THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Encouraging A Christian Worldview

The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 3: Episode 1
Transcript: Merging Science With A Christian Worldview

Reuel Sample: Churches have forgotten all about science, and it shows in our Christian worldview. Welcome to the Pastor's Voice. I am Reuel Sample and I talk to pastors and other Christian leaders about ways we can encourage Christian worldview to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ. We kick off our 2023 season by talking to Dr. Fazale Rana, president, CEO and senior scholar of Reasons to Believe, an organization dedicated to communicating the powerful case for God's existence and the Bible's reliability to both Christians and non-Christians. Fuz, welcome to the podcast.

Fazale Rana: Thank you so much, Reuel, for having me.

Reuel Sample: I like that last part. When we talk about the Bible's reliability to both Christians and non-Christians, basically what you're saying is that the Bible is true, whether you believe it or not.

Fazale Rana: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's remarkable to me really how powerful the the scientific evidence is for a Creator. But equally powerful is the fact that the creation accounts and scripture hold up to scientific scrutiny. And that really sets in place, I think, a framework to view the Bible as being completely reliable.

Reuel Sample: Well, we're going to talk a lot about science tonight, and it's important to establish your credentials right off the bat. So first, let's talk about your scientific background. You're not just a Joe coming off the street.

Fazale Rana: Yeah, well, I guess not. You know, I'm a biochemist by training, and so I did a PhD in chemistry with an emphasis in biochemistry from Ohio University. And then I did a couple of post-doctoral stints, one at the University of Virginia, one at the University of Georgia. And then after that, I worked for not quite a decade in research and development for a Fortune 500 company before joining Reasons to Believe about 23 years ago now. So, yeah, I've had I've cut my teeth in the scientific arena for certain.

Reuel Sample: Now let's talk about your faith background as well. You weren't always a Christian.

Fazale Rana: No, I wasn't. I, I didn't grow up in a Christian home. In fact, my father was a devout Muslim. He was also a nuclear physicist. So he was a a man of science, but also a man of faith and again, a devout Muslim. And growing up, my brother and I, of course, were then exposed to Islam. And as a teenager, I took the idea of becoming a muslim pretty seriously. And so I recited the Shahada, which is the the declaration that Allah is the one true God and Muhammad is his one true prophet. And my father taught me how to pray. And I began to to read from English translations of the Koran. And so it was going through that process for a year and a half, almost two years before I kind of abandoned all faith altogether and settled into a position of maybe agnosticism, for lack of a better description. And as I was studying chemistry and biology in college, embraced kind of an evolutionary worldview where I would have argued that the origin and the design and the history of life could be explained exclusively through through evolutionary processes. And and that fueled my agnosticism. It justified my agnosticism because, hey, if evolution can explain everything in biology, then what role is there for a Creator to play?

Reuel Sample: You know, that's it's interesting you're coming from that from a muslim background. We talk about that in Christian circles, that Christians go to college and they they fall away from the faith. But it sounds like almost an attack on all faiths. When you go to when you go to when you go to university.

Fazale Rana: Yeah. And you know, by the time that I had finished up high school, even before I entered into college, I already was becoming, I would say, maybe bored with with with pursuing religion, you know, as a young man, you know, and and sports and

rock music and girls were far more interesting to me than than the rote and the ritual of being a muslim. Right. Because a lot of what you do as a muslim is really out of obligation to try to please Allah. And that soon lost interest to me in light of everything else that I could could spend my time. But then it was really going into college that that kind of solidified that that position of uncertainty about whether God exists because of the way that I was interpreting what I was learning in my science classes.

Reuel Sample: But you found your way back to faith, but not necessarily the faith of your family.

Fazale Rana: Yes. Yes, it was. It was in graduate school studying biochemistry, really beginning to examine the intricacies of the cell. And I was astounded at not only the complexity of biochemical systems, but their elegance in their their sophistication, the ingenuity of these systems. And that really prompted me to ask the question, well, where do these systems come from? And the scientific explanation is called the origin of Life. This is the origin of life question. And as I examined in detail the different explanations for the origin of life, I quickly reached the conclusion that there was no way that chemistry and physics alone could produce these kind of elegant systems. That there had to be a mind behind everything. And so while science on one hand took away, science later gave back to me this conviction that there really is a mind behind life itself. And that, of course, then led me to ask the question, well, who is this creator? Do I relate to that creator? And if so, how?

Reuel Sample: So those are those are questions and thoughts that not only Christians wrestle with, but Islam as well. So what led you to Christianity in particular?

