

FAQs: 2. Faith and science
Genesis 1:1-8; Psalm 8:3-4
January 14, 2018
Pastor Steve Richards

If you were here last week, I hope you accepted the challenge and made an attempt to be purposeful about a time and space in each day for prayer. Last week, we focused on the words of Jesus: Go to your room, close the door, and pray... And it might even help to pull up a chair and imagine that Jesus is seated next to you. Prayer is a conversation at the heart of a relationship that God wants with each one of us. And if you are willing to accept the challenge, if you start today, it's 33 days. Let's see what we happens to the relationship. In his book, *Draw the Circle*, Mark Batterson asks this question on Day 2: "When was the last time you lost sleep because you were concerned about the Creator keeping the planets in orbit?" Maybe it's not even a question that you've considered.

Some would say that God really has nothing to do with the way the earth rotates so that we have day and night every twenty-four hours, nothing to do with the gravitational forces that keep us close enough to the sun while pushing this planet in a circular orbit that takes 365 twenty-four hour periods to complete, and nothing to do with how this has happened as long as this planet has been and continues with such reliability that with all the things that keep us awake at night, the continued existence of this planet is not one of them. It's a matter of science, or is it a matter of faith? How do faith and science fit together or is that even possible? To lean in one direction, does that negate the other? David Kinnamon is the president of the Barna Institute, a company that has done extensive research into the attitudes, faith, and cultural trends of teenagers and young adults. In his book, *You Lost Me*, he says when 18-30 years olds are asked "Which religion do you affiliate with?" One third of them respond "none", and what he has found is that one of the reasons is that they identify the church as anti-science. He quotes a young man named Mike: "*To be honest, I think that learning about science was the straw that broke the camel's back. I knew from church I couldn't believe in both science and God, so that was it. I didn't believe in God anymore.*" But is Mike right? Is it either/or?

We raise bright young people who go off to college, and because they are bright, thinking people, they come in contact with the latest and greatest scientific thought. And then they hear Christian voices that say science doesn't fit with Scripture. And they are left to decide, do I give up science to be a Christian or give up Christianity to be a person who embraces science? And often when the more compelling voice is what they are learning in the classroom, the gospel loses. And they are left to wonder, do we even need faith?

It was almost two years ago that Amanda was diagnosed with breast cancer. All of a sudden, we went down what she has described as a rabbit hole, not unlike Alice in Wonderland. For Alice it was a fantasy world filled with peculiar creatures. For us, it was the world of medical science and research. It was treatments and side effects and medications to treat side effects that had side effects of their own. I look back over the past two years, and I've learned at least three things: the human body is incredibly complex, medical science continues to evolve with tools to address the complexities, and yet there are limits to what science can do. And the edge of these limits is not where faith begins, but faith is part of everything and what keeps driving science forward with even greater discoveries.

Psalm 8:3-4. When I consider your heavens, the work of your finger, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? The writer is saying God made the world in a way that

would communicate knowledge, information, and evidence about truth, reality and the way things are. In other words, don't avoid thinking about things like cosmic background radiation or quantum mechanics or fossils or how species evolved. They are ways to see and hear and know the work of God. But that's not necessarily how the church has looked at science.

On June 22, 1633, Galileo was brought to Rome for trial. He was a Christian. He loved God, and he loved science. He had taken advantage of the latest development in lens and optics and made a primitive telescope. With that telescope he began studying the stars and movement of the planets, and he came to the conclusion that Copernicus was right – that the earth rotated around the sun. At the time, the church taught that the sun rotated around the earth, and the earth was stationary – because that's what the Bible taught. **The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved (Psalm 96:10); He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved (Psalm 104:5); The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. (Ecclesiastes 1:5)** If the Bible said it, it must be true. The accepted belief was that the earth was the center of the universe, so Galileo's teaching was considered heresy and was brought to trial. And on June 22, 1633, this was the verdict: *“Galileo... you have rendered yourself vehemently suspected of heresy by the Holy Office, that is, of having believed and held a doctrine which is false and contrary to the Holy Scriptures... that the sun is the center of the universe, and that it does not move from east to west and that the Earth moves and is not the center of the universe: and that an opinion may be held and defended as probable after having been declared and defined as contrary to Holy Scripture.”* Galileo was placed under house arrest for the rest of his life. He was not allowed to publish his findings, and what he had already published could no longer be distributed – until 76 years after his death. Galileo recanted that day, but he knew what he had seen with his own eyes, and today we know the earth does in fact rotate around the Sun. For people then, it was so clear that it didn't. The earth was God's special creation, and everything revolved around the earth. That was part of faith and intellect, and it made the world safe and stable and obvious. Galileo saw differently, and today you also see differently. And you understand something even Galileo didn't – that the Sun isn't even the center of the universe. The Sun is just a small star in the Milky Way Galaxy with 100-400 billion other stars – and this Galaxy is moving through space with hundreds of billions of other Galaxies in the ever expanding creation. You know that and are still Christians.

