



## **Inspired And Uncomfortable | Why Would A Loving Father Sacrifice His Son**

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**Speaker: Phil EuBank**

**Well, Good Morning, Menlo Church, and welcome back to our final message in our series, Inspired and Uncomfortable. Some of you have said, "Man, we really like this. Would you extend it?" Others of you have said something to the effect of, "I never asked for this series. Please stop it." So wherever you are in that paradigm, we are so glad that you're here. We're going to cross the finish line of this series together today.**

**Welcome to our Bay Area campuses. If you're joining us in San Mateo, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Saratoga, we're so grateful that you're here with us today. For those of you that are maybe on vacation still**

or again, we're all a little jealous. But we're really glad you're here, too, joining us online, especially if you paid for Wi-Fi to be here. That's amazing. God's grateful for that, I'm sure.

Today, we are finishing up this series by asking one final question together. And the question is: Why would a loving father sacrifice his son? So, we're just going to finish on a really light topic.

Sometimes the way skeptics or atheists have debated this topic, they'll ask the question: Is the cross cosmic child abuse? And so, we're going to dive into that. It's the culmination of a month of conversations about everything from slavery to women to war to the nature of how God saves people.

I know that summer can sometimes be one of those times of the year where your attendance patterns around church can fluctuate. But I would just say if any of those topics feel helpful and you missed them, you can always go back and catch them online.

**Today marks the fundamental difference between biblical Christianity and every other world religion. Every other world religion is about what you and I can do to get to God on our own. Period.**

**Depending on the world religion, you actually might get multiple lifetimes at trying to achieve it. I'm not sure about you, but for me, if that's what it took was me doing it on my own, it would definitely take multiple lifetimes. Biblical Christianity isn't about what we can do, though. It's about what God has already done on our behalf through Jesus.**

**But Jesus didn't simply sign a contract or agree to a 33-year missions trip to Earth. It was much bigger than that and much more painful, and we're going to dive into it together today.**

**But if you don't have a framework for this, or maybe faith is a brand new concept for you, then it can feel really strange. This part of sort**

of buying into biblical Christianity, especially without more information, can feel very overwhelming.

Maybe for you, you can relate to this quote from the late journalist and atheist Christopher Hitchens, who said this: "What kind of a father and what kind of a god would arrange the torture and execution of his son in order to buy forgiveness from himself?" And for some of you, that's an objection you presently feel about faith in Jesus. And so, you're like, okay, give it a shot.

For others of you, you've never thought about that. You're a follower of Jesus, but like this has just never been a place on the other side of letting ourselves navigate these challenging conversations.

Today, I hope we can all take a few minutes, no matter where we come to this conversation at, to examine why God delivered hope in such a unique way. Before we go any further, though, I'm going to pray for us. And if you've never been here before or never heard me speak,

before I speak, I pray kneeling out of a deep sense of how undeserving I am, not only to bring you a message, but honestly to have a message to bring in the first place. Would you pray with me?

God, thank you so much. Thanks for not giving up on me. Thanks for not giving up on my friends, my brothers and sisters, and you in this room and in rooms across the Bay Area. Thanks for not giving up on our neighbors and our co-workers and our family members who don't know you yet.

God, would you help this message and the reality behind it that's been true from eternity past to not only resonate deeply in who we are, but as we experience that identity, God, give in us a deeper sense of what it means to bring that hope to others in Jesus name. Amen.

So, I think it's safe to say we all kind of know this conversation is a heavier conversation. And if you've been around Menlo for a little while, you know that's coming. That's a little bit of some of the calling

card of Menlo. We can dive into challenging conversations. We can deal in things that take nuance. It's a really fun part of what it is to be us as a church.

But if this is your first time at Menlo, I do want to just warn you if by the end of the sermon you're like, I feel like I went theologically skydiving. Like I'm exhausted. They're not all like this. And so I'm saying get ready. But also this is a unique one. We usually use this time of the summer to dive into tougher topics. And so that's what we've done some of over the course of this series.

