

Asking for a Friend | The Pain Questions

Aaron Brockett | John 16:33

How are you doing? Good to see all of you today. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors across all of our campuses. Wherever you may be tuning in from or joining us from, we're so glad to have you.

Our mission as a church is to remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus, and there's a reason why we phrase it that way because we believe that Jesus is the only one who can change anyone, so we want to get everyone to him as quickly as we can and let him do what only he can.

Once we get you to Jesus, we want to walk with you so that you can grow in him and then eventually you would come to see that church isn't just something that you go to or that you go to receive something from, but that you're actually a part of it. We want you to be on mission with us.

This is really the reason why we've launched campuses around our city and why we continue to help start churches around the world. Several years ago, we sent out a launch team of people to our North campus to get that started. Then we did it again downtown in August of 2017. We sent a launch team of people to start our West campus, and right now we're working on the securing of land and building a facility for our West campus that we're really excited about. I announced that a few weeks ago.

Today, I've got some more exciting news. Would you like to hear it? I was a little uncertain there. I could just preach.

We're really, really excited. We've been doing lots of praying and planning and discussing, and we are ready to announce where campus number five and six are going to go next. So, Lord willing, later this year, perhaps maybe the beginning of 2020—it just depends on how quickly God opens up some doors for us—we're going to be launching our Northeast campus in Fishers and we're going to be launching our Midtown campus in Broad Ripple. There's a map—super excited about that.

I just want to remind all of us why we do this. We launch campuses where we already have people attending. Maybe they're driving more than 20 minutes to a campus. What we're doing is we're trying to equip you to be on mission with us. We're not trying to grow the church; we're trying to equip you to serve and to invite your friends.

We've just seen that play out over and over again with each of these campuses, and so I just want to thank you as a church for being one of the most generous churches on the face of the

planet. Thank you for believing in this, praying for this, jumping in and serving. You know who you are.

If you are interested in any way in being part of the launch team for campus five or six, then I want to encourage you to go to tpcc.org/launchteam and you can get all the information there, but let's be praying about what God's going to do this next year.

Well, we are in week number two of this message series that we're calling *Asking for a Friend*. Really, kind of the big idea behind this is all of us have questions that we want to ask from time to time, but maybe we're afraid to for any number of reasons. Maybe it's on a subject matter that's a little bit tense or we don't want to seem foolish or we're afraid of what other people might think of us and so it's sort of said tongue in cheek, like, "I'm asking for a friend. This isn't for me; I just know someone who wants an answer to this question."

I've got a few of these questions in my life. Maybe you can help me out with this. I've always wondered when someone hands you a stick of gum and you didn't ask for it, are they just being nice or are they trying to say something? I'm just asking for a friend. Have any of you ever had that happen? I'm always confused by it.

I had that happen out in the lobby not long ago. I was talking to this lady. It was her first time to be with us, and she was probably a little bit closer than I'd like for her to be, but she was kind of telling me her story, and it was a great conversation. She leaves and walks away, then two minutes later comes back, hands me a stick of gum without saying anything, and then just walks away. I was like, "I'm so sorry that this smells like a sewer."

What about this one: What do people in China call their really nice dishes, like the ones that they pull out for special occasions? Do they call it china? Because that just kind of seems to be a little redundant. I don't know. Just asking for friend. Maybe you can help me out.

But the questions that you all ask are much better than that. I've been serving here for a little over 11 years and there's just a steady stream of questions that just come in all the time. We actually asked you several weeks ago to just send in some of the most common questions that you have about life and faith, and so we've looked at a lot of those, and what we're just trying to do in this series is just to address as many of these questions as we possibly can.

I just want to be very, very clear. It's not because we have all the answers. I don't have all the answers to all these questions, but I do believe that there is a God who does and I believe that God's Word guides us and leads us toward wisdom on many of these issues and that this is actually where we grow.

So as a church we're not afraid of any question. We may not always like or agree with some of the conclusions or the perspectives that we come to, but we can have the conversation and we can keep Jesus out front and we can chase after him together, and that's really the heart behind this series.

Last week, if you were here, our Downtown campus pastor, Ryan Bramlett, did a great job kind of kicking off this series by addressing some of the most common questions that we have about relationships.

