

The Gospel of John: Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Any Sense

Aaron Brockett | John 16:16-33

Alright, what's up Traders Point? How are we? Good to see you—all the non-spring breakers right here.

I just want to welcome those of you who may be with us for the first time. We're glad to have you. And those of you who are watching via online live streaming from warm, sunny places, we hate you. It's good to have you guys here glad you're in town.

Next weekend is Easter weekend and we just want to encourage you to grab a stack of Easter invitations and invite somebody to come with you. This Friday night is our Good Friday service at 5 o'clock. I want to encourage you to come to that—it kind of sets up the whole weekend. It will be a service centered upon the crucifixion. We'll take communion together. And it really sets up the victory that we celebrate at Easter.

Saturday night our services are going to be at 4 and 6 o'clock and then Sunday morning 8, 10, and 12. I've had a number of people over the last week ask, "Which service should we come to? Which service is going to be the fullest?" If you're a Saturday person the two are really kind of the same—4 and 6. Last year I think that the 4 o'clock had a few more people than the 6.

If you're a Sunday person—which if you are here right now that means that you are probably a Sunday person—I would really steer you away from the 10 o'clock. The 10 o'clock is probably going to be when most of our guests show up and we want them to have a parking spot and a place to sit. So if you could come to the 8 o'clock—I don't want to be the only one in here, preaching—come next weekend at 8 o'clock with your coffee already in you or at 12 o'clock that would be great.

And I'd really ask that, if you could come and worship for an hour and serve an hour we're still a bit short on volunteers and we need people to step up in that capacity. We're really looking forward to a great weekend next week for resurrection weekend.

This morning we're in John, chapter 16. So if you have a Bible or if you have some sort of Bible app, turn to John 16. If you don't have one, that's okay. This will be on the screens behind me.

Several weeks ago my wife and I got our kids put down to bed and then we were getting ready to go to bed and she turns on a television show on HGTV, which is not necessarily a channel that I frequent very often. She turned on a television show that I've never heard of before. It's called *Fixer Upper*. So the whole fan club is here! Very excited about that.

How many of you have actually heard of that show? Yeah, a fair number of you. This is the third service—I've used this illustration in all three services and at this point wives start jabbering in their husband's ears. I don't exactly know what this is about.

Anyway, she turned on this show. I'd never heard of it before. I basically thought, "I'm not going to be interested in it but this will be a good way to fall asleep." And, if you've never seen then show then you

need to know that it is based around this couple, Chip and Joanna Gaines. They live near Waco, Texas. He is in real estate. She is in interior design. And they kind of brought their super powers together and they renovate these outdated or neglected homes. They really do some pretty amazing things.

And actually, in all seriousness, now that we've watched a few of these episodes I want to be Chip's best friend. I just think that he seems to have a lot of fun and Joanna's eye for French country is simply divine. I just heard Jenny Braun laugh.

If you've never seen the show there's this formula to the show like in all of the shows where you have this couple who is looking for a home to live in (or maybe it's an individual) and Chip and Joanna show them these three outdated homes. They get to choose one of them that is well within their budget. Then with what's left over they get to do some renovations.

Joanna tells them what she'd like to do to the house and then they go in and have what's called demo day. They rip all of the guts out of the house and start to redo it. And there's always, in every episode, some kind of unexpected trouble that they run into. And what makes the show kind of interesting is that they go, "Hey, wait a second. We didn't account for the fact that these walls are infested with bee hives. That's going to be several thousand dollars more to change that."

Or, "We didn't account for the fact that the wood siding is rotted out." Or, "These electrical plugs are out of code." They have to go through and change all of those things. Or the whole air conditioning unit has to be replaced. So they have to call the clients and say, "Listen. There is some unexpected trouble here and it's going to cause the budget to go up."

One of the things that we can all account for in life is that there will be these moments of unexpected trouble that will come into our lives. I think that all of us actually know this about life. If I were to sit down and say, "Hey, is life going to be perfect?" there isn't anybody in this room who would say, "Yes, life will be perfect." We know that trouble will come. The problem for us comes with the fact that, "This isn't supposed to happen to me, and it's not supposed to happen in this way, and it certainly isn't supposed to happen right now."