A couple years ago, my mom passed away. This summer, we used part of the inheritance that she left behind to help our family go on our first ever cruise. I'd never been on one before. It was fun. It was overwhelming, and it was not relaxing at all.

Now, I went on a cruise with kids. Some of you are like, "Cruises are incredible." Yeah, just try that like in a room with all your kids and no free time. It's fine. Mickey Mouse was there. So, it was great.

But here's the thing. I have been thinking about that experience for our six-year-old, Wells, like how he experienced the cruise. For Wells, he got shuttled to an airport. He got put on a plane, he stayed in a hotel, and he's had all of those experiences before.

But this time he stepped onto a giant boat with a schedule he didn't know, experiences he couldn't anticipate, and no understanding of when normal life would resume. Talk about overstimulated. I don't think that the unlimited soft serve ice cream helped. Like I think that was...

I know that this example may seem a little silly in comparison to Jesus, but I think that some of what gets us in trouble when we think about Jesus and what he's done for us is we think about Jesus like

**we think about Wells. He's a passive participant whose dad  
voluntarily told him to come to earth, live a perfect life, and die for the  
sins of others. But that's not true. That's not how it happened. And so  
I want to spend a few minutes breaking that down with you.**

**In order to better understand these challenging topics over the course  
of this summer, we've built what we've just called a toolbox, a  
hermeneutical toolbox, of building the tools that help us better  
understand and study the Bible responsibly. And I want to finish with  
one more of those with you this weekend. And that is Christological  
focus.**

**Christological focus is the principle that shows how the center of all  
of scripture, from the very first pages to the very final pages, is the  
person and work of Jesus, foretold in the Hebrew scriptures,  
described in the gospels of the New Testament, and it has fueled the  
church ever since.**



**So if it's true that the work of the cross has been central to the plan of God from the very beginning, how far into our Bibles do we have to go to discover it? Well, depending on the size of the text in your Bible or on your device, not very far at all.**

**In the very first pages of the very first book in Genesis, we see the fall of mankind, sin entering the world. And in Genesis 3, where God is declaring judgment over Satan, the enemy of our souls, we read these words, "He," meaning Jesus, "will crush your," meaning Satan's head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)**

**Now, that may just seem like a small snippet to you, but just a matter of pages into the Bible, this is widely considered to be the first Messianic prophecy or future promise of God bringing his son Jesus to deliver the world from the sin that we got ourselves into.**

**But why would God allow this to happen in the first place? Why would God allow Adam and Eve to sin in the first place? That's one of those**

questions that honestly the Bible doesn't answer. So I'm just going to give you sort of one possibility for why that's the case.

I think one possibility is that even if they didn't sin in the garden, but they retained the ability to have choice, somebody was eventually going to sin. It was eventually going to happen. The proverbial forbidden fruit would have been hanging over humanity from that point on, and our relationship with God would have been contingent on our ability to avoid sin.

But the cross means that for those who choose to follow Jesus, our relationship like God's love for us is unconditional. And so in some ways on the other side of the cross, you and I are offered a more perfect and more permanent relationship than even Adam and Eve had. And you can't break it because you didn't earn it.

In other words, the cross wasn't God's contingency plan. We've all had to pivot at some point, right, in our lives. You didn't have all the

**facts or circumstances changed. And so all of a sudden, you started to come up with alternative options. On the way back from our cruise, we had a connecting flight. And as we're landing on our first flight, it was fun to find out that my connecting flight had been cancelled.**

**I needed to find a place for 14 of us to stay in another city overnight, very, very quickly, and another flight to get on the next day. And I found myself instantly scrambling to find those alternatives and talk to people and make all the details happen. And it all worked out. But I can easily project my sense of scrambling in those moments onto God.**

**That in the garden, the infinite Triune God in heaven is looking down at earth going like, "Who saw this coming?" You know, like, "Wow, I can still do that." Even though I know it's not how God works. And that isn't what happened with the cross.**

