

Time of Grace Ministry
Tackling Tough Topics
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I am so excited to bring to you a brand-new type of program here on Time of Grace. In 20-plus years of Time of Grace, it's never been seen before until today. It's called, "Question and Answer Sunday." Here at my church, The CORE, we've been doing Q and A Sunday, the last Sunday of every year that I have been here, and to be honest, it's my favorite Sunday. I come in without a sermon, without a message, and people just like you get to ask the questions they've always wondered about God, and the Bible, and faith, and church. And my job is to grab a Bible and hopefully give a scriptural Bible based answer. To help me introduce the program for today, I'd like to invite my friend, my colleague, our worship director here at The CORE, Jonathan Favorite. Yes, you might recognize his voice. He's the guy who doesn't just sing at our church; he helps more with the amazing books and resources we have at Time of Grace.

So, Jonathan, tell our friends what they can expect today on Q and A Sunday. "Well, my job is going to be to engage in a little conversation with you. So, people might bring a really tough question and you may give a great Bible answer, but sometimes there's that, 'But Pastor Mike, what about this scenario? What about where I'm at in my life? What kind of answer can you give to that?' So, my job is kind of like to be as our kids and say, 'But why? But why? But why? Why? Why?'"

Yes. Yes, I do love him. And I appreciate that. It helps make Q and A Sunday better than ever before. Now, we're not able to share everything that was asked, but we have created a website just for you called timeofgrace.org/toughquestions. Over the years, we posted our 70 videos about modesty and dress, about church and faith, about anxiety, depression, about parenting, about suicide, mental health struggles, pornography, all kinds of things. So, make sure after this program is done you go over to timeofgrace.org/toughquestions.

But before you do that, you're going to have some great answers today, so let's get to our program and then you can check that out. Enjoy. Let's do it.

If a child passes away who was never baptized, how does God deal with their soul?

Half of answering a question is knowing the person who asked the question, right? So, I'm guessing the challenging part of this is not that you know, what's the technical Bible answer? It probably comes from someone who is in that situation. You know, you have a child, the child is sick, passes away, you want to raise that child to be baptized to know the word of God, you read Bible stories, but then maybe expectedly, maybe not, you lose the child and what does God say about that?

There's a couple of just biblical things that we can say for sure. We know that from the earliest moments of our existence we have the need to be saved by Jesus, right? If any of you are parents, you know you don't have to wait until they're 13 for kids to do bad things. You don't even have to teach them to do bad things. The Bible says in Psalms 51:5, "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." So, we do know that kids look innocent and beautiful, but give them a bit and they'll prove that they are, you know, not just good, but there's a lot of sinfulness in their heart.

And so, that's a problem we need to remedy. God says, "Children are sinful, humans are sinful, they need to be forgiven." And the second thing we learned is that God has a way for them to be forgiven. Some Christians call this the means of grace. It's like the means or the ways that God connects us to the forgiveness that we need through the Bible, through baptism.

And so, whenever a parent has a child, the urgent message that God says, "If this child has a spiritual need that needs to be washed away by the blood of Jesus, give this child the word, give this child the gift of baptism." I think of a passage just like 1 Peter 3:21, "Baptism saves you by connecting you to the resurrection of Jesus."

So, if you're a parent, sometimes, we -- "Like well, I want all the family to be in town and I just want it to be this memorable date for us." No, no when you have a kid the urgency is on to connect the sinful child to the only Savior from sin. Two things that we know for sure from the Bible: children are sinful, Psalms 51:5. Jesus is the forgiveness for every kind of sin for every single age, but that wasn't your question, was it?

The question is, what happens if, God forbid something happens before that moment. There's this awesome passage in 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul says, "How from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." This passage says, "From infancy." Not from kindergarten, but from infancy. Somehow the Holy Spirit is working through the Word of God to make even little ones wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. So, I would give comfort to a parent that, John the Baptist leapt in the womb of his mother when he heard Mary's voice in Luke 1 and God can do great things that we can't see through the power of his word and the power of the spirit. And if God forbid, that moment comes where we don't have a lot of chance to do that, I mean, all we can do as Christian parents is to entrust that child into the hands of a God who always does what is right and who never does what's wrong.

So, my answer is, from day one let's give our kids as much of Jesus as we can in the Word, in a baptism, and if something happens, we entrust that child into the hands of a God who never makes mistakes.

Good.

How can we trust that those words on those pages are absolute truth? People make the argument, "The Bible's been translated. How do we know that it hasn't been changed? There is so many different versions, how do we know which one? They seem to contradict."

Yup. How do we lay that foundation for people? You just asked like, seven questions. Can you answer all of them together at one time? Yes. In less than a minute. Yeah, that's great, right? The more you get to know people from different cultures, and backgrounds, the more you realize, there's lots of different books that claim to be holy. The Muslims have the Quran, the Christians have their Bible, Buddhist have their own sacred writings, Hindus have the same, there's the book of Mormon, there is -- you know, so how do we know that this book, the Bible, is the one that we should believe?

