

When I Don't Understand

by Carter Conlon

God's ways are higher than ours, and we must trust Him even when we don't understand what He's doing.

Duration: 39:42

Scripture: Psalm 22:1, Isaiah 55:8

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Providence"

Description

This sermon delves into the theme of trusting God even when faced with trials, questions, and uncertainties. It emphasizes the importance of faithfulness, God's provision, and the need to rely on His strength in difficult times. The speaker shares personal experiences and reflections on how God's faithfulness and grace sustain believers through challenges.

Transcript

I'd like to share with you a word that's been boiling deep in my heart all week, matter of fact for a long time now. And it's a message that's simply called when I don't understand. When I don't understand the way that God is leading me, when I don't understand the work that he's doing in my life, when I don't even know if he's still there doing something.

When the deepest question of your heart can be, have I missed God? Did I miss something in my life? Did I take a wrong turn somewhere along this journey? What happened to me? And why is the closeness that I once felt to him, to Jesus Christ, seemingly gone so far from my heart? What could it be that God is doing in my life? Psalm 22, please, if you go there with me in the Old Testament, Psalm 22. Now Father, I thank you with all my heart, Lord, for the touch of heaven on this day. You have been with us in the sanctuary.

You have met with us, Lord God. You have touched our hearts already in the worship. You've spoken about something to come.

You even had us sing this morning. I will understand it one day in the by and by. So God, thank you, Lord, for renewing faith in our hearts and giving us confidence in you and your faithfulness to us.

You yourself, Lord, said, I will never leave you or forsake you. And so Lord, that makes it definitive. Would you help us to understand now your workings? How is it, Lord, that you lead your people? And why do the valleys sometimes seem dark? And even foreboding? I thank you for this with all my heart in Jesus' name.

Psalm 22. Now everybody knows that Psalm 22, or most know that Psalm 22 is the psalm that Jesus Christ quoted on the cross when he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But if you read the whole psalm, you'll see it's a psalm of victory. But I don't want to look at it from that perspective this morning.

I want to look at it from the perspective of the life of King David, who actually was the human instrument that God used to pen this psalm. And we can draw the inference that he must have been experiencing these emotions in his own life. It would almost be fraudulent for him to be writing something that he wasn't even personally going through.

There had to be something. Now, obviously, the hand of God was on him, and he was describing, he was entering the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. But I want to talk about King David himself as a vessel that God used.

In Psalm 22 and verse 1, he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me and from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not hear. And in the night season, and I'm not silent. Having started his life with such promise, presence of God being in him in an unprecedented way, perhaps even in many in his generation.

Starting out with an anointing of God from his very youth, and then suddenly feeling forsaken by God. Feeling like the Lord has abandoned him on this journey, that his prayers are not being answered. He said, I cry in the daytime, and in the night season, I'm not silent.

So in other words, I'm seeking you, I'm calling out to you, I'm crying out to you, but why are you not hearing me? Somewhere near the year 2000, most likely before that, between 1997 and 2000, I was very, very sick. We didn't know it, but our home in New Jersey had toxic mold poisoning in it. By the time it was discovered, the entire attic was black.

There was, they tell me, no visible mold in the attic, and it was not that old of a house. And having come here in 1994, I found myself in 1995 developing a cough, which subsequently turned into a form of bronchial asthma, to the point where even walking down the street, sometimes I felt like I was going to pass out. I'd have to stop and gather my breath again.

And you have to understand, I was a jogger up to this point. When I first found out I was sick, I was jogging in Central Park. I started coughing so badly, I could hardly breathe, but not knowing what the problem was.

Ended up seeing one of the best doctors in the country in Albany, and after it was diagnosed, he ended up telling me, he said, you will most likely never recover from this. He said, the damage is quite extensive to your bronchial tubes. But during that season, in the mornings I had an oxygen tank in my office at home, in our apartment here on 51st, and I would have to breathe into an oxygen mask for about 15 minutes to try to get rid of the headaches in the morning, because that is one of the signs of toxic mold poisoning, is you get terrible, terrible headaches.

