

Ask God Hard Questions

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- [0 : 00] So, years ago, Kara and I led a leadership program at a camp out in Colorado. And the camp was building a new chapel building. And one of the tasks that our team had to do was to put tar on the foundation.
- Because if it's not well sealed, as moisture goes into the ground, it'll evaporate through. That's not the right term. But it'll go through the foundation and create mold problems and leakage just as the weather happens.
- So, we told these kids, excellence is everything. You've got to do it thoroughly. Nobody will ever see your work. But if you do it right, everybody for years and years and years to come will benefit from your diligence.
- So, they started work. I went and did other things. I come back down and we've got these 14 and 15-year-old kids completely covered in tar. That group of kids has been forever known as the tar babies.
- But the chapel building has never leaked. Ever. Ever. Because it's so important to build a good foundation. To know that what's under the ground that's not visible really is well sealed.
- [1 : 12] It's deep down into the bedrock. It's able to support the building in the midst of all the things that go about in life. And that's very relevant certainly to our church.
- It's also relevant to what we're going to talk about this morning. One of the things I resolved years ago as a youth pastor was to not shy away from hard questions. One of the things that was a recurring theme as kids would come to our youth groups is they would come because they had encountered an adult who said, you can't answer that question, whatever that question happened to be.
- Why does God allow people to hurt? Why is there injustice in the world? Help me to understand things about the Bible that are more obscure. And these adults had said, no, we don't go there.
- And I thought, that's exactly where we need to go. Because those are the questions that make or break people's face. And a lot of times they're very deeply personal questions.
- And in the passage we're going to look at this morning, we're going to be looking at the disciples dealing with deep-rooted confusion about what they're hearing from the Lord. And it doesn't line up with what they have always believed.
- [2 : 22] It doesn't line up with what they thought they understood the Bible to teach. And Jesus isn't exactly being helpful. In some, you'll see, he stirs the pot a bit.
- So they're like, what? What's going on? We need to face those questions. We need to go into them. So one more story about our son Luke. Luke is number two.
- When he was eight, nine, ten years old, he was the most legalistic human being in the world. We went to camp one summer. And he was a camper. And I walked past this game that was being played.
- And Luke is on the sidelines with a scowl on his face. Just angry. I said, Luke, dude, what's going on? They're cheating. Everybody?

Yep. Everybody. Everybody's cheating. Well, what do you mean? Well, Luke had his idea of what the rules were and what fairness looked like and how the game was supposed to be played.

[3 : 22] Now, Luke's rules and the actual rules were far apart. And fortunately, Luke had a very, very good counselor that week. And he worked with Luke.

And we continued because this was something we had to work with him as he matured. And to understand that sometimes your rules of how the world should work are not really how the world works.

And sometimes that feels unfair. Sometimes it feels like other people are getting an unfair advantage. Or that you are being hurt. And learning how to work with those things is hard.

It's challenging. But we have to face the reality. What do the rules actually say? So that's going to be our focus this morning. Is looking at those places in our lives specifically where we're confused.

Where we're wondering, God, what are you saying? What are you doing? And what I hope, what I really hope as we round the corner and come to the end of our time together this morning, that you feel more bold to ask God hard questions.

[4 : 30] Because he's not afraid. He can handle those questions and he wants us to have that dialogue with him. So let's pray together and then we will plunge into our sermon. Father, I'm grateful that you are a father who welcomes us into your presence.

That you are a father who not just allows us to ask hard questions but encourages us. And God, I pray that you would forgive us for not exercising that privilege of avoiding asking you hard questions.

Of somehow thinking that you might be offended or you won't have an answer. Lord, help us to enter fully into the relationship that we have with Christ.

Help us to come boldly before the throne of grace. And to talk to you about the things that are most confusing to us. And in doing that, to come to a fuller understanding of your grace.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So turning your Bibles to Luke chapter 9. We're going to actually be covering essentially what we've been talking about from the middle of chapter 8 all the way to the, toward the end of chapter 9.

