

Season 14: Episode 12 | Benjamin MacDonald | Can We Really Trust the Bible?

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur, I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society, and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode. Today, CBS Ambassador, Reverend Dr. Andrew Stirling will be interviewing Benjamin MacDonald.

Dr. Ben MacDonald is the Maritimes Director of Apologetics Canada. He's a theologian, speaker, and educator with a heart for engaging faith and culture. He lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with his wife, Melissa, and their daughter, Josephine.

Ben holds two undergraduate degrees in English Language and Literature from the University of Western Ontario and a Bachelor of Journalism from University of King's College. After a brief career in television news, Ben earned his Master of Theology from Acadia Divinity College and then completed a PhD in Theological Studies at Wycliffe College TST. Ben has spent several years as a traveling speaker and preacher, teaching around theology to congregations across the Maritimes and Ontario.

With a deep love for both the church and the academy, he's committed to equipping others to think deeply about their faith and engage thoughtfully with the world around them. Enjoy this conversation.

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Andrew Stirling: Well, Ben, on behalf of the Canadian Bible Society and Scripture Untangled, I want to welcome you to our podcast. And I have to say what a great pleasure it is to be able to have some time with you. And I know that our conversation will be a blessing to those who are going to be listening and indeed even watching.

And so welcome, Ben. It's lovely to have you with us.

Benjamin MacDonald: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

Andrew Stirling: Ben, tell us something briefly about your background in the faith, because your faith developed from growing up in a Christian home to having a vibrant faith of your own. And I sometimes distinguish between those two things because they don't necessarily follow each other. So, tell me a little bit about your background and tell me about the formation of your own faith.

Benjamin MacDonald: Yeah, yeah, I appreciate that. I, as you mentioned, I was raised in a Christian home. My father, as again, you know, your close friend with, was, is an Anglican cleric.

And so that was the environment I grew up on. And in terms of, I think, at an early age, I was asking a lot of theological questions. I think I had a proclivity for that.

And I think it's important that when I was younger, I was given quite a long leash in terms of the sorts of questions that I could ask. I think my father was probably wise in not being too overbearing in regard to, let's say, doctrinal commitments. You know, every doctrine was a conversation in a sense.

It wasn't just a set of propositions or declarative statements that, that you just had to agree with. There was always a why, and we wanted to get down to that. But part of that was the fact that learning and education themselves were regarded as having an incredibly high value.

And I think that was communicated to me, however, purposefully or not, through a distinctly Anglican lens. That that is, that there was this, the church and the academy,

academia, were deeply intertwined. I grew up basically thinking that to be a theologian meant essentially to be cultured, you know, that that was part of it.

That, you know, don't be a Philistine, learn to appreciate and have a regard for art and literature in its highest forms, because these things point to the transcendental. I almost instinctively, I think I would read something like Colossians 3.1 through that lens, you know, *"Since you've been raised with Christ, set your heart on the things that are above, where Christ is..."* Set your mind on goodness and truth and especially beauty.

And so, I saw early on, I think, my faith as an expression of something beautiful, artistic. God is an artist. God is a potter.

He's a creator. And so, for me, as I advanced into my college years, you know, I didn't move into theology proper in my faith. I encountered God first, really, through literature.

John Milton was maybe the first person to really grab my attention. And then studying people like William Blake, John Donne, several poets, Coleridge, Keats, Wordsworth. These were tremendous influences on me, I think, in my younger years and gave me a sincerely romantic vision of things when it came to my faith.

God being in and through all things. And so, you know, this led me later when I encountered people like Charles Taylor, for instance, who were using the language of enchantment and disenchantment. You know that language really appealed to me.

And I think I found a theological home there. And that really became a place where most of my questions and interest were. And, you know, for me, for my faith, I think at a young age, God, in a sense, always seemed very obvious to me.

And I was interested in, well, why isn't that the case for everyone else? And so, the history of ideas became a way for me into religion and taking religious questions seriously. And when I started to do that, I quickly realized, well, when you take

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Christianity seriously, it's inescapable. You know, I think another important thing is that I was living through my early intellectual and spiritual life at a time when new atheism was on the rise.

And Christianity truly seemed laughable to everyone I knew in college, right? You know, you're a Christian. You know, why would you be a Christian? And as I studied, not just art and culture, but philosophy, history, I realized, you know, wait a minute, every great mind is fascinated with Jesus. Descartes, Locke, Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, you name it.

