Q&A with Pastor Michael

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] All right, here we go. So it's a privilege to have him here. Also, we want to, I'm encouraged by all the questions you guys have asked, and it's good for me to hear the questions that you are asking, because we get to speak directly to those and Michael will answer them well. So we'll jump straight in. There's some heavy hitters in here, Michael, so be ready. First one's a zinger. So let's get right to it. What is your max on bench?

Which? Ever or today? Let's do both. So ever, and then what would you get today? The most I've ever tried was 290, which I got without a spotter. Unracked it myself, touched my chest, re-racked it. That's the most I've ever tried. Nice. So, I mean, 290. I don't know that I could have got much more than that. Today, oh man, less than that for sure. I've got old man joints.
So, less than you, I can assure you. Less than you. But more than you'll get at my age. Yeah, that's probably true. That's probably true. We're at Shepherds Conference, and I sat next to this guy in the youth ministry panel, and he walks up to me, and he goes, man, is it just a requirement to lift if you work with Staten? And I was like, ah, shucks. Like, yeah, it helps. And he was like, oh, you actually lift? I was like, ah, yeah. So, I thought it was a compliment, but I guess not. All right.
How much can you lift today? Can you get 300? No, I couldn't today. Okay. All time, I've gotten 295. Okay. But, yeah. Of course. Of course. Yeah.
All right. That's good. Goals. All right. I did get 240 yesterday after I had already done incline for four sets. So, without a spotter.
[1:49] That's good. Yeah. Which, if you lift weights, don't do without a spotter. That's a bad way to do it. Yeah. I agree. All right. What is your favorite meal? Favorite meal?

I mean, if I could just pick any restaurant, I'd pick Mahogany's. It'd be my favorite restaurant. My favorite meal at Mahogany's would probably be the bone-in filet. I don't eat there very often. Maybe once a year. Maybe. But that's, I'd say, I'd say a bone-in filet. If we're just talking normal life, my wife, Marcy, and I, we go to Chick-fil-A once a week, usually for Thursday lunch, because I'm a romantic like that.
Attaboy. She pays every time, incidentally, because she, like, pays with the app, and it's on her phone. So, she pays, although I pay the bills. So, however that works out.
But my favorite normal meal is Chick-fil-A. My favorite adult meal would be Mahogany's once a year. Nice. Like it. All right. Last kind of not serious one. Why are you the only pastor without a tattoo?
[3:01] So, that's the question. Is that true? I don't have a tattoo. You don't have a tattoo? Yeah, I don't. So, I have a smart-like answer, but I'm not going to say it. But I'll just say that I don't have a tattoo.

Very good. Moving on. And why I don't have one, I don't know. I'll get one when you do. You and I can go get matching tattoos. Do you think Joy would look good with a tattoo? Like a big arm sleeve? Yeah.
I think he would. I have many good friends who have tattoos. I have people I love with all my heart who have tattoos, but I do not. First one, I'm just going straight to the face, like face tattoo. First one.
Me and you, we're going to do it. When Joey turns 30, I'm going to take him to get matching tattoos. All right. I did think that question was a way of telling us something.
No, no announcements. I don't have any tattoos. Okay. Clean. Okay. All right. So, this question asks, can anyone perform a baptism in our church? So, not can anyone be baptized, but for the person actually doing the baptizing, can just anyone do it, or what is our church's stance on that?

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[4:16] That's a great question. So, what I would say with this and probably some others that would be asked, I imagine, I want to be clear that there are some things we do at our church here for a reason, for either biblical principle or in the way of wisdom.

There are some things that the Bible may not say exactly what to do, and so we're trying to live in the way of wisdom. There are some things I want to just say up front that other churches that I love and trust would do different than us.
And so, I want to answer this or any other question on what we do and why we would do it that way, with you understanding that there are other churches in our town, in our state, that may do it different than we do.
And I don't have any interest in disrespecting them at all. At our church here, I would hold pretty strongly that the best way to do baptism is that someone who is representing the church, representing leadership in the church, is doing the baptism.
I don't think you can chapter and verse that. There are churches where only the pastors can baptize. There are churches where anybody can baptize.
[5:41] There are churches where a close friend can do the baptism. There are churches where any mother or any father can do the baptism. At our church here, we would feel like the best thing to do is have someone who is representing the church as a recognized leader in the church to do the baptism because the church is in some way as best possible saying, we have evaluated this person, met with this person as best we can, affirming that this person is a believer.