[5 : 46] So we're going to cover a lot of ground this morning. So a lot of it's going to be review. Because as I was preparing this message this morning, one of the things that became very apparent to me is the conversation that we were looking at the last couple times I preached in early July are really central to what Jesus was trying to convey to the disciples.

Now let's set context. So back in 8 verse 27, you'll remember Jesus had just healed the man who was blind and he had to, he healed him.

The guy didn't see clearly and then he took another crack at it and then the man's eyesight was clear. Great metaphor for our lives. We don't always see the answer clearly right away.

And God has to take us through it again. And then he takes the disciples and they're walking up to Caesarea Philippi. He's got them alone. And he asks about who do people say that I am.

They talk about his identity. He gets in an argument with Peter. And he talks about that great passage that, he talks about what is discipleship. What does it mean to follow Jesus? I want to review that together because that is the core message of the gospel.

[6 : 56] We need to think about what Jesus was saying there and have a clear understanding of what the point was. And part of what we need to see is the urgency that Jesus was feeling at this point in Mark's gospel.

We're halfway through the book. It's got 16 chapters. But we've only got about four weeks left between what the conversation about Jesus' identity and the crucifixion.

They're going to walk, and you'll see this in the next few weeks, they're going to walk down to Jerusalem. Jesus has a few encounters with Pharisees and doing healings between this point and the triumphal entry on Sunday morning before the crucifixion.

But most of the time, he is focused on the disciples. He has got to get them to the point where they're understanding the core message of what he's trying to accomplish because they're going to carry the message forward.

And you're going to see they're not getting it. If you remember, I talked about in Romans chapter 8. Romans? I don't know where that came from. I just love Romans chapter 8, so that's how it came up.

[8 : 04] In Mark chapter 8, Jesus was frustrated. He had just had an encounter with the Pharisees. They're not getting it. They should have. They're Bible scholars. They're serious, apparently, about a relationship with God, and yet they're bound up in their own ways of doing things.

And so Jesus is frustrated with them. And then they, you remember the story? They get in the boat. They're going across the lake. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees. Beware the teaching of the Pharisees. And the knuckleheads are talking about, that's my term for the disciples.

The knuckleheads are arguing, did you bring bread? I don't know. Did you bring bread? I don't know. Why does Jesus care about bread? And Jesus is like, oh my, seriously? Weren't you listening?

Can't you see? Where's your heart? How much bread did I produce? He really takes them to task because they're confused and they don't get it.

They're not understanding. And so then the conversation, who do men say that I am? That's a critical question. That's a critical question for each one of us because we want Jesus to be the king.

[9 : 17] We want him to conquer the world, set our lives right in the details, and make the world right overall. But the problem is, we're not ready for that king.

We're not ready to be his subjects. God is at work in our lives to prepare us to be ready. And that process can only be accomplished by the suffering servant.

You remember talking about that? And so what Jesus is teaching the disciples is, look, there's two lines of prophets in the Old Testament. There's the suffering servant narrative, and there's the triumphant king narrative, and you guys want the triumphant king, and you kind of push aside the suffering servant, but the suffering servant has to come first, and that's who I am.

And so they talk about that. What was the suffering servant wanting to do? First of all, from the end of Hebrews 2 and the end of Hebrews 4, Jesus was learning firsthand what it's like to be us.

And if you're like me, you're uncomfortable with the idea of God learning stuff. But there's a difference between knowing things intellectually and knowing them experientially. I know in my mind that different sorts of suffering are bad, but if I haven't experienced them, it's a totally different thing.

[10 : 40] And so Jesus was learning what we experience. He was learning our hardships, our shortcomings, how frustrating it is to just not be enough for the demands of life.

He was experiencing that and learning to make him, it says in Hebrews, a faithful high priest, one that had credibility that we would go to and talk to about these needs of our lives.