Today, I want to address a set of questions that we get maybe more than anything else. This comes in probably near the top of the list, like the top three of questions that we get on a regular basis.

If I were to boil it down into maybe a single question, I would ask it this way: Why does God allow pain and suffering? Really, the spectrum on that is pretty wide. Some of us, we're just going through a hard time. Some of us right now there's a relationship that we're struggling with or we're emotional. Maybe some of us are going through a tragedy of some kind, maybe some kind of chronic pain, some sort of a loss, and so the spectrum is wide, so I would just put all kinds of pain and suffering into that category, the ones that we personally feel and the ones that we just see around the world.

And it doesn't surprise me that this question is asked so often. I've actually asked this question a lot. People have been grappling with this issue for centuries. In fact, theologian John Stott validates this truth when he said, "The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation."

I'm sure that you've seen those commercials advertising some sort of pharmaceutical drug and then, right towards the end, they list all the side effects really fast. Have you seen those? So there would be this drug that sounds like really amazing and then they get to the side effects and it goes something like this: This drug may cause joint pain, nausea, leg cramps, headache, or shortness of breath. You may also experience muscle aches, rapid heartbeat, impotence, and ringing in the ears.

If trips to the bathroom become greater than 12 per hour, consult your doctor. You may find yourself becoming lost or vague. It may cause stigmata in Ukrainians. It may induce a tendency to compulsively repeat the phrase "no can do". You may feel a powerful sense of impending doom. Do not take this product if you are uneasy with lockjaw.

This drug may shorten your intestines by 21 feet, has been known to cause birth defects in the user retroactively. Women experience a lowering of the voice, an increase in ankle hair, sensation of levitation or elusory as is the sensation of having a phantom third arm. Twenty minutes after taking the pills, you will feel an insatiable craving to take another dose. Avoid this with all of your power.

No thanks, right? I'm good with the little growth on my arm. It's all good. I don't think I want the side effects.

Have you ever felt like life should have a side effects label? Maybe there are some of you who decided to follow Jesus this past year, maybe even not that long ago, and you were sort of under the impression that once that happened life would get easier or better or that you would face less challenge or difficulty, but actually the opposite happened and there actually seems to be more pain and more heartache and more loss since you've been following after Jesus.

You begin to see that actually trusting him and following him isn't insurance against tragedy. The accidents still happen. The unwanted divorce still went through. The cancer still came back. The unemployment drags on. The friendship ended bitterly. The chronic pain returns—all these side effects to life.

Jesus actually addressed this in a passage that we've actually looked at quite a bit around here, John 16:33, where Jesus said in this world you're going to have some tough times. That may or may not be helpful to you. If you're anything like me, you may say, "Okay, thank you. Appreciate the heads up. But why? Because it seems to me, Jesus, that if anybody has the power to remove the tough times it's you, so why don't you?"

I think that all of us have asked or will ask or we are asking this question right now in multiple ways. Some of the greatest challenges to our faith will come in these questions. Many of you right now, this is the issue that keeps you from believing in God or trusting Jesus. You're like, "I'd follow after him, but I just can't reconcile the pain in my life and what I see around the world with a good God. He's not worth trusting."

Maybe some of you, this is what caused you to let go of your faith. Maybe there was a time when you were tracking with Christ and you did grow up in a Christian home and you basically just sort of absorbed through osmosis your parents' faith, but once you became a young adult, once you got out into the world, once they stopped sheltering you and you saw how things really were, you let go of faith in God.

We actually see that the topic of pain and suffering is laced all through the Bible. Author Tim Keller puts it this way. He says, "The book of Genesis begins with an account of how evil and death came into the world. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament is largely dedicated to the problem of suffering. The book of Psalms provides a prayer for every possible situation in life, and so it is striking how filled it is with the cries of pain, with blunt questions to God about the seeming randomness and injustice of suffering.

"The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are almost wholly dedicated to deep reflection on unjust suffering and on the frustrating pointlessness that characterizes so much of life. The prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk give searing expression to the human complaint that evil seems to rule history. New Testament books such as Hebrews and 1 Peter are almost entirely devoted to helping people face relentless sorrows and troubles, and towering over all, the central figure of the whole of Scripture, Jesus Christ, is described as a man of sorrows." And here it is. "The Bible, therefore, is about suffering as much as it is about anything."

