

Asking for a Friend | The Rest of the Questions

Aaron Brockett | 2 Timothy 3:16-17

How are you doing today? You good? Good to see you. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors across all of our campuses, wherever you may be 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 the reason why we say it that way is because we believe that Jesus is the only one who can change anyone; therefore, we want to get everyone to him.

The reason why we're passionate about that is because of Mark, chapter 2 where these four ordinary guys—we don't even know their names—they're trying to get their friend to Jesus. Their friend is paralyzed. Jesus is teaching in a house in Capernaum. It's packed. The doorways are jammed. So they show up. They can't get their friend to Jesus and so they do the only rational thing you would do—go through the roof.

I love that! They just tear a hole in the roof of this house that they did not own. I want to have that same kind of passion. I want to be able to get people to Jesus because I know the power that that moment can have.

Once we get you to Jesus, then we want to show you the pathway, give you some tools, and help cheer you on in your personal and spiritual growth. As your pastor, as a church we cannot do growth for you. We can show you the way and we can give you some tools and we can cheer you on.

The first place I'd just love for you to begin is *Growth Track*, and that's why we talk so much about it. That's why we keep pointing you there. It's an imperfect tool, but it's a tool to try to help you in your next step toward personal growth.

My desire for you is that you would eventually come to see the church not as just something you watch on a screen or some place that you attend occasionally when you can make it or a time when you just kind of sit back and take it all in, but that you would eventually come to see yourself as a part of this, that you would get on mission with Jesus and you would discover what it is that he has called you to uniquely do. I'm telling you that your church experience will just get a whole bunch better when you jump in and begin to serve.

I was at the Downtown campus last Sunday night working the lobby. I took our guest speaker, Caleb Kaltenbach, which; by the way, did you enjoy Caleb last week? Didn't Caleb do great? That guy is so much fun to hang out with. He's a trip.

But we went down to the Downtown campus. We were just kind of in the lobby working the lobby before and after services, and I had so many people come up to me and say, “Hey, I just finished *Growth Track* and today is my first day to serve,” and it was so cool to see that. I want that for you too.

Today I’m excited to give you some really good news. A few weeks ago, I told you we’re starting campus numbers five and six in Broad Ripple and in Fishers. Today I want to tell you who our Midtown campus pastor is going to be.

The campus pastor role is really, really crucial. In fact, whenever we start a campus we have to have the right campus pastor and we have to have a location or it’s a no-go. Our campus pastors, they have to have the character and the competency and the calling—they’ve got to have the Traders Point DNA, which is humble, hungry, healthy, and this individual has it.

I’m really excited to announce to you that our Midtown campus pastor is our very own Kyle Riley. Give it up for Kyle. We got a picture of him and his family, Kyle and his lovely wife, Brie, and their daughters, Kendall and Korinne.

For those of you who know Kyle, and those of you who don’t, he is our Group Minister at our Downtown campus, and he is just the epitome of a humble leader. If you were just to Google humble leader, that picture right there would come up.

What I love about him is that he was involved in ministry long before he ever got a paycheck for it. He was just developing group leaders, coaching people. He’s got so much talent and yet he’s so humble.

I’m thrilled for Kyle. I consider him to be a good friend. Two weeks ago, I preached the most challenging message of my life. Kyle was one of the first ones to reach out to me that morning and just say, “Hey, bro, I’ve got your back. I’m praying for you. I’m with you.”

I just love his heart and I trust his leadership so much that I want to go to the Midtown campus. I just want to follow him there. So if you are interested in being part of the launch team of our Midtown campus, go to tpcc.org/launchteam and we would love to get you connected to Kyle and to that team.

Today we are wrapping up this series of messages we’ve been in called *Asking for a Friend*, so if you’re just now joining us, basically what we’ve been doing over the last several weeks—a little bit of a different series—I’ve just been addressing some of the most common questions that I hear from you all on a regular basis.

I’ve said this before. I want to say it again. It’s not because we believe we have all the answers because we don’t—and I know that I don’t—but we put our trust in somebody who does and that somebody has a name. His name is Jesus.

We also believe that there are no questions that are out of bounds, that personal and spiritual transformation happens best when we can have honest conversations with a teachable spirit around really, really good questions and so that's what we've been attempting to do.

This may be the conclusion of the series, but I sure hope it's not the end of the conversation. I've entitled today's talk **The Rest of the Questions**, and really what I want to do is I've got way more questions than I have time for, but I want to try to get through as many of them as I can.

This is a little bit of a different format today. It's not necessarily like a typical message. I'm just going to plow through questions. These are questions that have come in. These are some of the most common ones that I've seen.

