Q&A with Pastor Michael

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] All right. All right. Let's come back together. We've got Pastor Michael here with us. Give it up for Pastor Michael.! Michael, thank you for taking time to be with us tonight.

! Do a Q&A. Glad to be with you guys. Always fun to be here. I always try to come here when I can, at least at the beginning of Elevate on Wednesday nights. I feel like I am smarter and cooler when I'm around you guys.
Yeah. So last year we tested how cool you actually were. And I surprised some people. You surprised everyone. Including myself. You shocked the world. Yeah, I did. With your brain rot terminology knowledge.
That was my flu game. And so we've got to make it harder this year. So we are going to do Name That Celebrity. I got no shot. Name That Celebrity. No shot. If we could get on the back screen, what's up on the front screen, please?
So Michael, the game is simple. There's going to be a picture of a celebrity up on the screen. Okay. Your task is to name that person. I have no shot.
[1:06] That's okay. And, you know, normally Michael comes into this completely cold. I did give him a hint this year. I said, your hint is celebrities. Okay. So here we go. We're going to have about ten of these, okay?

Okay. All right. First one. I'm more nervous than any Sunday morning ever right now. Leonardo DiCaprio.
Here we go. Here we go. I would. And I have, I haven't met him, but we were in the same room as him. Wow. Yeah.
Wow. Was that at church? Okay. Brad Pitt also at the same time in the same room as Leonardo DiCaprio that we were in.
Wow. And, and. What church were you guys at? Do what? What church were you guys at? We were at a taping of a TV show in, in Hollywood.
[2:07] Wow. Brad Pitt's uncle, right? Baptized my wife, Marcy. Whoa. Yeah. Not that night, but.

Okay. Yeah. Yeah. That would be a wild night. Okay. Two for two so far. Two for two. Beyonce. Okay. I wasn't confident, but. You're off to a hot start. Three for three. Hot start.
Taylor Swift. Okay. He's rolling now. Kansas City Chiefs. Is that four for four? Four for four. No one say it. Okay. No one say it. I, I have, I have, I have no clue.
I would, the first thing that came to mind was, was a Jonas brother, but I have no idea. No? Okay. Who's that? That is Shawn Mendes. I don't only, I've not only not seen the picture, I've never even heard the name.
[3:08] What does he do? How big of a celebrity is this guy? I've never heard of him. Singer? He must not be any good. Never heard of him. All right.

Four for five. Four for five. Ariana Grande? No?
Is that the right name? Is that? Kylie Jenner. That is the name of a famous person. Okay. I don't think that doesn't look like Ariana Grande, but, okay. Is that four for six?
John Jackson.
I have no clue. I've never seen this guy in my life. I don't know what his actual name is, but Mr. Beast. Jimmy Donaldson? Mr. Beast? Yeah, he's a YouTuber.
[4:09] Most famous YouTuber in the world, they say. Most famous what? YouTuber. Oh, wow. Okay. You know what YouTube is? Yeah, I'm familiar with it. Very impressive.

Wheels are falling off. I think... Is it... A singer?
Yes. I think I know this one, actually. Billie Eilish. Yes. Is that right? I couldn't tell you a single song she sings, but I know the name.

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Sort of face. Sort of. Okay. Impressive. Impressive. No idea.
No idea. Let's go with, uh... That looks like, uh... Jane Williamson. Jane Williamson.
[5:11] Great guess. Millie Bobby Brown. Millie Bobby Brown. When I was a teenager, there was another Bobby Brown who was married to Whitney Houston. Really? Yeah. Okay. He had some trouble in his life.

Yeah, that's his daughter. That's the only Bobby Brown I know. My Prerogative. At Westmore, we came out. Our warm-up song was My Prerogative by Bobby Brown. How about that?
Next one. Yes. Yes. That is, uh... Yo soy Miguel. Incorrect. That is me.
That is Tom Cruise. No, no. That is me. Yeah. That is, uh... An old... Is it... Mars, is that high school or college? College?
Yeah, that's, uh... That's, uh... That's who Marcy fell in love with, and then he turned into this, so... It wasn't that good to start with. It's sure isn't very good now, but that's... That's... That's all we got. The hair was flowing.
[6:10] That was nice. Look at that. I've got Joey. I'm telling... I always... In staff meeting, I always tell Joey, I used to have Joey-like hair, and nobody believes me, because Joey's got gray hair, and my hair stinks now, but I had some solid Joey-like hair right there.

