
Mental and Emotional Health Pandemic

I want to invite you back for next weekend. Next week we kick off a brand new series of messages titled *Rally Cry*. And here's what that is. A rally cry is simply a word or a phrase that's used to pull people together. When this word or phrase is heard it brings everybody together and they rally around an area—usually an area that's been attacked and needs protection.

So, what we've said is this past year a lot of areas in our lives got hit pretty hard. And what we want to do now, as a church, is rally around them. We want to spend some time and say, "What does it look like to rally around our marriages? What does it look like to rally around our kids? To rally around our relationships and our communities? And then to rally around our church?"

Because we believe that unified under the name of Jesus, no matter how hard those areas got hit, if we rally around them together they can be stronger than ever. Is anyone with us on that? Excited for that? Me too. AB will be back to preach that one.

But for today, we are finishing up our series *Let's Talk About It*. We've been in this for the past few weeks. I know it's hit me pretty good. It's been pretty helpful. Anybody here today been helped by this series? Anybody found some hope from this? Same.

This past year there was a big thing going on, a pandemic. But then there was also a pandemic underneath the pandemic. And it was the mental and emotional health pandemic. It was raging, but it wasn't getting the coverage the first one was getting. So, we said, "Hey, let's talk about it. Let's talk about some of these things coming up like anxiety, depression, addiction."

It's been good just to know you're not alone. And we've said this should be the spot where that happens because the church should be the safest place to bring our struggles and have honest conversations. And that's all we're doing in this series is having a conversation saying, "Let's talk about it."

Today is a little bit different in the sense that we talk about one side of what we are going to talk about today a lot. But the other side, the one we're going to focus on today and have a conversation about, we don't really hit too much.

Have you ever had things like that? Where people talk about the beauty of one side, the greatness of it, but then forget to mention this other thing over here. Like marriage, marriage is a beautiful, beautiful thing, right? Love and happiness, you've got one person with you the rest of your life. You fall asleep holding hands, *Notebook* style. But you guys wake up in the morning.

It's amazing. It is beautiful. People tell you about that. But what they don't tell you about is the bathroom situation. There is a lot they don't tell you about what happens in the bathroom, but one of the big ones is the bathroom drain and what a woman's hair does to it. And what, as a husband, you signed up for is to clean that drain.

We talk about love and service, but there is nothing like when you're down on your knees and you know—if you haven't been married long enough to see what the hair does, you get down there and you reach and get the snake thing that you don't really know how to work but you work it and the hair comes up. And you grab it.

She's behind you trying not to gag. No, I'm good, I'm going to get it. And then you're pulling it out. This is not the picture you had when you were down on one knee asking her to marry you, right? You're like, "How did I get here?"

Well, what we're going to talk about today is like that. We talk a lot about faith. And when we're down on our knees praying to God, "God, I believe that there is a God and I believe that he loves me and cares for me," there is this amazing moment and it has so much to offer us. It's a beautiful thing of faith. But there is another side of faith and it is this:

DOUBT

Those same knees that we're on when we're giving our lives to God, when we are on that mountaintop and we can never picture being down on our knees again in comes doubt, when the mountain has become a valley and we can't see as clearly, we begin to lose hope.

So, what we said is, "Let's talk about it. Let's have a conversation about doubt," because unprocessed doubt can show up in a lot of ways. It can show up in anger, addiction, depression, or anxiety—all of it.

Since our faith and our doubt are such major components of our life, if that string gets pulled and doubt begins to take over, it can be the thing that everything crumbles under. And we don't want that. But we also don't want this to be a fake place where we act and pretend we don't have doubts.

What is Doubt?

I want to start with just the picture of what doubt is. Because I think there is this traditional view of what doubt is. It's almost as if you could look at a timeline. You have doubt way over here, and you have faith over here—showing that they are very different.

Faith | | Doubt

There are moments I have faith, and then there are moments where I have doubt. But that's just not an accurate picture of what these two are. There is actually a paradox here, you can't eliminate doubt without also eliminating faith as well. Can I show you that? I want to go to a moment in time, in history, where if doubt was ever going to be eliminated completely it would be done in this moment. But we'll see what we see.

