Q&A with Pastor Michael

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] We've got Pastor Michael with us, resident theologian, expert on the Bible, to answer your Bible questions.! Michael, I get a lot of questions in youth ministry that are non-spiritual.

The most common non-spiritual question I get is, what's up? What's up? The second most common non-spiritual question I get is, is Michael cool? No, the answer is no.
I think you're cool. I think you're cool. That's an easy one. No. No, I think you're cool. Give yourself some credit. I think you're cool. I don't really know how to prove that to a youth student, though. I think you're cool, but it's very subjective.
But I've come up with a test to see how cool you are. I'm nervous. So this is just going to be a simple vocab test. We're going to test your knowledge on what Gen Z and Gen Alpha are calling brain rot terminology.
So... Kashawn, if you could get this up on the back screen, too. Okay. Okay. So we're going to just do one slang word on the screen. Okay. Your goal is to tell us what it means.
[1:06] Oh, gosh. Okay. All right. So here's the first term. Cap. I know this one. Uh-oh. Cap is something that's not true.

That's correct. So... That's correct. If I say, Jesus is the Son of God, no cap. How about that?
I've been telling you guys. He's cool. All right. Next one. I should quit after that one. I'm pretty sure. Aura. Aura. Okay. I know this one because SGA talks about this in basketball.
So Aura is like a cool factor. You're just kind of the it factor, just a vibe, like a cool vibe. Is that right? Is that good? That's it. That's it. So you would say, man, that dude's got Aura, no cap.
Yeah. I think most of our guys would agree. You've got a lot of Aura. Do you? Yeah. Okay. It was just a question of if you could define it. I'll tell you, I couldn't have spelled it, but I could define it.
[2:13] All right. Two for two. That's a great start. Next one. Cringe. I mean, I assume cringe like that's just no good. I don't like that. That's gross. That's icky. That's useless.

Is that close? Yeah. That's good. That's good. Yeah. That's cringe. All right. Three for three. There's eight. How many of you think he'll get more than four? Ooh. Okay. A lot of confidence.
A lot of confidence. I think I'm pressing my luck. Okay. Next one. FR. I mean, for real? For real. For real. For real.
All right. For real. Man's on a roll. Next one. Sus. Suspect. That's suspicious. I don't buy it. That ain't true. Sus is like a cousin to Cap.
That's sus. I don't buy it. Suspect. That's suspicious. Is that right? Yeah, that's right. That's right. All right. Next one. Simp. So I don't know this, but I would assume, if I'm guessing, simp is like from simpleton.
[3:16] So it's someone that's like not smart, maybe a dork, maybe someone that's just not very good. No? No. No. That's the first one you missed. I didn't know it. Someone define simp, like simply.

Anyone got a definition of it? Yeah, Luke. It's someone who's like only for the girls or only for the guys. Doesn't hang out with their friends because they're all about the riz. Okay. Okay. That clears it up really well for me.
Simp is the one for the riz. Chisel. Got it. That's it. All right. Next one. Bussin'. I would assume this means like you're in a hurry.
Things are hectic. No? No. So I was a bus boy. So bussin' to me is bussin' tables. But I've never heard bussin'. This is new. Yeah. So it means like good.
So you'd say like this food is bussin'. It's good? Yeah, it's good. Bussin' is good? Bussin' is good. It's really good. This is whack. So bussin'.

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[4:20] So Joey's new shoes are bussin'. Those kicks are bussin'. No cap. Okay. All right. Next one.

So I've learned simp and riz. Okay. Riz. Yeah. Last one. Yeah. I mean, I think riz is just like your attitude, your cool factor, your something like that.
Your riz, like you're really cool. You're really in. No? What do you guys think? Yay or nay? Nay. Nay? I got some people kind of leaning a little bit.
Leaning? Leaning? What's riz? Charisma. Someone tell you what riz is. Charisma. It's short for charisma. That's what I was saying. It would change the spelling, but like specifically towards the opposite gender.
So like. Okay. Yeah. It's or a towards the opposite gender. Yeah. Or a towards the opposite gender. So in my mind, I did not know simp at all. I didn't know bussin' at all. But in my mind, I had an idea for riz.
[5:18] I may not have to explain it well. Yeah. You were around it. Yeah. So you got like five and a half out of eight. I would say you're cool. I would say that's a way better than I thought I'd get. Yeah. You're cool.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Not bad for a guy who wore a suit in the first grade all the time. Yeah. Not bad. Not bad. I also want to bet with the sound booth. I had said you'd get four and they didn't believe me. Oh. They thought less than four? They thought less than four. They thought three was your max. So you said four.
That was believing in me. Yeah. Okay. You're welcome. And you exceeded all expectations. I've got, yeah, that's a no cap on that. Yeah. All right. A little, a little bit more philosophical here before we kind of dive into.
That's the hardest thing I've done in a long time right there. Yeah. You good? You take a break? How many holes does a straw have? How many holes does a straw have?
[6:17] Okay. So obviously on the end there's one and one. You'd say two. But I think this is the same riddle as like how many holes would be in a tunnel.

I think the right answer is one. It's just one with two openings. That's correct. That's correct. All right. Michael's just killing it.
He's on a roll here. So we're going to jump into these questions that you guys have asked and submitted. Believe it or not, you didn't ask any of those. But so one question is, why do we use the ESV?
So you preach from the ESV. Why that choice? Yeah, that's a great question. So I've said before, and other people have too, like the best Bible translation is the one you read.
I mean, get a faithful translation or read it. And the reason why I preach from the ESV and through the years, most of our church now has it because when you're preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible, it helps if the congregation's looking at the exact same thing that I'm preaching from.
[7:28] And so if I say, look at this word, and hardly anyone in the congregation has that same translation, it doesn't work very well. So I have stayed with the ESV for years and years because most people in our church now have an ESV they bring to church with them for that reason.

