

## A Good and True Story with Paul Gould

(December 31, 2022)

Ladies and gentlemen, what is the best explanation for the way things are? What is the best explanation for reality? Why is there a universe? Why is there life? Why are there human beings, morality, meaning, beauty, love, pain, death, religion? What explains all this? Should we even be looking for explanations?

Well, we're here to look for explanations today with Dr. Paul M. Gould. He's got a brand new book called *A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It*. Paul teaches at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He's written 12 books and *A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It* is the newest. It's great to have him on the program. Paul, how are you doing?

**Paul:**

Good. It's great to be here with you, Frank.

**Frank:**

Now, why did you decide to write this book?

**Paul:**

Yeah, that's actually a good question. There's a couple of reasons. A couple years ago, I wrote a book called *Cultural Apologetics* and that was written for Christians just thinking really deeply about this question that actually I've been wrestling with for years. And the question is, basically: How does the gospel get a fair hearing in our culture? There's just so much noise and people don't always want to hear what Christians have to say. And so, I was thinking really deeply about that. And in the book, *Cultural Apologetics*, at the end I kind of argued one of the ways that we can join with God and each other to re-enchant the world - we live in this disenchanted world - and part of what we need to do is to re-enchant the world and help people see reality as it is.



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And so, I gave these two kinds of ideas. One is that we, as Christians, would learn to see and delight in the world the way Jesus does. And then secondly, that we would invite others to see and delight in the world the way Jesus does. And those two ideas are two future book projects. And this one here is for that second idea of, how can we show people who are on the way that are not yet believers or non-believers? How can we point them to the world such that they see it and delight in it and it evokes a sense of, maybe there's a God out there. And so that's the sort of impetus for writing the book.

**Frank:**

Now, how did you become a Christian?

**Paul:**

Yeah, it's kind of interesting. Thought I was religious growing up, went to church, but missed the gospel. And as a freshman in college, two guys knocked on my freshman door and said, do you want to have a spiritual conversation. And again, because I thought it was religious, I was like, Sure, come on in. And they shared the gospel with me. And as they were doing this, as my heart was sinking, I'm realizing, okay, wait, if this is the gospel, I've missed the boat. And they finally left. I didn't become a Christian at that time, but there were two questions that sort of were niggling me at that moment. One was, wait a minute, if this is true I've missed the boat. And why are these guys that are normal looking people, like Christians, believing that God is relevant to their life? Those are the two questions that sort of animated me.

And so, I did something that I now know is not normal. I actually went to the local apologetics class at the local church. And for a whole year, I would walk in, and the professor would have a big stack of books on whatever topic they were talking about. And, you know, they'd go through the arguments for Jesus or the resurrection or God's existence. And at the end, they'd say, What do you think about the evidence, Paul? And my answer would be, it's pretty compelling. And then they would say, Well, at some point, you need to make a decision. And I'd say, Yeah, you're right. And that went on for like, a year. And then finally, long story short, I think I realized that this is true, and so, that was sort of the conclusion that I arrived at.

But then the idea was, hey, I'm just gonna, kind of, live the wild life in college and then after that, I'll put God into my life. And I think it was somewhere that summer after that freshman

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year, though, I realized that that was foolish, right, if this is actually true, that it demands all of my life. And so, that's when I became a Christian.

**Frank:**

Where were you going to college?

**Paul:**

Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

**Frank:**

Okay. In Oxford. It was a church that actually had an apologetics program.

**Paul:**

They did, yeah.

**Frank:**

Wow. That's hard to believe.

**Paul:**

And I just thought that's what it was.

**Frank:**

What year was that?

**Paul:**

Oh, this was a long time ago. So, this would have been like 1990. Like, two years ago...

**Frank:**

Yeah. And then you went on and you have your PhD in Philosophy from Purdue?

**Paul:**

I do. Yeah. And so, fun fact. I was an undergraduate accounting major. So, I actually started out as a CPA.

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**Frank:**

It doesn't add up.

**Paul:**

Yeah, it doesn't add up. I know. But because God had gotten such a hold of my life in college, I had a huge heart for college students and I wanted to work with college students and see them come to Christ. And so anyway, my wife and I both had become Christians in college, we made a huge heart for college student, so we went on staff with a campus ministry and worked as campus pastors. And that's where, what I would call this beach ball, this passion for learning - and it was an evangelism. I'd always veered toward the intellectuals or those who thought they were intellectuals and I wanted to have conversations about Jesus in the context of ideas. And so, that formed into this beach ball, which is this love of learning, you know, what is the truth about these things, but I'd shove that beach ball under the surface for a couple of years. And finally, I said, God, how do these desires to learn fit into my calling. And so, that set me on this path to get the education and become a philosopher.

**Frank:**

Now, you mentioned a phrase before, re-enchantment, or you want to re-enchant the world. My son and I wrote a book not long ago called Hollywood Heroes: How Your Favorite Movies Reveal God. And we noticed that in movies, which many are stolen from the greatest story ever told, we're enchanted with the storyline because people are in distress, they're experiencing evil, and a hero comes in and rescues them, which, of course, is really what happens in Christianity too. We're distressed, we want to be taken to the promised land. And so, we see all these movies do that. They kind of re-enchant our wonder with the world, they give us more wonder with the world. That's the aim here of this book, A Good and True Story. So, in this book, it's written for a non-believer to get re-enchanted with the world? It's not like you just open up by saying, "The Bible says...". Right? No.

