

Surprised by Doubt: The Not So Safe Confines of the Attic — Dr. Joshua Catraw

Dr. Keith Plummer

Thank you all. Dr. Joshua Chatraw, our speaker this day, is the Billy Graham Chair for Evangelism and Cultural Engagement at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. His research, writing, and speaking focuses on public theology, apologetics, evangelism, and culture. He has written, co-written, and edited eight books, including *The Augustine Way*, *Surprised by Doubt*, which he will be speaking from this day, *Apologetics at the Cross*, *Cultural Engagement*, *The History of Apologetics: Telling a Better Story*, *Truth Matters*, and *Truth in a Culture of Doubt*. He serves as an inaugural fellow at the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics, and is also a fellow at the Center for Pastor Theologians. For the sake of time, I'm trimming the list of his accomplishments and roles, but I do wish to highlight that Josh is far more than an academic. He has served as a pastor, and you do not have to read his work or hear him speak for any length of time before you realize that he has a deep, profound love for Christ and for his people, the church.

One of the foremost reasons that we use *Apologetics at the Cross*, which he co-authored with Mark Alan here in our apologetics course is because unlike many works on apologetics, this is a volume that places the importance of the church in the apologetic task up front. I am very, very grateful for that emphasis in his work. Among his other areas of, I would say, appropriate pride is the fact that he is a husband to his wife, Tracey, and the father of their two children, Addison and Hudson. Hudson, who happens to be with us down here. So please join me in welcoming Dr. Joshua Chatraw.

Dr. Joshua Chatraw

Thank you. Thanks for having me. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we believe. Help us in our unbelief. Help us to help those who are having a difficult time believing. May we be faithful ministers, faithful spiritual doctors to those who are sick. May we learn how to point them to you, our great physician. How to apply the medicine of the gospel. Lord, may we be faithful in this task. Would you help us today as we reflect on us. Keep us from error. Teach us your truth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for coming. When I speak on this topic, I'm always impressed when people show up in some ways. It's a downer. I'm an expert on doubt, so let's have a chat. But then I just met Adam and he encouraged me. He said, Don't worry, last year we talked about spiritual abuse. This is actually an encouraging topic for us here. I think that was my friend Mike Kruger, so I'm sure

that was wonderful. Speaking on the topic of doubt is actually fraught, as you can imagine. It's fraught for at least two reasons. One is it's complex and it's personal. It's complex because there's so many different types of doubt. There's intellectual doubt, there's honest doubt, there's duplicitous doubt, there's existential doubt, there's doubt rooted in deep hurt, which is probably what Mike was touched on, I'm guessing, last year at this conference. There's doubt due to ignorance or naivety. There's doubt about just being tired and physically exhausted. Of course, these different types of doubt are really never isolated. They're connected. So intellectual doubts are never just intellectual in the narrowest sense of the term. We're holistic beings, we believe for a variety of connected reasons, and we doubt for a variety of related reasons.

Hence, there's multiple targets to hit in a public lecture, and I just need to confess to you, I won't hit them all. I will not hit them all. It's also doubt is also complex because doubt is not actually the opposite of faith. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. We as Christians should not celebrate doubt. I'm not here for some pep rally for doubt. Doubting is not fun. Doubting is not awesome. But we shouldn't also carte blanche, condemn it either. After all, some things need to be doubted. In order to doubt something, I need to believe something else. For instance, if someone's doubting the resurrection, it might be because they're believing in a naturalistic world. And so this other belief, this competing belief is causing doubt. Doubt is always based on some belief. So doubt is complex. That's the first thing I want to say.

The other thing I want to say as I get going is it's personal. Some of you here today are full-time ministers, and you well, it could be that some of you are here struggling with doubt, and perhaps you've never even told anyone because of your vocation, because of your embarrassment. You haven't said a word. For some of you, doubt is personal because your kids are in the midst of deconstruction or your grandkids. Doubt has, in some way or another, come close to all of our homes, and so it's personal. For these reasons, I asked for some patience, particularly in this first talk this morning, because I'm going to ask all of us to better understand doubters. I'm going to ask you to step into one particular doubter's story. For some of you, this could be therapeutic. This could put language on some of the things you're describing or put language on something maybe your kids are going through. But for others, it might feel confusing or even alarming because I'm describing something you'd rather not think about. But for the sake of learning to minister to others, for the sake of being a soul doctor, as I just prayed, we need to learn what patients are going through. We need to better understand. Sometimes, as evangelicals, we're quick to rush in and try to help. That's a good instinct. But we need to first go to school on what's going on, what are the elements, why are people hurting?