And so at our church, it would be a pastoral staff member. We've had ordained deacons, servant leaders in our church who have done baptisms.
But at our church, it would need to be one of those two that are doing them. Not because if another church does it differently, they're wrong or in sin. I don't think that's the case at all.
But I do think it's best to say that as a church, as best we can, we're affirming this as a believer. So today, if I've got nieces and nephews who live all different places, different cities, if they called me and asked me to come baptize them in their church, in their city, I personally would not do that.
I don't think it's a matter of sin. But I think it would be better if someone representing that church, who is a recognized servant leader in that congregation, led out in that baptism, giving affirmation that they are believers.
[7:28] Yeah, I think it's really good. And as you guys know, if you've seen a baptism in our church, it is that believer testifying to their faith in Christ. What may not be as obvious is the church is also affirming them as a believer in Christ in some way by putting them in front of others.

And so I think it is wise to have someone up there saying, as far as we can tell, this person's a believer. So I think that's really wise. In the same way, I've got a good friend of mine who works at a church, a large church, and when they do baptisms, they would have multiple baptistries on their platform in their service.
And you would have, like they would baptize during a song. And so you just have, you know, two or ten or twenty people baptized through there. We wouldn't do that.
Again, not because I'm saying that's sinful, but I think the better way to do it, to what you said, is to have that person giving a verbal testimony of conversion.
Because I want people in the congregation to understand what this is about. And when the fourteen-year-old is baptized, or the senior in high school is baptized, or the fifty-year-old man is baptized, the people that are in that congregation are needing to know what's happening and why is this person doing this.
[8:58] And if it's just something we're doing quickly and repetitively without knowing who they are or hearing from them, I think it's an opportunity missed to have the gospel proclaimed.

And so, if you're a thirteen-year-old and you get baptized, we ask you to write out your testimony. And you're going to meet with somebody, probably with Joey, and we don't want fear of public speaking to be the barrier.
And so you can read it, or Joey will read your testimony, but it's going to be your words, because we want the gospel being proclaimed, yes, in picture by baptism, but also in word of the gospel.
So if another church, baptized without giving any testimony, I'm not chapter and verse, and that's wrong or sinful, but to me, the best way to make the most of that moment is to have the person being baptized share with the congregation, here is who God is.

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Here's what Christ has done for me. Here's my need of Christ. Here's how Christ saved me. And now, it's not just about people witnessing some ceremony. It's about the gospel being proclaimed.
[10:06] Not every church does it that way. And again, I'm not here to disrespect any other congregation, but that's why we would do it that way, and that's why we would have a recognized leader of the church doing it.

We wouldn't want to baptize someone that we didn't feel as best we could was a true believer, because that creates confusion. If someone who's not truly converted gets baptized.
So we want to help them and serve them by trying to make sure they're clear in what the gospel is.
Excellent. So this question comes from a middle schooler. Is it healthy to be thinking about marriage at 13 years old?
So just kind of, as a middle schooler in general, planning your life, is it healthy to be thinking about marriage? One thing, I guarantee that's a girl, not a boy. Number two, I want to make a distinction between is it healthy, is that the word they use, is it healthy?
Is it healthy to think about getting married or healthy to think about being married? If you're thinking about getting married at 13, like I want to get married before I'm 14, talk to me.
[11:22] If you're asking, is it healthy just to think about marriage, being married one day? Sure. And what I would say is, and this is true not just for 13, this is true for you who are 16, 17, 18.

The best thing to do is to know what the Bible says about what is a godly husband and a godly wife. And part of the danger, I don't know, obviously I don't know who asked that, but part of the danger is if you don't think about that, now you end up, there's this girl, I really like her, I feel happy when I'm around her, she's really pretty, and I'm 21, I want to get married, let's get married because that's what my friends are doing.
And you haven't thought about what is a marriage, what is a godly husband, what is a godly wife, I think that's dangerous. So, if you're 13, don't panic that you're not engaged yet, all right, you got time.
But, I would absolutely say, what if it's, I'm assuming it's from a teenage girl, what does a godly man look like?
What does a godly wife look like? So, you know, in the Bible, part of what it says for a husband is he's to love her as Christ loved the church.
[12:50] And the example, specifically given Ephesians 5, is that Christ laid down his life for the church. So, as a husband, I need to be willing to give up and lay down anything for the sake of my wife.

