

I Have Some Questions...

Everything You Were Too Afraid to Ask God



Week 2 – ...about Faith

Check - In

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... last week, we talked about subjects you liked learning about. Well, this week, let's flip it. What was the hardest things you ever had to learn? Maybe it was a subject you just don't understand? Someone passionately describes a topic, and you go, "I just don't get it." (Could have been one of the topics someone said they loved learning last week!)

Opening Prayer

God of Creation, grant us patience when we don't see the big picture or understand the world the way you do.

Introduction

Sometimes, learning a difficult subject is like trying to understand the mind of God. Something happens, and you sit back and go, "God, I just don't get it." That's okay! Last week, we began with a story about

a man who brings his son to Jesus and says, “heal my son, *if you can.*” And when Jesus replies, “what do you mean, ‘if I can’?” the man responds, “I believe. Lord, help my unbelief.” It’s a great line! We feel that way a lot. “God, I believe you’re present. I believe you love me. I believe you want the best for me. But umm, I have some questions.” And what does Jesus do? Does he go, “sorry, bro... you know the motto: you doubt, you’re out”? No, he heals the boy anyway to remind us that it’s okay to doubt. It’s okay to have questions. It’s okay to say, “this experience doesn’t make sense.” Last week, the question was, “why do bad things happen?” This week, we’ll look at a similar but separate question, “God, what were you thinking with <fill in the blank>?” But first...

Review Question: Last week, we talked about why bad things happen; namely that a majority of the bad things are attributed to our human decisions, but that free will was essential to Creation. Another small portion, natural “evils” like floods and earthquakes and tornados, was attributed to just the way our big, beautiful, awful, awesome blue marble has to work for us to have a place to live. You’ve had a week to sit with that now... how do you feel about those answers? Do they make some things easier to understand? Do they still fall short? Discuss.

Scripture

Today’s question, “God, what were you thinking here?” really is a question about faith, trying to understand the mind of God. The author of the book of Hebrews spends an entire chapter on this very

topic, recounting the epic feats of the pillars of faith. But he starts out with a very simple, very poignant line about the definition of faith. Let's take a look...

Read Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1.

Then, beginning with creation itself and working through historic figures like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and Samuel, the author talks about the impact of faith and what it can accomplish. And whereas their achievements are epic, this very first verse gives us a definition of faith that allows us a little more grace than what these heroes seemed to display. We'll finish with that, but first...

Question 1: Consider this verse. What does it say to you about faith? Is it encouraging? Get out your Bible and skim through the list of Old Testament heroes the author recounts. Do these accomplishments make you feel better about your doubts? Or do you just feel worse, thinking you could never live up to that pedigree?

Reflection

Pastor Mike has been collecting your questions over the last three weeks to help guide the direction of this series. Many of those questions fell under last week's category, "why do bad things happen?" For this week, there seemed to be another set of questions that fall under the heading of, "God, what were you thinking here?" And not just about why He gave T-Rexes tiny, baby arms or why He would create a brain that could remember all the lyrics to "Ice, Ice,

Baby,” but not remember why you walked into a room. (Unless the answer was to “stop, collaborate, and listen,” it just ain’t coming.) Thank God you had way more complex questions than that, many of which we’ll cover this week.

To get at the first collection of questions for today, let’s back up a bit. If you noticed, we cut off a common ending to last week’s question. It’s usually asked, “why do bad things happen *to good people?*” We took the ending off intentionally because it changes the question and we needed to address the first part first. We needed to talk about why bad things happen at all. But now, when we add the ending, it gives us a different question. When you ask, “why do bad things happen *to good people?*” it turns into a question of justice or fairness. In our human understand of fairness, we assume that bad things should happen to bad people and good things should happen to good people. And many of you asked questions about why God doesn’t seem to operate that way, about the reasoning and decision making of God. “God, how do you decide what happens to what person? Why am I able to live such a blessed life after making so many mistakes and others lives are cut short?” So, first, we’ll attempt to understand the mind of God and look at a few possible responses.

