

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

August 24, 2025

Does the Bible Really Say That?
“God Works in Mysterious Ways”
Isaiah 55:8-9
Rev. Mike Fordham

Have you discovered the ironic truth “the more you learn, the less you know.” It is a phrase that is often attributed to Albert Einstein but probably goes at least as far back to the great philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle. Before I went to college, I was very young and thought I had a lot of life figured out. What I discovered was the more I learned the more I realized I don’t know as much as I thought I did, that life is a lot more complex than I realized. It really is true the more knowledge we gain, the more we become aware of just how much we don’t know. Life seems to be one mystery after another that we never seem to be able to fully solve. We often hear another familiar phrase that some mistakenly think is found in the Bible, “God works in mysterious ways.” Who knows how many times I’ve said this phrase, especially when looking back over my life and seeing how the pieces seem to fall into place. In hindsight, my life makes more sense now but did not at the time of walking through those circumstances. Understandably, God’s ways are mysterious to us, but to God there is no mystery as it all makes perfect sense. The prophet Isaiah gives us some thoughts to ponder about God and ourselves.

Isaiah 55:8-9

***⁸ “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.
“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.***

GOD IS THE INFINITE GOD

God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah wants us to understand ***God is the Infinite God***. God says here in *Isaiah 55:8-9* that the way He thinks and the way we think are nothing alike. This can be a little disturbing for some people who think God is on the same page with them or they believe they have God all figured out. God also says here in *Isaiah 55* that God’s thoughts, and God’s ways are far above and beyond even what we could imagine. God then continues to say His ways and thoughts are as far above ours as the vast expanse of the heavens are from the earth. God wants us to grasp He is indeed the infinite God who has no limits in His thoughts and ways.

In the movie Toy Story, one of the toys which comes to life is a Space Ranger by the name of Buzz Lightyear. Even though Buzz is a toy, he is under the delusion He is a real Space Ranger for the Universe Protection Unit, and believes he has crash landed in the bedroom of boy named, Andy. Every time Buzz gets ready to try and fly in the air, he says with greatest gusto, "To infinity and beyond." Buzz uses that phrase to mean he is going into outer space, which is the closest thing we know to appear to be infinite. If you think about it, it is impossible to go beyond infinity because it indicates going beyond what is limitless or endless. There is no beyond infinity. Nothing is greater than infinity, except for God. God is the only true infinity and beyond.

We talked last week in our sermon about who God is. It is important to remember again that God is God. There are no other gods. He is the One and Only true God. There is no one in heaven and on earth like Him. God has no equal. God is infinite over time and, as such, is eternal. God is perfect in every way, lacking nothing as the infinite God. God knows everything, sees everything, and is everywhere at the same time. God has no limit in His wisdom. He is always wise in every situation. In other words, as the infinite God He is, He is wholly other than all that has ever, does now, or ever will exist. How then do we get to know this infinite God? God has descended into our world in the most absurd way possible. The infinite God took on the body of a limited, finite human being through Jesus. God got down on our level in order to relate as much of Himself to us as we can handle. Jesus came to reveal to us in human flesh the infinite God.

Even though God has revealed a lot to us about who He is, how He thinks, and how He acts, God has only given us a drop of information compared to an expansive ocean of who God is, how He thinks, and how He acts. God is above and beyond what we can comprehend. The Apostle Paul wrote in *Romans 11:33-36*, "³³ Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! ³⁴ For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? ³⁵ And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? ³⁶ For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen."

A good example of how God has the capacity, with all knowledge and wisdom to think and act in ways that we may not understand, is found in the book, *Truth Matters: Confident Faith in a Confusing World*. The writer says, "A basketball coach could call a time-out for any number of reasons at any different point in a ball game. He might see a flaw in the opponent's defense, for example, that he thinks his team could exploit with a hastily designed play. He might want to stop a flurry of momentum or a hot hand by one of the opposing players. He might use it to try icing a free-throw shooter. He might use it to stop the clock near the end of the half or regulation. He might use it to force an instant-replay review of a questionable call by the officials. That's six different options right there. And they're all determined not by fixed logarithms but by the flow of the game, the nature of the opponent, the time left on the shot clock or the game clock—any of these factors and many others could dictate his purpose in asking for a [timeout]. Plus it's all dictated by the coach's unique personal knowledge of his players, his awareness of what each of them can do, what makes them perform best, or what puts

them in the best position to win the game. Why must God's decisions for our lives be any different?" *Real life is much more complex than a basketball game, but this illustration can show how a wise "coach" can make good decisions that we may or may not understand. Of course there is one crucial difference: basketball coaches make mistakes; God doesn't.*

WE ARE FINITE, LIMITED, SINFUL HUMANS

There is a simple reason why we are not able to fully understand and grasp all that God thinks and why God acts the way He does. ***We are Finite, Limited, Sinful Humans.*** God is God and we are not God! The reason we struggle with God and His ways, His thoughts, is because we are not infinite or perfect or all-knowing or all-wise or all-loving. We are frail, limited, finite human beings who are trying to do the impossible, to grasp the ways and the thoughts of an infinite God. *Ecclesiastes 3:11* says, "*Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*" The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, gives us a great example of what it is like for us to try and comprehend God's infinite thoughts and ways. He said, "As well might a gnat seek to drink in the ocean, as a finite creature to comprehend the Eternal God. A God whom we could understand would be no God. If we could grasp Him, He could not be infinite. If we could understand Him, He could not be divine."

