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with Dr. Frank Turek **PODCAST**

## The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God with Justin Brierley – Part 1

(March 1, 2024)

### **FRANK:**

Ladies and gentlemen, is Christianity waning in the west? Some say it is. However, there is a surprising rebirth of belief in God among former atheists and agnostics who are highly educated, very intellectual people. Why is that happening? Why are these intellectuals coming to realize, or what are they coming to realize about unbelief? Why are some of them saying that secular values themselves actually come from Christianity? That new ideologies are in some ways stolen from God himself? What accounts for this new trend?

Well, my guest today will tell us. He has a fabulous new book called 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God' and an equally amazing new documentary podcast you're going to want to avail yourselves of because Justin Brierley has been hosting conversations between atheists and Christians, and Muslims and Christians, and agnostics and Christians for more than a decade. And he's now launched out to actually create a brand-new podcast based on his new book, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.'

I know you're going to want to hear it and you're going to want to read the book as well. He's coming all the way from the UK. Here he is, ladies and gentlemen, the great Justin Brierley. Justin, it's been too long we haven't had you on the show, and you've gone through a bit of a transition. First of all, tell us when you left Unbelievable. And why you then transitioned into this new endeavor.

### **JUSTIN:**

Well, I left Unbelievable in April last year. So, it was a very bittersweet goodbye to a show I had hosted for over 17 years, believe it or not. And doing all those interviews, as you say, between atheists, Christians, Muslims, and just in the process making a lot of friends and learning an awful lot. And I kind of documented that journey partway through when I wrote my first book, which you kindly had me on to talk about, 'Unbelievable: Why After Ten Years of Talking with Atheists, I'm Still a Christian.' The reason for moving on?

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Well, there were a number of different reasons, but I genuinely felt that it was time for something new. And the first of those new things is this new book and podcast documentary series, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' But it very much builds on those conversations.

And I still plan to continue having those kinds of open-ended conversations between the Christian and secular world because I think that's where I want to be. I want to be kind of in the middle of what's going on in our culture. I'm still very much working in the whole area of cultural apologetics. So, I'm excited about these new projects, new ventures, and some new times ahead.

**FRANK:**

Well, the new podcast. First of all, you're doing two podcasts, but the newest one about 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God', wherever you get podcasts, ladies and gentlemen, just look for that. You can look for 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God,' or you can look for Justin's name, Justin Brierley, and you will find it. This is a very well-produced podcast.

It's more of a documentary, Justin. It's not just you in a microphone talking with other people. You really have created in every one of these podcasts, and there's more than a dozen of them out there now, sort of a documentary with music and interviews. And you must have a whole team doing this with you because it's very well done.

**JUSTIN:**

Well, it's me and one other person. So, I'm glad that you've been given the illusion that there's a whole team behind it. I mean, I actually started, before I even started the Unbelievable show. My first sort of role in radio was actually producing features. So, I'm kind of going back to where I started here, and I really love the different kind of way that you go into producing more of a documentary style piece. I still love, obviously, live interviews and that kind of format. But this is a real chance to kind of tell a story more.

And that's what I'm really enjoying about this long form documentary series, because I think there's a really interesting story about the way that new atheism as a movement kind of came, but also collapsed back in on itself. And this story of how a new generation of secular thinkers is starting to take Christianity seriously again. And I'm really glad I've got the space to actually

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develop that story in this kind of more artistic way, as you say, with music, and narration, and lots of different perspectives, and talking heads, and kind of going back into the archives and, you know, looking back on some of those interesting moments in the past. So, it's been really fun, and I've had just an absolutely overwhelmingly positive response to it from both Christians and non-Christians who have been listening. So, I'm really, really pleased with the way it's panning out. It very much is a labor of love, but I'm enjoying the process.

**FRANK:**

Check it out, ladies and gentlemen. Let's talk about the subject of both the podcast and the book, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' First of all, tell our audience, Justin, from your point of view, why the new atheism arose right after 911?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, I think 911 was a particular catalyst. It kind of gave a reason for people who perhaps had an axe to grind against religion already to say, well, look, this is what happens when religious people are allowed to run amok. And it was kind of coming at a time when there were other issues in the culture, especially in the US. There was tension between those who wanted to teach intelligent design, and there was a kind of whole court case going on you may remember around that.

There were those who thought that George Bush, you know, was as a kind of evangelical Christian, that was bad news for the US. And, I mean, those all seem like quite distant memories now, actually, you know, some 20 years on from them. But at the time, I think combined with the fact that the internet was coming of age, and lots of secular folk, and atheists were suddenly able to find each other who might have been more spread out before, I think it led to a kind of an invigorated sort of form of this new atheism which was able to band together.

