



Season 9: Episode 1 | Wesley Huff | Why Do You Believe What You Believe? (re-release)

Hello, and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanne LaFleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society, and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today, we feature an interview with Wesley Huff, interviewed by Bible Society's Andrew Ollerton. Wesley Huff works as a director with Apologetics Canada, and he's been working on a video series called Can I Trust the Bible? He's currently doing a PhD in New Testament and Christian origins at the University of Toronto's Wycliffe College.

But Wes was born in Pakistan and spent a portion of his childhood in the Middle East. After being diagnosed with a rare neurological condition at the age of 11, he was left paralyzed from the waist down, and Wes experienced a miraculous recovery that the doctors themselves say has no medical explanation. This experience, along with a great deal of study and soul-searching in his later teens, solidified his interest in the subjects of faith and engaging the beliefs and worldviews of other people.

So, Wesley is currently the Central Canada Director for Apologetics Canada, and has participated in numerous public dialogues, debates, and interfaith events on the issues of faith, belief and religion across North America. Currently he lives in Toronto with his wife and their three children. Please enjoy this conversation between him and Andrew Ollerton.

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Andrew Ollerton: Well, welcome to another episode of Scripture Untangled. My name is Andrew Ollerton. I'm an author and scholar, and today I'm really delighted to be joined by Wesley Huff, who's involved in New Testament studies, in more further postgraduate research, and traveling around a little bit to explore the Bible and help other people make sense of it. Wes, it's great to have you with us today. Thanks for coming on.

Wesley Huff: Of course. It's a pleasure to be here.

Andrew Ollerton: Where are you as we speak, Wes? Where are you sitting?

Wesley Huff: So, I'm in Toronto. I have an office space in the church that I attend, and I'm a lay elder here. So, I'm in the West End, if anybody's familiar with Toronto, the Junction region near Hyde Park. But, yep, definitely much in the city. So, yeah. Great.

Andrew Ollerton: We actually visited Toronto as a family last year and had a great time. So, we're fans of your city. We're over in the UK ourselves.

This is a bit of a transatlantic conversation, but looking forward to it. We're going to dive into all sorts of things, including apologetics, and some of the reasons why we can, well, asking that question, can we trust the New Testament? Are these texts reliable?

But before we get to all of that, tell us a little bit about what you currently are doing. You know, what does your daily life look like at the moment?

Wesley Huff: Oh, man, my daily life's a little bit all over the place.

But I am, as I said, I'm very involved in my local church with the leadership here as a lay elder. But I'm also the director of Central Canada for a ministry called Apologetics Canada, which up

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until recently was largely based on the West Coast of Canada over in British Columbia. But with bringing me on and a few others, we've expanded.

We're doing a lot more coast to coast as opposed to just the West Coast specifically. I'm also a PhD candidate, as you mentioned, in New Testament Studies and Christian Origins at the University of Toronto. I have three kids, ages four, two, and eight months.

So, I'm very busy, husband, wife, scholar, apologist, you know, wear lots of hats. But yeah, so just trying to keep myself busy and out of trouble.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, well done you, that sounds like a challenge, knocking out a PhD on the side of being a pretty full-time parent.

I'm sure I've been through that stage. And we've got three kids a little bit further down the tracks, but I'm a sports taxi now. I do my research on the touchline of my kids' sporting events these days.

So anyway, familiar feelings, I'm sure, for lots of our listeners. So just tell me though, Wes, you weren't doing any of that, right? So you can't, let's say you can't do any of that.

You can't be involved in the church leadership, you can't do your PhD, but you could do anything else. What would it be? Would it be an astronaut or what?

Wesley Huff: Well, an astronaut would be fun, wouldn't it? I don't think I have the science or math background to properly be an astronaut. But yeah, that's a really good question.

I actually went to university with full intention of going into the police force. That's where I headed. I did an undergraduate in sociology with a focus on law.

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And it was, I mean, God leads us in various ways, doesn't he? And so that clearly wasn't, as I got into those studies, clearly wasn't the direction I was going. But I also was very much involved in athletics.

