Session 2
Small Group Guide: The Argument from Desire

Synopsis

Dr. Art Lindsley introduces the Argument from Desire as one of the most compelling reasons for God's existence, especially meaningful to postmodern students. Unlike purely logical proofs, this argument connects deeply with human longing — our hunger for meaning, beauty, immortality, truth, and community.

He contrasts the bleak worldview of Franz Kafka, who wrote of human aspirations with "no way" to fulfillment, with C.S. Lewis, who argued that such longings are "cosmic pointers" to something beyond this world. Kafka's stories — of guilt without acquittal, community without belonging, or hunger without satisfaction — highlight the despair of a life without God. In contrast, Lewis described these yearnings as signposts directing us to the eternal satisfaction found in God.

Formally, the argument runs as follows:
1. Every natural desire corresponds to a real object that fulfills it (hunger–food, thirst–water, tiredness–sleep).
2. We find within ourselves a desire no earthly thing can satisfy.
3. Therefore, something beyond this world — God — must fulfill it.

Lewis's personal experiences of Sehnsucht (a German word for deep longing) illustrate this truth. From childhood memories to glimpses of joy in literature and nature, Lewis felt yearnings no earthly pleasure could meet. These longings, he concluded, pointed him to Christ and eternal joy.

The Christian response is not to suppress or deny desire, as in Buddhism, but to purify and direct it toward God. Far from being a killjoy, God created pleasures and calls us to true joy, culminating in eternal satisfaction.

The Argument from Desire reminds us: our deepest longings are not accidents of biology but signs pointing to God, the only One who can fulfill the human heart.

Ten Life Applications

- Recognize Longings as Pointers – View your unfulfilled desires as invitations to seek God.

- Guard Against Substitutes – Resist the temptation to fill eternal hunger with temporary pleasures.

- Practice Gratitude – Celebrate present joys without letting nostalgia or imagined futures rob today's blessings.

- Reflect on Sehnsucht – Journal moments of deep longing and consider what they point to in Christ.

- Celebrate Joy – Build rhythms of celebration, recognizing God as the giver of every good gift.

- Purify Desires – Ask God to redirect misplaced desires toward Him.

- Engage Culture – Use films, books, or songs as bridges to discuss spiritual longing.

- Encourage Hope – Remind others that dissatisfaction in this life points to heaven.

- Live Expectantly – Anticipate God's ultimate fulfillment of all desires in eternity.

- Share Your Story – Tell others how your own longings led you closer to Christ.

Life Application Discussion Questions

1. Which of your longings do you recognize as a pointer toward God?

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2. What are some common substitutes people turn to instead of seeking God?

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3. How does practicing gratitude help reshape your perspective on unmet desires?

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4. Can you recall a moment of Sehnsucht in your life? How did it affect your faith?

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5. What rhythms of joy or celebration could you add to your life that honor God as the giver of joy?

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6. What desires in your life might need to be purified and redirected toward God?

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7. How might you use a movie, book, or song to start a conversation about spiritual longing with a friend?

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8. How does the hope of heaven encourage you in the face of present dissatisfaction?

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9. What does it look like for you personally to live expectantly in light of God's promises?

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10. How has God used your story of longing and fulfillment in Christ to encourage others?

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Lecture 2: *Does God Exist? The Argument from Desire: Can We Know God Exists by Looking Within?*

Today, the most appealing argument for God's existence to postmodern students is the "Argument from Desire." This is because it focuses less on logical syllogism (although it has a logical side) and more on reflections on our deeply human desires and aspirations. If we consider our aspirations for meaning, dignity, immortality truth, goodness, beauty, a capacity for awe, guilt over what we have done, a yearning for significant work and community, etc., we are caused to ponder whether these yearnings can be fulfilled. Is life full of sound and fury but signifying nothing? Are these aspirations cosmic pointers to the nature of reality? Can we reduce all the yearnings of poets, novelists, philosophers and saints to a mere quirk of our physiology, or are they indicators of what is real? This argument was a favorite of C.S. Lewis. It will not only strengthen your own faith but help you to see how your human desires are cosmic pointers to God, immortality, and much more.

Study Questions

1. Why is Kafka viewed by some as the representative atheist of the twentieth century?

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2. How can the argument from desire be put into a logical form?

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3. What does C.S. Lewis mean by 'Sehnsucht'?

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4. How was the argument from desire central in Lewis's conversion?

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5. How does Lewis develop this theme in his writings?

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6. What are Lewis's three ways of dealing with aspirations?

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7. Why does the atheist or materialist view of desires make human beings the most miserable of creatures?

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Set 1

Session 2 Transcript with timestamps

View Lecture online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWmrpsdjD8Y&t=7s

Small Group Guide: The Argument from Desire

Dr. Art Lindsley

(0:21 - 0:53)

Okay, let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord, thank you for this time when we can come together and meditate upon our own experience and where it might point us. I pray that as we look at these cosmic pointers that are put within us or around us in life, you might give us clarity to be able to understand what's here and ability to be able to articulate it to others and point others to that which really satisfies, in the end, in Christ's name.

(0:57 - 1:40)

We're going to deal in this session with the argument from desire, which is a very provocative one of these 25 arguments. Peter Kreeft, who gives these 25 arguments I mentioned in an earlier lecture, thinks that this is the most effective argument. When he presents arguments regularly in his college classroom, he finds that this argument connects most with postmodern university students because it has a logical side, a more formal side that you can put forward in a syllogistic form, but it also is a meditation.