And so that was one goal for the suffering servant. The second one, he was modeling human life. One of the things I always want to come back to and emphasize for us, and not to lose sight of, is that Jesus didn't have a cheat code.

Now for some of you who didn't grow up in a video game era, you don't know what I mean by that. In all these video games, or most of them, there's a cheat code. And what the cheat code does, it gives you superpowers that means you can play and conquer everything and not worry about consequences.

It's not really a game at that point. Jesus didn't have a cheat code. We think, well, he was God, so that's his cheat code. No. He was fully man, and he was engaged in life as fully man.

[11 : 56] Do I switch to handheld? Okay. Please hold. All right. Oh, there we go. So technology is always a challenge.

When I was the director at Lakeside Bible Camp, we had the oldest slide projector in all of the Pacific Northwest. Now, a minute ago, I talked about, I used an illustration about video games.

I thought maybe some of you aren't familiar. I hate to say you're a little bit too old to get the video game analogy. Now, some of you are too young to get the slide analogy. A slide is a white cardboard square with a picture in it, and it goes in a projector, and a light goes through, and it projects it onto a screen.

That's before these things became popular with the projector systems. So ours had two carousels, and it would merge them. And so we could do double the number of slides and do the whole thing.

The problem was that it would break down every time I did a presentation. So from one week to the next, I had no idea what we were going to be talking about. And so I got real good at stand-up comedy as I was trying to figure out how to fix the projector and not lose my audience.

[13 : 07] So it's just, you know, it's just part of the drill. Technology is a good thing and a bad thing all at once. So the suffering servant was learning what it was like to be human. He was modeling for us what it's like to be people dependent on God.

Do you want to know how you should conduct your life? Look at the Gospels. Jesus isn't cheating. He is experiencing all that we experience.

He is living through the things that we experience. He argued with God. Take off your holy sunglasses and look at the Garden of Gethsemane. Take this away from me.

I don't want to go. He was bleeding. He was sweating blood. He was so passionate in that prayer. But he submitted, and that's the model.

But don't lose sight of the fact that Jesus has experienced everything and is modeling for us what does it look like to be a person dependent upon God in this world.

[14 : 10] That's where we look, is to the pages of the Gospels. Number three, and this is very important, he was training disciples. As soon as he began his public ministry, right after he was baptized, he started picking a group of guys that were very intimate with him that they were walking through the next three and a half years as apprentices.

Seeing what Jesus did, seeing what Jesus did, reviewing their work, sometimes getting a thumbs up, sometimes getting a thumbs down or up. What were you guys thinking?

But that's what the Lord was doing as well as a suffering servant. And then the culmination of the suffering servant's work was he had to suffer, die, and be raised again. That was part of it.

He had to deal with the sin problem. And so Jesus was the atonement. He was a sacrificial lamb. On him, all of our sins were laid.

I love 2 Corinthians 5.21. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might have the righteousness of God in him. It's the most unequal trade anywhere forever.

[15 : 21] Our sin was laid on the perfect son of God, and he gave us his righteousness. So he was the atonement. He was a sacrifice on our behalf. The second one, here's a big theological word.

He was a propitiation for our sins. Let me, if any of you read the NIV, New International Version, I'm not a big fan, and this is probably the biggest reason why. The NIV stopped using the word propitiation and used the word expiation, another big theological word.

Here's the problem with that substitution. Propitiation is dealing specifically with the fact that God was angry. A propitiation is a sacrifice that satisfies wrath.

We don't like to think that God is matter. Isn't God the God of love? Yeah, he is. But he's also a just God, and he hates sin. And we were objects of his wrath.

His wrath was visited on Jesus for you. Let that sink in for a minute. Jesus took the wrath of his father for you.

[16 : 36] So the suffering servant was a propitiation for our sins. Expiation just is basically a synonym for atonement. We have to have atonement and propitiation.

And then the final piece, he completed the model for human life. And this is the other thing that we need to focus on that we're going to come back to at the end. Our life is a pattern of going from one crisis to another.