What I want to do, I want to frame up your expectations here because some of you, I know you. You'll get to the end of this and go, "You didn't satisfy me." I'm not trying to. I'm not trying to resolve these questions. That would be arrogant. I'm trying to respond to them.

I do want to offer some response, get you thinking. You don't have to agree with me on everything. It might even cause more questions, but hopefully you'll have a good conversation with maybe your group this week or maybe around the dinner table with your family or with friends when you get together.

I want to offer a response and I want to offer a couple of resources. I realize that for some of these questions I could spend a whole sermon series on them, so I hope you'll be patient with me. Let's just start plowing through these, see how many of these we can get through.

Here's the first question. This is how it came in:

How do you know when God is speaking to you? It is so hard for me to hear the Lord speaking in my life. What are some ways I can listen to him?

I love that question. It's a really great question. It's a vital question because we've all seen examples either in our own time period or throughout history when people have done some crazy and destructive things in the name of "God told me to".

That's how cults and wars get started, so I think all of us need to be really super humble whenever we say it. We've got to hold onto this loosely when we say, "Well, God told me to." And how do you know? How do you know God's speaking to you and it's not maybe your subjective emotions or maybe the bad burrito you had last night? How do you know?

Well, Jesus was one time asked a very similar question in John chapter 14. "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'" Do you hear what Philip is saying here? Philip's saying: Jesus, we want to hear straight from the horse's mouth. We want to know who God is and we want to know what he would say, and if you would just show him to us, then we would know.

I love Jesus' response. He replied in verse 9, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am?" And then he says these powerful words. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!"

In other words, Jesus is saying: I am fully God. He was fully human but he was also fully God. He says: If you want to know what God is like, then look at me. If you want to know what God would say, then listen to me. If you want to know, most importantly, how God feels about people, look at how Jesus interacted with people and then you'll begin to know.

So there are a lot of ways I could respond to this. I could talk about how God speaks to us through his Spirit and he does, and how God speaks to us through his Word and he certainly does. God speaks and even affirms some things through other people, other godly people who love Jesus and they love you and they've got good character. So many times, God has used somebody else to say something to me that I really, really needed to hear.

But I would say more than anything, get to know Jesus. In the four biographies of his life, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the one that I would point you to is the Gospel of John, especially if you're new to this. Just start reading through the Gospel of John because John does the best job of just telling us who Jesus is and revealing his heart.

A few years ago, I did a message series through the Gospel of John. I just plowed right through it verse by verse, and so you could actually use that as supplemental to your gospel reading of John and that'll help you in understanding some of the passages. Maybe get a good Bible commentary, but just read through that.

Here's why. God will never say anything to you that doesn't sound like Jesus. So if you want to know what that would be, then spend lots and lots of time with Jesus. Get to know his words.

A great resource for you would be *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. This is a great little book. Put it on your reading list. If you've never read *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, then you owe it to yourself to do so at least once in your lifetime. That book is on my desk and I pick it up often.

Here's the next question. It's very similar:

How do I go deeper in my relationship with Jesus?

Maybe many of you have asked that. Like you've come to know Christ; you've been attending church; I'm assuming that you've made a decision to follow him as Savior and Lord and so you're kind of like, "Well, I've kind of waded into the pool and now I'm ready to go to the deep end so how do I get deep?"

I want, first of all, to just affirm your desire. Way to go! Like you desire to get deeper and to grow in that relationship, however, I would say that whenever Jesus addressed this whole

concept, Jesus didn't necessarily use the word deeper. Jesus actually used a different word that I think captures it in a more healthy way.

Jesus, instead of us going deeper, would talk about us producing fruit. I'm not talking about apples and oranges; I'm talking about the fruit of the Spirit. There's a whole list of them found in Galatians 5: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—these things are of the Spirit of God.

Jesus would say in John 15:5, "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches." Here it is. "Those who remain in me," (those who stay connected to me) "...will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

So I think a better question than "how do I get deeper" is "am I producing fruit by staying connected to Jesus"?

Now here's why this is so critical. Some of you maybe can relate to my story. I grew up in church, like from the time that I was an infant, which has positives and negatives.

Part of the negative was that I just sort of went through the motions. I was pretty lukewarm until I was about 18 or 19 years old when God really got a hold of me. I was in Sunday school all the time. I was in church camp. I was in all kinds of discipleship groups.

Then, once God got a hold of me, I took it to a whole other level. I remember my Christmas list my freshman year of college was just all theology books. My parents thought I had a serious problem. Maybe I did.

I just got all these books and I just loved to read and I was growing in my head knowledge of God, but my head knowledge of God was outpacing my love of God and my love for people who were far from God. The description of that is called self-righteousness and it's the one thing that Jesus couldn't stand.