(1:41 - 2:07)

You can ponder various aspects of your life and look at it in that degree. Let's start first with the main contrast, and then we'll move to the formal side, and then we'll meditate on this argument. There was an atheist philosopher, Franz Kafka, who some people have regarded as the representative atheist of the 20th century.

(2:07 - 2:58)

I don't know if you've ever read any of Kafka's works, but often his work, The Metamorphosis, is required in many high school or college classrooms. But there's even an adjective that people use, Kafkaesque, which means bizarre, because many of his stories are bizarre. In The Metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa wakes up in the morning one morning, and he's a giant beetle or a cockroach, and he can't talk, and he spends the whole of the story trying to communicate with other people, and of course they're just horrified with his appearance at this point, and he can't communicate, and he spends the whole time frustrated at trying to do what he wants to do.

(2:58 - 3:21)

And you can imagine at the end the kind of loneliness, the kind of despair, the kind of inability to say what he wants to say or have people hear what he wants them to hear. Really all of his stories are similar to that. In fact, he wrote about his themes, really reduced it to one sentence.

(3:22 - 3:37)

He said, there is a goal, but there is no way. There is a goal, but there is no way. There are certain very deep human aspirations that people have, like in The Metamorphosis, communication, to be heard, to be understood, to be loved.

(3:39 - 4:06)

There are certain very deep human aspirations, but there's no way to get there. There's frustration along the way. Like for instance, he wrote a book called The Trial, and in The Trial, Joseph K. period, perhaps standing for Kafka, was arrested on his 30th birthday, and yet he's not told by the police what his crime was or how he can be acquitted from it, or he's indicted for the crime.

(4:06 - 4:33)

And he tries the rest of the book to find out what exactly was the crime, and he goes to many different sources, to lawyers, to the judge, to many other people, and he never does find out what the crime is. And after a while, he goes in himself to try to think, well, what are the various things I could have done, perhaps, that could have led me to be arrested? What are these various things? And after a while, he feels very guilty. There are many things.

(4:33 - 4:59)

Have you ever tried to do that? You know that somebody's angry at you, but you don't know why, so you sift through all the different conversations and encounters you have, what you've done and what you've not done. And he did that, and he was feeling very guilty for a while, but he didn't know exactly why he was guilty

of this crime. And he never did find out what exactly he was indicted for, and then he decides, well, at least if I can't find the crime, maybe I can be acquitted for it.

(5:00 - 5:17)

And so he tries various sources to do that. He goes to everybody he can think of to try to get acquitted for what he's been arrested for, indicted for. And he tries at the last resort, the church, and it doesn't satisfy him, and in the end, he's frustrated.

(5:17 - 5:38)

He doesn't know why he's guilty or how to get rid of the guilt. And it's a story, not just about, of course, this bizarre story, but about our predicament. Kafka wrote in another place, he said, I think I understand original sin better than anybody.

(5:39 - 6:05)

In other words, he understood profoundly his own guilt, but he didn't know as an atheist any clear standards or criteria by which he really was guilty, and he didn't know how to get rid of it. And he didn't find any other explanations for how to get rid of it to be satisfactory. I don't think the church of his day really provided a solid answers or things that could really address what he was dealing with.

(6:06 - 6:31)

In any case, that's the case in the trial. There's another work called The Castle, where a surveyor wants to get into a castle where he's going to find meaningful work and community. Again, a couple other very deep human aspirations, to have work that will really satisfy us, and to have a community of people around us that will really love us, and we can be part of, we can have a significant role within this community.

(6:32 - 6:44)

And from beginning to end, he tries to get into this castle, but he never can. Often the bureaucracy gets in the way, or one obstacle after another. He can never find a way to get there.

(6:44 - 7:16)

So again, there's a goal, very deep human aspirations, such as to communicate or to be loved, to be heard, this idea of knowing why we're guilty, how to be acquitted from it, meaningful work, community, and other aspirations, but there's no way to get there. There's frustration from beginning to end in all of Kafka's works. He wanted his novels to be burned by his friend Max Broad when he died, but he wanted a couple stories, one in particular, to be preserved.

(7:16 - 7:29)

It's called The Hunger Artist. And that's where a man in typical Kafka-esque fashion makes his living by professional fasting. He goes on one 40-day fast after another.

(7:30 - 7:56)

And the way he does it, he has a manager, and he goes into a town, and he brings a cage there, and he goes into the cage dressed in tights. And they keep the number of days up on the cage, the number of days that he's fasting. And as the fast goes on, towards the end, they have people even sit up all night with him to make sure he's not sneaking any food on the side.

(7:56 - 8:11)

And finally, on the 40th day, they have a brass band, and some beautiful women come on both sides, and he holds onto their arm and comes staggering out of the cage. And people give money. And now that's how he makes his living.

(8:11 - 8:29)

But after a while, the noble art of fasting is underappreciated. And so he can no longer get enough money to keep a manager. And in order to continue his chosen profession, he sells himself as a side show to a circus.

(8:30 - 8:57)

And he's put in a very bad place, between the big tent where the show's going on, and the cages where the lions, tigers, and elephants are kept. And so when people leave the big show, they hardly catch a glimpse at the hunger artist just sitting in this cage, doing nothing more spectacular than not eating or fasting. So people hardly notice that he's there.

(8:57 - 9:08)

And at least his manager from before used to keep track of the number of days. But the circus manager doesn't have to feed him. So he even loses track of the number of days.

