

What happens when a theoretical physicist meets God?

A conversation with Dr. Tom Rudelius

TRANSCRIPT



NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

The original audio is available here.

Mark Turman 00:02

Welcome back to the Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum and host for today's conversation about faith and culture and today, faith, culture and science, and how those things weave together and intersect complement rather than compete with each other.

Our guest today is Dr. Tom Rudelius. He completed his undergraduate work at Cornell earned a doctorate in physics at Harvard, and has conducted postdoctoral research at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Currently a postdoctoral researcher in theoretical physics at the University of California Berkeley, Tom will begin a faculty position at Durham University in the United Kingdom in the fall of 2023. His research focuses on string theory, quantum field theory, and early universe cosmology, a man of faith and an avid sports fan. He is a frequently requested speaker on topics related to science and faith. He also serves on the board for a tutoring organization in South

Africa. We want to welcome Dr. Rudelius to our podcast today, we look forward to an intriguing conversation that we think will help to equip you as you walk with Christ. And as you seek to be salt in light for the kingdom of God in your world in your context. All right. Well, we're welcoming Dr. Tom rootless to our podcast, and his recently released book is called Chasing proof finding faith. Dr. Tom, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for having me.

So tell us about your book. What? What is the background, the context of what prompted you to write this book?

01:51

Yeah, so um, so the book is a memoir, it's really about my journey to faith, I was raised in a very loving, but also very non religious family, I came to faith in college. And so it's the story of how he came to faith. And it's also the story of my walk as a Christian. And as someone in the field of science, and how those two paths of mine have sort of intersected with one another. I think, well, that's I'm sorry, go ahead. No, go ahead. I was gonna say, I mean, I think what what kind of motivated me is just this, this desire, I think, to kind of be able to share my story. So that people I think a lot of people will be able to kind of resonate with with, maybe not every thing from beginning to end. But but definitely parts here, you know, for the people who maybe don't, who aren't religious, don't believe in God. But we'd like to believe that there's something more for the people who have been Christians their whole lives, but wrestle with questions about, you know, how to reconcile science and faith. And so that's the hope is that the reader, wherever they're at would sort of be able to see a bit of their journey and in mind, and be able to kind of walk along that journey with me.

Mark Turman 03:07

Oh, absolutely. So your story includes, it's kind of encouraging to hear that you came to faith in college, we've heard, maybe not accurately, although always, but we often hear stories about **how young people lose their faith when they get to college. But talk a little bit more about that, and how the story of a twin brother named Steve and how Steve's journey became influential in your journey.**

03:32

Yeah, so. So as you say, my brother Steve was really the key person in it. I went to Cornell for college, he went to Northwestern. And his freshman year at Northwestern, Steve met a guy on his floor in his dorm freshman year, named Matt. And Matt was probably the first really serious Christian that the neither of us had ever met. And so Steve had started having a lot of conversations with Matt. And to make a long story short, that you can read more about in my book, Steve decided to become a Christian. And so he tried to he tried to talk with me about faith. He tried to give me a copy of the New Testament and some other books about Christianity tree. And I told him, Look, Steve, I have trouble finding time read books that I want to read, much less time to read books that I don't want to read. That was just kind of where I was at. With religion. It just didn't seem like the most important thing in my life. And there were other things school and sports and trying to make the most of my time in college that just seemed more important to me at the time. But it was really through just kind of having more conversations with him. And just kind of almost just a curiosity to see what was this. This thing that he had decided was was worth devoting his life to? That got me to start going to church with him when we were both home for the summer just just to see what it was like someone who hadn't really ever, you

know, hadn't gone to church more than a handful of times in my life. I started going to church started having conversations. And eventually, I did in fact, start reading the books and about Christianity, the new, the New Testament. And, and so yeah, it was kind of a gradual journey of discovery that led me down that that road to where I started learning more, started thinking more. And started recognizing that this actually was something that that, you know, was was was important and, and it did have implications for, for how I lived my life wasn't something I could just set aside.

