

# OpenTheo

## Our Longings Find a Home in Jesus | Greg Ganssle

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### The Veritas Forum

Before we believe that Christianity is true, philosopher Greg Ganssle thinks that we should want it to be true. He says that our longings for beauty, goodness, and freedom, are “at home in the Christian story.” At a Veritas Forum from the University of California-Irvine, Ganssle examines how our desire to flourish can lead us to faith in Jesus.

### Transcript

We're going to find that the things we want most in life make more sense in the Christian story than in the major alternative stories. Before we believe that Christianity is true, philosopher Greg Ganssle thinks we should want it to be true. He says that our longings for beauty, goodness, and freedom are at ease.

We're going to find a home in the Christian story. At a Veritas Forum from the University of California-Irvine, Ganssle examines how our desire to flourish can lead us to faith in Jesus. Thank you.

It's great to be here. I love the Veritas Forum. We're grateful to Veritas and to Radio Christi for their sponsorship of this event.

I think of all approaches to life's challenging questions, the Veritas Forum has learned how to set a hospitable environment where people, even if they disagree, can have great conversations. I've been a part of many of these events, either as a speaker or a panelist or a moderator on a variety of campuses and I've always enjoyed it. I'm going to say Radio Christi, especially the local Radio Christi group here for making this possible.

What we're going to do tonight is I'm going to present a print of my book, our deepest desire is how the Christian story fulfills human aspiration. I'm going to walk through the big lines of discussion in this book. After I'm done, AJ is going to come up and she's going to ask a series of questions to help me elucidate those places where foggy or I don't communicate clearly or I talk too quickly.

We're going to have time for Q&A discussion with the audience. If you think of your questions, jot them down or remember them and we will have a wonderful time. At least I'll have a good time.

Every human being has a project. In fact, I believe that every person shares the same project and that's the project of navigating life the best way that we can. Everybody tries to make sense out of his or her life and navigates by trying to be or to do certain things that seem good to be or to do.

We try to avoid the things that we don't want to be or do. In our navigation of our life, we do this not simply in terms of what we believe. We also navigate our lives based on what we love.

It's not just what we think is true that matters, but what we think is important. A guston made this observation many years ago when he wrote this. For when there's a question of whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes or what he hopes, but what he loves.

A guston thought that our disorder, our moral or spiritual failures are not a matter of us loving the wrong things or loving bad things. Rather, we love good things, but we love them in the wrong order. We have a disorder set of loves.

We love the less important things more than the more important things. That's the analysis of our moral or spiritual brokenness or our disposition to selfishness. At the heart of each person, as we navigate the world in terms of what we love and what we care about as well as what we believe, it's important to see that at the heart of each person, there's something I call the core identity.

The core identity is our deepest, it's a combination of beliefs and desires about who we are and who we want to be. Deep down, we all have a sense of the kind of person I should be. That is the deepest region of the self.

That's deeper than our worldview or our set of beliefs of what we think realities like. Most of the changes in our deep beliefs or our philosophies of life are changes in the direction or the contours of our core identity. Certain beliefs will make sense to us if they fit into the kind of person that we think we ought to be or want to be.

And other things won't make sense to us because they don't fit in to the kind of person I think I should be. So we navigate our lives with a sense of our core identity. Now we don't go around thinking about our core identity.

It tends to be behind the scenes. But if you catch yourself changing certain fundamental beliefs, and you can usually trace this to something in your core identity. Something is beginning to make more or less sense to the kind of person you want to be.

So that's kind of a background. I'm going to try to defend one claim tonight. And that's the claim that the Christian story helps to explain and ground our deepest desires.

And the deepest desires I have in mind are desires that are centered in our core identity. It's very important that I explain that I'm not arguing that the Christian story is true. I think it is true, but I also think that a lot of people don't care if it's true.

I think a lot of people today have the idea of I'm pretty sure of Christianity's false and it's a good thing that it's false. What I'm after tonight is the second part of that sentence. The notion that it's good that Christianity's false.

I want to argue that if we think about our deeper aspirations, we're going to find that the things we want most in life make more sense in the Christian story than in the major alternative stories. And this should motivate us, I think, to want Christianity to be true. And that's as far as I'm going to go.

