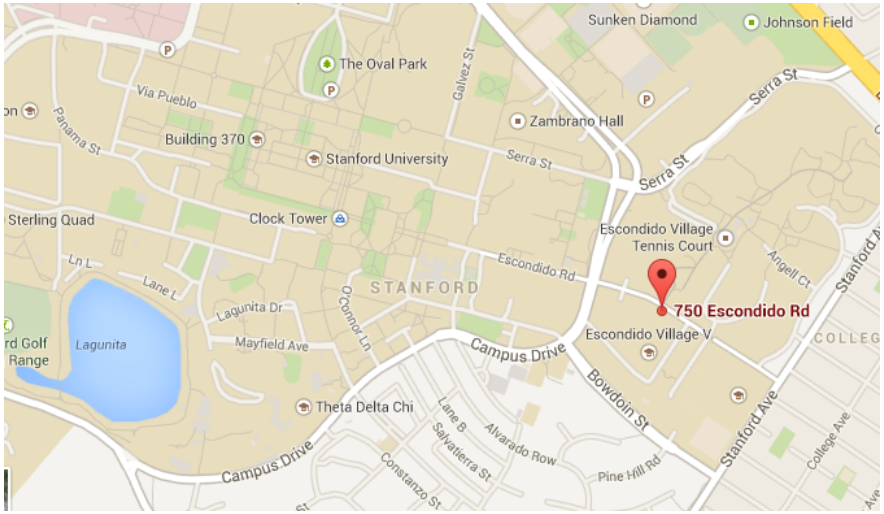
2013 Passion Talks

What We Do and Why We Care || Who We Are and Why We Live

Saturday, August 17th
Stanford University
www.passiontalks.org



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

9:00 – Keynote Speaker

10:30 – Session I Talks

- Technologies for Cooperation Across Diversity
- Meeting the Other: Building Philological Muscle for a Better World
- Wireless Communications: How God is Breaking Down Barriers
- Artificial Intelligence: What Makes Us Human?
- Computer Vision: The Image Pipeline and the Image of God
- A Christian Start-up? Learning from founding 4Soils

12:30 – Lunch

1:30 – Session II Talks

- Physics: Probing the Top Quark
- Astronomy: The Big Bang
- Ecology: Why God cares about environmental issues and so should you
- Neuroscience: NeuroPhilosophy
- Not Applicable: A Professional Testimony

3:30 – Session III Talks

- Serving God in Uniform
- Preventing an Imposter from Stealing Your Identity
- Dark Hollywood
- Transmedia: The Hidden Power of God
- What is Faith

5:30 – Post Mortem + Idea Jam

6:30 – Dinner

NOTES:

EMAILS:

IDEAS:

Transmedia: The Hidden Power of God

What if there was a systematic perpetual worldwide conspiracy to hide the existence of God? What if your family, your friends, and your co-workers were all actively part of this conspiracy? What if you discovered that you were also actively part of this conspiracy? Could you process the idea that everything that you believe and hold dear was separating you from God? This passion talk will question reality itself, and ask us why we believe what we believe?

Bio: Carl Varnado is an author, screenwriter, tech enthusiast and educator. He holds B.A.'s in English and Film & Video, and dual Masters in Education and Media Management. He is a Board Member of Blacks in Gaming and a member of IGDA. He currently serves as a Transmedia Producer at Intuitive Visions where he is responsible for the Intellectual Property development of "The Lost Book of Kings", "Black Dragons" and "The Last MC." He also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Scottsdale Community College and Grand Canyon University.

Theology: What is Faith?

Christian faith is based on the premise that people can choose to believe in Jesus Christ as God. Yet much work in philosophy would question whether it is possible for a person to choose what they believe. Further, there is the question of whether such belief could be considered rational. Where then does this leave Christianity? Is it a religion that is saying that our eternal destinies are based upon that which is impossible for us? Or is there more to faith than meets the eye? In this talk, I will look not only for the philosophical and theological answers to the question of "What is faith?", but also to the practical challenges these answers place before us as the body of Christ in sharing the Gospel.