In this first talk, that's what I'm going to do. I was thinking of a way to maybe, I don't know if this is going to be helpful, but I watched *Dune I*. I don't know if you've seen that movie. I thought,

Okay, I'm not that impressed. Maybe I'm the minority here, but I know it's setting up for something else. Then I watched the second *Dune* and I thought, okay, now with the risk of over hyping talk two and three, this is the set up talk for two and three. So don't run away and think, All right, I'm not sure. Now, again, I'm not going to live up to *Dune II* I'm quite sure I will not be that entertaining in these next two talks. Just think about this. I'm setting some things up for the next two talks as well this morning.

Several years ago, Rhett Mclaughlin, along with his *Good Mythical Morning* co-host, Link, shared his deconstruction story with a national audience. Now, you might have heard of these guys. They have one of the fastest growing, one of the top YouTube channels, *Good Mythical Morning*, as well as *Ear Biscuits* is their other show. Rhett grew up going to church, and he was deeply committed to Christianity.

He was all in, it seemed. He served as a staff member for Campus Crusade for Christ. In these episodes, he frames his own deconstruction story as a coming of age story, where he slowly had the eyes to see that his childhood faith, well, he could no longer believe it. Now, he explains that he didn't want to walk away from Christianity. Instead, his story, as he describes it, is him desperately trying to hold on to anything, something that would allow him certainty in his faith. Because of this, Rhett narrates his doubt and his experience of doubt as a going through and reading and listening to a lot of Christian apologists. This is why it's especially, I think, important for people like me to hear this, somebody who calls himself an apologist. Here we have somebody saying, I'm going to you as an apologist, and actually, you weren't that helpful. Now, he doesn't mention my name, just in my defense. But people like you aren't that helpful. What happens is Rhett moves from one doubt to another, as he tells his story, trying to find some new piece of data, some new argument that would allow him to escape his doubts.

But as he does this, the anxiety keeps mounting and even gets more and more as he does this. This experience is all too common. Rhett's experience from people that I've listened to, talked to, read about It seems that lurking amongst the algorithms of the anxious doubter, there is always a Reddit thread or a YouTube video threatening the control that they're trying to regain. There is just so much information out there, and Rhett seemed to have been thinking, if he could just dig deep enough, if he could just find the silver bullet, he could grow sure, he could grow certain. The pattern of doubt led to, Well, maybe I'll deal with it this way. Maybe this data will help me explain it. But then it was like a whack-a-mole. As he got one down, then something else would pop up. It was morality in the Old Testament. It was evolution. It was archeological evidence for the biblical account. It was the problem of evil. It was textual reliability. Each time he runs in doubt, he engages apologists, trying to find an apologist trying to find an answer to

banish his doubts. With each successive question that led to an unsatisfying answer, Rhett's anxiety grows.

He eventually grows so tired of this anxiety-driven search for answers, he becomes convinced that Christian apologetic arguments are unhelpful. They can't give him the certainty he's looking for. On one of the episodes where he's recounting this, he reflects back on something he wrote in his journal. He says this, "My faith is still weak. I think I have this up here. My faith is still weak, but it is not gone. From an intellectual standpoint, I may never have certainty about my faith. That pursuit may be fruitless. It's becoming clearer that the significance of my faith or the so-called proof of Christianity is not found in well-reasoned argument. Rather, it rings true the way a musical note would, it hits my resonant frequency." Now, I wonder what you think of that. I'm guessing he's saying something that many of you would resonate with. While I certainly want to stress that I think well-reasoned arguments are helpful, I think there's wisdom in here that Rhett offers us. He's wise to recognize that rigid proof or certainty can't be grasped through arguments, certainly not through arguments alone. No matter how effective any given argument is, it cannot ultimately banish every form of doubt.