I just want to acknowledge that it's one thing to have a conversation or to listen to a sermon based upon this subject that is just theoretical or even theological; it's another thing entirely when this conversation becomes personal.

There have been moments in my life when I thought I had some pretty good answers to the issue of pain and suffering until I went through it and then all of what I learned or thought to be true just sort of went out the window with the pain of my emotions.

See, when it's your health, when it's your marriage, when it's your kids, when it's your finances, there are no easy answers to this, and to pretend that there are doesn't help. In fact, to other people, it just feels insulting.

Pain and suffering just naturally raise all sorts of troubling questions about God. Here's a few common ones that I hear on a regular basis.

If God is all powerful, then why can't he do something about it? And if he can't do something about it, then should we conclude that he's really not all that powerful?

If God allows pain and suffering, does that mean that he's detached and indifferent and uninvolved in our world?

This one has come in a lot: If I'm going through something painful, did God cause it? Is he punishing me?

How about this one: Why not create a world where it isn't even possible? Like if I were God, that's what I would do.

So let's actually look at that question. Why didn't God create a world without pain and suffering? And the short answer is that he did. In Genesis chapter 1:31, it says when God looked out over all that he had made, "he saw that it was very good!" That means that there wasn't any pain. There wasn't any tragedy. There wasn't any suffering. There were no taxes or hangnails or Patriots fans. It was all perfect. It was complete. It was whole. This is like the one time you see God almost kind of bragging about himself. He's like: This is really, really good.

So if it was good in Genesis 1, then what happened? Well, if you keep reading, by the end of Genesis 3, you know what happened. I don't want to insensitively do this, but I want to throw some things on the table for us to just at least consider. If God didn't create the world with pain and suffering, where did it come from?

One thing that we have to acknowledge is that some of it is the result of my own sinful choices. I want you to hear me. I said some, not all, and I didn't say God's punishing you. Just sort of take God out of the equation for a minute. We all know this to be true. Many of us have made some decisions in our lives, maybe we did them intentionally, maybe they were just honest mistakes, but we dealt with the consequences of them that were painful.

So I know and I have to admit that if I neglect my marriage, if I stop working on it, then it shouldn't be a shocker if it falls apart. If I don't invest into my kids and spend quality time with them, then it shouldn't surprise me that if when they grow up and get out of my house that they don't want to have anything to do with me. If I drink too much, if I break some laws, if I mistreat some people, if I eat whatever I want, then that's going to cause some hurt in my life just as a natural consequence.

Another thing to consider is that some of it is the result of other people's sinful choices. Have any of you ever been hurt because of what someone else did? And you actually didn't have anything to do with it. You may not even know this other person. Maybe you were driving home from work one day totally minding your own business, you'd put in a hard day at work, and maybe a drunk driver hit you. You didn't have anything to do with that, but it was the result of their decisions and their choices.

Some of it is the result of spiritual attack. I don't want to over-spiritualize this, but I also don't want to underestimate it either. We have an enemy and his name is Satan and he is not all powerful, but this is his domain. His entire purpose is to kill and to steal and destroy. In other words, it is to cause pain, tragedy, and suffering.

I think there are a lot of things that Satan actually stirs up that God gets the blame for. There was this guy named Job in the Old Testament. Many of you may know his story where he suffers bankruptcy, physical affliction, the simultaneous death of all 10 of his children, and the loss of emotional support from his wife. It was a really bad day for him. You look at Job and you see that it wasn't the result of his choices. It wasn't the result of other people's choices. It was the result of spiritual attack.

So, some of it may be my choices. Some of it may be others. Some of it may be spiritual attack. I think most suffering is the result of the fact that we live in just a really, really broken world. In Romans 8:22, it describes the natural world in which we live as groaning as in the pains of childbirth. Genesis 3:18 says that after Adam and Eve sort of went their own way and made their own decision, that nature was corrupted and it threw everything out of sync.

What that means is that from that point forward there would be droughts, floods, wars, famines, tornadoes, and hurricanes. The air's polluted. The water's contaminated. The ground is poisoned. The weather is affected. Our bodies are vulnerable to germs, disease, and aging. Everything's groaning.