I'm not going to argue that it is true. That's topic for another lecture. We can do that one next year.

But so the four things I want to talk about briefly are first, these are elements of our core beliefs and desires, our aspirations. People matter most. That's the first one.

Secondly, goodness is good for us. Thirdly, beauty is at home in the world. And fourth, truth liberates.

So those are the four things. So we're going to start with people matter most. Now most of you in the room barely remember 9/11/2001.

If you're an undergraduate student, you were very young when this happened. But not since Pearl Harbor has our country been as shocked and riveted to the television. We could not believe what we saw.

We couldn't believe that the World Trade Center buildings came down. But what was interesting about that day, something we only thought about later, was on that day nobody grieved for the buildings. It was only later that people began to reflect on the permanent change to the New York skyline.

Of course this happened in New York and we were living in Connecticut, so we were right up the street. And it sent shockwaves throughout our whole community. On 9/11, we grieved for the people.

Because people matter most. When United Flight 93, which was hijacked in Pennsylvania, when the passengers realized that they were going to crash. And they decided we're going to make sure this plane does not crash into another building and they make sure it crashed in the field.

They all scrambled for their cell phones. And somebody commented later, nobody called the office to check up on the work. Everybody called the people they loved because people matter most.

It's fairly obvious. All of our values, or nearly all of our values, surround the value of human beings. The fact that people matter most is something we're really conscious of.

It's a deep commitment that nearly everybody shares. But reflecting on this invites certain questions about reality and our views of reality. Which picture of reality makes sense of the fact that people matter most? Or makes the most sense of the fact that people matter most? And I'm going to suggest that the Christian story makes really good sense of this.

And you can capture this notion with the phrase, in the Christian story, the most fundamental reality is personal. In the Christian story, the most fundamental reality is personal. So, if the Christian story were true, God would be the most fundamental reality.

And God is personal. God creates everything that exists. It all depends on him.

Now when I talk about God creating, which I wrote from time to time, I'm not talking about any particular theory of creation, or how or when God did it. The major point is that everything that exists depends on God for his existence. He is the most fundamental.

That's a basic claim of any theistic religion, not simply Christianity. The most fundamental reality is personal. God is not a force like in Star Wars, or an impersonal machine.

God has the elements of personhood in the Christian story. It makes things like intellect, God knows stuff. God acts for reasons.

God has the capacity to do things. God has a moral nature. God has, I think, aesthetic preferences.

And all of these things are the marks of personhood. So, one of the deepest things about reality in the Christian story is that the most fundamental reality is the most fundamental reality. So, then God creates the universe for reasons.

It's not accidental. It has some plan behind it. And God creates other human beings for reasons.

So, therefore, the existence, not just of human beings in general, but each human being, is something that God did for reasons. And what this does is it grounds or explains the meaning and the value of human life. Each human life.

The meaning of your life is a matter of there being a point to your existence. The value of human life is your worth in the context of reality. So, the Christian story grounds the meaning and value of human life, and it does so on a cosmic scale, so to speak.

It does so in terms of the fundamental structure of the universe is such that your life has meaning and value. My life has meaning and value. So, our personhood is tied linked to the most fundamental reality.

And this gives us a kind of meaning and value that's cosmic, that's objective. So, on a standard atheist view, if there is such a thing, I'm going to quote Bertrand Russell, who's one of my favorites. Russell wrote that man is the product of causes, which had no provision of the end they were achieving.

His origin, growth, hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental co-location of atoms. So, that's a picture that resonates with a lot of atheist views, even though Russell wrote this 112 years ago. It still resonates with some of the dominant views.

On this picture of reality, in this story, whatever personhood exists, arrived very late and completely by accident. Now, I have to be careful to make it clear, I don't think it's impossible that human beings can do exist, if atheism is true. I'm not making any of that kind of argument.

But our drive to value people most and our drive for meaning and value is in a sense against the grain of the universe. The fundamental structure of the universe does not ground meaning and value. Now, I have to be careful here also.

I am not saying that there is no meaning and value in an atheistic picture. We can find meaning and value in the people we love and the projects that are important to us. Even if we think there's no God.