**Our all-knowing, all powerful, sovereign God had always been working. In Genesis 3, he tells Satan himself that judgment was coming for him.**

**In Genesis 22, he uses the unthinkable possibility of Abraham in a near sacrifice of Isaac to foreshadow Jesus.**

**In Exodus 12, after centuries of captivity, God spared the children of Israel with blood as they marked the Passover celebration as a shadow in preparation for Jesus as the ultimate Passover.**

**In Isaiah 53, the prophet tells God's people hundreds of years before Jesus was born that he would be a suffering servant who saved them, not a conquering king.**

**As a matter of fact, in the Old Testament of your Bible or the Hebrew scriptures, more than 300 times, we find future descriptions of the**

work that Jesus would do. Not as a backup plan, not as a contingency option, but as the fulfillment and culmination of God's unconditional love, creating an invitation to an unconditional and eternal relationship through Jesus that was only possible because of the cross.

In his famous work, *The Reason for God*, the late great pastor Tim Keller puts it this way. He says, "Jesus was not a last-ditch rescue operation after God miscalculated everything else. He is God's overarching and eternal solution to the human predicament."

Whatever predicament you find yourself in, somewhere in the middle of it, Jesus is offering you a path back.

Look, we've all experienced the difference between someone scrambling last minute to get you a card for a holiday or throwing together a plan versus the kindness of prepared love. A love that anticipates our needs. A costly love that requires personal sacrifice for the good of someone else. That's the kind of love that God has extended to us.

And when we see the overall arc of the scriptures, it is unmistakable that God has always loved you. Even before he made you, even before he made the universe, God had set his love on you. Jesus was always the plan to meet your and my unmet need of connecting with him forever.

But maybe for you, you didn't think about that question and go, I'm really concerned that this was premeditated. You want to know, was this something that was done through Jesus or was this something that was done to Jesus? Because if it was the second one, what kind of a loving father could do that to his son?

If we really consider what we're talking about, this is kind of repulsive. Like we think about it and we go, "Wow, that really puts me off. The idea that the God of the universe would do something like this."

**And I think if you haven't thought about it, maybe spend a few minutes thinking about this idea. If you're a parent, it's very easy to go there and go, "I could never."**

**Prominent atheist Richard Dawkins puts it this way: "To believe in a god who required the torture and death of his innocent son to forgive sins is to endorse a sadomasochistic vision of the universe." And some of you are thinking right now like, "Amen. That's exactly what I think." And if that's what happened, if this was done to Jesus, I tend to agree. But the good news is it wasn't.**

**If this was done to Jesus, then it's not the kind of vision of love that we see Jesus paint for you and me. Jesus didn't come around later and find out from his dad what the family business entailed. As a matter of fact, we worship a God who is a Triune God. One God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. And they planned this together from before eternity.**

**Jesus was just as central to the formation of this eternal plan for your salvation as God the Father was and God the Spirit was. Ultimately, Jesus wasn't drafted to this plan. He volunteered for it.**

**We started by looking at Genesis 3 to this plan of God that always included Jesus. But actually Jesus goes back even further than Genesis 3. In Hebrews chapter 1, the author puts it this way: "Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels, as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (Hebrews 1:1-4). Did you catch that?**

**Jesus wasn't just in Genesis 3. He wasn't just in Genesis 2 or in Genesis 1. Jesus was in Genesis 0. He has always been. God the Son, Jesus himself, is the person of the Trinity that God used to create the**



world, to create the entire universe. And both here in Hebrews, as well as in the letter to the church at Colossians in the New Testament of your Bible, Jesus is described as the active agent of the Trinity holding the universe together at a molecular level every moment of every day of our lives. Incredible.

The entire point of Hebrews is that Jesus is the ultimate point of the arc of scripture. That his self-sacrificial love for the world flowed from his very nature. That God is a relational God who could have had eternity without you. As a matter of fact, he did have eternity without you. But he sacrificed so that we could share eternity with him.

