

[Suffering] Happens – 3/13/2011

Greg Boyd

I'm thinking that if you're visiting for the first time, you may... first, we have the [Crap] groups, [Crap] Happens, and then we have a toiletry ministry. You've gotta be thinking this is one of the most constipated churches in America! It's got, like, serious issues. I mean, next we'll be serving Ex-Lax for communion, drinking prune juice. But it's not about that. We're... we're dealing with heavy issues that can only be described as... as "crap." Every one of the messages in this series will be entitled [Something] Happens. And it's a kind of a version of [Crap] Happens. So, today's message is going to be called [Suffering] Happens, and a passage I'd like to just read at the start that we'll be getting to later on but sort of primes the pump, gets you thinking along the, asking the right questions, comes from Romans, Chapter 10, verse 21, which is really quoting the book of Isaiah where the Lord says:

"All day long I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

And in that simple verse, what we have here is God has outstretched arms towards His people and wants them to come to Him, wants them to submit to him, wants to have a relationship with them and they won't do it. And the question it raises is a really, really important question if you're going to understand how the world can be as crappy as it sometimes is. The important question is: How could an all-powerful God get Himself in that position where he's frustrated, he's angry, he's disappointed, he's trying to do something that is not getting done? How could an all-powerful God get himself in that position? Crap happens.

Let's say a little word about the title. Yes, it is junior high. Yes, it's immature. That's why we chose it. It's a play off of the famous bumper sticker. That's another version of crap happens. You know the bumper sticker. In various ways it says 'manure happens', 'excrement occurs', 'fecal matter transpires'. That bumper sticker. You know what I'm talking about. Well, we didn't want to use that word, the actual word. We're Christians for crying out loud. And we're mature so we didn't want to use that word. But we did want to use some word that is a little bit edgy, a little bit almost inappropriate. Maybe some of you are thinking, no, it is totally inappropriate. But, you see, here's the thing: We're going to be talking about stuff that has a level of anger, a level of anxiety, a level of pain that goes beyond 'ahh, shucks' or 'rats', 'doggone it'. No. It's in a different category than that. It's...and there's no polite word that can capture it. It's crap. You know, it's a little bit like if you've ever watched Christianized movies, like say a gangster movie, and they take out the bad words and they put in 'shucks' and 'damn it' and 'by golly, I'll shootcha!'. You know, no, that's not the way they talk, and there's something artificial about that. Well, if you're talking about something like what happened in Japan,

what's happening in Japan, pray for Japan, pray for everybody, because what's happening at the nuclear plant is 'scare-wee'. You know that goes beyond 'shucks,' 'doggone it.' No, no, no. This is catastrophic. We're talking about the kind of stuff that has a level of anxiety or pain or catastrophe. It is sometimes close to nightmare-ish, if not all the way into nightmare-ish. It's the kind of thing that makes you go 'arrgh!!!' We could just title the series [Arrrgh] Happens, but it wouldn't communicate quite as well, I suppose. And it's not just global crap, we're talking about stuff in our lives. The personal stuff that happens. The pain that is there. I shared couple weeks ago about my wife, and I have a son with disabilities, born borderline Autistic, and he brings, he's a tremendous source of joy in our life, but there's a tremendous pain that is there because it sometimes seems like he's cruelly wired to just be so on the fence that he wants things he can't get. He wants to be the kind of person he can't be, and there's all... there's this contradiction in him, and it's so painful and brings about such despair which, of course, brings about pain in our lives. And saying 'rats' just doesn't cover it. 'Shucks!', 'doggone it!' No. This is, this is nasty, raw stuff. And all of us, if we're honest, have stuff like this involved in our life. Now, we've talked about the problem of evil here at different times. If you've been here for a couple of years, you know that we weave that issue into a lot of our sermons. We tend to be rather theological around here, and we have a unique take on the problem of evil. And, in fact, twelve years ago we had a whole series on this. I think it's a series out in the gathering area or bookstore, where we just really kind of dealt with that in a thorough way. There are some books that we've written on it and etcetera, etcetera. This series will cover some of that and so, for new folks, they'll kinda get a perspective on the problem of evil, which is the problem of reconciling an all-powerful, all-good God with this world that is messed up. And so you'll get some of our take on the problem of evil in this series. But, for those who have heard that before, well, some of it will be review, but there's a different angle that we're going to be taking, as well. And the angle that we're going to be taking is that we're going to try to keep this not just theoretical and theological but to have a, have an angle on how it applies to our life. Application. How we personally wrestle this stuff. So it's not just trying to understand why and how the world, and maybe our life in this particular moment, can be so crappy. That's an important question. But, also, what do you do about it? How do you respond? What is the kingdom faithful way of responding to crap in our life? How... What is a way of growing through the crap in our life? And so we're going to keep an orientation on that.