And in those crises, a lot of times we have to die to ourselves. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We have to die to our own desires. We have to die to things that apparently seem satisfactory but aren't.

But in that death, we discover new life, which of course is what Jesus was raised to. The disciples got a foretaste of that at the transfiguration.

They got to see, oh, this is the future. And trust me, Peter, James, and John were deeply impacted by that. John alludes to it in the first chapter of John and in his epistles.

[17 : 37] Peter talks about it as well. We were the witnesses of his glory. They saw Jesus fully as he would be. And 1 John 1-3, 1 John 3-1 and 3-1-3, we will be like him.

We will see him as he is. John was saying, I saw that, you will, and we'll be changed. But the process of life and then death and then resurrection to new and better life, that's a pattern for our lives today.

We have to step into that. We don't like it. We would rather have lots of fun and ice cream every day and not have to worry about anything. Our life doesn't work that way because we live in a broken world.

And what the suffering servant was doing was showing how to triumph over that reality. So the triumphant king will come. Now, part of what Jesus did and said to confuse the disciples is he was using a title for himself, the son of man, that from Daniel 7 clearly indicated the triumphant king.

That's the prophecy in Daniel. And then he says the son of man is going to die. Wait, what? I'm confused. Because he was showing them that the son of man was both.

[18 : 55] He was the bridge from the suffering servant that we just talked about to the triumphant king. And the king will come. The day will come when he will reign with full authority.

But in the meantime, he is spreading his kingdom through us. We are the legacy of the disciples, carrying his rule in a very subtle, unexpected way into the world around us.

So the king, in a sense, has come through us and is coming to finally establish his rule. Does that make sense? So that's our Messiah.

So that's Jesus' identity and mission. And then we talked about God's interest versus man's interest. Remember the argument? Jesus said, guys, I'm going to die. Mark says he said it very plainly.

I'm going to die. And Peter says, oh, no, you're not. No, no, no. He pulls him aside. And I think there's a couple of things going on there. One, simply, was that Peter and Jesus were best friends.

[19 : 58] You don't want, you never want to hear your best friend say, I'm going to die. I'm going to suffer, be rejected, and die. And somehow Peter just kind of missed the point that Jesus also said, rise again. Because like us, if you don't understand something, you just kind of skip over it.

And so Peter pulls him aside and says, no, no, no, no. You can't do that because I don't want you to, number one. But number two, I have a narrative in my head. You're the Messiah.

And the Messiah is the king. You're going to kick Roman butts, kick them out of Jerusalem, overthrow them, and establish your throne. And I get to be one of the leading guys.

I like that narrative a lot better than the suffering stuff. And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. Get away from me, you adversary. You do not have God's interest in mind, but man's interest.

That is the key question that we need to address every step of the way through our lives, every day. Am I looking through the lens of what's God's interest, or am I looking through the lens of what is my interest?

[21 : 07] Now, there's some misconceptions we have about those questions. And this is really important because we think that if I want something, it's automatically bad because God doesn't want us to have any fun.

I once described myself to a group of teenagers as the executioner of fun. If that's going to be fun, nope, I'm going to make a rule, can't do that. We think God does that. You can't believe that and believe God loves you like the father of the prodigal son loved his son.

You just can't. Those thoughts don't go together. And yet, and yet, look into your heart. Is that in there? Mm. That looks like something I'll enjoy.

God's probably going to say no. That's bad thinking, folks. That's not accurate. The other thing we think, kind of the flip side, is, well, if God's calling me to something, it's going to be awful.

I had a friend, an older lady that was one of my mentors when I was in high school, that she was Canadian. And when she was a young woman, she prayed, God, I will go wherever you want me to go, except to the United States and except to a big city.

[22 : 17] And she spent the next 50 years of her life in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which last time I checked, is in the United States. And in her mind, Colorado Springs was a huge city because she grew up in a small town in Canada.