Mark Turman 05:37

Well, just the, the power of relational influence, right, especially those that we know well through our family and our friendships and just how influential that is. That's a part of my own story, how a good friend of mine actually two really good friends of mine, when I was in high school influenced me in the direction of faith, whereas I didn't think it was needed or that important seemed like it was pretty confusing. And not all that significant. But talk a little bit about this. This myth really what I've come to term as a myth, which is **the incompatibility between science and faith**, I've had the opportunity over, I don't know, the last 20 years or so to become familiar with the work of Francis Collins and his testimony, John Lennox, James tour down at Rice University, all of them like you very significant in their scientific discoveries and pursuits and studies. **There really are a large number, a significant number of very, very dedicated scientists like you, who are also very dedicated in their faith. Isn't that the way it really is? It's not like the the myth that science and faith are at odds are in some ways competing with each other.**

06:53

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think, you know, in within my field, I guess I see people from lots of, you know, from sort of across the religious spectrum. And so yeah, I mean, I think that there's quite a diversity of opinion, when it comes to religious beliefs within the field of science. I think that part of the reason why, you know, there's this incompatibility is, I think that, for a lot of people, there's kind of this understanding that science and religion are offering two totally separate and incompatible approaches to the same sorts of questions. And, you know, science deals with, like, data and truth and hard facts. And religion is speculation and sort of mindless conformity. And, you know, don't don't ask questions, just believe whatever the pastor or priest tells you. And I think when you when you look at it from that perspective, you know, I'm gonna, I'm personally I'm gonna pick science every time if that's the choice, and I think most people would, and most people do. But part of a big part of my own journey of coming to faith, and in my journey of sort of rising up the ranks in science is, is coming to recognize that I think that science and religion really aren't offering two totally different approaches to the same questions. I think they're actually rather similar approaches, to rather different questions that science deals with questions more about mechanisms, and how things work, and faith religion deal more with questions about meaning, and purpose, and why are we here? And, you know, what, why does Why does anything exist at all? And so I think that, for me, it was something that I found is that I can be a person of faith without having to sort of just turn off my brain, and just believe that the same sort of analytical approach that I take to weighing, you know, arguments in the field of science doing to, you know, dealing with uncertainties there, I think that that same approach for me is very similar to how I approach faith. And, and so ultimately, I think that there isn't really an incompatibility between how these two things work. You did

Mark Turman 09:16

a really great job. I thought, explaining how story and science are really two pathways. Can you talk about that a little bit, I, in addition to your book, I saw you do a YouTube presentation where I thought this was just so powerful. The reality that there is both the scientific, mechanistic mathematical side of the world and there's also the story side of the world. And I thought you really had a great conclusion about which one of those is in the lead, if you can talk about that a little bit.

09:54

Sure. Yeah. So I mean, yeah, as you say, you know, I think that and I think this is part of the art of What distinguishes maybe the non religious from the religious perspective in the world, is that I think that the non religious often tends to view the world as sort of, like this giant mathematical structure that there are these laws that only describe reality, but actually define reality. And I think that, as you know, as a theist, but what sort of makes the most sense of the world to me, is to view it not just as, like this mathematical structure with all these laws, but actually, it's a larger story, some sort of narrative that you and I are characters in. And I think, you know, there's, it's not like these things are incompatible, right? I mean, there's a, I think it was CS Lewis, who had this analogy, first of, like, you know, if you ask me, how, why is the cup of water boiling? I could, I could give you like a thermodynamic explanation for how, like water boils. And I can talk about, you know, phase transitions and stuff like that. Or I could just say that the water is boiling, because I wanted to make a cup of tea. And so the same phenomenon, right? The water, the water boiling to make a cup of tea can be analyzed from like, a purely mathematical physical perspective. But then there's also kind of this story component, right, that hope, you know, why am I making a cup of tea, that there's sort of this the story and the structure that go along? And, as you say, I mean, I think, you know, the question of whether theism or atheism, for me comes down to the question of, you know, is our world ultimately just a structure that's masquerading is a story that, you know, you and I are just like chemicals. And somehow we've gained consciousness who gained sentience? And that's just by a total coincidence? Or is there actually something fundamental about the story that we all experience? And so, you know, I think, I think you know, it, to me, there's a lot of things that seem nice about the world as a story, but they're also some things that are a little bit hard to square. Our story, you know, if science, if we believe in the, the like astrophysics account of what's going to happen, then someday the sun is going to swallow up the earth, and all of us will die. And that will be the end of everything. And so it kind of raises the question, what is the point of this story? What, Why, you know, what, are we just here for, for a finite time, and then we all die out. And that's the end of it. So our story seems to need like a point, it needs a climax, and it needs a hero. And I think to me, that's where Christianity really makes sense of the world where Jesus comes into this story, as the hero of the human story. He sacrifices himself for the good of the many prizes triumphantly over the grave in the climactic moment of history. And so to me, kind of the Christian story, is the last missing piece of the puzzle of our story of this true story, capital T, capital S, do we find ourselves living in? And so to me, that's kind of the thing that tipped tips, the scales that to me. Jesus just make sense out of this world, making sense out of questions like why does anything exist at all? What what what are we doing here? What's your meaning and purpose in life? And I think the last thing I'll say on this is, no, I think what I found to what I did find in my back in my days before I was a Christian, is that it's really hard to actually live practically. viewing the world is just like this giant mathematical structure. Like, it helps to think of it that way. When I'm, you know, working as a physicist, and I'm trying to figure out, you know, the laws of nature, there's, you know, it helps to think of it like that, but, but ultimately, even as a physicist, I have to go out, go home, and like live out the story of my life. And I think it's really hard to