**Paul:**

That's right.

**Frank:**

How do you how do you go about doing it?

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**Paul:**

Yeah, it's written for non-believers. I have three assumptions that kind of inform how I wrote the book. One is a thesis about reality. And it's just this ancient idea that reality - to speak with the learned, as I tell my students. In the Latin, reality is structured like a kind of story with Exodus [unintelligible], exit and return. Like all things are from God and one day all things will return to God. And this is kind of the fabric of reality, that there's this kind of ongoing journey.

This is the second thesis about us. We kind of take up our place and we're seeking this true story of the world, like how do we find our identity, our meaning, or purpose? And then there's this other thesis about evidence. And the idea is that evidence is actually widely available. Like, everywhere we look, you know, anything in creation, at some level points to the divine and the cause behind it all. And so, there's this idea that evidence is widely available, but it's, in some sense, easily resistible because it needs to be interpreted. And so, what I want to do is take the reader on a journey, look at that evidence, and then help guide them to what is the best explanation for this. And so, that's kind of that we're doing.

**Frank:**

You have a chapter right here on the universe. Why does the universe point to God? Start there.

**Paul:**

Well, yeah, so four features that I think are sort of evocative of some explanation. And that's the idea that the universe is contingent. It didn't have to exist but here we are. All the things in the universe are contingent. Number one, it's temporarily finite; it didn't always exist, it had a beginning. Number two, its immense. When you look at the actual numbers the universe is vast, it's huge, it's amazing. And then number four, it's also finely tuned for life. And so, kind of walking through these features, they press all these questions like, Why did the universe begin? If it's contingent, you know, it seems like we need a cause. What best explains that we exist? And then there's this question about, Why all the fine-tuning? Why is it tuned to life? And again, I think the best explanation for all those are some version of the cosmological or teleological arguments for God.

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**Frank:**

So, it's contingent, it had a beginning, it is fine-tuned, and it's immense.

**Paul:**

Yes.

**Frank:**

Okay. Those are the four on the universe. Now, this doesn't necessarily prove the Christian God. I mean, it could be the Christian God, right. You don't get all the way to the Christian God from this argument. So, you're kind of combining the cosmological and teleological arguments here in this first chapter.

**Paul:**

A little bit. Yeah. With the fine-tuning.

**Frank:**

Okay. All right. The next thing that you look into is the existence of life itself. Why do we think life points to God?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so just to back up, trying to be a little creative I have these sort of personified guides. So, Lady Nature is with us for these four origins. So, Lady Nature is before us saying, Look at the features of the world that we find. And I want to explore these four origin debates, because I think these are fascinating. Why do we have life at all? Why do we have all this diversity? Why do we have humans? And so, with life you have this incredible transition from chemistry to biology. And so, there's this question, first of all, What is life? And spent some time with a philosopher, I'm curious on these things. But then there's this other question, What best explains the origin of life? And there it's just amazing the strength of the arguments for God, right. It's just really hard to see how something can come from chemistry and biology by natural unguided processes. And so, that's sort of what I'm working with there.

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**Frank:**

Well, let's pick that up right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek. My guest is Paul Gould and his brand new book is A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It. You want to pick it up. And we'll continue right after this. Don't go anywhere.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio, go no further. You will never, ever, ever hear this on NPR unless the Lord comes back and sets them straight because they're never going to talk about issues like this. But we are. We are talking with Dr. Paul Gould. His brand new book, A Good and True Story, is all about the idea that there are pointers, clues, at least 11 of them, that will show you your place in the universe. And why does the universe exist?

Paul, just before the break, we were talking about the origin of life itself. Is there any viable naturalistic explanation that the atheists or non-believers will say, Hey, this is a pretty good explanation for how life got here?

**Paul:**

Well, it's what's interesting about that question is, when you look at the literature, you read what scientists are saying, there is a gap between the confident pronouncements that we will solve this problem, there will be a naturalistic cause to this, we just haven't got there yet. And the reality of the evidence and the complexity, the more we learn about the cell, the more we will learn about life, the more difficult it actually becomes to explain life for naturalistic processes. And so, I would say there are people working on it and they're very confident that they'll find a naturalistic explanation. But you know, it's so interesting, Jim Torre, who's a leading chemist and teaches at Rice University, he's kind of calling out his colleagues and says, Look guys, none of us know what we're doing here. It's incredibly complex to get life from non-life. And he's basically saying, if anybody tells you that we've discovered how to do that - he doesn't say it's a lie, but you know, it's not the case.

And so, yeah, you even have these fantastical ideas, like maybe life came from outer space, right. Francis Crick famously proposed that, and others. So, those kinds of proposals show you

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how difficult it really is to find a naturalistic explanation. And even if that was the explanation, it would just push the question back, like, where did it come from? In outer space, right. We'd still have the same question.

