffering didn't lead them to deny God existed. This really wasn't a mass, really a mass option. In other words, denying God's existence on the basis of evil wasn't really a popular option that people would say, Well, yeah, maybe God just doesn't exist until about 250 years ago. It's what Charles Taylor notes in his work. Now, though, we assume that analyzing and deciphering the cosmic stage, we should be able to solve this ancient problem.

Faith becomes, again, more like a problem solve, a math problem. In regards to suffering, it easily can begin to think, if there is a God and he has good reasons for permitting evil, his reasons should be intelligible to us. If not, then as Bart Ehrman has written, in fact, it's the title of his book, *It's God's Problem*. That's problem number one, a overconfidence in our own capacities. Number two, a false expectation for how Christianity and the Bible work. Ehrman, in his book, *God's Problem*, he lays out five ways or five different responses, biblical responses to suffering. Remember, he's primarily a biblical scholar. He says, The Bible offers these five reasons. Suffering comes from God as a punishment against sin. Suffering is a result of human sinning against other humans. Suffering is redemptive. Suffering is a test of faith. Suffering is at times mysterious. Now, I've systematized those for Ehrman. He's probably not going to thank me, but I've systematized those for him, but those are all in the book. He says, as he's going through the Bible. Now, I just wonder, you don't have to answer out loud. In fact, maybe it's better if you don't, but what do you think about those?

Just internally think, you guys Bible people, what do you think about those? I think they're a pretty good list. You might be nervous. You're agreeing with Ehrman a little bit too much in this talk. Okay, so I actually agree with this. We might add to the list for sure. But I think this is, again, a place like, okay, if we can... I'm just going to guess, most of us can get around those, I mean, can get behind those. Then again, what's the problem? Well, the problem, I want to suggest, is deeper than just the data. The problem is the posture towards this data that spills over. And what's interesting with Ehrman is his posture towards the Bible here spills over into his conclusions about God. What Ehrman does is he actually pits these against each other. He pits them against each other. But he needn't not do that. In other words, he sees these as contradiction. Nothing demands contradictions. Nothing demands that we read the Bible in this way. I see no good reason to expect the biblical authors to always give the same response to a very complicated question. Ancient readers certainly didn't expect sacred text to work this way.

Many of the biblical authors are aware of and respect the broader textual tradition, aiming to expand and then layer responses to weighty concepts like evil and suffering. In doing so, what the Bible is actually offering is a web of responses, framed in a particular way for particular communities that speak to the complexity of evil. I find this to be one of the richest aspects of the Bible. It speaks profoundly in different ways to people at different times in different contextual situations. Chris Watkins, the philosopher, describes the biblical responses are reductive if treated in isolation, but when they are woven together in the biblical canon, they provide a rich, complex, and existentially authentic view of the world. I'm sorry. In other words, he's saying, if you isolate these, he's not communing on Ehrman, but I think it applies to Ehrman. If you isolate these reasons, then, yes, of course, they would be reductive. But when you put them together, and I would say this is how the Bible works on other issues, when you

put them together, there's this richness and complexity Isn't that what we need in a complicated world? In short, expectations matter.

What if you simply have the wrong expectations of the Bible? Expectations that are sometimes inherited from well-meaning Christian attics and remain intact long after a person has moved on. However, if you read the scriptures from a different perspective and give up wrong expectations for how the Bible should work, must work, it must work like this, you might just discover the rich, layered responses you need to live well. This is what's happened the more I've studied the Bible, the more I've come to see it offering rich and nuanced responses to life's most important questions, the big questions. The questions we can't simply put in a machine and answer through data and then popping out answers. Like a wise teacher, the Bible favors textural responses over rote answers. Its responses are intelligible to children, yet brimming with enough nuance and depth to hold the attention of even the most brilliant mind. If they're received with the right type of posture. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. The Bible is offering us a way to live in light of the gospel, and I should add, it offers us a way to walk with God through the uncertainties and pain of life.