Fazale Rana: Yeah, well, once I became convinced that there was a creator and then ask the question, who is that creator is, I reflected on it. I was going down a path of universalism where I thought, well, maybe the different religions of the world were just simply the different ways that this creator was revealing himself to, to to different people, to different people groups. And as I looked at the religions of the world, they seemed to me to all share a common moral teaching. And so I thought, well, this this makes sense. Now, in retrospect, that position of universalism was really naive, because I now appreciate that that the different religions of the world do teach very different things about the nature of reality, the nature of God. And so in light of that, they

all can't be true either. None of them are true or one is true, but they all can't be true. But that was the position that I was beginning to assume. And along the way, the woman that I was engaged to rededicated her life to Christ. She grew up in a Christian home. She she kind of walked wouldn't say walked away from her faith, but just kind of fell away from her faith and then rededicated her life to Christ. And she began to share her faith with me. And as we were preparing to be married, her pastor, a guy by the name of Johnny Withrow, met me and he asked me this question, Have you ever read the Bible? And my answer was no. Then he said, Well, how do you know it's not true? And I felt like, Well, that's a really good point.

Reuel Sample: And.

Fazale Rana: You know, and my wife was a Christian, and so I thought, at least I owe it to her to to understand what Christianity is about. And it was really reading the gospel of Matthew and specifically the Sermon on the Mount that led me to an encounter with the person of Christ. And I would argue it was a religious experience. As I was reading through the Sermon on the Mount. I was very much attracted to the person of Christ. I felt that what he was teaching about authentic righteousness was was true. But I knew that I couldn't live up to that standard. And as I was going through that, to that, that reasoning process, I was actually in a chemistry lab. It was in the evening, nobody else was around. I was sitting at a lab bench reading the Bible, and I had this overwhelming sense that there was a person in the room with me, and it was at that point I just had this again over arching sense that that Christianity is true, that that Jesus is who Christians claim him to be. And then led me to, you know, to to seeking after Christ and to acknowledging his work on the cross as the means by which I was saved. So it was, you know, God revealed through the record of nature, but it was the person of Christ revealed not only through the pages of Scripture, but really through this, this divine encounter that I had.

Reuel Sample: Interesting. You're seeking you're seeking a reason for all these scientific things. Then you start understanding there had to be a mind behind it. Then you start seeking out all the gods of the world and then through your wife. You understand? The necessity of this God. But all that reasoning gets superseded by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Fazale Rana: Yeah. You know, I mean, to this very day, I could never abandon my faith as a Christian. Not because of the evidence that I've. I see for the Christian faith. And there's an abundance of evidence, but it's because of that experience that I had. It was such a real powerful experience that I could never deny that Christianity is not true, or that I can never deny that Christianity is true.

Reuel Sample: Well, let's talk about two or three things that point to a creator, two or three things that our listeners can say, Oh, well, that makes sense.

Fazale Rana: Well, you know, I think about the evidence from the perspective of a biochemist. And, you know, the first thing that I would say is that the elegant designs that we see in biology, you know, even the most staunch atheist would would acknowledge that biological systems have the appearance of design. You know, Richard Dawkins in his famous book, The Blind Watchmaker, says biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose. And so he would would agree with me that there is that appearance of design. But to me, I think that design is authentic design. And, you know, the more that we learn about biochemical systems, the more marvelous those systems become. And in fact, one of the things I find fascinating is there seems to be this this interplay between the technologies that we invent and the nature of biological and biochemical systems. And so what I mean by that is that to really fully understand how biochemical systems are structured, how they operate, many times we have to look at them through the lens of human technology, and then we suddenly get the insight as to what's going on. And by the same token, the more that we learn about biochemical systems, the more insight that we gain that actually leads to the development of new technologies.

Fazale Rana: And let me just give you what I think to be the an example that blows my mind. This is the type of thing that keeps me up, keeps me awake at night as I think about the implications. But but everybody, I think, is familiar with the idea of DNA, right? DNAis this double helical molecule, and it consists of two molecular strands that are formed by linking together these smaller molecules. So it's kind of like the links in a chain. And there are four different molecules that are used to build DNA that are abbreviated AGC and T, they're called the genetic letters. And it's actually the sequence of those genetic letters, just like the sequence of letters that are used to make up words in the English language in which there's information that's contained. And that

information is used to build the cell and to direct the operation of the cellular components. Well, that that information in DNA is digital information, just like the digital information that that we use in our electronic devices and the cell's machinery that manipulates DNA. Let's say when DNA is replicated or or the information is read to to build proteins, the machinery that does that is literally operating like a computer system.