Man, young Tom Cruise. In the past tense. Yeah. All right, so you got... How'd I do? I did pretty good. Six out of ten? Six or seven. Six or seven.
More than I would have thought. Yeah, that was good. That was good. All right, well, thanks for playing our game. All right, so you guys have been able to submit questions. You still... I would, just for the record.
Yeah, go for it. I'd like to debate that Mr. Beast is a celebrity, just for the record. Okay, state your case. I've never heard of him. That's all I got.
That just eliminated over half the celebrities in the world. That's true. That's true. All right. Pretty good. I mean, last year and this year, like, that was...
[7:11] You're cool. You're cool. I'm 52, almost 53. So that's the best I can do right there. And you still got it. Yeah. Well, I didn't say that, but... Yeah. So you guys have been able to submit questions.

You still are able to submit them now. Sean's at the back moderating them, so I'll bump up the ones that he deems good. But first, before we get to the super serious stuff, where's your favorite place to get a burger?
There is a right and wrong. This is a true gospel issue. Okay. The best place to get a burger is In-N-Out in California.
Is this among just fast food places or anywhere on the planet? I mean, if I'm at a real restaurant, I'm going to get someone's sides of a burger. So I think I would limit it to fast food.
Okay. Yeah, I'd be In-N-Out. I like Brahms, but I worked at Brahms in high school. It's my first job.
[8:11] So I like Brahms okay. Brahms has a lot of flies in it. It's the ice cream. If you ever wonder why there are always flies in Brahms, it's the ice cream. I like Whataburger, but it's not anywhere close to In-N-Out.

So In-N-Out is the right answer. Okay. I agree. That's fair. All right. So you mentioned you're 52, going to be 53, been a pastor for a while.
So one question is how long have you been a pastor? And then kind of follow up, what's your favorite part about being a pastor? Man, that's a great, great thing to think about. I went into full-time ministry when I was 20. May 1994.
So I was 20. So that'd be 32 years, something like that. About seven years at a church and more. And then I'm in my 26th year here. So 32, 33 years that I've been doing it full-time. Before that, I had a part-time, it was just summer only, but a part-time job at a little bitty church in Oklahoma City.
[9:18] Literally, literally, the average age of the church was about 75, for real. And they hired me to be their college and career guy for like May through September.

And I said, well, okay, give me your list of college and career students. I'll call me. We don't have any. That's why you're here. And my first Sunday there, we got two kids to come.
And so I was standing up teaching. And I heard this weird noise above me. And I couldn't figure it out. It was a big building. Church ran about 30, 40 people maybe. Come to find out a homeless guy and his family had been living upstairs for months.

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And the church didn't know because the top floor wasn't used. They just climbed up the fire escape every night. And that's where they lived. And what I heard was this guy snoring while I was. So I told someone.
They went and found like a whole family had just moved in upstairs in the church. So that was my start. Pretty interesting start. Favorite part.
[10:26] This is going to sound a little bit like I'm patronizing you. Literally, my favorite part would be things like this. The last two Wednesday nights, I was upstairs doing the same thing with our children's ministry.

And just being in small groups talking about the Bible, talking about the Christian life, talking about how do we take what we believe and try to live it out in a real world with real struggles.
I love Sunday mornings, obviously. I love preaching. Everyone that's called to preach, I think, loves that. But honestly, without it being hopefully too patronizing, literally, this is about as favorite as it gets.
Just getting to sit down with younger people and talk about the Bible and how to live. I love to study. I mean, I love to study. Preaching is fun, but preaching wouldn't be fun if you hadn't studied.
So I definitely love time alone studying. I love spending time with our staff. Just so you guys know, I mean, like our staff at our church here loves each other.
[11:41] We laugh a lot together. We disagree together. We work together. We solve problems together. We have a lot of fun doing what we do.

And it hasn't always been that way in my life. I mean, not all 32, 33 years have been that way. Praise God, many of the last number of years have been. But it wasn't always that way. And so literally, every Monday when we're talking and planning, even if it's working through disagreements, whatever it may be, doing it with people who I know love each other and care for each other, going to lunch every Monday after Saturday.
Like I never take that for granted. I never take that for granted. Because in other situations I was in, we didn't have that. And so even though it's been that way for years and years and years here, there's never a Monday.
I take the camaraderie we have as a staff. I never take that for granted because I've been on the other side of it. So those are all things I love, studying, preaching, being with our staff, being with young people talking about the Bible.
So those would all be among my favorite things. That's great. I love this next question because it kind of gets into who you are as a person, reveals something about you to us. If you weren't a pastor, what would you be doing?
[13:04] What would your occupation be? You know, there's a lot of things that interest me. I was just meeting with a family right before I came in here tonight, working with them as they're kind of discerning God's call in their life.