The Bible tells us in the Old Testament book of Job, that Job was this great man of God who suffered greatly even though he lived a most godly life. In Job's dialogue with God, he honestly complained to God about all that he suffered. *Job 38:1-7* gives us God's reply to Job's complaint, "*Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind: ² 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? ³ Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. ⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. ⁵ Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line? ⁶ What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone ⁷ as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?'" God talks to Job in this manner from *chapters 38-41*. When God finishes making His point that it is impossible for Job to fully grasp and understand God and His thoughts and ways, Job humbly responds to God in *Job 42:3*, "³ You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me." Job finally gets how immense God's knowledge, wisdom and power are especially as the Creator, and the vast gap between human understanding and divine wisdom, knowledge, and power. Job is put in His proper humble place by God.*

President Theodore Roosevelt's love of the outdoors is well documented. He was responsible for the creation of several national parks and monuments. In his first inaugural address, he spoke freely of the blessings of God upon our nation, saying, "I reverently invoke for my guidance the direction and favor of Almighty God." It is said that when President Roosevelt entertained diplomatic guests at the White House, he was fond of taking them out to the back lawn at the end of the day. As the president

stood gazing at the night sky, all eyes would eventually be cast heavenward, as his were. In his day, the vast array of stars was not dimmed by the city lights, and the magnificent display of God's brilliant creation would overcome the party. After a long moment, Mr. Roosevelt would say, "Gentlemen, I believe we are small enough now. Let's go to bed." It is important for us to understand how vast and infinite God is and how limited and finite we are. We need to know our place, to stay in our lane and recapture a holy, reverent, fear of God.

TRUST IN GOD

Not only should this understanding of God and ourselves lead us to be in awe of God, to worship God as we realize that in every way we do not even come to close to understanding God, it should also lead us to a greater ***Trust in God***. The Bible is one story after another of the infinite God, reaching out in love to bridge the impossibly vast gap between Himself and broken, frail, limited, finite humanity. We also find in the Bible stories of women and men of God who are learning to trust God. Abraham and Sarah were promised by God that they would be blessed with a baby boy even though they never could have a child, and Sarah was well past her childbearing years. When Sarah did not get pregnant right away, they took matters into their own hands and Abraham had a baby with one of their servants. This led to a tremendous amount of heartache because they did not trust God to be true to His word. On the other hand, there are many stories of people trusting God in the face of impossible odds. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace because they would not bow down and worship the golden statue of the king, they said to the king in *Daniel 3:16-18*, *"¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."* These men showed immense faith and trust in God saying that even if God does not do what they want Him to do they will still worship Him. These men did what Corrie ten Boom once said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." That is what true faith and trust in God does, we trust an unknown, uncertain future to a known God. Real faith is trusting God even when we don't understand, or agree, or cannot see the big picture.

How can we trust God in this way? We do so by having the faith of a child. Jesus said it himself in *Matthew 18:3*, *"I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven."* We are to be like humble children who understand we do not see the entire picture, are not as knowledgeable, wise, and strong as mom and dad. Therefore, we trust that mom and dad know what's best. In our relationship with God as our Heavenly Father, we know and trust that He always knows and does what is best. In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells of an event that took place when she was 10 or 12 years old as she traveled with her father on a train from Amsterdam to Haarlem. She had stumbled upon a poem that had the words "sex sin" among its lines: "And so, seated next to

Father in the train compartment, I suddenly asked, 'Father, what is sex sin?' He turned to look at me, as he always did when answering a question, but, to my surprise, he said nothing. At last he stood up, lifted his traveling case from the rack over our heads, and set it on the floor. 'Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?' he asked. I stood up and tugged at it. It was crammed with watches and spare parts he had purchased that morning. 'It's too heavy,' I said. 'Yes,' he said. 'And it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It's the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger, you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you.' And I was satisfied. More than satisfied—wonderfully at peace. There were answers to this and all my hard questions; for now, I was content to leave them in my father's keeping." Reflecting on Corrie's words, James Emery White in his book entitled, *Embracing the Mysterious God*, writes, "God is mysterious not simply because he is God, but because we are children. And in his love our childhood is protected. We should view both childhood and God's mysteries as a source of wonder and even comfort; there is a creator and we are among the created. There are answers to all things safely in our father's keeping."

In our relationship with the infinite God as His imperfect, frail, finite children, God invites us to simply do what *Proverbs 3:5-6* says, "⁵ *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.* ⁶ *Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*" If we will acknowledge that God is the infinite God and turn to Him and trust Him with what little we know and all that we do not know, God promises to direct the path of our life and in so doing give us peace and security that can only be found in trusting Him.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Against the Flow*, John Lennox
- *Abide in Christ*, Andrew Murray
- *Transforming Grace*, Jerry Bridges
- *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer
- *Knowing God*, J.I.
- *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom
- *Embracing the Mysterious God*, James Emery White

Icebreaker I – Can you share a time when something confusing or unexpected in your life later made sense in hindsight?

Icebreaker II – If you could ask God one question about something you don't understand, what would it be?

1. Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us that God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. How does this truth bring both comfort and challenge to your daily faith?
2. Rev. Fordham shared that if we could fully understand God, He would not be infinite. How does this perspective reshape how we approach unanswered prayers or suffering?
3. The sermon mentioned Job's experience of questioning God. What lessons can we learn from Job's eventual response in Job 42:3?
4. Corrie ten Boom said, "*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*" What does this look like in practical terms for your current season of life?
5. Proverbs 3:5-6 calls us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, not leaning on our understanding. What are some areas in your life where you are tempted to lean on your own understanding rather than trusting God's wisdom?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week's sermon to your life?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?