live consistently with the idea that we're all just chemicals in, you know, that it's all just matter in motion. We're just here by total coincidence, that somehow, all of us need to make some sort of larger meanings, some sort of larger story. And I think it's something I really like about Christianity is I think that it allows me to actually live that consistently with the worldview that I profess.

Mark Turman 14:14

Great, great way of explaining it sounds that sounds like what you mean, when you say that **Christianity is not just good advice. It's good news. It's, it's this ultimate chapter to the story, right?**

14:24

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, that was that was something that was initially very attractive to me, is, you know, if Christianity is just good advice, if it's, you know, just do this, and this is how you have a happy life. It's like, what do I really need religion for that, you know, I have my teachers, I have my parents, I have lots of people giving me good advice. But Christianity really comes with with some of the more than that it comes with a totally different understanding of what the world is that we find ourselves living in. And that's something that you know, when I when I realized that that's when when it kind of became something that I couldn't just ignore, you know, that I can't just go through live in life, trying to, you know, following good advice, like having this understanding of why, why is all of this stuff good in the first place? Like what's, what's the purpose? What's the overarching objective that we're all going for? And that was something that yeah, the Christianity, I think really offers, even compared to other religions, or in a rather unique way that it's mainly about good news, rather than good advice.

Mark Turman 15:26

Was that was that the biggest? or were there other preconceptions about Christianity that you had to work your way through as you were on this journey toward faith?

15:34

Yeah, yeah, there are a few. I think, I think one that, you know, growing up, as I said, we went to church a couple of times, but I had a number of friends, who, you know, whose parents kind of dragged them along to church every Sunday. And, and the thing that they all said, was that, like, church is really boring. The church is really boring, like, the Bible is really boring. And so that was something that when I, when I first started reading the Bible, the copy of the Bible, that my brother Steve gave me, like, pretty quickly, I was actually surprised at how interesting and even entertaining I found it. So he gave me just a copy of the New Testament. So I started with the Gospel of Matthew, and already there, I, I sort of started to see that there was something like, really, really unique and really compelling and captivating, about the figure of Jesus, about this story of Jesus in his life, and death and resurrection. And so, so that was a big thing, too, is like I, I started out, I plan to read just a chapter a day of this Bible that he'd given me, but the, like, the, there were times, you know, getting to the end of one of the Gospels, where I where I just like what couldn't put put the book down, you know, where I just read a few at a time. And so that was something that I think was also. Yeah, so surprising for me to find that the Bible, the Christianity in general, and the Bible in particular, weren't like boring as I expected them to be.

Mark Turman 17:10

Yeah, that's something similar about our stories. When I was in this same journey, a friend of mine gave me a Bible. But a note at Matthew one said, read a chapter a day, let me know if you have questions. And literally just through unique ways that that the story of Jesus just came alive in a way that I never thought that it could or that it would, part of the uniqueness of your story is that you had an opportunity to go to work for the NSA for the National Security Agency that required that you have a polygraph test. **Talk about how that was a unique part of your journey as well.**