Fazale Rana: And in fact, the similarity is so stark that it actually has inspired a new area of nanotechnology called DNA computing, where scientists are now looking to build computers from DNA. And the the molecules inside the cell that that operate on DNA, that manipulate DNA. And these are wet computers they are found in solution in a little tiny test tube that that's about this big. And it's more powerful than the most powerful silicon based computer system that we've ever built. And there's a number of technical reasons why that's the case. But the point here is that to really understand what DNA is doing and how DNA is operating in the cell, we need to look at it through the lens of computer science. And then once we do that, that then gives us an insight that allows us to to build a new technology, to develop a new technology. And so it's really eerie to me that there's that interplay between, you know, between the technology we build and the the structure and the function of biochemical systems. And to me, that that that finds explanation. If, number one, those systems are designed by a mind. But two, it makes sense if we think that as human beings were made in God's image, because if we're made in God's image and God is a creator, then we too are creators ourselves.

Fazale Rana: And doesn't it make sense that if we are image bearers, that what we do is unwittingly identical to what the Creator has already done within the creation? And and the more that we discover about biochemistry, the more and more examples of this type of of interplay that. That we see. And so it's extremely provocative. You know, DNA is an amazing molecule in many, many respects. But as I mentioned, it's a data. It stores information. That's digital information. DNA is so optimized to store digital information that it may actually be at the theoretical maximum in terms of the the information that you could store per per unit amount of material that people are actually looking at using DNA as a data storage medium. And so instead of hard drives or sorry, hard disk or magnetic tapes, people are looking at actually storing data in the DNA molecule. This is known as DNA data storage. And it's becoming, again, a burgeoning nanotechnology that that literally is going to probably revolutionize again, how how we

we we operate doing computations. But it very well may be that one day in the future, you know, we're working with computer systems that are essentially entirely made up of DNA.

Reuel Sample: So I knew my I knew my DNA was good for something. Now, the the intelligent design folks talk about irreducible complexity when they talk about things like the eyeball, that there's no way something like that could have come into existence through evolution. It's the same thing applied to DNA.

Fazale Rana: Yeah, well, I mean. You know, in in the original Life research program, there's something known as the chicken and egg paradox. And in this has to do with DNA because even though people talk about DNA as being a self replicating molecule, it technically is not. DNA can only replicate if you have proteins that really are carrying out that replication process. But the proteins that replicate DNA are are essentially the information needed to make them is stored in the DNA molecule. And so there's this interdependency between DNA and proteins. And so you can't get DNA if you don't have proteins to replicate it, but you can't get the proteins to replicate DNA unless you have DNA. And so it's it's it's a type of irreducible complexity. It's a chicken and egg problem or a chicken and egg system that's kind of like a type of irreducible complexity. And so this has this is really, you know, is considered to be a significant problem. And the only workaround that original life researchers have is to argue that maybe the very first life forms were built around something called an RNA molecules, not DNA and protein, and that later life evolved to give rise to to DNA and protein from the rrna world, as it's called. But the problem is, is that most origin of life researchers readily acknowledge that the RNA world hypothesis is again a failed model. In fact, Leslie Orgel, who was an original life researcher who conceived of the idea of the of the RNA world later on in his lifetime before he died, basically went on record, is saying it would be a miracle if a strand of RNA could ever appear on the primitive earth.

Reuel Sample: And so when you get into miracles now you're getting into areas they don't really want to talk about.

Fazale Rana: Right. Well, you know, and Orgel was an outspoken atheist, but he was also very honest and, you know, was in a sense pointing out that the problems with the RNA world are legion. And and so you have this chicken and egg paradox, you have the

problems with the RNA world. There's really no way to explain how DNA comes about. And and again, DNA is not a molecule that's just thrown together by chance and happenstance. It's an incredibly optimized, incredibly elegant molecule where every. Every every aspect of its structural makeup is vitally critical to its function. So much so that it's hard to envision any kind of other material that could ever operate like DNA. DNA is not only optimized and it really appears to be unique and uniquely fit for its role. And so that the evidence for design is just overwhelming. When you look at DNA and and all the processes that that DNA is involved in inside the cell.

Reuel Sample: If you're just listening to the podcast and not seeing the video, you need to understand that every time Fuzz talks about the elegance of DNA, his eyes light up like he's looking at a fine piece of art. But in your eyes, it is a fine piece of art. There's an elegance there that is beautiful to the scientist who can understand it.