Dr. Ralph Gale put it this way. "The sounds of nature are in the minor key. Dogs bark. Wolves howl. Horses neigh. Even the wind rustling through the tops of the trees sounds like creation groaning."

A broken world means that rain falls on the just and the unjust, and that's a difficult pill for so many of us to swallow because we value fairness so much, and rightfully so. We all want some justice. We all want someone or something to blame.

We actually see this exact thing happening in Luke 13. Jesus is actually asked here about two current events that were splashed all over the news, that were stimulating all kinds of water cooler talk.

One was an act of political oppression in which the Roman soldiers slaughtered members of a religious minority out in the open. The other, on down in verse 4 of Luke 13, was a construction accident that killed 18 people, and there are some people who want to know why.

They come to Jesus and it says, "About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple." Here's the question. Jesus, "Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?"

Do you hear what they're asking? Jesus, did that happen to them because they're just really bad sinners, because they're really bad people? Is God punishing them? Did they get what was coming to them?

Jesus answers it by asking a question of his own. He says, "Is that why they suffered?" And then he says this emphatically. "Not at all!"

Now Jesus may not have fully answered the question that was on their minds, the question of a cause. He never says: Hey, this is why these two tragedies occurred—at least not here, but he does make one thing crystal clear. They did not occur as a result of anything that those people had specifically done wrong. It's a result of them living in a broken world.

One of the things that God has built into this world that actually makes any of this possible is the freedom for you and me to choose and to make our own decisions. The technical term for that is freewill.

We might say, "Well, why did God even create this as a possibility? Why give us freewill?" I think that maybe the best answer to that question is that real love and lasting love, it's a requirement for it. You can't really have real love if you don't have the freedom to choose.

One of the things that makes my relationship with my wife, Lindsay, so meaningful is the fact that she chose me 20 years ago. I had to do some heavy, heavy convincing. I had to pursue her and chase her. She hit her head one day and I talked her into it. But I didn't tell her to marry me. I didn't command her to marry me. That'd be ridiculous. She chose this—pray for her—and she continues to, even on my worst days when I don't deserve it. That's actually where I know real love exists.

God didn't want a bunch of robots. God didn't want a bunch of people who couldn't choose him. God will give you the freedom to walk away from him because actually the decision to follow him is only where real love can exist. Yet, with that freedom to choose comes the possibility of suffering, comes the possibility of heartache and letdown.

Maybe you wonder this question. This question came in, and I think it's a good one. "If God is all-knowing, then didn't he see what would happen once he created the world? Didn't God know that Adam and Eve would sin and it would result in all this pain and suffering? So if he knew, then why did he create the world anyway? That just seems so cruel to me."

For me to stand up here and presume to know the answer to that question would be arrogant because the only one who can know that is God. We can't pretend to answer that for him, but yet, if I could take a crack at it today, why did God go ahead and go through with it? I don't know, maybe for the same reason that many of us went ahead and had kids.

We've been around kids before. We know what could happen. We know the pain and the suffering that they might be subjected to. There's no guarantee that your kids are going to grow up and love you. I've known parents who have done the best job ever and their kids still grew up and rebelled from them and caused them tremendous amounts of pain.

When Lindsay first told me that we were pregnant with our first child, I was so conflicted. I was excited and at the same time I was scared to death. Part of it was, "How am I going to be as a dad?" But the other thing was that I know this is a really dark world and what am I bringing kids into this world for?

I just sort of forecasted it out into the future, the scraped knees and the broken hearts and the potential for disease and the potential for hurt. "Man, why are we doing this?" Yet, I would say that there's risk there, but it's been so worth it because there's also been the tremendous potential for joy and the tremendous potential for laughter and love and connection. And so I wonder why did God go through with it? I don't know. I'm thinking it's probably for some similar reasons.

Pain and tragedy and suffering may be the number one reason why people walk away from God, and yet I've seen it over and over again—it's oftentimes one of the top reasons why people come to him and what keeps us dependent upon him.