17:46

Yeah, so um, yeah, so I guess, about six months or so, after I had started reading the Bible. So it was like, December of my sophomore year of college, I finished reading the New Testament, I had had a lot of conversations with Steve, I'd read through other books, arguing both for and against Christianity. And I was starting to get to the point where, you know, it seemed like, intellectually plausible, but it still just didn't seem like something that was maybe like, worth worth the investment, I guess, of mine. Like, it still felt like a really big change to go from. From how I was living to like, putting, like, putting God is like the the, like, the main thing about my life. And so, um, so I went, and as you said, I have this internship offer from the NSA, and I had to go and take a polygraph. And in my feelings towards the polygraph, were actually pretty similar to my feelings towards religion, I would say, where I always thought I thought, like, Okay, I'm basically a good person, like, I haven't done anything seriously wrong. This test is going to be fine. So I went in, and, you know, just answered the questions and, and I was failing. And pretty quickly, I realized with this polygraph that I was going to continue to fail, not only if I was lying, but just if I felt guilty about anything. So for about four hours, I had to share, like everything that I have done wrong in my life, which, by the way, isn't like, isn't like special. This is like what an NSA polygraph experience is like. But for me, I guess in that moment, doing it, you know, in the midst of kind of this, this journey of discovery, and learning about faith and learning about God, that in the midst of that, I had this it kind of like hit me that. You know, as I shared all these things that I've done wrong, it kind of hit me that like Hey, I'm actually not such a good person after all. And in that moments, like the message that Steve had been telling me about this God who, you know, like, who, who's died to forgive us that all, all of us are in need of forgiveness from God, that started to really make sense to me in a way that it hadn't. before. I remember actually, even one time, like earlier on having this, like, debate, it was probably the most heated I got with Steve, where I were, I was trying to argue that, like, most people are generally good, you know? And he was saying, like, no, that's, that's not right, you know, that. They're like, all people are like, sinful, and, and all people are needed forgiveness. And, and I always thought, you know, I'm like, basically a good person. But it was when I had to share all this stuff. It was kind of like, hey, you know, maybe I'm not so good after all. And, and maybe that probably means that a lot of people, you know, like, deep down. There's a lot more brokenness, I guess you as a Christian were then than I would like to admit. And so that, to me was kind of like the moments that that pushed me over the edge that made me realize that this is something that I actually need. And in that moment, you know, this Christian Gospel of a God who has come to forgive us, people who are broken, who are separated from God, and in need of forgiveness. So that started to make sense to me out of my own, out of my own love life and my own perspective of the world. So for me, that was kind of, you know, it was kind of like, maybe the straw that broke the camel's back. It's the moment that I like attribute to my conversion, I would call that my like confer conversion moment. But it definitely was kind of this combination of a lot of, of these conversations that I've been having with Steve, and all I've been reading and learning. And it kind of just hit me in just the right time. That it made me say, you know,

what, okay, that's it, you know, if this isn't God, like reaching out to me kind of giving me that that moment, then then nothing is. And so for me, that was the moment that I didn't even really say that I started calling myself a Christian that I started. You know, I put God on the throne of my life, if you will.

Mark Turman 22:11

Wow. Well, thanks for sharing that. That reminds me I can't remember the philosopher who said this. But he said, you know, modern man is not concerned about sin or its consequences. And you can't appreciate the story of Christianity. You can't it can't appreciate the life and work and story of Jesus, if you don't understand what your own need is. Yeah, yeah, definitely. It just doesn't make sense. Yeah.

So talk a little bit about how you've been received in the scientific community, since you became a Christian, and even now, as you practice your faith and work in some of these really, really significant places, what's been the reception that you've received?

22:51

Yeah, yeah. This is something I talk about a little bit in my book, it's a question. It's like, one of the questions that I'm asked the most, when by Christians, you know, who know that I'm in science? And that's the question I feel like I've never really had a good answer on. Because what I realized is just that, like, the reception has been so varied, that it's kind of hard to, like, haven't have one single answer, like I've had, I've been at, you know, I've been, I've been invited to speak at places, and then the, the conversation is kind of just like ridiculing religion the entire time. That's kind of that's pretty rare. Sometimes they're like people who just kind of dismiss religion and don't really want anything to do with it. Sometimes I've had people, other scientists, not even Christians, who have told me that they, you know, they like really admire my faith. And then I've also run into Christian scientists. And they there's kind of like this, this very much like this bond between us that we kind of have this like shared science, scientific experience, but also like the shared religious experience that we can that really like, ties us together. So yeah, I mean, I think on the whole, I'd say that, you know, I'm pretty. I think I've, you know, I've had a good, good relationship with my scientific gears. That in general, my work is, is judged, not based on, you know, what religious beliefs I have outside of science, but on how on the quality and the caliber of my work. But yeah, I mean, as I say, I think I think that there's a pretty wide spectrum of religious beliefs within my field. And so I think that people have figured out pretty pretty well you know, that this is something that, that people we can we can kind of agree to disagree on that we can still make progress within the scientific realm.

Mark Turman 24:48

[AD] Should Christians boycott? Is Christian nationalism biblical? Should Christians send their kids to public school? We tackle these questions and seven more In our latest volume of biblical insight to tough questions, support the mission of Denison forum and request our new book today at DF podcast.org. Well, good to hear and great to have people like you in those environments. Let's talk a little bit about your work. Now you're going to have to really help a person like me to understand you, you focus in the areas of string theory, quantum physics and early cosmology, which is a mouthful in and of itself. Yeah. So take all three, pick one, help us understand kind of what you do in your day to day life working in these areas.