(9:08 - 9:16)

And it goes beyond the 40-day fast. And it turns out the hunger artist is almost dead. And they come on him in his cage.

(9:16 - 9:25)

He's lying in the straw. And he says, I have to tell you my secret. My secret is, it's not that I like to fast.

(9:26 - 9:43)

If I could have found any food that I liked, I would have stuffed myself like any of you, but I couldn't find any food that I liked. And he dies, the end of the story. And of course, it's a parable, as are the other Kafka stories.

(9:44 - 10:01)

And it's a parable not about physical hunger, but it's about spiritual hunger. Kafka knew that he was, spiritually speaking, starving to death, but he couldn't find any food that he liked. And that's a tragic story.

(10:02 - 10:16)

But again, very deep human aspirations. But there's no way, at least he feels, to get there. No one ever presented a satisfactory food or drink that would satisfy him.

(10:16 - 10:33)

That's tragic and unfortunate. In many ways, this argument from desire looks at some of these very deep human aspirations and says, well, there is a solution. There is that which satisfies these deep human aspirations.

(10:33 - 10:56)

We sometimes can have partial satisfaction of these aspirations in this life. But there is, in the life beyond, a full satisfaction for these aspirations and desires. Let me give you the formal side of the argument first, and then we'll come back and look at this in a little bit more depth and circle around some of these ideas.

(10:56 - 11:16)

The formal side of this argument from desire goes this way, although I would rarely present it in this fashion. I just want to let you see that there is a logical side to it. The major premise is that every natural or innate desire in us points to a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire.

(11:16 - 11:29)

Again, every natural or innate desire in us points to a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire. For instance, there's hunger. There happens to be food that can satisfy our desire for food.

(11:30 - 11:39)

There's thirst. And there happens to be water or drink that can satisfy or quench our thirst. There's drowsiness.

(11:42 - 11:58)

There happens to be sleep that will satisfy that desire for sleep. There's sexual desire and there's sex. There are many natural desires that have corresponding real fulfillments for that desire.

(12:00 - 12:30)

The minor premise is there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy. Again, there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy. Again, some of these desires and aspirations like for meaning and dignity, morality and immortality, and sort of a yearning for truth and goodness and beauty.

(12:31 - 12:45)

I mean, we can get taste of these things within this life, but we're left with a desire for more. It doesn't satisfy us forever. It may satisfy us for a moment, but it leaves us wanting more.

(12:45 - 13:20)

And the question is, what's this continual lack of fulfillment? Does it, is that just the way life is? Or is there something that it points beyond or that it points to? Is it a cosmic pointer to something which lies beyond? In major premise, every natural or innate desire in us points to our corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire. Minor premise, there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy. Conclusion, there exists something outside of time, earth and creatures, which can satisfy this desire.

(13:20 - 13:42)

That these desires act as cosmic pointers to that which lies beyond. Just to indicate the status of the argument, this is not only an existence, argument for the existence of God, but also for heaven and for the nature of God and for the nature of heaven. And I'll try to illustrate it in a little bit in further ways.

(13:43 - 13:53)

But part of what makes this argument effective is, is that it's poignant. It causes us to reflect. And you can start anywhere.

(13:53 - 14:06)

You can start with a novel. You can start with any movie, any good movie, any movie that's really popular under the sun. It appeals to things that are very deep within our human experience.

(14:07 - 14:24)

You can start with almost anything, a popular TV series. Anything in life that people really crave or people desire. And you can start at, at, at any point and go beyond it.

(14:25 - 14:33)

It's, it's more than an argument. It's a meditation, an illumination, an experience. That's what makes it so helpful.

(14:34 - 14:51)

Let me illustrate it a little bit further, but let me define for a second a key term that's used by C.S. Lewis in this issue. It's the, the term is Sehnsucht. Means something like this.

(14:51 - 15:17)

Lewis chose the term because it conveys an idea that we don't really have in English. It has the idea of desire, but it's it, the idea here is that you have a desire which leaves you with this longing for more. It's a desire and yearning, but it involves a displacement from what you want.

(15:17 - 15:45)

An aspiration towards the infinite. It involves a sense of separation from what is desired and a longing which always points beyond. Or as I've tried to allude to it earlier the idea is that many of our desires are cosmic pointers and they, they give us a taste of things, but they leave us for a longing for a real and full satisfaction of these desires by God.

(15:45 - 16:05)

We often have these hints of joys, hints of longing, leaving us with a longing for more, and it's sort of this dual feeling, a desire which leaves you with a longing. That's this idea of Sehnsucht. It's a tension, there's a tension that's involved in it.

(16:05 - 16:23)

Let me give you some illustrations of this from, first of all, from some contempt, from some poets, and then from Lewis. Wordsworth has a poem Immortality. He talks at sometimes about intimations of immortality.

(16:24 - 16:37)

Here's a little section from it. Goes like this. Now there was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, the earth and every common sight, to me did seem appareled in celestial light.

(16:37 - 16:47)

The glory and the freshness of a dream. It is not now as it has been of yore. There has passed away a glory from the earth.

(16:47 - 17:12)

So he had experienced life with a kind of glory, a kind of, he doesn't use the word here, but holiness or sacredness or some special quality that was around it, but he's lost it. He's tasted it before, he's lost it, leaves him longing to have it again. There's a frustration from, from what he has known and yet what he has.

