

## Great Questions People Ask Series

### "God - Why.....?"

#### Preached October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018

"Why God...?" is a question that has likely been asked thousands upon thousands of times since God placed mankind upon this planet. It's most often a question that flows from personal heartbreak or disappointment from disillusionment. At it's core "Why God...?" typically expresses a deep dissatisfaction with the way things are right now and longing for a different outcome.

We see a rich history of "Why God" questions scattered throughout the Bible.

- When God delivered His chosen people out of their slavery in Egypt they found themselves wandering in the desert regions and they quickly began to complain, to God and Moses, about the lack of food and water. (Numbers 14:3; 21:5)
- Subsequently, we hear Moses then complaining to God that He put Moses in charge of these complaining people. He asks God what he's done to displease Him so much that He put him in charge and he asks God to just kill him. (Numbers 11:11-15)
- After Moses passed away, Joshua took over. And shortly after God miraculously brought His people into the Promise Land they were defeated in war by the Amorites and Joshua begins to sound a lot like the Israelites did when they complained in the wilderness (Joshua 7:7)
- A little later in Israelites history, the Israelites are hiding in caves out of fear of the Midianites, who kept invading their land, and taking their crops and possessions. Then one day an angel appeared to Gideon and said, "*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.*" I love Gideon's response, "*Pardon me, my lord, but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?*" (Judges 6:12-13) The individual circumstances might be different but often our "Why?" questions for God flow out of a certain amount of confusion as to why things in my life are so difficult? Because it seems like to us that if God were indeed with us, as He promises to be, that things would be different – they would be better.
- We see this questioning of God regarding my current circumstances expressed loud and clear throughout the life of Job.  
**Job 7:20-21 (NIV)** *If I have sinned, what have I done to you, you who sees everything we do? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? 21 Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more.*
- A common source of "Why God?" is uttered by David in Psalm 10:1 where we here David asking why God seems so far away or so unaware of what's happening to me. He says, "*Why, Lord do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*" And as you read on in this psalm, and in others, you'll discover the source of his question is that he looks around and the wicked seem to often prosper while those who are faithfully pursuing and serving God experience so many hardships. And how does this make sense.

If you read through the psalms you'll discover that many times this similar sentiment of feeling forgotten or abandoned by God is expressed by many different individuals (Psalm 42:9; 43:2; 88:14). Many of these questions could have easily been written by many of you at various times in your life and the brutal honesty expressed in these questions really connect with us as well.

Similar questioning continues in the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Habakkuk is fascinating. In the book by his name, Habakkuk only talks with God. And in this short book of only 3 chapters, the prophet questions God 10 times. His questions center around the injustice in this world and why God doesn't do something to fix it. Wow, how much more pertinent could the Scriptures get to our situation we find ourselves in today? When we see the widespread injustice in our world and wonder why God doesn't do something to fix it. When we hear of the death of young children and wonder, why God does this keep happening. When I encountered the 6<sup>th</sup> grader at camp this summer who had repeatedly attempted to end his life and wondered "Why God?" does this type of stuff continue? Why don't you step in and fix it. And my advice to him to call out to God and learn to rest in God's abiding presence likely seemed like trite and unhelpful advice when he's in the midst of those depressing and anxious thoughts and self-destructive feelings.

- And probably the most well known expression of feeling alienated from God was expressed by **Jesus** as he was dying on the cross. He called out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

Some well-meaning Christians might tell you that it's wrong, maybe even a sin, to question God. And yet, I would counter with the fact that **Job questioned God** throughout the book and yet it says twice at the end of the book that Job spoke "*what is right about God.*"

And yet, with that said, I think it's necessary to draw a distinction between questioning God about life and simply complaining to God about your circumstances. In the Old Testament the people's complaining angered God and in Philippians we are told to not be people who complain and grumble (which is the sound complainers make). (**Philippians 2:14**).

I really appreciate how **Elisabeth Elliot** addresses the issue of asking God "Why?" in her book entitled, "**On Asking Why**". Let me give you a brief background on Elisabeth Elliot that will help explain her motivation for writing this book. Her first husband, Jim, was killed in 1956 while attempting to share the gospel message with the Auca Indians of Eastern Ecuador. This would have certainly give Elisabeth plenty of reasons to accuse God with the question "Why God? Why did you let me husband be killed by the very people he was trying to witness to?" And yet, rather than wallow in self-pity, Elisabeth went back to these very same people that killed her husband and for 2 years told them about Jesus. And many of them came to know the Lord as their Savior. So, while her husband's death may have seemed senseless at the time, it was a breakthrough moment for many of these individuals to come to know the Lord and eventually spend eternity with Him. In her book, "On Asking Why", Elisabeth writes:

*"I seek the lessons God wants to teach me, and that means that I ask **why**. There are those who insist that it is a very bad thing to question God. To them, "**Why?**" is a rude question. That depends, I believe, on whether it is an honest search, in faith, for his meaning, or whether it is a challenge of unbelief and rebellion. The psalmist often questioned God and so did Job. God did not answer the questions, but he answered the man-with the mystery of himself."*

That's powerful. Don't miss her last point. While Job questioned God's motives through much of the book when God finally showed up he asked Job 77 questions and by the end Job said:

**Job 42:5-6 (NIV)** *My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

What changed? Did God answer Job's many questions? Not exactly. He revealed Himself to Job and reminded him of the majesty of His creation and it blew Job away. It made him realize how small he is and how big God is!!! And that perspective changed his whole thinking about God, the world and himself.