All of us receive these words at times that punch us in the soul and knock the emotional wind out of us. Words like, "We're going to have to let you go." "I don't love you anymore." "We can't find a heartbeat." "It looks like cancer. We need to start chemo right away." "I want a divorce." "I'm pregnant." "I can't get pregnant." "Your child will never walk." "Your son's been in a car accident." "Your daughter is in jail." "I'm sorry to inform you..." And on and on we could go.

Life is filled with trouble and life is filled with troubling statements. You could be cruising along doing your thing, minding your own business and at any moment get hit with information that will turn life on its head, upside down, and inside out. At that point in our lives, when we are faced with eye-crossing, mind-numbing, knee-buckling trouble we are riddled with a bunch of questions.

"Why does this have to happen?" "Why does this have to happen to me?" "God, where are You? Do You care? Why don't you intervene?" And maybe one of the most common lines of reasoning is this, "Is God punishing me for something?"

As we come to John, chapter 16—if you've been with us in this series, over the past several chapters—13, 14, and 15—Jesus is in the longest conversation that He has ever had with His disciples. He is

preparing them for His departure. He's given them some objective truths. Over the past couple of weeks we've heard Him say to them, "Listen. I have to leave. I have to exit here but I'm going to leave you My Spirit. My Spirit will be in you and walk with you through this."

Last week, if you were here, we looked at this great passage where Jesus explained our relationship to Him and He said, "Listen. I'm like a vine, you guys are like branches. So, you have to stay connected to Me." So, now we come to the end of chapter 16 and Jesus is going to teach us here that trouble will find us—even to those of us who are good and godly—and it's not because God is unjust, or unfair, or disconnected but there are actually some reasons why God allows us to walk through trouble in our lives.

So, let's pick this up in chapter 16, verse 16. Let me just read through the passage. I want to teach a little bit and then read some more and teach a little bit and then I want to bring three thoughts to the surface for you to grab a hold of and take home with you.

It starts off in verse 16, He says, "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." What is He talking about? Well, He's talking about His arrest and crucifixion, His ascension into heaven and He's saying that there's going to come a day when He will return. But there is a lot packed into those two little words "little while" don't you think? In fact, those two words are going to be mentioned seven times in four verses. It's almost comical as we read it. It sounds kind of like a "who's on first" routine. It's just very, very confusing.

Verse 17, "Some of his disciples said to one another, 'What is this that He says to us, "A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me"; and, "because I am going to the Father"'"?" If you have been here over the last couple of weeks, this is all a circular conversation. These are all questions that they've already asked.

Verse 19, "Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him, so He said to them, 'Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, "A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me"'"?" Now what made this moment so troubling for the disciples is they are in the dark. They don't understand what Jesus is doing. They don't understand what He is saying. It doesn't make any sense to them. So, they are focusing all of their concentration on the fact that they cannot see a solution to this trouble that they are in.

As I was studying this last week I scribbled this out to the side of my notes. I just asked myself a question, "When I'm going through trouble, and trial, and difficulty and I can't readily see a solution then do I sometimes think that there must not be one—from my perspective, from my vantage point, from the seat that I sit in?"

You know if you have any sort of experience at all in Bible study, one of the things that we all have a tendency to do—and I've been guilty of it as I have preached through passages of Scripture—is that it is really easy to make the disciples look stupid. It's really easy to be like, "Oh, my goodness. I can't believe that they missed this. I can't believe that they didn't catch this." As a preacher, I think that I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do—I think the disciples are going to come find me in heaven, "Hey, bro. You were a little unfair with us. And, if you would have been with us, you would have been asking the same thing." Fair enough.

See, we have perspective now 2,000 years later. We know what is coming. Next weekend is Easter weekend. Jesus goes to a cross, He resurrects—that's what He's talking about guys but from their vantage point they didn't see it. The lesson for my life and for yours is that our perspective is somewhat limited. Just because we can't see a solution doesn't mean that there isn't one.

In verse 20 He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice." Notice how definitive His words are. He doesn't say that this is a possibility, He says you will, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." He doesn't say that your sorrow will be replaced by joy. It says that it will turn into it, which gives us a little bit of indication that maybe sorrow and trials are actually a part of the process of joy.

Verse 21, "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish," that's debatable, right ladies? Easy for you to say, "for joy," there's that word again. We keep getting back to that word, "that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of Me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Joy is a really great word and it's mentioned, not only all over the verses that we just read, but if you've been here through our study in John's gospel—have you noticed that through each section John will say things like, "and this has been said," or, "this has been taught," or, "this has been done," for your joy.