**Frank:**

Yeah, that's right. That's right. And I think there's also a difference between saying, we haven't found any natural explanation for it. If you just plug God in, that would be a God of the Gaps argument. But also, it seems there's positive empirically verifiable evidence for an intelligent cause when you look at the fact that there's a genome there, a program, programs come from programmers, and codes come from coders, and messages come from minds. So, it seems to be there's positive evidence or some kind of intelligence out there that would bring life into existence. Then you have a chapter here on species. What's that about?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so we're moving from life, and part of what we're doing is kind of following the history of the of the universe. So, we begin with the universe. It began a finite time ago. And then, there's a period of time, and then suddenly life appears, at least as far as we know, on the standard sort of picture of the age of the universe, it appears here only in one place, Earth. And estimates of the oldest fossils are about 3.5 billion years ago that we have some fossils of life. So, you know, you've got a fairly finite time that life has appeared. But then over the next large number of years, the earth begins to wake up and life begins to take shape, and it becomes begins to become very diverse. And so, the question is, Where did all this diverse life come from? If we have just these single cells, how did it develop into the kind of life that we see today?

And one of the fascinating things was, as I looked at this, is that actually 99% of species that have existed are now extinct. And so, even though we have an incredible diversity of life now, it's nothing compared to the history of life that we've had on Earth. And again, this is one of those questions - I know there's the debate over evolution, and creation has become sort of toxic and sometimes it's hard to navigate through that. But within that, if you kind of set that aside, there is this wonderful fact, the diversity of life, the wonder of life. And how did that arise? And that's the thing that I was most interested in exploring.

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**Frank:**

It's interesting you mention the word toxic. You would think in a world of science that the word toxic wouldn't be used to talk about whether or not life was created or somehow evolved. But it is toxic. Why do you think it's toxic that scientists are worried that people might say, You know, there's intelligence behind all this? Is it more than just the science that is having these people worried?

**Paul:**

Yeah, I think that's a really astute question. I think the closer you get to the question of, What does it mean to be human, and the minute we start talking about the diversity of life, we're gonna have to talk about, What does it mean to be human? The closer you get to that question, I think the more worldview issues come in. And it is true that there's often an anti-supernatural bias a lot in the sciences. Not all the time but it is true that there is this bias. And there's also this incredible sociological pressure actually, in the academy. I know this because I've worked with professors for years. There's an incredible sociological pressure to sort of maintain the status quo.

Of course, the status quo is some version of either the Darwinian synthesis or some other non-Darwinian evolutionary story that's naturalistic. And so, there's a lot of pressure there even if we want to be card carrying members in the academy, even as theists, the majority of Christians are theistic evolutionists. Right? And in some ways, we shouldn't be afraid of that. Like, if God did it this way, fine. But my question in this book was like, Well, let's Look at the evidence. Let's do the best we can, even as a non-specialist. I'm not a scientist, I'm a philosopher. But I think we can assess the evidence because a lot of it is driven by worldview issues as well.

**Frank:**

Yeah, we've said before that science doesn't say anything, scientists do. And if, as Einstein said, unfortunately, the man of science is a poor philosopher, you've got to gather and interpret data and quite often how they interpret the data is based on their pre-existing worldview. They're gonna rule out any kind of intelligent cause before they look at the evidence. It also seems to me there's a moral issue here. Why do so many scientists get so allergic to the possibility of there being a divine intelligence out there? It seems to me it's because if there is a divine

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intelligence out there, and he cares about what we do, then suddenly there's a moral component - which we're gonna get to here in the book - and that won't allow them to just do whatever they want to do. There's a problem there.

**Paul:**

Yeah, I've always been struck with, I'm sure you know the quote. Thomas Nagel, who is a really important philosopher. He wrote this book in 1996 called *The Last Word*. And he says, I'm basically bothered by the fact that the smartest people I know are Christians. And then there are a couple things he says that are so revealing, like, I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. But then he says, if you continue on in the next paragraph, and part of the reason is I have a cosmic authority issue. And we're like, yeah, I get it. That's called sin. We all have that.

**Frank:**

A cosmic authority problem. We all do. At the time when he wrote that in the 90s he said, I think that Richard Dawkins has a cosmic authority problem like I do. And Christopher Hitchens, as well. So, that is interesting. You cover this all at a late level, so people can all understand this. And then when we get to humanity, you have a chapter here on human beings. They point back to God. How so?

**Paul:**

There's this quote by GK Chesterton, in his book *Everlasting Man*, where he says this really provocative thing that it is not natural to think of man as natural. And that's a really provocative idea. There's something unique and significant about humans, right. And on the standard maybe Darwinian story, as Darwin famously said, in his book *Descent of Man*, that we are not different in kind from the apes, we're just different in degrees. We've got larger brains. But I think the reality is, in the intuition at least, is that no, we're not just different in degree, we're different in kind. And that points to kind of unique significance. And so, I wanted to explore that question. Why is it, as Chesterton would say, that man alone creates art, and man alone has intelligence, and rationality, and will, and imagination, and all these things. And again, that would be another feature of the world that I think cries out for explanation, and I wanted to explore the evidence from both sides.