I need to love her as Christ loved the church. I need to serve her and lead her in a way, according to Ephesians 5, that she is holy because she's my wife.
And I do that until death parts us. If I'm not ready to love her and serve her and put her preferences above my own and put her holiness as my chief desire, I'm not ready to get married biblically.
And if I've never thought of that and I'm just going around high school campus and college campus and asking out every girl I can, hoping one out of ten says yes, that's a bad way to get married.
And so, if you're 13, I think part of what girls do when they're young is they plan their wedding. I'm not exaggerating. I never thought about my wedding ceremony ever until I was engaged and Marcy said, what are we going to do?
[14:10] And I said, never thought about it. And she had been thinking about it since she was probably 13. not a lot of guys in here worried about planning their weddings.

Most girls in here know who their bridesmaids are going to be, their wedding dress and on and on and on. That's fine. That's a part of life. But I will tell you this, particularly to the girls in here, if all of your attention and all of your energy goes toward planning that perfect day, you've missed everything the Bible says about getting married.
If that's all of your thought, you've missed the point. Because the ultimate point in the Bible of marriage is that you are living out the gospel of Jesus.
And you're going to need to do that every single day you're married. The heartbeat behind a biblical wedding is not a day.
It's a commitment for a life. So, according to this question, if you're 13 and you're thinking about what does a godly wife need to be, what does a godly husband need to do, how can we reflect the glory of Christ, how do I get my heart in a place to where I'm ready to follow the Lord Jesus and follow the leadership of my husband, how can our family and our marriage and our home one day

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make much of Christ, think about that every day.
[15:45] But if your thought is, I'm just obsessed with planning my wedding day, nothing wrong when you think about your wedding day, but if that's as far as it goes, then you're leaving the most important part out.

That's excellent. Just a practical tip for ladies, if you're looking for a guy trying to figure out if you want to marry him, would you want your sons one day to grow up to be like him?
So, if you're just hanging out with this homeboy, your sons are going to be like that someday. And same for guys as well, would you want your daughters to imitate her when they're her age?
So, just a helpful evaluative question. Okay, next question, so kind of related to assurance of salvation. So, when you fall deep into sin, how do you come back from it without doubts that you're still a Christian?
How do you come back from your sin? Yeah, so it seems this person has kind of had a bout with sin. They've repented. How do they come back to that and know I'm a Christian who's repented rather than getting saved in a person?
[16:48] One of the issues that we all struggle with is security or assurance of our salvation. One of the reasons why is because we still sin.

The greatest way to know that you're truly a believer is what do you do when you sin? Do you hide it?
Do you justify it? Do you blame other people? Are you indifferent to it? Do you say, all my friends do this?
Do you say, what's the big deal? I can do what I want and it makes me happy. Or do you say, I need the grace of Jesus Christ?
In your life as a Christian, you should never get past running to Christ. There is a meme that went around I saw maybe a year or two ago and I may mess it up, but it said something like religion says, I messed up, don't tell my dad.
[18:12] Christianity says, I messed up, I need my dad. Something to that extent. And for my sons, when they were middle school and high schoolers, I used to tell my sons, if you have your worst day, your worst moment, I want your first thought to be, call my dad.

I wanted my sons to call me and say, Dad, I'm in a mess. And whatever we have to do to work through it, we'll work through it.
But I wanted their first instinct to be not to hide it from me, not to blame somebody else, not to hope I never found out. I wanted my sons to say, I have messed up, I need my dad.
And as a father, I wanted to be there to teach them, to correct them, to help them, to encourage them, to discipline them, all the things that would happen from a father to a son.
And I think that's the same way it is for us as Christians. When you sin, you want your first instinct to be a need to go to the Lord. I'm going to repent of this sin.
[19:31] I need His grace. I need His mercy. I know I've grieved His heart. I know I've disobeyed. I know I've trampled on His word. And I hurt over that.

I grieve over that. But, I need to flee to the Lord. And so, if you are in a bout of sin, as the question talks about, and you come back from that, you worded it, how do we know?
What was the end of the wording of it? How do I know that I'm a Christian? Yeah, so my question to you would be, what do you do in your sin? Are you running to Christ?
Are you fleeing to Christ? Because that's what a believer does. A believer runs to Christ. There's a thing that, I assume it still goes on.
I don't know if you guys have seen this or heard of it, called the running of the bulls. Have you guys ever seen the running of the bulls? Where they let these bulls out and people like run down the streets and they just try to, have you ever seen them?
[20:34] Escape and evade the bulls. It's a horror, it's a really bad way to spend your weekend. But these people, they're just running away from the bulls. And everybody thinks that the way that you die, because people die in that all the time, is that they get, you know, hit by a bull.