Rhett was measuring his faith against certainty. But certainty, this idea of certainty, can mean so many different things. John Calvin. We'll get to that in a second. John Calvin, I'm guessing many of you at least know that name, writing some time ago, not in the midst of post-Christendom. He's writing in his *Institutes*. This is what he says. He says, "Surely while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. Believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief." So even in the midst of Christendom, even in the midst of a social setting that's very different than ours, John Calvin felt the pressures of doubt. Rhett was right to recognize that his drive for proof was unhelpful. But sadly, as the story goes on, Rhett couldn't rest in a posture that accepted doubt as part of the Christian life. And by the way, I'm not here to pick on Rhett. I've actually interacted with him with the book. We wrote some things where we interacted, and I'm not here to pick on Rhett. That's not the point at all.

I think Rhett's story can be very helpful for us to listen to. But at this point, I think there was something in Rhett's posture that was problematic. For Rhett had thought that Christianity was supposed to be this something you could engineer your way to a certainty through rational arguments. And so later, he called this stance, this, well, Christianity is like a musical note that resonates. He said that was like a cowardly form of faith. He called it cowardly faith. He couldn't accept it. To simply accept that he wouldn't be able to solve all the issues felt like a cop-out. And so he asked this question, I would say, he's telling his deconversion story. At the climax of it, he

says, If I don't have to believe in God, this is him thinking back, he says, If I don't have to believe in a God who sends people to hell, why would I? And so when Rhett decided he didn't have to believe in God anymore, he didn't. But I want to suggest to you that the posture Rhett received while growing up is at least part of why none of the apologizations esthetic material that he was going through was sufficient.

In addition to the increased external pressure brought about by modernity, secularization, and the intense ever present plurality manifested by these things we hold in our pocket, our phones. At least part of the reason stories like this are becoming more common is also those reasons, yes, but also how the church has responded to these various external pressures. Yes, there's a time to say what's going on out there. But I think in this first talk, at least, I want to reflect on maybe what are we doing? How have we maybe unnecessarily hurt ourselves? In other words, do we have planks in our own eyes we need to be more reflective about? Rhett emphasized multiple times throughout his account that he had been told showing up that "Christians have the truth." And of course, I would say, oh, yeah, everyone says, yeah, if you believe something, you think that it's true. And certainly Christians do. But the way he seems to have interpreted this idea is that as a Christian, he had to follow a specific path of rationally justifying each belief with a certainty. It's as if as an engineer, he needed to build a truth machine where you pour objective data in and then you turn the crank and then outcome certain answers. And that's how this thing works. At least that's what he seemed to be thinking.

But then in approaching his quest to deal with doubt in this way, every issue that remained unanswered or uncertain actually operated as mounting evidence that maybe this whole thing isn't true. My question is, what do we do in response? How do we help people like Rhett? How do we be physicians of the soul for people who have been immersed in Christianity, who have been to the worldview boot camps, who've gone to actually good schools, and it seem like they have heard all the arguments, and yet they're on the path to deconstruction. How do we help?

We could simply double down, keep operating the machine, pouring in the data, and rehearsing the same types of arguments over and over. Again, I just want to say, as Keith mentioned, I've written those arguments. I'm not against those arguments. I make those arguments. But I'm wanting to suggest that we might also or first dig underneath to look at why people like Rhett are not receiving that apologetic material well. Why aren't they receiving those arguments well? To do so, I want to go back to one of my favorite apologists, probably some of your favorite apologists, which is CS Lewis.

Lewis had this striking image of Christianity as a house with many rooms. Of course, for Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, this was an invitation for people who were outside of the Christian house to

step into the doorway and look around through the hall. It was to offer, as the title goes, a mere Christianity, a part of the house that represented the unity of the house without bearing the marks of any individual room in the house. Each of the many rooms in the house represented a certain way to be a Christian. Of course, these rooms represented as many of you know, different denominations and different cultures, different eras. But all the rooms are united by a shared belief in Jesus Christ, articulated, we might say, by the ancient creeds, like the Apostle's Creed, or what the early church would call the rule of faith, the gospel.