I competed in track and field, varsity athletics in my undergrad, and was very passionate about that. You could argue that my undergrad was actually in sprinting more than it was in the actual degree and program that I was in. So I loved that and got to train with some amazing people.

One of my training partners actually competed in Tokyo in the heats of the 100 meters. And so it's been really fun and a unique experience to see some of my colleagues. One of the throwers, the shot putters who was on the team, went on to do bobsled and competed for the Canadian team at the Winter Olympics.

So that's been fun. But as much as I love that, I was never the most gifted athlete. And so I'm officially retired.

So even though it'd be fun to go on to be a professional athlete, I've done way too much damage to my own body to be able to functionally do that. But yeah, so policing was a potential option. I also almost went to art school.

There were sort of two entry scholarships that I got. One was in track and field at York University, and the other was for OCAD, the Ontario School of Art and Design. And to the chagrin of my high school art teacher, I didn't go to OCAD.

I thought that I wanted a career that would actually pay something. So that's why I went into theology and biblical studies, right? Because there's lots of money there.

Andrew Ollerton: Oh, it's absolutely the place if you're looking for a loaded life. Absolutely. Just let's just backtrack a moment.

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You've said too many interesting things. So the whole 100-meter sprints, was that your best to spend 100-meter sprint? And what's your PB with that?

Wesley Huff: So, I ran 10.58, which was my claim to fame, because that's one second exactly off of the world record. Usain Bolt's record is 9.58, which if you don't know anything about sprinting, sounds very impressive. But if you do know anything about sprinting, you know that I'm not even in the camera shot at that point.

Everybody else has crossed the line. I'm still a good ways back. But yeah, Canadian indoors actually, because our season is during the winter, the distances are all different because we run on an indoor track, which is not 400 meters, it's 200 meters.

And you run crazy events like the 60 meter, which is basically you start and then the race is over. Or you run not a 200 meter, which you'd think based on the size of the track, but you run a 300 meter, which is one and a half laps, which I'm not sure how you explain that. And then the relay is a four by 200 meters.

So those are what I did mostly during the year. I would compete outdoors occasionally, but my outdoor season was actually predominantly in my high school years. But yeah, I loved track, still love track.

I don't follow many sports, but I'm one of the only people I know who regularly follow track and field and cross country and that kind of thing. So even though it's every four years for most people, it's all year round for me.

Andrew Ollerton: Well, listen, well done you.

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I must admit the PhD sounds a lot more like a marathon and a sprint from my experience at least.

Wesley Huff: It definitely is.

Andrew Ollerton: Full power to you with that.

That's definitely a stamina sport, doing that kind of study. So we'll get into that in a moment, but well done. That's such a cool backstory to hear about.

Give us a bit more of your backstory there. How did you come to faith? What was the sort of context out of which you journeyed to be a Christ follower?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, so I was a missionary kid. I grew up, I was born in Pakistan and spent a portion of my childhood in the Middle East. I come from a long missionary history.

My mom was a missionary kid. She grew up at a boarding school in India and my grandparents, I never knew my birth, my mom's birth mom, her stepmom was the one I knew. Her birth mom died before I was born.

But they were both missionaries in lots of different places, India, Nepal, Hong Kong. They were all over the place. And on my dad's side, I'm actually related to David Livingston, the famous Scottish missionary.

So, my middle name is Livingston. Every first-born male in my family is named Livingston, except for me, it's my middle name and it's my son's middle name. But long missionary history.

But we came back from overseas when I was relatively young. We were living in Jordan, and we came back for my primary school years. And my faith journey really starts just before my 12th

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birthday when I was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition that left me paralyzed from the waist down.

And the short version of that that I tell is that I was homesick on a Wednesday, homesick from school, and I had kind of camped out in the bathroom and I'd fallen asleep. And when I woke up, I couldn't feel my legs. And after being, you know, notifying my parents, being rushed to the hospital, I was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition called acute transverse myelitis.

And what they told me was that my body's immune system, instead of attacking the flu that I had, actually attacked the nerve endings of the base of my spinal cord, causing swelling and leaving me as a paraplegic. And so, the diagnosis was basically that, you know, this is a rare condition, and the severity is dictated by the speed at which the paralysis happens. And my paralysis was, as far as they were concerned, almost instant.