We're talking about being called to ministry and called to missions and how you think through that. There's a lot of things that interest me.
There's nothing else I could see myself doing. Anything else I would do, I would feel like I'm doing somebody else's job, living somebody else's life. What I do here for this church feels as close as to why I can figure out why God created me and gifted me and gave me the gifts he did, didn't give me other gifts he didn't give me, like trying to make sense of all of that, of who God made me.
What I do every day here, I feel like this is literally as close as I can get to why I exist on this earth. So in that sense, I can't see myself doing anything else. The sense of calling to pastor and shepherd God's people, it's hard for me to even envision doing something that's not that.
But if you could kind of take that sense of calling away and just say as a human being, things you like and enjoy, what could you do? I love the law.
[14:30] My oldest son's an attorney. And when he was doing his preparation for the bar exam, I somehow ended up being his person that asked him all the questions two, three, four hours at a time.

And I loved what I learned from that. So I'm intrigued by that. I love medicine. Whenever I go make a hospital visit and the doctor comes in, I'm there with a church member to pray with them.
Often, the doctor will talk a little bit and they'll say, do you have any questions? And the person I'm visiting is like, no, I'm fine. I'm like, hey, I got a few. I got a few. Like, how does that work? I just, I love that.

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I could have seen myself going to med school. It's easy to say that when you actually have to go to med school. I understand that. But I could see myself having, well, I could really enjoy that.
I love sports and athletics. I was never good enough to be skilled at it. But I love it. When I watch games, I still think through strategy.
[15:34] I will often tell my wife things that I think we could and should do differently and why. I like the leadership of coaching.

I like the strategy of coaching. I like the motivation of coaching. I like the game planning of coaching. So attorney, physician, coach, I could see myself in a different world with any of those things.
All right. I love this next question. They just ask, how should I do my Bible reading? And then where should I start in the Bible? So just kind of walk us through maybe your example of what that looks like for you.
But for students, what should their daily Bible reading look like? And if someone's never read through a book of the Bible, what would be a good place for them to start? Such a great question. Let me give you a few different things to think about.
The best way to learn your Bible. This is going to sound so obvious. The best way to learn your Bible is to read it. If you only listen to Joey teach it on Wednesdays and me teach it on Sundays and your Sunday school teacher walk with you through a passage on Sunday mornings, you will learn truths and you will learn some doctrine.
[16:53] But you won't know your Bible unless you read it. You can't truly learn the Bible by having somebody else talk to you about the Bible.

Good preaching, good Bible study, those things reinforce what you're learning. They help you make sense of what you're learning. They help you learn to think.
And so good preaching has an important role in your spiritual development. But if that is a substitute for you reading the Bible, you'll never learn the Bible.
Not in a solid way. So the first thing I would say is you have to literally spend time reading it. Sometimes people will say, you know, how do you know the Bible or how did you know that or how did you learn that?
And the answer is you just have to spend time reading. There's just no substitute for being in the Word. So it's great that you guys have world-class preaching on Wednesday nights in here.
[18:01] Take advantage of it. Listen. Take notes. Be grateful. You have a tremendous pastor in here on Wednesday nights. But if all you're getting is what someone else has read talking to you about the Bible, if that's all you're getting, you're never going to know the Bible like you need to or should.

So you've got to read. Okay. So that's the first thing. So if we're committed to that, now we say, I'm a teenager. What should I do? What should my strategy be? There's a few things I would encourage you to think about doing.
One is to just read through the New Testament. Start in Matthew 1 and just commit to read three or four chapters a day.
It would take you about 10 or 15 minutes. If you read three or four chapters a day, 10 or 15 minutes a day, you would get through the New Testament in three months maybe, four months, something like that.
It would not take you a long time to get through the New Testament. And it would help you to learn the totality of what's there. That would be my first encouragement to you.
[19:21] Another thing that you might think about doing is to take smaller books of the Bible and read them repetitively. So an example would be take the book of Philippians, four chapters.

You're going to read it in about nine minutes. Read the whole book of Philippians every day in the month of May. Take another book in June. Take the book of Ephesians, six chapters.
Read it every day in the book of June. And just take one smaller New Testament book. Read it every day for a month. At the end of that month, you will know that book.
In fact, you'll have memorized, without even meaning to, pretty big sections of the book. But if you haven't read the whole New Testament, I would start there.
And the easiest thing is just I'm going to read three chapters every single day. And just read your three chapters every day, starting in Matthew. When you finish Matthew, go to Mark. Read three chapters.

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[20:25] When you finish those 16, go to Luke. Read three chapters. And you'll be able to advance through your New Testament in just a few months and have read the whole thing. That's where I'd start. If you've done that a few times, or if you've already read through the Bible in a year or something like that, you might think about doing one book, read the whole thing for an entire month.

