

Dumb Things: Everything Happens For a Reason

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 5th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the lead pastor here. So last week, we started a new sermon series called Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe.

Enjoy that picture for a moment. It makes me smile every time I look at it. Through this series, we're going to look at a few of the dumb things, so incomplete or mistaken concepts that some Christians have come to believe over time.

And we often do this with the best of intentions. We have no reason, perhaps, to doubt what we've heard or what we've been told by others over time. So let's catch up a bit.

In our introduction to the concept of belief last week, we recognized that it actually requires or involves two important factors. It involves trust.

Trusting in the source of the information in question. And belief also requires faith. It requires us to trust in the things that we can't see.

[1 : 10] The things that we can't fully comprehend or understand for whatever reason. And so last week, we also dug into Scripture and recognized the Bible says two things about belief.

First, it says to believe in the sense of having faith means trusting in and having security in who Jesus Christ says he is, who God the Father says he is as well, and who we are, who we become as a result of those things.

And then second, last week, we consider that to believe in the sense of having faith means belief in Jesus Christ and belief in God the Father then opens the door to eternal life, to salvation.

That's the gateway. And this is exactly what the Bible is telling us about the importance of believing in Jesus Christ and God the Father. These things are the key to being adopted into God's family. Being connected to God's favor. God's favor according to his will, not ours. Being reunited with God and others who have gone before us into eternity.

[2 : 31] These belief elements, belief in Jesus, belief in God the Father, who they are, who they said they are, who they continue to be, are our inheritance.

And last week, we considered some of the things that we may have believed to be true. Remember that? We looked at some of the lighter stories in the Bible and said, oh, Adam and Eve ate an apple. Did they? It's not what Genesis says. Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Was he? Most translations say big fish. We assume whale.

And we talked about flannel graph last week. I grew up in Sunday school with a Sunday school teacher putting a whale up, putting a garden and an apple. And so we have no reason to question those things, but we recognize sometimes we need to dig deeper because the things that we've come to assume are correct are not necessarily right.

So, unexpected journeys. Some of you know this about me, but not everyone. During my time in seminary, Michelle and I made it very clear to God that we were open to whatever he had for us.

[3 : 47] That we wouldn't ever seek to limit his calling on our lives. And so when we were dating, which feels like a million years ago, there was a time when I clearly remember God saying, I need you for a purpose.

And at that time, Michelle and I both patted God on the head and said, oh, Lord, no, no. We're very much in love. So busy. Our whole life is ahead of us. Not a good time.

We patted God on the head and said, thanks, but no thanks. So when this call came again, we said, ooh, do we say no again? I think not. So during that time, in seminary, I began to feel a pull towards military chaplaincy in my first year.

And so despite having no idea what that would involve, I had people saying to me over and over again, do you have a military background in your family? Anyone in your family history?

Nope. Anybody a chaplain? Nope. So why? Because God said so. Okay. So when that pull came, we listened to God's leading.

[4 : 58] We followed what he was saying. And so the military chaplaincy career path, if you don't know it, and I hesitate to say career path in relation to ministry, but it is what it is in that case, it involves two distinct streams.

You need to apply through the military side of things, and also through the chaplain general's office in Ottawa. So you need to apply in a military sense, be trained as a soldier, and go through that process, and then also be endorsed by faith leaders, and go through that process.

So it's pretty involved. And there are many steps and hoops to jump through on both sides, but God's leading continued to be clear. And so despite not being wired for math, I want to get the shirt that says, English major, you do the math.

The odds were not in my favor, not by a long shot. The military application process is the Canadian Forces Aptitude Test.

Might sound like an oxymoron, military aptitude. But, my nephew is now going to be annoyed by that. But that's the reality, is that it's very mathematically based, this exam.

[6 : 14] And it's very intensive, and you get one shot. So I said, Lord, are you sure? Because I'm really not up to this. And he said, yep, I'm sure. So I studied, and studied, and studied, and did practice tests.

And ultimately, I passed that Canadian Forces Aptitude Test. I took it on a computer in a room, sweating the whole time, thinking, Lord, you gotta have this, because I don't.

So I still remember going out to meet Michelle and the kids in the car in the parking lot, doing a little dance. I'm Irish, so, doing a little jig, because I had passed, at the officer level.

There's no way I did that. No way. Absolutely no chance. Then in this, at the same time, I also became connected, with the Chaplain General's Office in Ottawa, to the point where, one of the senior chaplains, in that office, started calling me brother.

She and I would correspond regularly. She was cheering me on, cheering Michelle and I on, through this process. And I have chaplain, military chaplain friends, who say, how did you know her?

[7 : 26] How did you meet her? How did you connect with her? And I said, look up, man, because it wasn't me. Everything was progressing well. These two simultaneous streams were going forward.

Little teaser, I'm standing here, right? I passed my military interview. The captain who interviewed me said, awesome, we're glad to have you.

We're lucky to have you. My medical exam went, boom, boom, boom, yep, yep, yep. Until, here it comes, right to the point, where the medical tech noticed, that I had handwritten in, that I had a medical history, of kidney stones.