And so, the chances of me recovering were very low. The probabilities were very low. And so obviously, I talked about my track and field career, so something happened, right?

And the short story to the end of the story is that one month after I woke up and couldn't feel my legs, I woke up on a Saturday morning in February, got out of my bed, walked over to my wheelchair and sat down. And so that was what I truly believe to be a miraculous healing.

Andrew Ollerton: What did the doctors say? Did they have any other?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, well, they were the ones who started first throwing around the word miracle because they said, we really don't have a medical explanation. You know, they ran some tests and there was no evidence of the swelling or the inflammation.

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So, it was them who really, you know, my parents were a little bit hesitant to use that word. But that is truly what I think happened is that God healed me at that point in time. And that influenced a lot of my passion for athletics later in life.

And you'd think that that kind of thing would kind of solidify one's faith. But later in my teen years, I really struggled with my own faith, trying to figure out whether I should believe things that my parents told me to believe simply because they raised me to believe it. And that really started me on my journey of investigating the worldview in which I was raised compared to some others.

And fortunately, I lived in a household where because of the missionary background, I had a lot of exposure to other worldview systems. We had the Bhagavad Gita and the Book of Mormon and the Quran on the shelf in my living room, although it was never expressed verbally. I always felt that my parents would communicate that, you know, these things can stand up to the scrutiny of the worldview that we hold.

And so, they're not dangerous. They're not banned. You know, we can investigate them.

We can look at them. They can be in our house because the Bible and the Christian worldview will stand the test. And so, knowing that kind of background, I didn't have any type of crisis of faith that I think that would be overplaying my hand.

But I did, you know, try to, to the best of my ability, you know, as someone in grade 11, grade 12, read these things, look into them, see if they had any more or less validity, whether academically or experientially, over and against the system and the philosophy that I had been taught growing up. And I truly believe that after looking into those, that they didn't, that they really didn't answer the ultimate questions that I had of meaning and purpose. But also, I felt that they also were found wanting historically.

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And although I didn't necessarily have the tools that I later would get into my tool belt academically and kind of back that up, I likewise believe that they kind of fell short there. And so that really connected kind of, if you want to put it, the head and the heart for me, of, you know, experiencing something that medical professionals said, you know, we don't have a naturalistic explanation for this. And then doing some of that investigation and seeing, okay, well, the Christian worldview really does stand up to scrutiny.

And the Bible does have validity in that sense. And that kind of started me on my journey, if you want to call it, of apologetics. Although I couldn't have told you what that word meant at the time, but I worked to establish what it was that I believed and why I believed it.

Andrew Ollerton: Such a great story. I mean, from being at least temporarily a paralytic to being a sprinter is really such an amazing headline in its own right. But just to go on that journey also, you know, respect to your parents.

I think it's really cool that they didn't feel that they had to sort of insulate you from other worldviews or other claims to holy books. How did you, I mean, was it through that life changing experience, you know, when you were age 12 or so or otherwise, how did you begin to find your own confidence in scripture? We'll come on to apologetics in a moment, but just at a personal level, was there a particular passage or experience that drew you into the scriptures and made it feel like it was home?

Wesley Huff: You know what it was? It was, I'd read the Bible cover to cover a few times when I was a teenager, but I think, you know, there isn't necessarily one moment, but I think going back and continually reading Genesis chapter one and noticing, you know, I was raised in a particular perspective where there were particular disagreements and controversies about Genesis chapter one. And I kind of felt like those are missing the point in that when I was reading Genesis chapter one, I was seeing, well, there's this clear narrative that's communicating that God is doing something unique.

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And especially when I would get interested in the ancient Near East a little bit later on and read other ancient Near Eastern origin stories like the Babylonian Enuma Elish and just see the stark contrast between those two, you know, unlike a lot of the other origin stories or not unlike, you know, if you read Richard Dawkins' *A River Out of Eden*, you get a similar narrative that, you know, this world is purposeless. This world is a mistake.