So, I'm not saying if there is no God, there is no meaning, but notice on the atheistic picture, the meaning and value we have, which is very significant to us, is what we could call local meaning. In other words, it's meaning and value relative to the choices that we make as individuals. It's not meaning and value grounded in the nature of the fundamental structures of reality, because the fundamental structures of reality are completely indifferent to human beings.

So, it's a big contrast in the Christian story with an atheist story, even though there are lots of other different kinds of stories, the big contrast is on Russell's view, there can be no meaning or value until human beings invent the meaning and value. And again, the meaning and value we invent can be really significant to us. But on the Christian story, meaning and value is grounded in the cosmic structure, because the most fundamental reality is personal.

Meaning and value can only get traction, so to speak, when there are persons. In the Christian story, there were persons from the very beginning, because God is personal. In the atheist story, persons are right very late, so meaning and value arrives very late.

It's a common thing that we know people matter most. People are central to our sense of what it means to live a good life. The Christian story explains this.

It gives us a sense of that this is fitting to reality. Our deepest desires are deep human aspirations find a home in the Christian story in a way that they don't in the atheist story. They're in some sense out of sync.

I'm not arguing that therefore the atheist story is false, this could be the way reality is. But then reality and our deepest values are at odds with each other. So that's people matter most.

Secondly, goodness is good for us. We're all trying to navigate the world with a sense of what is it good to be and to do? What is it good to avoid being and to avoid doing? A sense of our assessment of the world and of character in terms of goodness is fundamental to our aspirations and to our values scheme. Now, we talk a lot and we argue a lot about the content of our moral disagreements.

But we take it for granted that we make moral judgments. And nobody has really challenged the notion of why we make moral judgments. That is until Nietzsche came along.

So Nietzsche asks provocative questions about the practice of making moral judgments. And here's Nietzsche from the genealogy of morality. He says, "Under what conditions did man invent the value judgments of good and evil? And what value did they themselves have? Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life or on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, vitality and will of life? It's courage, it's confidence, it's future.

So Nietzsche's asking not what things are right and wrong, but why do we make these judgments at all? Where did this practice come from? And of course he has his own story to tell about where this practice comes from. And for Nietzsche, the practice comes out of the resentment of oppressed people. And he tells this story to go something like this.

There have always been strong people on the weak people. And the strong people always oppress the weak people. And the weak people couldn't take revenge on the strong people because they had no power.

So at a certain point in time, the weak people accomplished something which Nietzsche thinks is amazing. He calls it the re-valuation of all values. And in the nutshell, what happened was this, the weak people took all of the qualities of the strong, things like power, exploitation, the ability to accomplish anything you want.

And then they began to label those qualities as evil. And then they took all their own qualities, things like weakness, timidity, cowardice, and they began to label those as good. And the surprising thing, at least it's surprising to Nietzsche, is that this strategy worked.

So things like humility become a virtue, whereas exploitation becomes a vice. So our practice of making moral judgments is born out of resentment. Because it's born out of resentment, one conclusion he comes to is that our moral judgments don't track reality.

There is no, it's not true that humility is better than pride, or that gentleness is better than exploitation. There just aren't any moral truths at all for Nietzsche. Another conclusion, and the one I think is more important for us, is that he thinks the practice of making moral judgments traditional morality as a whole is one of the severest enemies of life.

Because morality, all the way back to Plato, says that we have to put aside our drives and our passions to pursue something more important. We have to push down our desire to exploit in order to treat people a different way, the way we don't want to treat them. And so it requires us to stifle the very things that make life worth living.

So this is a gross, in a sense, summary of Nietzsche's argument. Traditional morality is one of the enemies of life. His assessment is original and thought-provoking.

But we can challenge him, and I think it's very easy to see that he's mistaken. And one of the ways we can see that he's mistaken is we reflect on what kind of people we want to be, what kind of relationships we want to have. And I think most people, I'm not going to say everybody, but most people, when we reflect seriously, we're going to say what we want.

We want that our relationships are characterized by things like love and respect and gentleness and honor and care. We don't want our relationships to be characterized by exploitation, power moves, combativeness. So when we see it this way, we see that Nietzsche's just wrong about traditional morality.

It is the path to flourishing. Our relationships flourish if we live our relationships, kind of the way traditional morality tells us to, to live in gentleness and humility and care for one another, and respect. Whereas our relationships die if we make them power struggles, if we're trying to exploit one another.