And that would, that would hurt. But what happens when people die, usually in the running of the bulls, is they fall down. They don't know what to do.
So they lay there and they get trampled. That's how most of the deaths happen in the running of the bulls. People who don't know what to do when they fall down. And I think there may be something there for us to think about.

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What do you do when you fall down? I'd like for you to not sin. I'd like for me to not sin. I'd like for you to always honor the Lord. I'd like for me to always honor the Lord.
But what do you do when you fall down? Do you stay down and just get trampled? Or do you get up and run to Christ? And when your heart's desire is to repent and to honor the Lord and to seek the Lord, I think that's when you know in that example that you're a believer.
[21:52] Not because your life was perfect and not because you didn't sin because we do. But when you sin, you run to Christ. If my sons were in a mess and they picked up the phone and called me, could there be consequences?

Sure. But why are they calling me? Because I'm their father. Other teenagers in town, if they had their worst day, they're not calling me. I'm not their dad.
And so just by the access to call me on your worst day was a way for my sons to know no matter what happens, I'll never not have him as my dad.
And that's how I feel as a believer with sin. I want to run to the Lord. And when you sin and you confess it and you run to the Lord, I think that's how, among other ways, I think that's a primary way you know that in spite of your sin, that you really are a believer because you're running to Him.
That's helpful. The next question is about the Pharisees. And why do you think they remained in unbelief? So you've got the Pharisees who are having close encounters with Jesus constantly, witnessing His miracles firsthand, hearing the reports, of the guards that He had risen and still refusing to believe.
[23:14] Why do you think that is? Yeah, I mean, I've thought about that a ton because if you're with us on Sunday morning, we're going through Mark 11 and Mark 12, and that's the exact situation. I think the best way to understand that is that, you know, the Bible says, do not harden your heart.

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. I think that the human heart gets to the place where you're so consumed with yourself that you don't want anything else but yourself.
I mean, I think pride is a big part of it. I think power is a big part of it. I think fear of losing their place and their standing was a big part of it. But ultimately, they rejected the truth over and over and over and over until they just became completely spiritually numb.
And it's part of the danger of hearing the gospel and not responding. And I would say, honestly, for each of you, when you're here on Wednesday night and you hear the Word taught and you hear the gospel sent forth, and if you're with us on Sunday morning and you hear the Word taught and the gospel proclaimed, if you think in your mind that I'm just going to deny, deny, deny, deny, but I'll flip it at the end of my life.
I'm going to come to church, I'm going to be a good guy, I'm going to be a good girl, but I'm not going to repent, not going to trust in Jesus, but I will before I die. I will when I get diagnosed. I will when I'm old.
[24:49] I will on my deathbed. My question would be, why do you think your heart would desire then what you're not willing to submit to now?

So, to me, the answer to the Pharisees is they were so consumed with themselves, they didn't want anything but themselves. But I would say that that is a wonderful question, but I would take it a step further because the Pharisees were 2,000 years ago.
We are today. And I think people make the very similar mistake today. And if you are hearing the gospel today, repent today.
Trust in the Lord today. Don't think, I'll wait when I'm in high school, I'll wait until I'm in college, I'll wait until I'm married, I'll wait until I have kids, I'll wait until I'm in my career, I'll wait until I'm retired, I'll wait until I'm about to die.
If you won't submit to the truth of the gospel today, why would you have any confidence you would do so later? So today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. I think the Pharisees did that because their hearts were so hardened from their rebellion, their love of self.
[26:07] What's even more concerning to me is I think people today do the exact same thing. Yeah, that's excellent. And I think one of the things we learn from the Pharisees is that faith isn't the result of evidence necessarily.