You know, Isaac Newton wrote more about Jesus than he did about physics. Now, he might have been heterodox.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah, slightly, yes.

Benjamin MacDonald: Yeah, he might have been an Aryan or something. But my point is, that didn't really matter. I think it was the fact that he was treating the question of Christianity as having the utmost importance.

You know, people were taking the question very seriously. I mean, even Nietzsche, right? I mean, oh, he's an atheist. Well, sure, sure, he's an atheist.

But he believed that you had to take this very seriously. You get rid of this Jesus fellow, and you're really in for it. So that was a journey of very serious questioning.

And I'd say that, in many ways, was for my Christian formation, that was like phase one for me, is that romantic vision, taking things very seriously, seeing God in and through all things. And then I encountered more apologetics. I would read people like C.S. Lewis.

And then in my master's study, I met people like Craig Evans. I went to Israel. I got to see the Holy Land, and all that history came to life.

And then if you were to say, where's the next phase? Where do I sort of land now in my Christian journey? That's the journey that happened since my PhD studies, and working under people like Ephraim Radner, who changed my view radically about Scripture and the world that we live in, and seeing Scripture as ontologically unique. And I'd say that's kind of where I hang out now. So that's maybe more than a brief answer.

But that's a big Christian journey for me.

Andrew Stirling: That is a journey. And anything that takes you from Isaac Newton to Coleridge is a fascinating one, I'll be honest with you there, Ben.

Benjamin MacDonald: Exactly.

Andrew Stirling: Very eclectic. You have a diverse experience, though. I mean, you were in journalism. You've been in youth ministry. You've been in academics. But now you're serving Apologetics Canada.

And I mean, we've already got a bit of a sense already from what you've said about the essence of your ministry. But our audience sometimes wonders about apologetics and wonders about the phrase itself, because a lot of people, if you say apologetics, it means apologizing in the popular idiom, as opposed to the real meaning of it. So, tell us a little bit more about apologetics and why that is an important ministry for you, Ben MacDonald.

Benjamin MacDonald: Yeah, it's a great question. And I'm quite sympathetic to the fact that people do have a problem with that term. You mentioned a bit about my background.

You know, before theology, I was in journalism. And I began with that, I think, for no other reason than the fact that, you know, I was very curious about things. I had an extremely high regard for people's ability to articulate themselves and to tell stories well.

And I always appreciated, too, the sensation of, you know, when you're talking to somebody or maybe you're teaching, but you're having a conversation and the light bulb turns on for someone, where they see something beneath the surface that they never knew before. And journalism provided a way of sort of presenting information to people. And I would say that's one of the reasons why it's fascinating.

It's providential the way that Apologetics Canada came into my life because it sort of married this journalistic aspiration, wanting to tell stories, doing documentary film with theology and my intellectual pursuits, taking people on a journey sort of into the mystery, right, and investigating. And so, Apologetics, for me, has nothing to do with debate or some kind of combative rhetorical performance. When I see that, I admit I cringe a little.

That's not what I enjoy. I used to joke, before I even worked with Apologetics Canada, I think I'm quoting Bonhoeffer here or somebody, but I used to say, you know, "Apologetics is where good theology goes to die."

Andrew Stirling: Yes, I've actually used that quote from Bonhoeffer, sorry.

Benjamin MacDonald: And so, you know, because I understand sometimes, sometimes I think it's done very poorly. But to me, moving from that sort of journalistic piece, it has everything to do with simply articulating the Christian faith and worldview in a way that is coherent to modern ears. Give a reason for the hope that you have in Jesus Christ and do it with gentleness.

That's 1 Peter 3.15. I think that's where we get the word apologia. To me, that's the essence of it. You know, be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have.

Why do we, and I mean Christians and non-Christians, think differently about the way the world is? And is it possible that I can bridge that gap with a more sophisticated understanding of what classical theism is actually claiming? Are people really aware of what they're actually rejecting when they reject Christianity? Or are they denying a

caricature impressed upon them by religious fundamentalism that's devoid of abstract thought and ultimately deserves to be discarded?

So, I think that's really where I see the importance of apologetics is, is in the conversation, not in some combative debate.

Andrew Stirling: So, Ben, I mean, I often wonder though, and this can be helpful to me and to others. Who's your audience? I mean, you're purporting to explain the Christian faith to people.