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**Frank:**

How about morality? That's a chapter as well. Without just referencing scripture, why would you say there's a moral code out there? And how does that point back to a moral lawgiver?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so again, here we switch. Lady Nature has been kind of with us on the journey. And by the time we get to morality, I invite this other journey mate, Lady Philosophy, who also showed up in a lot of medieval literature, And so, I was interacting with Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, where Boethius has found himself in prison unjustly accused of some things by the king there and he basically begins to ask these questions about was my life worth anything? You know, where can happiness be found?

And Lady Philosophy begins to console him of this question, Is there meaningful happiness? And so, to get to that, the next three chapters we need to deal with morality, and then meaning, and then meaningful happiness. And the reality is like, there is a moral landscape, because we all, even if it's just subjective, we all have views of what you ought to do and what you ought not to do. And so, one thing to just notice is that there is a moral landscape, even if it's only subjective. But then there are arguments that can be made that no, there are at least some objective moral truths out there. Right.

There are facts, like honesty is a virtue, that's a fact that I would submit is just as true as some physical facts about this table or chair. And if there are these objective moral facts, and there are arguments that can be made for that, then you lead to the next question, What best explains that. And as it turns out, there are basically three options. One option is nothing explains them. It's just a brute fact. There is no explanation. An explanation stopped somewhere. And I explored that. I explored Erik Wielenberg, who is a leading plutonic atheist who kind of goes that route.

And then there's this other sort of move that a lot of people make. No, the universe somehow accounts for objective moral facts. And so, you have like Thomas Nagel. Actually, his book, Mind and Cosmos, tries to ground objective moral value in the universe itself. And there are other people. So, I explored that. And then, eventually, you just land on the theistic option. If there are these obligations, it seems that we owe obligations to persons. And theism would

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accommodate that kind of idea, I think, quite nicely. And so, again, just walking through the arguments looks like another clue that points to something beyond this world.

**Frank:**

How can we have morality, or how do the atheists deal with this, Paul, when they say there is objective morality but they don't believe there's objective purpose? So, how can you have objective morality, an objective right way to live toward a purpose, if there is no purpose?

**Paul:**

I think that if we were going to be a platonic atheist who had that sort of a view - and actually, sometimes you could make moves like this. You could distinguish between the meaning OF life and meaning IN life, right. And so, I could see someone like that, that says, there's a kind of morality that gives us meaning in life. So, there's no real meaning out there to the universe but living this certain way makes my life meaningful for me. And my guess is, that's probably the best you get.

**Frank:**

Well, how would such a person deal with Hitler, who says, what makes life meaningful for me is to create my own super race and killing everybody that's my way? Is there any way to adjudicate that? No.

**Paul:**

Probably not at the end of the day.

**Frank:**

So, Erik Wielenberg's position is what? Is he a Platonist?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so he's an atheist who's a kind of Platonist, so there are objective moral values. There's an objective moral order. And I think he would even agree that there's meaning in life and maybe not anything beyond that. There's no cosmic meaning to the universe or something like that. And so, that's good enough, right. In fact, in the meaning chapter, I looked at Owen Flanagan, who's a leading philosopher at Duke University. And he wrote this book and the title

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of the book was, The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World. And it's so interesting, he's riffing on this other really hard problem, the problem of consciousness. He says that one's hard but the question of meaning in a naturalistic world is even harder. But he ends up at the end of the day saying, well, you know, we can have something that's good enough for meaning.

**Frank:**

What does he mean by good?

**Paul:**

Exactly? Right. Yeah. So, there's a kind of meaning landscape, you know, and he grounds it in culture in the world that we find ourselves in.

**Frank:**

Whose culture?

**Paul:**

The one that he finds himself in. And you're right. You're asking all the right questions. These are the kinds of push backs that we want to give.

**Frank:**

Well, let's talk about meaning right after the break. Is there objective meaning? You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network with 180 or so stations around the country. I'm talking to Dr. Paul Gould and his brand new book is A Good and True Story. There is a story out there, ladies and gentlemen, and you're part of it. How are you part of it? Well, you'll find 11 clues to understanding our universe and your place in it in this book. You may want to check it out. We're back in two minutes.

Is there true meaning? Is there true happiness? And, if so, how can you find it? And where does it point? Those are a couple of the questions we're talking about today with Paul Gould. His brand new book, A Good and True Story, came out very recently. You can check it out wherever books are sold. Paul, just before the break we were talking about, well, you can't have objective morality unless you have objective purpose. And if there is no God, there is no objective

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purpose. But What about objective meaning? Can we have objective meaning? Is there any meaning to life if there is no God?

**Paul:**

So, in the book, I explore that question. So, in that chapter, what I'm interested in is we have all these deep longings of the heart and we call it this - I forget exactly what I call it - but this set of longings that we have for value, for purpose, for identity, for meaning, for intelligibility, and for these kinds of things. And so, the question now is: Is there a story that fits with these deep longings of the human heart?