So, but why the ESV? So when you talk about Bible translations, you've got two major categories. And just to kind of do a quick overview and very simplified, you have a category that would be more thought for thought and a category that would be more word for word.
And the best kind of translation to preach from is the category that is as best it can be word for word. Okay. And the reason for that is I don't want the translators interpreting the text.
I want to do that. And so ESV would be in a category of a more word for word translation, what we would call an essential literal translation, as opposed to thought for thought, which we would call more dynamic equivalence.
Okay. So there's several translations that would fit over here. ESV, new American standard, legacy standard, Christian standard.
[8:49] All of those would be in this category over here. I think they're all excellent. I go back and forth when I'm reading and I go back and forth when I'm studying. But when I preach, I stay in the ESV because it's very difficult if I'm changing translations Sunday to Sunday and people aren't looking at the same text I'm reading from.

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So ESV is a good translation. I don't necessarily like it better than new American standard or better than legacy standard.
But I want to be consistent with it because that's what most of our people by now bring with them. That's really helpful. Do you preach from ESV in here? I do. Yeah. Yeah. I like it.
But I love the NAS too. I love new American standard. But, you know, a lot of a lot of the scripture I memorized when I was young was from NIV.
And I mean, the NIV was a big part of my life. NIV is a bit more thought for thought. And so I don't prefer to preach from it because there's places where there's too much interpretation before translation.
[10:00] But having said that, I like the NIV. In fact, I memorized several New Testament books of the Bible in NIV. And to this day, that's what I would still recite them in.

It's because it's in my heart. Yeah. Yeah. It's a really helpful answer for us. A question I get a lot in student ministries, how can I know I'm a Christian?
So this person asks, you know, what would you say to a student who loves the Lord, loves His Word, loves the church, but struggles with assurance? How can I know I'm a Christian?
So how can you help them? That's a super question. So let me attack it a couple of ways. The first thing you want to do when you're talking about, am I a Christian? We want to go to the Bible.
Okay. We don't start with our feelings. We don't start with our emotions. That's dangerous because if you're not truly saved, but you say, I feel like I am.
[10:58] Is that, are you saved if you feel like you are, but you're not? No. So we don't want to go to our feelings either way. We want to go to what the Bible says. So let me attack it two ways. First, biblically, if you're trying to struggle with how do I know I'm saved?

A great place to go is to read 1 John. 1 John's five chapters. You can read the entire thing in about 13 minutes. And 1 John walks you through different kinds of tests to see if you're truly saved.
It'll talk about doctrine. It'll talk about morality. It just draws a picture of what a Christian is. And you can say, does that look like me?
Okay. To summarize that in 1 John, there's really three questions. If you were in my office and you said, I'm trying to figure out, am I really a believer? Am I really saved? There's three questions I'm going to ask you.
Number one is, what do you believe? Specifically, what do you believe about Jesus? Do you believe he's a son of God? Do you believe he died and rose again?
[12:02] Do you believe he paid for our sin on the cross? Do you believe he's the only way to heaven? What do you believe? The second question I want to ask you is, who do you love?

Because if you say, I believe these things, but I don't love Christ. I don't love God's people. Well, biblically, there's a disconnect there.
So in the scripture, it says that we love because he first loved us. It says, Jesus says, they'll know you're my disciples by your love.
So one of the marks of a believer is that you love Christ and you love his people. So what do you believe? That's the doctrinal test. Who do you love?
That's the heart test. And the third question I would ask you out of 1 John is, how do you live? We know that your works don't make you saved, but the way you live should give evidence that you're a believer.
[13:02] So if you say, I believe the truth, I love Jesus, but I don't live at all like a Christian lives, I don't think you should have assurance of salvation. If you say, I believe the right things, but I don't love Jesus, I don't think biblically you have assurance of salvation.

I think the evidence of a Christian is what you believe, who you love, and how you live. Those are the things that give evidence that you're truly in Christ.
Okay? The second way I would attack that question is for you to make a distinction in your mind. There's two words we often use interchangeably, but they shouldn't be.
One is, you said the word assurance. Okay? So you have assurance of salvation. That's the question. But the other word is security. Eternal security.
You're really with Christ. Okay? So follow me here. If you are truly a believer, truly saved, you absolutely for all time have security.
[14:03] Christ cannot let go of those who are his own. Make sense? If you're a Christian, you truly have security. But could a true Christian lack assurance?

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Yes. Assurance is how you feel about your security. Does that make sense? So somebody could, if you ask somebody, are you going to heaven when you die?
And they say, yes, 100% I'm going to heaven. Does that person have assurance? Yes. But if you say, how do you know you're going to heaven? And they say, because I'm a good person.
Is that a Christian? No. That person would have assurance, but not true security. Does that make sense? So when someone says to me, I'm struggling with assurance of salvation, I want to get them off of that question and onto security.
Not first, how do you feel about your salvation? But what do we know about your salvation? Does that make sense? So what do you believe? Who do you love? And how do you live?
[15:08] If those things, according to 1 John, are in you and true of you, then you should have biblical assurance. That's what salvation is.