If you go ahead and open up your Bibles to Matthew 28, and if you don't have one, no worries. I'll set the stage for you. This is at the end of Jesus' ministry. He's already lived the life. He's already gone to the cross. He's already died, and now he is resurrected.

He has called his closest followers, the people who have been with him from the beginning, to come with him and meet him on the mountainside. Look at this. Look at what happens:

“Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him...”

Right? That makes sense to us. These are the people who followed him the closest. They know him the best. They were there when he was doing these teachings they had never heard before. They were there when he was high stepping on top of the water. They were there when he raised the one guy from dead to life.

And then they were there when they saw him crucified, thrown into a tomb. And now they are looking at that same guy standing in front of them. This would be the moment if doubt could be eliminated, if doubt could be done with on this side of eternity, it would be in this moment. But look at what we see:

“Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted.”

What? He is there, though, all the proof. They still have doubt. So, as much as I would love to get up here and to give you three quick ways you can eliminate doubt from your life, I don't think that is possible.

But what I do think is we can begin to reframe the way we see doubt. And we can find ways to work through our doubts. Let's start with this, which I think is a better picture of what doubt actually is. It's not a line where either I have faith or I have doubt, but it's a circle where it all exists together.

Faith & Doubt Circle

I have faith and doubt. Doubt is uncertainty, and faith is uncertainty with confidence. Doubt is not an enemy of my faith, but my faith is the most important thing and the foundation everything sits on. My faith is what I cling to and what I grab when there are things that are unseen and haven't happened yet.

Doubt is the thing that keeps me reaching. Doubt is the thing that keeps me going toward that rope and pulling myself closer and closer to Jesus. That there is no stigma that comes with doubt, there is no shame that should come with doubt.

Look at this. I want to say it this way:

Having doubts doesn't mean you're a hypocrite—it means you're human.

Having doubts is not something that should keep you from God, from church, from one another. It's not something that should keep you from anything. It's an invitation to ask questions, and invitation to pray, an invitation to work your way closer and closer to Jesus, because we can't eliminate it, but we can work through it. That's what I want to spend our time on today.

HOW CAN WE WORK THROUGH OUR DOUBTS?

If we want to work through our doubts:

GIVE GOD THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

This is a relational concept. If you're working through doubts with God, obviously you apply this to him. But if you want a better marriage, give your spouse the benefit of the doubt. If you want a better relationship with your kids, give them the benefit of the doubt.

Benefit of the doubt: The state of accepting something/someone as honest or deserving of trust even though there are doubts

This is the life of the follower of Jesus. As much as it pains us to say it, it is the life of faith, meaning it's a life lacking proof where faith has to come in. Where we have to show up over, and over, and over again.

I just want to say this right now. If you have doubts, if you are struggling with faith, don't let that stop you. Keep coming. Keep coming to serve. Keep opening up the word. Keep coming in here to worship with other people. Doubt is not something that should keep you from God. You belong here before you or if you ever believe. Can we say that? Can we let everybody know? That is you.

And this is just the beginning of the conversation. We've created so many resources to help you work through your doubts. And you can find that all on our website:

tpcc.org/care

But we want to give God the benefit of the doubt, meaning when that gap comes, when there are doubts that arise, I'm going to stop and I'm going to say, "God, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

We do this pretty naturally with people we trust and love, right? Like, with your spouse. He leaves for work in the morning, you're not like, "Hey, see you later," I don't know if I'll ever see him again. He might run off with someone. No, you would lose your mind if you had that thought. No, he leaves and you say, "I know who he is. I trust him to be faithful. I trust him to follow through on the vow he made me," and then you don't think another thing about it.

But at the same time, have you ever had someone or have someone in your life that you don't trust? That it doesn't matter what he says, you don't believe a word that is coming out of his mouth. How is that relationship going?

"Hey, how is it going Ryan? I like your shoes"

"Yeah, thanks, liar. I don't even like these shoes. I know he is lying."