And so, I think a lot of times what I hear from you guys and even what I've been tempted to in evangelism is if there's someone who's not believing, I'm just trying to think of the right argument or how I can phrase it perfectly or if they could just see this or just hear that so then they would believe

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and the Pharisees show that's just not true.
Salvation is a miracle from the Lord that He works in the heart. So I think they're a good illustration of that. For sure. Okay, so next question, if Christians shouldn't be divided over non-essential matters, why is our church Baptist?
Or why do denominations exist? So if we're to be unified as Christians, something Jesus prayed for in John 17, why are there denominations and why are we in one? Yeah, fair question.
I mean, I think there's a, and that answer would have several different layers. I think some of that's theological. There are theological differences that are significant that would make it very difficult to live and gather and worship without some distinctions.
[27:28] I think some of them are maybe more just on the practical side of preference, but I think the more important ones are theological. So, for example, I think the Bible is crystal clear that a true believer will not lose their salvation.

Someone who says they're saved doesn't necessarily mean anything. I mean, you can profess to be a Christian, not truly be converted. Plenty of people go to church, pretend to be Christians. They're not really. They should have no assurance of heaven because if you're not in Christ, you're not going to heaven. But I think the Bible is very clear that if you're in Christ, you're His forever.
If somebody else over here believes I can lose my salvation, it would be very difficult to partner at a local church that way because one Sunday, I'm preaching that if you're truly in Christ, you're eternally secure, and the next week, you're preaching and saying some of you may have lost your salvation this week.
you need to get saved again. How is that going to work? Just hypothetically, by the way. I would never say that. You would never say that. Yeah. Twice. So, that would be a theological distinctive that would be necessary.
[28:55] There are some preferential distinctions. There are certain denominations, for example, who don't have musical instruments in their church. Now, let me back up.

Some of those denominations would not say it's preference. Some of them would say this is theological, to be fair to them. But it's very difficult if you have a conviction against instruments, and other people in the church want to play instruments.
How do you have instruments and non-instruments? You can't do that. So, I think that there are some reasons that are necessary to have some difference and distinctions.
There are also some distinctions that are unnecessary and sinful. I think there are some churches who want everything just their exact way, and everybody here looks like us, talks like us, dressed like us, has our exact same favorite music, exact same favorite songs, exact same favorite everything, and anyone who's not just like us can't get in.
Or, churches where somebody wants to be a leader, and they're not recognized by the church as a leader, and they get mad, and so I'll just go start my own church. Remember, those things aren't good or helpful.
[30:13] It happens, but it's not good. So, I think there's some different reasons why those different distinctions occur. But, ultimately, I think it's a question of saying, how do we best do what Christ called us to do?

We're going to have to be in different local assemblies, and if we can do that in a place where as best we can, we are honoring Christ and preaching the Bible, that's where you want to be.
So, different denominations don't, I mean, to me, it doesn't bother me. I don't think that's a problem. I think the question is, is the church I'm in striving to be as biblical as possible?
I mean, let's be clear, guys. We've got a good church here. We don't have a perfect church. We don't have everything figured out here. Our staff, we talk all the time on Mondays in staff meeting, how do we get better?
How do we get more biblical? How do we go from where we are to being more biblical? We don't have it all figured out. This isn't the only good church in town. This isn't the only good church in the state of Oklahoma.
[31:17] We're not perfect by any means. I think the most important thing for any church you're attending is are they preaching the Bible and are they striving to be even more biblical? I mean, that to me is the most important issue.

That's helpful. Thank you. Something that's kind of been at the forefront of a lot of our minds the last couple days in light of events that have taken place, you know, things you've heard about, people

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out of state have heard about, his dad killing his family and then taking his own life.
Tragic, tragic, tragic circumstance for sure. So this question, I think, is kind of in light of that. If God is so powerful and good, why does he let bad things happen to innocent people and children?
It's a fair question, isn't it? And that's something we all have to struggle with. If that's not something you've struggled with before, it's something you will because this is the reality of a fallen world.
I think the first thing I want to say if somebody comes to me with that question, I want to change the first word instead of saying, if God is, I want to affirm what the Bible affirms, because God is.
[32:32] God is all powerful. However you're going to solve this heartache, we're not going to do it by creating our own God.

We're going to have to go to the God of the Bible. Does that make sense? So the question's not if God is powerful. Our problem is, or our struggle is, because God is all powerful. So let's start there. Let's make sure that we're dealing with what the Bible affirms about God. The next thing I want to do is I want to run to some biblical text that are rocks on this mud and shifting sand of this heartache we're talking about, whether the one of this week or any other one.
I want to put some rocks of God's Word out there to stand upon. Not that's going to solve every problem, not that's going to answer every question, but things that are true.
Okay? So, let's start by affirming God is all powerful. Whatever problem that creates for you is better than creating a God of your own mind that says, well, God's not all powerful.
[33:55] So let's start with a rock that we can put our feet upon. God is all powerful. Let's put another rock out there to stand on.