In fact, Jesus addressed this in John 5:39. He says to a group of religious leaders, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life." In other words, he's like: You know the Scriptures so well, but you've completely missed me. You've missed my heart.

One time, a Pharisee asked Jesus—they were trying to trap him—he said: Hey, Jesus, tell us what is the most important command. Now, there were 613 of them and they wanted Jesus to boil it down to one. Jesus gave them two.

Jesus replied in Matthew 22. He says, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important:" He puts it on the same playing field. He says, "Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

In other words, Jesus says the entire law can be summed up—not only that—the entire law hangs on these two commands: Love God and love others. So simply put, if you want to grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus then get on mission with Jesus. And Jesus' mission was always people who were far from God. You're as deep as the applications you apply to your life.

Now don't get me wrong. Jump into Bible studies, read the books, get the podcasts, go on the mission trips—all of that stuff. It's incredible. Yet, you can do all of that—and I speak from firsthand experience—you can do all of that and if you never apply what you've learned or you never let those things translate into love for people who are far from God, then you can know everything there is to know about the Bible and Jesus will still call you shallow. Your personal growth should always be for the sake of others and for the cause of Christ.

Here's the next question:

What makes cuss words so bad? Is there a list somewhere?

You're trying to get me to cuss in a sermon, aren't you? I know what you're doing. Hey, that's a really great question. Now the Bible's very clear with don't use God's name in vain; it's like a misappropriate use of the name of God because his name is holy.

But a lot of our four-letter words that we consider to be curse words are really kind of culturally informed. There's not a list in the Bible that says you shouldn't say these four-letter words. And, if you look at our culture today, there are some words—such as in Australia—considered to be cusswords that we don't necessarily think to be cusswords and kind of vice versa. So a lot of our language is culturally informed and we have to take that into consideration.

So the short answer to this... I get this all the time, especially when I'm on an airplane. I'm striking up a conversation with somebody next to me and they don't know who I am or what I do all kinds of colorful language is being thrown.

And then they say, "So what do you do?" I tell them; and they turn like three different shades of white and then they magically clean up their language. I'm just telling you, it is a good time. Just try it sometime. If you're bored on a flight and they say, "What do you do?" just tell them you're a pastor and just watch. It's awesome.

Now the short answer to this is that it's not the words, and what I mean by that is it's not like certain words are kryptonite to God, like if you say them then his ears melt off. That's not what we're talking about. It's the condition of our hearts. That's the big deal.

In fact, Paul used some pretty spicy language one time in Philippians 3:8. Let me give you an example of this. Paul writes, "Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as..." Here it is. "...**garbage**, so that I could gain Christ..."

You're like, "Well, that's not so bad." Well, we've cleaned it up. That word garbage there is translated in the Greek as skubala, which is a really fun word to say so at all of our campuses let's just say skubala out loud. Skubala! Now you just cussed in church.

Actually, you didn't. You said the word, but you didn't know the meaning of it. Skubala in Greek was the most extreme word, like their strongest word, for excrement; possibly the equivalent of our four-letter word for it. It's the only time that this word is ever used in the New Testament, which tells me Paul was pretty fired up. Paul let his emotions get the best of him. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that it was necessary.

Jesus would say this: Listen, what you say flows from what is in your heart.

Jesus' half-brother, James, in chapter 3, verse 7 says, "People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison."

He says on down in verse 11, "Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring."

The primary issue here isn't about trying to keep a tight rein on your tongue; it's about giving your heart to God and saying, "If I could get it out of my heart, it'll stay out of my mouth."

And that whole deal of like just paying attention to not only what you say but how it impacts the people around you is so important. You know, sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? That is just a bunch of skubala. It just doesn't work. You know it.

I preached a series earlier, last year, called *Slip of the Tongue*, and if you want to kind of dive more into that go back and re-watch that series and hopefully that'll help you in some of this.

Next question:

Is it okay to drink alcohol and do legal drugs?

Are we in Colorado? My son and I just got back from there a few weeks ago on a ski trip. We didn't even have to. It was just there.

Now here's the deal. This fits into the category of a whole bunch of areas in our lives as Christ followers where we are basically asking this question—you can apply this to a lot of different things: Are we allowed to...? Here's maybe another way that you might ask it. Is it okay to...?

Whenever you and I ask those questions, what are we doing? We're asking, "Where's the line so I can go right up to it?" and that's not always wise. I would say that this fits into that category.

Now for starters—for those of you especially who grew up in maybe an extremely legalistic environment where all you heard was moralism—let me just say this: You have more freedom in Christ than what you probably realize.