And so, what I do is I kind of canvas four stories. One from The French Cafe, Absurdism, Jean-Paul Sartre and [unintelligible]. And then I look at a more contemporary view called Nice Nihilism, which is Alex Rosenberg, a philosopher who is arguing for some view like that. And then from there, I move on to Odin Flanagan, which I mentioned before the break. His view is kind of what I would call Enchanted Naturalism. And walk through each of these and ask, Does it fit? Does this story actually fit with the deep longings of the human heart and satisfy these deep longings and argue that none of them do.

So, we arrive at the last story, which is a kind of enchanted supernaturalism, and there look at Blaise Pascal and his sort of famous quote about how we have this God shaped void, that it only is filled by God and we're trying to fill it with all these other things. Or CS Lewis who talks about how in the Christian story you have like hand in glove, or key to lock. There's a perfect fit between the deep longings of the heart and the story of the world, right. And so, that's kind of what we're doing there.

And it was a lot of fun to think through this question of meaning. Philosophers have been debating this, and there's a lot of vagueness with this, and there are distinctions that need to be made about the meaning in life and the meaning of life and whether you can have one without the other. But what I sort of landed on is the quest for meaning is this quest to discover our place in the universe, and places this rich normative term where we understand the place where we belong and where we discover our true name. And that's the thing that we're all longing for, right. This good and true story of the world. And so, it kind of syncs up really well

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with this idea that we're on this quest to discover this true story, the world in which we find our true name.

**Frank:**

So, from the Christian perspective - which of course we believe is the right perspective, because we think we have evidence for this - what is the meaning of life? Why are we even here?

**Paul:**

Well, in a word, what's so interesting is union with Christ. That's our highest good, man's highest good. The thing that we've been created for is to be united with the God who created us. Again, that's back to that Exodus [unintelligible] story, right. All things are from God and then one day we all things will be made new. And for those who are redeemable, we will be united with God. And so, beyond that, though, I do cash out, because we're kind of pushing to the next chapter on meaningful happiness. You know, this question: What is objective happiness? Not the subjective stuff, but what does flourishing really look like?

And for me, it's four things. It's a union with God, so rightly related to God. Rightly related to self, that's character, intellectual moral virtue. Rightly related to each other in the world around us. And then rightly related to our end, or telos, the purpose that God has made each of us for. And there just think of Ephesians 2:10, in this wonderful passage where Paul says, we are Christ's workmanship, this work of art, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. God has these specific things that he's created each of us to do and that's kind of the idea of flourishing. But ultimately, yeah, the highest good is union with God. That's the purpose.

**Frank:**

And how do we get there, though? Does it require quite often going through pain and suffering?

**Paul:**

Well, it often does, because we live in a fallen world. For sure, right. And I think that God uses these things, too, as CS Lewis sort of famously said that God whispers to us in our consciousness but shouts to us in our pain. So, I do think there is a sense in which God uses the pain and suffering and the angst in this world to awaken these deep longings that we have for

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the thing that will make us whole, and the story that actually answers, I think, gives you the satisfying answer to the problem with pain and suffering. Yeah, so that is often involved.

**Frank:**

Yeah, Lewis, I'm paraphrasing, but he said, if I have desires for things that this world can't satisfy, the most probable explanation is I was made for another world. Now, you have this chapter here on happiness. How would you define that? What is happiness? I mean, you mentioned those four things but what would be the definition of happiness? How do you get your mind around that?

**Paul:**

That's great because everyone wants it. Right. Everyone's searching for it.

**Frank:**

I want to be happy. What do you mean by that? Are we confusing happiness and pleasure?

**Paul:**

Often.

**Frank:**

Or happiness and comfort? I mean, what is true happiness?

**Paul:**

Well, that's exactly the way that I structured this. So, in the book, we enter back into Boethius, the story and the constellation of philosophy, because he's asking that exact question, What brings happiness in life? And so, he has all these counterfeit gods. Is it fame? Is it wealth? Is it success? Is it all these things? And so, we kind of walk through all those and then we get the answer, those four things. But even before that, it would be helpful to distinguish there's kind of a shallow view of happiness that I think if you talk to the man or the woman on the streets and ask this question, What is happiness?, they would probably say something like you did earlier. Like subjective pleasure, or the maximization of desires, or something like that. That's a very contemporary and shallow view of happiness.

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But classically, happiness was understood as flourishing in light of our nature. So, notice, even in that, then that requires this whole metaphysical backdrop, right. What do you mean we have natures? We have the way we ought to be, right? There's a teleology built in there. And then we have to discover that, right? And so, there's a rich Christian tradition actually of filling out the details of that. I love Peter Kreeft, he wrote this book called Back to Virtue where he gives us a seven fold picture of the flourishing or the happy life. And as it turns out, it's the virtuous life. So, you have the four classic virtues of courage, wisdom, temperance, and justice. And then the church adds a three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. And that's like your picture of a flourishing life, is a certain kind of person, and of course, that entails being connected to the God who creates us.

**Frank:**

So, it's maybe less associated with circumstances than character. Is that a fair way of saying, a true happiness is?