25:44

Yeah, okay. Yeah. So I mean, string theory is maybe like the most like flashiest of all of them may also probably the most controversial. So I'll explain that for for a few minutes, I guess. Okay, string theory is it's, it's an attempt to combine two very well established paradigms. Within modern physics, there's Einstein's theory of gravity, which is called general relativity. And then there's the theory of quantum mechanics. So quantum mechanics deals with very small things, like atoms and electrons and stuff like that. General relativity, because it's a theory of gravity deals with very heavy things. So things like black holes, and kind of the the universe as a whole and, and galaxies and stars and planets and stuff like this. But so both of these paradigms work really well in their own domain of validity. But if you kind of take consider an overlapping domain, where you have objects that are both very small, but also very heavy, very dense, like, for instance, that if you go to the to the singularity of a black hole, for instance, there, the the quantum mechanics and general relativity, they kind of don't fit well together. So what that means is that there has to be some sort of additional paradigm, some other theory, which somehow combines the two of them. And so string theory, this is where string theory comes in. And this is its claim to fame is that it's really the best, and maybe even the only consistent way to combine to consider to consistently combined quantum mechanics and gravity, general relativity into a consistent theory of what's called quantum gravity. So string theory, it's called string theory, because it says that everything is made up of little strings, things that we used to think of as particles, like electrons, or quarks, or photons, you were used to kind of think of these little particles as points in space. String theory says no, actually, they're extended in one dimension. So they're, they have a length, so we call them strings. And, and the reason why it's controversial. Well, in part is ignorance, in part is because it just doesn't really have any direct experimental verification. So unlike a lot of other areas of science, where we have hypotheses that are, you know, you make you develop some theory, you develop some hypothesis, then you tested experimentally, in string theory, there isn't really that that experimental verification process. On the other hand, where string theory differs, and where like, like fundamental physics differs from a lot of other areas of science, is it the mathematics itself, is very, like tightly constraining. In other words, you can learn a lot about quantum gravity, even without direct experimental evidence, just by requiring mathematical consistency, like it's not easy to put together, gravity and quantum mechanics in a consistent way, just like how it's not possible to put together special relativity and quantum mechanics and do it in a consistent framework. So there's a lot that's kind of a difference, I guess, which makes String Theory maybe more, more plausible. And, you know, it makes it possible to learn things even without experimental evidence, but it is still it still does raise the question of, you know, is this really science, it's kind of a different approach than most other fields of science take. And so this is why a lot of people and, you know, we're more accustomed side approach, maybe aren't such big fans of string theory. But anyway, that's, that's kind of what I do. A lot of what I do is focused on trying to connect string theory to experiments to try to like bridge that gap and figure out ways to test string theory, but it's like a very difficult task. So it's something that we kind of make only incremental progress in every day.

Mark Turman 29:48

So it is that those areas lead you toward this area of early cosmology is early cosmology, talking about the origin of the earth Those kinds of questions that you would typically if you went to average church and in the United States and had a conversation about science and faith, you know, you're gonna get the question about, okay, how old is the earth? And what about the dinosaurs? My own five year old

granddaughter is asking me, okay, where are the dinosaurs in the Bible? Right, right. Yeah. Is it taking you in that direction? And maybe a broader way to say this is, is **creationism and evolution? Are they at odds with each other? Or can they be complementary?**

30:32

Yeah, I mean, I think I mean, I guess I think it depends on what what the definition of creationism is. But because I mean, I think that there are different ways. You know, there's, there's, like theistic evolution, there's young earth creationism, there's old Earth Creationism, there's a lot of even even within Christianity, and even apart from sort of what science tells us, I think there's like good and interesting and important debates about you know, how to interpret some of these early Genesis texts. Now, my research itself deals with like, when I talk about, like, early, early universe cosmology, it's like, it's like, way, way before, like, the creation, the formation of the earth. So it's like, it's like Big Bang, like 10 to the minus 34 seconds after the, the universe is beginning. Because that's where that's where the energies are high enough that we actually maybe have a hope of testing string theory. So So personally, yeah, I mean, personally, I, I like, subscribe to an older view of the world. And I subscribe. I think that like, as I said before, I think in general, like faith, religion, the Bible is telling us more about meaning and purpose. And science is telling us more about mechanisms and how, how God has done what he's done. And so to me, I guess I think that the questions that I'm, you know, from a scientific perspective, someone who studies cosmology, I think that the questions that I'm looking at in that capacity, are the sorts of questions that sciences is like made to answer that that's the realm where science should be applied. And then I think that, you know, for when I look at the Bible, I think that this is something that's less focused on giving us like a scientific account of creation, a step by step process, and more of telling us like, what, what is the meaning of all of this? Why did God create? And and really distinguishing that narrative from the narratives of a lot of the other religions of the time? So I guess, from my perspective, there isn't an incompatibility, necessarily, but I think it depends on how one interprets the science one how one interprets the the text, the Bible, and, and how those things go together.