Galatians chapter 5 and Romans chapter 8 talk a lot about that. However, they also warn us not to use our freedoms as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love to serve one another.

So short answer: The Bible never prohibits alcohol, but it does ask us to be thoughtful. In Ephesians 5:15-18, it says, "So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit..."

It says don't get drunk. Well why? Because all kinds of bad things happen: You lose your memory. You break the law. You hurt people. You yourself get hurt. You can't make wise decisions when you're in that state of mind, so instead of asking is it okay, a better question that we need to start asking is: Is it wise?

Maybe you would even say, "I've got freedom in Christ to do this," but you know what? It isn't wise, maybe for all kinds of reasons: Maybe because I have a genetic disposition for addiction. Maybe because, if I'm being really honest with myself, I'm actually using this to try to medicate my anxiety. Maybe I've become too dependent upon it. Maybe I just need to say, "You know what? No substance is going to control me. I'm going to refrain from it."

In 1 Corinthians 8:13, Paul talks about how we need to be mindful of others. The issue for them wasn't alcohol, but it was the eating of meat, and he says, "So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live..." even though he had the freedom to "...for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble." We should take that same principle and apply it to this area of our lives as well.

Here's another question:

Should we celebrate or participate in pagan holidays?

I always get this question, oftentimes around Halloween. I don't necessarily hide that we take our kids out trick-or-treating. We get to meet our neighbors. And I always, always, always have somebody message me or email me and say, "How could you as a pastor celebrate Halloween?" And I would just say I'm not celebrating it.

The larger question is how we should, as Christ followers, interact with the culture in which we live. John chapter 15 says that we should be in the world but not of it. We don't retreat from the world. We don't run back to our holy huddles. We don't hide in the storm shelters. We are in and among the world just like Jesus came to be in and among us.

Matthew chapter 5 says that we should be salt and light. Salt doesn't do any good if it stays in the salt shaker. Light doesn't do any good if it stays behind the door.

Jude chapter 1 says to us that we should snatch others from the fire, and I love that passage because it, to me, describes somebody who's on mission with Jesus trying to depopulate hell, and you cannot snatch others from the fire if you've kept your distance.

In fact, on my gravestone one day, I just want it to say: Aaron Brockett. He smelled like smoke. Not the cigarette kind; the fire kind. Just like I was so close to the flames, right there just trying to rescue people, trying to depopulate hell.

Now, with all that said, there is a difference between celebrating something and participating in it, and you can participate without glorifying anything that's demonic. I would say there are three words that we have to remember:

Reject
Redeem
Restore

We can either reject the things in culture, we can redeem them, or we can restore them.

So to answer it frankly, it's a matter of conscience. Some of you would say this violates my conscience. Then by all means don't participate in it at all. Maybe you've got your reasons for that and your story behind it. It's also not a legalistic thing where we look down at others who do.

Here's where I land on it, and this is how it resolved itself for me. I just simply asked myself years ago where would Jesus be on Halloween night? Something tells me that Jesus wouldn't be inside with his lights off playing Bible Pictionary and watching Veggie Tales. Nothing wrong with that, it's just that something tells me...

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No, something tells me that Jesus would go: You mean to tell me that all my neighbors have come outside and they're going door to door? I'm going out to meet them and I'm going to actually rub shoulders with them.

Here's the next question:

What makes premarital sex and porn so bad?

You know, this question is like in the top three. This gets asked over and over and over again, even more so in the last couple weeks—a lot from young single people, like teenagers and young adults. And I'm so glad that they felt courageous enough to reach out to me as their pastor to ask me this question.

Listen, it is so important as Christ followers that we give a good answer to this question because, largely, the culture has moved on. What I mean by that is that for us to suggest that you should save sex for marriage, the culture largely hears that as old-fashioned and unrealistic. Like there's no way. There's no way that we could do that maybe for all kinds of reasons.

And I would even say that that is the mindset of even many Christ followers within the Church. Maybe you grew up hearing that sex should be saved for marriage and maybe you asked your mom and dad or you asked your Sunday school teacher or you asked that person you respected. And you said, "Well, okay I hear you. Why?" and you were never really given a good answer.

It's just like, "Well, because. Just because God wants you to and the Bible says so." And it's just like, "Okay, I hear you. I think I can even understand that. But it's not really a good enough answer to convince me," because sexual pleasure is so intense that it will always override any sort of conviction on it that we might have, especially if we don't have a good answer to the question.

Not to mention our culture today has largely—and we just see it more and more and more—disconnected what we do with our physical bodies from our souls and the essence of who we are. They just see it as another biological desire that, since it's a natural biological desire, then we should fulfill it. We have every right to fulfill it and to not do so would be cruel.