Now I want to circle back and consider the apparent logic behind Ehrman's reason for walking away from the faith. It's really just this classical problem of evil. God is all powerful, God is all loving there is suffering. How do you square that? After surveying the responses to this problem, the biblical responses, Ehrman concludes that an all powerful and all loving God cannot this along suffering. The only responses, and then he looks at the current world that he lives in. But the Bible, I would say, offers a fourth premise. According to the Bible, neither God nor his ways can be fully known by humans. We'll get to that in a second. I'm sorry. I'm jumping ahead on these slides. The biblical authors assume God is infinite and we are finite. Christianity has long said that God is omnipotent and good. There is suffering in God's ways transcend our understanding. The fourth premise changes the conclusion. Now, you might say, Well, that hasn't solved it. No, I haven't. I'm not solving. I'm responding. It's different. I'm not solving a math equation. But I am responding and saying there's nothing illogical here. Let me use a metaphor. Again, this is not original to me.

It's from a philosopher by the name of John Wipstra. But I don't think he maybe has the cool camping picture. Let's just imagine afterwards today, we're done with the Q&A and a few of us decided to go camping. I've set it up I've arranged it, and I say, Hey, you are going to be in this camp, and I've got some bad news for you. There's a giant dog in that tent. Then I open up the tent and there is no dog or you can't see a dog. What do you conclude? It's not a trick question. You conclude that I'm nuts or I'm a liar, but there's clearly not a dog in the tent. I go to the next tent. Well, let's just say at that point, there's good reason not to believe whatever I say next,

right? So let's just replay that. Instead of a dog, I say, There's a small bug called the nosium in the tent, and I lift it up and I say, And you say what? You're not going in, but you don't actually know if there's a... You can't verify that, right? Who knows whether there's actually a bug in there or not?

And likewise, what Wixtra says, If God is the God revealed in Christian scriptures, we have good reasons to think that if there were God-purposed goods for suffering, they would often be beyond our ken. See, what's happened in what Charles Taylor calls our social imaginary is that through the years, we've imagined that our rational capacities are really able to see into the heavens. If God exists, then he's just right there. He's like another one of us, basically, just a little higher. I should be able to do that calculus. Yet this is a huge assumption that Most people, it's actually very parochial. Most people in human history have not held that assumption. Certainly, the Christian scriptures don't hold that assumption about who God is and who we are. There's the fourth premise. This is what another philosopher, British philosopher, says to this. He says, To believe in God is not to be able to explain why terrible things happen and why many lives are ruined or tragically cut short. The message of the Book of Job is absolutely clear on this point. There is no explanation or no explanation we can comprehend. I think that last point is important.

To be a believer is not to solve this problem. But it's something else entirely. It is to hold that the meaning and purpose of our lives is to live in accordance with the sacred requirements of justice and compassion. To believe in God is to believe that we are required by a holy and inviolable power, not of our ourselves to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong. Now, we would want to say more about what it is to believe in God than just that. But he's getting at an important point. If you leave behind misguided expectations, You might actually... Well, the problem, they don't resolve. We still have to live in the evil world. But you realize there's not actually this intellectual, but there's an existential problem. We have to deal with this. But it's not the same type of thing as a logical defeater or an evidential defeater. C. S. Lewis, for example, once rejected Christianity along similar lines as Ehrman. Yet Lewis later saw his problem with evil was itself a problem that his atheism couldn't explain. He said, My argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust.

But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? In other words, the fact that evil is a problem that perplexes us, that repulses us, that angers us, seems to gesture at something beyond us. Given the deep intuition that the world isn't as it should be. Once we agree with someone of this fact, then I think we should ask them, why do we feel it shouldn't be like this? By what standard? Why would we expect a world of nothing

more than matter and energy to be anything other than absurd and violent? Why do we struggle so fiercely against the reality of the way things are? Like Lewis, if we go so far as to reject God on the basis of evil, we are intuitively bearing witness that we believe in some standard by which to judge the universe. It might just be that buried beneath you or your friend's skeptical doubts, there's reasons to believe. This is, I think, along the lines of what the late Tim Keller used to call doubting your doubts, to going deeper beneath the doubt, to see some intuitions there, some things you're believing there.