Mark Turman 32:59

So as you as you went down this road, as you continue to go down these roads, help, oftentimes we get into this kind of a conversation about science and faith, and where they weave together, how they are complementary disciplines, but also, different disciplines. Talk about the difference between evidence and proof. Christians, sometimes Christians who are not as scientifically geared as you are, will sometimes get, I think, in some ways errantly down this road about truth about this proves this or that and especially when it comes to matters of faith. **Talk about the distinction between evidence and proof.**

33:43

Yeah, yeah. So I mean, personally, I pretty much never like to use the word proof. Unless it's in the context of like a mathematical proof. And even in mathematics. You know, when we talk about mathematical proofs, I wasn't I was a math major. By the way, before, before I became a physicist, I did my share of of math proofs and stuff. And even in math, when we talk about proof, we don't mean like 100% certainty. But what a mathematical proof means is that the conclusion follows logically from certain axioms. And that does, it's not the same as 100% certainty. I mean, there, I can guarantee you

that there are mistakes in the mathematics literature, right. Even mathematicians make mistakes in their proofs. So in mathematics and logicians talk about proof. It's not necessarily like 100% certainty. And so I think that's why, you know, for some people, the word proof kind of denotes this 100% certainty. And the reality is that I think we, we really never have 100% certainty in anything, you know, every scientific experiment has error bars that are quantifying how much uncertainty do we have right, how much error is there? And I think that That's true for when it comes to questions of, of faith as well. You know, I think that every every debate that we ever have, you know, every theological discussion, every moral discussion, every scientific discussion, there's always going to be some amount of uncertainty. You know, and I think that what we have to do, what are, you know, as a scientist, the goal of science isn't just to avoid uncertainty altogether, or like, per se, like, Oh, if there's uncertainty, well, then this is too speculative. And we, and this isn't science. Really, really, science is about trying to quantify, minimize and navigate uncertainty. And I think that those are the sorts of principles that have really been helpful for me and in faith as well, where it's like, yes, you know, I don't have 100% proof and a lot of the things that I believe, when it comes to questions of faith, and you know, I'm not, I would say, you know, I believe in God, I'm not as certain in the existence of God as I am in the existence of gravity or something like that. But at the same time, right, and this is the I think the key thing with with science, my journey of science has taught me is just because there's some uncertainty doesn't mean that it's just a total shot in the dark. I think that some of the arguments for the existence of God, the existence of God are really good arguments, and they carry weight. I think some of the arguments against the existence of God are good arguments, too, and they carry weight as well. And so part of the journey for me has been learning how to navigate these uncertainties how to balance the weights, and to figure out what I actually believe. And also to figure out, you know, which which position makes the most sense from a practical perspective. And so to me, you know, the conclusion I arrive at at the end of all of this is I think that Christianity is the most likely worldview. And I think it's that it's definitely practically that the most reasonable path for me to follow, like, I'd rather I'd much rather give my allegiance to God to Jesus, than to then to anything else that I know, isn't going to pay off. But yeah, I think I think I do, like you I kind of get red flags when I when people start talking about proof. Because I think, you know, if one means 100% certainty, I think that's too high of a bar, not only for faith, but even for science as well. But I think that doesn't mean that we can't learn anything, we can't have important discussions.

Mark Turman 37:13

Well, that's it's refreshing to hear because at least in the stereotypes, right, and that's what they are stereotypes, is the idea that scientists don't deal with uncertainty when they actually deal with it all the time. And that's, that's where they're for their pursuits are often directed from is from places of uncertainty and a desire to understand a desire to grasp how the world is put together, in naturalistic ways, and why does it work the way it works? And where is it likely going from that standpoint, but in this conversation, you get back in some ways to at least on the faith side of this, the the core questions around the evidence for the Bible and and how, in this conversation, do you reconcile scientific realities that we do understand at this point, relative to things we see in the Bible, particularly miracles? Talk about your journey on that side of it? **How did you come to have confidence in the credibility of the Bible, and that, including its stories of things we can't explain particularly miracles?** We know, we hear the stories about Thomas Jefferson, how he took out all of those? Yes, from his Bible, what's called the Jefferson Bible. How did you work your way through that?

