

# *On Life and Meaning*

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## **Episode 60 – John Boyer – Spiral Logarithms**

### *Wrestling the Angel*

And now a personal word,

John Boyer is a teacher at heart. He lights up a room when he tells stories about works of art and the artists who created them. His narrations are referenced and precise. He shares what he knows because he wants us to know it too. When we listen to him, we can imagine being in a classroom with lights low as he projects images of paintings and buildings and modern design at a screen. Better yet, we don't have to imagine him and the art at all when we witness him gesturing to the real thing. He is thrilled at what he sees and thrilled when we marvel with him.

In our conversation, John defined true art as the manifestation of a person's deepest expression with the work being more important than the person who produced it. He talked about how God is in the details. He said his true art is a passion to make our lives better through engagement with the arts. He has done that as a college professor of art history, as director of the Mark Twain House, and now leading the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. He is living his deepest expression attending to the details.

Asking John about his true art leads me to ask myself the same question: What is my true art? What is my deepest expression where I find God in the details? The answer is in the question. In posing the question. My deepest expression where I find God, if there is a God and if God is to be found, is asking questions about life and meaning.

I was at a dinner hosted by a friend the other night. My friend is a leadership performance strategist who helps individuals break through to higher levels of achievement. He hosts dinners in which he invites many guests into conversation. The discussion turned to who we are at our best. A guest at the table remarked that the secret ingredient to being in an ideal performance state is love. If we do what we love and love what we do, we attend to the details with such effort that the product of our love appears to manifest effortlessly.

Here are I things I love: I love being in conversation with someone who intrigues me. I love asking them questions, getting to know them, going deep quickly with them about what matters most to them, creating a bond that is outside of time in the moment. I love expressing something essential about the people I meet, intuiting who they are and helping tell their deepest story. I love using words to create portraits of people, creating

an archive of their values and of my own, preserving something I hope is beautiful and true for others to discover.

Of course, what I am describing is this project: this podcast, the people I am meeting, the conversations I am having, the thoughts I am sharing, the episodes I am producing, the platform I am presenting. The details consume me. It is a labor of love.

The current exhibit at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art is called *Wrestling the Angel*. The exhibit examines how religion and sacred art appear in work made by secular, avant-garde artists. I see in the work artists expressing God in the details, not knowing whether God exists. I see in the work an assertion that life is divine in an indifferent universe. I see myself in the work wrestling with questions and answers about the human condition.

John Boyer makes it possible for us to marvel. He presents us with works of art that are labors of love. He does what all good teachers do: he invites us to encounter ourselves.

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