



Life Group Sermon Notes

“God's Not Dead: Finding Faith At Ground Zero”

Ps. James Lowe- April 10, 2016

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- If you could ask God one question face to face, what would it be?
- What do you most want to learn about God?
- What is one of the most difficult or challenging questions that people have about God?

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

Sooner or later someone close to you will find themselves in a personal crisis. Many suffer in silence, while others let the world know via social media. As believers, we rarely see these critical moments in life coming until they arrive. They seem to happen suddenly.

1. The Problem of Pain

The greatest question many people have when it comes to faith relates to the problem of pain and suffering. Whether it's senseless acts of violence or personal pain and loss, it is the elephant in the room during most discussions about God and faith. The biggest question you will hear again and again from people you talk to about God or spiritual things is “Why do bad things happen?” That's because pain and suffering are everywhere. It appears that evil has no limits. The universal cry is “Can anything be done to stop it?” If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He do something? The hope of this study is to show that God has already done something. In fact, the message of what God has done is so incredible it is called the Gospel or the Good News!

2. The Search for Answers

Many times people try to mask their pain by simply giving themselves over to distractions. Some search for riches, fame, or attention, while others give their focus to anything they can to try to ease the pain. If we can escape from these traps, our search for answers can become meaningful and not another dead end.

The good news is that God has come to us in the form of a man, Jesus Christ. He desires to bring us the help and the hope we long for. First, we are promised, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). We are promised from the beginning that our sincere search will not be in vain. Second, Christianity not just welcomes inquiry but requires it. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). We don't come to God against reason, but through it. That's why we say, “Real faith isn't blind.” God isn't just a distant Creator who set things in motion at the beginning and then stepped away from it in a detached manner.

He stepped into history as a man, felt our pain, resisted temptation as we have to do, and ultimately bore our sins at the cross. Indeed, God is personal and cares about us more than we could imagine. On top of this, He has promised to reward us for diligently seeking Him.

3. Giving Answers

It's important to keep in mind that no one has all the answers . . . only God has that kind of knowledge. While we are called to give the reasons for our faith, there are times we should say to others, "I don't know." When this happens, it serves as motivation to study and learn so we can be ready when the same question is asked in a future discussion with someone. It's also important to realize we don't have to have all the answers before someone can come to Christ.

This brings up another important point. In helping others in their journey, we actually don't lead with the answers. We start by asking questions and listening to them first. It's amazing what you will hear when you do this. Our questions should not be random; they should help reveal a person's foundational religious beliefs. For instance, ask a person who believes in God how they would describe God and what He expects of us. Or ask an atheist why they do not believe in God and what is the basis of their morality. If we start by simply sharing our beliefs, we might find ourselves answering questions they aren't asking.

We are called to give the reasons for our faith, but in doing this we must have gentleness and respect. If we listen carefully to others, they will reveal the issues or problems they are dealing with. They may also explain the real reasons preventing them from believing, such as fear of God rejecting them or painful experiences with Christians in the past. You could then specifically address their main barriers to faith.

4. The Hope of the Gospel

The Bible speaks of "the God of hope" (Romans 15:13). It also talks about "the hope held out in the gospel" (Colossians 1:23). The Gospel provides the ultimate answers that we need about God and ourselves. It provides us the hope that we are loved in spite of our weaknesses, mistakes, and sins. Knowing that God loves us can be a source of enormous hope and encouragement.

There is also the hope that He is aware of our struggles and our fears. God isn't detached from our circumstances. In Christ, He became a man and took upon Himself our pain at the cross (Isaiah 53:3-5). The Gospel also provides us the hope that when this life ends, it's not the end of our existence. The thought of death can bring the strongest and most intelligent person to their knees. It can fill us with despair and darkness in our minds and hearts. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we can be sure that death doesn't have the last word.

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related point for discussion.

- Is it fair to blame God for the evil and suffering in the world? Why or why not?
- Have you ever talked in depth to someone who was struggling with these issues? Please explain.
- What can we do to get better prepared to help others who are struggling with these questions?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Ask God to help us learn and receive comfort from him when we experience pain and suffering.
- Ask God to teach us more about the sufferings and triumph of Jesus Christ.
- Ask God for opportunities to ask two people you know about their thoughts on God and the purpose of life.