

SHARP FAITH

FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T

1. This 5-week course explores the emotional, intellectual, and deeply human dimensions of Christian belief, inspired by Francis Spufford's bold and unconventional book *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*.
 - 1.1. Rather than offering a traditional defense of doctrine, Spufford focuses on the felt experience of faith—its emotional weight, moral complexity, and the honest recognition of human failure.
 - 1.2. Through guided readings and discussions, we'll examine themes like belief as emotional truth, the raw demands of love and grace, the role of power and failure in the Church, and why Jesus remains the theological and emotional center of the Christian story.
2. The Author
 - 2.1. Francis Spufford is a British writer and former atheist who returned to Christian faith as an adult. Known for his work across genres—from history to fiction—Spufford brings a literary, humorous, and deeply honest voice to the conversation around belief in the modern world. *Unapologetic* is both personal and provocative, offering a fresh way to talk about Christianity for those who are skeptical of traditional religious language but still hungry for meaning

DATE	SERIES	SPEAKER	TITLE
May 4 2025	SHARP FAITH: "FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T"	The Rev. Dr. Luigi Gioia <i>Theologian In Residence, Saint Thomas Church</i>	"FAITH AND EMOTIONS: WHY BELIEVING IN GOD FEELS SO RIGHT"
May 11 2025	CONFIRMATION SUNDAY		NO CLASS
May 18 2025	SHARP FAITH: "FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T"	The Rev. Dr. Luigi Gioia <i>Theologian In Residence, Saint Thomas Church</i>	"A FAITH THAT DOES NOT GIVE ALL THE ANSWERS AND MAKES IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS".
May 25 2025	MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND		NO CLASS
June 1 2025	SHARP FAITH: "FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T"	The Rev. Dr. Luigi Gioia <i>Theologian In Residence, Saint Thomas Church</i>	"THE PUZZLE OF JESUS"
June 8 2025	SHARP FAITH: "FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T"	The Rev. Dr. Luigi Gioia <i>Theologian In Residence, Saint Thomas Church</i>	"POWER, SIN, AND THE CHURCH WE GET"
June 15 2025	GUEST SPEAKER HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER	The Rev. Dr. Andrew McGowan <i>Dean of Berkeley Divinity School and McFaddin Professor of Anglican Studies</i>	THE BEGINNINGS OF AN AMERICAN PRAYER BOOK (3)
June 22 2025	GUEST SPEAKER HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER	The Rev. Dr. Andrew McGowan <i>Dean of Berkeley Divinity School and McFaddin Professor of Anglican Studies</i>	THE NEW PRAYER BOOK: FROM 1928 TO 1979 (4)
June 29 2025	SHARP FAITH: "FAITH IN GOD HOLDS EVEN WHEN RELIGION DOESN'T"	The Rev. Dr. Luigi Gioia <i>Theologian In Residence, Saint Thomas Church</i>	"LOVE, HOPE, AND THE DEFIANT STORY OF GRACE"

A FAITH THAT DOES NOT GIVE ALL THE ANSWERS AND MAKES IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS (2)

Chapter 2: The Crack in Everything

1. We've been telling ourselves a very popular story recently, about a person poisoned by anxiety and self-hatred because they think they are forbidden to do something essential to their nature; then they discover that the prohibition is groundless, that it's a meaningless taboo left over from less enlightened times which they could and should discard. (31)
2. Over the last fifty years, we really have been escaping, as a culture, from a set of cruel and constricting rules, particularly about sexuality and gender roles, which (yes) did have the sanction of religion behind them. (Not that religion caused those rules to exist, on the whole. There was a malignant cultural consensus in place in their favor, of which religion was a part.) (31)
3. There's always, necessarily, going to be stuff it's all right to do and stuff it's emphatically not all right to do. We discover new immoralities to take seriously at the same speed that we abolish old ones. (32)
4. In my experience, in times of intense misery it's letting your guilt be guilt that at least stops you needing to accuse yourself [...]
 - 4.1. Admitting there's some black in the mixture makes it matter less.
 - 4.2. It makes it easier to pay attention to the mixedness of the rest.
 - 4.3. It helps you stop wasting your time on denial, and therefore helps you stop ricocheting between unrealistic self-praise and unrealistic self-blame.
 - 4.4. It helps you be kind to yourself. (35f.)
5. There are some human states to which guilty fear is the absolutely appropriate response; on which guilty fear is an immense improvement; from which guilty fear is the first step of the only available rescue. (38)
6. I'd argue that guilt is also a perfectly functional and appropriate emotion in much milder cases. In fact, I'd argue that guilt is often an instrument of self-discovery, telling you a new thing about parts of yourself which other people may have praised to the skies—and praised rightly. (38f)
7. Taking the things people do wrong seriously is part of taking them seriously. (42)
8. We find it hard to acknowledge the seriousness of ordinary screw-ups, because we get very worried by the idea that we might be judging people, "judgmental" being another Bad Word of our time. (43)
 - 8.1. Originally, what it meant was that we shouldn't think of good and bad in terms of laws, or in terms of a courtroom procedure which would find people guilty or not guilty. (43f)
9. [Christianity] produces a moralized landscape in which the good people can be told from the bad people; in which all human actions can be split into two categories, pure or impure, clean or dirty, permitted or forbidden, kosher or trayf, halal or haram. (45)
10. Christianity does something different. It makes frankly impossible demands. Instead of asking for specific actions, it offers general but lunatic principles. (45)