There were these online forums which turned into real life meetings, even to the point where there were big atheist conferences happening. And of course, there were these celebrity atheist speakers who had best-selling books: Richard Dawkins and 'The God Delusion,' Sam Harris, 'The End of Faith', and so on. And it just felt like it all came together at the right moment for that movement at least, to kind of suddenly capture a lot of people's attention and

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imagination. And it was just a very sort of out there, sort of unabashed, dogmatic form of atheism. I mean, in all honesty, it wasn't a terribly intellectual form of atheism. It traded more in slogans, and memes, and that kind of thing, but it caught people's attention.

And so, you know, here in the UK, we had, you may remember the atheist bus campaign, which was red London buses circulating with the slogan, "There's probably no God. Now, stop worrying and enjoy your life." And so, it was very much a high watermark, if you like, for this very dogmatic form of atheism. But it did fade off in the end. And that was interesting to document as well, the way that the movement kind of collapsed in on itself as well.

**FRANK:**

Why do you think it did collapse back in on itself?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, I think there's a few reasons why it sort of faded from cultural view. I think people kind of almost came to realize that it was such a dogmatic, zealous movement. It was almost quasi-religious in itself. You know, it had these four horsemen of the new atheism. They were like the high priests. They had their sacred texts. There was even a doctrine, you know, a creed, which was essentially scientific materialism. And people who went against that were rounded upon as heretics, really.

So, I think people realized that in itself, it was a certain type of fundamentalist dogmatism. But I think within the movement, once the kind of architects of it had agreed that God didn't exist and religion was bad for you, it turned out they really couldn't agree on anything else because some people wanted to take it in a very socially justice oriented moment direction. They wanted atheism plus, where you didn't just not believe in God, you also affirmed LGBT rights, and feminism, and so on.

And others just stood starkly against that and said, no. All we need is science and reason. And those two sides fell out with each other quite dramatically, to the point where these speakers could no longer share a stage with each other. Any kind of animosity they had towards their Christian counterparts was completely blown out of the water by how nasty they were to each

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other in the end. So, the whole movement basically collapsed in on itself, basically because the culture wars came early for new atheism. And that's really what did it in the end.

**FRANK:**

Yes. I guess they really didn't give people anything solid to believe in that met their needs either. I mean, if there is no God, if there is no spiritual realm, there's no purpose to life, there's no moral absolutes, there's really no difference in the end between living like Hitler or living like Mother Teresa. And people realized, there's just something wrong with this.

And we're going to dive into this in much greater depth with my guest today, Justin Brierley. His brand-new book and also podcasts of the same name, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' You want to avail yourselves of both, and you can. Back in two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio, go no further. You're never going to hear this on NPR. We're talking about 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God,' particularly among former agnostic and atheist intellectuals, with my guest, Justin Brierley, all the way from the UK. Before I get to Justin, let me mention a few things coming up.

I'll be down in Sarasota, Florida, at Apologetics Con, the 4-6th of March. It's at Grace Community Church. A lot of other folks other than me will be there. Alisa Childers, Vocab Malone, John McCrae, several others. Go to our website [CrossExamined.org](http://CrossExamined.org) to learn more about that. Then the following weekend, the 9th and 10th of March, I'll be in Detroit, Michigan, at Metro City Church, Unshaken conference on Saturday. That's me, Alisa Childers, and Natasha Crain. And then I'll speak at the church on Sunday morning.

And then keep an eye out for our continuing Digging up the Bible series. We'll be in our 17th episode of the top archaeological discoveries in the Bible on March 18. That'll be streamed live at 7:30 Eastern. Following week, I'll be in Louisiana, also at Southeastern Louisiana University, which you can check on our website. Then I'll be up north of Grand Rapids on the 28th, a Grant Community event. You can check that out.

University of Buffalo, April 3. Boise State University on April 8. Much more on the calendar. Go to [CrossExamined.org](http://CrossExamined.org). Click on Calendar. Click on Events. You'll see them there. Now, a man

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who is very good at events is Justin Brierley. In fact, Justin, you have one coming up in London for our over the pond listeners with Tom Holland. Tell us a little bit about that coming up.

**JUSTIN:**

Well, it'd be useful to first of all, explain who Tom Holland is for those who don't know. He's not the actor in the Spider Man films.

**FRANK:**

He's not Spider man. Ok. Maybe we shouldn't have said that. [Laughter]

**JUSTIN:**

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

**FRANK:**

You'd have a bigger crowd. [Laughter]

**JUSTIN:**

Well, the historian Tom Holland, though, is an amazing person, someone I've had the privilege of interviewing several times in recent years. And he's someone I feature quite a bit in this book, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God,' and the documentary podcast series. Because he's gone on a really interesting intellectual journey himself. He started out essentially having had a sort of nominal Christian background, kind of that all fizzled out by his teenage years.