Well, this fits in the Christian story, this observation, because in the Christian story, goodness is good for us. So we said earlier that the Christian story says that God made us for reasons. And in the story, some of the reasons are so that we can express the character of God through embodying certain virtues.

Part of God's plan for making human beings that have a moral nature and a free will are

that we can choose to live in a way that reflects God's own character. Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness. And so one of the very reasons God made us in the Christian story is that we would exemplify these virtues, and these are the very virtues that give us the richest life.

So goodness is good for us. There's a startling fact that the morally good life is the humanly good life. This fact makes sense in the Christian story.

So people matter most, goodness is good for us. Beauty is at home in the world. Beauty is kind of a mystery.

Philosophers have long commented on the relationship between beauty, goodness, and truth. Following Plato and Aristotle and Platonus, medieval philosophers and theologians, both Christian and Islamic, called these the transcendentals. They were transcendentals because they stood above other properties, other characteristics.

They were thought to be grounded in the very nature of God. So beauty is a transcendental. Roger Scruton, philosopher Roger Scruton, says this, "Beauty is therefore as firmly rooted in the scheme of things as goodness.

It speaks to us as virtue speaks to us, of human fulfillment. Not of things that we want, but of things that we ought to want because human nature requires them. The majesty of beauty and its rolling human flourishing makes sense on a Christian story because in the Christian story, God is a master artist.

He created the world and he made it beautiful. It's full of extravagant beauty. There's a glory.

There's one of the poems in the Old Testament that says that Heavens declare the glory of God. And it's just a rejoicing at the beauty of the Heavens. And we see this extravagance in the fact that there are so many galaxies and so many different kinds of frogs.

And only if God who loves beauty would make somebody. In the Genesis story of creation, which is laid out in these days, at the end of each of the days where God creates a different facet of the Heavens and the Earth and the animals, at the end of each day it says, "And God saw and it was good." And this theme is repeated. And you get the sense that God is just delighting in the beauty of the world.

And then God creates human beings that we can participate in beauty. So God is a master artist, not just because he's the supreme artist, but he's like a master like in the medieval guild. And God is a master who would take on apprentices and train them in the craft.

So they could become, in a sense, masters. And God is a master artist in that he creates



us, gives us creativity, and sets us free to explore the good and beautiful world he made. This is deeply rooted in the Christian story.

The passage in the early creation story where God says to the human beings, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the Earth and subdue it." And the filling of the Earth, the theologians believe, is extending the garden that God had made for human beings to cover the whole Earth. So it involves cultivation.

The passage is called the cultural mandate. It's that we are created to make culture. That's part of our purpose as human beings.

We are creative because God is creative. We are to bring good and true and beautiful and useful things out of the good world God has made. This is part of our calling as his creatures.

Our art is not only because he's created a beautiful world that's extravagant in his beauty, but that he calls us into cultivating and creating beauty. And this is why beauty is a vital part of human flourishing. This is why, to get a little to talk public policy for 30 seconds, this is why public art is so important.

Beauty is part of human flourishing. And we impoverished ourselves and our communities if we do not make room for beauty. Some years ago I was a guest lecturer in this philosophy of religion class at the University of New Hampshire.

I was talking about my book on the New Atheists and had a great discussion. And at the very end the professors stepped in and said, "Okay, here's my question for you." He said, "Why dinosaurs?" And I think he was thinking, "Why would God make dinosaurs when no human beings see them?" And I paused and I said, "Because they're so cool." And he laughed and he said, "Yeah, that's a good answer." Every six-year-old knows dinosaurs are cool. If you or God wouldn't you make dinosaurs? Of course you would.

There's this celebration and this extravagance. God is not bound by efficiency. That everything has to be efficient and trimmed down to the bare minimum necessary.

We can overflow. Like goodness beauty is good for us. We need beauty.

There's something deeply moral about creating and protecting beautiful things. And the Christian story is that God is the originator of beauty but also the originator of the human quest to make and celebrate beauty. So our quest for beauty that beauty is home and home in this world makes sense in the Christian story.

So people matter most. Goodness is good for us. Beauty is at home in the world.

Last, truth liberates. Truth liberates. I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "Language is not transparent." I thought about it for a while as I was driving on the Wilbur Cross

Parkway in Connecticut.