**Paul:**

Yeah, it's going to be disconnected in a way from that, because happiness is - and again, we're on a journey, even with faith. Like faith is the path as we journey in hope toward love. Right? This is the beauty of the theological virtues. But hope is the one virtue that we don't take with us into the afterlife, because one day all the deep longings will be satisfied, and all the angst, and the failures, and the things that we fail on won't be there. And so, that's the kind of interesting thing theologians talk about. Well, this is the one virtue we don't take with us because we'll have fulfillment of all the deep longings of the heart.

**Frank:**

Now, would you equate the biblical happiness to contentment more than just, I'm feeling upbeat today? I mean because you can feel upbeat sitting, right. You can feel upbeat getting something for nothing. You can feel upbeat with pleasure. So, what is this more lasting, deep, thick kind of happiness?

**Paul:**

Yeah, that's a great question. So, what's so interesting, I do think pleasure, and success, and fame - there's a sense of fame - all these things that are actually ingredients in that ultimate

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subjective happiness, but they're just not the thing itself. Right. So, now that we're talking on the Christian story, it was so interesting, like think of CS Lewis in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, in that essay with that title, he talks about, what's so interesting on the Christian story that we get to even be part of God's happiness as we're united with God. That's the weight of glory, fame, right. One way to understand famous is kind of excellence, you know, and so, we have this weight of glory. Yeah, so, I think just being connected, experiencing life and becoming the kind of people that God wants us to be. And of course, the joy or the pleasure, those things come and go. They are ingredients in happiness but that's not what happiness actually is.

**Frank:**

When you think about Paul, Paul's writing about joy. Not you, Paul, the other one. The one you're named after.

**Paul:**

The saint.

**Frank:**

Yeah. He's writing from a Roman prison when he's writing about joy in *Philippians*. So, his circumstances are pretty bad, but yet somehow, he has this contentment about him, this strength, this ability to know that he's flourishing somehow, even though his circumstances are bad.

**Paul:**

That's right. Because the highest good for man, it's a relational good. The highest good is union with God. That's why Augustine got it exactly right in the confessions. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you, right. So, not only the deepest longing of the human heart is for God, as it turns out, the deepest subject of longing is connected with the highest good, being united with God. And so, that's why Paul can have contentment because the thing that makes him flourish are relational goods. And those things are impervious to whether he's in prison, or in want, or need, or things like that.

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**Frank:**

So, I don't know if it was Chesterton who said this. It may be attributed to him. But he said that any man knocking on the door of a brothel is looking for God. Have you heard that before? I don't know if it's Chesterton or not; sounds like Chesterton. It could be somebody else. But we're all searching for this and we're searching for good things. I mean, sex is a good thing, quite obviously, but if we get it out of order, that's when we get into trouble. I mean, it seems that we are disordering ourselves when we seek good things at the expense of the best thing. Would that be a fair way of putting it?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so, one way I think of our belongings is think of it like as an inverted triangle. Think of all the things that we desire, put it instead of this inverted triangle, you've got your surface desires at the top. Like, right now I'm hungry for a hamburger. That's a surface thing. Once I get that hamburger, that desire is gone, right? But then as you go down, you have your deep desires, and then your deepest desire, and of course, that deepest desire is union with God. Our hearts are restless until I find union. But right above that, and this is what CS Lewis does so well in all his arguments from desire. Right above the deepest longing we have these deep longings of the heart for goodness, truth, beauty, justice, love, meaning, and identity. All that stuff.

And so, if this is how God has made us, I think that if it was Chesterton who said that, that quote is actually perceptive because we have these deep longings and we're just trying. And we're seeking the object, we're on a quest to find the object that satisfies that longing. We think it will be fun and pleasure and we learn that ultimately, that's not it, right. And so, we're going to untether. And if we faithfully follow this sort of dialectic of desires Lewis actually talks about, eventually that will lead us to the true object of our longing, of all those deep desires, including that deepest desire, which is Christ.

**Frank:**

Well, we've got much more with Dr. Paul Gould. His new book is *A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It*. And as we come up here to the end of the year, keep in mind that we have some new online courses coming out in the new year. Go to [CrossExamined.org](http://CrossExamined.org) and click on online courses. We have one from Steven C. Meyer,

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another from Scott Klusendorf that you want to be a part of. And I'll be teaching one as well. We're back in two minutes don't go anywhere.

Does beauty point to God, and if so, how? God's an immaterial being, so how can he be beautiful? Well, we're talking to Dr. Paul Gould, about his new book, A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It. His new book has all these pointers that actually point to God. One of them is beauty. Paul, how does that point to God? God's an immaterial being? How is he beautiful?

**Paul:**

Yeah. Well, it all depends what beauty is. So, what's so interesting, there's a debate about beauty and whether it's an objective feature of the world or if it's subjective, it's in the eye of the beholder. I firmly land on the side that beauty is an objective feature in the world in the same way that there are moral facts. We talked about that earlier. I believe that there are aesthetic facts. The sunset is objectively beauty. We're sitting here in Denver, right, and the Rocky Mountains are objectively beautiful. And so, again, the question is, what's the nature of beauty and then what does that tell us about the nature of the world and transcendent reality?