And the one thing that seemed to help, it was oxygen. So I'd be sitting there with an oxygen mask. And it was a time of despair.

It was a time of questions coming into my heart, like you experienced. We all experienced these questions. And I started writing, during my devotions, I started writing poems, really, is what they were.

And they eventually became songs. And most of them were published in a CD called Quiet Times, which, thank God, has blessed many, many people throughout the world, especially those who are at home, alone, sick, and firm. Seems to be a touch of heaven on these songs that gives them strength to face tomorrow.

But I wrote one in particular. It was called When I Don't Understand. And it was written from the depths of my heart.

I remember the morning, sitting at my desk, actually writing this, not as a song. I would start hearing the tune later on. But initially, it was just a poem that I wrote.

And I'd like to sing it for you this morning, before I continue in this message. Greg's going to help me on piano. It's called When I Don't Understand.

I think the words will be on the screen above me as well. When I don't understand the way that you lead. And my fear tries to say no one cares.

It's then that you whisper with heaven's sweet love. Tell me forever you're there. Tell me forever you're there.

Off through trials and testings, my heart would believe. I've lost touch with mercy. Why would God receive such a flock seeking a peasant to have for his own? To share in his glory and come to his throne.

When I don't understand the way that you lead. And my fear tries to say no one cares. It's then that you whisper with heaven's sweet love.

Tell me forever you're there. Tell me forever you're there. It's his blood that has saved me and called me to peace.

By his spirit, I'm quickened. And I'm given release from weakness to glory. By his life within, I'm free from dominion and power of sin.

So lead me, dear Jesus, to where I can't go. Give strength I've never had, so that others might know. You call not the righteous, but the weak for your own.

To pass through the veil and inherit a crown. When I don't, sing it with me, understand the way that you lead. And my fear tries to say no one cares.

It's then that you whisper with heaven's sweet love. And tell me forever you're there. And tell me forever you're there.

The prophet Isaiah, God says through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 55 verse 8, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down in the snow from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth and make it to bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please. And it shall prosper in the thing which I sent it.

In other words, God's saying to the prophet Isaiah, I do things my way. And you may not understand why. You may ask the question why, and sometimes we'll never get the answer to the question.

There's been times in many of our lives when we do get the answer, but there's times when you won't get the answer. It really boils down to a place of trust. I have to trust and you have to trust that God knows what he's doing.

And the day we gave our lives to him, we were sealed in the hand of God, the father. That's what Jesus says. And we're being carried by his mercy, by his faithfulness, and by his grace until that day that we're deposited at the throne of God in eternity.

And God knows what we need. It must've been hard for King David to understand this season in his life, especially knowing that he had for so long been living a life governed and sustained by the promises of God. Listen to what he says in verses nine to 11 of Psalm 22.

But you are he who took me out of the womb. You made me trust while on my mother's breast. In other words, he's raised obviously in a godly home because he had the power to trust God, to fight a lion and a bear, even in his young teenage years.

I was cast upon you from birth from my mother's womb. You've been my God. Be not far from me for trouble is near and there is none to help.

He was going through that season in his life where there seemed to be no natural answer to the question, why? God, I remember when Samuel, David could say, came to my house and I was brought in from the field and he poured that flask of oil upon my head and began to prophesy that which God was going to do in and through my life, that I was going to lead the nation of Israel and be a forerunner to something much greater that only God himself fully could understand or comprehend at that time. And going out from that place of anointing and taking on a giant called Goliath and defeating him with only faith and confidence in almighty God. Joining the army of Saul, leading squads into battles and coming back with incredible victories that he in his heart knew that only God could have won these victories.

Now he's pursued by a madman, a king who's lost the spirit of God and is envious of them, is now pursuing him to take his life. He's surrounded. This may be the very illustration.