And he was a happy kind of secular liberal who got an Oxford education and eventually got into researching and writing popular historical books. But it was actually his experience of doing that, kind of standing in the sandals of the ancient Greeks and Romans, that really brought him up short. Because he began to see how very alien their values and way of life were to his own.

You know, this was a world where slavery was just a standard part of the economy, where people could be bought and sold. It was a place where, you know, if you were a Roman male, then anyone who was your inferior was essentially your sexual property. This was a world where the lives of women and children were cheap. And he began to realize that in almost every way his values were completely at odds with these ancient Greeks and Romans.

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And he realized his values, his belief in equality, democracy, freedom, human rights, progress, that didn't come from the Greeks and the Romans. It didn't come from science or the Enlightenment either. He realized that where it came from was the Christian movement. The early Christian movement was what had birthed everything that he now believed in as a secular liberal westerner. And this really set him on a journey to kind of tracing that.

And he wrote this huge book, a very celebrated book, 'Dominion,' which just lays out the way in which all of our moral instincts in the west are essentially a product of Christianity. And he started talking about this in public forums. He now runs probably the most popular history podcast in the world. The rest is history. And he frequently talks about this. But what's fascinating is, he's not coming at this exactly as a Christian.

He's simply a person who has recognized that the West is essentially founded, and secular people, humanists, and everyone else are essentially Christians when it comes to their moral beliefs. And so, he's been a fascinating dialogue partner. He's one of these people that I talk about in the book who are these secular intellectuals who are pointing people back towards the value of Christianity, saying, you didn't kind of get your morality out of some kind of vacuum.

It was there, and we've just kind of forgotten about it. We've forgotten the origins of it. He describes it as, you know, the fact that we're like goldfish in a goldfish bowl. We don't recognize the water we're swimming in, but they are Christian waters. So, I'm really looking forward to a special conversation with Tom on Tuesday, the 5th of March. We're going to be at Westminster Chapel, a historic church in the center of London.

And yeah, we've got, you know, the last time I checked, we were at about 500 people who have already bought tickets. It's going to be a big event. There's a lot of interest in Tom Holland, and a lot of the people coming aren't necessarily going to be Christians. There's a lot of agnostics, atheists, people who are seeking, who are really interested in this thesis, and who are kind of on a similar journey to Tom himself.

So yeah, I'm looking forward to meeting folk who are tracing this journey, who have read the book, who are listening to the podcast. And if you can't be there, obviously a lot of people can't

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come to London. We will be putting it out on the podcast in due course and early as well for supporters of the podcast. So, you'll get a chance to watch and listen as well.

**FRANK:**

How can people get tickets if they will be in London on March 5, Justin?

**JUSTIN:**

The best, easiest way to do is go to my website, [JustinBrierley.com](http://JustinBrierley.com). If you go to the podcast page, then you'll find a link there for the Tom Holland event.

**FRANK:**

Let me play devil's advocate for a second on this because I've seen some internet atheists say, oh, you're saying all our values came from Christianity. But what about verses in the Old Testament which say, you know, if your kid is disobedient, stone him. Blasphemy laws, that doesn't sound like free speech. That doesn't sound like equality. Women appear to be not at the same level as men. How would you respond to that?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, I'd want to first of all make sure that people understand which bit of the Bible they're reading and that there are going to be certain parts of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, which were obviously relevant to a particular culture, place, and time when God was doing a certain thing through his people, and he had to kind of have a particular set of laws to show that they were distinct from the pagan cultures around them.

So, God obviously deals in certain ways at various epochs of history with people. But the bigger point I'd want to make, probably to someone who makes that kind of objection. Well, look, how can you get your morality from the Bible when it says such and such? Well, the whole point of it is that you are judging those bits of the Bible that you don't especially like, on the basis of the morality that actually Christianity and the Bible gave you. That's the irony of the whole thing.

You are judging the Bible essentially by Christian standards. Because the fact is, your belief in equality, dignity, the fact that we shouldn't go around murdering or killing people, essentially came from the Christian Bible that told you that. So, it's very difficult to get away from the fact

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that even when we dislike the Bible, we're essentially judging it on Christian terms. And I had a fascinating interview with a woman who came from China that features on the podcast documentary series.

And she went through an interesting journey where she was kind of an atheist. She'd sort of just grown up in Communist atheist China. And when she came to the UK, she just found that there was a different sort of way of life. You know, there was just a natural sense in which people were more humane. They did treat each other more kindly. Money and power weren't the things that just naturally greased the wheels of culture.