But part of our problem is, and this is true for students maybe in here, this is true for adults in our church, this is certainly true for students you go to school with, there are all kinds of people who feel like they're going to heaven when they die.
And if you say, do you have assurance? They would say yes. But that's the lesser question. The more important question is, do you have eternal security? Are you truly in Christ?
And so it's not my emotion or my feelings about my salvation that keep me secure. It's the promise of Christ to hold those who are His.
So if I can say all that, and I'll give you a very quick answer. Someone says, I struggle with assurance. I'm going to take them to 1 John. Let's read these five chapters in about 13 minutes. And then you tell me, what do you believe about Jesus?
[16:09] Do you love Christ and love His people? And are you living the way that a believer would live? Super clear and helpful. Thank you for that. Our culture is kind of increasingly becoming more and more sinful and more and more abandoning a biblical view of certain sins.

A lot of those sins are in the category of sexuality. So this person asks, how do I help a friend who's dealing with homosexual temptations or feelings? How do you deal with those or help someone deal with those in a biblical way?
So that's an important question. And that's a timely question. And as your pastor, I want to love you enough to speak directly and honestly with you about this.
And so there's a couple of things I'd want to say up front. If someone asks me that question, whether it's about themselves or a friend, we've got to establish that what the Bible says about human sexuality is true.
The culture doesn't establish truth. Your friends don't establish truth. The movies you watch don't establish truth. God's Word establishes truth.
[17:21] So if somebody says, my friend is struggling with homosexuality, what I want to do is encourage you to be gracious with them and honest with them.

And honesty is to tell them that in the Scripture homosexuality is a sin. It's not the only sin. It's not a sin that Jesus can't forgive and redeem.
But it is a sin. And part of our problem, you started the question by saying, you know, as culture shifts and changes. Part of the problem is, if you ask teenagers 30 years ago, is killing someone a sin, they would say yes.
If you ask them that today, they would still say yes, for the most part. If you ask someone 30 years ago, is homosexuality a sin? They would say yes. If you ask them today, maybe wishy-washy, maybe yes, maybe no, or maybe just say, well, no.
It's not. And so that sin is one that people are struggling with to just even realize it is a sinful thing. So we have to start there. We have to start with what's true.
[18:37] And then I want to help them to understand, you know, the Bible and the New Testament says to flee sexual immorality. That would be true for any sexual sin, whether it's homosexuality, whether it's premarital sex, whether it is impure thoughts, whether it is taking in pornography, any kind of sexual sin.

We need to flee that. And so one of the things you've got to understand, if you're struggling with homosexuality, or your friend is struggling with homosexuality, almost always, part of the problem are the things you're giving access to your mind.
You're watching television shows that make it acceptable. You're watching movies that make it normal. You're talking to people that make it feel okay.

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you're desensitizing your own heart, or they are, to that sin. So when the Scripture says flee sexual immorality, if you don't view it as a sin, you're not going to flee it.
And one of the things that teenagers especially have to do is not allow sinful influences into your heart and mind to determine how you're going to live.
[20:07] And so I'm not arguing against watching TV. I'm not arguing against watching movies. I am saying that if this is true for all of us, especially a teenager who's struggling with this, you need to take a close look at what is feeding your mind and determining your convictions.

Because if you are struggling with homosexuality and you are surrounding your day with intake, thoughts, pictures, conversations, movies, commercials, books that make it okay, you're not going to flee from it.
And I would say the same thing if we could just take it to a different sexual sin, even away from homosexuality. If you're 16 and you're a boy and you have a girlfriend and you don't struggle with homosexuality, but you're struggling with impure thoughts or premarital sexual sin, I'd say the exact same thing.
If you're watching TV shows and movies and listen to music and conversations that make that normal, you're going to be dissentized to that as a sin. So when it says to flee sexual morality, if you don't see that as immoral, you don't have anything prompting you to flee from it.
So you've got to make sure that you're letting the Bible define right and wrong, that the Bible is determining your convictions and that you're not opening your heart and your mind to deviant sinful influences that numb your heart to the effects of sin.
[21:45] And so that's how I would want to approach it with somebody. I would want to be gracious with them. Also, this is important too. If you're a teenager especially and you're struggling with this, or as the question asked, your friend is struggling with it, I don't want someone to define themselves as, well, I'm a homosexual.

Because if I define myself that way, now that's just who I am and I have to accept it and you have to accept it. I want someone to understand that the Bible has a standard and this may be a sin I'm struggling with.
This may be a thought I'm struggling with. This may be something in my life that's a battle for me. But I'm not going to define myself as someone who is living in that sin.
I want to battle and fight against it. But one more thing I would say to somebody, and this is something that I think even good-intending churches and Christians miss.
This is important to me. The idea of as long as you don't act on it, you're okay. That's bad counsel.
[23:03] Because if you are letting your mind think about, dwell on, conversations take place, looking at things on your phone, and you just say, well, I'm not acting on it, I'm just thinking about it, I'm just considering it, I'm just daydering about it, I'm just talking about it, I'm just reading about it.

That is taking in sinful things. And the idea that I just have to stop before the physical act happens is not a biblical idea.
Jesus says, it's not about murder, it's about hate. Why? Because murder starts with hatred. He says, it's not about adultery, it's about lust.
Why? Because adultery starts with lust. And I think too many times people are taught, as long as there's no physical act, then I'm not sinning.
But if you're thinking about, and laughing at, and daydreaming of, and watching movies about, and looking at pictures of any kind of sexual sin, that sin.
[24:15] And so we've got to fight that. Not at the level of physical act, Jesus backs it way up. Let's not talk about murder, what are you going to do before you murder someone?