It doesn't say, there's no historical data that tells us when this was written, but you have to assume it's at this, these kind of pivotal moments in David's life, excuse me, what he knew in his heart that he was surrounded and his own natural strength was not going to be sufficient to meet the need that was before him. And David could have asked the question like you and I asked, why is this necessary? Why can't we just proceed from the promise made to the place of the promise fulfilled? Why does all this middle ground have to happen? Is there a divine purpose in it? Will I ever understand it? I want you to think just for a moment about the prophet Elijah and through the story of one sequence in his life, how faithful God is to prepare us for that, which we are going to have to face every one of us in the future. This is a man who prayed for the spiritual restoration of the people and of a nation that he loved.

And so how did God respond? Now we know that God could just come down. His presence is sufficient. He could bend the whole nation.

We pray for New York city. For example, he could bend the whole city in a moment of time. Second, if he came down in the fullness of his glory, there's not a person to be standing in the streets.

Not a cab would be driving, not, not an arrogant God hating person or casual person, or even a religious person that would still be standing. People be laying in the streets of God came down with the fullness of his presence and power. And we know he can do that.

We know he can do that, but for his reasons, remember his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His ways are higher. So the Lord responds to Elijah's prayer by sending a drought and a shortage of food and even a potential depression upon the people so that they might turn back to God.

Again, he had to produce something and he chose to do it this way to cause the people to begin to think about their ways. Have you noticed as it come to your attention that there is an increasing depression happening in the United States of America today? Have you noticed that opiate and heroin addiction is starting to infiltrate our cities and not just teenagers in the street anymore. Now it's moms and dads.

Now it's 50 and 60, 60 years old that are high on opiates and heroin and all kinds of addictions. There's a depression and people are looking for something to satisfy. And God is producing that cry in the people.

If you really seek him, you begin to understand that. And so he sends him to sit by a river, a Brook Cherith, it's called in first Kings chapter 17 verses three and four. And Elijah could have asked the question in his heart, why the delay Lord? I know who you are.

I know the power you have. Why the delay? Why this three and a half year delay in answering my prayer? And why here? Are there no five star inns left in the country where I could ride this out? Why do I have to sit beside this Brook and just trusting for Ravens to come down and drop a dead rabbit in my lap every day? That's exactly what happened. Ravens were finding animals and they're killing them and they're bringing them and dropping them.

And God fed him beside that Brook. There are two reasons that come to my mind that why the Lord did it this way. Now, having, having the privilege of looking back historically and not forward as it was his case, we now know the full story and knowing the full story as God knows the full story of your life, my friend.

God knows what you're going to face tomorrow. Number one, Elijah, if you're going to represent me before the people, you must be aware of and a partaker of their sufferings. Nothing annoys me more than a preacher who descends out of an ivory tower to preach to God's people who has never suffered, doesn't want to be a partaker, goes back to a five-star environment, lives there, stays there, and comes out with all these wonderful theories about God week after week.

The second thing the Lord was teaching him is that he could provide in the wilderness. He was in a wilderness. It was beside a Brook and he had to trust God for the provision every day for three and a half years, knowing God knew that Elijah was soon going to have to face and pass through a wilderness of his own feelings of failure and depression.

It wasn't going to be far down the road that Elijah was going to flee. He was going to win a victory, but then he was going to flee from a queen called Jezebel. He was going to run into the wilderness, hide under a juniper tree, and ask God to take his life.

He was going to be overwhelmed with a sense of failure on the mission that was given him. He needed to be taught of God and prepared that when your wilderness time comes, I can and I will look after you. I will not fail you.

I will not forsake you. God knows what you and I are about to face in the future and what it will take to get us through. He knows what you're going to face next week, next year, the year after.

And being a faithful father, a heavenly father, he will start to prepare you now and start to plant in you what you're going to need to get through those days. And we sit there and we say, oh God, why? Oh God, why? Oh God, why? And sometimes we will understand in the future. Most times we will, but sometimes we won't.