And she came to realize eventually, as she went on a journey of discovering Christian faith, that it was the Christian heritage that was responsible for that. And so, when she started watching some of my shows where I had Richard Dawkins on, you know, critiquing the Old Testament, she kind of wanted to stand up, she said, and sort of say to Richard Dawkins, you couldn't be that kind of atheist in the country where I come from.

You wouldn't bat an eyelid at people kind of rubbing people out and using their power. You know, the reason you're critiquing these passages is because you are a Christian atheist, Richard Dawkins. And I just found that fascinating, that someone sort of who perhaps more readily sees the way in which our culture and the morality we inhabit is very different to other cultures, and times, and places, sees how clearly even someone like Dawkins, even in his critiques of the Old Testament, is actually critiquing it essentially from a point of Christian morality.

So, I just think that you have to remember that, yes. We have to try and get our heads around what's going on in certain parts of the Old Testament. But the very reason you're even having the conversation is because of Christianity.

**FRANK:**

Now, the discussion you had with Tom Holland and this lady from China is actually in the January 9 podcast called 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' So, friends, what Justin just said there, he said in just a couple of minutes. But it's an entire hour and a half podcast, very well produced documentary that you're going to want to listen to.

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He goes into much more depth than obviously he could here. So, you want to find 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God' podcast and also the book. Wherever you get books, you can get the book and learn a lot more about that. That is a rather profound point, that they're using the standards of the Bible to judge God, in order to say that God may have been wrong at a certain point. And in that podcast, Justin, I just listened to it yesterday.

You also had a clip from our mutual friend John Dickson. And of course he wrote the book, 'Bullies and Saints,' which talks about how the Church has gotten many things right, but also many things wrong over 2000 years. And he said this, which I found quite profound. And this is on Justin's podcast, ladies and gentlemen. He said, "When Christians do evil, they are just being human.

The Greeks and the Romans tortured people long before Christians did so against, by the way, the commands of Jesus. But it was only Christians who provided charity and established hospitals and universities." So yes, Christians can be just as bad as anybody else. But it turns out that virtually nobody is as good as Christians when Christians actually follow Jesus.

**JUSTIN:**

Yeah, the way he put it, I thought was brilliant. He said, that's the unique contribution, if you like, of Christianity. So yes, you can find cruelty and abuse in every sphere of human life, and Christians can be as guilty as anyone at various points in their history of doing that. But you won't find the Romans, and the Greeks, and other cultures developing this idea of universal dignity, and healthcare, and education. That was the unique contribution of Christianity.

So, you shouldn't try and sort of just claim, oh, they're no different to anyone else. There is something very different and very unique about the Christian revolution. So, yeah, thank you for mentioning that show. It's a good place to get into it. But the whole idea of this podcast actually is that you can kind of start from episode one and kind of trace the big journey of the book across the whole of these episodes. And we've still got plenty more to come as well.

**FRANK:**

Now, Justin, we're just going to start this question before the break here, but people say there is a contradiction somehow between Christianity and science. What say you about that?

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**JUSTIN:**

I say that it can be framed in that way. And if you kind of have a very warped view of Christianity and a warped view of science, then, yeah. You can certainly make them conflict with each other. But actually, I think a deeper understanding of both what faith is and what the best science actually shows us about the universe and life, I don't think there's any conflict. I think, in fact, that science, if anything, is a pointer towards God. That's been my experience and yeah, would love to talk to you about that on the other side of the break.

**FRANK:**

Well, let's talk about right after the break. We're talking to the great Justin Brierley from the UK. His brand-new book, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God,' you're going to want to get. You're also going to want to avail yourself of the podcast by the same name. Lots more coming up with Justin, so don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. Back in two minutes.

Science and faith at odds, is that really true? We're talking to Justin Brierley, all the way from the UK. And he's got a brand-new book and a brand-new podcast both by the same name, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers are Considering Christianity Again.' Let's go back to the discussion, Justin, if we could, about science and Christianity. You point out in the book, in a fair amount of detail, that the early founders of modern science were all Christians. Why did they see no contradiction between Christianity and science?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, it wasn't just that they didn't see a contradiction. It was that very specifically, their faith fired their scientific inquiry. A lot of people assume that, oh, well, probably the scientific pioneers were simply Christians because that was what everyone was, right? It wasn't like that. In fact, the people who've actually done the research on this can show you that they were actually motivated by their Christian faith to go out and explore the world in new ways.