Do you have that with God? That you give him the credit for all the bad things, but none of the good. You see, to give God the benefit of the doubt is to come to this spot saying, "I'm going to trust you. Even when I don't know why, I know who, and I'm going to trust your character." The way we do that is two simple ways:

Begin with Jesus

The way faith works and the way we are setup, we will find what we're looking for. If we are setting out to find an angry God who is mad at us and upset with the world, if we're looking for an absent God, we will find him.

But if we begin with Jesus, we will find Jesus and see God in a new light. We can say so much about who Jesus is, but I want to narrow it down to this one short verse in John. Look at this:

“So the Word (God) became human (Jesus) and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son. John 1:14 (NLT)

“No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.” John 1:18 (NLT)

So, when I think about God, giving him the benefit of the doubt, it becomes much easier if I start with Jesus, because I start with a God who has nothing but unfailing love and faithfulness for me. Everything he is doing is for my good, for his glory. It’s a response out of love. Not doing something in love, but he is love. It’s all he can do. That’s where I begin. I give God the benefit of the doubt by starting with Jesus.

Be Humble

This is such a hard concept. Because a doubt is birthed out of this phrase, “I don’t know,” and that is a tough place to sit. We hate not knowing. And our kids remind us of how much we don’t know all the time.

I’ve got three little ones who have questions I don’t have answers to. We will just be driving, and they are just simple questions. I blame my public education, like I do most things. I’ll be driving and my son is like, “Dad, what is fog?”

“Well, you see, fog the term actually comes from a Latin derivative of fog meaning... What kind of fog are you talking about? Are you talking about Indiana fog?” I can’t say I don’t know. And then my daughter, who is two years older than my son says, “Oh, a fog is just a low cloud that has gathered close to the surface.”

You know what? I was about to get to that point. I was giving him a background of where it comes from. You want to talk now? Maybe you should go to your room and think about talking, if you want to talk so much about what you know.

But we hate not knowing. Especially the older we get, becoming adults, to say, “I don’t know,” is a tough thing. But if we are going to process the things of God, things that our finite brains cannot, then we’re going to come to a God where we’re openly saying, “His ways are not our ways. They are bigger, stronger, different in every way.” If we are going to try to wrestle with these, we are going to have to get comfortable saying, “I don’t know.”

So, let’s have some fun right now. We’re going to say it together. I don’t know. See how freeing that is? It’s not attached to anything. But, I don’t know, there is so much humility that comes from that. It brings us to such a safe and secure place. Which sounds so strange, because I think a lot of times we go to I don’t know, and then it twirls us into a bunch of other things we don’t know.

We start with, “I don’t know that, what else don’t I know?” And then we spin over here and continue opening that door to another thing we don’t know, and then another thing we don’t know. And then we get way over here and we’re questioning everything—reality. Am I real? Am I a person? Is this a dream? How can I know?

So, start with I don’t know, but then quickly move to this:

I don’t know. But here’s what I do know.

And this is going to be the framework we will use as we walk through doubts. I don't know. I don't know what that is, but here's what I do know. I'm going to give God the benefit of the doubt. There is a gap here, and I'm going to fill it with trust.

I'm going to begin with Jesus. That's how I'm going to see this problem through, what I am struggling with. What does Jesus have to say about this, and what does he tell me about this?

And then I'm going to be humble, coming to the fact that I may never get my arms around what this is. I'm going to come to this space of humility saying, "God, I don't get it, but I'm going to trust you anyway. I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

And what I want to do right now is just kind of work through this with some of the big buckets where a lot of our doubts kind of live. They are birthed out of these three big things, these barriers that keep us from coming to know Jesus.

If you have doubts right now and you are saying, "I wish I could believe. I want to believe. I want to give my life to Jesus," it's probably one of these three places your doubts are coming from.

PEOPLE | PROOF | PAIN

I would believe, but my doubts are just too heavy when it comes to people, proof, or pain. Let's just walk through each one of those.