We turn to Genesis, chapter one. It is a beautiful description of creation, but it's not science. God is teaching something bigger than science. Genesis 1 is describing what people at the time it was written understood about the world. They thought the earth was flat and rectangular and placed on a foundation of pillars. Underneath was water which was obvious because whenever they would dig deep enough, they would find water. And if you stepped off the edge of the earth, you would step into the abyss which was water. And there was also water above. A dome or vault separated the water above from the water below and above the dome were stars, the sun and moon and above that was water which sometimes came through the dome and watered the earth below.

God spoke to people in a way they could understand. God didn't correct their science and try to explain DNA and the human genome. This was 3500 years ago. God knew that one day they would figure all that out, and they would find joy in such discoveries. God wants us to discover and explore. This school year, I'm one of the literary volunteers at Oakwood School and for a half hour each week, I listen to a third grader read – and when he comes to a word he doesn't know, I don't automatically tell him how to pronounce it, we work at sounding out the words and together figure out what that word means. And what I'm seeing is now that he knows the process, he will work at a new word before he asks for my assistance. There's joy in that – for him and for me. And I think that's what God was doing with Genesis 1. God wasn't concerned

that they get the details correct. It wasn't a science lecture, but a description of the meaning of life. Let's hear it again: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.**

What's God teaching? God is there. God is the author of all existence, and when we see patterns in the sky and patterns at the molecular level, there is a reason. And God looked at everything God created and said, It is good. There were other religions that said the material world was evil, but Genesis tells us God saw all that God created and it is good. And when God created humankind, God does so in God's own image – a reflection of our Creator. You have sacred worth because you are created by God, a God who will never let go of you. Science cannot teach us the meaning of life or its goodness or our purpose for being here. Faith teaches us that. Science teaches about creation, and when there is a discovery, it helps us see the glory of God and bring glory to God.

Many years ago, I had an opportunity to visit the Sistine Chapel in Rome with its depiction of the last judgement on one wall and beautiful panels covering the ceiling. When our tour guide brought us to the door of the Chapel, he told us he would meet us at the door on the other side in 20 minutes. And we walked into the Chapel and saw this [photo] This photo does not even adequately capture what I saw, but my first thought was 20 minutes? I could have spent the whole day in that room. I could have spent 20 minutes on this panel alone [photo] 9 feet by 18 feet. The artwork was absolutely incredible. Later that day, we purchased a book that described how Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, how he used plaster in a technique called frescos, and it described the pigment and how it took four years for him to complete the ceiling, not on his back as some suggested but standing on scaffolding with his head tilted backwards – for four years. Did reading about how Michelangelo did it ruin my experience? No, after reading and understanding what he did and how he did it, I had an even greater appreciation. And so it is with science, it enhances the glory of God.

It's like our journey these past two years with cancer. The more we know, the more we realize we don't know, and the more we need to trust to God.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1)

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of January 14, 2017

Weekly Prayer: Lord God, you created us with minds that ask questions and also have the ability to pursue answers. You gave us the capacity to gaze in wonder at nature, be inwardly stirred by music and the arts, and to gasp in awe at the touch of a baby's tiny fingers. Teach us the power of faith to help us live fully and completely for you. Amen.

Monday, January 15 - Day 9: Dream Factory

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:1-5

I, Paul, make a personal request to you with the gentleness and kindness of Christ. I'm shy when I'm with you, but I'm bossy when I'm away from you! I beg you that when I'm with you in person, I won't have to boss you around. I'm afraid that I may have to use that kind of behavior with those people who think we live by human standards. Although we live in the world, we don't fight our battles with human methods. Our weapons that we fight with aren't human, but instead they are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses. They destroy arguments, and every defense that is raised up to oppose the knowledge of God. They capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Observation: In his visits and letters to the Corinthian believers, the apostle Paul has won over most believers but not all. Some have attempted to discredit Paul by saying he is bold from a distance while weak and indecisive if he is with them in person. In other words, some say he lacks the authority he claims to have. So, Paul is planning another trip to speak in person as he speaks in his letters. He describes this battle of words as a battle for the mind. One's ideas and thoughts must be submitted to Christ: "Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Application: Never underestimate the power of a single prayer. When you get an idea, do you submit that idea to Christ in prayer before acting on that idea? One way to capture thoughts is through a prayer journal – writing down the thoughts and then making those thoughts obedient to Christ.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the ways you are present in my life. Grant me the willingness and readiness to trust you with my thoughts and ideas, to share them openly with you, and to invite you to shape my thoughts according to your will. Amen.

Tuesday, January 16 - Day 10: Crazy Faith

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8

Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, 'Give me justice in this case against my adversary.' For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don't fear God or respect people, but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me." The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?"