God is gracious and merciful. Now, the hard thing is when the events of this week happen, it doesn't always feel like that, does it?
God is powerful. God is powerful. God is powerful. God is good and merciful. God is powerful. God is powerful. God is powerful. God is powerful.
God is powerful. God is powerful. So I want to affirm God is powerful. God is good and merciful. And then I want to affirm that every heartache in life is a wake-up call to my soul to repent and be ready to meet the Lord.
[35:04] When I hear of the tragedy of this week or any other tragedy, we just had April 19th. April 19th, before you guys were alive, was when the Murrah bombing happened downtown.

April 19th or 20th is also the date of the Columbine School shooting that happened years ago when that was such a big deal. My mind always goes to Luke 13.
Luke 13, people come to Jesus and they say, hey, you know, we've got this big catastrophe that happened. What are you going to do about that? Jesus, how are you going to fix this?
And the problem in Luke 13 is the tower, this tower falls and a number of people, it falls upon them and they die.
And the question to Jesus is, explain this. If God is powerful and if God is merciful, explain your way out of this tower that fell and these innocent people died.
[36:15] repent, and Jesus' answer in Luke 13 is repent or you will likewise perish.

Not being indifferent at the pain that's happened, but saying your first instinct ought to be make sure you're ready to meet the Lord.
I'm not promised tomorrow and neither are you. And whether it is a tornado or a gunshot or a disease or a car wreck, there are untold numbers of people every day taking their last breath.
and none of them knew it would be that day. And so the most important thing I would say is use every heartbreak in your own spirit and soul to make sure you're ready to meet the Lord.
We start there. I want to put those three rocks in front of you. God is all-powerful. God is merciful. And you must be ready to meet the Lord.
[37:44] Repent. After that, I want to go to Habakkuk 1 because Habakkuk had a very similar question.

Habakkuk said, God, you're not doing anything. These people are sinful. They're full of debauchery. The spiritual leaders are not faithful.
Habakkuk is a prophet in the Old Testament about 650 years before Jesus was born. And Habakkuk says, God, you seem deaf.
You're not listening when I pray. He didn't think. He said, God, you seem far away. You feel distant to me. He said, God, I feel like you're just disinterested in what I'm going through and how I'm feeling.

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And the promise of God in Habakkuk 1 verse 5 is, I'm doing something. You don't know what it is yet. You can't see it yet. But I'm doing something.
[38:50] And then God tells Habakkuk what he's doing. And Habakkuk doesn't like it. He says, God, that's not fair. You can't do that. You can't use that level of pain and suffering to accomplish your work.

That's not fair. That's not right. And Habakkuk argues back with God. And I don't want to encourage you to judge God or to doubt God or to argue with God.
But I do want to say this for Habakkuk. At least in his doubt and struggle he kept going to God. You can do worse than that. He kept crying out to God. In chapter 2 you get all this dispute.
In chapter 3 you get this reminder of all that God has done. And when you get to the very end of Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 16, 17, 18, and 19, Habakkuk has come to the place where he says even if there's no fruit in the vine and no cattle in the stall, even if everything I've known and trusted in is taken away from me, yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
[40:19] Now Habakkuk wasn't there in chapter 1. It took a process of crying and praying and struggling and wrestling but you're not going to get to the right answer by denying things that are true.

God is all-powerful. God is gracious and merciful. I need to repent and be ready. Then, I'm crying out to the Lord and I'm trying to discern, God, what are you trying to teach me in this?
How can I know more of your heart from this? And if you're here tonight with struggles of how do these bad things happen with a good all-powerful God, just know this, to run away from God is going to get you nowhere.
You've got to run to Him. With your questions, with your struggles, with your doubt, you run to Him. And if someone in a family is going through some terrible thing and they bring it to me as a pastor or a friend, I'm not trying to solve every riddle for them.
I mean, there's a season where at first, I'm just going to sit with you and I'm just going to put my arm around you and I'll just cry with you. I'm not trying to make everything go away.
[41:51] I can't do that. I've sat with families when someone died tragically. I've sat with families when something awful happened.