I have found it interesting in preparation for this sermon and asking people, "what would you ask God if you could ask him any "why" question. People almost always go to some sort of injustice they feel they are experiencing or have experienced.

The other option would be to ask God a whole different series of “why?” questions.

- Why God, have you been so generous to me?
- Why God do you love me unconditionally, after all I’ve done?
- Why God do you never leave me or turn your back on me when I’ve done it repeatedly to you?
- Why God were you willing to come and die for me on a cross?
- Why God did you allow me to wake up this morning and get out of bed and come to church?
- Why God do you give me your very presence, the Holy Spirit, to equip me to live for you?
- Why God do you continue to forgive me every time I sin?
- Why God did you allow me the ability to see the sun rise?
- Why God did you create the 4 seasons and allow us the privilege of experiencing them.
- Why God did you create this expansive universe and yet you know me personally?

And the list could go on and on. So, why don’t we typically go in that direction when we ask why, but we instead focus on what we don’t have rather than be appreciative for what we do have?

I think we do, because we so easily fall into the trap of Satan in focusing on what we’re lacking rather than on the many gifts God has given us. And by doing that he steals the joy from our life that God wants to give us so that we can daily live in it.

If you really do believe that God is still in control of this world and is involved and that He loves you and has an incredible plan for your life - then we should live with the belief that God is wanting to work in every area of our lives for His glory and our transformation in Christ-likeness.

**Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

Let me throw another verse out there for you to consider as well.

**Matthew 28:20 (NIV)** *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

These verses remind us that Christ promised that he would always be with us. These verses need to help us be empowered in our questions directed toward God. So, if you believe the promises of God – then it’s never true that God abandoned you. It might be possible for you to not feel God’s presence but that’s a very different thing from you questioning whether God still loves you and is still here for you. And so, in the midst of feeling abandoned by God and all alone a better question would be: “God I trust in your promises and you’ve promised to always be with me. But I’ve not been feeling your presence lately and I really need to. So, why God have I not been sensing your presence? Is there something you are trying to teach me in the midst of this situation? Is there something you’re trying to reveal to me about yourself or about me?”

In 2011 the very popular song, “Blessings” by Laura Story was released. The song flowed out of a personal struggle her and her husband were going through regarding his health issues. They and many other had prayed for his healing – but it hadn’t happened yet. And so they began to wonder if maybe God’s blessings could be coming to them in unexpected ways. Was it possible that God could bless them and use them in the midst of his sickness instead of healing him.

The chorus of the song says,

*“What if Your blessings come through raindrops? What if Your healing comes through tears?  
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You’re near?  
What if trials of this life are your mercies in disguise?”*

*We pray for wisdom, Your voice to hear. We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near  
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love. As if every promise from Your Word is not enough  
And all the while You hear each desperate plea. And long that we’d have faith to believe.”*

Laura wrote a very perceptive article about what she’s learned about asking God “why?” through this process.

She suggested taking a piece of paper and writing down all of your “**why**” questions for God.

When you're finished flip the paper over and write all of your "how" questions.

She explains: "I've discovered that the longer I focus on why, the less progress I make. When I continue to ask why, somewhere deep inside me the repeated questioning and lack of answers feeds a sense of entitlement. When that sense of entitlement grows, it usually leads to bitterness."

The disciples asked Jesus, "Why was this man born blind?" Jesus changed their "why" question to "how". Jesus responded with: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:3 (NIV))

How might this man's blindness be used to reveal the work of God? Man asks why and Jesus asks how. Man asks, "why did this happen?" Jesus asks, "How might My Father's glory be displayed through this situation?"

And Laura lists several examples of how our "whys" can be changed into "hows" for the display of God's glory.

- How might God use my current trial to glorify Himself?
- How might God use my weakness, infirmity, or disability to display His power?
- How might God use my hard circumstances to show me something about myself?
- How might God use my hard circumstances to show me something about Himself?
- How might God use my pain for His purpose?
- How might God make this mess into a message?
- How might God use my current chaos to make me into a person who walks by faith, not by sight?
- How might God use my situation to show me that true peace is found only in Him?
- How might God use a loved ones' death to stir the hearts of others and show them the importance of eternal security in the life to come?

Which side of the sheet do you have more control over? The why questions will eventually suck your dry, slowly draining the life out of you. But changing your "why?" questions into "how" questions begins to get your focus off your conditions and onto the God who wants to use you in the midst of your conditions to display the brightness Himself.

**Myth:** Contentment begins with understanding the "why's" to life.

**Truth:** Contentment begins with asking "how" God might use this for His glory.

**Philippians 2:14-16 (NIV)** *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.*

Always focusing on "why?" steals our joy and can make us bitter and become self-absorbed. And it destroys our witness for Christ and other will notice that. Grumbling and arguing destroys our witness to a world that is looking and hoping for hope. When we trust in God during the tough times in our lives creates a witnessing opportunity for us to give hope to others and that may be what God uses to draw them into a right relationship with Himself.

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If you could ask God one “*Why?*” question, what would it be?

***“Why God ?”*** \_\_\_\_\_

Who in the Bible questioned God?

Is questioning God a sin? Why or why not?

What’s the distinction between questioning God and complaining to God?

How did God respond to Job questioning God?

Asking “*Why God?*” can often lead to a sense of entitlement.

List a couple of better “*Why God?*” questions you could ask.

1.

2.

Laura Story says instead of asking “*Why?*” we should ask “\_\_\_\_\_ *God?*”

Using Laura’s suggestion, what would be a couple of questions you’d ask God?

1.

2.

How is questioning God affecting your lifestyle witness for Him?

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