And I thought, "It's transparent enough because I knew what the bumper sticker was about. It wasn't about the Red Sox, like most of the bumper stickers. It wasn't about some political thing.

It was about language. It was a claim about language. But that got me thinking about what kind of claim is it that language is not transparent? What is a person after? And I'm pretty sure.

I mean, I can't say what individual person's motives are. But the notion connects with some common currency in the ideas of our day. That there's a deep skepticism about the capacity of language to reflect reality.

And the skepticism turns out to be a skepticism about truth. That the idea that I could have a claim that's true in some objective sense is thought in some circles to be so outdated, that's to be laughable. And not only that, in some places it's thought to be offensive.

Because if I think something is true, then I have to think the denial of that thing is false. That seems to pop. And to think someone has a belief that's false seems arrogant or suspect in some way.

Now, this is a common kind of theme that we observed in our culture. But I want to say that the very opposite is true. That truth liberates.

But why would someone be afraid of this? Why would somebody worry about truth being stifling? I think a couple of things. People are not as worried about truth as they are worried about people who claim to know the truth. And I think people are worried that people who think they know what's true are not going to listen.

They're going to be arrogant. They're going to be rude. They're going to try to bludgeon you to death with their arguments or whatever.

They're going to throw memes at you. And we just don't want them. So I think some of our cultures' existence to the notion that there is truth that can be known has to do with being really afraid about how people who think they know the truth, especially about things like morality or God, how those people are going to act.

Well, nature also fueled these suspicions. And he thought just like morality is an enemy of life, truth is an enemy of life. In fact, he thought science is an enemy of life.

He thought science. He says our faith in science is still a metaphysical faith. And he goes on to explain this.

And he says, our commitment to science is grounded in what he calls, the will to truth.

And just like morality makes us suppress our passions and our desires to achieve something that's good, so our desire for truth makes us submit and press down our passions and our desires to achieve something of highest value, which is truth. If truth is divine, then we have to sacrifice everything for truth.

And nature will have no patience with the notion that we should press down our desires and our passions. Rather, he thinks we should live out our will to power rather than our will to truth. And he actually thinks this is what we do.

We live by will to power and we pretend to live by will to truth. So we should just admit it to ourselves. The fact of the matter is we're deeply truth oriented.

We navigate the world in line of what we think is true about the kind of people we should be about what matters. We think people matter most. We think that's true.

And that becomes part of how we find our way, how we make sense out of our lives. Jesus articulates this when he says his famous claim, the truth will make you free in John chapter 8. That's the second most famous statement of Jesus. The first is don't judge.

And then the truth will make you free. The reason I think that's pretty famous is there are a whole bunch of libraries around the country that have that card into it. The truth will make you free.

But in context, we can see what Jesus is going after when he says this. So he says this, I'm going to read two sentences, three sentences. Jesus is saying, look, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.

And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. They answered him, we have descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean saying you will be made free? Jesus answered them and said, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

So what Jesus has set up here is freedom and depression. And to get a sense of what is going on, we have to unpack what he means by sin. Most people today put the card before the horse when they think of what the Christian story means by sin.

We saw that God made us for reasons. That we would produce good and beautiful things in the world, that we would embody virtues. That it also includes that we would live in a relationship with God, a dependence relationship with God that overflows into a serving relationship with one another.

And a cultivating relationship with the rest of creation. So that's the framework into which we were created. But what happens is human beings reject the dependence relationship on God.

That rejection is what Jesus means by the word sin. We think he means there are a list of 12 actions or 19 actions and these actions are the sins. But any action that could be considered a sin is actually a manifestation of this rejection.

Fundamentally sin is rejecting our dependence relationship on God. And that overflows into bending or corrupting or twisting our relationships with one another. So we no longer serve.

We love ourselves more than we love others. So we have disordered loves in Augustine's view. And we no longer cultivate, but we exploit anything we get a chance to exploit.

So sin has a domino effect. Okay, that's the picture in the Christian story about what sin is. Jesus says whoever practices sin is a slate.

Sin oppresses. Well, why is that? Well, God made us so that we would flourish in our relationship with him and in our relationship with one another. We flourish when we depend on God and we serve one another and we cultivate everything else.