To keep that orientation, I want to do this: Right now, I want you to ask yourself, and try to be honest with yourself, that's always the first and fundamental task, to be honest. When I say the word 'crap' or when I say 'pain', what comes to your mind in terms of your own life? Ya know, Japan's over there but what really impacts you now? As you're sitting in this auditorium or listening through podcast or watching it some other way, what comes to your mind? Think of one or two things that is what I, or one person, describe it as 'suck factor'. Okay. What sucks

about your life? If this wasn't here, your life would be a whole lot better. And just grab hold of what comes to mind, because I want that to be sort of a peg that you can hang this and all subsequent messages in this series on, to keep it concrete. I want to talk about that problem. For some of us here it might be a physical ailment that goes way beyond, 'ahh, shucks,' 'doggone it'. A friend of mine found out yesterday, he's been battling brain cancer for eight years and has been remarkably successful at that, but had a CAT scan that came back a few days ago that the tumor's back with a vengeance, and the news is very, very bad. That would qualify as crap happens. He's got three kids, young guy. I have shared about this neck issue that I got, with a degenerating vertebrae. In that kind of thing where there's this kind of chronic pain, it could be chronic pain in your life, it could be terminal illness that you just found out you had, get ahold of that. That's the peg you want to hang this message and subsequent messages on. But it might not be a physical thing at all. Maybe it's more of an emotional thing. Maybe it's a depression you deal with or anxiety that you're wrestling with or maybe it's anxiety about your finances. That can be sorta like a chronic pain. It's always there. It chips away. It just doesn't allow you to completely relax. You're living in a constant wonder of how you're going to make ends meet let alone where you might get your next meal. It could be just a general anxiety. Sometimes people find that they, all of the sudden, their heart starts racing, they don't know why. There's an anxiety disorder there, a panic attack, or there's a depression or a sense of hopelessness, or maybe you lost your mojo a couple of years ago and you can't get it back. Life just sorta flattens out on you. That happens sometimes. That's what we're talking about here. Crap happens. Or maybe it's relational. Maybe the marriage that failed or maybe looks like it's gonna fail or you lost your spouse or you're estranged from your child or you lost your child or maybe you just feel profoundly alone and, and you can't seem to be able to connect with anybody, and I'm hoping that this Table we're putting on our website will help. But sometimes you just feel lonely, isolated. Maybe you can't connect with God. Maybe it's an ongoing sin issue or a habit that you've got that seems to tear you down. Whatever it is, get it in mind right now, and I want you to hang, use that as sort of a reference point for this whole series, to keep it concrete and practical as we go through this. That is what we mean by crap happens, and it's a little bit different for each one of us. It's important that you don't minimize it. Whatever that issue is, there are some folks who maximize every issue they have. Right? If they have a stubbed toe, the world knows about it, and they sulk a lot and whatever. So, if that's you, then what I'm gonna say right now doesn't apply to you. But there's others of us that do the opposite. We minimize everything. I'm guilty of this. When something bad happens, when crap happens, I immediately go into a minimization mode where I try to convince myself I'm above it, this is not really a big deal. Some of you have that same kind of issue? Drives my wife crazy. So, when I got this diagnosis, this MRI about my neck, I was hoping it was a slipped disk or a pinched nerve. Turns out to be degeneration. We're looking at all sorts of options to address it, but it means there's no easy fix on this thing. And I

immediately minimize it! I zoom out. I look at the big picture. I think of the problems that are there in the world, and I say to myself, I can't complain or moan about this. Okay, I don't have much neck motion, and I've got, you know, on-going pain there and maybe it'll get fixed, but maybe it won't. But, even if it doesn't, there are people who can't even move their arms and legs! There are children who are starving to death, there are kids. Many people haven't been able to live to my age. I can't complain. And by global standards, this is a small problem, and I've got Jesus, and Jesus can get me through anything. With God, all things are possible.