And at the end of a year, 12 months, you'll have read 12 individual books in the New Testament 30 times. And you'll know those books.
Then the third thing I would offer up is to consider memorizing chapters of the Bible. When I was a sophomore in college, I read the book of James every day for 30 days.
And at the end of it, I didn't even try to memorize it. But I thought I'm kind of starting to have parts of this memorized because I've read it so much. I thought I was going to memorize it. So in college, when I was 20, at 19, I memorized the book of James.
I already read it every day for 30 days. It wasn't that difficult to do. And I know the book of James really well because I've memorized it 34 years ago.
[21:42] And so if you memorize chapters at a time, it gets, it's just like it's a muscle. Memory is a muscle.

And when you have memorized scripture, it hurts. It's hard just like working out. Once you start to build some muscle in that, it gets much easier and pretty addictive.
So those would be three or four different ways I might encourage, depending on your level of knowledge, your level of what you've already done in reading. If you're not used to reading the Bible, if that's just not a part of your daily life, start Matthew 1 tonight.
Read three chapters and just start doing that. Ten minutes a day, you'll get to your New Testament. You can't learn your Bible without reading it. Joey's a great preacher.
You cannot learn your Bible just by listening to him. I do the best I can on Sundays. You will not learn the Bible just listening to me. Hearing other men talk about what they've read is a help.
[22:42] It is not a substitute. You've got to be reading your Bible. That's so helpful. Thank you. What would you say is your favorite book of the Bible and why does that hold a special place in your heart?

Yeah, that's a legitimate question. But the honest answer is this is true every time I ever ask that. Literally, it's whatever book I'm preaching. And the reason for that is when I'm preaching a book of the Bible, not every day is the same, but every single day.
The whole time I'm in that book preaching, I'm doing some kind of reading or studying in it. And so we started Philippians in August every single day, maybe except one.
I was really, really sick in January. And there was a day where I didn't get out of bed and I don't even know that I opened my eyes. But other than that, I've done some reading and some meditating and some work on Philippians every day since August.
And so when you're preaching a book, you're living with it. When I mow my yard and my mind has nothing to think about, I'm thinking about Philippians because that's what I'm studying. When I'm driving down the road, I'm thinking about Philippians.
[24:00] If I'm at the gym on the treadmill, I often will have something related to the book I'm teaching, whether it's a lecture or another person's sermon, something related to it.

I mean, every single day. So honestly, whatever I'm preaching, the honest answer would be the book I'm preaching is my favorite book. If I could try to zoom out and you were to say what's been your favorite book to preach, I would probably say Mark.
Now, Mark's still pretty fresh. I just finished that a year ago, so it's still pretty fresh. But I thoroughly, thoroughly loved reading and preaching and studying Mark.
I absolutely loved it. Philippians would be my answer today. That's the honest answer because that's what I'm living with. So if I kind of zoom back, I would say maybe Mark.
I preached Esther. Most of you guys didn't get to hear much of it because Sunday nights when you guys were in Passion most of the weeks. But I preached Esther from like early January through around spring break.
[25:08] And I started studying Esther last July. And I was reading and studying things related to Esther or the Medo-Persian Empire, all kinds of things that may or may not ever make it to a sermon.

I studied that for about six months before I ever preached a sermon on it. And so when I finally got to preach that, like that was like I had to get that out. It had been in my mind, in my heart.

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I had to preach that somewhere, somehow. And I loved, loved studying Esther. I loved preaching Mark.
But I loved studying Esther. And so those would be among my favorites. I mentioned the book of James. I preached James in 2020 here.
I just remember that because it's when COVID was going on. And I've known that book the best, the longest.
[26:09] But preaching that through a season of time that's very memorable will always stick with me too. So a lot of different answers.

Yeah. So one common struggle in teenage years, you're starting to become a man, starting to become a woman, but still living under your parents' authority. So what are some, what's some advice you would have for students to begin to be a godly man, godly woman, while still being respectful and honorable to your parents' authority?
So not bucking that, but starting to take on responsibility and be a man or woman that God. Yeah, that's an insightful question. And whoever asked, that's a really, really helpful thing to think about. Because, you know, the way, from a father's side of it, you guys have heard me say before in sermons, if you're here on Sundays, as a parent, I think in terms of teach, train, and release.
I want to teach my kids what's true. I want to train them. That's kind of a hands-on back and forth. But all of it is to release them. So the goal of me for my, we raised two sons, Cale and Benjamin.
[27:21] My goal and Marcy's goal in raising them wasn't to make them depend on us the rest of their life. The goal wasn't that my 18-year-old sons would say, I don't want to ever leave the house.