If we step out of that, by stepping out of our dependence on God, we're stepping out of the very source of human flourishing. And we're stepping into slavery. We cannot fully flourish.

We can experience elements of flourishing. But we cannot fully flourish as we step out of this dependence relationship. So that's what Jesus means by sin oppresses.

So what does he mean by truth setting us free? I think there are a lot of levels to this. And we can pull a lot of different threads. Two of them have to do with, well, the first one is, we have to have an accurate diagnosis of what oppresses if we're going to have hope of liberation.

If we don't understand what oppresses accurately, then our remedies aren't going to be helpful. If you go to the doctor and you say, "I've got this headache," and the doctor says, "Oh, it's just allergies. He takes a mass brain and he says, "I think it has something to do with the nail stuck in my head." The doctor is making a bad diagnosis.

So her remedies aren't going to be helpful. So the truth can set us free in that we need an accurate diagnosis of what oppresses. Secondly, the truth says it's free because flourishing requires a reality orientation.

We flourish if we live into what does it mean to be a human being? How do we flourish? Are there moral facts? And if there are, what are they? We need to have the truth of these things if we're going to navigate life in a way that flourishes. I think a lot more could be said on that, but that too would be another lecture. Let's take a screenshot of where we've been.

We talked about deep human aspirations. People matter most. Goodness is good for us.

Beauty is at home in the world and truth liberates. What I've tried to do is not so much present an argument, but help you recognize, "Yes, these are things I value a lot." Then I talk about how these things are at home in the Christian story. The Christian story makes sense and fulfills these very aspirations we have, these deepest longings.

Remember, I'm not arguing that the Christian story is true. I think it is true. But I'm arguing that if we reflect deeply on who we are and who we want to be, we may begin to want it to be true.

And if that's true for you, if you come to the place where you see this, the next step might be investigating whether you think it's true. So Greg and I have known each other for, he told me earlier, 23 years. I find that really hard to believe, but it's been a privilege to know Greg and his wife, G. And I have just gotten back from Houston and on the plane I finished Greg's book, or *Deepest Desires*.

And it was really a fun thing to finish reading because I've heard Greg talk about some of these themes ever since I've known him. And what Greg didn't share with you is one of the most bizarre things I think I would ever associate with Greg as Greg is. It's extraordinarily unique in all the people that I've met in all the world because unlike most people who come to a realization of their need for God or they come into some kind of Christian conversion story or experience, Greg's was uniquely different.

And it fits very well with the theme of this book. So Greg, could you maybe just take one or two seconds to share why I make that observation and why I say you're a pretty bizarre individual. Or being the only one that I've ever known that has come to this understanding this way? Okay, I might admit to the bizarnis.

So I was brought up going to church, but as a teenager it became increasingly less relevant to my life. And I'm not sure I ever, I think I toyed around with atheism for a while and I still toy around with it every once in a while. But when I was 16, I was very involved in music, playing music and listening to music.

And I had lots of good friends. And it was one of these really weird moments that teenagers hardly ever have. And I just discovered Bob Dylan, much to my parents' chagrin.

And I was so captured by the beauty of this stuff. So one day, this is literally true, I was standing in the shower thinking about all of this stuff. And it hit me like a flash that there's too much goodness in the world for it to be an accident.

And God had to be real and God had to be present. And this was a turning point in my life. I had gotten involved with some Christians and we had begun to read the Bible and I was starting to get a little bit interested.

But it was a flash, too much goodness in the world. God has to be real. And that was a turning point and it still makes sense to me.

This is why talking about beauty is so moving for me, even for someone who has very little artistic temperament. So I just think that that's so bizarre. I've never heard someone say that they were struck by too much goodness and beauty in the world.

And then all of a sudden that just hinted to something greater. This is why my parents couldn't ask it. I guess I'd let that part out.

So actually, Greg, you didn't talk about it, but it was one of the chapters that I was most struck with in your book. After the chapter, we talked about God being an artist. And after that, I think it's entitled "Beauty Points the Wake Home".

And you actually see in that chapter that captured by beauty in ways that go deeper than the fact that it satisfies us. It triggers a dissatisfaction. It brings out a longing that draws us onward.