Observation: Jesus uses this parable of the persistent widow to remain constant and determined in our prayers. The widow could have and technically should have waited for her day in court. Going to the personal residence of the judge crossed a professional line. Some translations suggest she wasn't simply persistent but "crazy." Yet, Jesus honored her persistence.

Application: The viability of your prayers is not contingent on using the right words but rather the intensity of what you pray. God already knows what's on our mind, but how persistent will you be with prayer? Bold prayers honor God and God honors bold prayers.

Prayer: Teach me your ways, O Lord. I want to be faithful to your direction. Give me the courage to be bold in asking and even bolder in not letting go of what I believe to be your will. Amen.

Wednesday, January 17 - Day 11: First Class Noticer

Scripture: Colossians 4:2-6

Keep on praying and guard your prayers with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for us also. Pray that God would open a door for the word so we can preach the secret plan of Christ—which is why I'm in chains. Pray that I might be able to make it as clear as I ought to when I preach. Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Your speech should always be gracious and sprinkled with insight so that you may know how to respond to every person.

Observation: Prayer is the difference between seeing with our physical eyes and seeing with our spiritual eyes. Prayer heightens our awareness and enables us to perceive spiritual realities that are beyond our five senses. The Colossians are new Christians. They are taking their early steps in the faith. Having begun the letter by telling them that he is thanking God for them, and praying for them, Paul now draws towards a close by asking them to do the same for him.

Application: Prayer turns us into first class noticers. It helps us to see what God wants us to notice. When you pray for someone or something, you start noticing anything related to those prayers. Have you ever noticed that when you pray, coincidences happen? And when you don't, they don't. It's more than coincidence; it's providence.

Prayer: Here I am, Lord, ready to listen. Help me to notice what is important to you, how you are at work around me, and how I can respond to what you are doing. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Amen.

Thursday, January 18 - Day 12: Sow a Seed

Scripture: Matthew 17:14-20

When they came to the crowd, a man met Jesus. He knelt before him, saying, "Lord, show mercy to my son. He is epileptic and suffers terribly, for he often falls into the fire or the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him." Jesus answered, "You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Then Jesus spoke harshly to the demon. And it came out of the child, who was healed from that time on. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and said, "Why couldn't we throw the demon out?" "Because you have little faith," he said. "I assure you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Go from here to there,' and it will go. There will be nothing that you can't do."

Observation: Jesus speaks of faith in relation to a mustard seed, the smallest known garden seed in that culture. Like every seed, it needs to germinate, and this particular seed can take up to ten days to germinate. Some plants, like some dreams, take a lot longer. Faith is what keeps those dreams alive, even when it seems as though they are dead and buried. But that's the nature of seeds, you don't know they are germinating until they break through the surface.

Application: A little faith goes a long way; in fact, a little faith will last an eternity. If you do little things like they are big things, then God will do the big things like they are little things. Keep

praying, keep loving, keep serving. If you keep sowing the right seeds, the harvest of blessing will come.

Prayer: God, you know how hard it is for me to wait, especially when whatever I am praying is beyond my ability to accomplish. Help me to remain steadfast, knowing that you are enabling the seeds of faith to germinate. Prepare me for the right harvest that is to come. Amen.

Friday, January 19 - Day 13: One Day

Scripture: Acts 10:1-3

There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion in the Italian Company. He and his whole household were pious, Gentile God-worshippers. He gave generously to those in need among the Jewish people and prayed to God constantly. One day at nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, he clearly saw an angel from God in a vision. The angel came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Observation: "One day." It was not the first day that Cornelius prayed. Acts tells us that he prayed regularly, but *one day* his prayer was answered – and not even with an answer that related in any way to what he was praying. Prayer is like an investment account. Every deposit accumulates compound interests, and then *one day* there will be dividends beyond anything we imagined.

Application: One day could be today. Today could be the day that God answers the prayer, performs the miracle, or keeps the promise. Or, today could be the day the seed is planted that will bear fruit one day. Can such hope keep you constant in prayer, knowing *one day* will come?

Prayer: God, when Jesus walked out of that garden on the third day after he had been buried, everyone thought that was impossible. You are able to make the impossible possible. I don't want to miss a single day with you. Help me to stay close to you and your purposes. Amen.

Saturday, January 20 - Day 14: Speak to the Mountain

Scripture: Matthew 17:20

"Because you have little faith," he said. "I assure you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Go from here to there,' and it will go. There will be nothing that you can't do."

Observation: "Say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." There comes a moment when you must quit talking to God about the mountain in your life and start talking to the mountain about your God. You proclaim God's power. You declare God's sovereignty. You affirm God's faithfulness. You stand on God's Word. You cling to God's promises.

Application: Maybe we need to move from defense to offense. Maybe we need to stop talking to God about our problem and start talking to our problem about God.

Prayer: God, you are good. You are mighty. You are all power, all love, all compassion. Help me to speak who you are into every problem and challenge that I face, so that my greatest challenge will know that I stand with the Creator of the Universe. Amen.