For not only does Christianity proclaim a moral universe that provides a foundation for these intuitions, it also provides resources for what our present society is perhaps lacking most. The ability to face evil, the ability to suffer well, the ability to live well, the ability to face the worst of the world and not surrender to the worst of human tendencies. This is a big deal. As I look around, I study, this is what I think about every day, is that people might not be looking... They might not be saying they're looking for God, but they are looking for ways to cope. They are looking for ways to deal with tomorrow. The University of Columbia, Professor Andrew Delbanco, observed years ago, he's not a Christian, he observed, he says this, A gulf has opened up our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it. Another way to get at this is critiquing is easy, offering a consistent and livable alternative ain't so easy. Since we need a livable space, we need a place to live in, I want to close this lecture by considering what Christianity offers, the Christian house offers, in comparison to this house that I'm calling optimistic skepticism or Ehrman's agnosticism.

So don't miss the point. If you're walking with someone through doubt or someone who is about to leave the faith or who already has, they aren't jumping into nothingness. We all have to live, we all have to die, we will all suffer. This is our plight as humans. Those are realities. Now, what are you going to do about it? An important question for any way of life is, how will you live in light of these universal features of our existence? To draw on Dalbanco's words, right now, our culture is lacking the intellectual resources to do so. How about Ehrman's position? How about Ehrman's space? This is what Ehrman says here. At the end of his book, *God's Problem*, he gives several pages of so what? Where does this leave us? He believes, as he puts it, this life is all there is. But he doesn't find this to be an occasion, and these are his words, "for despair and despondency. Instead, this should be a source of joy and dreams, joy of living for the moment and dreams of trying to make the world a better place, both for ourselves and for others in it."

He goes on. This is a little long, but again, I want to step inside of this. I want you to hear it from the words of somebody in this space. "I think we should work hard to make the world the one we live in, the most pleasing place it can be for ourselves. We should love and be loved. We should cultivate our friendships, enjoy our intimate relationships, cherish our family lives. We should

make money and spend money. The more the better. We should enjoy good food and drink. We should eat out and order unhealthy desserts. And we should cook steaks on the grill and drink Bordeaux." -- For some of our traditions, it's not that one. We should end the beer part. I'm sorry. I was in Anglican church for five years, so everything's out the window now. I'm just kidding. -- "We should walk around the block, work in the garden, watch basketball, and drink beer. We should travel and read books and go to museums and look at art and listen to music. We should drive nice cars and have nice homes. We should make love, have babies, and raise families. We should do what we can to love It's a gift. It will not be with us for long. But we should also work hard to make our world the most pleasing place it can be for others. We need to live life to its fullest and help others as well to enjoy the fruits of the land." So much for Ehrman.

Ehrman urges here what I would call an unvarnished pursuit of personal contentment and pleasure in the things that this world has to offer. Which on one hand, I think we can partly get behind, creation is a gift. We're embodied beings. Note that Ehrman's advice offers measly resources for practically living out the ethics, fortitude, and joy that he commends there. It offers no moral grounding for why someone should feel obligated for that last bit to live the moral life he describes. The first part of the vision, enjoying life by the way of nice cars and homes and food and drink, will inevitably, at times, be in tension with his charge to help others. While I share his moral sensibility, and I do mean, I use the word sensibility there because it's a sense. Nothing actually rationally grounded in his worldview. I share his moral sensibility that we should care for others. But why do that, though, given the first part? If it requires giving up-time spent in our own gardens with our own family, if it prevents us from working overtime required to move into nicer neighborhoods, why would I give up that to help others? Ehrman never gives a motivating rationale for putting others before. If Ehrman is correct in saying this world is all there is, then one should be willing to look realistically at what it means to live consistently in this place. What does this mean for those who can't enjoy cars or fine wines? What does this mean for those who enjoy such luxuries but are crippled with a dull emptiness and anxious restlessness? People are growing antsy with a cardboard consumerism, the endless cycles of spending and buying and working, vacation. Is this it? What does this mean for the person in hospice care with a terminal diagnosis? The clouds of suffering and loss, which Ehrman reminds us of so powerfully in his writings, cast dark shadows over the gift of life Ehrman encourages us to enjoy. But if Ehrman is correct, if we are alone in the universe, then we need to face the fact that this good news rings hollow.