You know, the ancient Babylonians who read this origin story every new year would remind themselves that they were just the product of a war between the gods, and they were the end result. You know, what a kind of rosy thing to read every new year to encourage you on into the next year. You're a mistake.

Don't worry about life. But reading Genesis chapter one and seeing, you know, God created things with a purpose. And not only that, he created humanity in his image and he entrusted them with creation to steward it, to tend the garden as his representative in the physical realm on earth.

That really stood out to me. And likewise, you know, when God creates the land or when God creates the trees, he talks to the land, and it brings forth life. And when he creates the fish, he talks to the sea, and it brings forth life.

But I remember thinking, OK, well, who does God talk to when he creates humanity? Well, he talks to himself. And what happens when you remove a tree from the earth?

Well, it dies. You remove a fish from the sea. Well, it dies.

Well, when Adam and Eve, when our first parents, when they chose to eat of that fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, the one thing God told them not to do. Well, what happens when we remove humanity from God? Well, we die.

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And so that really standing out to me that there's been this separation, not unlike a tree being uprooted and not having the nutrients and not having the life-giving source that it truly needed. And so, we, when we choose to call the shots on our own terms, which is really what Adam and Eve were doing, weren't they? You know, to know the difference between good and evil, I think is less kind of an intellectual assent.

And I think it was more trying to call the shots on their own terms. I didn't come up with this idea, but I use it in a talk where I say, you know, in one sense, you can't break the law of God any more than you can break the law of gravity. Because, you know, if I decide I want to fly and I tie a cape around my neck and I get up on the building that I'm currently in and I jump off, I'm not going to break the law of gravity.

The law of gravity is going to break me. And when we try to break the law of God, we end up breaking ourselves. And that is truly what we do when we turn away from God's law that is good, that is a reflection of his character.

And so going back to your original question, as I wax on, reading that and just feeling that, you know, the powerful narrative, aside from all the debates about the mechanisms of creation and 24 hour days or not, seeing that there's something here that's communicating a very powerful anti-cultural narrative, both in the ancient world and today, that you're created with value, you're created with purpose and meaning and intention, and you're created for relationship and that that relationship has been broken.

And God has made a way in order for that relationship to be restored and renewed. And so not a single passage necessarily, but the whole section of Genesis 1 and 2 and then the promise that God made that he would provide a way. And we ultimately see that in the Gospels.

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Andrew Ollerton: Really good. So, the origin story was part of your journey to a conference in Scripture, which is interesting, isn't it? Because it's often one of those, as you say, that's flagged up as being sort of controversial or most obviously out of date, if you read it through a particular lens.

But actually, potentially, it's the most meaningful section of Scripture. So that's really great. Let's get on to apologetics, because we kind of touched on that, which is, what do you understand by it?

When you speak of yourself as an apologist, what are you meaning? How do you explain that to people?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, what I'm not doing as a Christian apologist is apologizing for being a Christian, right?

I think there are some people that might have to apologize for being Christian, but I hope I'm not one of them. But Christian apologetics comes directly from Scripture, I believe, in Peter's letter that he writes to the dispersed ancient world. He says, but in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. And that little prepositional phrase in the original language is *pros apologia*. And so, we take that Greek word, *apologion*, we stick an English suffix on the end, and we have the word *apologetics*, to give a reason, to give a defense, to give an answer.

And so, this is something I think is, it's often made to be a lot more complicated, and it's kind of entwined with these big philosophical arguments, say, for the existence of God. But I think if we're having a conversation and someone asks us why, at that point, we're engaging in

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apologetics. You know, why Jesus is a very profound apologetic question, as much as it is, you know, what is the cosmological argument for the existence of God?

That requires maybe a little bit more homework. But in another sense, the question why Jesus, or why not Jesus, or any of those things, is kind of the other face of the coin of evangelism. One side is evangelism, the other side would be apologetics.

And so, the way that I understand apologetics, and being someone who has their formal job description as a Christian apologist, is helping others, coming alongside them in the journey of explaining, well, why do I think Christianity is not just a way, but the way? And how do I explain those things logically and concretely, and even aesthetically and emotionally, to help others see that this is truly the way that they should follow and live? And so, in that sense, giving a defense, giving a reason, is just as much an intellectual endeavor as it is an aesthetic and emotional appeal to say, we live in a world that is obviously more than a matter in motion.

