

FAITH ASKING QUESTIONS



A ST FRANCIS COLLEGE SHORT COURSE

THE TRANSCRIPT

Episode 6 Life, death and what comes next

6.5 My loved ones don't believe in God. What can I say when they are faced with death and dying?

Cameron Venables: Well, I think when people die, inevitably, we grieve, whether we are Christians, or we are not Christians. If we have a belief as Christians that the only way that we can be with God after death is through faith in Christ, then we would possibly grieve more deeply because we think that somehow, we are going to be separated from those people who mean the world to us. But if we have an understanding that God's love is infinite then I think there's something exciting to explore there. My sense in terms of talking with others about that is that God is love and in that God's love they and us will find a home after we die.

Jazz Dow: When I was a teenager, 15, my stepdad died, and my foundation rocked considerably. His story was one of growing up in a Christian family but the time I knew him he was always critical of Christian faith. He would very lovingly mock my own Christian faith but then in my early teenage years he turned on Christian music, but he would still profess to having no faith, so there was this small shift in him towards something spiritual. When he died very suddenly of a heart attack playing football, so it was completely unexpected, they were questions I asked as a 15-year-old in the Church...what does it mean? Is he in heaven?

But I have to believe, and I do believe that this stuff isn't for us to dictate and that God again, has a heart for the other, God has a heart for us for the earth and so never is God going to turn someone away from his face unless they want to be turned away. I firmly believe that Mick, my stepdad is in life in abundance, in the presence of God.

Marie-Louise Craig: And so psalm 103 is a good place to sit, from verse 8: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, he will not always accuse nor will he keep his anger forever – he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquity for as the heavens are high above the earth so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the



east is from the west so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father he has compassion for his children, the lord has compassion for those who fear him for he knows how we were made, he remembers that we are dust.”

This is such a beautiful idea of God that what he wants for us is that we would know his mercy. I go then to a Matthew passage (Matthew 18:18) where it says what you release on earth will be released in heaven and so for those people I say if you release them, then God will hear you so no matter what they’ve done in their lives, if you release them God will hear you and so he will release them. That’s all we can say at this point because my pay bracket is a little too low to make those decisions, but I think there is hope.

Cameron Venables: Sometimes I hear people say that their loved one has been taken by God and this has been a particular challenge when families have lost children through accident or through disease. Well-meaning people say “Well obviously God wanted to take them now” or “They’ve gone to a better place” as though their family and their home is not a good place. And I’m very uncomfortable with that. And sometimes that is tied up with the “God is in control” so God, for reasons beyond our comprehension decided to pluck that person. I don’t believe in a God who does that in a random scary sort of way. I’m much more drawn to the image of Jesus weeping at the death of his friend Lazarus. I believe in a God who weeps with us and holds us up when we want to fall down, so I don’t believe in a God who randomly kills people, otherwise we’d walk around constantly terrified

Jazz Dow: Part of being a priest is having the privilege to journey with people when they experience the pain of death whether it be dying themselves or experiencing losing someone and it is not uncommon for me to hear things like “It was meant to be”, “God willed that”, “Why did God take my loved one?”, “Why is God taking me?” (Although that’s very rare to hear - most people I meet on their death bed are very peaceful and very ready...not everyone, but most people who’ve had time to travel that journey are very peaceful.) But for those who sit on the other side of death, the remaining side of death, they are big questions...because it hurts, it really hurts and we very fairly become very angry at God, or we look for someone to blame and that is super normal. I don’t believe God takes people; I don’t believe we are puppets in God’s ultimate pantomime.

I think that God has a heart for us. Catherine LaCugna’s theology of the Trinity is that God is always for us. (<https://booko.com.au/9780060649135/God-for-Us>) So there’s a YES to humanity. There’s a YES to the earth and so that idea that God would take people from people in some sort of transaction or whatever form it takes, doesn’t sit right with that – it’s not comfortable, it’s not something I can believe. I believe God holds people when they are in the suffering, I believe when we do die God holds us and keeps holding us beyond death but I don’t think God takes us from the people we love.



You can find the video of this session, along with reflection questions for individuals or groups at www.stfran.qld.edu.au under “SFC Short Courses—Faith Asking Questions”.

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