You're going to hate them. So you don't allow hatred in your heart. That's long before the physical act. So we don't want to have the physical act of sexual sin. But we've got to back way up before that, and get rid of any influences that's numbing our heart, and numbing our mind to it.
And everybody can remember this. Everybody probably remembers that first time you lied, or that first time you cheated on the test. And it just ate you up.
Your stomach was in knots. You were miserable. But the second time you lied wasn't quite as hard. And the next time you cheated on your homework wasn't quite as bad. And if you keep doing that, after a while, you grow numb to it.
And so when somebody says, be an honorable student, you don't even think about it because you've allowed cheating and lying to become a norm for you. So when the Bible says, flee sexual

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immorality, if your heart and mind are numb to the convicting work of the Spirit, you're in trouble. [25:31] No matter what physical act you have or haven't done. Does that make sense? So we want to back way up to the place of our thoughts and our heart, what's right and what's wrong, and allow the Scripture and the Spirit to convict us and flee from sexual sin.

So if I'm talking to somebody, I don't want to be hateful. I don't want to be dismissive. I don't want to distance myself from them. I don't want to make them think they're the only person in the world that's gone through this. I want to show them grace and compassion and kindness.
But part of compassion and kindness is letting them know, we've got to fight this. And if the world has convinced you it's not sin, why would you fight it?
You fight sin when you're convinced it's dangerous. And so I need to convince that person that God's ways are right and you're good. For your good.
His ways are for your good. And if that's true, then the opposite of that is for your destruction. So we've got to approach this battle as though this sin is trying to destroy you.
[26:37] And I would take them to Genesis 4. It's the first time in the Scripture the word sin is mentioned. If you do what is right, will you not be rewarded? If you don't, sin is crouching at the door and it desires to have you.

That's what sin does. Sin is lying in wait, crouching at the door. It wants to devour you. The sin of homosexuality, the sin of pornography, the sin of premarital sex, all of these sexual sins, they want to devour you.
It's not a pathway to freedom and happiness and joy. It wants to devour you. It wants to destroy your life. So if someone's talking to me about it, I want them to understand it's that serious.
And I'll fight with you. I'll help you. I'll walk with you. I'll teach you. I'll counsel you. I'll pray for you. I'll help you. I'll hold you accountable. But we've got to fight because this thing that you're fighting against biblically wants to destroy you.
This isn't a small thing. This is something that wants to destroy you. We've got to fight with that kind of vigilance. Thank you for that. One question is, how do we deal with Christians in positions of authority and leadership who fall into serious sin?
[27:57] As we see this quite frequently, even in close to home, recently, prominent pastors, leaders in the church, leaders in private schools. You're asking about Christian, you say Christian leaders or Christians?

Did you say leaders? Yeah, leaders. So people in positions of authority who fall into egregious sin. How do we respond to that? How do we think through that? Yeah, I think there's a couple of things that happen.
One is from the church in their position. The other is for you in a personal way. Okay. So everyone's a sinner.
We understand that. No pastor, no missionary, no youth pastor, no Sunday school teacher is perfect. We all sin. So we never want to leave grace behind.
We're saved by grace. We're sustained by grace. Let's never leave grace behind. So we want to approach in a gracious way. And a gracious way is to try to call someone to repentance.
[28:57] repentance. Now, there are some things as a leader that I think disqualify you from being in leadership. And I think a sexual sin or certain kinds of sin just makes it impossible for you with any integrity to lead God's people.

So it may be that someone commits sin and they need to step down. But that doesn't mean that we don't seek in a personal way to still love them to Christ. I mean, this is very real life for me.
I've got a friend who committed horrible sin and it cost him his position in ministry. And it should have. But I'm still his friend.
And I still talk to him. And I still try to encourage him to follow Christ. I still ask him, are you going to church? I ask him, are you still meeting with leaders who are trying to help you and to call you to repentance?
I ask him, are you still seeking reconciliation with your family? I didn't quit being his friend. His sin didn't cost him my friendship. It cost him his position in the church.
[30:09] If he doesn't repent, if he continues in that sin, then the Bible speaks to that, that we do withdraw from them. And the purpose of withdrawing from them is not to be mean.

It's to isolate them so they can feel the weight of how awful their sin is so that they would repent and be restored to the church and to God's people.

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Not their place of leadership, but restored with God's people. So in our church, if somebody sins in a horrific way, we're going to talk to them about that and approach them about it.
They're not going to be able to just do that and no one cares. But the goal is to restore them. The goal is their repentance. And there may be some consequences there, but the consequences is not going to be our love.
We're going to love them. So if you see a leader who falls morally, their place of leadership is over. But through repentance, their part in the body of Christ is not lost.
[31:15] And I would even argue that their personal friendship with you need not be lost, provided they are seeking the Lord and repenting. Earlier, you had mentioned that someone struggling with assurance of salvation, one of the questions you'd ask them is what do you believe?

So we would say that believing in Jesus is necessary to go to heaven. So what about people who have never heard of Jesus? They've never heard the gospel. What happens to them? So you approach it the exact same way that you do the assurance question.
You never start with your feelings. And that's the problem with that, not with the question, that's the problem with the way that people approach that answer is they start with how they feel about it. You don't start with how you feel about something, you start with what does the Bible say?
So if someone says to me, someone who's, does the Bible speak about those who do not know Christ, Romans 1 is the answer. Romans 1 speaks to that.
And Romans 1's language is that they are without excuse. That what has been revealed to them, they have rejected. The way I feel about that is not what determines truth.
[32:29] The way I feel about hell doesn't determine if it's true or not. God's word determines if that's true or not. And so, I mean, and even from just a logical, practical standpoint, think of it this way.

If the answer is that if your friend grows up and never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever hears the gospel that they're not accountable to God, then just lock them up and don't tell them.
Why ruin it and tell them? No. What the Bible gives us is the exact opposite encouragement. To go and to tell. To proclaim the gospel. To give it a defense for the hope that you have.
And that's why we do personal evangelism here in your life, in your school, in your homes here. That's why we send missionaries around the world because the Bible tells us to go. How will they believe if they've not heard?
How will they hear without a preacher? So we want to preach the gospel, proclaim the gospel, raise up preachers around the world to proclaim the gospel. And so you just have to start that question.
[33:37] And the other question is does the Bible speak to this? And how we feel about something is not the arbiter of truth. It's revelation that determines truth.