PEOPLE

And here is what I mean. You've probably had this thought. If there is a good God, why are people so messed up? Scratch that. Why are Christians so messed up? These are God's people? Don't you think they'd look a little bit better?

And I think what we need to get to with this one is this separation. When we begin to talk about people, that becomes how we see God. For me, I didn't grow up in church. I didn't come to know Jesus until I was 21. And, for most of my life every idea I had of God or the church or his people was wrapped up in one person, one interaction, in one open gym.

You see, one Wednesday I heard about this open gym. I loved playing basketball growing up, so I show up and I get into the gym and start putting my basketball shoes. This guy comes up to me and says, "Hey, were you here for the Bible study?" And I was like, "Hey, I don't know what that is, so I'm pretty sure I wasn't here for it, but I'm just here to play basketball. No worries."

He was like, "Oh man, I'm sorry, but if you didn't come for the Bible study you can't be here for the open gym." I was like, "Ah, okay." He said, "I'm going to need you to wait outside."

It was raining outside, so this was a bad moment. So, I'm standing in the rain waiting for my ride to come. Now, I didn't have anything else to put with God other than in this instant in this place where God is supposed to be. And even though I didn't process it or articulate it, when I think back that's how I saw God. God was someone who would tell me I don't belong here, that I needed to wait outside. He was okay with me being in the rain.

So, I think we need to come to this spot of saying a lot of the doubts we have in people, whether that's through a person you met or though something like slavery or crusades, or

things that people did in the name of Jesus, to come to this spot instead of, “What did the headlines say? What did that person do? That’s how I see God.” But start here:

Jesus is...

And if you don’t have anything to fill in that blank with, you probably don’t have enough to have doubts in God. But to start in that space and to say, “Maybe all the things I’ve gathered aren’t true about Jesus.” They may be true about other people. They may be true of the situations you’ve been in. But who is Jesus? Because here’s the truth of it:

...perfect.

A lot of people do things in the name of Jesus but violate the ways of Jesus. And we have to know Jesus really, really well to know the difference. So, here is the framework. I don’t know why we struggle so much and mess things up. I don’t know how people landed logically to the spaces they’ve landed over time in the name of Jesus.

But here’s what I do know. Jesus is perfect. Jesus’ ways bring life. They bring healing. They bring hope. And they are incredible. There is nothing like them. And if we want to look at people, you know, a lot of times we see the bad and we apply it to all. If you want to look at people who have been impacted by Jesus and don’t do great things, it’s not hard to find.

Start with the 11 on the mountainside who doubted. A bunch of ordinary nobodies who, after this moment with Jesus, taking him seriously and living by his Spirit changed the world, to the point that, 2,000 years later, we’re here talking about this same Jesus.

I don’t know a lot. But what I do know is Jesus, and he is perfect and he is filled with unfailing love and faithfulness to me. That’s what I know.

PROOF

The second one is proof. I think this is a big one for a lot of us that we wrestle with. I would believe, but God needs a better marketing department. My man is not making it clear who he is, that he exists. Just put it in the sky for me one time. “I’m God,” signed God.

But the problem with proof is it’s never enough. If you had a chance to open your Bible you will see there are stories of people who had these incredible moments with God, where God speaks directly to these prophets. And they have amazing moments.

Like Elijah, who we were talking about last week. He had this day that would blow your mind. He shows up and it’s him against the world, him against all these false gods and false prophets. And God shows up in a big way and destroys the competition. In less than 24 hours he goes from having faith that God can do anything to so much doubt he is ready to end his life.

You see, the problem with proof is that it’s never enough. If proof were enough, a marriage license would be enough to keep marriages together. The truth about it is it’s enough for a conviction, but it’s not enough for a relationship.

So, there is a lot I don’t know about why God reveals himself the way that he does. But what I do know is that if our God is after faith, trusting in him, then proof is not going to be what he leads with. Because if he has to prove himself every single time, our faith will never grow. But

instead, I believe he is going to create opportunities where we can follow him, where we can fill that gap with trust. That's the proof.