Here's my three-part answer: the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus. So, someone asked me, "Why do you believe this book? Why do you preach about it? Why do you want everyone to read it?" I'd say, "Prophets, the apostles, and Jesus." The prophets in the Old Testament predicted in hundreds of different ways things that came true long after they wrote, right? So, there's predictions that Jesus would be born at this time, in this place, in Bethlehem, Micah 5:2. He would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7:14. Psalm 22 said he would be crucified before crucifixion was even invented. The emperor said where it would happen, Jesus would be raised in Galilee, he would rise from the dead, that's Psalm 16. There are -- read Isaiah 53 in its entirety. He was buried in a rich man's tomb, what? Even knew like how rich the guy was whose tomb Jesus laid in. There're tons of prediction that all came through in Jesus, and it proves -- who could make that up? Who could possibly know that hundreds of years before it happened? That must prove that the Old Testament comes from a God who knows all things.

Second, the apostles. The apostles in the first century would have known whether or not Jesus was the real deal, and they were willing to die for their faith, right? So, imagine this, someone arrests you for being a Christian, and let's say you made up a story about Jesus. "Yeah, he said he was God, and he rose from dead, and he's running Heaven right now." And then, they stretch you out to flog you and rip the flesh off of your back before nailing you to a cross where you slowly suffocate and die. Would you hold on to a lie, if you knew it was a lie? Would you make up a story that would cost you your wealth, your health, and your very life? Would you be tortured for something you made up? And the answer is no. The apostles were not like seventh generation Christians who were just taking up by faith, they knew what Jesus said and did, and they were willing to die for their faith, they suffered for it. Read the book of Acts and you'll find the proof.

So, the prophets, their prophecies, the apostles and their suffering, and finally, my favorite, the message of Jesus. Every other religion in the world operates by a single system. Do enough good things and you'll have good things happen to you in the life to come, right? Fix your karma, do enough good things, balance the scales, do enough good things, make up the good and the bad, do enough good things. Jesus came along and he preached something so different, you had to wonder, "Where did this come from if no one else came up with this?" And what Jesus came up with is, "I'll do all the good things you need so the person like you, whose done bad things can be rescued and saved."

That's the uniqueness of the gospel. John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." So, someone

pushed me, "Why believe the Bible?" Here's my three-part answer: The apostles, the prophets, and the message of Jesus himself.

"I think maybe a little bit of this question -- I know I asked seven questions at one time, but..."

"You did, yeah."

"How do we know that Isaiah wasn't altered later after Jesus came so that it did all fit? How do we know that what Isaiah wrote before Christ is actually, actually what he wrote?"

Yeah, I love this. How many of you have heard of the Dead Sea scrolls before? Yeah, so they found in this cave right next to the dead sea, which is kind of south of Jerusalem, I think back in the early to mid-1900s. The shepherd found these, big kind of canisters, jars. Inside was almost an entire copy, this massive scroll of the book of Isaiah. The copy was dated to before the time that Jesus came.

So, all those prophecies I mentioned, Isaiah 7, especially Isaiah 53, about the coming, the suffering, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, we know for a fact, we literally have the copy. You can see it in Jerusalem now on a scroll, that says all of those things before Jesus was even born. So, to claim that people took the Old Testament, Jesus came, they edited a bunch of parts, so that it would kind of fit the story of Jesus; it just doesn't work historically. You can Google it, just look at the dead sea scrolls, an amazing find.

I'm so grateful that goat climbed into that cave and that shepherd threw a rock, and it shattered, and he investigated, and we found an amazing answer to that question. The Bible has not been altered or changed. In fact, when they found that copy of Isaiah, I think it predated the oldest copy known to that point by a thousand years. And when they compared the two copies, they were 99% identical. So, it's proof that Christians who believe the Bible is the Word of God, haven't been changing it, altering it, erasing it, making it, you know, edited for their culture, they've been faithfully passing it on from year to year and copy to copy.

"Good. Thank you for answering two of my seven questions. Appreciate that."

"See, we're two out of seven, not bad."

The struggle is, there is so many good questions coming in. This one, I think can really apply to pretty much every single person here and that is, the Bible says, "Do not worry and do not be anxious." I think you could even throw anger into that mix too, a lot of things that are very emotionally driven, where is that line? The moment that I have a worrying thought or an anxious thought, am I sinning before God or is that not where that line is, is it more, "I'm fighting against that thought so I'm not sinning yet?" Where does that become a sin against my God?

Oh. I can't prove this biblically, but I think my best answer is, it's not a sin the first time, but it is the second. Let's imagine a stunningly beautiful woman who is not wearing a lot of clothes.