And so that's great self-talk, isn't it? And there's a legitimate role for that, and it's good to keep a perspective on things and don't become all sulky and moany and feeling sorry for yourself. That's good. But, at the same time, if I'm honest, and that's always the most important requirement, if I'm honest, some of what's going on in my head is I'm talking to myself like that. It helps me feel more righteous. Some of what's going on in my head is I've got a cheerleader who's saying, "Greg, you're bigger than this! This is nothing! Other people would get down about this, but not you because you know the Lord, and you have a global perspective on things, and so this is really no big deal." And, if I'm not careful, what can happen is that cheerleading becomes sort of a surrogate for dealing with the real issue. I want to be a person who conquers this, and I'm gonna be. I'm gonna, whatever happens here, I'm not gonna become a negative, curmudgeon person, a negative person, a complaining person. Even if it's always on-going, it will not defeat me. But, to get there, I've gotta be real with the fact that, that this pisses me off! I'm sorry! There's another little indecorate [sic] word. It is irritating! I turn my head, and it's like a pin or a knife that goes in there, and it's been that way three months, and it's like when you hit your, hit your head on the cabinet door. Did you ever do that? You turn and hit, and it just makes you mad. Did you ever do that? You just want to slam the thing because it catches ya off guard. You're like, arrrgh, and it takes you about a minute to get re-saved. It's kinda like, busted! You know, it's so aggravating.

Well, that's how this is. It's just there. And so I'm going along fine, someone honks the horn, "ahhhhhh." And it makes ya mad! And that's the reality of the situation. By global standards, yeah, it doesn't really rate that high, but this is my issue, and it's ticking me off, and so it doesn't matter that it doesn't rate on some global scale. The reality is, is that this is what I've got. And the reality is that you've got what you've got. And the reality is that we've gotta deal with that. In order to grow to be the kinda people who handle the crap well and in a kingdom way, we've gotta be honest with the fact that it kinda hurts. It hurts to be able to say that outloud and to deal with that. It's a little bit like, in that Faith and Doubt series that we just got out of, I tried to model this last week. When we go to the Bible, it's ok to wrestle outloud with the text. It's ok to be bothered by passages. I think sometimes they're supposed to bother us. It's okay to say out loud, "this confuses me" or "this aggravates me" or "this doesn't make any sense." We've got to give ourselves permission to wrestle with God on that. So, also, when it

comes to life events, we've gotta be ok saying: This really irritates me or frustrates me or makes me depressed or despondent. And we don't want to sulk. No, no, no. But there's gotta be times when you give yourself permission just to be real with it in order to grow past it and beyond it. So, get it in your mind the one or the two issues that you're gonna be focused on here throughout this series. What does crap look like in your particular life, whether it's emotional, physical or spiritual? And, having that in mind and giving yourself permission to feel it and be bothered by it, then ask this question: Why? Why is it there?

The question that we asked -- oh, hello there, Jud. What are you doing up here? I got a clue! I'm getting a word of knowledge from Charlie. You know what it is? I forgot to mention the questions. Okay. Listen. Throughout this series, we're going to be doing something that -- that was very discreet, Charlie. You did very well. Because I don't look at the monitors. They're telling me on the monitors, "Greg, don't forget the questions!" But do I look at the monitors? No! Why? Because I have A.D.D.! All right. One more crap happens!

So, we're going to be having questions at the end of this message, and throughout this series we're going to be having questions. And -- oh. Mary's back there dancing. I thought you were having a spaz attack or something. Or maybe just a spontaneous choreographed dancing or something. She's back there going like this. I was thinking what a weird place to exercise. Knock it off! So, the number, okay, you can text your questions, but you gotta start now because they're going to start collecting these and then they'll ask me them at the end of the message, depending on how much time we have, which, at this rate, is not going very well. But the number's 651-321-3030. That's 651-321-3030. Supplies are limited. Call now. Visa and Master Card accepted. And, if you want to, if you don't have a text thing, and, by the way, when you turn your phone on to text, don't turn the sound back on. And then, if you want to just write out a question, and you can go back, to the back of the church, and someone will collect those, and they'll get them that way. And then, the one's that we can't get to we'll put on, on the website, on the Table, where we're going to have all sorts of dialogue stuff going on, and you can dialogue through it that way. All right. So text in your questions, and the number is in the bulletin if you forget it as I'm going through here.