(17:13 - 17:21)

And he wants more. The sense of the divine, and yet a sense of separation. Nostalgia for a previous time in his life.

(17:21 - 17:59)

He wants to experience it again, and he struggles with it. Or another illustration might be from Matthew Arnold, a poem called The Buried Life. And he says this, but often in the world's most crowded streets, but often in the din of strife, there arises an unspeakable desire after the knowledge of our buried life, a thirst to spend our fire and restless force in tracking out our true original course.

(18:00 - 18:23)

I know when I first read that, that section, I, I did have something of that feeling that was there. But often in the din of strife, there arises an unspeakable desire, there's something that comes up from the depths of our being, this unspeakable desire after the knowledge of our buried life. A thirst to spend our fire and restless force in tracking out our true original course.

(18:23 - 18:36)

It's like we've lost our way, and we want to find our way back. Find that, this meaning of life. Find that our true original course, and beyond it, the course to satisfaction.

(18:36 - 18:46)

And many times in our lives, we have something like that. We know where we ought to be, we don't quite feel that we're there. And we've had a taste of it.

(18:47 - 18:52)

But we don't have it now. We want it. We want something more than what we have.

(18:56 - 19:08)

Lewis talks about this same suit in his own life, in Surprised by Joy. In fact, it's really the whole idea. Surprised by Joy is counter to people's misunderstanding.

(19:09 - 19:34)

It's not about his wife, who is later named Joy. It's about these stabs of joy at various times that he's had in his life, and trying to figure out the significance of these feelings that he had had at various points, sometimes as a young child, and up through adolescence, and later on. And later, he came to find the significance of it, but it's really around this whole idea of same suit that I have mentioned here.

(19:35 - 19:59)

Like for instance, one time when he was very young, his brother brought him a biscuit tin with a toy garden on it. With the leaves and twigs and flowers, all arranged in a way to make up an imaginary garden. About three years ago, I taught over in Oxford, and I mentioned this.

(19:59 - 20:16)

And we had a woman that was commuting to Oxford from Ireland every week for the class on C.S. Lewis. And she brought me pictures of biscuit tins with imaginary gardens on them. Now, I don't know whether this was a common thing in Ireland.

(20:17 - 20:34)

I think probably it was going on before C.S. Lewis or Warren made this toy garden, but it's a very interesting thing. It's perhaps something that was there in the culture. But in any case, his brother brought him this biscuit tin, and he was deeply moved by it.

(20:34 - 20:49)

Here's the way he describes it in Surprised by Joy. He says, once in those very early days, my brother brought into the nursery the lid of a biscuit tin which he covered with twigs and flowers so as to make it a toy garden or toy forest. That was the first beauty I knew.

(20:50 - 21:06)

What the real garden had failed to do, the toy garden did. It made me aware of nature and something cool, dewy, fresh, and exuberant. As long as I live, my imagination of paradise will retain something of my brother's toy garden.

(21:07 - 21:23)

One of the interesting phrases in that is, what the real garden had failed to do, the toy garden did. That sometimes he didn't have the same feelings with the real garden. That toy garden just brought something immense, a great feeling within him that he remembered really all of his life.

(21:23 - 21:51)

And even as an adult, when he was writing Surprised by Joy, he remembered the feeling he got when he had this toy garden. A little bit later, and I don't know exactly, he doesn't give an exact time sequence, but we'll say months, perhaps later. Maybe a year, who knows? He was just standing, he remembers this feeling of standing by a currant bush outside and the memory of this toy garden just flooded back into his mind and again produced this great emotion.

(21:52 - 22:20)

Said it's difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me. Milton's enormous bliss comes somewhat near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire, but desire for what? It wasn't a desire for the biscuit tin or for the past, but what was it? Left him wondering what its significance was and left him feeling that everything else was insignificant at the time.

(22:21 - 22:36)

And he pondered these experiences. As a young child, he often saw, too, he grew up in Belfast, Ireland, and he looked off and he saw these green hills off in the distance. And he says, they taught me longing, he uses the word same suit.

(22:37 - 23:01)

Now, they were not very far off, but they were, to children, quite unattainable. I know what I was writing once, my book, C.S. Lewis' Case for Christ. I was out in Santa Barbara at Westmont College, and every day I would drive up to Westmont, and beautiful mountain scene there.

(23:01 - 23:18)

And I was also rereading Lord of the Rings at that time, and the idea of adventures you could have in the mountains. There's something about those mountains that would pull something out of you and touch your imagination deeply. And you would just look at them, and they'd produce something within you.

(23:19 - 23:32)

And that was something like what Lewis felt. Perhaps it's adventures he could imagine having as a young boy in these green hills. But it's, to the child, quite unattainable, he says.

(23:33 - 23:54)

Later on, he was reading from one of some of his ancient literature, a saga of King Olaf, a little phrase. It said, I heard a voice that cried, bolder the beautiful is dead, is dead. He said, and instantly I was uplifted into the huge regions of the northern sky.

(23:54 - 24:17)

And I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described, except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote. Even later, as a young man, he saw an illustration for Siegfried in Twilight of the Gods on a magazine. And it was as if the sky turned around in his own imagination.

(24:17 - 24:29)

And he said, he had this very deep feeling arise within him. And the feeling was pure northerness, engulf me. A vision of huge clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic.

(24:29 - 24:48)

And with that, a plunge into my own past, there at once, almost like heartbreak, the memory of joy itself. And at once I knew with fatal knowledge that to have it again was the supreme and only important object of desire. And as a result, he set out to be a poet.