Question 2: Philosophy time... What is your understanding of fairness? An eye-for-an-eye, Code of Hammurabi stuff? Do you deal with justice on a case-by-case basis? If you were tasked with setting up the justice system of the world, what would be your overarching theme? Ready, go.

I'm sure you have some great ideas, but the question remains: why doesn't God's idea of "fairness" seem to match our definition of fairness? If you're a bad person, you deserve bad things. If you're a good person, you deserve good things. Seems fair, right? But as we look around the world, bad people get good things and good people get bad things. It just doesn't match up. So, "God, what are you thinking here?" Well, the issue arises when we really start to break down our theory of "fairness." On the face of it, it's logical and reasonable, right? But this gets real slippery, real quick. First, on the extremes, it's pretty clear. Hitler, awful guy, deserved bad things. Mother Teresa, great lady, deserved all the good things. Easy. But what about all of us in the middle? The questions get real dicey. How good is good enough? What if you're just on the wrong side of the hump and giving your McDonald's Happy Meal to that one panhandler that one time would have tipped the scale? Also, who says what "good" is? Christians have been fighting over that for centuries. It varies from country to country, culture to culture, and church to church. Finally, who gets to be judge? Can we, as humans, truly know a person's heart well enough to know if they are good or bad? Only God can really do that.

So, what's the solution? The Bible has some insight. First, Jesus tells us that God **"gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."** (Matthew 5:45 NLT) *That's* the fairness of our God. We all get good things or bad things, good and bad people alike, and justice seems to have little to do with it. Maybe the justice comes later. The bottom line, we leave it in God's

hands. We can fight against obvious systems of injustice, but generally speaking, we let God judge a person's heart. Let God dole out the blessings and focus on our relationship with Him.

Question 3: How do you feel about this response? Again, it may not make you feel better, but does it at least provide a sense of understanding of why bad things still happen to good people? Does it seem lacking? What issues do you still have with it?

“Okay, bad things happen to everyone, I get that. But do those bad things always have a purpose?” one of you asked. That’s a good tangent to these questions of faith. Do the bad things that happen always have a purpose? We often try to answer that question with the cliché, “everything happens for a reason.” But if that were true and all bad things had a purpose, it would mean God would be doing them *to* you, that God is causing you intentional pain. And that’s not how our God operates. Our God does not give a person a disease, or send a tornado to destroy a house, or put you through suffering to teach a lesson or achieve a goal. Instead, the Bible reminds us, there may not be a “reason” beyond what we’ve discussed already, but if we let God, God can help us make something good *out of* the bad things. For example, was there a purpose for a child to die at the hands of a drunk driver? No, but it’s what led to the creation of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which has arguably saved thousands of lives through policy change and advocacy. So, was there a purpose for the bad thing that happened? No. There was a reason *why* it happened, bad human decisions like we talked about last week. But

did the child *have to* die, did God *cause* the child to die, so that MADD could exist? No. Instead, if we allow God, something good can come from the suffering. So, the less-than-satisfying answer is... no. The bad things don't always have a purpose. But beauty can come from the ashes.

Question 4: Discuss this response. What's your experience with "everything happens for a reason"? Is it a phrase you've said or believed? How does this response impact your thoughts about "bad things having a purpose"?

Closing

We said we'd come back to our verse from Hebrews. Let's close with that. So, we've been talking about faith as trying to understand the mind of God: if we only *understood* what God was thinking, if we only saw the *reason* for what God was doing, if only God would explain it to us, *then* we'd be set. But the author of Hebrews gives us a different definition. Faith isn't the *understanding* of what God is thinking. As we've discussed, that's impossible. Instead, the author says, faith is a conviction of that which we can't understand. He's saying that there will always be questions... but faith is hoping for them anyway. Faith isn't complete understanding. Faith is believing in God's provision, even when we don't know why God thinks the way He does. We may not be Noah or Sarah or Moses. But given this definition and a little grace in our lack of understanding the mind of God, we can still have their faith.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**