And she would tell people, you know, as soon as I prayed that, I knew God was going to send me to the U.S. That is terrible theology. It's wrong. So our desires and God's desires are not mutually exclusive.

That's a math term. Mutually exclusive means they have nothing in common, no connection at all. That's not true. Good theology is that my best interests, adjectives matter, my best interests are nestled deep inside of God's interests.

What we have to come to is the belief that that's actually true. In the midst of the conundrum of living life, of hardship, of just aging bodies and difficulties with family or whatever the case may be, illness is recognizing and accepting and stepping into that our best interests are nestled in God's interests.

So we talked about Jesus' identity and mission. We talked about God's interests versus man's interests. And then is a classic passage at the end of Mark chapter 8 about discipleship. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me, is what Jesus says.

[23 : 53] Now that's another passage we misconstrue a lot of times, in my view, because we cherry pick it out of the context. The context before, which has to do with God's interests and man's interests, and the context after, which is a transfiguration and a promise of glory.

If you put it back in there, discipleship is not something extra, something more that we're called to. This is how we learn to live our lives under the umbrella of God's interests.

And we discover that all things truly do work together for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. That that's actually true. But we do it by denying ourselves, taking up our cross.

Quick reminder, to deny yourself isn't just a new asceticism. I'm not asking you to become a monk or a nun. To find something, what's something I really like? I'm not going to do that anymore.

That's all for you, God. You know what God says most of the time? I didn't ask you to give that up. I don't care. You know what God wants us to give up is a lot deeper than that. The message of John and the message of Jesus was very simple.

[25 : 06] Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Turn from your way of doing things, your presuppositions about how life should work, and turn to my way and follow me.

Trust me that my death, this is Jesus speaking, my death on the cross dealt with the sin problem in your life, and now there's a better way to live and follow me. That's denying yourself.

It's looking into the mirror. James describes the word of God as a mirror. Looking into the mirror and saying, where am I falling short? Where are my interests eclipsing God's interests instead of subordinating to them?

Where am I putting myself on the throne? No, that's denying yourself. What is the best thing I can do to help my marriage thrive or to help my kids thrive or in my workplace?

How can I bring the gospel to bear wherever I am? How do I address the hard questions of life? That's all a part and parcel of denying ourselves.

[26 : 11] And then take up the cross. The metaphor oftentimes is, because it was the cross, we think Jesus is saying, prepare to suffer. Now, that's not wrong, but it's not completely accurate.

It's not complete. Because the cross was a horrible way to die. But what Jesus was saying was, follow God's will for you.

The cross was God's will for Jesus, the suffering servant. And yes, it did involve suffering. So what Jesus was saying, follow the path that God has for you, no matter the cost, because it's the best path.

Remember I said, our best interests are nestled in God's interests. When we follow the Lord, denying ourselves the way we think things should be, and submit to him, and continue to learn that, and step into his plan for us, that's when our lives thrive.

You remember, we talked about the fact, we drew the analogy back to Adam. Adam was given a garden. Adam and Eve were given a command, be fruitful and multiply.

[27 : 29] Adam's responsibility was to make the garden thrive. God delegated to him responsibility. That hasn't changed. Each of us has, some of us have a literal garden.

All of us have a figurative garden. We have an area that's our responsibility to care for. It's our children. It's our spouse. It's a home.

And the neighbors around that home. It's our workplace. Those are our garden. How can we contribute to the thriving of the people in those environments?

What can I do to bless the people around me? To point them to the Lord. To show them that they can step onto the best path that I've discovered and I'm trying to figure out.

Let's do it together. That's what God is calling you to do. And to discover in the process of making your garden thrive, that's when you discover what it means to have a relationship with the Lord.

[28 : 27] That's when you begin to understand the dynamic of a conversational relationship with God where you're talking to him about the things that are challenging. I'll give you an example.

Real simple. This bank of lights works. This bank of lights doesn't. Why? We don't know. Kind of like my headset.

Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. Why? We don't know. Now, am I throwing Jeff and Roger and the guys under the bus? Absolutely not. It's technology. You all know the headaches.

Do you know that we can take simple things like that to prayer? God, could you show me how to make this doggone thing work? And then listen? God works in those details.

So we talked about Jesus' identity and mission. We talked about God's interests and man's interests. And then the idea of our identity and mission in that passage at the end of Mark 8.

[29 : 28] Now, I'm sure you're wondering, okay, it's 927 and we haven't even turned to Mark 9 yet. So turn to Mark 9 and have no fear. I can tell time. So Mark chapter 9, we're going to start at verse 40, or verse 30, excuse me.

So from there, they, and this is the disciples and Jesus. So they're in Caesarea Philippi.

They just came off from the Mount of Transfiguration. They healed the guy who was the young man who had epilepsy or was oppressed by a demon or both. Pastor Tim talked about that last week.

And now they're heading south to the Galilee, heading toward Jerusalem. From there, they went out and began to go through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know about it. Remember I talked about Jesus was under time pressure.

I've only got a few weeks to get the knuckleheads to understand what I'm trying to tell them. So he's focused on them. For he was teaching his disciples and telling them the Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him.

[30 : 32] And when he has been killed, he will rise three days later. But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him. I don't think this was an isolated conversation. It was probably a good week-long trek as they were making their way south.

So it's probably an ebb and flow of conversation. I'm sure you've experienced that on a hike. That was going on. Jesus had an agenda, but the disciples were afraid to ask because they didn't know what he was going to say, and they didn't really want to hear the answer.

Can you relate? I'm sure you can. So they came to Capernaum, which is on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. And when he was in the house, he began to question them, what were you discussing on the way?

But they kept silent. They're not stupid. They kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, he called the twelve and said to them, if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.

Oh, man. It's another pillar of their understanding of what it would be like to serve the triumphant king, and being a servant was not on the agenda.

[31 : 35] And then, taking a child, he set him before them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me, and whoever receives me does not receive me but him who sent me.

John said to him, teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us. But Jesus said, do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in my name and be able to soon afterwards speak evil of me.

So we're going to look real quickly just at all the different ways that the disciples were confused. So first of all, they're on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Picture the scene and put yourself in Peter's shoes in particular, because he had the argument with Jesus. Jesus says, I'm going to suffer. Peter says, no, you're not.

Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. Deny yourself and take up your cross. Okay. I don't understand, but suffering is going to be part of this equation. Then they go up to the mountain.

[32 : 39] Jesus is transformed. He is glowing from within. His clothing is just so overwhelmingly bright. Cleaner than any cleaner can get it. Not even Tide Pods can get it that clean.

And Moses and Elijah are there. Okay. So who are you? Are you the suffering servant or are you the king? Because this looks like a king to me.

Part of the significance of Moses and Elijah, where they were representative of the law and the prophets, Jesus came to fulfill them. And they were talking about what was going to happen in the coming weeks at the crucifixion.

And so they had the conversation. Peter, who if he ever isn't sure what to say, says the wrong thing. So he says to Jesus, hey, we should put tents for all you guys.

We should just camp out here. Which meant he saw Moses, Elijah, and Jesus on the same plane. Still not getting it.

[33 : 41] The fog comes down. Moses and Elijah go back up into heaven. By the way, side note. Cool thing about God. Do you remember the last words that Moses heard before he died?

He said to God, can I go to the Holy Land, please? And God said, no. And yet here he is in the promised land. God is gracious.

So Peter and Moses and Elijah go back to heaven. They're encompassed by a cloud and they hear a voice. This is my son. This is my beloved son. Listen to him. Pay attention.

Good word of advice for us. Listen to what the Lord has to say and continue pressing in to listen until we reach understanding. So they're on the mount.

The Lord says, listen to him. And as they were coming down, he tells them, don't tell anybody until I rise again. Wait, what?

