

Asking God Why

Introduction:

(While holding a nicely wrapped package.)

We like faith to come in a nice little package. Everything is neatly wrapped. Everything fits snugly inside. And the whole thing is nicely tied together. No muddle. No mess. No loose ends.

(Now start unwrapping the package in a sloppy manner.)

But the truth is that faith is usually a much more sloppy affair. Kind of like our living room floor after Alyssa has opened all of her gifts. There are things that do not make sense to us. We have questions for which we cannot find satisfying answers. There are doubts that linger in the back of our minds, and distractions that hang around in the corners of our heart.

Sometimes the church acts like the Christian life is one of simple answers, but the truth is that in your spiritual journey you come across a number of things that can't be dealt with in the three points of a sermon, or even in a best-selling book of twelve steps by a Christian author.

Sometimes God reveals His purposes. Sometimes we have a moment of enlightenment where everything falls into place. Sometimes every loose end is tied up, every "T" crossed, and ever "I" dotted. But there are other times when all the pieces just don't quite fit, or there are pieces left over. Like Job, we may never know in this life God's reasons, and like Paul facing his thorn in the flesh, sometimes we can only cling to the sufficiency of God's grace. And there are those times that the answers that satisfy the head, just don't satisfy the heart.

Just ask C.S. Lewis. Lewis was probably the best known Christian author of the 20th Century, and he was arguably Christianity's greatest defender in the last 100 years at least. In 1940, Lewis released this book, *The Problem of Pain*. It undertakes to answer the question, "If God is good and God is omnipotent, then why is there pain and evil in the world?" or, as one 7th grade girl put it, "If God loves me, why can't I get my locker open?" His arguments in this book are sincere. His logic is valid. His points are biblical and orthodox. The book was widely acclaimed. However, his approach is that of a detached biblical scholar. The most famous quotation from this book is perhaps this one, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in

our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

More than fifteen years later Lewis married Joy. After spending less than five years with her she died of bone cancer. Suddenly Lewis could no longer approach the problem of pain as a detached biblical scholar. In 1961 he released another book, *A Grief Observed*. The book was so controversial as Lewis struggled through his grief, doubts of faith and questions for God that it was originally released under a pseudonym. It was no nicely wrapped package. It showed faith as muddled and messy as could be. But it had far too many loose ends for many Christians.

Listen to these painful questions.

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — or so it feels — welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?

These may be loose ends. But they are the same loose ends that ensnare many of us along our spiritual journey. If we were willing to let the truth be known, many of us have struggled with doubts. Many of us have lingering questions. As we continue our series on the church being a safe place for hurting people, we need to understand that the church needs to be a safe place for those that are struggling with doubt. These are questions we often don't feel free to ask in church, and so people suffer with their doubt in silence until we lose them completely. We must be a safe place for people to ask questions.

Your friends and loved ones will have questions as you try to encourage them in their spiritual journey. Many of us wrestle with such doubts in our own relationship with God. When we have questions, we wonder about our faith. I want you to know it is okay to have doubts. You aren't less of a Christian if you have questions, as long as you are honestly asking and earnestly seeking. If you're just throwing out excuses and justifications, then that could harden your heart, not lead you closer to the truth, but Jesus never lashed out at anyone who was asking an honest question.

The Bible is full of questions: “ask” — 735 times; “question” — 35 times; “Why” — 550 times. People asked Jesus many questions. By one count, Jesus answered 113 questions. Many of these questions are spiritual questions, questions of doubt and uncertainty. Jesus didn’t always give the answer people wanted to hear. Sometimes he answered a completely different question, because it took them closer to the truth. Never once, though, did he say, “How dare you ask such a question.”

What can we learn from all of this? I can't tie this all up in a nice package for you but let me offer these four anchor points, strongholds onto which you can hold in the midst of doubt. Or you can see them as beacons by which you can get your bearings in the face of hard questions.

Anchor Point #1: God Won't Zap You For Asking Why

Some of the Bible's greatest heroes of faith asked some of the toughest questions. Giants of faith such as Abraham, Job, John the Baptist, Peter, and many of the prophets wavered with questions of faith. With so many heroes of faith experiencing times of struggle in their walk of faith we know that God isn't going to zap us for not being perfect.

Of all those that questioned God, the Psalms of David give us the greatest look into the questioning heart. Just listen to these questions cried out to God.

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? Ps 10:1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Ps 22:1-2

I say to God my Rock,
"Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"
My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?" Ps 42:9-10

You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?
Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell. Ps 43:2-3

Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?

Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
 Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?
 We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground.
 Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love. Ps 44:23-26

How long will the enemy mock you, O God?
 Will the foe revile your name forever?
 Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?
 Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them! Ps 74:10-11

But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? Ps 88:13-14

David struggles through these times of questioning, but where does he go to work them out? He works them out in the presence of God. God can handle our questions. He can love us through our struggles. A God that can't handle doubt isn't big enough to be God. But our God is big enough to face our questions. His glory isn't threatened.

Many of our questions do have answers; good, thorough, solid answers. God is more than willing to hear all of your "Why's." He will not turn you away. Jesus Himself invited us to ask, seek and knock.

We in the church need to be willing and ready to give these answers to those who are seeking. The apostle Peter tells us, *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."*

We should not turn those who have questions away. We should welcome them with open arms, just as God welcomes us. What better place to work out your struggles of faith than among those who have struggled through the same things? What better place to ask questions than among those who are asking the same questions?

Trust and doubt are not always enemies. Sometimes trust and doubt are traveling companions on the spiritual journey. Faith does not grow because we step without doubt or question. Faith grows when we step forward in the face of doubts and questions.

Anchor Point #2 God's Wisdom is Beyond Our Understanding

There are times we feel God must give us a detailed explanation of all that He is doing and why. First of all, God is not obligated to explain anything to us, but let's assume for a moment that God was willing to give us a full explanation. We couldn't begin to comprehend

His reasons. God's knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are unlimited. Yet we are limited beings. God's reasons would entail so many variables, contingencies, connections, and intricacies we couldn't begin to grasp them.

If someone were to give me the blueprints for a spaceship, I wouldn't be able to understand them. I couldn't point to a diagram and say, "That's not right. This wiring is all wrong. This thing will break apart on reentry. The design is flawed. This is a part of the glory and majesty of God. It is part of what makes Him God. It is what separates Creator from created. To think that we could understand God's reasons is like saying that eternity could be contained in one second of time.

This doesn't mean God isn't just, or fair, or loving. It just means that God is beyond us.

Ps. 18:11 says, "He shrouded himself in darkness veiling His approach with thick rain clouds." The prophet Isaiah declares, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is. 55:8-9)

Paul writes in poetic beauty in Romans 11

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

The Bible makes it very clear than our understanding now is limited at best. We will not be able to put all the pieces together until we are with God in heaven. As Paul writes in 1 Cor. 13, *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Cor 13:12*

Anchor Point #3 Jesus Knows How We Feel

One of the greatest comforts whenever we have any sort of struggle is knowing that someone understands. They don't have to say anything. Just knowing that they've been there and done that and they care about what we're going through is an encouragement.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate understanding friend. He's been there and done that. He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane as he begged God to change His mind. He cried out on the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He's walked more than a mile in our shoes.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Heb 2:14-18

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb 4:15-16

Anchor Point #4 — The Greatest Assurance Is Not Knowin Why, It is Knowing Who
(Read "Tapestry" section from Job commentary)

Jesus is the answer. That's not just a cliché. It is life changing truth. Satan throws many questions at us to distract us from the one answer we really need. There are many questions, but there is only one answer that matters ultimately, and it is not a why, It is a who. His name is Jesus Christ. He wants to be your Lord and Savior.

Steven Lawson has a fantastic book on the biblical book of Job called *When All Hell Breaks Loose: You May be Doing Something Right*. Lawson then gives a beautiful analogy of how suffering is like a tapestry. On the backside there is a tangled mess of thread which seemingly have not pattern or design, just threads going every which way. However, when you flip it over, you discover that tangled mess was actually accomplishing something quite beautiful. There is an intricate design, a beautiful picture and it all makes perfect sense.

The point is that on this side of eternity we only see the backside of the design. We don't see the beautiful design that God is weaving. Lawson writes,

True comfort comes not in seeing the other side of the tapestry, but in seeing the One who designs and weaves the tapestry. True comfort comes in knowing God. True comfort comes not in knowing why. Tre comfort comes in knowing who. It comes in

knowing God. In trusting God. In worshipping God. When our world falls unexplainably, we must not dwell upon why, but upon who.

Conclusion

Jesus is the answer that contains all the answers that really matter. To those that have known only hate. He is the answer of love. To those that have been mired in sadness, He is the answer of Joy. To those caught in the breakneck pace of the rat race, Jesus is the answer of patience. To those wrecked with injustice, Jesus is the answer of kindness. To those burdened with evil, Jesus is the answer of goodness. To those whose hearts have been torn by broken relationships, He is the answer of faithfulness. To those beaten with brutality, Jesus is the answer of gentleness To those ensnared by a weak flesh Jesus is the answer of self-control.