Who listens to you?

Benjamin MacDonald: That's a great question. I mean, I've been to now a number of our apologetics conferences, and we do get a really diverse group. It's not like it's one age group.

You know, we get really young people who I'm fascinated by their questions and their rigor and ability to kind of track with us. And then elderly people as well. It's anybody really who is, well, let's say confused about, how do you make sense of this? How does it all fit together? And we all wrestle with these questions one way or another.

So, there are the, I think when some people think about apologetics, they immediately move to historical evidence. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Was he a real person? Those kinds of questions. But then there's another side of it too, right? What about the problem of evil and suffering or big life questions that what do we do with any of this? And so really anybody, I think apologetics, I've often said this about apologetics, that it's a little bit insular.

It's for people who are on the inside, who have taken the first step inside. You know, they're open to the question. If you're debating an atheist, this is where I don't like apologetics when it's simply, if I just am trying to have a debate with somebody on the other side of the fence, you're typically going to drive a wedge even further.

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It becomes polemic. They just, we're going to just drill down further into our own beliefs. We're not really having an open conversation where we're open to the idea of being convinced by the other.

And that's when it's not useful to me. But if you have somebody, young or old, who is going, you know, maybe there's something to this Jesus thing, but I can't quite fit it all together. I think that's where apologetics really helps.

I think that's our audience.

Andrew Stirling: Yes, I think so.

Benjamin MacDonald: It's people going like, yeah, they're going, oh, I think they're probably this is true, but I'm this shaky ground. I don't know.

Can I trust what's being given to me here? How do I know what's right? And so, we want to be a guide for them.

Andrew Stirling: So, one of the things that you have talked about, and I think is very central to our audience, Ben, is the question of can I trust the Bible? You know, there are a lot of Christians who read the Bible, and then there are others who will say, you know, you really should not and cannot trust this ancient document, and it shouldn't have any relevance in your life. Where can Christians find, the word I'd use is confidence, maybe, that they can trust the Bible, Ben?

Benjamin MacDonald: Well, so it's funny when you phrase it that way.

I think one of the main problems, the first problem isn't with trusting the Bible. It's probably in having a delusional trust in yourself. I think it's quite fascinating, in fact, when people think that they can read an ancient text that was and is held sacred to a whole people group, to nations, and then judge with perfect clarity upon first reading what that text means and whether it's true or not.

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I think that's an incredible display of hubris. And the truth of the matter is that when you read Scripture, you are reading something that requires what many figures of the early church, people like I'm thinking of Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian and others, you're reading something that requires a rule of faith. The *regula fidei*, it was called, right? Or often called the canon of truth, which is it requires an interpretative standard by which Scripture is meant to be read in the light of Christ's death and resurrection.

So, if by trust the Bible, we mean as 21st century people, did every event recorded here happen historically, precisely as it's written, then I'm going to say, well, no, this is a type of historical document, but that's not the full picture. You know, Gnostics who came a little later read the same Scripture as everyone else or interpreted Jesus's life in a certain way, but they were very different than what the Christian community and tradition were saying. There is a proper way to read this text.

So, whether one trusts the Bible or not, I think has much to do with what one thinks the Bible is. And when we understand what it is, I think it can most certainly be trusted. So now I'm giving you a deeper theological underpinning, but it follows then that I think certain questions might arise about, how did we get the Bible? And that's largely what our documentary series with Apologetics Canada, the *Can I Trust the Bible* series, that's what that's seeking to answer.

How did we get these texts? Why do we have these books in our Bible and not others? You know, why are the Gnostic Gospels not included? Were these Scriptures faithfully translated and transmitted to us? Because many people, especially today, I think they're suspicious. They have this, you know, we have grand conspiracies. Everyone thinks there's these coverups throughout history.

You know whether that's, you know, were the Gnostic Gospels suppressed or something like was Christ's deity in the Trinity? You know, those aren't Scriptural. That's an invention by Emperor Constantine or something. And I think we're trying to

clarify those issues and show that the Bible as we have it today is absolutely reliable and trustworthy.

It's incredible the meticulous nature that was given to the translation and transmission of Scripture and that it faithfully aligns, therefore, with what the earliest Christians taught. And it's an accurate depiction of Jesus's life, but it's an accurate depiction of Jesus's life in accordance with the Scripture.