So the question is: Why? God loves us, right? God wants the best for us. Why doesn't He take this away? And what really makes that an interesting question is that we say, in the Christian tradition, that it's biblical that He is all powerful. All powerful. And, if God's all powerful, it would seem to indicate, follow me here now, that He can do anything He wants. He's got all power. So, it would seem that he could take away the neck problem if he wanted to, and he could take away my friend's brain cancer if he wanted to. He could prevent that rape from happening if he wanted to and prevent the earthquake in Japan if he wanted to. He's all powerful, which seems to indicate that if he didn't, doesn't heal my neck, it's because he

doesn't want to. If he doesn't heal the brain cancer, it's because he doesn't want to. If he doesn't prevent the rape, it's because he doesn't want to. If he doesn't save Japan, it's because he doesn't want to. Which would seem to indicate that he wants you to have the neck pain, he wants you to have the brain cancer, he wants you to get raped, and he wants the earthquake and tsunami to happen out in Japan. He's all powerful, right? He can do anything he wants. And, since he's all good, we confess that, it has to be that it's good that you've got that neck pain, it's good that you have the brain cancer, it's good that you got raped, and it's good that Japan's going through what they're going through right now. Because everything God does is good. In fact, if everything he does is good, it actually gets worse now because you have to say that if those things weren't in place that the world would be less good. All the crap is here because God wants it to be here. Every single thing is part of his good plan. He's all powerful. If he doesn't stop it, it must be because he wants it. So, now you gotta say that it's good and that every rape that happens, it's made the world a better place, it's somehow good. Every kid that ever got gassed in Auschwitz and ever got raped and mutilated and every person who drowned in the tsunami or every kid who's ever buried in a mudslide or ever got cancer or brain tumor or neck problems or you name it, it's all good. It's all good. In fact, if those things weren't there, the world would be less good. It'd be tragic if one less kid got raped than actually gets raped. It'd be sad if one less person died, if just the right amount of nightmares are going on. Because that's the amount that God allows, and so God must want it to be there, no more, no less, just the right number of people breathe their last breath in a gas chamber, just the right number of people are killed, just the right number of people die of AIDS, and so on and so on. It's all good. And now you gotta ask the question: Are you talking about God or the devil? Because, if God in any sense wills child kidnappings and mutilations and molestations and other nightmares, what do you need a devil for? I mean, I think if God's already controlling all of that, there's really nothing left for the devil to do, except maybe be a puppet on God's hand. And he becomes sort of a fall guy. He gets blamed for it even though he's just to carry out God's will. Good luck figuring that one out. You can see why this is an important series, why this is an important question. The logic seems absolutely irrefutable. God's all powerful.

Now, here's the thing. In asking any question about God, it's always important, and I say this a lot, but I can't ever say it too much, the most important question to ask is: Where do you get your picture of God from? What is your authority? It all comes down to this. And, if you're a follower of Jesus, you've got to, got to, got to, get your picture of God from Jesus. He is the word of God. Not like there's a lot of words. There's one word of God, John 1:1, and it's Jesus. He's the image of God. Colossians 1:15. There's not a lot of images of God. There's one, and it's Jesus. He's the form of God. Philippians 2:6. There's not a lot of forms of God. There's one, it's Jesus. He's the one who says, the Bible says of him that he is the perfect, the singular perfect expression of God's essence. Hebrews 1:3. There's not a lot of that, his name's Jesus.