38:32

Yeah. So I think that this is one of the areas that I really saw, like the most dramatic shift from where I started to where I am today. Like, I remember, this was like, when I when I started talking with Steve, I started having these conversations, kind of figuring out what I believe, because I never really thought about it too much before. But I kind of was like, okay, you know, I could believe that there's a God of some sort, I can believe that there's some sort of, you know, like, higher intelligence behind all of this. But I really struggle with like, with this idea of miracles, like I like the idea that it's like, you know, I believe in science, you know, I, I am a scientific person, how do I believe in miracles because to me, miracles were kind of like a breakdown of the laws of nature and a breakdown of the way that the world was supposed to be. I'm, where I am today is, is I think, what I what I came to realize, and I've read, I guess, I think I read this from someone else. But Jesus's miracles aren't shouldn't be understood. So much is like a breakdown of the laws of nature, and a breakdown of the way that the world is supposed to be, but that rather, they're, they're actually a restoration of the way that the world is supposed to be. The world isn't supposed to have, you know, evil and so Jesus cast out demons, the world isn't supposed to have disease and sickness and so Jesus heals the sick, and the world isn't supposed to have death. And so Jesus raises the dead and ultimately conquers death. To His resurrection. And I think where this really gets back to is that thing we were talking about before, of, of, you know, structures and stories, where if the world is just some giant mathematical structure, then yes, like miracles, miracles don't make any sense, right? Because it's the laws of nature, is all that exists, then how was anything else going to come in and like break those laws of nature. But what I realized is, you know, it's a little bit circular, because yes, if I assume atheism, if I assume that the world is just some giant, you know, this is all just math in motion, then yes, miracles, just, like don't make any sense at all. But Jesus isn't saying, you know, atheism is true, and I'm going to do these miracles, Jesus comes in with this whole different understanding of what the world is that it's not just this mathematical structure, but it is actually this larger story, there's a God in charge of it. And within that story, right, as I say, you know that these miracles have a function, they have a purpose. It's not just random breakdowns of the laws of nature. Instead, it's actually God restoring his world to the way that it's supposed to be. And so, you know, the, the difference, you know, is, the miracles aren't just accidents, they're actually key, the crucial parts, Paul talks about how, you know, if Jesus hasn't been raised, then our entire faith is in vain, that we're, we're still in our sins. And so I think from that perspective, when you look at it from this perspective of the story, you see in the miracles of Jesus, and especially in his resurrection, this like key miracle this, I guess, what Tolkien called the you catastrophe, or good miraculously triumphs over evil that you see in the climax of every great story. From that perspective, I think the miracles of Jesus make a lot of sense. And so it's, we have to look at the world in the, we have to look at it all through the right lens, I think. And when we do that, we say that the miracles are not actually only possible, but even expected, that the sort of things that we should expect, that the God revealed in Jesus would do in these key moments,

Mark Turman 42:04

as I said, is, as indications of God restoring all things, a taste of that and an indication of what Jesus will ultimately do. At the culmination of all things in your book does a great job of helping us to get a fresh handle on what I would call the positive side of doubt. Or the embracing of uncertainty, we all have this struggle that we deal with on a daily basis, how life seems to be random. **What, what kinds of doubts**

and uncertainty are you working through right now? What What questions are you moving toward? In your journey of faith at this point, and talk a little talk a little bit about how doubt and question is actually a wonderful gift from God?