Bio: I am currently working for InterVarsity Graduate & Faculty Ministries as the staff advisor to the Stanford InterVarsity Graduate Christian Fellowship. Prior to this appointment I completed a Masters in Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen, a Bachelor of Theology at Oxford University, and the Oxford Certificate of Christian Apologetics at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. Theology is my second career. Prior to studying theology in the UK, I practiced tax and estate planning law in Melbourne, Australia. As a lawyer, I always struggled to see how my faith ought to inform and change how I did my work. Thus the focus of my theological research, and my passion, is to consider the interaction between Christian theology and other academic disciplines, with a view to better articulating the integration of Christianity with these other disciplines, and to developing effective apologetic responses to objections to the Christian faith.

Passion Talks 2013 Vision

Simply put, Passion Talks is a venue where we give "professional testimonies." It is a hybrid between professional conferences, and testimonials. The need for Passion Talks arises from the big chasm we, people in academia and for that matter any field of research, face as believers in a personal God. Almost everything about our work, the way we conduct research, the way we talk about it, the way we communicate, is purged of all forms of subjective and personal thoughts, regardless whether they are true or not. This has its benefits, it keeps science universal; however, if we believe a personal God is the author of creation which we are trying to understand, how can we hope to know him better through our work if we insist on confining all our thoughts about our work to the truly impersonal and objective?

The truth is, no science is purely objective, and it is imperative that we who hope to live genuine lives of worship to God find ways to speak about the personal and subjective aspects of our work in hopes that we reflect better the beautiful qualities of our personal God, who nonetheless created the seemingly objective and impersonal universe and the laws governing it. (Kassa)

Passion Talks History

The collaboration started in 2009 with students from Stanford, Berkeley, and UC Santa Cruz as a montage of jam sessions, prayer meetings, and planning of events. In 2011, UC San Francisco joined the discussion. As graduate students moved on in their careers, the network has grown into other institutions of their employment. At the annual Bay Area Winter Conference 2013, was the first set of Passion Talks, followed by the organization and launch of this Summer's Passion Talks 2013 at Stanford University. (Sherol)

Keynote Speaker – Dr. Hsi-Yang Wu

Current Research and Scholarly Interests

"My lab studies the coordination of neonatal bladder and external urethral sphincter function. By understanding how the spinal cord creates efficient voiding in neonates and children, we hope to develop new treatments for pediatric voiding dysfunction and adult urinary incontinence."

Technologies for Cooperation Across Diversity

Although the Internet and globalisation offer us the possibility of meeting and cooperating with people who are different from us, actually doing this is harder than it seems. In this talk, I plan to reflect on the role of technology for cooperation across cultures, geography, language, and religion, and how public cooperation can shape our way of doing research itself.

Bio: The speaker is a PhD student at the MIT Media Lab and Center for Civic Media, where he designs social technologies which empower people for creative and informed cooperation. He is a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University and a fellow of the Royal Society for Arts. Before MIT, Nathan worked in UK startups, developing technologies used by millions of people worldwide. He studied postcolonial literature at Cambridge University, helped start the Ministry of Stories in London, and facilitates #1book140, The Atlantic's Twitter book club. He's on Twitter at @natematias

Meeting the Other: Building Philological Muscle for a Better World

The usefulness of the humanities has been subject to lively debate lately. While the pragmatic benefits of obscure philological work in, for example, Old Norse literature can be difficult to tally in terms of concrete, one-for-one causality, the interpretive work of understanding and analyzing texts that goes on in my undergraduate courses allows students to build up those "muscles" needed for reflexive, sympathetic, and yet critical engagement with both themselves and Others, whether taken as cultural or national Others, or as the Others they see every day, work with, hang out with, etc. The humanities, done properly, teach us to engage reciprocally with that which is different than ourselves, to remain humbly aware of our own socio-cultural situatedness, to appreciate at the same time that we remain critical--all essential skills if we are to love the world and yet not be of it, to bring the language of Christianity to the problem. I will talk about my own teaching and research, my growing awareness of the potential of my field and the humanities in general, and the way all this relates to my understanding of my faith and its relationship to the world.

Bio: I filed my dissertation at UC Berkeley in 2009 on viking age poetry about mythic-heroic scenes on shields. I taught as a lecturer for the Scandinavian department until Summer 2012, and then taught as a visiting professor at Gustavus Adolphus College from 2012- Summer 2013. I am currently looking for part- or full-time teaching positions in the Bay Area, and have research coming out or in progress on the Figure of the Home in the Old Norse Sagas and on the application of Cultural Memory theory to the study of Old Norse religion.