Those deconstructing often grew up in a specific room, and so the way that they experienced Christianity was impacted by whatever room they grew up in. For many, this is the only Christianity they know. When they begin deconstructing a room, they feel like they're deconstructing the entire house. Talking to those who are doubting and deconstructing, the reality often plays out like this. Something that seems as if it should be easy for me to answer. I've written on that. Let me give you an answer. Let me help you here. They don't want to be intellectual. They think, Man, maybe I grew up in this this space here, and it was anti-intellectual. I can show them how a Christian church has a deep tradition of critical inquiry. You don't have to turn your brain off. You shouldn't turn your brain off. They don't want to be driven by partisan politics. I can show them how Christianity has spoken prophetically to all kinds of various political regimes. They don't want to be a racist or sexist or xenophobic. I can tell them how Christianity offered the Western world the ethical resources stand up against these things as evil.

But what I've often discovered to those who are deconstructing is they feel like I'm just patching a leaking ship. You get one hole and then you've got another one. They seem to have this suspicion of me, and maybe you've had this experience, that I'm just covering for the real Christianity, the Christianity that they grew up with. I'm a good cover artist. I'm just covering it up for them. I'm just spinning. This is when I began to realize that those who are deconstructing don't only need a path forward. I'm trying to give them a path forward, but they need a way, and I think this can maybe help some of you as you're trying to help others through this. They need not only a path forward, but they need a way to make sense of their own Christian past. They need a way not only to interpret the future or the present, but they need a way to understand what has happened. For so many who are deconstructing, they've grown up not on the main floor of Christianity, not even in a hallway. And Lewis, by the way, says you shouldn't just try to live in the hallway. You need a room. But instead of growing up in a room on the main floor, I suggest that many people who are deconstructing have actually grown up in an attic. They're in the house. I'm not saying attics aren't in the house. They're in the house. It's a Christian community. But attic Christianity, as I'm about to describe, was built to protect the faith of those inside.

It did it in a certain way, and it produced certain anxieties, certain concerns that I'm going to suggest in some ways at least have backfired. Now, of course, if you think about going up to your attic, just if I can elaborate on this metaphor a little bit more. I often run... I don't do Christmas decoration. I'm not a huge Christmas decoration person. My job is to go up in the attic and get them out there. That's my job in the family. I go and get them out. It's not that bad. I make it out to be worse than it is, just to get sympathy from my wife, but it's not that bad. But I couldn't imagine living up there. Because when I go up there, and you can imagine this with you, I'm having to bend down to get everything. If I do that, I'm going to hit my head. The walls are tight, of course, it's not insulated. There's no air conditioning, so it can be very cold or very hot depending when I go up there. It's fine if I'm going to get Christmas decorations or go grab the yearbooks to show the kids funny pictures.

But to live up there would drastically affect my posture. It would drastically affect the way I inhabit the It would drastically even affect the way then I would evaluate things. You can imagine if you had to live in the attic and then you one day walked over to the window and said, No walls out there. Looks pretty free. Look at the grass. I think it'd be nicer to be out there than be in this attic. And so you say, You know what? I think if I can't... I'm just going to jump out the window.

So what are these rafters? What is this space doing? I want to flush this out for the rest of this talk. There's going to be some strange rafters here, because when you look at my first one on there, make up your own mind, you're right to say, Hang on just a second, what other option do we have? If I'm not making up my mind, who is? And certainly taking responsibility for your own beliefs is a healthy and integral part of growing up. But you see, attic Christianity takes this wise advice, necessary advice, and it often takes it to an unhealthy extreme.

In the attic, each person is tasked with charting their own path through the many controversies of the faith. There are two parts of this command, if you think about it. There's one part that denotes a clear individualism in the life of the mind, but there's also a drive towards a decisiveness. Not only do you need to be the lone captain of your beliefs, you need to chart a clear course, and you better hurry up. You can't be comfortable with uncertainty or mystery because maybe it's not put quite like this, but somehow along the way, the attic can make you feel like we have the truth, therefore, mystery is out. Uncertainty is out the door. This mental individualism means that the writings of theologians and church fathers are relegated to good advice, but essentially equivalent in that is to the weight of the random Christian or this dude who's doing these posts on this Reddit thread. This creates, of course, a bit of a problem for those who are trying to wrestle with doubt because it becomes a question of who can they trust?