We're confused because it's the Wisconsin winter. She walks into church, and I notice her as a guy, "Like, oh wow." Yeah, there's something about me that's very interested in looking at her a little bit more. I noticed her the first time, is that a sin? I would say no, that's the temptation. What do I do with my second look--is the question. There's temptation, "No, I want to honor my wife. I want to be faithful to Jesus so I'm going to look away." So, I think in that case I haven't sinned, I faced the temptation and I resisted it.

I think in the same way when it comes to worry and anxiety. I mean, stuff is going to happen that makes us so worried. We're going to be confronted with temptation. The doctor says this, or the boss says this, or you get the email or text that claims that -- just a natural human reaction is, "Oh, man." But then what do you do in that moment? You just fix your eyes on the situation until you freak out, and you're anxious and you can't escape it or to the best of your ability. Do you turn to God and say, "God, I'm really afraid right now, help me. I know that you're with me. I'm so grateful for that." So, in Philippians 4, that's the famous passage where Paul says, "Don't be anxious about anything," his next line is, "But in everything, by prayer and petition, with gratitude offer your request to God," right.

So, in the context of -- and I know a lot of you struggle with anxiety. It's a constant battle for you is -- man, when that comes to assault you, as fast as you can just cry out, "God, help me." And just like a lot of people in this room, not lusting after other people is difficult, it can be a battle for a long time, maybe for you worrying and anxiety is the same thing. But here's my encouragement, to fight, to run to God, to know that it is really difficult work. That's what temptation is, it's tempting. But some day very soon when Jesus comes back, you'll be rid of that temptation and finally set free. But until then, run the race, fight the good fight, and cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you.

"If I am in the fight, I'm good, I'm fighting."

"Yes."

"But I should be concerned if I don't have the desire to even fight and just say, "Whatever. I can't stop it so..."

Yeah. And maybe even with more compassion because I know and love people who struggle with worrying. I mean, we worry about how much we worry, right? And we're anxious about the fact that we're anxious, and telling an anxious Christian who severely wrestles with anxiety, "Stop." "Thanks." I think what I would want to do is maybe go away from the law a little bit of here's how you should live and just go back to the gospel and say, "God's got you. I know you're worried about how that work project is going to go, God knows, he's going to take care of it. I know you're freaking out about what you said and now you're wondering what people think of you. Listen, God loves you no matter what they think. I think I'd want to get back as soon as I could to the promises, and the bigness, and the beauty of God, and let that calm an anxious and troubled heart. Excellent. Thank you for that.

Here's, I think, a very difficult one, but a very good one that we need to talk about and that is, how do we interact with our neighbors who identify as transgender etcetera, or other things? So, I don't think the question is necessarily to address transgenderism or maybe homosexuality, but the question sounds like how do I talk to them, how do I interact with them, how do I treat them?

Yeah. It's as easy as it is complicated, right? So, we have all kinds of neighbors, family members, coworkers, friends who don't believe the things that Christians believe, or behave in the ways that Christians try to behave. That could be with just a buddy who's sleeping with his girlfriend, it could be someone in a same sex relationship, it could be an atheist, could be a Buddhist, could be a cousin who stopped going to church a long time ago. So, what do we do in those situations? The number one most important thing is to love in really practical ways. You don't have to be standoff-ish in the driveway and like, "Well, I don't agree with your lifestyle just yet." The Bible says, love people, serve people, be there for people. Invite people into your home. Have someone at your dinner table. Let the love of Jesus shine so -- we live in such a selfish world where everyone is always rushing, and doing their own thing, and they got their head down with their own to-do-list; but if you just actually show compassion and take some of the time in your schedule to serve people, I can almost guarantee you they'll notice it. And then, while you're seeing them up close, let the beauty of the Christian faith shine within you.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus said, "Let your light shine so that people see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." So, your unbelieving friends at your dinner table, you found out that there was an accident, or your dad got cancer, or you're really sick, but you're not afraid like they would be afraid. You're not fearful of the future because you believe in God who runs the show. You believe in a God who is forgiving, a God who's prepared a place in Heaven for you. And I guarantee you, in those moments, they're going to know even if they don't say it that there is a difference between the way they live and the way that you live.

And when that moment comes that they ask about that difference the Bible says, 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer for those who ask you for the hope that you have. But do it with gentleness and respect." Right, so someone's like, "Aren't you afraid?" Gently and respectfully say, "I follow Jesus. My Jesus died to make me perfect. My Jesus rose from the dead so that death won't have the last word on me, why would I be afraid?" And they're going to sit there and say, "What?" And then, the Christian faith stops being about Sunday schedules, and rules, and you know what you can and can't do with your body or money. It starts being as beautiful, and as big, and as supernatural as it is intended to be.