Andrew Stirling: Right.

So, it's Scripture interpreting Scripture, isn't it, really, in many ways?

Benjamin MacDonald: Absolutely, and that's where I say it's equally important to say, well, there's obviously a way of understanding what this text is trying to communicate. And so, I think people run into, once we kind of put to bed some of these questions of translation, transmission, do we have kind of, are we looking at the same text that Jesus had? You know, that's an important question. But if we can faithfully say, you know, if we can reliably say this is, that's the case, then it's a bigger question of actually like, well, what is this text really trying to do? Is it, you know, wasn't it Alistair MacIntyre who said, facts are an 18th century invention? We read the Bible expecting something from it.

I think sometimes we're putting our own standards on it. Anyway, and that's a bigger question.

God's Book: The Series: I want to take a moment here out of the conversation to talk to you about an exciting new small group video series from the Canadian Bible Society, *God's Book: The Series*.

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What does the Bible really say about science, miracles, violence, and suffering? *God's Book: The Series,* is tackling the Bible's toughest questions in a new eight-part video series created for young adults and others who are asking honest questions about the Bible. Featuring Bible scholar, Dr. Andrew Ollerton and three Canadian young adult hosts, *God's Book* explores some of the most challenging questions surrounding the Bible through thoughtful and accessible conversations. The series is launching soon, and you can be the first to know it's arriving now.

So, preview the trailer, download a free episode, check out the free launch kit, go to godsbooktheseries.com. That's gods book the series . com. And as always, the link will be down in the show notes. Back to the conversation now.

Andrew Stirling: No, it's fascinating because it's an important one.

And I mean, I had a conversation just yesterday at my car dealership with one of the mechanics who found out I was with the Bible Society and said, well, you know, I think the Bible's great. And, you know, I used to go to church, but I don't go to church anymore. But I mean, those stories are still in my mind.

They guide me. They still help me and have a knowledge of life and so on. And it was as if he was trusting the Scriptures, but then not making, you know, the faithful move to sort of respond to them.

It was a fascinating conversation I had with him. And I thought, you know, he actually represents a lot of people that I know who have this sense that the Bible is unique. It's important.

Its stories are powerful and so on. But they themselves have sort of a block in getting to it because they expect it to be something completely different.

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One of the things that comes out in your academic work, and I don't want to drill down too deeply into this for the sake of our audience. But you use a phrase and did studies in what is known as kenosis. Now, you know, many people and many of our audience will have read Philippians 2, for example, in the self-emptying of Christ.

Is this important for Christians to understand? And is it relevant for our lives? Because I think it goes to the heart of Jesus Christ and His power in our lives. But tell us more about that and your own thoughts.

Benjamin MacDonald: Yeah, it's a major theological doctrine teaching, probably one of the highest points of Pauline Christology.

I know many people listen to this podcast and might not be watching it, so they might not be able to see this. But I actually have the Philippians hymn right here behind me. This is a facsimile kindly gifted to me by Wes, my colleague, Wes Huff, of P46, which is our earliest Pauline collection.

So, this is Philippians 1 and 2. And that's the verse, as you mentioned, known as the kenotic hymn. Kenosis, which, by the way, apparently is pronounced kenesis. I just want to say, I'm not going to split hairs about this, but apparently the proper pronunciation is kenesis.

It means to pour out or to be empty, to divest oneself of their position or status. And that's what Paul is writing there in Philippians 2:5-11, is the kenotic hymn. "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though being in the form of God...*" which is *en morphe theo*, *"Did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped."*

And the language there, harpegmos, which means to hold something forcibly, "*But emptied himself*," kenosis, "*By taking the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men.*" So profoundly important Christological doctrine, high point for Paul, obviously, in his Christology, but something that's beleaguered theologians for centuries because it turns on two very deeply interrelated questions. And the first is being

really, what is the incarnation? What does it mean for God to be a man? What is being poured out, in a sense, is the question.

Like if something's being emptied here, what exactly is it and who's the subject? And secondly, then how, given that massive theological question, how does that inform us about our humility? Because at the end of the day, Paul is giving us a teaching here about how we are to be amongst one another.

So that's why it's important is because we have to eventually bridge that gap where the rubber hits the road of, how exactly are you behaving in light of this? And so, I think maybe if I could sum up, what's so important about it is that the Kenotic act is not, as some people may hear, that Jesus is somehow putting aside His divinity as though like God ceased to be God for a moment while He walked on the earth and then returned. And rather that the fullness of the divine life is expressed precisely in this manner of self-sacrifice, in the coming under the limitations of human finitude.