Who can guide them as they work through their doubts? Everyone seems to be shouting opinions, and many of those opinions are seemingly drawn from the Bible.

So who do they trust? And amidst all of these swirling opinions, the addict dweller is tasked with deciding who is right. And so with the scope of intellectual and emotional challenges posed in a pluralistic world today for a Christian, this posture requires young people to assume expertise in far-ranging areas, biology, geology, mental health, politics, theology.

You might think it would be possible to just quickly duck under this rafter and then move on. But right on the other side of this command is another seemingly competing instinct. Rafter number 2 demands, yes, make up your own mind, but do it in the right way. Think for yourself is what is said. You've got to think for yourself. But then in a thousand little ways, an important addendum is communicated. As long as you think like me. We professors, we like to talk about critically thinking. You need to be critical thinkers, students. Think for yourself. But there's a part of us as professors always thinking, and we can slip into this. I'm speaking to myself. But what I really mean by that is, I just want you to think like me. Find the truth through investigation of the text. But if you come to a different conclusion for me, you probably aren't being faithful to the text. The result is that in the attic, mystery becomes less and less tolerated. For if each question can generate a sure and obvious answer, mystery is minimized as a vital part of Christian thought, rather than guarding the mystery of the faith. Rather than seeing the creeds as a way to guard doctrine, and doctrine is itself speaking to something that we can't, as Augustine said, if you think you know God, you do not know God. Now, Augustine wrote a lot about God, by the way. He He wrote a lot about God. But what he wants us to realize is there's always mystery there. We have to keep that in mind as we communicate the truth of the gospel, the truth of who God is. Yet there's always still more to No, there's always mysteries there.

Rather than guarding the mystery of the faith, the attic who often imagines theology and apologetics as a way to reason our way to God. Mystery is thus seen as a cop-out rather than something tied into the heart of the faith. Second, intellectual humility is not parised as a virtue. If each person with this mindset, if each person can attain these clear and obvious answers on their own, humility in our own conclusions seems irrelevant. The logic looks something like this. The common sense reading, the common sense reading of the Bible teaches that the is this many thousand years old or that women shouldn't work outside the home, or it tells us clearly when and how Jesus will return. You don't need to be humble because it's just plain. It's just right there. Of course, I hope you understand. That's not what I was saying. That's not what I was saying, but this is how it can feel in the attic. Third, if someone rejects the clear and obvious answer that you have found, generosity is no longer an ideal that constrains you. Anyone

disagreeing with you with the obvious answer is ill-informed, ill-intended, or one way, one step away from destroying the entire faith. And so ducking under this what I would call a pseudo-scientific approach, because it's not even how big scientific theories are actually reached. It's a pseudo version of science. But then it's applied to theology so that those in the attic are pressured to search for that objective truth that they should be able to prove: but if you just read that next book, if you just read this book, just watch this YouTube video.

This is when they run straight into the third rafter. Make up your mind in the right way on every question. You see, if an objective, clear rationality can guide the theological process, then any deviation from the clear rationality might become a gospel issue. You in its implications. To be a faithful Christian then it feels like, and again, I'm sure we all have problems with this and want to nuance it. I'm trying to describe through many conversations that Jack and I had as we wrote this, a lot of research, this is how it can feel. I'm not saying it's always fair, but it can feel like for students, for young people, for young adults, for older adults we talk to, that you have to have the right answer on everything from vaccines to Harry Potter to science to beer to national politics to yoga. I got to figure this out, man.

The fourth rafter makes it clear that you not You certainly need the right view, you need to live it out in the right way. Rafter 4, while staying between our lines. The entire house, I need to add another caveat here, lots of caveats. Of course, the entire house has always been concerned with morality. Just like Rafter 1, the ideas undergirding Rafter 4 are obviously good and healthy. There are clear lines we should stay between in the Christian life and those need to be told. But here's, again, where things shift a little bit, where the rafters come down in on us, is that attic Christianity has this unfortunate habit of weaponizing morality in the service of identity formation, almost entirely in reaction to the world outside. God, thank you that I'm not like those sinners. Thank you that we're not like that. We have biblical worldviews. Thank you, God.