What I do know, if you're looking for proof, is a historical account. There are eye witnesses. There are thousands of copies of the manuscript. If you place the Bible against any ancient piece of literature, it's not even close in comparison. There is so much proof there if you want it, but I'm telling you it will never be enough until we come to this space of saying, "Jesus, you are enough. Jesus, you are the proof I need."

PAIN

The final one is probably the biggest one, kind of builds on the others here. It becomes really hard to reconcile a good God with a bad world, a good God with painful circumstances, a good God with cancer, a good God with death. How do we reconcile those two things? I wish I could believe, but I've seen too much. I can't bring those two ideas together.

I just want to say I don't know. I don't know why a lot of things have happened to me. I don't know why the bad things that have happened to you have happened. I don't have an answer. I don't have a why. But I do know who. And if I start with Jesus, then I know he is not absent in the pain. I know there is a God who is for me. Because of Jesus, I know there is a God who has experienced everything I have experienced.

The problem with pain is I don't have a lot of my answers as to why, but I do know who. I know that with my God pain was not a part of the plan, but when it came in he made a plan for the pain. He is going to deal with it. You see this in Revelation. It takes faith to believe it and trust it, but look at what God says.

"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." Revelation 21:4 (NLT)

You see, I fill the gap with a lot of things I don't know, but I do know that. I know my God sees it, I know my God is with me, and I know God has a plan that one day it will be no more.

I don't know, but here's what I do know about proof, people, and pain. I think those are the three big buckets.

I don't want us to get to this spot where we ever think we have to hide or pretend. There might not be answers we want to hear, but there are answers. If we start with God, give him the benefit of the doubt, and then look at who Jesus is and we are humble, we can get somewhere. We can work through our doubts in a healthy way.

And I do think those three things create a lot of doubts, but there is also another little thing the trips us up. Another thing that creates doubt in our lives. And this is when doubt begins to shift.

We've talked a lot about healthy doubt, and how it leads to faith. But there is also a doubt that is not so healthy; a doubt that is created there that leads us away from God. I think a lot of times this happens because if we're living in a world God created, he is a really big God. He is a really powerful God. Which means he has the right to say what I should and shouldn't do.

And if I'm going to get around this God, I have to doubt him. I have to diminish him. I have to discredit him so I can do the thing I want to do. So, I can do the thing I feel like doing in the moment.

I know you're a little quiet, even though I'm stepping on your toes. Am I getting a little too close? It's too real? Oh, not you? You don't struggle with that? We all have those things. I understand how we get there. Because if there's a God who is omnipresent, he is there all the time, he sees everything we do, and not even that, everything we think. All that we think before we think it, as we think it. It becomes a lot. So, we say, "You know, the easier thing is to just do away with it. I'm going to doubt God and do my own thing."

My wife was actually studying this same topic this week in 1 Thessalonians. Don't you love it when a plan comes together and you can steal from your wife for a sermon? She was talking about, "Yeah, I do think there is good, healthy, natural doubt that leads you to Jesus, but then there is this other doubt that leads to something very dangerous. We begin to diminish God." Here is what that is, and we need to be mindful of it.

"Do not stifle the Holy Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (NLT)

And the word stifle just means make it hard for someone to breathe. That's what our doubts can do to the Spirit of God if they are approached in a negative way. Here is just a list of what that could look like.

Lack of prayer

It can turn into a lack of prayer, because I doubt God has anything to say to me and I doubt that it matters if I talk at all.

Justifying sin

I doubt that what I do matters anymore, so I'm going to live for the moment.

Pulling away from community and church

I doubt the people over there have anything to help me with. I doubt people.

Division within the church

It moves from, "I doubt that they could be helpful," to "I doubt that they should exist at all."

And doubts can come through and begin to be divisive and tear people apart. This is why we need to take doubt seriously. Not that it shows up in anger and it shows up in anxiety, it can come that way. But the reason we need to be really careful and address doubts head on and to be honest with them and process through them in healthy ways is because the consequences are detrimental.