So to that question, which is a fair question and an emotional question, there is biblical language for it to answer in Romans 1. That's so good.
So we believe that Jesus died for our sins, paid for our sins on the cross. For those people that never hear about Jesus, for the people who never believe in Him, did Jesus pay for their sins?
Or whose sins did Jesus die for? Yeah, so there's a lot behind that question. But I think here's a helpful way to think of that.
Jesus' death on the cross is the only thing that saves. Anyone in the world, any time that's saved is saved by the death of Jesus. Rightly does the Bible say He's the Savior of the world because anyone in the world, anywhere, any time that's saved is only saved through His death.
[34:44] Jesus, though, He speaks to that. Give me one second here.

John 10, Jesus says, I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Verse 14, I'm the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.
Just as the Father knows me, I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. So I feel like we're in good grounds when we say anyone who believes anywhere, anytime is only saved by the death of Jesus.
And I can use Jesus' own words to say the way He describes His death is laying down His life for the sheep. So for anyone, for whosoever will that believes, Jesus is the only way to heaven.
And Jesus' words of who He laid His life down for are for His sheep. And so for me, I feel comfortable resting in the tension of those two things. A couple of questions about your favorites.
[35:58] So favorite book of the Bible, and then favorite hymn. You've got to choose one. One hymn. Yeah, I mean, honestly, the honest truth is whatever book I'm preaching is my favorite book

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because I'm living with it every single day, day after day after day.

We went through Mark, and it's no exaggeration that every day for that whole time we're in the book of Mark, I'm reading something in Mark, thinking something about Mark.
And so it's dominating my mind and dominating my thoughts. So usually whatever book of the Bible I'm preaching, in that moment, is my favorite because it's the one the Lord is most teaching me from.
But if I could back up from that, and you just said, what book has the most practical impact on my life? It'd be the book of James. I know some of our girls are going through James in here.
It's a great book. One of the reasons James has impacted me so much is when I was in college, that was the first book I memorized in the NIV. In fact, today, we were in here when Kashan said, do a mic check.
[37:06] I just, it was in NIV. I couldn't read James in the ESV. I'd sound like I've never read before because my mind automatically goes to NIV because I've known it for 30 years. And because of that, that book has probably impacted me more because I've known that book and it's been in my soul more than any other.

So James, my favorite book in terms of practical living. In terms of theology, I would say the book of Romans is my favorite. That's kind of Paul's magnum opus on theology.
In terms of just joy as a Christian, I think the book of Philippians is probably the one that my heart is drawn to. I really want to go, I really want to preach Philippians again here because there's just so much in the joy and life of a believer.
So those books would be up there. If you're talking about just what other books, if I could pick just a part of a book that has impacted me, Habakkuk has had a huge impact on me.
And there's some reasons why. I don't have to go into them, but that would be one of them. The book of Ruth has had a major impact on my life. The book of Ruth is all about the providence of God, which to me is the secret to joyful Christian living is embracing the providence of God.
[38:39] And the book of Ruth probably demonstrates that more than any other book. So all of those would kind of be among them. If you just said pick one book, I'd probably pick Romans or James.

And favorite hymn? Favorite hymn. Oh my goodness. Yeah, that'd be impossible. I mean, Grace is Greater Than My Sin is the first one that comes to mind.
There's an old hymn that's never, ever, ever sung. Only the old people in the room will know this. I see some old people back there. Some of y'all will know this. Love divine, all love's excelling.
Who knows that? Marcy, you know that? Anna knows that? Oh God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.
That's a favorite hymn. The church is one foundation. That's a favorite hymn. I mean, asking my favorite hymns is like asking which is my favorite kid or grandkid.
[39:48] I just, I can't, I literally, it's so personal to me. I love them. But all of those would be up there. Favorite preacher to listen to?

Joey Snodgrass. Oh, come on. Come on. Yeah, right. Yeah. Wouldn't you agree? So, you didn't say best preacher.
You said favorite preacher. No, let me explain that. Let me explain that. I think I can make an argument that that's true because I have watched and known Joey from his first sermon.
That's not true for me or for anybody else. Joey, I know the first time he preached and the second and the third. And I watched him go from someone who has preached once or twice to someone who's preached 10 times and 20 times.
I've seen the growth and the development and the evidence of the work of God in his life. You're the only preacher I ever hear preach that I've been able to watch the whole way from beginning to now.
[40:57] I love to hear all the guys in our staff preach because I love them as people and I believe in their ministry. But I knew you before you were a preacher.

I knew you when you started to preach the first time. And it's a great picture of the work of God. Joey does a great job. Joey's always been smart. Joey's always been disciplined.
Joey's always been gifted. But like everybody, Joey was not a preacher, the preacher seven years ago, eight years ago that you are today. It's a process.
That's true for all of us. And I've been able to watch that from the beginning. I don't have that with other people. And so I just watch you preach and I learn every time and I'm challenged every time.

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But I'm also able to think back to the first time I heard you preach and say, look what God has done. And I mean that in a very sincere way. I love when other guys in our staff preach because I know their hearts.
[41:56] I know their lives. I know that they mean it. I know that they're sincere. When I watch guys on TV preach, they may be really good, but I don't know them day to day. But when Jeff or Joey or Jeremy or John, a bunch of J's, when those guys preach in our church, I know their lives.