The fact is it's actually through the stories of tremendous pain and suffering that some of the most beautiful stories come from that move us so deeply. Maybe one of the most recent ones that affected so many of us here in Central Indiana is Tyler Trent, the young man who bravely faced his battle with cancer and inspired thousands and thousands of people, not just here in Central Indiana but all around the world.

Several months ago, Lindsay and I had the privilege of having Tyler's father, Tony, in our home. He just sat with us at our kitchen table and he just shared with us what it was like. I just had no

words for him. He wept as he shared with us how he didn't want his son to die and how it was hurting their family and all the pain and all the confusion and yet he still turned a corner and he smiled at us and he said, "But yet I see God's hand all over this, and I see how Tyler's inspired so many people that maybe he wouldn't have inspired otherwise. I wish that this wasn't happening, and yet I can see God's hand holding us up through it."

Tyler knew this. It's what would inspire him to say things like this on Twitter. "Sometimes the hardest days are the most important days." —a December 20 tweet on Trent's @theTylerTrent account.

He would say this another time. "I feel like I'm getting to view my legacy come to life. I'm incredibly thankful that I'm getting to see the impact tissue donation is having. Most people don't live long enough to see their impact but I'm getting blessed with that." —Trent in a text message to IndyStar on December 11 regarding his donation of his tumor to Riley Hospital for Children at IU Health

He would say this. "Whatever happens because of this, it's going to come out for good, whether I see that now or not." —Trent speaking to Purdue Exponent after he found out in early 2018 that his cancer had returned.

We see with this young man that there was beauty in the ashes.

I have to admit that I feel out of my league talking about this issue because I'm a lightweight when it comes to pain and suffering. One of the burdens, the weights that I carry being your pastor is that I get a front-row seat to what I know many of you are going through.

I was thinking about this this last week. Just in our church alone, the circumstances that I'm aware of, and I know there are many more, I could rattle off at least a dozen, if not more, things that people are walking through right now that I don't know if I could.

I don't know if I would have the faith for it. I don't know that I would have the face for it. I don't know that I could be able to walk through it with as much poise and conviction and courage as what some of you are.

I was trying to think of what was a circumstance in life or something that we walked through that was scary or hurtful or painful, and God just brought to my mind something that happened 12 or 13 years ago.

Our daughter, Campbell—she's 14 now, but when she was just a toddler she knew a few words but she couldn't yet fully communicate with you and she was just barely taking a few steps. I came home from work on a Monday night and I walked into the kitchen. Lindsay was making dinner and I gave all three of them—we had only two kids at the time—I gave them a big hug and a kiss and I went into the other room to drop my stuff off. That's when I heard a scream come from the kitchen where I had just been.

I ran back in there and I see that Lindsay had been preheating the oven and the door to the oven got opened. I think it was possibly my son who just accidentally opened it and Lindsay didn't know it. Campbell was crawling and she crawled up to the open preheated oven door and she propped her arm up on the inside of it to get herself up and she burned herself from her wrist to her elbow.

Immediately we could see that it was really, really bad. She wasn't crying because I think she was just sort of in shock and Lindsay and I were in shock. We scooped her up and I immediately rushed her to the emergency room and we had to wait.

Waiting in that emergency room was excruciating both for her and for me because it began to blister up and the pain receptors began to kick in and she began to cry and wail. I'm sitting there as her dad trying to hold her and trying to comfort her and it was so painful because she couldn't understand me.

I was trying to explain to her what happened and I was trying to explain to her where we were and that the pain would go away soon and this is what we're going to do to make the pain go away, but she didn't understand me.

If I could've taken the pain from her right then I would have. I mean, sign me up. There was even one moment where she started to fight me, like she didn't want me to hold her. She actually looked at me as if I were the one causing her the pain. It was as if God just kind of sent this to me like: Hey, Aaron, that's sort of like what I feel like with you sometimes.

Like right now we're in the emergency room, right now God is holding us. He's trying to explain from his Word: Hey, this is what happened and this is what we're going to do and the pain's going to go away. Just trust me in this. Yet we don't fully understand him. There are even some moments when we begin to fight him and we begin to look at him as if he's the one causing the pain.

So what are some of the things that maybe God would want you to know even in the midst of some of your pain and confusion? I think that God would want you to simply know that **you are not alone**. There's power in those words when we know that someone else has actually been where we are currently.