Then the second curious thing happens. After the brook dries up, he sends Elijah to a poor widow. Why a poor widow? Why not a rich one? Why does God send Elijah to somebody? By her testimony, she's going out, she's gathering a couple of sticks to make a fire.

She's got a little bit of flour, a little bit of oil. She's going to make cakes for her and her son. And by her testimony, she's going to die.

And God sends Elijah to this home and says, I've commanded her to feed you and look after you. And there's a reason I see it's that he needed to see what God could do with a little faith and a little bit of resource. Because God was about to use him to train others to believe for the next generation.

God was about to use them. Folks, when revival comes, if we experience a spiritual awakening in America, people are going to flock to the house of God with seemingly so little faith and so little resource. But we have to have the eyes.

Having gone through it ourselves, we have to have the eyes to see that God can take nothing and make something out of it. He doesn't need our talents, doesn't need our abilities. He doesn't need our resources.

He has all the talent. He has all the ability. He has all the resources.

He simply needs somebody who has a willingness to say, God, would you take my life and would you use it for your glory? May God give us eyes of faith that we're not looking at people who are going to come to these altars in the condition they're going to come in. We don't see them that way. Give us the eyes of Jesus to say, this is who you are, but this is who you will be in the not too distant future from now.

This is what God is going to do in your life. Again, in Isaiah chapter 55 verses 12 and 13, he said, you shall go out with joy and be led out with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.

Now this is after he says, my ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. I've sent my word and my word is going to prosper in the thing which I sent for it.

And here's the promise now to his people Israel. It does apply to us. You will go out with joy.

You'll be led out with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth into singing. That's every obstacle will be commanded to worship God and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn will come up the cypress tree. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree. In other words, instead of all that appears to be barren, hopeless, all that seems to cause pain, you see, he's talking about briars and thorns.

Instead of everything that has caused pain, there's going to be fruitfulness in your life. And it will be a name for a name to the Lord and an everlasting sign that will not be cut off. God was saying through Isaiah, yes, you're going to go through pain and you're going to go through times of feeling barren, but I'm going to bring you out with such power.

I'm going to bring you through with such glory. You're going to know me in such an intimate way. It will seem like all nature itself is clapping its hands at how faithful I've been to you.

And I'm going to take you in your nothingness. I'm going to take you in your confusion and I'm going to do a work in you so powerful that it will bring my name. The Lord says to glory, my name, not yours.

My name, my name will be brought to glory in Psalm 22. Again, David goes on in the latter half of verse 21. He says, you have answered me.

I will declare your name to my brethren in the midst of the assembly. I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him.

All you descendants of Jacob glorify him and fear him. All you offspring of Israel, for he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, nor has he hidden his face from him. But when he cried to him, he heard.

When you gave your life to Jesus, he heard you. When you said, Lord, take my life and use it for your glory. He heard you.

When you said, Lord, prepare me to be a vessel in your hands. He heard you. When you said, God, teach me to get through what I'm going to have to face in my life.

He heard you. He has not despised your affliction. He is not offended by your weakness or even by the questions that come into your heart.

But when you cried out to God, he heard you. He heard you. You see, the reason we get into trouble in our understanding of God is because when we pray, we immediately formulate an answer in our minds as to what the answer is going to look like.

That's what you do. It's what I do. When you went to that altar and you uttered your sweet words, remember those sweet words, Lord, take my life, use it for your glory.

What did you see? Crowds, healings, demons fleeing. And you created this picture, we all do, of what this is going to look like, what the journey is going to be. And yet the journey doesn't pan out the way we thought it was going to be.

But God did hear us. And God did answer your prayer. He doesn't want to lose you.

He doesn't want you to fall by the roadside. He doesn't want you to be overwhelmed by the struggles. He knows what you're going to have to face.

Do you understand that? He knows what you're going to have to face. When I was sick here in New York City back in those days, I prayed this prayer. I said, Lord, I cried out to you and asked you to use my life for your glory.