I live with them, essentially. I watch them every day of the week. We talk about things. I know how they treat their wives. I know how they treat their kids. I know how they care about the church.
And so, if you're just asking my favorite people to preach, I mean, I love to hear the guys on our staff preach because I know it's genuine for them. I know their lives back it up.
If you say who are the best preachers, or if I can get outside of the people on our own staff, my favorite, and part of this answer, too, is because I know him and he's a dear friend and I know his life, but I love to hear Tom Pennington preach at Countryside Bible Church in South Lake, Texas. I've known Tom for a long time. He's become a dear, dear friend. He's a man of great influence and the Lord's used him in a big way, but it's not that. It's that I know his life. I know his heart.
[43:11] I know his character. I know his sincerity. And those are the people, to me, that are my favorite. All-time most influential pastor on me would be John MacArthur.

I've heard John preach more than any other preacher. I've learned more about preaching from him than any other preacher. But I don't hear him. I mean, he doesn't preach much anymore because of his health, so I've not heard him, you know, in a long time preach new things.
But those would be my answers. The thing to me is, I love to hear guys preach that are really, really smart and really, really gifted. But what impacts me would be to hear men preach that I know their lives and I know that they're sincere men of God.
That's the guy who impacts me the most. And so, if it's a sunny night and I'm here and one of our other staff guys is preaching, I'm not worried about, is this the perfect sermon?
Because these are guys that I know and love and trust. I know their lives. I know their character. And that has a different kind of impact on me than some guy I don't know very well who's just a great, skilled orator.
[44:26] So, long answer, but that's an honest answer. Well, that's very kind of you. Flattered by that. Someone did ask, why do you hire so many J names? Yeah, it's a mistake because I can't keep them straight.

It is true. So, we have Jeff, Joey, John, Jeremy and our pastoral staff. I guess I just got grandfathered in because I don't really fit. When I first started in ministry, the interim music minister was a guy named Michael.
Our pastor's name was Michael and my name was Michael. So, we had three of us. All were Michael. So, someone called the church and said, is Michael there? And we'd say, probably, but that doesn't help us, you know.
But that is true. We have a lot of J's. We have a lot of J's. No more. We're not hiring anybody else with a J name. So, it's not happening. This person asked, when did you kind of know you wanted to be a preacher?
When did you kind of, not necessarily decide, but recognize that was your path? And then how long do you plan to be a preacher? Well, some of you guys maybe in a want have heard this, so I'll give you the really fast flower version, but when I was a little boy, I used to write sermons and I used to preach to my family.
[45:49] I would gather my family up in the living room, have on my coat and tie, and preach. And I don't mean like, you know, four minutes.

I mean like 50 minutes. And back then, when I was six or seven, I was a yeller. I was a thumper. I was loud. I've got a cassette tape. Some of you on Awana may have heard that. I played that a few years ago for Awana Kids.
I was a screamer. But I used to write sermons. I was in the fifth grade. I would write a sermon every couple of weeks. And there was one Sunday in the fifth grade where it was bad weather.
We were at church. My dad was the music minister. We had to be there. And there was a few people in our fifth grade Sunday school class, but the teachers didn't make it because of the weather. So I just circled the class up and I started teaching them the sermon I had written that week.

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And a few minutes into it, the teacher next door came over and said, hey, I just found out your teacher's not going to be here. You guys can come into class with us. And I said, that's okay. I'm teaching. I've got it.
[46:50] And I just kind of dismissed them. And I preached to that group. Aura. Aura. Aura. Yes. No cap. So I'm preaching to that group and I'm letting them have it.

So looking back, I've always loved to study God's Word. I've always had a heart to want to explain God's Word. However, in the seventh grade, on a certain day, in a certain moment in time, for a reason I cannot explain, an instantaneous fear of public speaking came over me.
And it did not subside for years. And it was my biggest reason in college why I did not surrender to preach. I felt a call to preach in my heart.
When I would read the Bible, I felt a call to preach. My friends would talk to me about a call to ministry. And my biggest fear was I had a fear of public speaking that hit me in the seventh grade and would not leave me.
And I just thought, I don't know how I could be a preacher if I'm afraid to speak in front of people.
And in February of 93, in a car outside Marcy's dorm room, we weren't married at the time.
[47:58] We were just dating. And we were talking about this. And I was just talking about how I don't know what to do because I know God's called me to preach. I know that He has. I love the Lord. I want to honor the Lord. But I have a fear of public speaking that won't leave me.

And Marcy, the Lord used Marcy that night literally to change my life. Marcy said to me that night in the car, don't try to outplan God. Just do what He's called you to do.
And the next day, February the 13th, I publicly surrendered to preach. And I was scared to death because I thought, I've got a fear to speak in front of people and who's going to hire me.
So if you put all that together, I've always had a desire to preach. I've always had a desire to study and always had a desire to help people understand the Lord. I've always loved the church. I've always loved the church. But from seventh grade till about 21, I had just a paralyzing fear of public speaking.
And so I didn't want to do it. I mean, I wanted to want to do it, but I didn't want to do it. I just did it anyway. And then eventually, the Lord removed that fear. And now, I mean, I can't imagine anything else.
[49:10] The second part of your question was, how long am I going to do it? I'm not going to do it until the Lord calls me home, I hope. I mean, I don't plan to do anything else. I'm 51. I don't want to overstay my welcome somewhere, so I don't presume upon the grace of God.