That wasn't the goal. The goal was to raise them to be men, to raise them to be responsible, to be strong, to be faithful, and to go out on their own and to live their own lives.
So as a father, you're raising your kids to become independent. What's hard, and some of you guys are right in the middle of this, what's hard is when you're 15, 16, 17, you're starting to think independently.
And that's good. But you're not yet ready for the fullness of that independence. And that's where the struggle with mom and dad can come in.
You're trying to become your own man or woman. Your parents are wanting you to become your own man or woman. But you're not fully there yet. And so that's part of the struggle of being an older teenager.
[28:33] But that's normal, too. That's just the way that life is. So I think some things I would think about, for those of you who are 16, 17, 18, you've got to think about, how do I live out my core beliefs?

So when I was in, I'll give you an example. When I was in college, I had some good friends of mine, very good friends of mine, that were, said they were called to ministry.
And they would talk about how they graduated college, they were going to go to seminary. When they finished seminary, they wanted to be a pastor. But on Sunday mornings, they didn't go to church.
They slept in. And that seemed so strange to me. And I remember, they were buddies of mine. I remember saying, what are you all doing? Why aren't you faithful at church?
And I'd say, well, when I go to seminary, I'll go to church. And when the Lord gives me a chance to be a pastor, I'll go to church. And I'm thinking, you've got to start living that out now.
[29:49] You don't start going to church when you're a pastor. Like, that's so weird. But if you take that same mindset, there are people who are 15, 16, 17, 18, and they'll say, I want to be on my own.

I want to be a man. I want my parents to treat me like a man. But you sleep in until noon on Saturdays. That's not what men do. Or you say, I want my parents to treat me like a man.
And you don't pick up after yourself. And you leave a trail of shoes and candy wrappers and Coke cans for your mom to come and pick up after you.
That's not what men do. And I'm not saying that. I'm not trying to be rude to you. I'm just simply saying that if you're going to be a man, you've got to take what you believe and act on it.
And I think what's really difficult on the parent side of it is when your 16-year-old son or daughter says, I want more freedom.
[30:50] I want you to treat me like a man. Treat me like a woman. I'm feeling like I'm growing up. But you're not acting like a mature person does. There's just a high level of dissonance there.

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And so what I think as a young man, a young woman growing up, wanting to get ready to be on your own, you've got to start doing what's right on your own.
Not just when mom and dad's watching. Do what's right on your own. Little things like make your bed. Clean your room.
Do your chores without being reminded. Do your homework. Clean out your car. All of those things are a part of acting out how a grown-up lives.
And your parents see that. And the more your parents see you being obedient and on your own, acting like a mature person, the easier it is for them to do that work of releasing.
[32:03] And so I really think some of the most spiritual things you could do are the most practical parts of your day. Show your parents what maturity looks like.

And what maturity looks like is doing what you're supposed to do without anybody else having to coerce you into doing it. So nobody made me get up today.
Nobody made me go to work today. Nobody double-checked to make sure I was where I was supposed to be. I'm an adult. I'm a man. That's what I'm supposed to do. So just start doing that.
When you talk about biblical manhood, there's a... I don't even know where I read this, but I think it's helpful. There's kind of a five-fold part of how biblical manhood is often described.
One is you live in humility. Another is you live under self-control. A third is you protect your family.
[33:12] You provide for your family. And you lead your family. Now, if you're 16 and a junior in high school, you can't do all of that yet.

But you can sure start to put those things into practice. Live in humility. The world doesn't value humility, but God does. God says, I'm opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
God values humility. Self-control. Galatians 5, one of the fruits of the Spirit. Undisciplined men let their earthly appetites control them.
Godly men live under self-control. And then you provide, you protect, and you lead. If you're able to, get a job.
Get the discipline of work. Go get a job, if your parents bless it, without them making you do it. And go be the best worker you can be. Learn to save your money.
[34:24] Learn to pay for some of your own expenses. I don't want to buy my own stuff. Well, then why are you wanting freedom on the weekends if you're not willing to pay for your own gas?
Maturity is not saying, I want all of the freedoms and none of the benefits.

I mean, none of the responsibilities. Maturity is saying, I'm embracing the responsibilities. And I can handle the freedoms. And so, I think one of the best ways to live out your faith is to give evidence at home that you're putting into practice the things that men and women do.
Now, give yourself some grace. You're 14. You're 15. You're 16. You're going to make mistakes. That's okay. But start to live like a godly man lives.
Start to live like a godly woman lives. And I think those five things are a good way to start. Humility, self-control, provision, protection, and leadership.
And just start to put those things into action every day in small ways. That's excellent advice. So, this world is fallen because of sin.
[35:38] And because of that, every aspect of life is tainted by sin. Both our thought life, our inner life, our actions, even just the world itself.