Because essentially, what Christianity did was it said, there is a God who has created a universe of order that you can go and explore. That wasn't necessarily the way that the ancients tended

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to see the universe. They didn't necessarily see that there was an orderly pattern to life. But that was what the Bible told people God had done. He'd set up an orderly universe. And so, because there was a Lawgiver, people were able to go out and explore the laws that that Lawgiver had created.

And that was really what fired, you know, Francis Bacon, and Kepler, and Newton, and even Galileo, who's often held up as some kind of example of someone who, you know, got into a battle with the Church over science versus faith. The common version of that story is essentially a modern myth. And when you actually go and look at what really happened in the Galileo affair, it's a very different state of events. But even Galileo absolutely recognized that his science flowed from his faith.

And so, it's very interesting that in the modern age, obviously, science has often been touted as this big thing that's come along to destroy God. When, in fact, the early pioneers of the scientific revolution were absolutely Christians who were fired by their faith. I think the reason why it's kind of changed in, you know, the modern sort of age is simply that people have forgotten the Christian roots of the scientific revolution, and because it's become a kind of a convenient way, especially when it's set up against easily knocked down straw men.

You know, people who perhaps want to have a very sort of unsophisticated way of looking at the Bible and the way it interacts with science. It's easy then, to simply kind of use that as a battering ram against faith. But actually, in my experience, when you get to the really interesting parts of science, where you're looking at, where did the universe come from? Why is it set up in such a way that humans can exist? What is the origin of life? How do we make sense of consciousness?

They're all, in a sense, yes, scientific questions, but questions that actually point beyond science. Because ultimately, these are the kinds of questions that require some kind of agency in the universe or beyond the universe. And interestingly, you know, part of this 'Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God,' I think is the fact that many scientists are coming to those conclusions themselves.

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Not necessarily believers, but people who are just recognizing the kind of atheist naturalist assumption that has for so long dominated the scientific academy, it's not making enough sense anymore. You have to kind of go beyond it. So, one person I focus on a little bit in the book is Paul Davies, who I've had a number of conversations with. He runs the origin center at Arizona State University, a well-known physicist. And he's done a lot of work, again, in origins, in consciousness.

And he, again, is someone who wouldn't call himself a Christian, but he really annoys the new atheists as well, because he refuses to say there's no purpose in the universe. He recognizes there's something intrinsically interesting about the fact we're here. He put it to me this way in one of our conversations. He said, the directionality in the universe going from matter, to life, to consciousness. And he said, I would add comprehension to that.

He said, there's an arrow of time in the direction of comprehension. And if that is the case, if this is not just an enormous fluke, a happy series of accidents, then that, to me, comes very close to something like meaning or purpose in nature. He said, I think that's a sort of religious feeling, what Einstein called a cosmic religious feeling. Now, the way he puts it there reminds me very much of the way the Gospel of John starts. He says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And that Word spoke all things into being.

This idea of the Logos is this idea that there is a Word that speaks order into chaos, that life, and logic, and meaning come out of. And I just think that that's what he's describing here. He's saying, there's something behind this universe that kind of creates meaning, and purpose, and directionality in life. And so, when I see those two things come together, what the Bible says and what Paul Davies is saying, I think there's no conflict here. You know, they support each other. This is not something where we have to kind of choose one or the other.

**FRANK:**

We've said so many times before, ladies and gentlemen, in this program, that we know God by his effects. So, if there is a creation, that's an effect, we're reasoning back to a cause, a creator. If there's design in the universe, such as the fine-tuning of the universe, that's the effect. We're reasoning back to a cause, a designer. If we have a moral law written on our hearts, that's the effect. We're reasoning back to a cause, a moral Lawgiver.

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If there are natural laws that seem to be consistent and persistent that do the same thing over and over again, we realize those are effects. There must be a cause, some kind of Lawgiver. In fact, it was Paul Davies a number of years ago, Justin, who wrote an op-ed in the New York Times called 'Taking Science by Faith.' I unpacked that in my book, 'Stealing from God' quite a bit because he pointed out that materialists and atheists start with an assumption that the laws of nature just exist.

And so, he asked in the New York Times, where do the laws of nature come from? And he said, my email inbox was filled with vitriol from atheists claiming, don't ask those questions. He said they were mad that he was actually bringing the point up, that they're taking those by faith. And I know you've had many conversations on the Unbelievable podcast in debates. When you get to a point with atheists and you point out, okay, you're going to start with the laws of nature. Where did those come from? Have you ever gotten any kind of speculation, any kind of answer for that?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, I've had similar sort of vitriol that Paul Davies experienced where people say, well, that's not a valid question. You know, when I had Lawrence Krauss on the show debating these kinds of issues with John Lennox some time ago, you know, he just said, well, it's an invalid question. But John Lennox quite rightly pushed back and said, why on earth would the ultimate question of why there are laws of nature be an invalid question just because it's outside the scope of science?