We can actually stifle the Spirit of God within us, which is the best thing we have going for us. It is our hope to live this life God has for us. And maybe you don't know who the Holy Spirit is, but let me just kick it for you really quick. This is one of the things the Holy Spirit does. He is an advocate for you. Rooting for you, cheering you, supporting you, leading you to Jesus, the very Spirit of God. Look at what it says in John:

"If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth."
John 14:15-17 (NLT)

Drop down just a little bit more.

“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.” John 14:26 (NLT)

When those doubts begin to creep in, when we begin to lose a connection with what we’re seeing, of our reality, painting pictures of God that just aren’t true, we actually have the very Spirit of God redirecting us. Bringing us back. Realigning us. Sharing all truth with us. Saying, “That’s not what Jesus said. Remember what Jesus did? Remember what Jesus showed us?”

If you’ve ever seen a coach with 3 and 4-year-olds, that’s what I picture the Holy Spirit looks like for most of us. Just running around with us, “No, no, no now is not the time for a water break. You’ve got to get back over here. No, put that down. Get your hands out of your nose.”

Let the Spirit Breathe

We have the Spirit of God within us reminding us of all things. And if the warning is to not stifle it, then we need to give our lives and hope that we have to let the Spirit breathe. Let the Spirit of God breathe in you to lead you to all these spaces that you don’t even know yet, but trusting that God is going to take you through them in ways no one else can. We’ve got to let the Spirit breathe.

I just want to give us three ways we can create environments where the Spirit can breathe, because you probably have environments in your life where the Spirit breathes better when you are there. You have spots in your life where you breathe better no matter what the situation is. When you go to that place, it is easier for you to breathe.

The first thing we can do is this: Be in God’s Word daily. Scripture, the Bible, is described as “God breathed.” And then there is this ancient Chinese proverb that says, “The faintest ink is stronger than the best memory.”

Think about how much stronger the ink of God is in our lives. It’s not just reading something to cross it off. It’s not just reading something to say, “I did 10 minutes.” No, you are interacting. You are going back and forth with a God who has penned his thoughts in a book. And you get to live and work from that. Look at how it talks about it in Hebrews, what the Bible is, what the word of God is:

“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.” Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

The breath is on the words, and then God’s Spirit is leading us. Reading through that, you had that crazy thought? Come and let me show you what God’s word says about that. Oh, you think God forgot you? Let me take you to this Psalm over here. Come on over here. I’m going to open it up to places you don’t even know about yet, and your faith is going to be renewed.

That’s the first thing, daily Bible reading. We’ve created a whole thing. We’ll send daily Bible reading out to you every single day if you subscribe to it. Just because we believe in God’s word that much.

Prayer

The second one is prayer. If you want to let the Spirit breathe in your life, you have to spend time talking to God. It is hard to give the benefit of the doubt to someone you don't talk to, someone you don't have a relationship with. Our prayers get us to this honest space where we get to have a conversation with God.

But it's not a one-and-done type thing. Jesus paints a very different picture of what prayer is. Look at this in Matthew:

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

But this is the spot we were talking about in the beginning. When we get to this spot of, “I don't know. I need to ask.” And we knock on that door and give God about 30 seconds to get to that front door—heaven is really big it takes a long time to get there...

We are like, “Bang, bang God. He is not there. I'm going to open this door.” And we begin to walk through this other way. But the way Jesus paints this picture, he calls it effective prayer, is that you keep on knocking. You keep on seeking. You come to the place of, “God, I don't know the answers, but I do know they are out there.”

It is like this place in the gospel where the disciples get this really hard teaching, and Jesus is like, “You all going to leave too?” They are like, “Where else would we go? You are the one who has life.”

So, we come to this space of honesty and doubts, and not that we're getting the answers right away, but we believe where we're standing is the best place to be. We know God is not withholding from us, and we know everything is working in his time, that his unfailing love, his compassion, and his faithfulness is going to come, “And I'm going to keep on knocking because I know I'd rather knock at the door of God than go anywhere else. I trust you, God.” It is prayer.