[34 : 41] So you are dying? But what was that? They're confused again. And so they ask. They seize upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

And so Jesus, sometimes teachers get to understanding by sowing more confusion. So he knows these guys are confused. Who are you, Jesus?

Are you the king or the suffering servant? And Jesus says, Elijah does come first and restore all things. And yet, how is it written? How is it written that the son of man will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

He puts his finger right on the point that is confusing Peter. Because the prophecy about Elijah in Malachi 4 goes directly to victory.

Jesus does that to us. Sometimes, as we open ourselves up to the spirits working in our lives, he puts his finger right on the pain point and really presses into it and drives into it.

[35 : 44] Let me tell you why. When I haven't been in ministry, I've been in sales. And the fact of the matter is, if someone comes into your place of business, I sold mattresses. Someone comes in with a problem. You know how I make sure I'm going to get a sale?

As I interview them and talk to them about why they came into a mattress store, which is not a popular place to go on a date. Why are you here? They'll tell me about pain. They've got back pain, shoulder pain, neck pain.

They're not sleeping well. It's affecting their lives. Fix this problem. You know what I do? I bring up that problem over and over and over and over again.

I remind them of it. So, does that help the back pain? Does this mattress help? Nope. Let's go to another one. That really hurts, doesn't it? Tell me more about that. Why does it hurt? When does it hurt? I just keep pushing on that.

Why? Because I'm cruel and I hate them? No. Because I'm trying to help them solve a problem. And the solution to the problem is through the pain.

[36 : 42] The pain is addressing it and figuring out together what's the solution. That's what Jesus is doing with Peter. Bonk. Let's push that pain point where you can't reconcile the suffering servant narrative and the triumphant king narrative and let's poke it.

And he doesn't answer the question. He just asks it and they keep walking. Sometimes God does that. So, more confusion. So, let's press forward a little bit.

And they're on the road to Jerusalem. And Jesus says again, I'm going to suffer. This time, we're not even going to ask.

We don't want to know. We're not going to ask them. They avoid the whole topic. And then Jesus separates himself for whatever reason. And what do they talk about? Talk about tone deaf. You know what?

I think I'm the greatest. You know, me and Jesus, this is Peter. We talk all the time. And John says, yeah, but he loves me. I get to sit right next to him all the time.

[37 : 47] They've got this argument going back and forth about who's the greatest. Right after Jesus has said repeatedly, I'm going to die. Parents, do you ever have a time when you're on your last nerve with your kids and you yell at them?

You set them straight. Maybe give them a swat on the butt. And they turn around and go, can we go off ice cream? No. Duh. I think that's what Jesus was feeling at this point.

But again, they're confused. They don't understand what Jesus is doing. They don't see what... They don't understand the bigger picture.

Jesus is working with them to the point where they will. And this is very, very important for us to come to grips with. Is we have all different misconceptions about how God works in the world.

The question of leadership is very important. Because what it illustrates, what it exposes about the disciples is they still thought that God was going to create change in the world from the top down.

[38 : 56] He was going to come as a benevolent dictator and force the world to change and to conform to his will. But God knows that simply doesn't work.

It's not sustainable. You cannot force people to do things against their will. As a matter of fact, I heard a psychiatrist talking about the biggest challenge in his practice is if he makes a statement to a patient that is clearly for their best interest.

Even if they agree with it, they'll go the opposite direction. We have this perversity. It's probably part of sin that if someone tells us to do something, we do the opposite. And so Jesus is coming in with an entirely different paradigm.

The greatest will be the servant. Those who aspire to leadership have to serve. When I was a 21-year-old man, right after Kara and I got married, we met with the elders at our new church.

And they asked, these are men I knew pretty well. And they asked, you know, John, what's your vision for your life? What do you want to do? I said, well, I want to preach. You know, cocky 21-year-old kid. And they said, that's great.