And so then you also make this observation that beauty is at home in the world, but that beauty is pointing to something that's not quite satisfied in the world either. So can you unpack that just a little bit? Well, I'll see if I can make a few comments. A lot of writers have commented on beauty producing a longing.

And beauty is not simply a satisfying. And so it's a trigger. And some of the writers that I read in thinking about beauty for this book were Roger Scruton, who I quoted, and some others.

And they also kind of capture this idea that beauty does two things for us. It reassures us that this is a good place to be as human beings, this world, that we're at home here. But then it prompts us with this satisfaction that we have longings that really won't be satisfied in this world.

And I thought that resonates with the Christian story very deeply, and in a way that surprises a lot of people, because most people think the Christian story thinks it's all about pointing to the next light. And I think that's just not true. That's a distortion of the story.

God created a world, and he created us, and we are at home in this world. Because of our rejection of our dependence on God, our nature has been bent, or twisted from its original shape. And this has effects on our relationships, this has effects on the way the world works.

So things are not as they were meant to be. But there's still goodness and beauty and at-home-ness. The world is a good place for human beings to be.

At the same time, because of the twisting of our nature and the twisting of reality and the evil in the world, we will not be fully satisfied until those things are completely dealt with, and that's the next world. And so we do. We deal with the longing both for this world and for the next.

So that's what I was trying to capture. One of the other things that you pointed out in that chapter, that I brought up, is that we live in an information-rich age. We're constantly seeking or being hit with information, whether we're looking at our cell phones or computer screens or whatever we're doing.

The TV or radio conversations, information is constantly flying at us. And we're trying to assimilate a lot of that as being part of the information age, but you can track that with beauty. You say that beauty actually, in order to encounter it, we have to slow down.

We have to contemplate it. And I just think that that creates attention. Maybe it takes a philosopher to help unpack the power of beauty for us.

Just one other comment, it's kind of Lewis, and I think you quote him in the book where you talk about Lewis pointing out these longings, and beauty sort of serves this longing in us when we do take time to notice it. And then Lewis says something to the effect of, I mean, I get it right, correct me if I don't. I think there's a longing that can't be fully satisfied in this life, that it must be pointing to another life, another home.

And in a way that's how beauty is pointing to the skull. Am I getting there right? Yeah, that's exactly what Lewis had in mind when he makes this comment. And I think he's right about that.

I think one thing as a philosopher, I can contribute to the discussion, is a reminder that as we inhabit certain practices over time, we cultivate dispositions to act. So let me translate that into English. I mean, what we call the information age, I don't know if people still call that because everybody's scrambling to be the person to name the age, so then you can sell your books.

We're not on this age. But in the age dominated by information, the practices that lead to success are things like managing information, efficiency, quickness, scanning, and everything has to be faster and faster. So what that does to the human person is we have these practices of giving less and less attention to things.

You have a finite amount of attention to give. There are more things clamoring for your attention and more things insisting that you only think very quickly about everything. It's no wonder that our age is not the age of wisdom or the age of beauty.

You can't scan or skim beautiful verse. To skim is domestic. You have to ponder.

We have to reflect. Every little in our age that encourages us to slow down, take time,

reflect in such a way that we put ourselves in a position where we can even encounter beauty. I think some of the reason in the last hundred years, there are lots of reasons, that even the art world has moved away from beauty is these practices that have been used.

It takes practices that have been cultivated. It takes time, it takes reflection, it takes thinking over the same things again and again to cultivate the virtues of being attentive. This is true in many areas of our life.

The studies are unanimous that we are becoming less and less able to give attention to another human being. We have trained ourselves to be completely or at least largely distracted. The distraction is the enemy of virtue.

That view is not unique to a Christian story. This is Aristotle's view of how we cultivate virtues, which fits well into a Christian story of the world. Many Christians think he got a lot of this stuff right and they import this into their own moral thinking.

I think I have one more question before we turn it over to the audience. It's along the lines of Augustine talking about this in the talk this evening about having an improper ordering of our affections or the things that we love. I have been with the idea that people matter most.