I've sat with families when babies have passed away and it's heartbreaking. And I just want to put those rocks in front of them and I just want to be there with them.
In time, I'll help them as they wrestle with their theology of suffering but I'm not there to try to tell them everything's easy. I'm not there to pretend I can make everything go away.
But if I say someone, you know, God's not all powerful, I've just taken away the rock they need to stand on. Genesis 18.25 says the judge of the earth will do what is right.
I can't solve every riddle of why everything happens. But I trust that God is powerful, merciful, and calling me to repent.
[42:59] And for the things I can't understand, I'm going to keep crying out to him. And I don't have to have every answer to trust him.

If I think I do, then I'm making myself God to say God can't be any bigger than my mind can understand. Yeah, that's excellent, thoroughly biblical.
I think also this question of the problem of evil comes up a lot, not necessarily with specific situations, but just in general. I think those are excellent answers.
I think along with prayer and who our God is, we can point them to Jesus. God is not removed from evil. evil. He has experienced it himself in the person of Christ, the only truly innocent life that was lost.
And he laid down his life for a sacrifice for our sins and dying on the cross. And so regardless of all the unanswered questions, all the difficulties that brings up, God's not removed from us.
[44:02] Our high priest knows what evil is personally. And so he has an excellent answer. Thank you for that. You know, when my oldest son was born, we had some health issues with Marcy and with him.

I don't want to overplay it. Everything ended up being fine. People have been through far worse situations. But for a couple of minutes, it was very, very frightening.
And we were in the operating room and Kale was born. And Marcy grabbed my hand and she said, Michael, he's not crying.

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I don't know anything about babies. My first, I thought, how sweet. He's a sweet, obedient baby. That's what I said. And she said, Michael, it means he's not breathing.
anything. And then I thought, oh my goodness. And she grabbed the doctor, the surgeon right beside her and she said, she said, doctor, everything's okay with my boy, right? And the doctor said, this is, this is not, I don't know if this is the best thing to say, but I'll never forget these words. [45:11] He said, I'm not going to make you a promise I can't keep. to her answer, is my baby going to live? And he said, I won't make you a promise I can't keep. And in that moment, and it wasn't a long time, but I didn't know, what I can with all of my heart and complete sincerity and integrity tell you, is I sense the nearness of the Lord, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and everything within me felt, I will trust you through this.

Now, I've not walked through some of the heartache of other families who that story did not turn out okay. Cale ended up being fine. So I don't want to overplay that.
People have been through far, far worse. But I tell you, in that moment when I didn't know, everything within me said, I will trust the Lord no matter what.
And I think back on that often, because there will be other hard days in my life that come up. And when it happens, I trust and believe that no matter how big the heartbreak is, because I believe the Lord is powerful, merciful, I trust and believe He'll see us through.
God, and I want you students to know that in your hardest moments, you cling to the Lord. [46:54] You cling to Him. You trust Him. Not because you know everything, not because you've got every question answered, but where else are you going to go? He is your rock.

He is your Savior. He is your salvation. And so you cling to Him. And I would encourage you to do that this week and any other week with whatever trial comes up.
Excellent. This will be our last question. There are two questions that kind of go together. So one is, how would you respond if someone says that Christianity is just another religion? So it's just one among many possibly true religions.
Then the second question was, what makes Christianity unique when there are other religions that claim to offer kind of a transformation? So there's better well-being or people sobering up on other religions or whatever.
So what makes Christianity unique and what makes salvation authentic in Christianity? Yeah, so here's the problem. The problem is we're all sinners. We know that.
[47:55] We don't need to be convinced of that. The issue is, what are you going to do with your sin? That's what the law comes down to. What are you going to do with your sin? And this world will offer you an endless array of options.

Different religions, different practices, different beliefs, whatever it may be. All of them, with their distinctions and nuance, all of them, except for Christianity, is going to start with, here's what you've got to do.
Here's what you've got to achieve. Here's what you've got to accomplish. which makes sense, because if man is going to invent something, you invent something that ultimately puts you as the champion.
Christianity alone, Christianity uniquely, because it comes from God, not from man, says the way that you deal with your sin isn't what you accomplish, it's what God has done for you.
All the religions of the world are about mankind trying to reach up. Christianity is about God coming down, God reaching down. And other, you know, other programs can help me sober up or whatever it was.
[49:13] The issue's not, are there other things that can help your body? Are there other things that can help your mind? Sure there are. The issue is, what are you going to do with your sin? What happens when you die?