42:52

Yeah, yeah. So yeah, so I guess, I think it's useful. And what I found is, it's kind of useful to separate, like, the two categories of doubts. One of them is I've gone through, I've experienced a few seasons of my, in my life, I've just, like, terrible, like, devastating doubts of just like, almost unable to get out of bed in the morning, you know. And what I have come to realize is actually what that is, it's not really doubt, it's really just like mental health issues. It's like anxiety or depression. And so that's the first thing that I want to say, you know, for the people who are in that, that I think it's easy to believe, like, oh, man, I'm really struggling, I need answers. And a good friend of mine told me last time I was going through this, like, dude, if you're little if you're literally dry, heaving right now you don't need answers, you need treatment. And so I think that that's, that's the really the first thing and, and I you know, that sucks like that. I think, having experienced, like, those sorts of those sorts of doubts, those sorts of fears and anxieties, that just sucks. And, and I think, yeah, for anyone who's doing that, like, get treatment, do what you got to do. And feel free to like, leave the questions for another time. Now, the second type of doubt, I think, is, is fortunately what I'm what I am not, so I'm not experiencing that firsthand right now. Thank God. But I think there's a second kind which is kind of just like, the questions, the things that nag at us, the things that bother us that we feel like man, I really wish I understood why God did that, or why it was like this. And I think those are the sorts of things that can that can be like good and helpful and, and push us to like, new and better ways of understanding God. So for me personally, I think the three the three like doubts the three like good, the three like good arguments against God, I'll say the ones that have actually, I think there's a lot of really bad arguments out there, right that you can and online, there are three that have actually given really given me pause. There's the problem of evil and suffering. There's a hiddenness of God of like, why isn't it more obvious that God is just like that he just exists? Like, why doesn't he talk to us audibly? Why isn't it clear that he's there? And the other one is, is the Bible like, I love the Bible, in some ways, like, there's so much there that I just love. There's also a lot that really bothers me. You know, I'm reading some of that the Old Testament laws, reading, you know what, you know, God commanding the Israelites to, like, totally destroy the Canaanites, stuff like that. It's like, oh, man, you know, like, what am I? What am I supposed to do with this? Um, I think, though, that, you know, I mean, I think a lot of these questions, really where I've found the best answers is in is in Jesus, but somehow, like, looking at him looking at who he is, that somehow there just seems to be better answers to these questions there than there is than I find anywhere else. And so for me, I like to think at least that these sorts of Dallas's these sorts of questions, are, in some ways, the questions that God wants us to ask that he wants us to ask these things, because ultimately, they're going to point him, point us to him. And I think you especially see that with the problem of evil and suffering, you know, this is, it's been called the rock of atheism. It's something that a you know, atheists have, and theists and Christians and everybody like, has wondered for millennia is where's God in the midst of all this suffering? And I think it's something that's really special and compelling about Christianity to me, is the way that Christianity really makes this like the main point of the entire Bible, from the very beginning with Adam and Eve, rebelling against God and evil and sin entering into the world. To the psalmist, asking like, Why, oh, Lord, you stand far off while you hide your face in times of trouble, all the way through to Jesus and killing the sick to Revelation where the apostle John like

foresees a future day, where all tears are wiped away from all faces and evil in pain and suffering and death is no more that I think that, that really, God God wants us to ask this question from page one of the Bible of God, where are you in the midst of suffering, so that someday we can, you know, we eventually will get to Jesus. And we see that this is where God is in the midst of suffering that he's suffering alongside us. So I think that a lot of these questions that we're, you know, it's not like God, it's not like God wants us to just not ask questions and believe I think that these are the doubts that God has given us that he's given us these puzzles these mysteries, precisely because they're the mysteries that will point us back to him.

Mark Turman 47:41

Yeah, that's great insight, as well. And I think all of us are struggling with those same three kinds of questions. You know, on that on the second one, why isn't God more obvious I, I've just kind of come to the conclusion, at least for now, in my mind that God doesn't make himself more obvious so that he's giving me room to believe, if he was more obvious. He I mean, he could become so obvious that we'd have no choice. It would be just required that we believe, and he's giving us room in order to do that. But I think you're right, I think we're all struggling with those same kinds of questions. And in a world that seems, at times very chaotic, and sometimes just downright evil. It can be really challenging.

You're moving into a new opportunity in life by moving to Durham University. What will you be focusing on there?

48:33

Yeah, yes. So I'll be starting my first faculty position there. I'm a postdoc at Berkeley right now. But in September, I'll be starting a faculty position as a professor at Durham University. I'll mainly be continuing my research in string theory in quantum field theory, or early universe cosmology. And then I'll be doing a bit of teaching probably some graduate classes, my undergraduate classes in physics and math.

Mark Turman 48:59

Fantastic. Well, Dr. Tom, thank you for taking some time to talk to us today about your work and about your book. Again, folks, it is chasing proof finding faith by Dr. Tom Rudelius, you can also find him on YouTube. Some great presentations there. Dr. Tom, a last word before we go that you'd like to share with folks.

49:22

Oh, boy, I wasn't ready for this. But I think I just like to say thanks for having me on. And yeah, I hope people will enjoy my, my book and be able to resonate with my story.

Mark Turman 49:36

Well, thanks again for being a part and we want to thank our Denison Forum audience. If this has been helpful to you, please rate review us on your podcast platform, share it with friends and family so that they can be a part of the conversation as well. And we're grateful for your time with us today. God bless you. We'll see you next time on the Denison Forum Podcast.