The word happiness is never used. It never says, "Hey, this is done for your happiness," because there is a distinct difference between happiness and joy. If we could define it, we would say that happiness often reflects our circumstances but joy supersedes them. Joy rise above our circumstances. Happiness is simply a reflection of what has happened to us.

So, you can say things like, "Hey, man. Are you having a good day?"

"Yeah, I'm having a really great day. I'm happy right now."

"Why are you happy?"

"Well, I got accepted" or, "I got hired," or, "I received a raise" or, "somebody just gave me a compliment," or, "she said yes," or, "the house finally sold," or, "the neighbor finally moved," or, "the car got fixed," or, "the meal was free."

Those are, "Hey, something good happened to me so I'm happy." My circumstances are often dictating my happiness. That's not a bad thing. Happiness is a great thing. But it's not the best thing and it's not the lasting thing. Joy actually rises above circumstances.

You might think about it this way. Happiness is about as durable as Paper Mache. Joy is like Teflon. You can put a smile on your face and have joy out of the deep resources of what God is doing within your soul even when trouble arises. That's the point that Jesus is trying to make here.

I love the subtitle of this next section of Scripture that we're getting ready to read here in verse 25. It says this in my Bible. Maybe it says this in yours. The subtitle says, "I have overcome the world." That's a

pretty strong statement. Only two kinds of people make statements like that, people who know what they are talking about and people who don't know what they are talking about. And Jesus knows what He is talking about.

This is really the pinnacle of this passage where Jesus is offering us reassurance in the midst of trouble, trial, and difficulty. So He says in verse 25, "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming," that basically means when He is no longer with them, when He ascends into heaven, "when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

Here's what Jesus basically says in these few verses. He basically says, "I've been speaking to you in parables, I've been saying things like I am a Vine and you are the branches—figures of speech. But one day, through the Spirit, I'm just going to speak straight up, just plainly and you're going to know and you're going to have clarity. Now you're in the dark, in that moment you're going to see clearly.

We see this even in the lives of the apostles because throughout the gospels they always seem late to the party, they didn't seem to understand what Jesus was talking about, they seemed timid, they seemed unsure of themselves. But man, you go to the Book of Acts, which we're going to study later this fall—in the Book of Acts after the ascension of Jesus these same men who are so unsure of themselves seem so sure. They seem so courageous and they seem so brave. Jesus says, "Now you're in the dark but when the hour comes you're going to have clarity over this specific issue.

Verse 29—this is almost a bit humorous, "His disciples said, 'Ah, now You are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that You know all things and do not need anyone to question You; this is why we believe that You came from God.'" Seems a little easy don't you think?

"Jesus answered them," this is how I think He would have said it [in a questioning voice], "Do you really? Do you now believe? Because, I've been saying the exact same thing to you over and over again these few chapters,"

Verse 32, "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave Me alone." That's another way of saying, "You guys are going to abandon Me." Just like light hits a room and the cockroaches spread, you guys are going to bail, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me."

See in verses 29 and 30, I think that John is using a little bit of irony. He says that basically the disciples—it's almost like they are saying, "Okay, we're tired of being clueless idiots. Even if we don't fully understand what You're talking about, we're going to pretend like we do." But we know that they don't fully understand because when Jesus is arrested and crucified, they don't stay by His side, they bail. They still don't have a full understanding even in the midst of this moment—they're saying that they do but they really don't.

It kind of reminds me of when, about a year-and-a-half ago, I sat down with my son and decided it was time to have the birds and the bees talk with him. I told you guys about this several months ago. It was one talk and it lasted about one hour and I did most of the talking. I just kind of laid it all out there. I know that as a good dad that I've not done my job in that area by just one talk. I can't say, "Well, I've done my responsibility, I've done my task." I know that I need to continue to follow-up with that.

This year, he's in the sixth grade, I got a hold of a book that's written with fifth and sixth grade boys in mind. And it's a book that dad's read with their fifth and sixth grade boys. It's called *Preparing Your Son for Every Man's Battle*. And I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to read this. It's my step two."

Well, I'm going to be honest with you. He's not really excited. I'm like, "Hey, son. We're going to read this book together." He's like, "What's it about?" When I told him he was like, "Ohhh." So we read the introduction and we read chapter one and talked about it. Then I said, "Okay, I want you to read chapter two, when you're done reading chapter two come and tell me and I'll read chapter two and then we'll talk about it."