- 10.1. It's insanely perfectionist about motive.
 - 10.2. It won't accept generosity performed for the sake of self-interest as generosity.
 - 10.3. It says that unless altruism is altruism all the way down, it doesn't count as altruism at all. (46)
- 11. So far, so thrillingly impractical. But now notice the consequence of having an ideal of behavior not sized for human lives: everyone fails. Really everyone. (46)
- 12. The essence of the experience I'm trying to talk about in this chapter is that it's chaotic.
 - 12.1. You stop making sense to yourself.
 - 12.2. You find that you aren't what you thought you were, but something much more multiple and mysterious and self-subverting, and this discovery doesn't propel you to a new understanding of things, it propels you into a state where you don't understand anything at all. (49f)
- 13. For what do we do with the knowledge that [...] we no longer make sense to ourselves? Turn to face each other, for a start. A community of acknowledged [failures] ought at least in theory to be kinder to one another. (52)

Chapter 4: Hello, Cruel World

- 14. It's faith that creates the "problem of pain," as the whole issue is known in theological shorthand:
 - 14.1. the whole problem of suffering's existence in a world supposedly presided over by a loving and all-powerful God.
 - 14.2. In the absence of God, of course, there's still pain. But there's no problem. It's just what happens. (87f)
- 15. Evolution doesn't let Him off the hook.
 - 15.1. He is still the creator and the sustainer of the processes by which life takes its myriads of altering forms, and therefore answerable for the results of those processes. And for their costs. (88)
 - 15.2. Suffering is not incidental to evolution. Suffering is the method. (92)
- 16. The cruelties of the world are an emotional, not just a logical, challenge. (88f)
- 17. The love of the God of everything need not be exhausted by the human definition of love, but it must not contradict it either, if He is to be worth worshipping. (97)
- 18. We do our violence unimpeded. We suffer it unprotected. (91)
- 19. Well, there's self-deception. Because there's always self-deception, it's a resource available in every human situation. If you're lucky enough in where you live and when you live and how you live, the problem need not press too hard. (94)
- 20. Theodicies: Each tends to find some useful elements of truth to grip on to, but to end up failing. (96)
- 21. ***We suffer because God is refining us.***
 - 21.1. The element of truth that is being seized on here is that there are virtues which, quite genuinely, can only be developed by endurance. (97)

- 21.2. The ills of the world are not all neatly sized so that we can cope with them. It is not true that we are never tested beyond our power to endure. (97)
- 21.3.
- 21.4. Spufford, Francis. *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense* (p. 97). (Function). Kindle Edition.
22. ***We suffer because God has a plan in which our suffering is necessary*** (98)
- 22.1. The God of everything, if you believe in Him, must be the God of all times at once. Accordingly, He cannot be limited to perceiving things in sequence as we do. (98)
- 22.2. If love is love, it can't manipulate. If love is love, it can't treat those it loves as means to an end, even a beneficial one. (99)
- 22.3. So suffering can't be vindicated by a pay-off elsewhere. (99)
23. ***We suffer as part of a package deal that gives us free will.*** (99)
- 23.1. It offers no help at all with the other kinds of suffering, the kinds that are not caused by human action. (99)
24. ***We suffer, but it doesn't matter, because it's only a momentary prelude to heaven.*** (100)
- 24.1. The only useful element here is a hope you can hang on to, that love will outlast trouble;
- 24.2. otherwise, it makes the loving God into a practitioner of dodgy cost-benefit analysis, indifferent to the way our lives feel as we live them. (100)
25. ***We suffer because the world is not as God intended it to be.*** (100)
- 25.1. How could the God of everything, the creator who precedes and sustains all nature, whose love song summons nature into existence, produce something defective? (101)
- 25.2. "How can God permit a universe that permits suffering?" The problem doesn't vanish, it merely relocates, it merely moves back a step. (101)
- 25.3. The element of useful truth in this last and best of theodicies is the reminder it contains that the creation is not the same as the creator. He may sustain it all, He may be its bright backing, He may be as near to us at every moment as our neck-veins: but it is not Him, it is not-Him, it is in some utterly mysterious sense what happens where He isn't. (104)
26. How, then, do we deal with suffering? How do we resolve the contradiction between cruel world and loving God? (104)
- 26.1. The short answer is that we don't.
- 26.2. The question of suffering proves to be one of those questions which is replaced by other questions, rather than being answered. (104)
- 26.3. We take the cruelties of the world as a given, as the known and familiar data of experience, and instead of anguishing about why the world is as it is, we look for comfort in coping with it as it is.
- 26.4. We don't ask for a creator who can explain Himself. We ask for a friend in time of grief, a true judge in time of perplexity, a wider hope than we can manage in time of despair. (105)

- 27. We still know that
 - 27.1. if He can help us and He doesn't, He isn't worth worshipping;
 - 27.2. and that if He doesn't help us because He can't, there must be something weirdly limited about the way He's the God of everything.
 - 27.3. The impasse is still there. (105f)
- 28. We say: all is not well with the world, but at least God is here in it, with us. We don't have an argument that solves the problem of the cruel world, but we have a story. (107)
- 29. For a Christian, the most essential thing God does in time, in all of human history, is to be that man in the crowd; a man under arrest, and on his way to our common catastrophe. (107f)