Now, you're thinking, Phil, maybe that feels like a little bit of a stretch. Like, where do you get that? Well, if we keep reading in that very same letter later on, the author of Hebrews puts it this way: "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

**Who decided to do this? Jesus did. How could God the Father send his son? Oh, because Jesus volunteered for the assignment. Why did Jesus decide to volunteer? For the joy that was set before him from eternity past when God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit planned for all of human history, the day that he came to earth as a helpless child to the day that he would hang on the cross, he had the joy of a restored relationship with you in mind. What an incredible sacrifice.**

**Jesus was regularly trying to share with his disciples during his earthly ministry that the way they would experience a permanent and perfect relationship with him forever on the other side of a different kind of kingdom came with a different kind of victory. Not by winning in a ballot box or on a battlefield but on the cross once and for all.**

**At one point John actually records Jesus saying these words to make the point. He says, "For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." Listen to this part: "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority**

**to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my father." (John 10:17-18)**

**We see the continuous and unbroken relationship between God the Father and God the Son that this was a volunteer operation. No one forced Jesus to go along with it. He understood the stakes. He understood the cost and he understood the pain. But because of the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross for you.**

**In one passage, we actually see just how collaborative this process was, not just in eternity past, but even in Jesus' own prayer life during his earthly ministry when the night that he was betrayed, he spent time praying in a place called Gethsemane.**

**And as he's praying on that night that was betrayed, while sweat as drops of blood are running down his forehead just out of the stress realizing what he was about to have to walk through. He says to his father, "Dad, if there's another way to save everybody, can we explore**

**that option?" But he says, "Nevertheless, not my will, yours be done."**

**He says, "If this is what it takes, I'm still in."**

**Think about God the Father's love for God the Son. And when God's spirit and the angels ministered to Jesus as this clear answer in that moment that the cross was the only way to give permanent and perfect restoration to God's people. What a moment.**

**Now here's the thing that I think we need to acknowledge. One of the apprehensions we have in 21st century in the West is, we just want God without holiness. All of this is to satisfy the holiness of God. And we go, "Well, God, just give up on that part." But here's the thing. You wouldn't worship a God that wasn't holy. He wouldn't be worthy of it.**

**See, you want God to care about you, but not about your sin. But a God who leaves sin and the consequences of it unsatiated will leave you unsatisfied. We need God to be holy and loving, just and merciful. And that's what we discover in the cross.**

But some of us were saying, "God, can you just, just let us be? You know, just kind of look the other way. Leave us alone. Let us do whatever we're going to do. Just stop interfering." And if you want a place where you can sin forever and God takes his hands off of it, that place exists for eternity, but you don't want to go there. And the cross is so that we don't have to.

So, if the cross wasn't God's contingency plan and Jesus wasn't drafted, he volunteered, then we need to pause and we need to consider what Jesus really volunteered for. The flesh and blood moment, the real cost of our hope even today.

Now, I do want to let you know as a warning, if you've never considered these realities or you've never put them in place, we spend a lot of time sort of softening them or we think about just a piece of it or a part of it or the impact of it. This part might feel a little graphic. And so, I just encourage you to stay engaged, continue to listen, close your eyes if you have to. Just let yourself picture the

price that your savior was willing to pay for you, whether you would call yourself a follower of Jesus or not.

See, the cross, it didn't start as a religious symbol. It was the fine-tuned, brutally implemented Roman execution device designed for maximum humiliation, prolonged suffering, and unparalleled humiliation.

For Jesus, the process started with flogging and scourging.

Scourging was a process where whips that had been embedded with pieces of bone and metal tore flesh and muscle with every strike to his body. This act of torture could take someone's life all on its own. And for those like Jesus who survived it, even without the cross, he would have never recovered.