He's the one who says, "If you see me, you see the Father." Why are you looking any place else for the Father? John 14:7-9. He's the one who says, "No one knows the Father," nobody knows the Father except the Son and to whoever the Son will reveal Him. No one. Which means: Don't go any other place to find out what God is like other than the person of Jesus Christ. We gotta lock that in. God looks like Jesus. And so, now you gotta ask yourself this question, in light of the conclusion we just came to a minute ago, reasoning about God, ask the question: How many times do you see Jesus, in any way, wavering or being involved in child kidnappings and rapes and molestations? When you read the gospels do you see him participating in that much? How many people did he afflict with brain cancer? Not very many, I don't think. How many people did he jack up their necks? How many earthquakes did he cause? How many Tsunamis did he cause? How many nuclear meltdowns? Was he involved in any of that? Did he ever favor wars? Was he, in any sense, 'willing' any of that? No. You know what, you read the gospels, and you'll find, if Jesus is our picture of God, he reveals a God who is not on that side of things. In fact, the God that Jesus reveals is a God that is doing the opposite. The God that Jesus reveals is a God that heals diseases, he doesn't cause them. He comes to liberate us, he doesn't put us into captivity. He comes to rejuvenate creation, not afflict creation. He's a God who, he comes that we might have life and have it more abundantly. The devil comes to kill, steal and destroy. That's why he's the enemy of God. Jesus comes and reveals who God is, because he came to give life and to give it more abundantly, he comes to restore, to set the captives free, to heal the sick, to heal the blind, to free us from the clutch of the enemy! That's the God that Jesus reveals. And, if he's our – Amen! – if he's our picture of God, if that's our, we lock that in, then any line of reasoning that led to a different conclusion must be wrong somewhere. You following me here? We start with this omnipotent concept, and we come to the conclusion that God's controlling everything and he wants the crap to be there. But that's not who we see revealed in Jesus. So somewhere we must've gone wrong. Somewhere we must've gone wrong. Now, where did we go wrong? Is it maybe that God's not omnipotent or not involved and not caring about the world? I'd be careful about that one. Be very careful. Here's what can happen. Sometimes folks, they come to the conclusion, sometimes rightly, that God doesn't control everything, not an omni-controlling God. And they come to the conclusion that that would make God responsible for evil, and that can't be right. They come to the conclusion that humans have free will and angels have free will, what they choose affects what will come to pass. So, they come to the conclusion that the world, a lot of what you see in this world does not reflect God's will but reflects the wills of other beings, angels and humans. And so the world's a lot more ambiguous than they previously thought. And then what can happen is they can throw the baby out with the bath water where they think, well, since God's not controlling things, he doesn't have much to do with anything. He's either all powerful or he's a distant God, not un-concerned, but he's not involved in our life very much. What really runs the world is a bunch of free will and luck and chance.

Kinda like this movie I saw the other day, which is a great movie by the way, The Adjustment Bureau. Whoa, check that movie out. It's got some great theology in it. But you get the impression -- oh, it's just, oh, marvelous. I'm going to, I'm gonna blog on it in a few days. You get the impression that the Chairman, who represents God, is like way far away. You can't really get to the chairman way out there. The movie kinda redeems itself later on, but through most of the movie you have all these agents trying to run around and keep things in check and whatever. And the Chairman is really distant. And a lot of people have that picture of God. Oh, yeah, there's all these free wills, all these variables and things that come to pass, but God is way far away. Because what happens is for a lot of people their sense of intimacy and closeness with God is wrapped up in their belief that God controls everything and so, when they throw out the language of God controlling everything, they throw out the language of God being close. For some people, you feel you're special because you really believe that God found you that parking space and that your plane was the one plane that didn't get delayed, and you really believe that it was God that gave you the promotion or God that got you fired. You know? It was God when your basketball team loses. Well, that's because God willed it to lose so don't get too mad at the ref. Yeah, it was a bad call, but God's got a plan. Everything's part of the plan, and you're at the center of the plan, and you feel close to God. And then maybe you come to the conclusion that maybe it's not that simple and maybe there's other wills that affect what goes on. And what can happen is that maybe you feel kinda alone down here in this world where chance and free will and some people don't -- start to lose confidence in even the power of prayer. Here's the thing you gotta ask. You gotta be careful about this, not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Our small group, the people that I share life with, has been talking about this: How do you hold on to a Christ-like character knowing that God looks like this while also believing that God is all powerful? Is the problem in believing that God is all powerful or is the issue that we're not thinking about power in a Christ-like way? See, I believe that God is all powerful, to the core of my being. Jesus teaches that. Jesus models that. The whole Bible teaches that. God is all powerful. But here's the question: What do you mean by power? We often think of, in fact, usually I think, think that power means control. Because that's the kind of power we fallen human beings would like to have. So we think if we say God is all powerful, we tend to think that means that God is all controlling. But, if Jesus is our model of God, why would we think that?

Maybe we gotta think about power in different ways. Look it. There's at least four different kinds of power I can think of. On the one hand you've got, let's call it Neanderthal power. This is power of the Neanderthal man, the cave man power. This is brute force power. This is the stereotypical picture of the cave man who's got the woman, dragging her by the hair, a billy club. You know, me want woman, me get woman, me hit woman on head and now I got woman. We're talking sheer brainless testosterone power, the power to conquer, the power to get your way because you can. And this is, frankly, the kind of power that runs things in this

fallen world. This is the way nations operate, you know. This is about brute force! Right? This is what everyone kinda craves. I wanna get the power so that I can impose my will on others. It's Neanderthal power. The power of brute strength, that is power to control.