[40 : 04] But the fact of the matter is we have guys that come in. I think I may have told you the story. We have guys who come in all the time who want to preach. But they're worthless for the church. They don't actually do anything. They're a one-trick pony and all they want to do is preach.

We're not interested in them. You want to preach? You need to serve this church. You need to love the people. You need to be in the trenches.

And if you'll do that, we'll let you have the pulpit. Because what they were teaching me was what Jesus was teaching the disciples. Is that when you connect with people, when you serve them, you develop relationships, you fall in love with them, and then your teaching has power and you have credibility.

And it works from the bottom up. And for me as a leader, it developed my character. That's what Jesus is saying to his disciples. It's bottom up. So again, he's flipping the paradigm.

It's upside down. And then John says, hey, there's these guys over here, and they're casting out demons without your permission. And I told him to stop. Because you know, it's just us.

[41 : 11] John had a very narrow understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. And Jesus says, no, leave them alone. Don't worry about it. Do not hinder that man, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in my name and be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

Again, it's a reversal of the paradigm. It's a reversal of the understanding of how God works. I would be very confident in saying that if we're honest, confusion with what God is doing is pretty much our normal state of being, if we're honest.

And I want to encourage you, as we wrap up this look at the disciples' confusion, that you don't hide from that confusion, that you don't deny it, but that instead you step into it, that you own it, that you share it with people that you trust, that you can struggle with together.

Because it's in that confusion, as we go to God with our confusion, with our misunderstandings, that I think the Lord says, now there's something I can work with.

But if we're avoiding him because we're afraid he'll condemn us because we're questioning, or we're ignoring our pain because good Christians don't quite, this is just my lot in life, we're blocking ourselves off from the very source of life himself.

[42 : 43] God is inviting you in prayer, through the word, through a community of people who love you and love God, to face the difficulties of life and to help other people understand them.

I'll tell you straight up, the two most effective ways to engage somebody in a conversation about the Lord is either to let them talk to you to share their griefs or to share yours.

We as Christians don't always have to be the answer people. But we need to step into our pain. So I want to wrap up this morning with a series of questions. And this is where I'm going to stop. These questions, by the way, we'll put them on.

If you go into the Church Center app or onto the website, click on sermons, you can see that when you click into this week's sermon, below it, there'll be a link to my notes.

So I want you to think about these questions. What if my best interests are actually nested within God's interests? You are God's garden.

[43 : 48] Ever think about that? It's John 15. You're God's garden. He's cultivating you in partnership with you as you cultivate your garden.

How cool is that? So number one, do you recognize that your best interests, probably don't know what those are.

That's part of the question for God, are nested in God's best interest, in God's interest. Number two, what if God really does love me to the degree that the Bible claims?

Because part of our confusion in the hurts of life is if God loved me, I wouldn't be going through this. Don't deny that you don't feel that.

It's okay. But you go through, let that feeling drive you to God, not from him. What if God really does love me to the degree the Bible claims he does?

[44 : 47] But what about my hurts? What about my disappointments? What about injustice to me or in the world? Why does this continue? What should be my response?

We've got to wrestle with God, brothers and sisters. Follow Jacob's example. Grab a hold of him. And don't let go. Until he tells you or shows you.

You'll never get the complete answer to this side of eternity. But I tell you from experience, you will step closer to him. You'll experience him more deeply. And you'll begin to see the knots of our lives unravel.

And clarity come. But we've got to wrestle with God. We've got to step into the confusion just like the disciples did. Because frankly, God's interests really don't make a whole lot of sense to us.

But he knows better. We have to trust that. Let's pray. Father, thank you that we can truly trust you. We can put our hands in, we can put our lives in your hands, knowing that you care for us, you love us, you know what's best.

[46 : 01] God, like the father of the epileptic man, I pray, cry out to you. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. And I pray for all of us that we would have that same mindset. Lord, help my unbelief.

Help me to trust you. God, make us a congregation that is praying together, that is loving each other well, that can be candid with each other about the challenges that we face in life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.