And one of the difficulties is babies dying. And so, this question asks, do you think babies that die go to heaven? And if so, why?
That's such a real question, isn't it? Yeah, I've done funerals for babies.
I did a funeral for a three-year-old on my son's third birthday. That was one of those days edged in my mind for sure. So, my answer would be yes, I do believe they are.
And I think there's a few places we can go to. When David's son dies, that's 2 Samuel 12, I think.
[36:40] 2 Samuel 12, is that right? I think it is. He's been grieving. He hasn't been eating. His son dies. His son dies. And he says, he's not coming back to me, but I know I'll go to where he is.

And that gives us some insight into what happens there. In the Gospels, you see Jesus take children and he blesses them.
You don't see Jesus blessing hell-bound people in the Gospels.
But further than that, he takes them into his lap. The disciples are trying to get rid of him. Get these kids out of here. They're loud. They're noisy. They're messy. They're a problem. Get these kids out of here. Get these kids out of here.

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And Jesus holds the child and says, let them come to me. Here's his reason. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.
[37:45] It seems like in the Old and New Testaments, you see this consistency of this love that God has for children. And because they've not been able to defy the Lord in their sin, they have a sin nature, we all do.

But they've not lived out any rebellious ways or defiance against the Lord. I would believe the grace of God covers them. One other thing I would say about that, too, is I suspect one of the reasons Jesus said the kingdom belongs to such as these.
If a baby dies and goes to be with the Lord in heaven, the only explanation is the grace of God. Which is the only explanation for why I'll be there.
And I think in the grace of God applied to a child, we see the clearest picture of what's true for every single believer.
That it's all of Jesus. All of grace. So I think when you look at David in 2 Samuel 12, I think when you look at Jesus with the welcoming of the children.
[39:13] Jesus with the blessing of the children. And Jesus saying the kingdom belongs to such as these. And just the manifestation of God's grace.

And I think it would be consistent with the heart and character of God for them as well. I would feel confident in saying that babies are with the Lord.
You know, one other thing, too, to think about with that is as raw as that whole question issue is, the Bible talks about people from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, like people from every inch of the globe being present in heaven.
There's parts of the world that don't have the gospel. Parts of the world that don't have a Bible. Parts of the world that are unreached people groups.
How could you right now, if the Lord were to come for the church, and if in seven years after that, the second coming of Christ came and all of this was wrapped up and done, how would you have people from all over the world?
[40:19] How would that be possible? And I think the answer is because you've got babies from all over the world who are redeemed and saved by His grace.

And because of that, you have right now currently the presence of all of the world. People from every square inch of the planet today with the Lord in heaven as a fulfillment of that promise.
Yeah, it's so helpful for a lot of dark situations that families go through. Now, I think you're right. I completely agree. And I think God consistently categorizes babies and infants as innocent.
And like you said, they're sinners by nature, but we'd say they're not sinners by choice. They haven't consciously rebelled. Yeah, in fact, I think Jeremiah used that exact term. I think in Jeremiah it's referred to as the innocence.
I think that very term is used in Jeremiah there, yeah. Yeah, excellent. So when we think about God's sovereignty, God being in control of absolutely everything, absolutely all the time, we also use a word called providence.
[41:24] So can you help us distinguish what's the difference between sovereignty and providence? How can we think about both those terms as they relate to each other? Big words, important words.

It's a way to understand who God is, and it's a way to trust Him through your life. And I think there is a distinction. I think that here's the simplest way I think I could make the distinction.
When you're talking about sovereignty, you're talking about God's two things, His right and His power.
So when you say God is sovereign, you're saying God has the right or He has the authority to rule over everything. It also is saying He has the power to rule over everything. It also is saying He has the power to rule over everything.
It also is saying He has the power to rule over everything. So there are certain things that you say, you know, that God commands us to do.
[42:21] And you say, well, how can He command us to do that? Well, He is sovereign. He's got the authority to do it. He's got the right to do it. Sovereignty is sovereign. That's important to understand that God's right and authority supersedes everything else.

When we talk about providence, we're talking about God's wisdom and plan as He uses the right and authority that is His.

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So I would make a distinction between sovereignty and providence. Sovereignty is God's authority and power. Providence is His purpose and plan in how He uses His authority and His power.
So I believe with all of my heart, with all of my heart, I believe God prepared Marcy to be my wife and me to be her husband.
We met in college. I'd never heard of her before. She was from a town I'd never heard of before. I couldn't have made myself find her if I had to. I believe with all of my heart, God had us to spend these years as husband and wife.
[43:40] So He has the right and the authority to do that. That's His sovereignty. How does He do it? Well, He did it by me having a friend named Greg who was on President's Leadership Council who was helping freshmen move in.