But, I mean, I have no thought of doing anything as long as I'm coherent and able to, to do anything other than preach until I can no longer physically do it. I have no other dreams, no other aspirations, no other hope of going somewhere else.
When Mars and I moved here in the year 2000, our dream was, let's give our lives to this church. We didn't even know what it looked like at the time. That's just what we prayed. Let's just give our lives away to this church.
Let the Lord do with us what He wants. And, you know, it's an old saying, but I believe with all my heart, I want to preach as long as I can. I'll die, be forgotten, let the work live on.
If I've been here 25 years, if I'm here 25 more, I'd be 76, I'd be good with me. And if I die, let somebody else preach the next week and forget about me because it wasn't about me in the first place.
[50:22] But there's nothing else I want to do with my life. I mean, this is it. I can't imagine doing anything else. Praise the Lord. Does God speak to us outside of Scripture?

So some people would share a story, maybe similar to you, you said to call the ministry. Some people would say, you know, the Lord spoke to me and it was very clear that I should do this or marry this person or go into ministry or take this job.
So does God speak to us outside the Bible? Is that helpful language? I think our language matters. I don't think it's helpful for us to talk like that.
I think if you say, if you say God spoke to me, I think the next thing you need to say is a chapter and verse because that's how we know that God spoke. Now, the Holy Spirit is illuminating our minds, giving us understanding, leading us to application, guiding us into obedience.
So certainly, when I read the Bible, the Holy Spirit's leading me into truth. I think the Holy Spirit is helping us to obey and live those things out.

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[51:31] But I mean, think about it. If, well, I mean, just practically, Marcy and I met and the day we met, she told her roommate that we had just met that morning.

Marcy told her roommate, that's the guy I'm going to marry. I don't know how she knew that, but I didn't know that. And in Marcy's mind, it's like it's good as done.
Like, we're getting married. What's the problem? Well, was she right or wrong? Well, she was right, as it turns out.
But if she just said, Michael, God told me we're going to get married, that doesn't help me. I don't know. I don't believe that. I don't feel that. You know, whatever. So if you go up to some girl and say, God told me you're supposed to marry, I mean, that girl's going to run away from you.
And she should. So I don't think it's helpful to think like that. And you see it abused in a church. I'll give you an example. Let's say that we're talking about building a new building as a church.
[52:33] We're going to build a four-story, $10 million youth building out there. We're not. I'm saying hypothetically. If I stand to the church and say, you know what?

God's told me we should build this building. Well, now what's your choice as a church member? You say, I don't think that's wise. I don't think we should do that.
So you're arguing with God. It's not fair. For me as a pastor to claim God spoke to me in a different way than He spoke to you. I just don't think that's biblical language. So I think what we want to do is say, I'm in the Word.
I'm praying. I'm gathering with God's people. And I'm striving to live in obedience with what the Bible has taught me to do. I think that's a better way to approach that. So does God speak to us outside of the Bible?
I would say the authoritative way God speaks to us is through His Word. He certainly uses the church, your parents, your Christian friends to lead and guide and shepherd you to obedience.
[53:33] But if you say, God spoke to me, we need to go to a chapter and verse. So there are a lot of religions in the world. How do we know that Christianity is the true one?

Is there anything that sets Christianity apart? How do we know that our religion is true? Because there are people all over the world that are just as convinced that their religion is true. Lots of things, but probably the most important thing that can be said about that is you've got the uniqueness of the Bible.
All the other religions in the world will tell you what you do to accomplish and earn salvation, which makes sense because if man's going to invent a religion, he's going to make himself the hero of it. So it's what you perform or what you sacrifice or what you do without or what you bring to the table. Christianity stands alone that this is not what you do, this is what God has done.
This isn't us working our way to heaven. This is God coming down to us. The historical evidence of the Scripture, the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the presence and existence of Israel, the preservation of Scripture, a book that has been banned and hated and burned and yet it still goes on.
[55:03] But above all of those things, I think what you do is you just unleash the Gospel. If you have a friend that's not a believer, I think it's good to engage them on different fronts and grounds, what we'd call apologetics, but ultimately, just unleash the Gospel on them.

Because the way someone is saved is not through your argumentation. Someone is saved as the Holy Spirit brings them from death to life. And the means the Holy Spirit uses is the proclamation of the Gospel.
So if there's someone who's not a believer, I'm all for talking through those issues I just raised. But what I'd rather do is let me just flood them with the truth of the Gospel and talk to them about sin and hell and judgment.
But God, rich in mercy, sent forth His Son. Christ died for us. Christ rose again. The Lord alone can bring salvation to your soul.
And let the Holy Spirit use the proclamation of the Gospel to call the spiritually dead to life. I'm not going to argue someone in the kingdom. I'm not going to reason them into the kingdom.
[56:20] I'm not going to shame them into the kingdom. But I can proclaim the Gospel and the Holy Spirit quicken their dead hearts to salvation. That's what I would do.

I don't think we should be ignorant of the world's questions. We ought to be able to dialogue with them. But the greatest evidence of what Christianity is is the internal life change brought about by the Holy Spirit that has no other explanation than Jesus saves.

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So, Isaiah 52, how beautiful are the feet on the mountains of those who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who say and design, our God saves.
And you just proclaim that truth. Our God saves. We are sinners deserving of judgment, but Christ has made a way for us. And there are unbelievers dead in their sin that God graciously leads and calls to life.
And I think we just flood them with the truth of the Gospel. Final question. It's got two parts. As you kind of know the life of our student ministry, what's one way these students encourage you and are a bolster to you just in ministry and in life?
[57:32] And the majority of this room is within five years of kind of being an adult, being out on their own. What would be also a challenge you have for them as they kind of face that living deadline? This group right here, and some of you I know really well, and some of you I may not know as well, but as a collective whole, this group encourages me more than you would ever think or expect.