I came to New York City by your will, not by my own. And I stood by a man of God and I fought his enemies as if they were my own. And it was a difficult time.

It was a hard time. And now I can barely breathe or walk down the street without feeling like I'm going to pass out. And I remember the prayer.

There used to be a restaurant called Beefsteak Charlie's over on 51st, or it's 8th rather, near 51st. And I was walking by and it was one of those nights where I would see these black dots around me all the time as I was walking because I was always on the verge of passing out. I wasn't getting enough oxygen.

And I cried out loud, is this really necessary? And I meant it with all my heart. It wasn't an accusation against him, but God, hasn't it been hard enough here? We've had to fight to get through. And Lord, you sent me to help this man of God.

And I've given my all, everything I've got, I've given for this battle to the point of exhaustion. And now I'm so sick, I can hardly breathe. Is this really necessary? That was my prayer.

I was so surprised when he said, yes, it is very necessary. And immediately there were three passages from Psalm 119 that came into my mind. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have learned thy statutes.

In faithfulness, Lord, thou has afflicted me that I may learn your ways, that I may understand. I began to realize God was saying, it is my faithfulness that has allowed this into your life. You are not being overpowered by the devil.

This is not even the devil attacking you. I have allowed this to come into your life for a specific reason. And it was strange the reason he told me, because I didn't know at that time that I would be called soon to lead this church.

I had no idea. We'd never discussed it, Pastor David Wilkerson and myself. It wasn't even in my thinking to be the senior pastor of this church.

I had come here only and specifically to help Pastor David Wilkerson through a certain period in his life. And I didn't even know how long I was going to stay here. But I felt like I had done faithfully what God called me to do, not knowing that probably a year or so from when I prayed that prayer, on this platform one day, Pastor David, this is the way he always did things.

Prophets are very unique and different kind of people. We'd never had any discussion of this at all. We're in the middle of worship.

He leans over to me and says, you're ready now. And I have no idea what he's talking about. I have no idea what he's talking about.

He's half deaf in his right ear. So you got to shout to get back to him. And I said, ready for what? And he says, you're ready to lead the church now.

He said, I'll be putting honor on you. And he said, I'll be beginning a slow and a gradual departure from the church. He said, but you are the man God sent to replace me.

I'd never had this conversation before. And it's in the middle of 10 a.m. worship. You see, the Lord spoke to my heart that day on the street.

And here's what he said to me. I have to teach you how to be dependent on me. He told me in front of Beefsteak Charlie's.

I don't want your opinions and I don't want your ideas. I want you to obey me. I want you to learn how to follow me when I speak.

I'm going to take away your strength and I'm going to make you dependent on me. You can't accept every invitation that comes to speak at conferences and places because you won't have the strength to do it if I'm not with you. I have afflicted you in faithfulness.

How faithful God is. Years later, I wrote another song. Greg's going to come and help me with this again.

There he is. Both Greg and I have colds. We're both on DayQuil today.

I was reading a Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength, the very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, even though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Though the waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. There is a river. There's, in other words, is a place and a promise whose streams shall make glad the city of God.

And I do pray. One I don't understand is a song written at a certain time in my life. But thank God for his faithfulness because he brings you through those times you don't understand.

And I wrote a new chorus a few years ago called I will trust in God. I will trust in God. I will trust in God all the days of my life.

I don't always have to have the answer anymore. I don't need to know the reason. But I do know that God will be faithful.

He will be faithful. He will be faithful to you, be faithful to your marriage, be faithful to your children, be faithful in your home, be faithful to keep your mind, be faithful. You're not going to fail.

You're not going to falter. You're not going to fall. The devil is not going to gain advantage over you because Jesus Christ has interwoven the honor of his name in keeping you.

And he's going to plant in you what you need to get through the days that are ahead of you. You have to understand that the trial that you're in today has a reason. It has a purpose in your life.

And one day you're going to be able to sing this song with all of your heart. I will trust in God. I will trust in God all of my days.