(24:48 - 25:26)

Now, these experiences were something that haunted him for a while. But was this just full of sound and fury signifying nothing, meaningless? Or did it have some meaning? I mean, why did he experience it? Was it a mere quirk of his physiology? Was he reading too much into it? Was he exaggerating too much of this experience? Did it have a real significance? That was the thing that left him pondering. Later on, he did resolve it and did feel that these feelings did point to something beyond.

(25:28 - 25:55)

And he does a lot in terms of his writings with this kind of idea. Like for instance, I'll just give you one illustration of a time in his work Perlandra, which is the second one of the Space Trilogy, where he reflects on this idea of desire and a satisfaction of desire. And he imagines what life would be like without the fall.

(25:56 - 26:23)

Or if we had not experienced sin, if we could really experience the full pleasure of that which is there within us. And in the beginning of Perlandra, Ransom goes to Venus and he experiences a planet that has not yet experienced the fall. So he experiences pleasures as they might have been originally intended, say on Earth.

(26:24 - 26:37)

When he arrived in this forest, Ransom said, the smells in the forest were beyond all that he had ever conceived. To say that they made him feel hungry and thirsty would be misleading. Almost they created a new kind of hunger and thirst.

(26:38 - 26:56)

A longing that seemed to flow over from body into the soul, which was a heaven to feel. He found a yellow fruit there, and he took a bite of this yellow fruit, and it caused him incredible pleasure. Says it was like a discovery of a whole new genus of pleasures.

(26:57 - 27:13)

For one draft of this on Earth, wars would be fought and nations betrayed. So this was a phenomenal kind of pleasure. Yet as he thought about repeating this pleasure, with a second taste it seemed opposed to reason, he said.

(27:14 - 27:43)

It's difficult to suppose that this opposition comes from desire, for what desire would turn down such deliciousness? Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be like a vulgarity, asking to hear the same symphony twice a day. And he wondered how often in his life he'd reiterated pleasures, not through desire, but in the teeth of desire. He comes across a lady, the green lady, who's like Eve.

(27:44 - 28:02)

And Eve has not yet experienced sin or the fall, and is being tempted later by Weston to choose sin. And so there's a battle between Ransom and Weston on this. But in any case, the green lady imagines what evil desire would be like, not yet having experienced it.

(28:03 - 28:30)

He says, you could send your soul after the good you had expected, instead of turning it to the good you had got. You could refuse the real good, you could make the real fruit taste insipid by thinking of the other. In other words, you could take this yellow fruit that has such incredible pleasure to it, and you could always imagine a fruit that has more pleasure than you had in this incredible pleasure of this yellow fruit.

(28:30 - 29:03)

So you could spoil the incredible pleasure of this real fruit by imagining a better fruit. What Ransom also speculates is, it's like this, that there's a desire to go back in the past, as if life were like a film that could be rewound. That we spend a lot of our time, perhaps desiring, to go back to a previous time, where life was simpler and where we had great pleasures and experiences.

(29:04 - 29:52)

And so we can spend a lot of our lives being frustrated by what we have now, and not thanking God for the good things we have now because of our remembered past. Because things are not now as they were, or we're not experiencing the pleasures that we had in the past. So you can spoil the present good, the present pleasure, by a remembered past, or an imagined good that's beyond the goods you have, or an expected good in the future, that someday in the future I will have pleasure beyond this and spoil again the real good, the real pleasure you have right now, because of a remembered past and an expected future or a present imagination that goes beyond what you have right now.

(29:53 - 30:15)

So it's amazing how easy it is for us to do this, how our desires get in the way of these things. And really sometimes of our own pleasure itself. So you can spoil real goods by remembered, expected, or imagined good.

(30:18 - 30:49)

Pretty profound observation of Lewis, how our desires get in the way. And by the way, it might be worth mentioning here that there's a profound contrast between Buddhism and Christianity on this whole matter of desire. The Buddhist says that the whole problem is that of desire, and that you need to eliminate desire, or eliminate your attachment to things, and then you'll become, at least you won't be so frustrated, let's put it that way.

(30:49 - 31:40)

Now, you might argue that the Christian would see the diagnosis of the problem in the same way. Augustine speaks about the mother of the vices as being pride, but you might also argue that the mother of the vices is covetousness, a twisted desire at the very root of things. So if that's the case, if the mother of the vices is desire, and good reason to argue that it is, like you could say that pride is a forsaking of God and the pleasures of God to seek pleasure in self, you could even look at it in terms of desire, so that if covetousness is the root of the vices, that diagnosis of the problem between Christianity and Buddhism would be very similar, would be the problem of desire, but that's where the similarity ends.

(31:41 - 32:34)

The Buddhist problem is to cure the headache of desire by decapitation, to eliminate it, whereas the believer wants to purify desire and then raise it to the highest possible degree, so that blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Or take it back to Psalm 42, as a deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God. So far from passion or desire being a bad thing is to be purified and directed in the right direction and raised to the highest possible degree, so that the Buddhist diagnosis might be regarded to be similar, but the answer is totally dissimilar in terms of what desire points to or the solution for desire.

(32:37 - 32:57)

Desire, I would suggest, is a good thing. Here's another thing that Lewis, another illustration that Lewis uses from The Silver Chair, one of the Narnia Chronicles. Jill, at the very beginning of the novel, is transported to Aslan's land, and she's stranded in a strange forest because of her pride and foolishness.