On top of that, centuries before Jesus' earthly ministry ever began, the Jewish prophet Isaiah, he gives us a glimpse. He gives us a snapshot into what Jesus looked like in this moment when he writes,

**"His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being.  
And his form marred beyond human likeness." That's not a metaphor.  
That's what he did for you.**

**Then came the path to Golgotha, the location of his final breath,  
carrying the crossbeam that would have weighed as much as 100  
pounds across shredded skin and exposed muscle. Each step that  
Jesus took brought greater and greater pain and agony. And even  
with a stranger enlisted along the way to help him, arrival on the hill  
of the crucifixion was far from certain.**

**Add to that the procession of Roman soldiers mocking, spitting,  
striking, and eventually jamming a crown of thorns onto his head.  
Nothing he experienced was kind or gentle.**

**Blood poured over his face and body as he made this difficult journey.  
And he endured each and every painful moment with you in mind.**

**And remember, Jesus didn't go unwillingly. He didn't go unknowingly. He went unflinchingly for you.**

**From before the foundations of the world, he knew that this moment would be necessary to have a permanent and perfectly restored relationship with you that nothing, including your and my own actions, could take away. And the plan started with a God outside of time, knowing that this is what will be necessary, and he did it anyway.**

**At the sight of the crucifixion, rough iron spikes were hammered into his wrists. Not soft tissue, but intentionally through nerve clusters in his wrists and ankles, sending overwhelming pain mixed with debilitating shock through his entire body. And then he was hoisted into position. And as he hung on the cross, stripped down and exposed to a mocking crowd, every heartbeat, every eye blink, every breath was a battle.**



**A battle against time. Because the cross, crucifixion, it didn't take your life by blood loss. You died from suffocation. Think about this. The God who breathed life into mankind died because he couldn't catch his own.**

**Hanging by his arms would have compressed his lungs. And to exhale, he would have had to push up on his nailed feet, scraping torn flesh against rough wood just to get one more breath.**

**In between those breaths, he would have held his breath as much as he could and tried to avoid any unnecessary exertion to prolong his suffering and prolong his life.**

**This, by the way, it makes the conversation that he has with the thieves on the cross even more extraordinary that he continues to offer undeserved grace to the people around him while he receives undeserved judgment. He offers undeserved grace even as that grace physically hurts him to do it.**

**But the physical pain, it wasn't the worst part of the experience. While all of this was happening and his physical body was shutting down, he was also bearing the weight of our sin. The collective guilt, shame, and brokenness of humanity pressing down on him harder than any crown of thorns ever could.**

**In this moment, we are reminded that God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

**This moment it didn't mark some accident or God making the most of a failed plan. This was the plan. This is a loving God absorbing our sin willingly out of the overflow of his love from eternity past all the way to this moment for you. The same voice that spoke the universe into existence shouted to his heavenly father in pain and in torment. But he did it by choice.**

**At the cross, God didn't lose his son. Jesus gave himself so that God would never lose us again. The cross isn't cosmic child abuse. It's cosmic adoption. Adoption into a family that you never have to leave, into a relationship with a father who will never let you down, and a future forever secured because of it.**

**This vision of a family is quite different than the one that I grew up in. And maybe for you it feels too good to be true. But this is the price he was willing to pay for you.**

**Imagine stepping into a family where shame has no voice and failure has no claim because the debt that all of humanity carries has been paid in full by the one who volunteered to do it for you. That's what the cross made possible. And that possibility exists just as strong today as it ever has.**

**We started our time together by asking this question: Why would a loving father sacrifice his son? And I hope you heard that this wasn't**

**a father forcing his son. It was father, son, and spirit moving together in perfect harmony, determined to do whatever it took to bring you home.**

**Jesus, he wasn't drafted. He volunteered. The father didn't scramble for a backup plan. This was the plan from the very beginning. And why? Because he knew what the cross would accomplish: that it would open up the door for a rebel like me, a rebel like you, to come home into a family where shame is traded for grace, guilt for brokenness, and death for life.**