Marcy was a freshman and Greg met her and Greg invited her to go to church. And me and Greg went to church and we picked up Marcy and that's how we met.
That's providence. That's how He did that. So God had the right and the authority, sovereignty. And the way He uses that sovereignty, His purpose and His plans are His providence.
And so your entire life is all about the sovereignty of God and how He, through His providence, makes those things happen.
So Joey is with you every week because he's our youth pastor. He's our youth pastor today because of the position he was in before this.
[44:49] He was in the position before that because he was a volunteer intern. He was a volunteer intern because he was already at our church. He was already at our church because his family had moved here years earlier.

All of that is the providence of God. That's the way God orchestrated your life and your family to get you where you are today.
His sovereignty is what gives him the right to do that. His providence are the detailed steps he took and put into place to bring you where you are today.
Me where I am today. You where you are today. And where you'll one day be. Which means, as a Christian, the only thing you have to worry about is trusting His providence and obeying His word. That's it. I had no idea I was going to meet Marcy that Sunday. I had no idea. But I was going to church that Sunday because that's where I went every Sunday.
[45:48] She was in a new town looking for a church because that's what she did. She went to church. That's where Christians go. So you don't have to worry about figuring it all out. Just submit to His sovereignty, His authority.

Be obedient to His word. And by providence, let Him orchestrate the events and details of your life.
So if that's helpful, that's how I think of a distinction of those two things.
Sovereignty is His authority. Providence are His plans or purpose. That's so clear. Very helpful. The conscience is really important in the Christian life. Paul writes to Timothy, the aim of our charge is love.
That issues from a clear conscience is one of the things he says. So if one student asks, you know, if your conscience is bothering you but you're not sure why, how can you identify the root cause of that and live in a way that's pleasing to the Lord?
So if you're feeling guilty, not sure why, trying to weigh, is this legitimate? Am I making this up? How would you counsel that student? Read the specific question again.
[46:54] If your conscience is bothering you, so you're feeling guilty but you're not sure why, what would you do to identify the root cause of that? Yeah. One is I would, you know, David said in the Psalms, search me, O Lord, and know my heart.

Try me. Know my anxious ways. See if there's any, you know, wickedness in me. So the first thing I would do is I would trust this is an invitation from God to confess my sin.
And I would look and say, do I have any sins? We break them down in the sins of commission, things that we do that we shouldn't, or omission, things that we haven't done that we should.
And so I would just, I would pray through that. Lord, is there any thought, word, attitude, anything I'm doing I shouldn't do? Anything I'm not doing that I should be doing?
And I would ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart, as the psalmist said, and to reveal that to you. If you've done that, and as best you can, honestly thought through that, prayed through that, and confessed that, and you said, but I still don't feel, you know, clean or pure.
[48:11] However, I would say that our feelings aren't bad, but our feelings make bad gods.

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They're not bad guides, but they're bad gods. So feelings aren't the enemy, but I'm going to live by truth, not my feelings. My feelings can guide me into obedience, and can guide me to pray and repent, and can guide me into how to live.
They make good guides, but feelings make bad gods. And so I want the authority of God and His Word to rule over my life. So if the Lord says, you're forgiven, and you're clean, and I say, well, I know you forgive me, but I don't feel it.
Well, that's, I'm going to go with God, not my feelings. But the first thing I'm going to do is seek to repent of my sin. And I'll just tell you, for me, if I ever feel something like that, I don't have a hard time finding sins to confess.
Like, I don't sit down in prayer and say, man, I can't think of anything. I mean, without fail, there are things I've done I shouldn't, or things I haven't done that I should have done.
[49:27] That the Holy Spirit brings to my mind for sure to confess. So I would use it as an invitation to confess. But, you know, sometimes people will say, I don't feel saved.

And you say, do you love Jesus? Yes. Do you believe the Bible? Yes. Have you repented of your sin? Yes. Is your only hope of salvation Jesus? Yes.
Do you believe Jesus died and rose again? Yes. Do you love Christ and want to honor Him with your life? Yes. Is there fruit and evidence of your life that the Holy Spirit's at work in your life? Yes. What's the problem? Well, I just don't feel saved. I say, well, okay, let's deal with what's true. I'm not going to base my final verdict of anything on my feelings.
I'm going to base the final verdict on what God's Word says. So if I love who Christ tells me to love, if I believe what Christ tells me to believe, if I'm living how Christ tells me to live, I'm going to trust and rest that that means I'm a child of God.
[50:39] And I'm not going to let my feelings have the final say on that. That's so good. Yeah, the book of 1 John talks about this a little bit. It says if your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart.