So it's kind of like it's not any different than being hungry. I'm hungry; I'm going to eat. I'm sleepy; I'm going to take a nap. I desire sexual intimacy; I'm going to go fulfill that with whomever and whenever and however I want to and it would be cruel to suggest otherwise.

Therefore, if we say that you should save sex until you've made a covenant in a marriage relationship and anything outside of that is sin—that, in other words, it's missing God's best for your and my life—the culture hears that as crazy talk.

Why? Well, if I could, let me attempt to try to answer the why behind that question. The reason why we should listen to God on this primarily is because God is the one who thought up sex, and I don't think he gets enough credit for that.

God, way to go! That's awesome!

God's like: I'm going to design this thing. It's going to work like this and it's going to bring this intense amount of pleasure and fulfillment to you. And I think at times God's up there going: Hey, yoo-hoo, that was my idea. You guys have hijacked this from me and you've actually made it to look like I think that this is dirty or that this is like a wrong thing.

God designed it. And if God designed it, then he knows how it works best and he knows how it might hurt us. Just think of all the ways in which we disregard God on this and how it's introduced all kinds of ways in which sex has brought about debilitating pain into our lives.

Sexual intimacy is an expression or an illustration of God's covenantal love. That word covenantal is just a promise for his people. He created it in Genesis 2, which means that it is his idea; therefore, he knows how it works at its optimal best.

It's like for me—I did not design or make the truck that I drive. Someone else did. He gave me an owner's manual and it's in the glovebox. If I really want to know how it should run best and how it could be optimal, I'm going to pull that out and I'm going to read it. I'm not just going to go on feelings because I drive it every day. I'm going to actually go to the designers.

In the same way, God has said that he's designed sex for three primary reasons.

Here's the first one:

He's a good, good father. He designed it as a gift for our joy and our pleasure that is not meant to be selfish but selfless.

So this is why, and I had this question come in the last couple of weeks from some young people, and I'm so glad that it did. They asked about masturbation and porn. And I would just say that this is why those two things are unhealthy, because masturbation and porn are ultimately self-centered, they are addictive, and they set up unrealistic and even harmful expectations for your spouse or the person who might be your spouse one day.

Some of you may say, "Well, I'm not married and I'm single right now and it doesn't really matter," and I would just simply say this. I don't know if you'll get married one day in the future, but you might and the time to start working on your marriage is not when you get married; it's now because what makes a healthy marriage is healthy people, and you get healthy now when you don't have that other person in your life just yet.

Here's the second thing:

God designed it for pro-creation. That's pretty self-explanatory. I won't spend any time on it. If you need further explanation, come see me after. I have flannel graphs in there. It's awesome.

Number three:

To illustrate who God is—this is what we miss—to illustrate who God is as well as the covenantal love he has for us as his people. God uses the description of male and female in a marriage relationship to describe his relationship with the Church. It starts in Genesis. It's a thread that runs all through the Scriptures and it culminates in Revelation.

In fact, my favorite depiction of this is in Hosea. Old Testament prophets, God would give them a word to then say to the people. In Hosea, God gives Hosea a painful experience to live out that the people can watch.

Some of you know the story. Hosea was told by God to go down into the red-light district of town to find a prostitute, and he said: I want you to marry her and take her home as your wife. Her name was Gomer, which is very unfortunate. That's just cruel right there. It's like, "A prostitute named Gomer. I thank you."

My apologies to all the ladies named Gomer.

Hosea brings her home. They have a beautiful life together. She's remade. She's experienced his love and his grace and his forgiveness and he loves her; not as somebody he found who was a prostitute; he speaks dignity into her life. They start a family together.

Then, one day, Hosea comes home from work and he sees that she's not there. He knows she's not at the store. He gets a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He goes back down to the red-light district of town where he found her years before and he sees her in the arms of another man.

He's heartbroken and he's angry, as anyone would be. And God says to Hosea: Now you know how I feel because this is what my people have done to me and it's what they continue to do to me over and over and over again. So I'll tell you what you do, Hosea. You go back, you buy her from her pimp, you bring her home, and you forgive her, just as I have forgiven my people. That's the description God uses to describe his love for you and me.

We see this thread all the way through Revelation, the reason why it's male and female in a marriage relationship. Going all the way back to Genesis 1:27, let me just read you one verse. It says: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created **them**; male and female he created them."

I want you to see here that there's a singularity to humanity, but there's also a plurality, male and female. We are one but we are two. We are similar, but we are distinct. We are equal, yet we are very different as our physical bodies even illustrate.