Preventing an Imposter from Stealing Your Identity

Many graduate students suffer from "imposter syndrome" at some point in their academic careers. That sense of inadequacy and feeling like a fraud can stifle one's professional growth by weakening his/her self-confidence in their abilities and accomplishments. Left unchecked, imposter syndrome can strike at the very core of our identities. This talk will contrast the secular response to imposter syndrome with the biblical concept of identity, highlighting how we, as Jesus followers, are to take our cue from Christ, not the world around us (or how we may perceive it).

Bio: Professionally, I'm an astronomy PhD student who is planning to become a college instructor. I am very interested in the intersection of faith and our academic pursuits. I became a believer very recently (7 months ago), and I've seen how my worldview has radically changed since coming to Christ. I used to be plagued by professional and personal insecurities, but my newfound faith has helped me turn toward Christ as the ultimate source of my identity. My talk is more of a personal story, one that I hope can encourage all of us.

Dark Hollywood

“Movies are a reflection of a society's value system". Who doesn't like movies? The film industry's power in entertainment is obvious, but how can they use media to alter our thoughts and culture? What makes Hollywood so successful and omnipresent? Enter Hollywood's dark side to discover the hidden messages in our favorite movies, the science behind screenwriting; a quest to 'know (and love) your enemy.'

Bio: A long time technology blogger and with a passion for writing, the speaker was a past engineer and researcher. With a business mind, he saw the problems that needed light in some major and most lucrative industries in the world. With his technical and creative approach, he will show you the science behind screenwriting, the hidden messages that Hollywood is promoting, and how we can prepare and correct a dark industry.

Neuroscience: NeuroPhilosophy

Advances in neuroscience have allowed us to, for the first time in human history, look inside warm, wet brains. We're learning how to see what's going on inside our heads when we do math, pray to God or watch a sad movie. This talk will briefly review techniques available to the modern neuroscientist and discuss a few example experiments. We'll then discuss the interaction of philosophy and neuroscience, including its implications for faith.

Bio: I am a medical student and researcher in a neuropsychaitry lab. My work involves using a brain magnet (transcranial magnetic stimulation) to explore the relationship between willpower (inhibition control) and the brain (specifically the inferior frontal gyrus).

Not Applicable: A Professional Testimony

I was encouraged to give a talk and have some interest but am not really interested in writing an abstract or anything. I'd probably talk a little bit about the research I'm interested in and what I'm doing in grad school. I'm not sure how my research relates to God, but I'll share about why I'm still in grad school.

Bio: I'm a physics PhD student at Stanford and started following Jesus about 4.5 years ago.

Serving God in Uniform

Following God impacts the decisions we make, the way we interact with others, and the way we think and feel about ourselves and our place in the world. In this talk I'll tell you a little about my experience following God in the military–from my decision to join the Navy, how knowing God has shaped my approach to leadership and career development, and how the crazy parts of life sometimes bring the richest blessings. (I'm also happy to try and answer any questions you have about military life.)

Bio: I've been in the Navy for eight years. I've deployed on an aircraft carrier, served in Korea, led 30+ sailors and soldiers, and learned a little bit about a bunch of stuff, from firefighting and maintenance to anti-terrorism tactical watchstanding. I'm currently finishing a thesis on U.S. - China military relations for a masters in Asian Studies from Stanford (funded by Navy fellowship), after which I'll head to DC for a military liaison job at the State Department.

Wireless Communications: How God is Breaking Down Barriers

The development of wireless communication over recent decades has revolutionized the way we interact with the world around us, breaking down barriers that once limited our connection with people and information. This talk will look more closely at why wireless communication systems is relevant to us as Christians. Drawing from both technical concepts as well as personal experiences, we will discuss the ways in which God can use all people to demonstrate his desire for all people.

Bio: I am currently working on my MS in Electrical Engineering, with an emphasis on wireless communication systems, which builds on my experiences with antenna and microwave circuits, voice packet scheduling over wireless networks, and cellular communication system design. Over the past few years, I have learned that when I let God take the wheel, things always turn out different and better than what I could have ever hoped for, whether in research, work, or my personal life. I don't know where I'm headed exactly, but I hope that wherever I am, whatever my work is, I will always be focused on walking with God and loving His people.

Artificial Intelligence: What Makes Us Human?