And we have these longings for something that's more, and something that's greater, and something that's beyond ourselves. And so, finding answers and giving reasons for that is a very important and influential endeavor that we all should do. We're not all called to be apologists as a job description.

But apologetics, even if we don't claim to be a Christian, is something that we should at least dip our toe in to find out the reasons why we believe what we believe, and how we came to that conclusion.

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Andrew Ollerton: And of course, giving a reasoned defense for the faith is nothing new. That goes all the way back to Scripture itself, and then Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, and Tertullian, and these early church fathers. But what has changed is the kinds of objections that culture is, if you like, generating.

The sensitivities and sensibilities have shifted. So as you think about particularly the younger generation, and where there is a plausibility crisis, where there is a sense of Christianity just doesn't make sense of our world, or it's not good for our world, or it's not logically coherent, what would you, I mean, are there two or three standout issues that you as an apologist are coming up against that maybe wouldn't have been 30 years ago, the same three?

What are you hearing? What are you sensing is of the moment?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, that's a very good question, because I think the questions people are asking have changed very rapidly, even in my own, you know, lifetime.

I think when I was younger, you still had more of the classical apologetic questions that the sort of bigger names, the Lee Strobel's and the Josh McDowell's were approaching of, you know, does God exist? And those type of arguments, and I think that those are still very profound. You know, we still need the Lee Strobel's and the William Lane Craig's and the John Lennox's and Alistair McGrath's. Those are important contributions to the story. But I think in my own

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generation, as there was a shift from what was called the new atheism, you know, which really wasn't very new, but was very popular in the early 2000s.

I think there was a shift because people realized that the fruit of those seeds planted really didn't give much in the way of purpose. That if you are told that you're just a product of time plus matter plus chance, and that those existential and metaphysical questions that are answered by things like religious worldviews, well, that's just silly nonsense. Well, that doesn't really leave you with much hope or even a pursuit of a goal.

I remember I was doing an event, this was a number of years now at the University of Toronto, but after the event, I was talking to some of the other students and there was a student who was doing the pre-med program at the University of Toronto. And the talk had been on science and Christianity, you know, do those two conflict? And he kind of said to me afterwards, you know, I'm told by my professors that, you know, I'm just the product of a long line of evolutionary processes, that I'm just matter in motion, that really, you know, all of this is going to end with the heat death of the universe anyways.

So, you know, there really isn't an objective purpose and meaning, but he said, then I'm told to have goals. I'm told to pursue things that are of value, and I'm told to be the best that I possibly can be. And he says, I find that conflicting.

I find that hard to deal with because in one sense, it gives a temporary meaning, but it doesn't give a true meaning. And I think that's where we saw the switch. And I think that's where we see, you know, now there's much more of an interest here, at least in North America, in things like new age and things like mysticism, because people who I think otherwise would have been interested in new atheism are now pursuing something that's a little bit more transcendent.

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And we see the rise in things like psychedelic drugs to pursue their being more than just this world. And so, I think people, in terms of your original question, are asking less, is God real? And they're asking more, is God good?

Is God good for me specifically? You know, when I talk to people on the street or at outreach events, that's kind of the front-loaded question. Now, I think that there are actually questions behind that, questions that I find important, like, can we trust scripture?

Is that truly reliable? I think that actually sits behind it. It's the prerequisite.

And a lot of people need help in answering those questions, because when you remove some of the, is God good questions, the fallback is often, well, yeah, but you're just relying on the Bible, and you can't trust that. You know, that's just a translation of a translation of a translation. That's just error written copies.

You know, the most recent book is thousands of years old. It's obviously been tampered with. And there are all these other books, you know, you're reading the Jesus from the gospel of Mark.

But what about the Jesus from the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Thomas?

Andrew Ollerton: We'll come on to that, Wes. We're just staying on the apologetics focus.