And so, in writing that chapter, what was so interesting, two things about beauty that stood out that people have noticed. One is the ubiquitous nature of beauty, like it's everywhere, right. If naturalism is true, think about art. It's really easy to make art but it's really hard to make beautiful art. It takes a certain kind of artist, certain kind of skill. If naturalism was true, you wouldn't expect the world to be saturated with beauty. Everywhere you turn from the cell to the cosmos, you find beauty everywhere. So, that's one interesting piece of evidence, the fact that the universe is saturated with beauty.

And the second piece of evidence that was so interesting is - and the language I put; I called it this transcendent nature of beauty. And then a lot of writers from Plato all the way to contemporary thinkers have noticed that there's something evocative about beauty. Like Plato famously said, beauty evokes desire and it awakens something within us. And it kind of sets us on this journey to find that object of longing. And so, there's this kind of transcendent quality, as one writer named Elaine Scarry, who wrote the book called Beauty and Justice, talked about how writers throughout history have noticed that there's something about beauty that points

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to the eternality of it, right. This is sort of something that that's beyond this world. And so, if you plug that into this argument, these two facts cry out for explanation.

And again, the best explanation, given the saturated nature of it, and the fact that if it really doesn't point beyond just this world is kind of a bad explanation for beauty. As it turns out, there's a pretty strong argument from beauty to a God as a source of beauty. And so, that's what I explore in that chapter.

**Frank:**

So, how can he be, though, if he's immaterial? We always think of beauty as something physical. That's not always the case, though.

**Paul:**

So, this is what I find really interesting. Aquinas, this 13th century monk, you know, who would have thought that he would have really interesting things to say about beauty, but he said two things that I think are super provocative. Number one, that beauty is that which is pleasing to apprehend. And so, it's pleasing, that's the idea of evoking desire, but to apprehend. And what he means there, he's not talking about just visible beauty, the kind of thing you're talking about, he's talking about anything. It could even be like the laws of nature, they're pleasant to apprehend in the mind's eye.

**Frank:**

Okay.

**Paul:**

So, that would be one thing. And then the second thing, well, actually he says three things, but the other thing he does is he makes this connection - and here's the distinction. I would want to distinguish, and this is a rich history of thinking this way in the Christian tradition between these three things: the experience of beauty, beautiful things, and then beauty itself. So, we have the experience of beauty as humans. We encounter things that are pleasant to apprehend. And then Aquinas says some interesting things about the criteria for beautiful things. He gave these three criteria; they have perfection, wholeness, and he called it radiance. This kind of calls to you, this evocative transcendent nature of beautiful things. We could quibble about the

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criteria, right. But then he gives us theistic grounding to it, where the source of beauty itself is God. So, beautiful things participate in beauty itself. So, the tradition locates beauty itself in deity. And that seems like the proper starting place, the thing with perfect wholeness, perfect integrity, and perfect radiance is God, and so, God is beauty itself.

**Frank:**

Yeah, I know people have said it's in the eye of the beholder, but it seems to me that's kind of an argument from the beard in logic. Yeah, we may disagree over things in the middle. Like right now, Paul, do you have a beard or not? I don't know. You might have beard, it might be kind of not quite there, but we would know your beard from Jorge's over there who's got the full beard, right. That's a beard. Okay. So, just because we're ambiguous about stuff in between, doesn't mean there aren't objective ends of our investigation. So, yeah, you might find some person attractive, and the next person doesn't find that person attractive, but everybody could see the difference between something like a beautiful sunset and a garbage dump. Right? Everybody knows the sunset is beautiful and the garbage dump isn't. Now, you have a chapter here on love. We're all after that. What's that about?

**Paul:**

Yeah, this feature of the world that we want. We all want there to be genuine love. And so, explore what is the nature of love and actually walk through some of the contemporary philosophical theories on what love is and ultimately argue again, that Aquinas, this 13th century celibate monk, got it right. That love is this desire for two things: the well-being of the beloved and union with the beloved. So, that's what love is. So, yeah, did some conceptual spadework on what the nature of love is. I think Aquinas actually got it right.

And then the question is, Well, wait a minute, we seem to all experience this - hopefully, most of us do, hopefully, all of us have. But what explains this? Again, it's sort of surprising on naturalism that we would have this kind of deep and enduring love, and I walk through these features of love. But on the Christian story, love is actually at the foundation of reality itself, right. It's the bedrock fact. In fact, the universe was created out of love. And so, it makes sense that this kind of love would find instances in the universe. But on the naturalistic story, it's late, it's local, as far as we know, on the earth, through at least the human species, maybe others. I don't know. And it's something that on some stories, like Michael Ruse, who's an atheist, he

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says that it's kind of an illusion. So, it doesn't fit, right. And so, again, you have this argument, surprising on naturalism on theism it's what you would expect, and that's there's actually some evidential force then for the existence of love to the existence of a God who is love.