And that ultimately what Jesus demonstrates here is that what makes God so powerful is that He can still be God in weakness. And in doing so, I think Jesus is fulfilling something in the incarnation, the undoing of fallen humanity. I mean, think about that idea of not taking something or grasping it.

You know, what was Adam and Eve's original sin is that they took by force something that God had set aside. And so, the second Adam, Jesus, who's the perfection of human being, He's going to receive the divine life instead through obedience, not by grasping it Himself. And on that basis, He's then exalted His name above every other name as the verses continue.

And I think that just tells us something radically about not only Christ's divinity, but about our response. I relate it sometimes to this apologetic debate of people often say about Jesus, He never claimed to be God. This is something apologists constantly, right? You know, He never claimed to be God, or if there are expressions like, I and the Father are one or something, those are in John's gospel.

And that's a later gospel. And that can't be trusted. And you hear people say this, well, here's Paul writing this in 60, 62 AD.

And in a sense, he's expressing this very idea that, well, no, you're right. Jesus isn't that explicit. He's concealing His divinity in this weakness.

In other words, He's taking, He has all of the authority of God, the Gospels, The Gospel communicates Jesus behaving as God, doing things only Yahweh does. But when it comes to the question of, you know, does He just claim deity outright for himself? I find it fascinating that Jesus turns that question to us. And He says, well, who do you say that I am? Who do you say? You know, He puts that confession on our lips.

It's almost, and that's, I think that's an incredible thing. Even John the Baptist says, right? Are You the one to come? Or should I be looking for another? What's Jesus's response? No, John, I am God. I'm the Messiah.

No, He goes, well, what do you see? What is it that you see?

Andrew Stirling: What's in front of you?

Benjamin MacDonald: What's in front of you? Are the lame walking? Is good news preached to the poor? Are people being raised from the dead, right? And so, this idea that not taking things by force, not taking things by control, but receiving the divine life. I mean, Matthew 26, also, you know, what Jesus says, I could call down legions of angels. Like I could send an army right now and stop this whole thing because I have that power and authority, but He doesn't.

He hands, you know, He's handed the authority from the Father. What does He do? He hands it right back. And that's the essence of the triune life.

And so, to be made in that image, it means we are to receive that. We participate in that, not by taking things by force, even when we might have the power to do so. But you have the power to submit yourself.

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You have the power in Christ to be glorified in your suffering. You can do that. That's where the divine is expressed.

Andrew Stirling: This brings me to sort of a natural question. And that is, I mean, when you look at Jesus and you look at Him not seizing that power, but His life was one of sacrificial, in the end, suffering and ignominy. And, you know, before He was raised, you speak about, and I've heard you speak actually, Ben, about suffering.

And this is something that I encounter and all of us do in life, in pastoral care, very, very much so. And people saying, how do I reconcile a benevolent God with the reality of suffering? Ben, how do we do that? Because a lot of people, in a sense, have a crisis of faith when they face the challenge of suffering.

Benjamin MacDonald: Absolutely.

It does lead actually out of the last thing, because, you know, one of the first reasons why I got interested in the idea of kenosis, was related to an article written by a woman named Karen Kilby on what she called *The Seductions of Kenosis*. The seduction of thinking that suffering in and of itself is good. And this is, you know, I just gave a lecture at our last apologetic conference on the problem of pain and suffering.

And I think the whole point of my talk there was to say, suffering is bad. Now, that might not seem like a grand revelation, but actually it is, because the Bible tells us that we should rejoice in our sufferings and that it produces maturity and endurance. But that is, when we separate it out and say, well, is suffering in and of itself a good thing? The answer is no.

This suffering is not good. Evil is evil and you need to name it as such. God hates evil.

And the question, you know, is he the author of evil, becomes part of this question. But let me start with maybe the more apologetic thing, because there's, you kind of mentioned, there's a pastoral concern here.

Andrew Stirling: Yes, there is.

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Benjamin MacDonald: That ultimately needs to be addressed. And I think if you move immediately to apologetic, sometimes you can, you risk losing the individual who, this person who's suffering gets clouded or overshadowed by some abstraction.