We end up weaponizing moral guardrails to separate the outsiders. I'm sorry. We weaponize those moral guardrails to separate the addict from outsiders. Since leaders create these guardrails in response to changing cultural pressures, they shift over time. The principle here is that people will remember, as leaders, people will remember what we talk about the most. People will associate Christianity with what we get most excited about. As these perceived threats come in and we respond to them and they get our focus and we focus more on them and we talk about them more and we get excited about them more. Those things become attached to the very essence of what Christianity is, what the primary part of what Christianity is, at least in people's minds. But if you actually watch how these... And many of us are old enough in here to know that these things have changed through the years, haven't they? And so some of us have lived through this. When I was growing up in some of the communities that I was

around, there was a focus on abstaining from non-Christian music and movies. That's still a little bit in some communities, but for the most part, we've thrown that out the window. And then when I got into high school, it was, Well, we need to teach young people not to date because of purity concerns, especially as we were reflecting on the sexual revolution and increased divorce rates. I'm not talking, by the way, about prudential decisions that you make as a family. I'm not talking about that. You make certain wisdom type decisions. I'm talking about this is sin, and you can't do that, and we're going to ostracize you if you do. But even that seems to be less emphasized now in many evangelical communities.

During COVID pandemic, it was masks or vaccines. And now we scroll through Twitter and we read that if you're not in one political party or another, or you're not doing something in some advocacy for some particular issue, you're anathema. So this is the space that many people who are deconstructing have inhabited. I'm not saying it's necessarily your space and your church. I'm not saying every time that this space has been created, it wasn't well-intended. Sometimes for some obvious reasons that made sense at the time. But what happens is these shifting moral priorities makes growing in the attic rather stressful, particularly when you're trying to make up your own mind in the right way about more and more issues.

Then the other thing that we found is often there grew a cognitive dissonance with people when they grew up in these environments and then they step out and then they meet people outside the attic who aren't even in the house at all, aren't Christians at all. They've been told that these are the evil people. Then they meet them and they're like, Oh, Oh, wow, this person's actually nice and smart. Then the trickle of, well, as I'm sure Mike talked about last year, the reports of scandal in the church. Again, you see how the intellectual issues and the moral issues, existential issues, are connected together, and they begin to wonder, Is this even real? Thus, they find themselves like red, tempted to jump out of the house altogether.

And today, as I give these talks, on one hand, I'm not here in any way to... It might sound otherwise, we're not here to beat up on the attic. But I'm here to try to help you to go and help people interpret their past and perhaps give you a metaphor to help people think through, what are you deconstructing from? What are you deconstructing from? Is it Christianity? Or is it a version of Christianity? And I'm not calling anyone to stay in the attic. In fact, I think it's healthy to leave the attic. But you can leave the attic and not leave the house. You're just on the wrong floor. And so part of this task of actually caring for people, of being soul doctors, is to say, come on the main floor of Christianity. And you might just be surprised on that main floor, some of the characters you bump into.

Some 1,600 years ago, Augustine of Hippo, really the greatest theologian in the Western tradition, was growing up as a young man in the backwaters of the Roman Empire. I'm from South Georgia, so I like to describe Augustine as growing up in South Georgia, where I grew up. He was raised by a devoutly Christian mom who diligently took him to church. And yet at the same time, because he was in the backwaters of the Northern Africa, the part of the Roman Empire that he was in, it felt like a version of what we would call today, Attic Christianity. His mom took him to church, but the church that he was part of was filled with authoritarian bishops, an anti-intellectual streak, a rigid moral code, and literal interpretations of, well, just about everything. At the same time, the thing with Augustine, growing up, was his dad, Patrick, was a pagan. So he felt in his own home these cross pressures. Augustine got educated. He increasingly saw Christianity as he got educated and he wanted to make a name for himself, he saw Christianity as naive, even embarrassing. He believed he found what his quaint childhood faith could never provide. He writes about this in *Confessions*. Certainty based on reason alone. Until one day, Augustine discovered, actually, that this was a childish coming-of-age story that he and his friends like to tell themselves to make themselves feel better.