And he went, hmm, kidney stones, how recently? And I said, I don't know, a couple years, probably. And he said, so within five then?

And I thought, uh-oh. And he closed my file, and he said, Kent, I'm retiring soon. I'm not allowed to do what I'm about to tell you.

[8 : 32] But he said, I'm supposed to pat you on the head, and send you home, knowing full well, you'll get a letter in the mail, from Ottawa, in a few weeks, saying, thanks, but no thanks.

So he said, that's the end, of the story. So I remember having, uh, a contact at, in seminary, one of the faculty, and she was shocked, that I was not, devastated, suicidal, all these things, because she said, she had met, other people who felt, clearly called into, military chaplaincy, and hit that brick wall, and it was devastating to them.

And I said, I've got to trust, that God's got this, and I've got to not cling, to anything, that he brings. So that one, relatively minor detail, I have friends, that are military chaplains, right now, who are still annoyed, but it is what it is.

There was no way around it. There was no way through it. The door slammed shut. And as I've described it, to some people, it slammed shut, so hard, that the molding, around the door cracked. So hard. And I said, okay Lord, got it. I was mad, I was frustrated, I was disappointed. But friends, what I have come to recognize, in that, there's more to this, unfortunate journey.

[9 : 54] But what I came to recognize, in that, how God has used that, for me, is that it is my, it was my Abraham moment. God said to Michelle and I, oh Kate, you're willing to step up, you're willing to respond, to my call on your life.

Perfect. Will you, leave your city? Which we love. Will you, be stationed somewhere else, in the country? So we gradually, opened our fists.

And God said, okay, you'll do that. Will you do this? And we said, yes Lord. And he said, Kate, will you do this? And we said, yes Lord.

And obviously, the cracking, molding, around the door, was God saying, you will do, everything I ask, I will not require, this of you.

Wow. So that's what, we have come to recognize, that as. So you think, that's the end of the story. Well, I also had friends, in seminary, who confirmed, and affirmed, my gifting for chaplaincy, in a hospital setting.

[11 : 08] And I have friends, that are still serving, in military, and hospital chaplaincy, and say, why am I here, and you're not? This makes no sense. But again, I had two interviews, for the kind of training, that is required, for hospital chaplaincy.

The first one, was bizarre. The second one, even more bizarre. And I will forever remember, walking out of that interview, someone from New Brunswick, on a Zoom, part of the meeting, people in the room, I felt grilled like a salmon.

I walked out to my car, and started to laugh. And I said, Father, I get that this is not the road, I get it, cracked molding again.

But I said, I trust that what you have, is better than any of this ever could be. And message received. So against all odds, you're passed up for a job, or a promotion, that seemed like a sure thing.

A diagnosis, of a health situation, takes a sudden turn, something you didn't expect. Becomes far more serious, than you could have ever imagined.

[12 : 28] A friendship, or a romantic relationship, that you thought would last forever, suddenly, and abruptly ends, due to whatever circumstances.

You experience something, in your life, that changes the course, or direction of your life, for the foreseeable future. It leaves you shaken, and uncertain.

But you know, everything happens for a reason. Ha, ha, ha. It's a phrase we hear, all too often, I believe.

We maybe use it ourselves, we've heard it from others, in our circumstances. And it seems to be, most often used, when bad things happen.

Can you recognize that? People don't say, happy birthday, everything happens for a reason. They say, your mom died of cancer, but everything happens for a reason.

[13 : 31] When we experience loss, or discouragement, or uncertainty, or failure, or grief, we hear that phrase. Have you ever had someone, say those words to you, at some point in your life?

Or maybe you've said them, to someone else. It's a go-to expression, that has become common, right? It has essentially become, so common, that it's a cliché.

So why do we say that? I had a friend in seminary, I had lost friends, still some of them, maintained today.

But he and I had, he had lost his mother recently, and I had lost my father, and we decided for, a theology assignment, to get up and talk about, the awkward things, that we say to people, when they're grieving, and give people a lens, into why they're not helpful.

And then give people, alternatives of things to say. So why do we say, things like this? Well, I believe the words, come from, something we need to say.

[14 : 44] We, we feel awkward. We feel awkward, or uncomfortable, in the midst of someone else's, difficult circumstances. sadness, grief, disappointment, and we feel like, we need to help.

We need to, pitch in, we need to step up. These are all, uncomfortable, and awkward emotions, and they usually result, from uncomfortable, or painful circumstances.

And in many ways, I think you could, probably see this, our society, has come to, ignore them. We tend to be, look on the bright side, kind of people, don't we?

In many ways, our society ignores them, like I said. We seek to move, past them. We may tend to, encourage people to, you've probably heard this before, to move on.

To, as I said, look on the bright side. Or perhaps, worst of all, maybe you've heard this, the idea that we need, to somehow, get over it.

[15 : 51] But the emotions, these emotions, that we've talked about, they may seem negative, but they are just, as valid. They are just, as part of the human condition, as joy, or celebration.