This last week I had two friends text me and say, "Hey, can you clear your schedule and just meet me for coffee? I really need a friend," and then they added this. "And I don't need you to fix it." Because they know I'm a fixer. They know I'm tempted to do that. They're just, "I just need you to come and don't have all the answers, don't come with your pastor hat on. Just be my friend and listen to me and just sit with me in this."

I want you to know that you are not alone.

Another thing God would want you to know is **I know how you feel**. There's something that strengthens us when we talk to somebody who has been through what we are going through. That's one of the primary differences between the Christian faith and every other belief system. There is no other belief system that teaches that its deity came to us clothed in human flesh, except for the Christian God.

Hebrews said that we have a high priest who can—I love this word—sympathize with us because he's been tempted in every way that we are and he's been through everything that we've been through. Jesus knows what it's like to be lonely, depressed, tempted, angry, annoyed, irritated, and isolated, and betrayed. He knows what it's like to lose a friend. Therefore, we can approach his throne with confidence.

The ultimate response to pain and suffering is not an explanation; it's the incarnation—that Jesus would come to be with us. God is not distant.

Another thing that I think God would want us to know is that **pain often has a purpose**. All pain is painful, but not all pain has a purpose. I think that when we understand the purpose behind our pain, it makes it more tolerable.

Many of us will subject ourselves to pain. We'll go to the gym. We'll actually show some restraint. We'll actually make a tough decision. It's painful, but we know the purpose behind it; therefore, it makes the endurance of the pain easier because we can tell what it's getting us.

From what I've been told, the two most painful things that a human being can experience are passing a kidney stone and giving birth to a child. Neither one have I ever experienced. Hope to never experience one of them. Hope to never experience either of them, but if I experience one, that would be weird.

Yet I've talked to people who've experienced both. They talk about those things very, very differently. Nobody's showing me pictures of their kidney stones. Nobody's saying, "Maybe we'll have another one day," but people say that all the time about kids. Why? Because there's purpose behind the pain.

2 Corinthians chapter 7 tells us this. It says, "For the kind of sorrow" (now this is alarming) "God wants us to experience." What? God wants me to experience sorrow? Yeah. The kind that leads me away from sin, the kind that results in my salvation. There's no regret for that kind of pain.

I look at my own life and there have been moments where I needed to grow in a certain area of my life and that growth almost exclusively came through the pathway of pain. The times when it wasn't painful, it's a gift; I'm thankful for it. But the times when I really grew, the times when my character really deepened, I can look back and I can see that was a painful path.

I want you to write this down or remember this: Sometimes God will calm the storm. Other times God sees the raging storm as an opportunity to calm you.

Almost every time my kneejerk reaction when I'm in the middle of a storm is "God, calm it! God, remove me from it! God, take it away from me!" because in my perspective that seems like the most loving thing to do, but from God's perspective, he might say: Well, let me let the storm rage so that I can calm you, so that I can do some things in you.

See, when pain and suffering come in, we discover that we are not in control of our lives and we never were. God *never causes* the pain, but there may be moments when he will allow it for a time to teach just like as a father, as a parent, I won't just swoop in and bail my kids out every time, because if I did they would grow up with a very, very flimsy character. They're not going to be very fun adults to be around. But if I sit back and let them go through some painful things, then it forges their character. But I'm right there.

And I don't know, maybe God allows the cancer to teach us to develop and to value some relationships. Maybe God allows the difficult boss for a time to teach us self-control. Maybe he allows the unemployment to teach us faith. And it seems so long when we're going through it, but then once we land another job, we look back and it doesn't seem like it was all that long at all.

Maybe God allows the frustrating experience to teach us obedience without success. Maybe he allows the colicky baby to teach us patience. Sorry, too close to home. Maybe God allows the embarrassing moment to teach us some humility.

God doesn't cause all things, and it may sound like a cliché to you because you've heard it so often, but it's true: He does cause all things to work together for our good and we come out of it on the other side looking a little bit more like Jesus.

Listen to me. God never wastes a hurt. Some of you are in the furnace right now and I just want you to know his eye is on the timer and his hand is on the thermostat. He knows what he's doing.