Well, that maybe just shows us that science isn't the only explanatory game in town, okay? Because science itself needs to be explained. The fact that we can do science is an extraordinary mystery. And so, for me, it's quite natural to push it one step back and say, well, why is there such a thing as science? Why is there such a thing as the laws of nature? And of course, that takes you to metaphysical sort of territory.

And that, I think, is very uncomfortable for some scientists who would like the world to be purely a material product. But the problem is, you know, even it doesn't take much kind of just to sit down in an armchair and think about it for a while to realize that if we exist, if there is just something, then it cannot explain itself. It has to have some kind of reason behind it.

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And for me, I just find it fascinating that so many atheists kind of almost, as you say, can get quite angry about that idea. I mean, one story that particularly strings to mind, though, when it comes to some classic interactions I've had. I'm sure you know Hugh Ross of Reasons to Believe, who's a Christian and an astrophysicist by background. But he had a wonderful engagement once with a well-known atheist scientist here in the UK called Peter Atkins.

And Atkins had just written a book in which he apparently claimed to have sorted out this whole question of where the laws of nature came from. Well, Hugh Ross had something to say about that. But we got to a really interesting moment in their conversation where, essentially, Hugh was kind of giving various evidences why he thinks there is a divine mind behind the universe. And Atkins was just batting them away and saying, oh, this is poppycock, lazy thinking.

And I just eventually said to Atkins, well, look. Is there anything that could move the dial even a little bit for you, Peter, when it comes to belief in God? And he said, well, I'm not sure. And I said, well, what if Jesus appeared to you right now in this room? And he said, oh, well, I'd assume I was just having some kind of brain seizure. I said, okay, well, what if the stars lined up and said, "Peter, it's me, God. Believe in me"?

And he said, well, I would just assume it was advanced alien technology. And I was like, well, at this point, Peter, it sounds like there's literally no evidence that would convince you that God exists. And he said, well, I'm not sure about that. But essentially, he had to concede that he was so wedded to his materialist naturalist worldview, there could have been no piece of evidence you could have presented to him that wouldn't have been filtered.

So, I think there is this bias that I think sometimes is hiding behind kind of an intellectual facade. But actually, someone like Peter Atkins doesn't just need another piece of evidence. He needs some kind of change of mind, something supernatural, frankly. Because it's not just about intellectual arguments in the end. Often, there is a kind of a spiritual issue going on for people where they just don't like the option that you'll be asking them to consider in the end.

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**FRANK:**

Yes. Pascal famously said that people almost invariably base their beliefs not on the basis of proof, but on the basis of what they find attractive. Now, as you know, friends, that sword cuts both ways. It could be Christians just believing what we believe because we find it attractive. But I think here's the biggest difference. I think a Christian can show reasonably that the evidence shows that Christianity is true. Whether I'm believing it because I want to believe it or because it's really true isn't the point.

The point is, if there's evidence it's true, that's where the Christian can say, okay. I might have a bias, but here's my evidence. When you say the same thing to an atheist, they don't give you evidence that all of this can be explained without God. It seems to me in most cases, Justin, atheists more have complaints about the way God's running the universe. You know, there's too much evil in the world. He hasn't appeared to me. I don't like his sexual ethics. It's not really an argument that there's no God. It's really, I just don't like God.

**JUSTIN:**

Yeah, I think if I'm, you know, perfectly honest, I don't want to say this of all atheists, but certainly.

**FRANK:**

No, of course not.

**JUSTIN:**

I've met plenty who do kind of fit that description, sadly. And as I say, at that point, even though it's sometimes dressed up as, I just need the evidence. If only I had more evidence, I would believe. I don't think that is actually what's going on there, because people can always reach for another objection if they just don't want the thing that's on offer. I mean, I've generally felt this about apologetics. I don't know if you share this opinion, Frank.

But apologetics for me is at its most powerful when it's essentially removing obstacles for people. So, maybe they've got a question about the problem of evil, and perhaps you can offer them a solution to that. Maybe they're not sure about whether we can trust the bible. You can give them some reasons. But in the end, it's not going to force someone to believe. It'll remove

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*to be an* **ATHEIST**

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the obstacles. They've still got to want to walk down that road and want what's on offer at the end of it.

**FRANK:**

They're still going to want to have to say I do because God will not force himself upon them. We're talking to Justin Brierley. One more segment about 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' In fact, after the break, we're going to talk about some people that have actually at least come up to Christianity who previously were opposed. Back in two minutes. You think Christianity is waning in the west? Not so fast. There are some signs of hope that you will find in Justin Brierley's new book, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.'