(32:58 - 33:13)

She becomes extremely thirsty and finds a stream, but right next to the stream is a lion. Now, she's never met this lion before, so she's rather afraid. And the lion says, and yes, it's a talking lion, and you can guess who it is.

(33:13 - 33:24)

But the lion says to come and drink. The voice, it says, was not like a man's, but deeper, wilder, and stronger. I love that.

(33:24 - 33:44)

The lion's voice was deeper and wilder and stronger, a sort of heavy golden voice. And Jill says, may I, could I, would you mind going away while I do? Said Jill. The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl.

(33:44 - 34:04)

As Jill gazed at its mountainous bulk, she realized she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come, said Jill.

(34:04 - 34:15)

I make no promise, said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that without noticing it, she'd come a step nearer. You eat girls, she said.

(34:16 - 34:29)

I've swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms, said the lion. Didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

(34:30 - 34:39)

Why, I daren't come and drink, said Jill. Then you will die of thirst, said the lion. Oh dear, said Jill, come another step nearer.

(34:39 - 34:54)

I suppose I must go and look for another stream then. There is no other stream, said the lion. A great sort of parable about thirst particularly in this case.

(34:55 - 35:09)

And desire of finding a satisfaction for thirst. So Lewis is great as far as dealing with this imagery. Longing is one of the things that's there in a novel, Till We Have Faces.

(35:09 - 35:22)

One of the heroes said, I am a craver. This craving or longing at the very root. She says, you remember how we used to look and long.

(35:23 - 35:54)

The sweetest thing in my life has been the longing to reach the mountain, to find the place where all beauty came from. What do you think that all this longing meant, this longing for home? So this yearning, this longing that you see portrayed in novels and in film and poetry. But what's the significance of all this longing? That's the question that's at the root in this argument from desire.

(35:54 - 36:07)

And in much of Lewis's writings, he touches on this theme time and time and time again. I could multiply this all day and find illustration after illustration. It's one of the central themes of Lewis.

(36:08 - 36:23)

The way he puts this, the alternatives, he puts it very clearly in Mere Christianity. At least in some versions, it's page 119 and 120. So he puts it with three different alternatives.

(36:23 - 36:37)

There's three ways that we can deal with this idea of pleasure. The fool's way, the way of the disillusioned cynic or the Christian way. The fool's way is this, to put the blame on things themselves.

(36:38 - 36:57)

Always seek satisfaction in things that we have in front of us, yet always disappointed. And he says that people, they go from marriage to marriage through the divorce courts, always thinking that the next marriage will be better than the one before, and yet always disappointed. Never quite experiencing the satisfaction that was hoped for.

(36:57 - 37:14)

Or you can go from car to car, always thinking that the next car will provide the ultimate satisfaction. And it might for a moment, but oh yeah, there's a need for another. Or how about a home? Or multiple homes, you know? If you had enough money, many people have several homes all over the place.

(37:15 - 37:23)

With each home, perhaps, you'll find the ultimate satisfaction. But yeah, but it doesn't in the end fully satisfy. Or the ultimate vacation.

(37:23 - 37:47)

And you can find real pleasures there in taking a vacation, but it never quite provides, perhaps, what you anticipate it will provide. And there's always this desire for more. I've seen people at vacation spots, trying to pretend as if they were having the greatest time of their lives, but there's something hollow in the way that they're doing it.

(37:47 - 38:07)

It's like they're trying to believe that this is the ultimate experience, but it's not quite satisfying everything that they'd hoped for in the experience itself. So that's the fool's way, to put too much stock in the things themselves. Not enjoying it for the kind of pleasure you can have, but expecting more of it than you could have.

(38:07 - 38:17)

And always being disappointed by that new thing. And always wanting more from it. The second way, he said, and Lewis said, this is the way I would choose if I were not a believer.

(38:17 - 38:29)

It's the way the disillusioned cynic. And he says, to repress that part of you which would cry the moon. Don't expect too much pleasure, and then you won't be disappointed.

(38:31 - 38:45)

That's another way, to be a cynic about life. Not want too much, and then you're not going to be too let down when you don't get it. And the third way, he says, is the Christian way.

(38:45 - 39:00)

The Christian says that creatures are not born with desires, unless satisfaction for those desires exist. A boy feels hunger, well there's such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim, well there's such a thing as water.

(39:01 - 39:23)

Men feel sexual desire, well there's such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. As I mentioned earlier, just as hunger points to food and drowsiness to sleep, a response to melody leads to music.

(39:24 - 39:58)

There's certain unquenchable longings, just as every natural desire points to a corresponding real fulfillment of these desires. So the question is, are certain things that I mentioned earlier, like a desire for meaning, desire for dignity, desire for immortality, the quest for beauty, for satisfaction for desires, and so on and so on. If these are also natural desires, then there's a corresponding real fulfillment for these desires.

(39:58 - 40:15)

If nature makes nothing in vain, then the conclusion follows. So it's a meditation on the nature of our experience. These desires, these yearnings that I've just mentioned, these spiritual yearnings seem to be universal.

(40:15 - 40:43)

Say a capacity for awe, desire to be in awe over things. These seem to be part of humanity, part of human beings. Are they just full of sound and fury signifying nothing, or do they signify something or point beyond to something more? Certain unquenchable longings can find their goal, perhaps in part in time, where we get a taste of it, but ultimately the goal in eternity.