Well, it sat on his nightstand for like two weeks. And I finally go into his room and he's on his iPad doing something. And I'm like, "Hey, have you read chapter 2?" And he's like, "No, not yet." And then he goes, "Dad, why do we have to read this because I remember the talk that you gave to me last year and I already know everything."

"No, you don't."

That's kind of what the disciples are saying, "Oh, we totally get it now." And Jesus is like, "No, you don't." That's what sets up the pinnacle of this passage. It's verse 33. He said, "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation." Another word for tribulation is trouble, in this world you will have trouble, "But take heart;" be encouraged, "I have overcome the world."

Notice what Jesus says and what He does not say. Jesus says, "I want you to have peace. This peace can only be found in Me. You will still have trouble." He doesn't say, "I will make you immune to trouble." He doesn't say, "I will take you out of trouble." But He says, "In Me you will have peace, even in the midst of trouble."

Let me give you three tangible things that you can grab a hold of and take home with you. You can talk about them in your Life Groups. Three big things that I think we just read in our passage.

Number one: Trouble is inevitable. Trouble will just find us when we're doing something wrong, intentionally or not.

I looked up the definition of trouble last week and here's what it said, "It is the condition of distress, something upsetting, a source of difficulty, real or apparent weakness, medical problems, disorder or unrest, malfunction, worry, problems, and strife" sounds like a bad day. That pretty much sums it up. Jesus says to us here, "In this world you're going to face all of these things."

This is not a possibility, it is an inevitability. In this world you're going to have some trouble." This is probably—well not probably—this is most certainly one of the most difficult things about the human experience and trying to rationalize whether or not God exists and if He does exist what's He doing anyway? Why doesn't He intervene? Why wouldn't He pull me up out of these circumstances? Anguish and pain calls our most basic beliefs about God into question. We see that just because we put our trust in God that offers us no insurance against tragedy.

For the longest time—I grew up thinking that what salvation was—if I put my trust in Jesus and I said that I believed in Him, that I followed Him, then somehow God owed it to me to put an invisible force-field around me that kept me immune from some of the trouble in this life. And that is just not the case.

I was at the hospital last week with a family who is sincere, they're good, they're godly people and yet they are having some really horrible things happen to their kids. And there is not a category that I know to put that in.

I was just talking to some people out in the lobby between services who came up to me in tears and said, "Here's the situation we're in." And everything within me is like, "I don't even know have a category to put that in. I don't know why you're facing that."

So, when I look at some of the trouble, and pain, and difficulties that happen in life... I know even now that this is going to hit people in different ways. Some of you, right now, just even talking about trouble and difficulty—you can fill in the blank right away. You're like, "Yep, I am there right now and now, with you addressing it, it just kind of feels like you pressing on a bruise."

And others of you may be like, "Well, life is pretty good right now but I've been in a situation, I know what this is like. I've come through some healing. God has taught me some things through it." So, all of us are going to perceive and see this differently.

Can I just say that when I think about trouble, and trials, and difficulty and why we have to go through them in our lives, there are really three big reasons I can think of, three big overarching reasons.

Number one: It's just the result of general sin, and pride, and rebellion that is in the world that causes everything to be off kilter.

Perhaps it's my own poor choices—I have to look back on my life at times and say, "You know what? Sometimes there is trouble that comes into my life and it's because of something that I have said or done or something that failed to say or to do." I have to own that at times.

Paul talks about this to Timothy in his second letter to him. In chapter 3 Paul says, "Understand this. In the last days there will come times of difficulty for people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."

Man, I look at that list and there's only one person who I can really ask this of or be accountable to and that's me. I look at that list and I go, "I've been guilty of just about all of that, if not much of it in the last week." Paul says for us to just come to this understanding that all of us... When I say sin, it is shorthand for pride and rebellion. My pride and rebellion cause me trouble in my life.

But even if it's not the result of my poor choices, sometimes trouble finds me because of the result of other people's poor choices. We are in a war. We are in a battle. Not against flesh and blood, not against culture, but the principalities and powers of this dark world.

You don't have to do something specific to get into trouble, trouble will come find you. And oftentimes this is the weapon of choice for Satan, "All it takes is for me to cause a little bit of trouble in the lives of the faithful and we'll see how faithful they are." That's just the story of Job.

Job is a man who was upright. He pleased the Lord. Satan goes to God and he is like, "There is nobody who is faithful to You." And God is like, "Well, what about My boy Job?" And Satan is like, "Oh, yeah. That's just because You've blessed him. But let me take his wealth. Let me take his health. Let me take his marriage. Let me take his kids. He'll curse You to Your face."

See, Jesus says in this passage, "I'm not going to rescue you out of trouble but I'm telling you, straight up, that trouble will find you." And notice what He says and what He doesn't say. Jesus doesn't say to us, "Man, I had no idea that could happen to you." Jesus doesn't say, "You know what? Trouble is a real possibility but if you are good, and if you are godly, then you don't have anything to worry about." Jesus doesn't say, "You know what, man? You must have done something to really tick God off because, I don't know, I think that He's punishing you."

In the middle of pain and difficulties, it's very difficult for us to see this with the right perspective. We've all been there. Maybe you're there right now. And Jesus' words teach us here that He may not allow us to escape from trouble but He says this, "I'll give you the strength to stand up underneath it."

If we had a vote in this, we're going, "God, can I vote for you to take me out of it? Do I have a say? Because actually that's what I would like to suggest." We would all like to say—in fact, even when I pray with people, I'm praying that God would remove the trouble, and the pain, and the trial, and the difficulty but what if He doesn't? He says, "I'll give you the strength and the power to stand up underneath it." You keep bringing this word "joy" back up into the middle of it.

This is why, as a church, sometimes you just can't offer an explanation. As a pastor, everything within me wants to. When I go to the funeral, when I go to the hospital bed, when I'm praying with somebody in tears, I feel like I need to give them a verse or wrap it all up nice and neat and put a bow on it so they can go, "Oh, now I totally understand." That's why Romans 12 says, just weep with those who weep because trouble is inevitable and it will find us.

What's the second thing that we see in this passage? The second thing that we have to realize is that my perspective on this trouble is limited. It has a limit to it and it is incomplete. That's where those two little words "little while" become such big players in this text. Seven times in four verses, Jesus says, "A little while, a little while, a little while."

Would you not all agree that "little while" means different things to different people? A little while in the ice cream shop is not the same thing as a little while in the dentist chair. If you say to your kids when they ask, "When are we going to go to Disney World?" And you say, "In a little while..."

My son just asked me that question. I'm like, "Hey, on your birthday."

"Yeah, my birthday is in September. That's forever."

And I'm going, "Well it's just going to come in a snap." See, the difference is our perspective on it.

One of the things that we have been noticing about John's gospel—have you noticed this over the last several chapters—what have the disciples been trying to talk Jesus into? They've been trying to talk Him into staying. They've been trying to talk Him out of going to the cross. They don't know what they are saying.

They don't know what they are asking because if they would have managed to talk Jesus out of going to the cross, they might have had a few more years with Him, a few more sermons, a few more miracles, and a few more moments when they could have hung out with Him but they would have lost the atoning sacrifice.

I would imagine that later they looked back on this moment and said, "Man, I am so glad that we didn't talk Jesus out of going to a cross. We would have messed it up for everybody." Many times I have to just

open myself up to the possibility that my expectations, that my perspectives have a limit to them. Life has certainly taught me that.

You know Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians he says, "God gave me a thorn in my flesh." Paul doesn't tell us specifically what that thorn was. It could have been an illness, it could have been relational difficulty, it could have been depression—we don't know. Paul just said, "God gave me a thorn in my flesh." And I'm glad he didn't tell us specifically what that thorn was. Do you want to know why? It's because we would fixate on his specific calamity. Instead, Paul says to us, "God gave me a thorn in my flesh and I pled with Him to take it away."

But listen to what He says in chapter 12, verse 9, "God said to him, My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness." Not when everything is going great but it's perfected in our weakness. Therefore, Paul says, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest on me. For the sake of Christ, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities." Man, that's difficult to say. But he says, "For this reason. When I am weak, then I'm strong."

Isn't that true in your life? Even though it seems counterintuitive? In those moments when you are empty of yourself, you lean into the power of God all the more. There are moments when I have been filled with pride, or thought that I had the right perspective and I go to God and I say, "God, You have to do that. You have to do it that way."

You know what's really scary? It's to think back over the course of my life and say, "What if God answered all of my prayers exactly the way I prayed them in the moment that I prayed them?" This is where a prayer journal actually becomes really humbling. I've kept a journal in which I have recorded prayers off and on throughout my life. I haven't done it very consistently but I have a few and I can go back to different seasons of my life—five years, 10 years, 15 years ago—it's humbling.

I read it and I go, "Oh, my goodness. I was clueless." Looking back on my 20-year-old self I think, "You really thought that? You really prayed that?" And in the moment, with just that much perspective of time I go, "Man, God. Thank you for not answering that prayer from that knuckle-head." I would have totally messed it up.

It's very difficult when you're in the moment. Why? Because from your perspective right now you're going, "Well this makes complete sense. Why wouldn't God do that?"

There is a psychologist by the name of Robert Emmons and he sorted people's life goals into four basic categories. He said that all of us could put them under these four umbrellas: personal achievement and happiness; relationships and intimacy; faith and spirituality; and, contributing something lasting to society.

Those are the four categories in which we put our life goals. And he said he had this observation. He said, "People who invest much or most of their energy into the goals of personal achievement and happiness are the most vulnerable to the adverse circumstances of life." Why do you think that is? Well, it's because of their perspective. They are saying, "This would make me happy in this moment." We chase after those things and those things elude us.

That's not new. Jesus said it this way. He said, "Whoever would save his life would lose it, whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Think about this for a minute. Think about the wisest person whom you ever met. Was their life trouble free? Or, had they faced lots of trouble and God had given them the strength to stand up underneath it? Did they have some emotional scars and spiritual scars—actually, isn't it by definition that what gives somebody deep waters is the fact that they have walked through some significantly painful things? That's part of the whole maturity process.

As painful as it is for us to say this, when you and I go through a trial it's an opportunity for us to grow, to grow in relationships because people rally around us, to grow in our priorities and perspectives because it pushes us outside of our comfort zone. James, chapter 1 says this, "Count it all joy, my brothers," there's that word again, "when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Let steadfastness have its full effect. What does that mean? It means don't bail out too soon. Don't bail out in the process. Stand up underneath the trouble and let God develop something within you.

"Well, Aaron, how am I supposed to do that?"

That's where this third and final thing comes into play: Cling to what you know, not what you feel.

Cling to what you know. Feelings can't be trusted. Feelings are all circumstantial. That's why in these last few chapters that Jesus has been sharing some things with His disciples before He leaves. He's giving them some objective truth, "Now, I want you to know that I have to leave but that I'm going to give you My Spirit. I want you to know that I am the Vine and you are the branches and you have to stay connected to Me."

When you're in the middle of trouble, and pain, and difficulty, you cannot trust your feelings and perspectives in the moment because you are not your circumstances. You are not your failure. You're not your sin. You're not your shame. You are not your addictions. You are not your kid's home run. You are not your kid's failing grade. You are not your husband's job. You are not your dirty house. You are not your Pinterest page, your Facebook status, or your Twitter followers. You are not your circumstances.

So when you are in the midst of trouble you have to ask yourself, "Who is God? What do I know about Him?" And that fleshly part of you, that cynical part of you, will want to miss it and then you'll want to be defined by your own circumstances.

This is true in our house. I have four little kids under the age of 12. There are moments in our household when they lose their minds and I know that nobody in this room can relate to what I'm talking about so you're just going to have to pretend that you do, alright?

There are days when my kids—their behavior is off, they don't listen, they make messes, it's just as if they've gone to another planet and I find that it is time for me to kind of lay down the law, which means that I introduce some trouble into their lives. And they cry, and they have snot coming out of their noses, and they fall on the floor in a temper tantrum.

That's when I have to get eyeball to eyeball with one of them and have a re-centering conversation. This is how that goes down. I'll just look at one of them and I'll say, "Who am I?" And through tears and sobbing very reluctantly my son or daughter will go, "You're Daddy." And then I'll say, "Who are you?" And he would be like, "I'm your son." Or she would say, "I'm your daughter." Maybe one of them will

give me their name. And then I'll say this, "I know that you're upset right now, but do I love you? Do I care about you? Do I provide for you?" And do you want to know what is often said in the midst of trouble? "No!"

Now, do I believe that? Are they acting on what they feel or what they know? What they feel. They've already demonstrated what they know but they make their decision by what they feel. Man, I do that all of the time. I'm in the midst of some sort of trouble that I don't understand, "God where are You? Why would You allow me to go through this?" And God says, "Who am I?"

"You're God. You're sovereign, You're true, You're all powerful, You're righteous, and You will do what is right. I believe that."

"Well, who are you?"

"Your son."

"Do I love you? Do I care for you? Have I provided for you?"

"No!"

"Come on. You're just reflecting what you feel."

You have to cling to what you know. Ecclesiastes, chapter 8, verse 6 says, "There is a time and a way for everything. Although man's trouble lies heavy on him for he does not know what is to be. For who can tell how it will be?"

The moment when life is lying heavy on you and you're like, "Man, I don't know what's coming in the future, 2 Peter, chapter 2, verse 9 says, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials."

Psalm 46 says, "God is our Refuge and strength a very present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea..."

Nahum, chapter 1—I know that most of you are probably doing your devotional reading in Nahum right now, maybe you should because of what verse 7 says. It says, "The Lord is good. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in Him."

Now, here's a thought. If life was trouble free, why would God find it necessary to describe Himself as a refuge? God says, "I know that you're going to have trouble, I know that you're going to experience..."

"Now, God, why do we have to go through trouble?" We're not going to know that answer fully until He comes with a new heaven and a new earth. We just won't know. But He has said, "In the mean time, I will provide for you a refuge."

For those of us who say, "Well maybe God is punishing me." Please understand. He's not punishing you because the punishment has already fallen upon His Son, Jesus. Or for those of us who say, "Well maybe God doesn't love me." He's already demonstrated His love because He gave you everything in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now listen, I have one son and I love all of you but there is no way that I would give my son for any of you. But if I did, what else would I not give? God says, "I've already demonstrated My love, I've already demonstrated that I care. I've already demonstrated that I want to overcome the trouble in this world because I gave you My Son."

And you can mad at God. You can get angry with God. You can curse God. You can ignore Him. In your defiance you can say, "Well, I don't even believe that God exists." And all that really gets you is that you just have to walk through the trouble and trial alone. It's still pain. But God says, "I'm offering you a refuge in the pain. I'm offering you pain with a purpose. I'm helping you to understand how to sort this out."

Martin Luther, who was a German theologian in the 1500s said that trials and difficulty, or for lack of a better term, pain and suffering—the role that it plays in all of our lives is that it empties us of ourselves. It empties us of our pride, our self-sufficiency to where we lean in and depend on God. I don't necessarily like that message but I know it's true.

You want to know how I know that it's true? Give me one week trouble free and I forget about God. Give me a span of time where everything goes my way and I'm happy and I don't talk to Him as much. I don't lean into Him. I don't think that I need Him. In reality, is life grand? No, it's just an illusion because it's happiness it's not joy. And Jesus is after something so much deeper.

Scripture speaks to this theme so often. It's weaved all throughout its pages. In 1 Peter, chapter 1 it says, "According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance," listen to this, "that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in for heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while," there are those words again, "for a little while, if necessary you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Romans 8 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us." Nothing can separate us from God's love.

2 Corinthians 4, "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen."

Psalms 34 says, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted," any of you brokenhearted right now? Any of you crushed? It says that God is near to you, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

So, when you are in the midst of trouble, and trial, and pain the Scriptures say, "Go to God and lift those things up to Him and pray to Him." Here's the thing about prayer. Prayer can be a really frustrating experience if we don't perceive God as listening to us or that He will answer us, or that He will answer us in the way that we would like.

And most of the time when I pray, I'm not necessarily asking God to work something out, I'm telling Him to do something, "God do it that way, and if You don't do it that way then clearly You don't care or You're disconnected because this is like a no-brainer to me." Believe me, man, there's going to be a moment when we get to heaven and I'm going to go to God and say, "God, could you please explain that? I don't understand why You did it that way." And if you still need an explanation, then—but something tells me that you probably won't—I think that God would be happy to give you an explanation.

See, here's the thing. There are so many times I think I know what I ought to pray for. I think I know what I ought to say. But what if I'm wrong? What if it's just like my 20-year-old self and my prayer journals and what I'm asking and what I'm praying is actually quite foolish or it's a short-circuit that's causing me to miss out on some of this testing of my faith that might produce joy?

I would never want to walk through that again. I would never wish it upon my worst enemy, but what if God is trying to deepen my well, what if He is trying to say, "You know what Aaron? I know what you're going to go through 15 years from now so you need this experience to prepare you for that experience. And it doesn't make any sense to you now, but trust Me. What do you know about Me? And who are you? And do you really think that I care?"