Then there's another kind of power to control, which is a little bit more sophisticated, and we call this Machiavellian power. Machiavelli was a philosopher in the 16th century. He wrote this book called The Prince, and here he gives political leaders advice on how to control people without them even knowing it. It's brilliant. The great leader is one who just takes the stupid people, the masses, and controls them but makes them think that they're in control of their decisions. It's brilliant. Some would argue that that philosophy is still very prevalent today. But see, it's still a power to control. It's just a little bit more sophisticated than Neanderthal power. But there's other kinds of power. For example: Wisdom power. This is the power of someone who's just got good ideas or insight into things, and when there's a problem, they say, "maybe this" or "look at it this way" and people tend to go "yeah!" So they follow the person, not because they're controlling them but because they've got wisdom. Their ideas have a drawing power. So there's wisdom power, Neanderthal power, Machiavellian power, wisdom power.

And then there is called agape power. This is the power not to control but the power to win allegiance by servitude. This is the influence you have by loving somebody, by caring about them, by serving them, by ascribing worth to them, by sacrificing for them and you win their hearts. Agape. It's the Greek word for other-oriented love. It's the power of love, and I would argue it's the strongest power in the universe.

We've got four kinds of power. Now, the question is: When we say God is powerful, what are we talking about? What kind of power are we talking about? Ask the question: What kind of power is more appropriate to God? Which leads to the question: What kind of power do we see Jesus modeling in his ministry? Because all of our thinking about God has to be centered on Jesus. When I read the gospels, I see a little bit of Neanderthal power. For example, when Jesus casts out demons, he doesn't do it politely. Get out! So there's some Neanderthal power, but that's not the way he relates to humans very much. I don't see any Machiavellian power. I don't see him manipulating anybody. I do see a lot of wisdom power. Jesus manifests wisdom all over the place. In fact, his entire life is a manifestation of God's wisdom, who's using the crucifixion to outsmart his spiritual enemies. Wisdom all over the place; and, of course, we see agape love power, the power of the cross.

God is the heavenly groom who comes down for his bride, and he doesn't do it in a Neanderthal way where he clubs us and says "Now you're mine." He doesn't do it in a manipulative way where he kinda secretly controls us without us knowing it. He does do it in a wisdom way, and he does, certainly does it in an agape way. He gives his life for us on the cross. And that's the kind of power that we're talking about. It is wisdom power. It is love

power. It's not the power to control. It's the power to influence. Ya see? The power to be influenced in life. God could, if he wanted to, Neanderthal everything. He could have created a world where he's just The Controller or the Machiavelli Ruler who just manipulates everything. But I submit to you that that would be beneath God. Leaders use Neanderthal power and Machiavellian power when they don't trust their own wisdom and their own character. That's when you result to the more primitive kinds of control. But God is above that. And, if God is looking for a world that is capable of love and if God is looking for a world where there's free choice and moral significance and the capacity to choose whether to enter into a relationship or not, well then the power you use to do that is not control power but influence power. Because the reality is, maybe, men, listen up on this, you cannot Neanderthal your way into a loving relationship. You can't do it. You can't Machiavelli your way into a loving relationship. You can use wisdom on your way into a loving relationship, and you must use agape love in your way to a loving relationship. So, if relationship is what God wants, wisdom and love are the primary ways that he does it. This is the God who's revealed in Jesus Christ. This is, I submit to you, the God that's revealed throughout the Bible. Sometimes God uses Neanderthal power. He can do that; he can decide something's going to happen, yeah, sometimes. But not all the time. We find throughout the Bible his wisdom is praised. And we find throughout the Bible his character is praised. And, if God was Neanderthaling everything, controlling everything, he wouldn't need any wisdom. You don't need wisdom if you're controlling it. You don't need wisdom if you're a Machiavellian leader. You just control stuff. No. You need wisdom when you're dealing with a creation full of free agents who make decisions. And you need love, agape love, when you're dealing with a creation full of free agents.

Now, see, we have this understanding of divine power. The question then is: What does that mean in terms of how we understand crap happening in our life and how we understand what we're supposed to do in response to it? You can now begin to make sense of the passage we read earlier in Romans 10.

"All day long I've stretched out my hands to this disobedient people."