So, there is a time to get to the truth, to call people to repentance, to say, "If you're going to enter the family of God, you can't just do whatever you want to in the household of God. If you're going to come into the kingdom of Jesus, you don't get to be the king, that's only Jesus and he gives the commands." Alright, so there's going to be a time that you say, "Hey, give up your old life to have this life with Christ." But who's going to make that exchange unless they know how life with Christ is, how beautiful, powerful, and glorious it is? So, love with no strings attached, let people see up close the difference that your faith makes, and I bet you they're going to take a step of curiosity and ask you for the hope that you have.

“I wonder if part of this question is, what if they don't? What if they don't take a step forward into the hope that you have? And instead, I wonder if there is a fear of, they're going to call me out as not being accepting, not loving because I don't accept them in a certain way? I can see that fear crippling some people, myself included, how do we respond there?”

“Ready for the words of Jesus?”

“Yes, I am.”

So, I just quoted Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others." Five verses before that same sermon, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Do the best you can and if people throw it back in your face even if you try to be loving, run to Matthew 5 and say, "I am blessed in this moment and like the apostles in the book of Acts, I'm going to rejoice and be glad that I get to suffer for the beautiful name of Jesus."

Okay, so maybe let's end on one easier, maybe a lighter question and that is, if I'm trying to share my faith with someone who is not religious, what book of the Bible should I start with talking through with them?

“Luke.”

“And why?”

“You said it was the last question and I answered it.”

“Why shouldn't they start with Revelation, how about that?”

Let's scare them. Give them Revelations. No, you need Jesus. Yeah, so if you don't know, the gospel of Luke was written by a first century medical doctor. A really smart guy who turned into a historian of Jesus and the very beginning of it says that he didn't just say, "Hey, here is my thoughts and personal belief about Jesus." Luke says he did this very careful research to put together an orderly account. He interviewed eyewitness. So, this is the well-researched, documented, first century biography of Jesus.

And what it does is from even before Jesus' conception all the way up to his return into heaven, it just walks you through who Jesus was, what Jesus said, and what Jesus did. So, if you have a friend -- and actually this is a really great way to connect with people. Some people aren't interested in organized religion, or the church, but their very curious about Jesus and that simple invitation of, "Hey, I know sometimes you and I talk about scriptural things, would you ever want to read one of the original accounts of who Jesus was?" I know some pastors said he was like this; some pastors are wrong. And some people think Jesus was like that and people aren't always right. "But would you actually read, like literally it's going to take you three hours, half of

a Netflix season that you're about to watch. Would you like to read with your own eyes with me and see who Jesus was?"

There is an old Christian theologian name C.S. Lewis. You've heard of him. He was an Oxford, I think, scholar who was an atheist and he became a Christian. And he said, "You know, if the gospel of Jesus Christ is like a lion, the best way to convince people of the power of the lion is to just let it out of the cage." So, you don't have to come with some persuasive speech that convince them on being a Christian. Let them see the real Jesus with their own eyes. Read this, was he not compelling and amazing? Did he not love people who didn't deserve it? And then, connecting people with that Jesus, because faith comes from hearing the message, is the best way to bring people to faith. Alright, let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for your word. Honestly, if we didn't have the Bible today what would we do? Would we guess that we're going to make it to Heaven? Would we just assume that you like us or maybe assume that you don't? We're so grateful that your word is like a bright light, and it shows us the clear path that we need to walk. It's not always an easy path, God, as we repent of our sins and submit to you as King and Lord; but you've shown us it's a beautiful path because there is forgiveness, there's mercy, there's eternal life, and there's Jesus as we walk with you.

I'm so grateful for the openness of everyone who is here today. Thanks for their boldness and asking questions. I pray that something that I said, that Jonathan and I dialogued about, is going to be helpful as we take another step in our faith.

Please bless us not just on this day, but on this year. God, you use moments, and services, and individual years in our lives to be catalyst for real life change, and so maybe this morning is the moment when someone for the first time in their whole life takes their faith personally and seriously. Maybe this is the service where there is some dad or mom sitting here who realizes, they've been delegating the discipleship of their own son or daughter and now they're going to turn off some of those screens and open the book and teach their precious little ones about the love and salvation that's in Jesus.

Maybe this is the moment, God, when you call someone to repentance. And they have been living in sin and haven't been caring and you're going to snap them out of it before it's too late.

Or maybe this is the time, God, when you ease the anxiety and worry of one of your precious sons or daughters. When you remind them that you're a sovereign God who works out your will for the good of your people.

God, whatever you want to individually do in individual hearts, we pray that your will be done. We're grateful for your Word today. We're grateful for this church and we're grateful for the time to discuss what you say together. We pray all things as your beloved children, and we pray them all in the name of Jesus and all God's people say, Amen.