Fazale Rana: It is. Well, I mean, one of the things that as a young college student that really attracted me to biochemistry is the sheer beauty of the molecular realm, and particularly the biochemical realm. These these biomolecules are, as you said, works of art. They have this these beautiful structures, this beautiful symmetry that defines these molecules. They are just simply something to behold. And so, yeah, I see beauty. And that again, I think, points to a creator because no matter where we look in in nature, whether it's looking up into the night sky and seeing the the grandeur of the cosmos or looking at a sunset or peering into an electron microscope to look at the molecules that make up living systems, there's just this incredible beauty. And if we live in a universe that is the product of a of a creator, we would expect it to be a beautiful universe. Scripture tells us that that the heavens declare that the glory of God, that God's glory and majesty is evident in the creation. And and we definitely see that in the beauty of creation. But what's even more remarkable is that as human beings, we have this deep appreciation of the beauty of the world around us. And that makes sense if and only if we are made in God's image. It seems it's we're made to appreciate the beauty of the creation that God has has put in place. If we're the product of evolution or if the universe is just a brute reality, why would it be beautiful? And why would we have an appreciation for beauty? Beauty really serves no useful purpose in an evolutionary sense. It's it would be a distraction from our survivability. And so even when we think about the beauty of the world around us, that leads us to the reality of a creator.

Reuel Sample: Evolution focuses on function. A creator focuses on both function and beauty and all the things that go into it. Let's let's bring this back to the church, because we do talk about world view. And I love the church, and I think in many ways the church of any denomination has led its believers, its members, its believers down because on one side they come to church, their kids play with the felt boards. You have to be my age to remember felt boards in church. And they they listen to all the stories and they say, Oh yeah, the Bible is true. But then they go out into the academic world or into the real world or whatever, and they have to live a double mind. How do we in our churches get the idea that science does not overrule faith, and neither does it have to be separate from faith, but it can be a vital part of our faith. How do we do that?

Fazale Rana: Yeah, well, I think the first place to begin is to realize that Scripture tells us that God has revealed himself to us. And of course, most people understand that the words of Scripture is is the way in which God is revealed himself to us, the person of Christ. If we see Jesus, we've seen God. But, you know, Scripture also tells us that God has made himself known to us through the record of nature. And it's not just simply that we see God's fingerprints in creation, but we, even according to Scripture, can begin to discern something about God's character and nature of His Majesty, His glory, his righteousness, his love. The Scripture tells us that this is all evident to us within the creation. And so science is the study of the creation. And so we would expect that that science should reveal to us, you know, again, evidence for God's existence and evidence for God's nature and character. And so by studying science, it really leads us it should lead us to a place of worship. It's, you know, God spoke the world into existence.

Fazale Rana: And so we could think about the creation as God's spoken word to us, whereas Scripture is God's written word to us. And of course, Jesus is is the living word, right? And so the each of these three are elements of God's revelation to us. So that's the first thing that I would say, you know, and, and, you know, and if again. If God is the author ultimately of the record of nature of the world that we live in. He's also the the author ultimately of scripture. We would expect that those two accounts should never fundamentally disagree with each other. Now, we might interpret scripture wrongly or we might interpret the record of nature wrongly, and there could be perceived conflict because of the misinterpretations. But fundamentally, these two accounts should always be in agreement with each other. And so to me, science is a mechanism by which we

can really appreciate and understand and and gain insight into God in a in a in a unique and fresh way. If we think about science in those terms.

Reuel Sample: Two questions for you. We've got two different folks that I hope are listing. The one are Christians who have kids or who have other folks who are scientists or who who say, well, I think for a living, so I'm not going to waste my time on faith. First question is, how should how should they talk to them? How should Christians engage with that kind of mindset?

Fazale Rana: Well, you know, I think, you know, there's this mischaracterization of what faith is all about. You know, faith isn't just simply blind, hopeful belief in something, but it actually is looking at the evidence and then operating on the basis of what that evidence is telling us, you know. And so we're where we're exercising our faith really is not so much in whether or not God exists, but really our faith is being exercised in do we trust in the person in the in the work of Christ on the cross for our salvation? But, you know, when you look at Scripture, there are many places where God is clearly indicating that he is providing evidence, you know, for for his for his existence, for his for the reality of what is being communicated in scripture. You know, I love the story of of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Right. Because, you know, Jesus asks Mary, I'm the resurrection. Do you believe that? And she says, Yes. And then what does he do? He raises Lazarus from the dead. And so he's providing evidence for what he just claimed through through that action. And so, you know, faith isn't isn't irrational. It's it's it's not based on it's not based on an absence of evidence. But it really is, I think, motivated by evidence and reason that that. And so for somebody like that, I think it's very important to get that that point across that that there is evidence for the Christian faith and it's completely reasonable.

Reuel Sample: God himself, I think it was in Jeremiah says, come let us reason together. God is not above logical. Reasoning logical discovery. So the second question is, is that. I'm a pastor. I have an undergraduate degree in business and sociology. I have a master's degree in divinity. I know ancient languages and I can take apart the Bible and put it back together all day long. But I don't know anything about science. So how should pastors bring the idea of merging science into faith in their congregations? How can they go about doing that to strengthen the worldview of their members?