How can an all-powerful God be in a position like this? Well, because the kind of power we're talking about is not Neanderthal power or Machiavellian power. A God who used that would never be a frustrated God, never have his will thwarted. But a God who's relying on wisdom and agape love can. And so God puts himself in a position where he can experience frustration sometimes and a broken heart sometimes. And that totally re-frames the way we ask questions when we're dealing with crap in our life. It means this, and I'll close with this, and then we're gonna get to a few questions. It means this, that if God doesn't control everything, that means that as we're dealing with the crap, we don't to think that God had to ordain that to be here. We can't just read God's will off of events that happen. No. A lot of things cause

events including other free decisions. So we can't just look at the crap and say, oh, God willed this. But we can, and must, look at the crap and say, God is in it. God is in it; not in a Machiavellian or Neanderthal way, but God is present in all the crap, in all the mess, in all the nightmares. He is present in a wisdom influence and present in a loving influence. God's influence, he controls very little, but his influence is everywhere. In fact, when you believe that there are other free agents, angelic and human beings who affect what comes to pass, that is all the more reason we need to, day by day, moment by moment, be relying on the loving influence of God. At all places, at all times, in all people, in our lives, God is present as influence to maximize the good, to minimize the evil. He's closer, as we sang earlier in the worship service, he's always so close. He's holding us, squeezing us. He's closer to us as we are to ourselves. He's closer than the air that we breathe. He's not controlling you or all the other variables, but he's always influencing. And so we don't need to say, "Because he doesn't control, he's not here. He's off at a distance in a place," or something like that. No. Precisely because he doesn't control, he's always present as an influencer. And so our job as kingdom people, one of the first tasks in the midst of the crap is to say, "God, I trust that you are here getting your hands dirty in the mess. Help me to: a) see you; and so we look for his grace to break through in the darkest moments. And help me to: b) to align my will with yours; as we cooperate with his to transform the evil into the good. He doesn't will the crap in our life, but he uses it. As someone once said, it smells like crap, but it's good fertilizer. He uses it to grow things in our life, and our job is to cooperate with him doing it. Romans 8:28.

Let's deal with a few questions. What do we got? What do we got on the board? Questions. From Peter. Thank you, Peter. "I get that Satan brings a lot of crap into the world, and we are supposed to pray for God to take it away. But why do answers to prayer seem so arbitrary?"

Bingo. Shauna will handle that problem in two weeks. Won't you, Shauna? You gonna just deal with that? Maybe. Well, she will touch on unanswered prayer. But I'll take a shot at it here first.

As an advertisement, I do have a book out there, and it's called Is God to Blame, about that, and so you might want to pick that up if that's a burning question that you have. The one-minute answer I have is this. We assume often that it's all up to God if he answers prayer or not. We pray and, if God wants it, he goes "yeah;" and if God doesn't want it, he goes "no." Because he's all powerful, right, and he gets what he wants. Going back to the discussion we had a little bit earlier. And the thing that's troubling is it seems so arbitrary. God's up there, and you're praying, "God would you protect me from the rape," and God's either going, "Yeah, okay, I'll do that," or "no, you know, I don't think I will." And that leads to the whole thing of why wouldn't he answer your prayer and protect you from the rape? He must want you to be raped. And now we're in that whole pit hole that we talked about earlier. I want to submit to you that

prayer is simply a matter of whether or not God wills it or not. The answer to prayer is simply a matter of whether or not God wills it or not. Nor, is it simply a matter of whether you have enough faith or not. We talked about that in our Faith and Doubt series. Because some people think, "Well, God wants to answer the prayer and, if you have enough faith, it will be answered. So, if it wasn't answered, it must be because you lacked faith. I submit to you that it is a whole lot more complicated than that. Praying is powerful and effective. James 5:16 says that. So always know that when you pray you are sending out a kingdom ripple effect that makes a difference, whether you can see the ripple or not. Know, trust that it's powerful, that it's moving in a kingdom direction, and the situation you're praying for, it's moving it in a kingdom direction. But it doesn't automatically collapse all the other variables that affect what comes to pass. It doesn't mean that no one has free will all of a sudden or that angels don't have free will and a bunch of other things. There are still a multitude of other influences going on. And so sometimes you can pray about something and God answers it, but the answer doesn't break through on this realm because of other interference, other ripple effects. The classic example of this is Daniel, Chapter 10, where Daniel prays, God sends an angel, because God usually works through mediaries [sic], sends an angel in response to prayer, but the angel is detained 21 days because the prince of Persia, who's this demonic entity, interfered. Our free decisions can interfere with God's plan for people's lives. Why can't angelic interference do it? This is why sometimes prayers can be answered like this [snaps fingers], and other times they can be answered, you have to persist, you have to keep working at, working at it. Sometimes one person praying is sufficient, sometimes you need a thousand people praying, because there's this warfare involved. There's a multitude of variables involved. It looks arbitrary, but the reason it looks arbitrary is that we don't know all the other factors that go into affecting what comes to pass.