As I continue to listen to you talk about the other things that you are bringing into the talk this evening, it seems like if we don't get that part right, that sort of what bends some of the other things. I think that Augustine and I think that you pointed this out too, that first our first affection ought to be oriented towards the thing that matters most, which would be not people but God. If we've got that first, and then we've got people that are most out of that, that these other things that seem to challenge maybe some of the things that you were saying this evening, we look around, we don't all get overwhelmed with how good the world is.

I think most of us probably look around and we get overwhelmed with how much suffering there is or how much evil there is. Yet I think what you were sharing tonight ties into what Augustine was saying and that somehow there's a theme there that is a disordering of our affections that are causing, even when you brought up people that are most, you led with "Oh my goodness, 9/11/2001". When you look at that and they think, well that's an indication of just how evil people are, other people.

And so there's a tension in that observation, right? You brought out the goodness, but probably 9/10 people wouldn't have seen the goodness that you saw they would have seen the evil. It's a very complicated question, the problem of evil and suffering, in fact I've tucked whole horses on it. But let me say a couple of things about it.

Most discussion on God and evil takes place, or at least most discussion that I take part



in being a philosopher and not like a normal human being, takes place in the context of what you could call just the minimum concept of God. God is really smart, God is all powerful, God is good, and yet evil exists. It's very hard to put those things together, and there's been a lot of good work done on this, and I've written on this myself.

But in the context of tonight where we're talking particularly of the Christian story, I think the Christian story has resources for us to think about evil and suffering that just a generic picture of God doesn't have. So here's a few of them. So if there was not a lot of really horrible evil, think about that, if the world was such that there was not a ton, not literally a ton, but just lots and lots and lots of really horrible evil, we would know that Christianity is false.

Christianity requires lots of horrible evil, if it's going to be true, because it's a story of what God has done to redeem human beings from horrible evil. I mean, Christians have just celebrated Book Friday and Easter two weeks ago, and that's our celebration of Jesus on earth as God taking on the penalty for our rejection of God, and then rising from the dead to show that there is a way open for forgiveness. Well, if God himself becomes a human being to take on this penalty, which is more than just physical death, but it's a spiritual death, then we're not talking about trivial evil.

Christianity requires lots and lots of horrible evil, so that's one fact. So the horrible evil by itself fits right into the Christian story. Secondly, I think Christianity gives us hope in the face of evil, and the hope comes in two ways.

One, the Christian story of God coming to the world in Jesus and paying the penalty for our rejection of God shows that God actually has defeated Jesus. He has defeated evil at its root without violating our dignity or our freedom. Secondly, the Christian story includes that God will defeat evil in its entirety without violating our dignity.

In other words, no child molester will get away with it. There'll be no more trafficking of little girls and little boys. There'll be a obliterated.

This is part of the Christian story. So that provides us hope. And then the third thing I want to say, and I know we're doing a lot here, is the Christian story also promises the resources for us as individuals and communities to navigate our life in the midst of suffering.

In other words, we have the presence of God in us to give us strength to remind us of perspective that helps us navigate the realities of suffering. So Christianity, rather than being escapist about evil and suffering, I mean even when suffering is smacking the middle of the Christian story, that's a few things I would say about the resources of Christianity is in particular. First, I just want to thank you for writing the book, having read the whole book.

It reminded me in a couple of different places in your talks and I also prompted this memory that I was at a virus conference three years ago, and it was about viruses that affect bacteria. I had breakfast one morning with a professor from Yale that I had just met at the conference, and one of his friends from Canada joined us at the table. And the professor from Yale knew that I was a Christ follower, but the professor from Canada didn't.

And they got into a conversation and at one point the professor from Canada just said, "Well, you know, Christians, these are just people that are out there looking for meaning and purpose in the world." And he goes, "You know, it's just ridiculous." And I remember sitting there thinking, "What do I say? What do I say?" And I didn't say anything. It's one of those things, but I'm the kind of person that I've run a conversation through my head 15 times after the conversation's over. And your book just highlights, well of course we're people who want meaning and purpose.

And not only that, but we find meaning and purpose that resonates very deeply with what we long for and desire. And so thanks for writing the book. Thank you.

Thank you. If you ever get a chance to hear AJ's talk about the theology of viruses, it's a brilliant piece of work. So maybe that'll be the next very end.

Maybe it needs a chance of your title. Find more content like this on [baritas.org](http://baritas.org). And be sure to follow the baritas forum on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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