But I think it is important, you know, you begin apologetically with the sense that, and C.S. Lewis does this brilliantly in the problem of pain, if anyone's ever read it, is that the only reason you feel the need to reconcile the reality of suffering in the first place is because you're told by Christian revelation that God is in fact omnibenevolent.

That if you think about unnaturalism or atheism, pain, of course, still hurts, but it's hardly surprising. It's the way things are. That's just nature doing its thing.

And it's really only if you claim that there is a God who is all good and all powerful that you even have a problem to begin with. And so, what Lewis is trying to say in that, in his book there that I think is so important is to recognize that Christianity actually creates the problem of pain before it answers it. If suffering therefore is the reason for your unbelief, you've already in a sense smuggled in the idea that that's somehow unjust.

But what could you possibly be appealing to?

Andrew Stirling: Who are you appealing to? Who is the just one, right?

Benjamin MacDonald: Precisely. What are you appealing to with your complaint? If not, a God who is all loving and all good. So in order to even have a problem of pain, you need the God of Christian revelation.

You need an all loving, all good, all-powerful God. And without that, there is no problem. You just basically just try and avoid things that kill you.

And that's luck, right? Now, of course, that's to say we haven't solved the problem. We've merely understandably, you know, given us the premise, the parameters for addressing it. God is real.

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God is good. God is love. Okay.

In that context, how do we think of our suffering, given that that's the case? And you have to, I think, begin there as a sort of logical underpinning. That does a lot of the apologetic work. And from there, where I like to go, is I move there are several important points that you could make. But one of them follows from largely from Augustine and his teaching on what's called the *privatio bon*i, meaning the privation of the good. And I think many people, there's many challenges to this, but I'm a firm believer, I think, in the *privatio boni*, as far as I can understand it. That what Augustine is essentially saying there is that when you speak about evil, you're not speaking about a thing, but a process.

You're speaking about a process by which something good is perverted. And I think that's two things that are important. One is that God doesn't make anything that isn't good.

In Genesis, God doesn't go, this is good. This is good. This is bad.

And this is good. And this is right. Everything is good and we are very good.

And so, God is the author of good things. That's He brings good things into creation. But secondly, then Augustine is going to make this argument that if God is the good, if He's the supreme good, the summum bonum, the good in itself, then evil can't exist alongside Him as some other thing in the world.

Otherwise, He's not solely God or the good. There's a logical issue.

Andrew Stirling: Evil is not an equal power.

Yes.

Benjamin MacDonald: And so exactly. So, evil can have, for Augustine, no substance of its own.

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It's fundamentally parasitic. It exists in the absence of the good in the same way that darkness is the absence of light or cold, the absence of heat. Those are some of the examples.

You know, I think I love this example, too. You think about it this way, like Andrew, how many donut holes have you ever eaten? This is an example. And the answer is none, right? Because a donut hole isn't a thing.

It's the absence of a thing.

Andrew Stirling: Unless it becomes the Timbit. But that's a whole other story, right?

Benjamin MacDonald: Precisely.

Well, the metaphysical category of Timbit. But this is and that's where Augustine then moves to the free will defense. I think sometimes the free will defense does a lot of legwork in the problem of evil.

But I think you have to understand these underpinnings as, you know, things like the *bravaccio boni* first, that evil therefore arises only out of our own resistance to God and to the good. Evil itself can't create. And that's fascinating to me that when you ask if you were to ask Augustine then like, well, where does evil come from? What's the origin of evil? Augustine is going to say it's a nonsensical question.

There's no origin of evil because evil isn't really a thing. Now, that might not land on, this is where the pastoral concern comes in because you go like, well, I'm experiencing evil. I'm certainly experiencing this.

Suffering. But what I think what all of that does, what that helps us do pastorally is that it means that we can look at evil and suffering and pain as absolutely fundamentally diametrically opposed to God. And that you don't need to somehow fit pain and suffering into some syllogistic logic that's going to make sense of it.

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In fact, I often say this in my lectures when I use things like the Holocaust as an example where the Jewish philosophers who talked about the Holocaust in its aftermath talked about it as a meaningless suffering, you know, useless suffering. And what they meant by that was if you could somehow explain this logically, it would cease to be the evil that it is. Because if you could explain it, then you then you're really saying, well, it was part of a greater good and it needed to happen in order that and that's not what's happening.