**Today, the same Jesus who chose the cross is choosing you. Will you say yes?**

**You know, we think that the picture of this moment is like one part of the Trinity somehow goes rogue. But it's like God's trying to make a point. It's like God is shouting as he had his son live on earth for 33 years before he hung in silence and darkness for 3 hours and dying at**

**3 p.m. only to come back from the grave 3 days later. It's like Jesus saying, "This just wasn't me. It took all three. It was always the plan. It was always the purpose of God to welcome you home."**

**The scripture tells us that if we confess Jesus as our Lord, the ruler of our life, if we believe that God raised him from the dead, that you'll be saved. The scene on the cross is tragic. But the reason it's triumphant is that 3 days later, Jesus would walk out of a tomb showing everyone that he had the power not only to come back from the grave, but he had the power to win you back from the grave.**

**So for some of you, today is the day. You've been thinking, you've been wondering, "Next time, next time, next time." I'm just telling you, just like Jesus hanging on the cross was running out of time, so are you.**

**Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day that God has been welcoming you back, whispering to your heart. Here's the thing. In**

**just a minute, I'm going to pray a prayer. And if you know you need God's mercy to hold you back from the consequences you deserve, his grace to give you the favor you don't now and forever to be in a relationship, you can pray this prayer.**

**It's not a magic spell. It's not an incantation, but we believe that if you pray this prayer and you mean it, God will give you a brand new start that never ends.**

**And as I pray this prayer, you just repeat it after me in the quiet of your heart. And Menlo Church at all of our campuses, I want you to pray this prayer with me out loud to give some encouragement and give some confidence to those around you who are wondering, "Are these people really in this? Do they really believe this?"**

**I want them to hear from the saints who have found this to be true, who know that this thing that seems too good to be true is because**

**Jesus died for you. That's the kind of love that the God of the universe has extended. Would you pray this with me?**

**Repeat after me, Menlo Church. Jesus, thank you for loving me.**

**Thank you for going to the cross for me. I believe you died for my sin.**

**I believe you rose again to give me life. I believe I know I need your**

**mercy. I need your grace. Today I choose to trust you and give my life**

**to you. Be my savior. Be my lord. Lead my life. Thank you for making**

**me part of your forever family forever in Jesus name. Amen.**

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## Resources

### **BOOKS:**

- *Is God a Moral Monster?* – Paul Copan  
[Link](#)
- *How (Not) to Read the Bible: Making Sense of the Anti-women, Anti-science, Pro-violence, Pro-slavery and Other Crazy-Sounding Parts of Scripture* - Dan Kimball  
[Link](#)

- *The Drama of Scripture* – Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen  
[Link](#)
  - *The Reason for God* - Tim Keller  
[Link](#)
  - *The Problem of God* - Mark Clark  
[Link](#)
  - *Chosen by God* - RC Sproul  
[Link](#)
  - *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* - DA Carson  
[Link](#)
  - *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* - JI Packer  
[Link](#)
  - *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* - Gordon Fee  
[Link](#)
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## PODCASTS:

- [Ask NT Wright Anything](#)  
Offers thoughtful responses to theological questions, including topics like election, gender, and violence.
- [BibleProject Podcast – “Character of God” series](#)  
Breaks down who God is—even when He seems angry or distant.



- [Undeceptions with John Dickson](#)  
Each episode tackles a misunderstood or controversial issue of faith.
  - [Unbelievable Podcast](#)  
Does God predetermine everything?
- 

## **WEBSITES:**

- [The Center for Hebraic Thought](#)  
Academic and pastoral resources on how the Bible thinks, especially for understanding OT laws and ethics.
- [Ruth Haley Barton – Transforming Center](#)  
Tools for soul reflection during a series that invites discomfort and depth.
- [Fuller Seminary’s “FULLER studio”](#)  
Videos, articles, and lectures from a wide range of scholars engaging modern faith questions.