In 1956, the term Artificial Intelligence was introduced through an extended brainstorm session at Dartmouth College. Six years earlier, Alan Turing published a paper that proposed a metric for determining human-like intelligence in machines. Since then, there've been many attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct our attempts to define the area of Artificial Intelligence. This talk will (1) give a few Philosophical counter-arguments towards the possibility of intelligent computers, (2) describe a range of systems that were created in the attempt to achieve greater intelligence, and (3) use the experiences from pursuits in Computer Science as a means to understand what it means to re-create ourselves—(and) more fundamentally, what makes us who we are.

Bio: I'm a Computer Science PhD student at the University of California Santa Cruz. I research the use of Artificial Intelligence in expanding the possibilities of storytelling in video games. In addition to having a crush on Super Mario, I fell in love with video games at the age of 5 and have since developed both commercially and for fun. I'm also a game and culture blogger, doing other projects such as video journalism for the game industry and author for game and culture books. Additionally, I'm a band leader for the Terminal Degree Jazz Band (terminaldegree.org), a group of Science and Engineering PhD students and friends that play gigs all around Santa Cruz. Most recently, I founded Reclaim International (reklaim.org) with a group of academics interested in building bridges with universities around the world.

The Image Pipeline and the Image of God

The process of capturing an image with a digital camera is deceptively complex. I will give a brief introduction to the imaging pipeline – the process of capturing an image, from photons entering the lens to writing the digital image to storage. In the latter portion of the talk, I will discuss the "image of God", as mentioned in Colossians 1:15, and draw some analogies to the way photographs are produced.

Bio: I am a 3rd-year PhD student at Stanford University, where I work on image processing, computer vision, and computational photography. I am currently involved with the "Frankencamera" project, which aims to build an open and programmable camera for computational photography research. I've also spent two summers at NVIDIA Research, working on real-time video stabilization for cell phones.

A Christian Start-up? Learning from founding 4Soils

Kids are like sponges, and they're spending on average 43 minutes a day on smartphones and tablets. Why were there no good Bibilcally based materials for children? As I saw the trend for edu-tainment in the areas of math, reading, and a host of other topics, I was lead to think about and start my current start-up on the area of engaging the mobile first generation with their faith in a new way, through these interactive, touch, mobile devices.

Bio: The speaker recently graduated from the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where she focused on entrepreneurship. In addition to her business career, 4Soils, her start-up, was launched based on a combination of her courseworks at the design school, business school, and education school.

Probing the Top Quark

The Top Quark is the heaviest Fundamental Particle discovered in nature. The reason for its exceedingly large mass is not well understood. But experiments at the Large Hadron Collider can shed some light by measuring it Magnetic Dipole Moment. In this talk I will discuss my work on modeling the effects of magnetic moment on the property of photons emitted by the Top quark. I will discuss the relevance and significance of this project in the contexts of 1. advancing particle physics, 2. advancing God's Kingdom, and 3. my personal spiritual growth.

Bio: I am a graduate student in particle physics conducting my research at the SLAC Linear Accelerator Laboratory.

Cosmology: The Big Bang

How did the Big Bang Theory become the dominant theory that describes the history of the universe? In this talk, I will explain various competing candidate theories in the 20th century that describes the evolution of the universe: their mathematical foundation, philosophical underpinnings, and observational predictions. I will present the evidences from observation that helped the Big Bang to gain critical mass support. In and through this, we will be able to see how worldviews and scientific investigations influence each other.

Bio: I'm a 4th year grad student in cosmology working on an experiment that aims to detect the Cosmic Microwave Background B-mode. Measuring the amplitudes of the B-mode generated by primordial gravitational waves will advance our understanding of the earliest moments of the physical history of the universe, framed by Inflationary cosmology.

Ecology: Why God Cares about Environmental Issues and so Should You

Environmental issues such as climate change are some of the most pressing in our society today. And yet discussion of such issues has mostly been absent from the church, and these issues have been dismissed as unrelated to how we are to live our lives as Christians. In this talk, I argue that in fact the opposite is true. Environmental issues are supremely important to God, both in terms of our stewardship over the Earth and our calling to help the poor. As Christian scientists, we should be leading the way on these issues because we are uniquely positioned to further God's kingdom through them.

Bio: I am a third year PhD student in Civil & Environmental Engineering working in the Department of Global Ecology at Stanford University. I work in two main spheres: the first is on the impacts of extreme climate events on water quality and the second is on the provision of water and sanitation services in developing countries. My first publication examined to what extent a record-setting toxic algae bloom was influenced by meteorological conditions consistent with future climate change. My second publication explored different methods for monitoring global access to water supply for the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals.