



*Gregg Koskela*

Sometimes I wonder why we often “dumb things down” for kids. Many times their questions and the things they think about are incredibly deep, and worth exploring as an adult. Last summer at Newberg Friends (Oregon), we did a sermon series exploring kids’ questions about God. The devotionals this week were adapted from that series.

I’ve been married to Elaine for almost 20 years, and we are the parents of Talli (almost 16), Hayley (13), and Aubrey (almost 8, pictured with me above).

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 2:1-5*

War can be made to look quite compelling. But only when the carnage is put at arms' length, through a distance that doesn't let you see the human cost.

My grandfather fought in World War II. My grandfather, as I knew him, was an extremely quiet, kind man, who didn't talk much at all—especially about his time in the war. When my brother and I were kids, he did tell us a few courageous stories. He cheated death twice; he saved the lives of half his company. Just a few stories, but they were enough to make this boy idolize his grandfather.

Much later, I became aware of the toll the war had on him. Elaine and I visited my grandparents at their home when I was in seminary. We sat in his living room and watched college football, one of his favorite things to do.

He looked at me, and said, “There's a question I've always wanted to ask a pastor.” And then, out of the blue, it came.

“Will God hold me accountable for the people I killed in the war?”

One unexpected question from a quiet man, almost 40 years after his being on the front lines in Europe. I saw the deep pain in his eyes, and realized that this question betrayed years of pain and anguish over memories. My grandpa represents millions of people in our country who have seen and felt and wrestled with the horror of war. The truth is that the people most involved in war are often the ones who most want it to stop. They know the cost. And they ask the question: “Will the wars stop?”

*SONG: Peace, Perfect Peace*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: God, bring your peace to our world.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Zechariah 9:9-10*

I've imagined the face of the child who asked this question. I see him with head down, speaking quietly, naming something that causes him fear, and wondering if he can dare to hope that the fear might come to an end.

Not all kids' questions can be answered easily; so it's nice to be able to give a simple, definitive, and sure answer. “Will the wars stop?” Yes! Not when governments figure out how to bring peace. Not when we through our willpower change to become better people. They will stop forever when Jesus returns to make all things right.

We have hope of almost incomprehensible peace and freedom. We have hope of a deep change in the core of creation. True freedom is coming! It comes because of and through the sacrifice of Christ.

I often emphasize life with God in the here and now. I believe Jesus is worth living for *now*, even if heaven wasn't part of the equation. I don't like the idea of a faith that is only focused on the future hope of heaven, when it's meant to be both/and, now *and* forever.

But, I would never want to eliminate the hope of heaven either! Nothing in this life will ever be completely right and whole. But through God's power, God will bring to reality peace and unity unbelievably different than our current understanding of “reality.”

We serve a powerful, redeeming God—a God who will bring justice, who will end bickering and fighting and war, who will re-create creation into something good beyond our comprehension!

*SONG: The Solid Rock*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, show me the true hope we have because of you.*

—Gregg Koskela

**Tuesday**  
**May 4**

**“Will the wars stop?” (Part 3)**

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*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 11:1-9*

Both Israel and Judah faced the horrors of war, the ending of life, the ending of a nation at the hands of stronger enemies. They knew what it was like to be hungry and surrounded and besieged, without hope, as war went on all around.

The human condition, the very nature of being on planet earth, is to face fighting and war. We live on a violent planet. Pick any region, and look across history and across time, and war is a common, awful experience. It seems to be woven into the fabric of the land.

And yet, all through the prophets, we find God speaking a word about the future. A word of hope—hope of profound and deep change that will lead to war coming to an end.

This word of hope in Isaiah 11 goes deep!

Our hope is centered in the shoot from Jesse, David’s heir, whom the gospels clearly show is Jesus Christ. It is God’s power at work in and through Jesus that will bring change, a deep change.

As hard as it is to imagine humanity being purged of our unstoppable habit of war, the picture here goes further: the very nature of creation changing! The natural world being turned on its head!

Predator and prey in harmony together! Wolf and lamb, leopard and goat, cobra and infant—not just separate and safe, but together and in relationship! The knowledge of God so flooding the creation that war and fighting and pain and suffering are forever banished!

This is our hope! Peace is coming, because of Jesus.

*SONG: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: God, may your peace come!  
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8;  
Ephesians 1:13-14*

We talk about being led by the Spirit, changed by the Spirit, comforted, convicted, taught, and overwhelmed by the Spirit. Some are slain in the Spirit, laugh in the Spirit, moved to tears by the Spirit.

What if none of that seems to happen to you? I don’t want to add to your anxiety by saying you might be missing something; yet at the same time, I really do believe that God is alive and active today, that God didn’t lock himself in the pages of the Bible and history. Let me try some general statements:

First, the Holy Spirit can act in our lives without our feeling or noticing it. Sometimes when we don’t feel the Holy Spirit, it’s because we’re looking for something spectacular, and we miss the mundane ways God is active in our lives. We may look for writing on a wall, like the Persian king in the book of Daniel, and miss the way God speaks through our best friend.

Second, there isn’t a particular way the Holy Spirit must be expressed to “prove” we are saved. Several places address this in the Bible, but 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most powerful: God’s love for others in us is a far better indicator of his work in us than “special” Holy Spirit activities.

Finally, God does not reserve the Holy Spirit for a few special people. The Holy Spirit is part of God’s down payment on us, a promise that God is with us now, and will be with us forever. God isn’t stingy, hoarding the Holy Spirit like some precious treasure!

*SONG: Holy Spirit, Come with Power*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Holy Spirit, show me how you are already at work in my life today.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Titus 3:3-7*

Time to tackle the second half of yesterday’s question.

Salvation is not just salvation from a future hell. Titus reminds us that in this life, in the here and now, we are people who “were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.” Malice, envy, and hatred were a part of our relationships, and we needed something to rescue us from that kind of living.

As Friends, we stand with a group of churches that goes by many names: Wesleyan, holiness, or Armenian. The holiness emphasis does a beautiful thing: it calls us to live a different kind of life now, because of God’s activity within us.

One of the dangerous side effects is that we sometimes think if we don’t get it right—if we don’t feel the Holy Spirit in us—we might be in trouble. When we’re experiencing that side effect, we need a good dose of the Calvinist/Reformed antidote. Salvation is all Jesus! There is nothing we can do to bring our salvation, and there is nothing we can do to mess it up.

Titus 3 teaches truth. We’re saved now, to a different way of living now, that sets aside foolishness and enslavement to passions and hatred and malice. But it’s not our doing, our lists, our legalism, our will power. No, verse 5 states: “He saved us...not because of righteous things *we* had done, but because of *his* mercy” (emphasis mine).

Our faith, our belief, our relationship with God is based on something much more sound than our feelings. It is based on God’s action in Christ. You and I can’t mess that up!

*SONG: Blessed Assurance*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Holy Spirit, give me wisdom to understand that you alone, bought my salvation.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 3:9*

When someone we love dies, we sometimes say, “God loved them so much, God took him or her to heaven to be with him.” Does God really love some people more than others?

Imagine a woman critically injured in a car crash. She hasn’t been a woman of faith, but her husband is. A chaplain says, “God cares deeply for his children. Pray for his protection for your wife.”

If that woman dies, the husband might conclude that God really isn’t a very good God to serve. Why would God choose to protect just a certain few?

Do you see the dangers that come when we try to fill in reasons for why God does or doesn’t save people?

The vast evidence of the Bible says that God has a deep love for everyone he has created. I don’t fully understand why God doesn’t heal every time. But I know several things that are *not* true.

God does not choose to act based on more or less love for people. God loves us all deeply, and longs for us to be whole.

God never has a time where he is unable to act. In other words, he isn’t blocked from using his power by any kind of human action, by any other spiritual power. God has infinite power.

God doesn’t act in vindictive or punishing ways. His failure to heal is not because he’s trying to get back at us. God is infinitely good and just.

We may not fully answer this question; but we serve a loving, good, and powerful God!

*SONG: It Is Well with My Soul*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, show me your love and goodness even in the hard times.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Revelation 21:3-4; Mark 2:1-5*

God *will* show his power one day! God will make everything right, and bring healing to all of creation, as we see in Revelation. No more pain, no more sorrow, no more death! It's important to remember that every time God “fails” to heal or save from death, that “failure” is only a temporary failure. God has done everything to make it possible for us to live forever with him through Jesus Christ!

What do we do in the mean time?

Well, we certainly don't want to give up praying for people! We certainly don't want to give up on asking God to bring healing to the people that we love, simply because we don't fully understand why and when God does choose to heal. Praying for others is something we are given permission to do in the Bible, and at times something we are commanded to do.

Jesus demonstrated a strong desire to have people come to him in their time of need. He said, “Let the little children come to me,” when his disciples wanted to keep them away (Mark 10:14). Crowds followed him everywhere, and when he saw them, “he had compassion on them,” for they were “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

I think what we do in the meantime is take Mark 2 and these friends as our guide. We should lower people through the roof! Don't fear doing it wrong. Don't worry that God doesn't love, or that you aren't valuable enough. Our privilege and responsibility is to do whatever we can to put our friends and loved ones at the feet of Jesus. It's the safest place to be.

*SONG: I Cast All My Cares upon You*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, I place myself and those I love in your hands.*

—Gregg Koskela