When people visit our church, there are two comments I get all the time. One is the look and sound of hundreds of people opening their Bibles.
It's sad, but it blows people away. A lady was visiting our church last Sunday for the first time. I hear this all the time. Last Sunday, she said, we have been in church my whole life. She's in her 60s. She said, I've never in my life heard the sound of that many people opening their Bibles at one time. That's the first thing I always hear. The second thing I always hear are how do you get the youth to sit up front and listen like that?
When I'm preaching up there, the first eyes I see are you guys. If you're not listening, think how distracting that would be to me.
[58:50] If you're not paying attention and you're the first people I see, it's incredibly distracting. But thankfully, that's not how it is. When I look out to those first three or four rows, I see teenagers with Bibles open, pens writing, people listening, people paying attention, people engaged, students who are hungry.

That is an absolute, just super charge to my heart. You have no idea how effective your ministry is by being up close, at the front, engaged, engaged in participating.
It not only influences, encourages me, but it encourages everyone who's at our church. And they tell me that, and now it's a double encouragement. Because I got encouraged by seeing how you guys are participating at the beginning, and then I get encouraged after the service when people tell me, I can't believe how great your students were.
when Al Mohler was here a year and a half ago, president of Southern Seminary, one of the most influential Christian men in the world, no exaggeration. When Al Mohler was here, we went to lunch afterwards, and the first thing he said when we sat down at lunch was about our students, how many of them were there sitting up close, listening to him, and engaged in worship.
And this is a man who has preached literally all over the world as influential as any Christian man around. And the most influential thing to him when he was at our church August a year and a half ago was the way our students participated in the worship.
[60:24] It is absolutely life-giving the way you guys do that. That would be the encouragement. The challenge for them would be to not, and you guys do a good job of this, but to not wait until you're older to think that you have kingdom impact.

This is just the reality of it. Raise your hands today. Raise your hands right now if today you talked to an unbeliever.
Raise your hand. Okay? When you become an adult, it changes.
You don't see as many people as you do when you're in school. You're not around as many different people as you are. Your life gets maybe more stressful, but the people you talk to get smaller.
And if you wait until you're older to have kingdom impact, you're going to waste the most evangelistic opportunities of your lifetime. You right now, most of you, every day, talk to more lost people than Joey does or than I do.
[61:49] I'm a little envious of that. the impact you have the opportunity to make today is as strong as it will ever be. And if you think, well, I'll get serious about the Lord.

I'm 18 or 21 or 31 or 51. You're going to look back and regret these days where at your school, on your ball team, in your choir, in your cheerleading squad, whatever it may be, you're surrounded by

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people that need to hear the gospel.
The greatest way for us to reach people in this town is to say who's around the most lost people. And the answer is you guys.
And so, that is not only my challenge, it's also an encouragement to know that our church is so much stronger when you guys are evangelistically bold.
And that doesn't always go well, does it? Sometimes you share the gospel and it goes poorly. Sometimes you share the gospel and you get rejected. Sometimes you share the gospel and you lose a friend. I get it. I know.
[62:58] I get that. But if you wait until you're old to say, I'll get serious about the Lord, God will still use you then. But you're going to miss these days right here where you are around people who need Jesus every single day.

So my greatest encouragement to you for the Christians in this room is to see yourself today as those who are living on mission, living on purpose, impacting the kingdom and not waiting until you're old to do that.
The older you get, you get more knowledge, you get more wisdom. That's all true. But the opportunities you have today are not promised to you.
And if I were to ask anyone in this room, including myself or Joey, the adults in the back, if I ask anyone in this room, tell me about the end of your life. Just picture for just a minute the end of your life.
Every one of us in this room would imagine ourselves as an elderly person. But that's not always true. We're not all promised to be 80 or 85 or 90.
[64:12] Sometimes the end of our life comes much earlier than that. I don't say that to be depressing. I say that to say you're not promised as much time as you think you are. It's an arrogant presumption if I think the Lord owes it to me to be 85 or 90.

And so the only way for me to be faithful till I die is to be faithful today. Because I don't know how many days I have. And so my challenge to you is not to think I'll get serious for the kingdom when I'm old because you're not promised to grow old.
You don't know. And if you want to be faithful the day you meet the Lord, the only way to make sure that's true is to be faithful today and faithful tomorrow if you wake up and faithful the next day if you wake up and to maximize every opportunity you have for Jesus right where you are.
When I was in college I had lots of gospel conversations. Some went really well. Some went terrible. But I was around lost people all the time. I was around way more lost people in college than I am today as a pastor.
So maximize your opportunities today for the kingdom. That would be my greatest encouragement to you or challenge for you. Thank you Michael so much for being here tonight. We love you and we're grateful for you and your wisdom.
[65:35] Glad to be here. And today is actually his birthday.

I'm just kidding. It's not. It's not. That was cap. That was cap. Michael would you pray for us? I would. Lord we thank you for our time together.
Pray that it's helpful. Pray that your spirit would apply the questions and issues and Bible texts that we've talked about and help us to understand them to live them out in the midst of the real world. Thank you for these students and for the work that they are doing within our church for your glory and your kingdom. Lord I pray that these questions or that we've looked at questions about how to share the gospel are questions that are hard with our theological understanding of assurance. Questions about real life issues of assurance of salvation or homosexual desires and struggles with sin. All the different things that we've covered. Lord I pray that tonight has been a place where honest issues and honest questions could have been dealt with with biblical answers.
[66:55] That's what we strive for. And as we leave this place may we be more committed to study your word to honor your word and to love your people. Thank you Lord for these students for their teachers for their leaders for their volunteers for Joey and for Lacey for Kashawn for Hadley for all these who give their time for these students and for their good that you would bless their ministry every day that they're here serving.

It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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