So how are we supposed to pray when life is painful and we don't see a way out? Well you might pray something like this, "Father this is what is going on in my life and this is what I would like to see happen, this is what I would like for You to do. From where I sit, from my vantage point, this makes complete and total sense. God this seems like a no-brainer to me. This seems like the best resolution to this so I hope this is what You do."

There is nothing wrong with that prayer but it is an incomplete prayer. And the reason why it is an incomplete prayer is because we're basically saying, "What I want from You, God is only what I can understand."

So keep going. Keep going in the prayer and say, "But, I believe that You are Who You say that You are and that You're good and even if I can't see how or why this is happening in this moment—and I still want this to change—but God, even more than that and above all I know that You are good and I know that You are sovereign, and I know that You're all powerful, and I know that whatever You do and however You do this, it's going to be the right answer. Just help me to trust You because right now I don't see it and I'm really struggling." That's a harder prayer to pray. That's a better prayer to pray.

As I was growing up there was a hymn that we sang in church pretty often. And I never knew the background of the hymn until later. It's written by a guy named Horatio Spafford, that's an awesome name. If you have a name like Horatio Spafford then you need to grow a really long beard and smoke a pipe.

He lived in Chicago during the late 1870s. He was a lawyer and a successful businessman. He and his wife Anna had five children. They had a boy and four girls. Tragedy struck in 1869 and his only boy, his son—he was only four years old at the time—passed away due to Scarlet Fever. He and his wife were grieving over that.

A year later the great Chicago fire swept through and destroyed all of his real estate investments that he had bought into along Lake Michigan in Chicago. It wiped out his entire business, it wiped out his entire savings account—they had nothing. So in the matter of a year they lost their son and he lost his life savings.

They were Christians and so he and his wife decided that they were going to take their four girls on holiday to England. D. L. Moody was preaching a revival at the time. They said, "Let's go over. Let's hear Moody preach." So they were getting ready to board the ship crossing the Atlantic to England and he had a business opportunity pop up that he couldn't pass up. So he says to his wife, "I don't want to ruin the holiday. Why don't you and the girls go on ahead of me and I'll catch the next ship over. We'll meet up."

Somewhere over the Atlantic tragedy struck and the ship that his wife and his four daughters were on sank. His wife, Anna, survived but his four daughters perished. His wife wrote him a telegram. She said, "I'm the lone survivor." And life just fell on him like a heavy, heavy weight. In just a matter of a year or a year-and-half he lost all five of his kids and he lost his business.

He gets on his ship with a really heavy heart. Sails across the Atlantic to be reunited with his grieving wife and, when he gets to that spot in the Atlantic, the captain of the ship brings him up and says, "I just want you to know that this is the region, this is the area where your four daughters perished." So, he pulls out a pen and paper and he writes out the words to this hymn that we're going to sing, *It is Well with My Soul*.

When sorrows like sea billows roll—in other words when life doesn't make any sense and trouble finds us. Then we say, "God, I know who You are I know who I am and what You've done. I'm going to lean in to what I know and not necessarily what I feel." Does that diminish the pain? No. Does that mean that God wants you in that position of pain? No. Does it mean that God may see it fit to give you the strength to stand up underneath it for your everlasting joy? Yes.

We're going to sing these words together and I want to encourage you, in an act of worship and faith, to just belt it out. But you know what? Some of you aren't going to be able to sing this and that's okay. As we sing, would you just let these words wash over you and just make this your prayer, "God I hear everything that Aaron is saying and I want to get there but I'm not there yet. Would You provide strength for me in this moment?"

We're going to sing this hymn and then we're going to take communion together.

Let me pray.

Father we come to You right now and I pray that in these next few moments that Your Spirit, the same Spirit who Jesus promised us, the same Spirit who gave Horatio Spafford the ability to be able to write out these words in the middle of a gut-wrenching situation that that same Spirit would minister to our hearts and minds this morning.

I don't know specifically what people in this room may be facing, the trouble that they are experiencing. But experience has taught me that I know that there is probably some pretty heavy stuff that some of us are facing and we need You in this moment. We trust in Your identity that You are Who You say that You are, that we are Your children and that You demonstrated that You care. And God, right now we need a refuge in the midst of our trouble. So we ask this in the precious name of Jesus.

Stand to your feet as we sing this hymn together.