(40:45 - 41:04)

And it gives us a different reflection on the nature of pleasure and happiness, that God is not a killjoy. To the contrary, God is the source of pleasure. He created pleasure and created joy and wants us to experience it.

(41:04 - 41:24)

In fact, there's an interesting passage in Lewis's works in Screwtape Letters, where Screwtape, the demon, you kind of have to reverse it here, argues that all the real pleasures come from the enemy. And of course, from the devil's perspective, the enemy is God. But here's a section from Screwtape Letters where Screwtape is speaking.

(41:24 - 41:35)

He says, he's a hedonist at heart, that is, God is a hedonist at heart. He makes no secret of it. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

(41:36 - 41:46)

He's vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. There are things for humans to do all day long, sleeping, walking, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working.

(41:47 - 41:59)

Everything has to be twisted before it's of any use to us. So that God has a corner on pleasure. All we can do is twist it, misdirect it.

(42:00 - 42:09)

We don't create new pleasures. God has created pleasure abounding for people to enjoy, and he delights in our experiencing it. He's made his creation.

(42:10 - 42:19)

God is life-affirming, joy-affirming. That we're meant to experience life. We're meant to experience joy.

(42:19 - 42:32)

The kingdom of Christ is not opposed to life, but to sin. The kingdom of Christ is not opposed to the creation, but to the fall. So we ought to be life-affirming and creation-enjoying.

(42:33 - 42:45)

The idea of having joy and celebration is a missing element. Remember, I had a friend who spent six months reading the scriptures, going through the Old and New Testament, just over and over and over again for six months. He went away to a house.

(42:45 - 42:56)

He was single at the time. He went away and he just read through the Bible for six months. He came back and reported the things that he discovered that were missing from our lives.

(42:57 - 43:15)

And one that stuck out to me, and he talked about three in particular, but one that stuck out was celebration. He said all the way through the Old and New Testament, there's celebration. God creates feasts for us, certain points where we're to go out and enjoy things.

(43:16 - 43:32)

In fact, there's even one feast in the scriptures where you go out and you can take a tithe, a tenth of your income, and go out and buy whatever your heart desires. It's Deuteronomy, I think, 14. Go out and just buy whatever your heart desires.

(43:32 - 43:49)

Wine, strong drink, oxen, just get whatever you want and just have a feast before the Lord your God. Just don't forget, he said, to invite the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner to come and join you in your feast. But you're to go out and celebrate before the Lord your God.

(43:50 - 44:01)

There are times to abstain, there are times to fast, but there's time to feast and to celebrate. Time to throw a big party. There's time to be extravagant as well as a time to save.

(44:04 - 44:14)

And often we miss that. The idea of celebration is very rooted in the Old Testament, very rooted in the New. There are times where we are to leap for joy, Jesus said.

(44:15 - 44:38)

The times where, like in Philippians, 16 times in those four chapters, you have the idea of joy or rejoice being echoed. Even sometimes in the context of suffering, it says about Christ, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. Even facing the cross, he did it for the sake of the joy that was set before him.

(44:40 - 45:02)

Enduring the cross, despising the shame, and he was seated at the right hand. There was an outcome of the resurrection, the ascension, and the session, being seated at the right hand of God and finally sending the Spirit at Pentecost, where there was joy on the other side of even the suffering he went through. So joy is very much at the center.

(45:02 - 45:18)

John Piper writes about Christian hedonism, which shocks people. People have great difficulty with his book Desiring God, The Meditations of a Christian Hedonist. Seems like an oxymoron, you know, to say that.

(45:18 - 45:29)

But there's something profound about it, that God has created us for joy. He desires joy for us. The question is that we often don't pursue joy in the way that we can really fulfill it.

(45:29 - 45:54)

And there's a favorite quote I have from C.S. Lewis from A Weight of Glory, and it says this, Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child content to play with mud pies in a slum because he doesn't know what it means to have a holiday at the sea.

(45:55 - 46:04)

We are far too easily pleased. Again, our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We don't even have a passion for our own deepest desires.

(46:06 - 46:19)

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We're half-hearted even in the pursuit of our own pleasure. We pursue things that we think are going to satisfy us but actually undermine our own pleasure in the long run.

(46:20 - 46:35)

We play with mud pies rather than the holiday. We ignore the infinite joy for drink, sex, and ambition in a more limited way. We don't really pursue our own satisfaction in the right way.

(46:37 - 46:57)

So that's what this argument from desire is about. It's getting us to meditate on our desire. Now, what are the alternatives to this idea? I mean, the thing that's interesting is to look at the greatest of human beings.

(46:59 - 47:27)

Poet, philosopher, saint, literary writer, meditate upon these deep, deep experiences of meaning and dignity and immortality and truth and goodness and beauty, these longings. It's all shot all through literature at all kinds of levels. Now, this is either exercise in futility, full of sound and fury signifying nothing, or these are cosmic pointers.

(47:28 - 47:59)

What the atheist has to do is reduce all of these things to a mere quirk of our physiology. For instance, there's an author, Sir Harold Nicholson, that writes in his book Journey to Java that certain people like Byron and Kierkegaard and others that were plagued by depression have been cursed with some deformity which hampers biological fulfillment, with some functional weakness which prevents the easy elimination of waste products. Now, Lucretius was impotent.

(47:59 - 48:12)

Nietzsche had an underdeveloped pituitary gland and so on and so on. So you explain all of the deep feelings and aspirations by all these literary authors by some physiological explanation. So there's nothing really human.