And what Augustine's going to say, I think what the *Pravach Obonai* provides for us is a way of saying pain and suffering are fundamentally the enemy of God. They're not good. They are not part of a greater plan.

We don't need to make sense of it in that way. But because we have got there through the resistant will, Jesus providentially changes what suffering is. And I think there's, you know, outside of the whole deep, deep theological territory that we're in, what I'm trying to get across to people when we talk about suffering is that Christians suffer differently.

You know, that's what Paul is really writing about when he's talking about suffering is that suffering is not good, but suffering in Christ. See, Paul takes everything that he's going through and just transfers it in Christ. And if it's in Christ, then it can have meaning.

Then it can be redeemed. And through death, we find life. But outside of Jesus, and this is truly, I mean, here's the grand claim.

Outside of Jesus, your suffering really is meaningless. It really doesn't mean anything unless it can be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. That is the Christian teaching.

It is to say in Christ, we can rejoice in our sufferings. But outside of it, there's nothing we can't. It's not Nietzsche's, what doesn't kill me makes me stronger.

That is not, you know, that's building up courage for basically no reason. And therefore, there is reason that suffering does happen. It does mature us.

It does help us to grow up. And so, it can bring us closer to God. But I'm still trying to get across this. And there's the paradox and the tension of saying; evil is still evil. You don't need to try and fit it into some logical system, because actually, then it won't be evil as such. So, there's a bit of a puzzle for you.

Andrew Stirling: Yeah, there is a conundrum, for sure. And I mean, and I think it's borne out in human experience. I mean, I think what you're saying actually is true.

And that we suffer as Christians, we suffer differently. And we have a point of not only power and support in our lives, but in a sense, it refines us. And in a sense, deepens at times, you know, our faithful response.

And, you know, I've just seen so much suffering in my life. So much. And, you know, as most preachers and priests and pastors have done in particular, you see people at the depths of their sorrow.

And bringing Christ into the midst of all of that actually transforms it. It's like a light where all it seems is a void and a darkness. Our time is coming to an end, Ben.

This has just been, I mean, absolutely fascinating. And you've dealt with, I think, things that a lot of Christians are really, really thinking about and so on. In terms of, and I ask this of every guest, Ben, what is it that you would like us to pray for you? In your work, but your personal life, even?

You know, here, you've got all this cloud of saints out there wanting to cheer Ben McDonald on. How do we pray for you in your work?

Benjamin MacDonald: I very much appreciate the question. And I would simply say, you know, pray for my family as a whole, my wife, Melissa, my daughter, Josephine, together, you know, doing life where both mom and dad work full time is a difficult thing.

And I travel a lot for work. And my wife actually travels a little bit for her work as well. And that creates a lot of difficulty finding rhythms and routines and just being able to kind of rest and have that calm.

So, I really do appreciate just prayers for my family in that regard and for our ministry, for Apologetics Canada. Because I would say, you know, one of the big things, one of the big hurdles in that ministry has been to really, you're putting yourself out there in a new way. I stayed off social media entirely for most of my life.

And now that I'm with an organization that works through those mediums, you are sort of forced into a podcast, you have an Instagram account, you do the, well, you're now open to all kinds of criticism and to debate and to, and that's, that's well and good. And I think that's fine that, you know, it's a duty that we have to evangelize and put ourselves out there and do that kind of stuff. But it comes with some real difficulties sometimes.

And navigating where to go next, how to speak properly and have the wisdom to know what's fruitful and what is not. And so, I think just wisdom and discernment for us as well in that time and moving where we're moving on to bigger and better things. And we're constantly, Apologetics Canada is doing some really exciting stuff.

But, but yeah, I just pray that it's a help, not a hindrance to the Kingdom in the sense that it is not, not driving a wedge, but actually building bridges, that Apologetics actually becomes a way for us to get closer together and to unify ourselves more and more rather than divide us into this opinion versus this opinion or this belief versus this belief. So those are things you can pray for. I very much appreciate that.

Andrew Stirling: Well, Ben, we will do that. And I will do that. And I know that our audience will have just been enthralled by your insights.

And I want to thank you for being on Scripture Untangled. God bless you in your work. And may you be given a sort of a rich balance in your life and joy in the walk that you have with the Lord in this important ministry.

And on behalf of the Bible Society, Ben, God bless you. And thanks so much for being with us.

Benjamin MacDonald: Thank you.