You'll also find that same hope done in a very stylistic and entertaining way. The podcast by the same name. It's really a documentary. It cheapens it to just call it a podcast, but it's something you listen to. So, that's why we call it a podcast. And wherever you get podcasts, look for 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' Now, Justin, who are some of the people that previously were pretty hardcore atheists but are now at least moving toward Christianity, if not completely becoming Christians?

**JUSTIN:**

Well, there's lots of people on different sort of parts of the journey, and I feature a lot of them in the book. I mean, you've got some interesting examples of people who weren't necessarily hardcore atheists, but who are kind of attracting the same crowd as were turning up for Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris at one time.

So, for instance, Jordan Peterson is an interesting example of this, a secular psychologist, well-known kind of as a sort of culture warring kind of figure as well, on Twitter. But he's a fascinating example of someone who is selling out lectures, basically drawing crowds of young men to tell them that they need to get their life in order, and that the Bible is a really useful way of ordering and understanding life.

So, you've got really interesting characters like this who are, you know, have these huge platforms. And rather than telling them that, you know, religion is for dummies and it's all fairy tales, they're saying, actually, no, you should look into this. And so, it's interesting. I've met lots

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of people who have now walked through the door to full-blooded Christian faith because Jordan Peterson kind of gave them permission to think about it and do that. Now, I don't know exactly where Peterson himself is on that journey. And he's an interesting one because he's kind of sometimes difficult to pin down exactly what he does believe about God.

But nonetheless, he's one of these interesting secular intellectuals who is pointing people in the direction of Christianity. Another example I could give is one of my fellow countrymen, Douglas Murray, who is an associate editor of the Spectator magazine, a well-known journalist, speaker, and writer. But again, he kind of had a faith and lost it in his early twenties and very much fell in with the new atheists. He was a regular lunch buddy of Christopher Hitchens, and that was kind of the way he saw things for a good while.

But then really, probably over the last ten years or so, he came to realize that atheism itself didn't really answer any of life's deepest questions. And he came to realize kind of, I think, through the influence of people like Tom Holland and others, that actually all of his assumptions when it comes to his belief in equality, human dignity, freedom, progress, they're all essentially Christian. And he started to call himself, certainly in the conversations I had with him, a Christian atheist.

So again, he's someone who's not embraced Christianity, but has certainly realized that atheism does not hold the hope for kind of reinvigorating the west. And so, he calls himself a sort of curious, unsatisfied agnostic at this point. But then you've got, interestingly, far more recently, in fact, so recently, wasn't able to include it in the book. But you can hear about it on the documentary series, the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Now, I'm sure you might be familiar with this, Frank. But she was one of the new atheist crowd back in the mid 2000s. She was a Somali born Dutch person who came out of fundamentalist Islam. And that experience led her to write a book where she kind of condemned that form of religion and very much joined the new atheist crowd in railing against religion and in favor of science, reason, and logic.

What she actually found in the intervening years was that atheism itself simply wasn't enough, that it did not provide the kind of meaning that people need in their lives. And it wasn't enough

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of a bullock against some of the culturally oppressive things she was discovering, not just Islamism, but the kind of woke ideologies on the left that she felt were tearing culture apart. The threat of these monolithic regimes: China, Putin's Russia.

She realized secular material atheism just doesn't have enough going for it to be able to give people a kind of a foundation for their belief in this stuff that we call human rights, and democracy, and everything else. She realized all of that, again, came from Christianity. And she has said that she has embraced Christianity because of that. Now, again, lots of people have debated, well, is this just a sort of convenient kind of cultural, political kind of embrace of Christianity?

But actually, if you read her article, if you look at some of the interviews she's done, she's obviously gone on a spiritual quest as well. And so, I think that it's fascinating to see some of these characters at various points in their journey, well-known intellectual secular thinkers, but who are starting to turn back or to point other people back in the direction of Christianity. And that's a big change because this wasn't happening 20 years ago when new atheism was ruling the roost. I just feel like something has really changed in the atmosphere recently.

**FRANK:**

Yes, and if you can capture the intellectuals, eventually you will capture at least a good portion of the culture. Because if the intellectuals inform the university, and then the university teaches the students, eventually it'll trickle its way down. So, this is important when you have intellectuals starting to realize that atheism itself is vacuous. Let me push back on this a little bit, Justin, because atheists will say, well, look, atheism is not a worldview. We don't have positive beliefs. We just say your beliefs are false. How would you respond to that?