When a male and female make a covenant promise to each other and they come together in sexual intimacy, that's the ultimate pinnacle of how we image God. In other words, our bodies were designed to display who God is and his love for us.

It's all over Genesis 1, complementary pairs of things that God creates that are similar but they're different and they work together to image God. We see it in the heavens and the earth. God created light and darkness. God created day and night. God created fish and fowl, water and land.

Can you imagine a world where it was all light and no dark, or all dark and no light? Can you imagine a world of all water and no land or all land and no water? Could you imagine a world with all logic and no emotion? Some of you are like, "Yeah. I'm married to him."

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Can you imagine a world with all emotion and no logic?

These things are similar, but they're different and they actually work together to image something. God created the heavens and the earth, but the culmination of his creation was male and female, and he said: This is the ultimate way in which you image me—different things working in harmony to display the glory of God. God didn't just tell us; he gave us an active example to show us.

Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman within the promise of a committed, covenant marriage is designed to display the glory of God. That's why.

A great resource on this that you might want to check out is a book by Nancy Pearcey called *Love Thy Body*. I love this book. Nancy is a former agnostic. She's a scholar. She does the best job of unpacking the theology behind human sexuality that I've ever read. It's great.

Next question:

What's the point and purpose of prayer? If God already knows how it's going to work out, then why should I pray?

Well, I bet you're fun to be friends with. Do we really need to talk because you already know?

Let me just say this: Great question. I would answer it this way. Jesus prayed and he was fully God and perfect and sinless and he already knew God's mind, so if Jesus prayed, I should probably pray too, so there's that.

The next thing is just what I said. I mean, prayer is more than just getting something from God that you want. Man, you treat it like that you're always going to be disappointed because God won't give you everything that you want.

The point of prayer isn't to change God or to make him aware of things; the point of prayer is to change you and to make you aware of things, so you continue to go to him. And I would just say this. If you're praying and praying and praying and it seems like God is silent, start listening

more than talking. Just go to God and say, "I'm not going to say anything because obviously I've been spending all my time talking and I don't feel close to you. It's probably because I'm talking over you, so let me just take some time to listen."

Next question:

What is the unpardonable sin? How do we sin/grieve the Holy Spirit?

This is a good question. This is oftentimes referred to as blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, if you have a church background. Really, here's what this is. This is the removal of any desire to be reconciled to Jesus. God is the one who puts that desire into all of us, Philippians 2:12-13. So all that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit means is a hardening of the heart to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

It's kind of like when communication begins to break down between you and your spouse or you and a good friend and you're not talking. You don't feel connected. Your heart grows hard to each other and it becomes harder to connect.

The way that anybody responds to Jesus is through the prompting of the Spirit. If you're a Christian today, it's because God prompted you. God put that conviction within you.

Now we grieve the Holy Spirit when we start ignoring him so much. In other words, that still, small voice says: Hey, you need to go there and do that. "Nope, I'm not going to do that." Hey you need to stop doing this and start doing that. "No, I don't want to do that." You start ignoring it so much that you begin to become hardened to his voice. You no longer recognize him anymore.

See, the only unpardonable sin is refusing to let God pardon you by his grace. And it's not that God's grace runs out; it's that your desire for God's grace runs out.

Those of you who are maybe worried today that you have committed the unpardonable sin, let me just put you at ease. If you're worried that you have committed the unpardonable sin, take a deep breath. You haven't because if you had you wouldn't be worried about it because your heart would be hard. There. That was easy.

Here's the next one:

How can I trust the Bible? Where should I start? Doesn't the Bible advocate slavery and the mistreatment of women?

That last question there, our culture has stated as a fact that the Bible does advocate slavery and the mistreatment of women so much so that we've just come to believe it. I wonder how many of us have actually dug in to really investigate it on our own.

Let me say this. I could spend a whole series on this question so I know that I'm not going to do it justice, but let me just say this. It may not be enough to convince you, but let me say it. The Bible does not advocate slavery or the mistreatment of women. It is in there. It mentions it. It talks about it. But it doesn't advocate it. It doesn't encourage it. It doesn't command it. It doesn't cheer it on.

In fact, I love how Tim Keller puts this. He says in the Old Testament that when the Bible mentions slavery, if you actually play it out, it shows the consequences of the people who owned the slaves and it's never good.

The Old Testament is jacked up. That's why we need Jesus! So Jesus comes along. He says, "I've come to set the captives free."

Another thing we need to remember is that first-century slavery was often known as having bondservants. Bondservants were oftentimes like the equivalent of employment, so it's not like our American history with slavery, which is dishonorable and disdainful, that we need to repent of.