**Frank:**

So, you said Aquinas said that love is at least seeking what's good for the other person and then being united. Isn't that interesting that when you see a beautiful landscape, say a beautiful mountain, you almost want to unite with it. You know, it's like, how can I hug the mountain, right? Yeah, I don't even take pictures of that stuff anymore because you can't approximate it. But tragically, I think in our culture, people think love means approval. Like, if you love me, you'll approve of what I want to do, particularly on the sexual issues, right? But of course, every parent knows that if you approve of everything your child wants to do, you're not loving, you're unloving. You need to seek what's best for that individual and that often means telling them the truth, even when they don't like it. Paul says love always protects, love rejoices in the truth, so that's what we need to do. Now, the final chapter in the book, A Good and True Story, is religion. So, what's that about?

**Paul:**

Yeah, so the central metaphor in the book, as you can see on the front cover there, is the idea that there are stones, the cairns. Think about hiking a mountain peak and you're trying to get to the summit and there are these cairns, these step stones that guide you along the way. And so, the metaphor is that each of these clues act like stones that we're stacking one on top of the other as we guide toward the summit, toward the goal of our faith. And so, the last clue that would only be fitting in the book is religion, and the fact that all cultures, historical and contemporary, have been deeply religious. And so, then the question is, and at this point, I think I've argued pretty clearly, I hope, that there is something beyond this world. There is a true story that includes a transcendent God.

And so, then the question is, Well, wait a minute. Of all the religions, which one is true? And so, there it was kind of the most personal of the chapters where I shared a little bit of my own journey and just began with this question, can they all be true? As a point of simple logic, they can't all be true, because they contradict each other. And then, if they can't all be true, then it moves to the question of which one has the most evidence. And I just kind of share, not just for

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me, in my own journey, going back to your question about how I became a Christian going to that apologetics class. I was persuaded by the evidence for the resurrection and the fact that wow, there's all these good reasons to believe. And so, shared about that a little bit.

But then the last piece, and I'll end here, is that all the things that we've talked about perfectly fit together on the Christian story. The universe, and the contours of the human heart, and our quest for happiness, all these things find their fulfillment in the Christian story that, indeed, is not just a good and beautiful story but it's the true story. As Lewis would say, it's true myth. It's the thing that unites head and heart, or reason and romance, in this perfect blend and that's the beauty of the gospel story.

**Frank:**

Now Paul, if we're going to be scientific, we're going to reason from effect to cause, and that's what you've done in this book, right? We've got a universe, that's an effect, you reason back to a cause, a creator. You've got design, that's the effect, you reason back to a cause, that's a designer. Moral law, meaning, all these things go back to what appear to be a God of some kind. And of course, when you look at the Christian worldview, or you look at the evidence for the resurrection, you say, well, it's gotta be the Christian God. But you're on a college campus, you're at Palm Beach Atlantic, and I don't assume that everybody that goes to your school is a Christian. Maybe they claim to be. But this seems so reasonable. Why do people resist it?

**Paul:**

Yeah, no, that's good. Why do people resist it? Well, because we have a will, that sometimes has their fists. That's the wrong metaphor, right, but sometimes our fist is wanting to live our own life and wanting to go our own way. And so, at the end of the day - and this is what became so clear to me in my own journey, that I had all these intellectual questions and doubts - and I think, obviously, we need to deal with them, but oftentimes, and this was what it was, for me, they were smokescreens. For me, it was just a question of the will. And I even go back to like Augustine and his whole journey. You know, in the confession, he shares his spiritual autobiography and he basically says he came to this point where he now believed that Christianity was true. And then there's this famous chapter in book eight, where he praised the lady chastity, you know, give me chastity, but just not yet.

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**Frank:**

That's right.

**Paul:**

I'm just not ready to do it. Like, it was the moral thing. And so, yes, it's the head, but it's the heart too. It's the will. And I just think that's part of the journey. So, my hope here was just to be a gentle guide. Expose them to these deep longings of the heart and the truths, and then, you know, you can't force anyone into the kingdom, but I think that in awakening these longings, looking at these features, hopefully the Holy Spirit will do his work.

**Frank:**

Too often we suppress the truth in unrighteousness, as Paul says. It's not about God's existence, it's quite often about our resistance. We don't want it to be true. Now, Paul, where can people learn more about you and see some more of your work? Do you have a website?

**Paul:**

Yeah, you can find me online at Paul-Gould.com. And then I'm on Facebook and Twitter and you can find me at the university faculty page at Palm Beach Atlantic University as well.

**Frank:**

And you've written 11 other books, so this is just one of them. This is the most recent. What do you teach down there? Is it mostly philosophy?

**Paul:**

Yeah, I actually lead a Philosophy at an MA level program. We go kind of deep into the whole bedrock of the gospel.

**Frank:**

Thanks so much for being on the show, Paul.

**Paul:**

Thanks, Frank. Thanks for having me.

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**Frank:**

That's Paul Gould ladies and gentlemen. The book again is called A Good and True Story: Eleven Clues to Understanding Our Universe and Your Place in It. You definitely want to pick it up. Thanks so much for listening. And thanks so much, if you're listening to this on radio, realizing there's a bonus podcast in the middle of the week. It comes out on Tuesday. You're not going to hear it on the radio. Look for the I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist podcast and you can hear it there. And I'll see you here next week, Lord willing.

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