Fazale Rana: Yeah, and I think my advice to pastors would be you don't necessarily have to become an expert in science, but I'm willing to bet that you that you probably have people in your congregation who are scientists or who are scientifically oriented. And those would be wonderful people to involve in ministry as as kind of the the that community's scientific expert and involve them in worship. I mean, what what would be some anything? I mean, I can't you know, you could envision somebody showing people the incredible images that are coming from the James Webb telescope. Right. And then as you show people that just encourage them to begin to contemplate, what is this telling us about about who God is. Right. And, you know, in looking at the passages of scripture that describe the heavens, declaring the glory of God or the majesty of God, but in other words, introduce the congregation to to the to science in a way that isn't threatening to them, but rather where science is really reinforcing and encouraging and motivating their faith. And that would be the first thing to do. And then I think it's probably important to try to as much as possible, weave here and there bits and pieces of scientific evidence for the Christian faith, you know, to show people how scientific discoveries seemingly affirm the truth of Scripture and the reality of God's existence. It doesn't have to be a long lecture, but just even introducing tidbits here and there could be incredibly helpful in terms of just getting people motivated about science. You know, I remember attending a small church a few years ago and was asked to speak, and I did a talk about the magnitude of the universe, how big the universe is, and and to think that God brought all of this into existence.

Fazale Rana: And what does that tell us about, you know, how great God is? And there was a person in the congregation who was a high school, had a high school education, was a tradesman. And, you know, the following week he comes up to me and he talks to me about an article that he read in Discover magazine about dark matter or something like that. So suddenly, you know, by showing this person how science actually helps him to get a better grasp of God, it ignited in him an interest in science so that he was now out reading popular science pieces where he probably wouldn't have read them before. And he was beginning to ask questions and beginning to wonder. And so that that those are the types of things that that that I think we can do in churches we don't have. It doesn't have to be this this deep discourse into that into these highly obscure scientific ideas. But, you know, just simply introducing to people, just the beauty of of the creation and, you know, little tidbits here and there about what this tells us about God can can ignite, I think, a fascination where now science isn't a threat to

their faith, but it's that science is something that that augments their faith in, in powerful ways.

Reuel Sample: Or if pastors just even want to go overboard and spend a lot of time on science in their congregations, they shouldn't be afraid of it because because it's not going to disprove. It's actually going to do just the opposite. It's going to prove the glory of God and the existence of God. Yeah, there are there's a ton of stuff that you and I can keep talking about, but you cover a lot of these things over at Reasons to Believe. Tell us a little bit more about Reasons to Believe.

Fazale Rana: Yeah, well, Reasons to Believe is an organization that's been around, gosh, 36, 37 years now, in which our focus is to explore the relationship between science and the Christian faith. And our motivation for doing this is ultimately to open people to the gospel by revealing God and science. And so we produce a number of resources, blog articles, podcasts, videos, we write books, and the list goes on and on, where we just simply explore the science faith arena, where again, the eye is towards really evangelism. We're not interested in apologetics for the sake of developing arguments, but we really want people to to to see again the reality of God through science, where science becomes a bridge to the gospel. You know, we we live in a world today where increasingly it's secular. People have a lot of respect for science and for the technology that comes from science. And so it becomes a very powerful bridge to the Christian faith. People may not want to talk to you much about spiritual matters initially, but they will talk to you about the latest discoveries in science. But if you can then use that as a springboard to open up more spiritual conversations. It's a very powerful tool to to introduce people to to the to the Christian faith and then hopefully to the gospel itself.

Reuel Sample: I like that because far too often Christians are trained either on purpose or accidentally to just throw truth bombs out there. And, you know, you can't you can't believe because of this or this. But what what Reasons to Believe and what you are teaching is engagement. And then through that engagement, through whatever whatever principles that you're talking, then they come to realize, just like you did, the saving power of Jesus Christ. So Doctor, I'm going. I'm going to get this wrong. So forgive me, Doctor Fazale Rana. Fuzz. From Reasons to Believe and the website is.

Fazale Rana: Reasons.org

Reuel Sample: Boy, you got that early, didn't you? And how can they. How can they get in touch with you? Just go to the website.

Fazale Rana: Go to the website or I have social media, Facebook, Twitter. People can look me up on social media and and interact with me there as well.

Reuel Sample: Thanks for being here and all the best with you and all the best with Reasons to Believe.

Fazale Rana: Yeah, thanks for having me.