He came to discover that it wasn't just Christianity that required faith. Everyone, he realized, in some sense, lived by faith in something. He gave up. He writes about this in *Confessions*. He gave up on the idea that he could 6 plus 4 his way to God. Not to the big questions of life. The shallow questions of life. We can 2 plus 2 our way through. We can look under a microscope see, but not the big questions of life. There are no absolutes that would render God the certain result of a logical equation, Augustine realized. There was no machine to build that just pumped out truth. Disillusioned and jaded, he jumped out of the attic, his own attic built in late antiquity. But he doesn't jump into Christianity, he jumps into a period of skepticism. But one day, having made it, having made it in a world where it's very difficult to make it in, you couldn't just rise up in the same way you do today. And yet Augustine does. He makes it to Milan. Milan in the ancient world is well like Milan today. It's the New York city of culture for the Roman Empire.

He's now surrounded himself with the intelligentsia of the day, the cultural power players, and he finds himself empty. He looks at a beggar on the way to give a very important speech in front of the Emperor, and he says, "This beggar who is drunk is happier than I am. At least in the morning, he'll be sober, but I'm still drunk on these illusions that I'm living." One day, he goes to hear Ambrose, a preacher. Now, he didn't go to Ambrose at this point because he thinks Ambrose had the truth. He goes to hear Ambrose because Ambrose could speak well. And Augustine was a rator, and he thought, maybe I could learn something here. But as he listens to him, he begins to think, oh, my goodness, the version of Christianity that I had received isn't what he's talking about. He realized in language, he realized he had grown up in the attic and he thought this might be true. And by the middle of *Confessions*, Augustine says this. He says, I

resolve, therefore, to live as a catechumen in the Catholic Church. Don't think Roman Catholic. Everyone was Catholic at that point. It's just the Catholic church. Until some certainty. He said, I'm going to go and I'm going to try this one again. In other words, in my language, he's going to go. And now that he's seen the main floor, he's going to try it on again. Until some certainty dawn by which I might direct my steps right. He says, I've got to go again. I realize this is different. I realized I was living in an attic. He's still not sure, but he's willing to step into Christianity and try it on again. This time, however, he's not trying to two plus two his way to God. He's not trying to prove Christianity in the way you might prove a math problem. Instead, he adopts what I would call a more rational view about rationality. A more rational view about rationality. He's been humbled. And so he adopts a new posture.

Augustine has tried on a posture somewhat akin to Rhet's rationalistic journey, but that eventually led him to skepticism and then to despair. He had dabbled with the elite philosophies of his day, and with each, he solved problems. And so in today's pluralistic world, one of the ways that we can care for souls, one of the ways we can be doctors of the soul, is to do the work, not only of helping people to understand their past and interpret their past, but also we need to imaginably step into the spaces that they might be deconstructing into. Because if they're going to jump from the house, they're going to live somewhere. Living nowhere is not an option. To be human is to assign value and live towards some end. To be human is to be a social and moral creature. To be human is to inhabit some story and then live that story out. We all intuitively do this. And so when people deconstruct, they're interpreting their past a certain way. And then, whether they realize or are conscious about it or not, then they're jumping into another space. Here's the kicker. Not only is the past something they need to look again at, but often they have been, not always, but in most cases, they haven't given anywhere close to the same scrutiny they have to their own attic than they have the space they're about to jump into.

One of the ways we can minister the gospel to them is to do the work of actually going before them and saying, okay, where will you live? Where will you live? Who has the words of life? You're going to live somewhere.

This afternoon, or actually my next talk this morning, we're going to look at one of those houses outside. What is it? How do we step inside and imaginatively go there and then help them see the problems and say, Listen, I hear you, and I do think there's problems in this space that you grew up in. I want to take that journey with you, but let's also take this journey to where might you go then. Let's be just as critical with those rooms outside the house. Then in our third talk for this afternoon, what I want to do is say, Okay, we've looked at some of these spaces you might live, where will you go for life? Where will you go for the words of life? How will you live then? Then dropping in and saying, Now, let's go to the main floor. Can you imagine what it

would be like to live there? That's the plan. Stay with me. Talk number two. We'll go outside the house and then we'll go to the main floor and we'll step inside that and work together about how we might guide people through that and offer that to them. Then in the final session, I think we're doing Q&A. If I've said anything heretical or that bugs you, you can yell at me then. All right, thank you.