But I can tell you how you know that doubt is creeping into your prayers. It's not when you stop praying, that's one thing. But there is another thing that can happen in our prayers where it moves to this spot where we go to God as critics. We go to God critiquing him, not going humbly before him as the Creator of everything, but demanding answers.

And then poking holes in his character, and making it seem like there is something wrong with him. And we get this picture. It happens to a guy in the Bible whose name is Job. Job had it bad, the worst it could possibly be. He lost everything, the people he loved, his kids. Everything is falling apart around him, and all he had was a bunch of goofballs for friends.

They are giving him bad advice, and now he is beginning to turn on the one thing he has, his faith in God. And he begins to question and challenge who God is. Look at how the Lord responds to him:

“Then the LORD said to Job, ‘Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God's critic, but do you have the answers?’” Job 40:2 (NLT)

And when we find ourselves in this spot of being a critic, that's when we know our doubts are taking us away and they are beginning to stifle the Spirit.

Maybe you're beginning to experience that now in your prayer life. Every time you go to pray, you just feel like you're taking a knife to God and cutting him down little by little. Instead, what would it look like to do this? Let our doubts become confessions to God and not critiques about God.

When I go to God it is a confession of all that I am and all that I'm not. "God, I don't understand. God, I'm struggling. God, I'm hurting. God, I even feel like you've left me."

But doubts don't turn into critiques about who God is, instead they start with, "God, I don't know, but I believe you are the only one with the answers. God, I believe you are the only one who gives hope. I believe you are the only one I can turn to. God, help me."

That's the spot where the Spirit breathes. That's the spot where lives can be changed. That's the spot where doubts can actually increase our faith and we can have more trust in God when our doubts become confessions, and not critiques.

Groups

The third thing is this. Get in a group. There are so many conclusions we land on driven by doubts we never would have gotten to if we were in a group. If we had other people around us. The doubts that are in the back of our minds that we project as truth, if we shared those with other people, they would get cut down in a minute—you don't really think that about yourself. No, they would never live. Doubts, in a group, are like fish out of water. They can't breathe.

Did you do something growing up, maybe on the first day of school? You did something you had doubts about. You got the shoes nobody else was getting. It was a risk, it could pay off, but you had doubts.

And then you walked down the hallway and you're waiting just for somebody to notice. So much doubt. Every step, more doubt, more doubt. Until you see your crew. And then they lose their minds. They start hyping you up. "I can't believe you got those. Those are so cool. You look incredible. Seriously, can I buy them from you right now?"

They immediately give you confidence and take away the doubt. It is the same thing with a group, lifegiving relationships. People who love God, love Jesus, and love you are able to sit with you and process your doubts. When you come into those spots, you have people on the other side of you. If we can be humble enough to say, "I don't know, but here is what I'm feeling right now. I don't know, but this is who I'm seeing God to be. Help me see this. Help me with my unbelief."

And you can have people rally around you who can say, "I don't know, but here is what I do know. Here is why I know doubt is a lie from the Devil. Here is what I do know about who God is and his unfailing love. This is what I do know about Jesus is."

And you have a whole group of people behind you. That is an environment where the Spirit can live. And we have a spot for you. If you're looking for a group, if you're looking for people to come alongside you, we have a spot for you to let the Spirit breathe. That's what it's about.

And I know there are people here today who are saying, "I just want to believe. I just want to have a little bit of faith. If I could believe, I would. But I can't get to the faith I see in other people. I can't get to the faith that God wants me to have."

I want you to start with Jesus. Where is this idea that you think you have to have this super-hero faith to come to know God? I just want to show you how Jesus interacts with doubt through a guy named Thomas who catches a bad rap for having doubt. But nobody read Matthew 28. A lot of them were doubting, even as they were staring at Jesus.

But there is one follower that they point out who says, "I just can't believe it." He was with Jesus, he saw everything, but then they said he was resurrected and he was like, "Ah, I can't go that far with you. You all are wild. Until I see Jesus, that's when I'll believe." Look at what Jesus does:

"The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!' 'My Lord and my God!' Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, 'You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.'" John 20:26-29 (NLT)

God knew you would come to this spot. Where you would have to make a choice to believe even without necessarily having the proof of seeing Jesus before your face. And he says, "Blessed are you."