And they're just, as unique, from individual, to individual. And they're deserving, of attention, and care. everything happens, for a reason.

I believe, sometimes we say, things like that, because maybe, it's better than, saying nothing at all. You know what I've learned, when I'm grieving?

Sometimes, just a hug, is lots. Or even an, I'm sorry, is lots. But we say, things like this, with the best of intentions.

I think, as I said, we're trying to fill, the awkward silence. We're trying to deflect, awkward emotions. Or, we may say them, because we are genuinely, sincerely, trying to bring, comfort and hope, to someone, who feels, hopeless.

[17:03] But I believe, it can actually, be damaging, to someone, particularly, a person, who believes in God, when we hear, the words, everything happens, for a reason.

Especially, when it's connected, to a tragedy, in our life. Why? Well, I believe, those words, suggest that, whether you like it, or not, there's a reason, something bad, happened to you.

Can you recognize that? Can you relate to that? And that may, even suggest, to the person, who's on the receiving, end of it, that the bad things, or tragedy, that have happened, to them, especially for someone, who believes in God, are actually somehow, in some bizarre way, God's plan, for them.

God's intention, for their life. That bad things, are actually, what God has in mind, for them. That's not great, is it?

Can you see, how that can cause, someone, to begin, to get a broken image, of how God, sees them, how God, sees their circumstances? Can you see, how it might start, to give someone, the impression, that God is an aloof, and spiteful being?

[18:22] That he is somehow, putting them, through the ringer, just for fun. The risk here, is also that, it suggests that, things, just happen.

That everything, is random, and that there is, no intention, or design, or form to it, at all. Is that what we believe? That's not what we believe.

But I hope, so I hope we can recognize, that's not true. That's absolutely, not true. And that's not, what we want to suggest, to other people, that they should believe, that things are random, and purposeless, in their life.

And sometimes, I think, each of us, need to be reminded, that there is, order. There is, purpose, to our lives, overall, to our story.

Our lives, are not just, a series, of random events, that happen, with no rhyme, or reason, to them at all. Do you believe that? I hope you don't.

[19:27] So let's seek, to find, some truth, that lies behind, this dumb thing, that we're looking at today. Especially, especially for Christians, I think we, suggest to someone, when we suggest, to someone, that everything happens, for a reason, we actually may mean, something very different, from what the average person, who uses that phrase, means.

There's no question, that sometimes, life is just life. We live in a sinful, and broken world. It is a fallen world.

Sometimes, poop, just happens. I asked a pastor friend, if it was okay, to say poop, and he said, yeah, I think so. But you know the phrase, things do not go, according to plan.

News is not, always good. Endings are not, always happy. But we can find comfort, in knowing, that none, of what happens, in our lives, not a single thing, that happens, will be wasted, by God, as he seeks, to shape us.

So how can, we trust that? How can, we have faith, in that? How can, we believe, that? it's because, the Bible says, it's true.

[20:53] One of my favorite verses, in the entire Bible, and I would argue, that it's probably, the most, encouraging, and hopeful one, you're ever going to find, is Romans 8, 28.

Say it with me. And we know, that in all things, God works for the good, of those who love him, who have been called, according to his purpose.

Romans 8, 28. In some things? In several things? In the vast majority, of things? No.

In all things. Period. So does it always feel like that? If you're like me, probably not, at times.

One writer I read said, it is often hard, to discern God's goodness, in the midst of, throbbing grief, sorry, the throbbing pain, of grief, or in the uncertainty, of an oncology ward.

[22 : 02] However, at the end of history, in light of a glorious, eternity, the goodness, of God's purposes, will be fully understood.

What Paul tells the Roman Christians here, is not that we live in, the best possible world. Not at all. What Paul is getting at here, is that we are being prepared for, the best possible world, and in the best possible way.

As the theologian, Augustine, once wrote, God is so good, as to permit, no evil to exist. Except, that God is so powerful, to be able to draw, something good, from any evil. Isn't that powerful?

God is so good, as to permit, no evil to exist. except, that God is so powerful, to be able to draw, something good, from any evil.

[23 : 12] Friends, there is always, something to be learned, through the ups and downs, of our lives, here on earth. But here, is the key.

Here's something, to take away from you, with you, sorry. We need to be open, to what God, may be looking, to teach us. We need to be quick, to ask him, to help us learn.

I think that's the part, we forget. Lord help me, get me out of this situation. I don't really, want to learn from it. I don't want to be, uncomfortable. We need to be quick, to ask him, to teach us, help us learn.

And we need to be willing, to submit ourselves, and every circumstance, of our lives, to that process. not always easy. Everything, that happens, to us, is seen, by God.

Everything. Every tear, we shed, is seen, by him, and he grieves, with us. And through, the good, and bad things, that happen, in our lives, in all things, God has a plan, for our lives.

[24 : 27] And everything, that happens to us, in our lives, has a purpose, in that plan. So maybe next time, we can think of, instead of saying, everything happens, for a reason, let's consider saying, God sees you, and he is with you, in this.

And so, am I. And let's say, I'll get you, I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.