Yeah, definitely. What advice then would you give to people, you know, as you say, at a popular level, all of us are tasked with giving a reasonable response and answer for the faith that we have. But sometimes our tone needs to shift a little bit.

Sometimes our approach, you know, if you're like, I don't want to be too tactical, not tactics, but just approach and tone needs to adjust to a generation that's thinking differently about the

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world. Do you have any sort of, you know, just top tips on just generally, and then we'll get on to scripture, but just generally, how do we not just, if you like, have the right answers, but approach people's questions in the right way in the right tone?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, I think that's a really good question to ask for people who want to do apologetics or who are passionate about reaching others for the gospel.

That 1 Peter 3, 15 to 17, which I quoted, I think I used to go to apologetics conferences, and they would just have, always be prepared to give an answer on the screen. And I think, ah, that's a really good verse. And I'd go back, and I'd read 1 Peter 3 and find out, well, first, the context is persecution.

So often we've kind of pulled it out and placed it in a vacuum. And so there's a very specific context for it. But also, I would argue that that always be prepared to give an answer is actually sandwiched between two things that if you're not doing, you're probably either not doing apologetics in the Christian sense, or you're not doing it very well.

And that is that, you know, that first slice of bread is, but revere Christ as Lord in your heart. And I think that starts with a heart posture on our end. You know, we're not revering Christ.

If we're not taking care of our own spiritual well-being, we're not going to be in a good place to then be able to give an answer because we're going to come across in a way that is probably not representative of Christ and someone who's revering him as Lord in our heart. And then the other slice of bread on the other side is, but do so with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ will be ashamed of their slander. I think that's really important.

And that takes a lot of wisdom. It's something that comes with time and prayer and sort of practicing spiritual disciplines. But I think it's important.

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You know, I was once told at an event during a Q&A interaction, make sure that every person you answer during the Q&A, view them as the most vulnerable person you can think of. And I think that's really good advice because you just don't know what someone is going through, right? You don't know why they're asking the questions they're asking.

And they might be asking a question about violence in the Old Testament when really they're just searching for a God who they know won't attack them or abuse them like maybe they've been attacked or abused. And so there's often a lot more that sits behind these questions. I don't know if I've ever been asked a question about the problem of evil and not found out either at that moment or later that there was some very profound hurt and struggle in the person who'd asked the questions life.

And so I think we need to make sure that we're approaching these issues with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience. You know, just briefly, the tagline of the organization I work for, Apologetics Canada, is love God, love people. And I think we need to do that in that order because it's only by learning to love God and how God loves us that we can actually go out and love people.

That's often reversed in our culture. We're told to love people and then use that as a blueprint in how we should love God. But that's really going to lead us astray.

We need to make sure that we're revering Christ as Lord in our heart. And on that basis, we can give an answer for the reason for the hope that we have.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, very good. And it's easy because so often apologetics can be seen on the stage. You know, there are showcase events where Christian thinkers have come up against skeptics and they're great to watch. But the majority of our interactions are much more human, much more, a lot more proximity, a lot more life rubbing up against life.

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And I guess that sense of just having a tender-hearted apologetics and not just clever arguments. I think that's the sort of emphasis I'm hearing. And I fully agree.

Yeah, really good. So just turning to Scripture itself, as you rightly said, it underpins the basis upon which we have something to say. And I know you've just both in your PhD research and at a popular level, you're pushing into this space of just how do we know that the New Testament particularly has credibility, reliability.

Just tell us a bit about what are you up to and what are you discovering in that space?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, so my academic work has to do with early Christian scribal culture. So it's an interesting area because it kind of dips one toe in New Testament studies and one toe in early church history, which I think for me personally has been very valuable.

One of the most useful kind of studies and endeavors that I've found in my own apologetic work is being able to have a competency in the biblical languages and actually have an understanding of early church history. Because a lot of the objections, whether we're talking about from Muslims or Mormons or atheists or Jehovah's Witnesses, you know, fill in the blank, will come down to some objection that I think is often a misunderstanding or a misrepresentation of something that can often be resolved, not all the time, but to a good degree be resolved by simply, you know, opening the Hebrew, the Greek and saying, okay, I understand what's going on here.