There are so many ways you can go, so many doubts that would lead you in different directions, but if you can come to this spot of just a little bit of faith. If you can muster up a mustard seed of faith and say, "I don't know a lot, but what I do know and believe is that Jesus is who he said he is.

"What I do believe is God came, he lived this perfect life, and he loved me so much—to go to a cross for me. He lived as a human. He did that for me, that's unfailing love. I don't have all the proof, but I have proof in the fact that God not only went to a cross for me and died, but he proved he was the one with power over life and death when he resurrected, giving me hope and faith that I can too. I believe. I'm going to give God the benefit of the doubt."

When it comes to pain, all the pain that is keeping you from God, there won't be a time it's not there. You can't wait until that is gone until faith comes. Faith comes in the middle of it. Faith comes in the middle of suffering.

"What I do know is that God went through that pain. God took the nails. God sent his Son. God sacrificed so much for me. I know God has a plan for me. I know one day, as bad as it is, it won't compare to what awaits me. So, I believe."

I just want to say if that is you, you can always text Jesus to 87221 to begin that conversation as to what it looks like to follow Jesus.

What I want to do right now is one of the reasons to gather on a Sunday. This is an environment where the Spirit breathes. This is an environment where we stir one another up. We hype one another up. We come in here with doubts, struggles, and pain. But then we come to this spot and look up to God and say, "God, I'm going to trust you. I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt in the midst of all of this."

I know we talked about this last service, but Myron and I were leading a couple of years back. He was leading at one of our worship nights and he was getting everyone to stand and to sing.

He said, "Sometimes we worship because we can't help but worship. It's already up here. As soon as we walk in, it comes pouring out of us. We believe, we have faith, we know."

But he said, "Other times, we've got to start singing to be reminded. Other times we've got to do it even though we don't know why, but we know who. And we have trust that God is going to show up in this environment."

So, what I want to ask right now, everyone in this room, everyone watching online at the campuses. Would you stand with us in this moment? Would you stand with us in our doubts, in our struggles, in our worries, and in our faith that is rock solid? We're going to declare the name of Jesus. There is a lot we don't know, but we do know who Jesus is.

So, in this moment, it may have taken a lot for you to stand up, standing in your doubts. Your doubts are talking to you, telling you who you aren't. Who does Jesus say you are? In this moment, who does God say you are? Because God doesn't say you are who your doubts say you are. God says you are handcrafted, made in the image of God. God says you are a reflective image of him. God said you are worth dying for. God said, "I'll move heaven and earth to get to you."

Who does Jesus say you are? Who do your doubts say God is right now? What does he tell you? Do your doubts tell you God is distant? That he is keeping you out in the rain? That God is punishing you? No.

Who does Jesus say God is? Jesus says God is a Father, God is a Father who not only wants a relationship with you, he wants to adopt you, call you his own. You are a child of God, a son, a daughter, that is who you are.

And we serve a God who is faithful, who is powerful, and who speaks of things to be. That is who God is. That God is for us. And if he is for us, who could be against us?

So, right now, we are going to sing to Jesus, our anchor through all of it.

God, thank you so much. God, thank you for this moment in time that we can come here filled with doubts and struggles. God, in this moment we choose you. We choose not to walk down those dark hallways of doubt that lead us to more and more confusion. God, we don't know it all, but what we do know brings us to our feet. What we do know carries us through. What we do know is enough proof to carry us on. What we do know is your love sustains for this moment and for all of eternity.

So, God, we lift up our voices to you. Jesus, we sing to you. It is our hope that is in you and your unfailing love. It is in your faithfulness. It's not our faith, but what our faith is in. It is in Jesus. We pray right now that the Spirit would breathe. We pray this room would be filled with your Spirit overtaking us right now in this moment, Jesus. We pray in your perfect name. Amen.