Another thing I think that God would want you to know is: **Hang on and don't let go.**

Don't let go. You know, we can endure more pain than we thought possible when we know just what's up ahead, and something to look forward to makes all the difference.

2 Corinthians 4:17 says, "For our present troubles are small" which some of us might push back on "and won't last very long," which some of us might push back on. But yet the author's looking at this from the span of eternity. Then he says this. "Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"

In other words, if there was a string that went from me on this stage all the way to the back corner of this room, then our life on this planet is just a speck right up here. God sees it from the spectrum of eternity and he says: Yeah, from your perspective it seems like a long time.

Some of you have been dealing with chronic pain since the day you were born and you've said, "You know what? God's never going to take this away from me," but in perspective of eternity, eternity far outweighs the decades that you'll spend on this planet.

God promises us through John in Revelation 21 that one day it will come to an end. I love how John describes heaven because he doesn't just tell us what will be there, he tells us what won't be there.

John says, "I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!'"

He's saying there will be no more death and no more crying and no more pain and no more anxiety and depression. No more abuse. No more cancer. No more car accidents. No more suicide. No more starving stomachs. No more anxious waiting rooms. No more empty tissue boxes. No more tables for one. No more tear-stained divorce papers. No more motionless ultrasounds. No more small caskets. Can you just imagine!

And if you can't bring yourself to join in on the clapping, I understand because some of you are maybe sitting there going, "Okay, I hear all of that. Why not now? Why not now? There are children dying every day. There's tragedy happening every day. It seems to me like God's being pretty callous. Why wouldn't he just intervene now and stop all this nonsense?"

Once again, to presume to answer that question would be arrogant of me, but I wonder if it's because God is waiting. Actually, Scripture affirms this in 2 Peter 3:9. It says, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think." Maybe those some people would be some of us today. "No, he is being patient for your sake." Here's why. "He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."

Here's what I think Peter's saying. He's saying God's holding back the curtain of history as long as he can. He's waiting for as many people as possible to respond. And I wonder if maybe that person might be you. You may be here and you may say, "I'm undecided about God." That's fine. Thanks for being honest. He is not undecided about you.

Do you want to know if God cares? You look to the cross of Jesus Christ. He didn't just tell us. He didn't just send another message on two stone tablets. He showed us. He wrapped himself in human flesh and said: I'll show you how much I care. I'll absorb all the pain and all the suffering for all of eternity and put them onto the shoulders of my son, Jesus.

And I know it's hard and I know it's painful. Here's the thing. You will go through pain and suffering with or without God, but with God he offers an explanation. You may not like the explanation. You may not fully understand the explanation just yet, but he offers one.

And he gives you a promise—an explanation and a promise. He says, "Listen. I'm going to do something about it. The battle's already won. I'm keeping track of your tears. I'm actually putting them in a bottle," Revelation says, and he'll actually go through them painstakingly one by one to reconcile each.

Your pain is not without a purpose. God says: Would you just let me carry it? That's why Jesus would say, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light," because he says: Let me carry some of that.

Maybe today at all of our campuses right where you're sitting, someone might choose to put their trust in Jesus. Maybe you would look back and part of your testimony would be "because I was going through pain and suffering and I chose to give it all to Christ and to allow him to do what only he can."

So I would just simply ask that you would spend a few moments with him. What do you need to do with him? Maybe some of you need to trust him for the first time. Maybe some of you need to come back to him again and give to him what you could never shoulder on your own.

Father, we come to you right now, and I just feel like I'm walking through a minefield. Not just with this message, but in the future messages in this series because I know that there are some heavy questions and I know that people are hurting right now.

There may be somebody sitting here going, "Hey, Aaron, nice try, but I'm going to call it. I just think this is a bunch of hogwash." You know what? I'm glad they're here and I'm glad they feel free to be honest. That's why I pray that your Spirit would lay heavy on them and not let them go because you love them. They may be indifferent toward you, but you're not indifferent toward them. They may be undecided about you, but you're not undecided about them. They may be angry with you, but you love them.

So, Father, I pray that you would do a transformational work in each of our lives and in the life of our church through a difficult subject. We ask this in Jesus' name, and the church together says: Amen.