Instead of proclaiming joy in the news that this life is all there is, my read on this is more like the British author, Francis Spurford, who said that if this view is right, we need to be honest enough to say "what it amounts to is to yell, 'There is no help coming. It amounts to a denial. This is Spurford's words. It amounts to a denial of hope or consolation on any but the most chirpy,

squeaky, bubbly, gummy reading of the human situation." St. Augustine called this thing cruel optimism, 1,500 years ago, and it is still cruel. Spurford is not alone. Many people who have similar doubts as Ehrman. Many people have those doubts. Many people are rocked in the face of suffering evil, begin to doubt God. But many of them continue to believe. They're like the man in the gospel of Mark: "I believe, help my unbelief." Not because they've solved the problem of evil or have figured out exactly what God is up to. But instead, like Lewis, they recognize the intuitions lying beneath their revulsion towards evil. They can't shake the feeling that this world is not as it should be. But they also recognize that this deep-seated intuition isn't rational unless there's some standard beyond this world. They also can't so easily reconcile the idea that this life is all there is with the claim that there's nothing to be frightened of. And like Ehrman, again, like Ehrman, there's much that I can affirm here as I critique. Like Ehrman, they sense that life is a gift. That life is a gift. But where does the gift come from if not a giver? So one might opt to follow the path of Ehrman and leave Christianity. If you have wrong expectations about how Christianity works, have an over-confident sense of what humans should be able to understand about the things of God. But once you recalibrate to a more rational understanding of rationality, then there's a whole lot of reasons to believe amid your doubts.

See, I don't think, and this is important, I often tell this to students and other people I talk to, your doubts probably aren't going away anytime soon. To live in a fallen world means that we see, well, to live in this world, it means to see through a mirror, but to see dimly. It means to still wrestle with sin while having a deeper hope. It means wrestling with unbelief. But the key word is we're continuing to wrestle. To me, that's part of the journey of living in a fallen world. It's a realistic. So we need to deal with their doubts. We need to face them. We're not celebrating doubts. We're investigating, we're looking, we're learning to doubt our doubts. And so many continue to do this. Even amidst their unbelief, they cry out, Lord, help my unbelief. I do believe. And maybe some of you are in that boat today. Maybe you just didn't sneak in here to hear about how to help somebody, but you came because you needed help. And I want to tell you to close this talk, why not join us? Why not join us? Why not come back? Not resolving all your doubts, but believing while doubting. There's good reasons, even looking behind your doubts. Join us in looking around and acknowledging that we are recipients of gifts. Life is a gift. We're a gift to each other. This world is a gift. And then turn upward and look through the gifts to worship the giver. Join us in looking to the one who gave us not only life, but then who came to us and gave his own life. Because while this doesn't solve the problem, the incarnation and the cross speaks to us of a God who isn't on the sidelines, but in Christ has come to us, and in Christ, the God man has suffered with us and for us. We can walk with him through suffering.

Let's pray. Lord, we know that and we trust your spirit is at work even now, and we ask that it would, that you would, spirit, that you would increase our faith That if somebody has walked

away from your church and walked away from you and who is in this building, that they would come back. They would not resist your spirit. And we pray, Lord, that you would move them this morning. We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.