**JUSTIN:**

I would say it's amazing how many books have been written on the non-belief of atheism in that sense. Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens did quite well out of writing books, essentially, about their lack of belief. In the end, yes. You can define atheism that way. But in the end, most atheists I meet do have a way of looking at the universe. And frequently you might put a label like materialism, physicalism, naturalism on that.

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It's basically the view that all that exists is matter in motion. So, it's not that I'm the Christian with all the funny beliefs and that's just some neutral bystander who doesn't have any beliefs. We all come to life with a set of beliefs. That's just the fact of it. And the question is, whose set of beliefs, whose worldview makes best sense of the evidence?

And in my experience, when you look at the totality of everything, we've got in front of us, the nature of the universe, the fact that we exist within it, the fact that we believe in this funny thing called human rights, that we believe there's something called human value. When we look at the idea that across all times, places, and cultures, people have had a search for meaning and the transcendent, when I put all of the things together, it fits better with the idea that there is a divine mind behind the universe who revealed himself.

And there was a kind of an answer to all those longings and hopes. On the atheist story of reality, it's all an illusion. It's all just kind of nature playing a trick on us because we just, you know, all of this stuff is actually fictional. In fact, all we're doing really is playing out the deterministic outcomes of a completely mindless, purposeless process.

So, those are two different visions of reality. And I think only one of them makes sense of all of the data we actually experience and the way we experience life. So, for me, it's not enough just to say, you're the one with the beliefs. I don't have any. We all come to life with beliefs. The question is, which ones make best sense of reality?

**FRANK:**

In fact, you point out in the book, again, the book, friends, is called 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' You point out in the book that people, and maybe this, now that I'm thinking about it, is similar to what Chesterton said where he said, people that don't believe in God don't believe in nothing. It turns out they believe in anything. Like the whole universe could come into existence without a cause, they might say. But there's a section in here, Justin.

And if we get time, we can talk about it now. If not, the midweek podcast, we could probably talk about this coming up. There's a section in here where you talk about the fact that people have to worship something, and they have to believe in something bigger than themselves even if they claim to be atheists. And you mentioned environmentalism, feminism, anti-racism,

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LGBTQ rights. Can you unpack that a little bit? Because you have people now saying, well, I'm an atheist. But I believe in all these causes now. Why?

**JUSTIN:**

Yeah, yeah, exactly. I think it does come down to that GK Chesterton quote you said. When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing. They have the capacity to believe in anything. And I've seen that time and again in our culture. People are intrinsically religious. And when they stop believing in God, they just start believing and getting religious about other things. And I think that's true in our culture, especially with some of those issues you mentioned, ideologies, identity politics, social issues.

You know, these are the new gods, effectively for people. They're the new religion. They're the sacred thing, the kind of identity maybe that they, they live in that cannot be questioned. That kind of even comes with it, often with its own rituals and, you know, holy texts, and everything else. It's a kind of quasi-religion, essentially. And the reason I think people do that is because we are made, as I say, to worship something, to live into a particular story.

And because we've forgotten the Christian story, people are searching around for other kinds of stories to make sense of life by. But the problem is, of course, none of them satisfy. These aren't the stories that we were meant to put at the center of our life. And for me, it's always a sign that there is a bigger story that people are searching for. And for me, rather than railing against, you know, the fact that obviously the culture wars are happening and everything.

I think we should be speaking into that and praying for people to discover the thing that they're really looking for. Because very often, that search for justice, you know, even if it goes off in the wrong direction, it's still at core, they're looking for the ultimate source of justice. But if they only have a kind of, a kind of political ideology, all they've got is the kind of righteous anger and cancel culture that comes with that. They don't have grace. They don't have forgiveness. They don't have a source of peace, and joy, and love that actually is what should be firing their activism.

So, for me, when you put any kind of politics ideology on the left or the right in the place of God, you're setting up an idol, essentially. And for me, it's about helping people to realize that

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there's only one true source of goodness and love that will actually satisfy them. So, I just want to send people back to the original story, the story that did give people their meaning, purpose, and identity for millennia, and say, try this because this might be the thing that you've been looking for all along.

**FRANK:**

And it's true. There's evidence for it. Justin, fabulous conversation. We're going to pick this up in the midweek podcast. So, friends, if you're listening to this on the American Family Radio network, you will not hear part two of this interview. You have to go to the I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist podcast to hear it. It'll come out on Tuesday. Justin, wonderful having you on. Looking forward to having you for next week.

**JUSTIN:**

Thanks for having me on. Cheers, Frank.

**FRANK:**

All right, that's Justin Brierley. Again, the book and the podcast by the same name, 'The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God.' Check them both out. Outstanding resources, and you can share them with unbelievers, and they will be very effective resources. So, check those both out and we'll see you here on Tuesday. God bless.

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