Let's walk through that. Or some miscommunication about something that happened in church history about, you know, whether that's really early church history about talking about some of the doctrines, the doctrine of the Trinity or the establishment of the church or, you know, the how the interaction between church and state happened with Rome or the Crusades or that kind of thing. But so I feel like I've been truly blessed to be able to understand that my studies

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have helped me learn about the history of the text of the Bible, but also the history of the lineage, the church family that I stand 2000 years down the road in and be able to interact with that.

Also, you know, my recent work with Apologetics Canada has had me, we just started filming a series, which we're still working on. It'll come out by March 2024 is kind of the release date where I flew over to Egypt with a colleague and a filmmaker. And we filmed on the ground some of the story of the discovery of some of our earliest manuscripts of both biblical documents, but also some non-biblical documents that listeners might have heard about.

The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Peter. Why is it that we have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in our Bible and not those? And so, I've been really blessed to be able to do things like that and to get into that study and help communicate as effectively as I possibly can.

Hopefully I'm doing that well. Why those things are important and then why, you know, this can help us understand and answer some of those ultimate questions.

Andrew Ollerton: So just give us a little bit of, I appreciate the resource will be out later in next year, but just give us at a headline level, you know, as you think about those other Gnostic Gospels, the Pseudo-Biblical writings, the things that are in addition to, but not included in the New Testament, you know, you've obviously been inspecting that a little bit more closely than most of us get to.

What are some of the headline thoughts you have about the reliability of the four Gospels we do have and whether there is, you know, because I think that sort of nagging conspiracy theory of maybe something was switched and conveniently things were left out that didn't fit the narrative. You know, it's not just the Da Vinci Code that does the rounds on that. There are other people who put that out there as well.

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So, what are your thoughts, you know, at a headline level, having looked at that a bit more carefully, what are your thoughts on that? What's simmering away in terms of confidence in the Gospels?

Wesley Huff: Yeah, well, I think the answer to that question is both more complicated and more simple than we often realize.

It's more complicated in that it does rely on us to actually look and investigate. And I in the past have simply, I heard at a talk once, an academic, someone asked, you know, his answer was, well, I'll give you a copy of the Gospel of Judas. You can read it and then you come back, and you can tell me why it's not in the Bible.

And I think that is effective in one sense, in that a lot of people hear these about these books, they've never investigated them for themselves. And often when they do investigate them, they realize, oh, oh, this is kind of strange. Like this doesn't sound, we often think that the Gospels are spectacular because they have these miracle stories.

But then you read some of these other apocryphal and like you said, pseudepigraphal writings and you find out, well, I didn't even know what embellishment could be until I've read this. And this clearly sounds like something that is coming out of Greco-Roman pagan mysticism. So, I think in one sense, that's the tactic.

But I think what I found useful is simply to say, you know, I want to know about Jesus. As a Christian, I want to know about Jesus. You know, I have a friend who says, if you take Christ out of Christian, all you're left with is Ian.

And that Ian's a great guy, but he can't save you from your sins. And so, if we want to know who Jesus is, as a trained historian, I need to look at the earliest sources. And the simple fact is

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that the earliest sources are not the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Mary.

Those are coming in decades and centuries after the people who are attached to the documents as their authors were dead. And so, I'm going to go to the earliest source material, which is clearly showing an understanding and an origination in terms of their composition when they were written from the timeframe of Jesus from the first century. And that's one of the earliest criteria that when the early church was talking about putting together a canon of scripture, you know, and they were doing the due diligence of saying, you know, we need to make sure that what we put together in terms of representing the new covenant documents actually go back to the apostles.

One of the simple criteria was, does it come from either someone who knew Jesus or someone who knew someone who knew Jesus? And unequivocally, the books that fall in that category are specifically the four Gospels, but the rest of the 27 books that we call the New Testament. And so, when people hear about these other, you know, there's sometimes described as lost or secret Gospels, both of those titles are misnomers.

They're really lost, and they were never really secret. We've known about them for 2000 years from the early church writing about them and condemning them most of the time for the heretical content. So, when we discovered, you know, say the Gospel of Thomas, it didn't blow up our understanding.