And so, we started off joking about bench pressing. Well, here's what I can tell you. 2 Corinthians 4.16, the outer man wastes away.
It's true. It does. And you can bench press a little bit, and you can eat some protein, and you can, you know, eat some healthy things, and you can avoid the bad stuff.
And that can make you a little stronger for a little while. That's fine. That can push back the effects of aging maybe. That's fine. But you live long enough, that outer man's wasting away. Then what? Some program of the world may get you sober.

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Great. I'd rather you be sober than drunk. But then what? What's going to deal with your sin problem? And the world, because they create these religions, give you all these options that are about you working your way up.
[50:19] Christianity says that's not how it is. Because Christianity is not at the invention of man. Christianity is the gift of God. And God comes down to us. That's what makes Christianity unique.

Yeah, that's very good. And John MacArthur, whom both of us both love, he's said that there are two types of religion. There's religion of human achievement and then divine accomplishment. So every religion is what can we do to please God? How can we find God? And Christianity is to come and see what our God has done. And so what he's accomplished. So would you also thank you to Michael for being with us tonight?
Can I steal one minute? Yeah. I just, I want to say before we, before we close out tonight, I want you guys to, and if you, if you've been around a while, you know this, but I don't want to assume that you know this.
I want you to hear it from me. I want you guys to know how absolutely valuable you are to our church. You're not a church within a church.
[51:23] You're a part of the church. You are so essential to our church. And there are a lot of things about our church I'm thankful for.

There are a lot of things about our church. I love to give God the glory for what he's doing. But at the top of that list is what he's doing through our teenagers. And I want you guys to know that your church loves you.
I want you to know that I love you. I would love that you're here on Wednesday nights. I love that you're here on Sundays. I love that you guys sit up front. I love that you lead by example.
I love that you bring Bibles to read and to participate in worship. I love that you're a part of this church. Our church needs you. Our church depends on you.
Our church loves you. And I want you guys to know that you are essential to the work God has called us to do. And I want you guys to know that your church believes in you.
[52:29] I don't really put up or tolerate if people want to bad mouth teenagers. Because I know 200 of them right here that I believe in with all my heart. I believe in what you're doing.

I believe in the God that you serve and what he's doing in you and through you and with you. And a big group of you guys are getting ready to be graduates. Some of you will stick around.
Some of you will go away. Some of you will come back and forth. You're not sure what you're doing. I want you guys to know it doesn't matter where you live. This is always a home for you. And we will always be there to do our best to serve you and to pray for you and to help you no matter where you live.
You don't have to be at this address for us to care about you. And I also want to say that while a part of me can't stand the thought of looking around at you seniors and thinking of you guys being gone because I love you so much more than you know, I will say that there is a time when you need to go on to that next step.
And while it's sad in some ways to think of this big group of seniors being gone, it's just about time for you guys to do that. Like y'all are just about there. You're ready to do that.
[53:48] And God has something great for you in that next phase. And there's a good group of leaders that are junior seniors and sophomores and freshmen.

And the youth group is not falling apart because we're losing this amazing class of seniors, though they are an amazing class of seniors. Because there's other leaders God's preparing. And they're about to be unleashed in leadership.
And that excites me. And those of you who are graduating, God has given you an amazing gift to be a part of this church and this youth group.
And you've been amazing stewards of what God has given you. And those of you who are juniors and sophomores and freshmen, middle schoolers, there's a bunch of y'all about to be unleashed to be leaders in a way bigger than you've ever been.
And I'm going to be there to cheer you guys on and love every step of the way. So don't assume your pastor loves you. I want you to hear it from me. I love you guys.
[54:56] And I care about you guys. And I believe in you guys. And our church is better because you guys are here. And seniors who may be about to move away, you will forever have a home here.

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And we will be there for you no matter what. Don't let people look down on you. You guys are the real deal. And you guys have my absolute love and respect with all of my heart.
I mean that sincerely. All right? Amen. Would you pray for us and we'll be done? Thank you. Lord, I do thank you for these students. I thank you, Lord, for Joey and Kashawn and Mary and the amazing group of volunteers who teach and serve with these students.
Lord, I pray that you would continue to use this church and this ministry to build and equip leaders. Lord, I thank you for everyone that's a part of this group, for those who are new, for those who are even just guests here tonight.
Lord, that they would know this is a place they can come and learn your word, ask hard questions, struggle with things, but I pray, know that they are loved and cared for. We thank you for your many blessings to us in Christ's name.
[56:08] Amen.

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