So it oftentimes talked about bondservants. A bondservant was somebody who said, "I want to actually be with this person and work for them," and they would actually get their ears pierced with this like wooden earring thing, and they would say, "I'm your bondservant."

The Bible never advocates the mistreatment of women. Same kind of principle, we see how it plays out when that happens. The first-century pagan world, they mistreated women. They treated them like property and Christ followers were some of the first ones to offer dignity to women. Jesus offered dignity to women. He was always going and speaking hope and life into them.

Let me say this. When it comes to the Bible, some of you are like, "I don't know if the Bible can be trusted. Wasn't it just put together by human beings?" Yes, put together by human beings who were inspired by God.

Listen, I love the Bible. I've been studying it for over 30 years. I believe it. It is not easy in places and there are still things that perplex me. Yet, at the same time, when I sincerely seek answers, then God has led me to those answers—maybe not in the way that I would always want, but he has.

And I would say that I believe the Bible is perfect. I believe that it is inspired by God. I love what 2 Timothy 3:16 says. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."

With that said, you have to read it correctly.

Yeah, go ahead and clap for that. There we go.

You have to read it correctly. I've heard people butcher it due to their interpretation. Here's what I mean. The Bible is written in different genres and you read different genres differently to arrive at different meanings. So the Bible is written as history and poetry and prophecy and letters. And you've got apocryphal stuff at the very end. You don't read a comic book the same way you would poetry, so you've got to understand what the meaning is and you've got to understand the metanarrative.

The metanarrative of Scripture: It's not a science book. It's not a rule book. It's not a history book. It's a love letter from God saying: This is who I am. This is who you are. This is what went wrong. This is what I did about it. This is what I will one day do. And you read that through the whole thread of God's word.

With all that said—this might shock some of you—I am not a Christ follower because of the Bible. My faith is not a house of cards based upon the Bible. You want to know why? Because the first Christians responded to Jesus before the Bible was ever put together. Three-thousand people gave their life to Jesus on Pentecost before the Bible was ever put together, which means the core of our faith is not necessarily the Bible; it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That's why I'm a Christ follower. That's why I'm a Christian.

Last few questions here:

Does it really matter what you believe, just as long as you sincerely believe it? How do we know Christianity is **the religion** among all other religions?

Yes, it matters because not all religions teach the same thing. They teach dramatically different things. Just study them. Here's a form of it. Most other religions say here are the things you need to do and to be in order to be reconciled and hopefully you do enough. If I could just summarize it, that's where they all fall into that category.

Christianity is the only religion that says Jesus did it for you; rest in him. Christianity is not a religion. A religion is man's effort to get to God. God said: No, here's my effort to get to you. Religion says, "I messed up. My dad is going to kill me." The Gospel says, "I messed up. I need to call my dad."

There isn't anything that you can do to be saved. We are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus. Not because this way is superior, but because this is the only solution that is relevant to our situation because you and I can't save ourselves. Jesus did it for us.

Should we clap? I don't know.

Are we obligated to tithe?

Obligated? No. Invited to be generous? Absolutely. I always get a little bit heartbroken when Christians want to fight over this, like, “How much should we give and what should we give?” and all that, because I’m just like, “Man, here’s the thing. God didn’t tithe Jesus.” Think about that for a minute: I’ll give you 10 percent of Jesus. He gave us 100 percent of his first and his best. We are saved by grace.

Now, the Old Testament incorporated a 10 percent tithe, which was actually more like 30 percent because of agricultural offerings. But God says: Okay, let’s just limit it down to 10 percent as the starting line of generosity, not the finish line.

Why? Because money is God’s chief competition on the throne of my heart and God says wherever your treasure goes, your heart will follow. God says: I just want you to trust me. I know this is really hard and I know that actually this would be a moving scale if I just told you to be generous, so let me just give you a number: 10 percent.

Why 10 percent? Well my theory is because it’s not enough to break you but it’s enough to get your attention. God says: Start there and trust me with this and see what I might do.

Last few questions here:

How can I know if I’m really saved?

Do you believe Jesus has accomplished everything sufficient for your salvation, yes or no? If yes, good. Next question: Therefore, will you go where he tells you to go and do what he tells you to do, yes or no? If the answer is yes to both of those, you’re saved. Some of you are like, “Well what about...”

Romans 10:9 says, “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.”

Baptism then is your first step of obedience to that, where you say, “I’m not ashamed of God. I’m going to go public. I’m going to dive into a watery grave and come up as a new creation in Christ.” It has nothing to do with what you could bring to the table. God brought it all. You just respond.

Here’s the other one:

Can you lose your salvation?