All it did was confirm what writers like Irenaeus in the second century wrote about them. But I think what we can say is to people who raise those objections about those books is simply, I want to know about Jesus. And so, I'm going to go to the earliest source material and the earliest source material is unequivocally and unabashedly the fourfold Gospel biographical material that we call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

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Andrew Ollerton: Really helpful. And yeah, really helpful. I think just clarifying in terms of, as you say, it's actually a simple task when you flip through and just almost intuitively sense where credibility lies, where historicity is being showcased in the Gospels case, you know, deliberate, unnecessary details being given.

So really helpful. Just pulling out of the detail, though, I look forward to seeing the program on that that comes out in next year. But pulling out of the detail and just going back, circling back as we wrap up to that question.

So why does it matter? You know, you've got a young person who's worried about the environment and environmental crisis and they can't get a job at the moment or, you know, they're still paying off their tuition fees or whatever it may be. And you sort of, you know, we're scratching around here about Egyptian texts and papyrus manuscripts and palimpsests and all these other things.

But, you know, pull back. Why does it matter and how does it affect the way that you actually experienced the New Testament to have dug into these questions?

Wesley Huff: I think it matters because truth matters, and truth matters because we are beings that have a longing to understand how we situate ourselves in the universe.

And so, we can answer all sorts of scientific and philosophical and historical questions. But I think at the end of the day, the question of what is truth of the capital T is an important one. And ultimately, Jesus claimed to be the way and the truth.

And so, if what I said earlier about the creation story, if that is true, then that means that we are creatures that have eternity imprinted on our hearts and that we are, you know, inherently physical but also spiritual beings. Those are intertwined and were created with purpose and meaning and value. And for people who are struggling with questions about, you know,

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whether it's the environmental crisis or whether it's sort of the turmoil of global politics, I think we can look at the narrative of Scripture and say, you know, we have both a hope that is here on earth that gives us purpose and meaning, but it also goes beyond that.

It goes beyond that because we have a hope that is eternal. It was C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity who said, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world. And that's exactly what the narrative of Scripture is, you know, our hope is not here.

Our hope is eternal and it's in a right relationship with God. That doesn't mean that the here and now is not important. You know, we can care about the environment because we were entrusted as stewards of creation and that can give a strengthening and an undergirding for caring about the world around us, caring about people.

And I think ultimately these desires that we have for stewardship, for ideas like justice, well, those are inherently Christian ideas. That's the air we breathe in the Western hemisphere because of our Christian heritage. We often take it for granted, but that is an inherently Judeo-Christian value that we are created with purpose, we are created with meaning, we have intrinsic worth by nature of being human and not extrinsic worth in nature of what we can contribute to society.

We decry groups and societies and governments who say, well, you know, only what you can participate in, only what you can contribute is how you are seen as valuable and everyone else, you know, they're really not contributing. So, we can remove them from society. We inherently have a revulsion of that.

And I think for a good reason, it's because we're imprinted with the image of God. And when we have desires for what is good, what is beautiful, what is valuable, what should exhibit justice, that's because we are created in the image of a God who exudes those things by his

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character. And so, I think going back and asking the question, you know, how does this relate to scripture?

Well, we find the foundation for that in scripture. And the temptation is to ask the question that the serpent asked Eve in the garden, you know, "has God really said," well, yes, he has. And we can have a firm foundation that that is true.

And that is going to, it's going to make a difference in the way that we live.

Andrew Ollerton: Well, I love that. I love that little trio that you brought together, that it's good, it's beautiful, and it's valuable.

And I think that really is summing up our conversation, that those are the questions that need to be answered and the hope that needs to be brought to our world. So, thanks so much for joining us. I really want to encourage our listeners to check out Wes's other work.

I know you've got some fantastic visual infographics, Summing the Bible Story, this new video that's coming out in the new year, and also the apologetics organization in Canada that you represent. We'll make sure that links are available to all of those in the show notes. But Wes, thank you so much for joining us and helping us untangle Scripture that little bit more.

Wesley Huff: Yeah, of course. It's been a pleasure and a delight to talk to you, Andrew.