(48:12 - 48:18)

It's all material. It's all materialism. Nothing that transcends the material.

(48:18 - 48:54)

So you can reduce all these experiences even of the people that are regarded as the highest, most thoughtful, most philosophical, most inspired, you might say, human beings are reduced to the physiological. Which would make, interestingly, human beings of all beings the most miserable. Because if we can ponder our predicament, as rocks and animals and birds can't do, then we of all beings would be most miserable if there are no answers.

(48:55 - 49:12)

Because we could meditate forever on our own futility. On the idea, as we started out with in Kafka, that there is a goal, but there is no way. There's no way to satisfaction of any of these desires.

(49:12 - 49:23)

These are dead-end streets. There's no way that we could ever satisfy these desires. That would make us of all beings the most miserable.

(49:23 - 49:49)

And yet this is where materialist perspective reduces. That the meditations of the highest of human beings, of literary writer and poet and philosopher and saint, are full of sound and fury, signifying that we only have a universe, as Russell says, of unyielding despair. That all these things signify that.

(49:52 - 50:07)

Whereas Lewis says, and this argument from desire says, there is a goal, and there are many goals, and there are ways to get there. Kafka says, there is a goal, there is no way. Lewis says, there is a goal, but there is a way.

(50:11 - 50:30)

There might be one other illustration here, and that's from Peter Berger. That's a book called Rumor of Angels, where he, in a similar way as Lewis, looks at various things that are pointers. Things in life that cause us to ponder.

(50:31 - 50:48)

One is hope in the face of death. Is this just wish fulfillment? We addressed that earlier in one of the lectures. Or is it a pointer to something beyond? Another is the conviction that there must be retribution for monstrous evil in life.

(50:48 - 51:16)

Is there going to be any balancing of the scales? Or is injustice going to be left unpunished? Are the things that people do, the good things, forgotten? Is there no structure to the universe? Is there no remembrance of evil or good? No balancing of the scale. Man's affirmation, he mentions, of social ordering. Or he mentions another, which Lewis also picks up, the idea of humor.

(51:17 - 51:35)

The radical discrepancy between life as it is lived and life as it ought to be. Pretty much all humor addresses that. There's a kind of humor that's a peekaboo humor, like a slapstick humor, where you say peekaboo to a baby and they laugh.

(51:35 - 51:47)

It's sort of a surprise kind of thing, or a slapstick kind of humor. But then most humor is based upon at least a mild unpleasantness. If the unpleasantness gets too big, then we don't laugh anymore.

(51:48 - 52:07)

And sometimes people cross the line and maybe lose their jobs on TV or radio because they've made a joke that's just really inappropriate. If it crosses the line, becomes too unpleasant, it's no longer funny. But pretty much all of humor rests upon this mild unpleasantness.

(52:07 - 52:25)

Like Rodney Dangerfield made a whole living on one basic argument, I don't get no respect, or one basic joke. And he makes his illustration from lots of different angles. Because we know that in some ways we deserve respect the way things ought to be, yet we often don't experience it.

(52:26 - 52:31)

We're taken lightly. We're disrespected. And so he makes a joke about it.

(52:31 - 52:46)

It's the difference between the way things ought to be, that we should be respected and shown respect, and the way things actually are. That's what makes it funny, that tension. And really, I think all of humor goes along that line.

(52:46 - 53:00)

That's what Berger points out. And Lewis said, actually, in his book Miracles, he could make a whole argument for the Christian faith, or at least the Christian perspective, from two things. Humor, or horror over dead bodies.

(53:01 - 53:10)

But just about the whole thing of humor. The difference between the way things are, and the way things ought to be. The whole idea of ought makes you stop and think.

(53:12 - 53:35)

Is there a way that things ought to be? And that's what Berger's getting at, this whole thing of humor. Or even certain play experiences, he says. Under the aspect of inductive faith, he says, religion is the final vindication of childhood, and of joy, and of all the gestures that replicate these.

(53:36 - 53:49)

So this argument from desire is a tantalizing argument. It's one that causes us to reflect on our own human aspirations. It's something where you can start in a film.

(53:50 - 54:15)

Start with, say, a connection with nature. Start with what people yearn for. What's the source of the problem in this film? What's the source of what people desire? And what's the answer given as to how you can achieve that satisfaction? Is that valid? Is it possible to achieve satisfaction in this life, or not? We just have to be cynical.

(54:16 - 54:30)

Detach ourselves from our desires. Not pursue them. Is there a true satisfaction for our desire? This argument from desire is something that can make us ponder.

(54:30 - 55:02)

And for Lewis, at the end of Surprised by Joy, he said that these experiences he had earlier in life took an immense place within his thinking before he understood the answer. But by the end of Surprised by Joy, he said he'd found the significance of where these desires pointed in his belief in God and his acceptance of Christ. And he said that these acted as signposts along the way.

(55:03 - 55:16)

Now, a signpost is very important when you're looking for a city. You want to follow the signs to the city. But once you've arrived at the city, you don't think anymore about the signpost.

(55:16 - 55:30)

Because you've arrived at your destination. And that's what these desires are. They're pointers, he said, that assumed immense significance before he found his destination.

(55:30 - 55:52)

But then they took less significance because they were like signposts along the way. So this argument from desire is worthy of being considered and worthy of being used. Hopefully, what I've been able to do is kind of circle around like a helicopter around this idea of desire and get you to meditate upon it.

(55:54 - 56:05)