A lot of people want to know this. Lose like your car keys? No. Lose like your marriage? Probably a lot of us know people who’ve lost their marriage and maybe we’re afraid of that happening with us and God.

Here's the one big difference: You're married to Jesus and he's perfect. Where you fall short, he doesn't. Jesus is the one who seals your salvation and Jesus keeps you in the secure grasp of his loving grip and so you don't need to keep praying the prayer of salvation out of fear.

Some of you have been here for a while and have heard my story where I just kept baptizing myself in the neighborhood pool every summer because I just wanted to make sure. I got really good at it. You don't need to keep doing that. You don't need to keep getting dunked in the tank every time we open it up because your salvation isn't dependent upon anything that you can do, but it's your obedience to what he has done for you.

Now we do have to be careful of a hardening of the heart. If your disposition is: "I gave my life to Jesus. I can do with and live my life however I want," that's a bad sign. You know you're saved when you always feel conviction, with hope. You know you're saved when you always go, "You know what? There's something I need to repent of every single day," because that's the Spirit of God keeping your heart soft.

Here's the last question:

What about those who've never heard or are unable to respond to Jesus?

A lot of people use this question to kind of say, "You know, it hardly seems fair to me. Why would God send a whole bunch of people to hell who've never even heard about Jesus? Or maybe they're physically incapacitated. They can't make this response. What about them?"

I guess I would just say there are maybe two ways I could answer. Romans, chapter 1 says that the universe, as well as our physical bodies, gives us all the evidence that we need. It cries out that there is a God, so all are without excuse. John 3:17 says that God doesn't want to condemn; he wants to save. 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient. He does not want anyone to perish, but he wants all to have life. In other words, God's got this.

You may say, "Well, what about all the people who have never heard of Jesus or haven't responded to Jesus?" And I would just very lovingly say what about them? And what does that have to do with you? You do know and you have heard.

See, the question of Jesus is the most important question that you will ever ask and you cannot ask it for a friend. You can only ask it for yourself.

Today I just want you to know, in case anyone hasn't heard, that Jesus is the son of God. There is a God who loves you. He created you. The world has fallen in sin. He sent his Son to reconcile you back to him, and when you place your faith and trust in him as Lord and Savior, God says: You're mine.

And today you can respond to that. I know that maybe everything that I just said—you're just like, "Well, you just stirred up a whole bunch of other questions," or "You know what? I've seen Christians who actually made a mess of things."

Yeah, me too. I have as well. Just because somebody has followed Jesus poorly does not mean that Jesus isn't worth following. Stop looking at them and look to Jesus.

Maybe today you just need to say, "You know what? I'm just going to come openhanded to him and I'm just going to open up my heart and respond to him as Lord and Savior." It's as simple as you sitting right where you're sitting responding to this prayer that I just want to lead you in.

So would you, at all of our campuses, just close your eyes just for some focus and some privacy, and if you're ready, just make this prayer your own.

Lord God, I come to you and I don't have it all figured out. I've tried to figure it out and I've tried to do life on my own terms and all that it's brought me is just more disappointment and frustration, and today I'm just ready to surrender.

I've still got more questions, God, but instead of trying to get all the answers to my questions before I come to you, I choose to come to you and then pursue the answer to these questions with you, not against you.

So today I just come to you as a sinner. I recognize it. I confess it. I repent of it. And I want Jesus to be Lord and Savior of my life because I believe that you have already done everything sufficient for my salvation, and if I can trust you as Savior, I'm going to trust you as Lord over all of it—over my money, over my thoughts, over my marriage, over my kids, over my relationship, over my desires. God, I give them to you. I want to be a new creation in Jesus Christ. In his name I pray. Amen.

I'm confident that there's at least one person in every room who claimed that prayer. Can we just celebrate with them right now? If that's you, way to go! And if so, we want to hear from you. Just make yourself known. We want to follow up with you. We can talk about baptism. We can talk about what your next steps are.

Here's what I want to do at all of our campuses. I just want us to come together at the conclusion of this series and I just want us to worship in such a way that reflects the fact that we know what God did to save us.

I'll be honest with you. Some weekends I'm not feeling it when I walk in here and sometimes I look out across the room and go, "Man, I'm a little bit intimidated to preach today because they don't seem like they're in a very good mood. They kind of seem a little stoic and even a little angry." And I would just even say that if you realize what Jesus has done to save you, maybe your heart needs to remind your face. Could I just say that to me? It's just like wow, like I walk in here angry.

Don't tell me you don't know how to worship. I went to a sporting event this last week and a concert and people were worshipping their faces off and it was a game and it was a concert. We can do better. We should be pacesetters in this, so let's stand to our feet. Let's worship together. Let's do it.