Though the seas may roll and mountains leave their place, hearts of men may fail, tears on every face, safely I will stand in God's amazing grace. I will trust in God. I will trust in God.

Come what may in Christ I say I will trust in God. I will trust in God. I will trust in God.

Come what may in Christ I say I will trust in God. Let's take it from the beginning. Sing it as if it's your own song now.

I will trust in God all of my days. Though the seas may roll and mountains leave their place, the hearts of men may fail, tears on every face, safely I will stand in God's amazing grace. I will trust in God.

I will trust in God. Come what may in Christ I say I will trust in God. I will trust in God.

I will trust in God. Come what may in Christ I say I will trust in God. I want to give an altar call this morning.

We're going to sing that song again as a whole congregation. But for people that are, you're really, really, you're going through such a trial. And you had that question deep in your heart this morning.

Why, oh God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from me? Why did I start with such promise that it seems like I'm in the valley of the shadow of death? You don't know the answer right now, but you will soon. God's putting his strength in you. And if you just want to come and join me here at this altar and just say, God, I'm going to choose to trust you today.

I don't need any other answer. The answer is that you are faithful and you will never be anything but faithful to me. You will keep me in all my trials.

So let that be your song today. Let that be the song that you leave the sanctuary with today. I will trust in God.

I'm not going to leave here singing why, why any longer. I trust you, Lord. You will not fail me.

You will not forsake me. Whatever it is that you're going through, let's stand together and just make your way down in the balcony, go to either exit in the attic between the screens and just make your way here. And we're going to pray together for strength and for faith.

I love that verse in Amazing Grace. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come to his grace. God's favor, God's strength, God's promises have brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.

Praise be to God. Father, in Jesus' name, Lord, I just pray for these men and women who have come forward today, God, for strength in every home, every heart, every ministry that's represented here, every marriage, God, every situation, Lord. God, you are the one, Lord.

You are planting in each of us, Lord, that which we will need. We will need to get through the coming days. And so, Father, we thank you, God.

We thank you for the hard places. We thank you for the tears. We thank you for the sorrow, Lord.

Whatever it is you placed in us, God, you tell us that all these things will work together for good because we love you and are called according to your purpose, Lord. And so, God, even out of the hard places, let that which is as sweet as honey begin to flow through our lives, God, and begin to bless others, Lord, who are coming after us. As you have kept us when we had nothing, help us to trust for others who come into the house of God and they have nothing.

Lord, help our words to be kind. Help our words to be empowering, enabling, Lord, for people who will come looking for help and looking for hope. And, God, we thank you with all of our heart for how merciful that you are, how kind you are, how good you are, how faithful you are.

Just lift your hands and begin to thank him now. Just begin to thank him out loud. Just begin to thank him for how faithful God is, how faithful he is to place in you what needs to be there.

God knows. God knows. God knows.

God knows. God knows what you need. God knows what you need.

God knows and will be faithful to keep you. He will be faithful. He will be faithful to you.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, God. Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you for touching so many hearts, Lord, for giving sight to so many blinded eyes, God. We just thank you for your faithfulness to us, Lord. Even in spite of our faithlessness, Lord, you remain faithful.

And when our hearts condemn us, Lord, you're greater than our heart. Thank you for loving us, God, in spite of our questions, our struggles, our trials, our frailties, Lord. You love us, God.

Your love is an unconditional love. Thank you for your love. Thank you for the greatness of your redemption.

Thank you for the shedding of your blood. Thank you, Lord, for paying the price, God, for our wrong. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, God, your strength, your power, your promises to us, Lord.

God, we bless you. We bless you and we praise you this day. And we thank you in the mighty, in the unmatched name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We give you praise and glory this day, God. We thank you, Lord. We thank you, God.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, God. I will trust in God.

Come what may in Christ I stay. I will trust in God. I will trust in God.

Come what may in Christ I stay. I will trust in God. I will trust in God.

I will trust in God. I say, I will trust in God.

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