And so exactly what you're saying. We may feel guilty and it may not be legitimate and we need to stick with truth. For sure. And I'm guilty in one sense. I mean, I'm guilty that I'm a sinner.
That's always true. But Romans 8.1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So if there's something in my own heart or mind or flesh trying to condemn me, and I know I belong to Christ, I know that He's died for me, and I know that He holds me in His hands, I want to believe Romans 8.1.
There is no condemnation. Even if I feel guilty or don't feel as saved as I wanted to feel, nothing, the end of Romans 8, nothing can separate you from the love of God.
Not height, nor depth, nor principalities, angels, or demons, nor, it says, nor anything in all of creation. My feelings aren't strong enough to separate me from God's love if I'm a Christian.
[51:49] Nor anything in all creation, including you, your flesh, your mind, your thoughts, any of those things. That's so good. Okay, final question. I know you are a huge supporter of youth ministry.

You used to be a youth pastor before you became a senior pastor, went to the dark side. What would you say to the students? Why are they such an important part of the life of our church? Why do you value them the way that you do? Yeah, I love, love, love youth ministry. I think Joey has the best job in the world.
I really do. Joey gets to do everything I do, only he can blame it on me if he wants to at the end. Like, it really is the greatest job.
It's such an important part of the church because teenagers believe in things. They've got feelings. They've got dreams. They've got goals.
[52:47] They've got hopes. You feel disappointment. You feel joy. Like, those things are wonderful. And sometimes as adults, the older you get, you get kind of numb.

And honestly, there's parts where I kind of miss the days of meeting with a teenager, and they're telling me, you know, it's terrible, it's awful, it's the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I'm like, at least you feel something.
You talk to adults, they're just numb and beat up by the world, you know. I love that about youth ministry. I love the energy and excitement, but it's more than just that.
I love the modeling that you guys do for our church. So, my favorite part of Sunday night church, by 10,000%, are when our teenagers are in there on Sunday nights.

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I've loved the last year. And I didn't even get, I'm not very smart. I didn't even make it to where I'm preaching these last several weeks when their youth are in there. I mean, you're getting to see all these teenagers right there at the front on Sunday nights.
[53:58] I should have booked myself to preach one of those Sunday nights. But even just seeing you there, you're modeling what we want from our adults.

You're listening, you're singing, you're taking notes, you're talking, you're engaged, you're alive, you believe, and man, it's just, it's modeling what you want from all of our church.
But, you know, you hear, you guys have heard this a thousand times, I know it's still true, so it's worth repeating. You know, the whole adage of, you know, the youth or the future of our church. You're the future leadership of our church, but you're the present of our church. You guys can, through your modeling in life, 1 Timothy 4.12, let no one despise you for your youth, which isn't just talking about teenagers, but the concept's the same, but set an example for them in love, speech, faith, purity.
You're setting an example for our church already today. And I think a church that has godly teenagers who are striving to live out their faith today, that is such a great gift to the church.
[55:20] It's such a great gift to the church. And, just in a really practical way, on a Sunday morning when I'm preaching, what age group do I visually see the most?

You guys, right? You're in the front, and you're in the middle. You're the ones I see the most. So, who do you think has the most sway over encouraging me or discouraging me?
You. Who has the most sway for our musicians leading music? You. If you're singing, if you're listening, if you're engaged, if you're paying attention, if you're participating, you're giving life to the people that are leading on the platform.
You're giving life to the preacher when you do that. Now, the other side's true, too. If you're not paying attention, if you're scrolling on your phone, if your head's down, if you're not singing, if you're not trying to listen to the sermon, do you think that has an effect on the preacher?
I promise you it does. So, what age group in our church has the most influence over the most influential people on a Sunday morning?
[56:43] It's you. If the people in front leading are the most influential for the worship service, you have the most influence on them every single Sunday.

You guys wield far more influence than you realize. And one of the things I love about our church, love about our church, is it would be extremely rare that you guys are not an encouragement to me as I'm preaching on Sunday.
I mean, it would be by far the exception, not the norm. Because when I'm looking at our teenagers, you're singing, you're listening, your Bibles are open, you're taking notes, you're engaged, and you are putting wind in my sails when I preach.
And this group in here has more influence over me as I preach than any other group in our church. church. And so, if you ask me why I love and appreciate our youth, it's because of how important you are to our church in a thousand ways, not the least of which is because of where you physically sit.
You're able to put so much encouragement in the lives of those who are tasked with leading our church on Sundays. That's a far greater ministry than you'll ever understand.
[58:20] That's so helpful. Michael, we love you and are grateful for your time and influence over us. So thank you for sharing this night with us. Honor to be here. Appreciate it. Love you guys. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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