Okay. Another question. Great question. From Mari. "Is God there if you don't always feel his presence? Does he ever get mad at you and want to punish you if you don't go his way?" Thank you, Mari, for that question.

Two questions, really. Yeah, is God there if you don't feel his presence? So important for you to know that he is. Whether you feel God's presence or not depends on a lot of variables. And it could be something as basic as what you ate the night before or the germ you got infected with or a mood, you know. What you feel at any given moment is, largely, some would argue, exhaustively chemical. It's the chemical combustions in your brain. So, don't leverage anything on what you feel. Now, at the same time, I'm not saying it's not important what you feel. I love to sense the presence of God. Sometimes I do, but most of the time I don't. But I always know that he's there. I take that on faith, and I envision that as I go throughout the day, that I'm like a fish swimming in the sea of God's presence. Right now I'm a fish, you're a fish. We're all

swimming in an ocean of God's love. He is right here, and it's so important to know that. Take it in on faith if you don't sense it. Yes, he's present. He'll never leave you or forsake you.

Does he get mad? Sure, he gets mad. You find that in the Bible. But his anger isn't like our anger. We get mad often for selfish and petty and self-serving reasons. God never does. If God is angry, it's an anger that expresses his love. God is love. Sometimes it's hard for us to make the connection. He's always motivated by love, always motivated by love. Now, does he punish you? Well, it depends on what you mean by punish. We often think of punishment as getting even, "I'll make you pay for that." I don't think God does that. If God was doing that, we wouldn't need a cross now, would we? He's not about getting even. But he's always about teaching, and so he does discipline. Hebrews 12 tells us that. He'll use all the trials of life, all the struggles of life, all the crap of life to do it. He'll use anything that's available. That doesn't mean he desires that or causes it; but, now that it's there, he'll work with it. He'll work with it. And so, he disciplines us. And sometimes, in fact, I would argue most the time, what we experience is simply God allowing us to experience the consequences of our own decisions in order to learn, not to get even, not "I told you so," or anything like that. He's always about redeeming us. Everything he does is with a redemption motive to grow us, to teach us, to expand us.

Got time, I think, for one more. From anonymous. Ha-ha. I was just thinking that you could put Mike there, and we still wouldn't know who you are. Or Joe or Greg. You could put from Greg but, see, that wouldn't be honest. This is an honest way of being anonymous. Ha-ha. "So we've been having serious crap coming like waves for over two years. How do we deal with it if it doesn't end? We're really beat up and wasted."

I hear you on that. I first want to say that I completely empathize with what you're saying. Sometimes you go through seasons where it feels relentless. The other night, Shelley and I had some friends, we were talking about our experience as a group, and I said more persistently than anyone else that I'm just tired. Because it's been one thing after another, things on a multitude of levels: Physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, and it keeps coming and keeps coming, and it just gets so tiring. Uncle! Okay, you win! Done! And it just gets tiring. It's very, very tiring. And so I get that. What if it doesn't end? All I can say is this: That I believe that if it doesn't, and there could be a lot of reasons for that, here's where you have to have a confidence in God's ability to pull you through it. And part of this, what I find is this: That when I get to a level of fatigue at the relentless onslaught of things, and I know to do cheerleading in my head to keep it in perspective or whatever, but when I'm tired and it gets painful and, especially, what's worse than your own stuff is when you see someone else suffering, and it doesn't go away. It just breaks your heart. But it comes down to this: It's either gonna break your or you're victorious over it. This can break you. You can become cynical, you can become

ornery, you can become miserable. That won't do the world any good, and that won't do you any good, and it's certainly not kingdom. On the other hand, I believe that when I am weak, he is strong. And that's not just some nice little cliché. I really mean that. And when I now have to deal with this new level of relentless crap, I have to deal with this way beyond 'ahh, shucks' 'darn it', I have to deal with this new level of it, that puts me in a position now where I need God more. Just to stay in a good mood, I need God more than I did before. Which is a good thing. It is a good thing. I can no longer coast on my natural personality as I used to. I've got this thing going on, I'm just talking about one little aspect of this relentless thing. It forces you to grow. It forces you to grow. And so, even in the midst of this, it seems endless, just always trust that God is present, not in a Neanderthal way, not in a Machiavellian way, but in a wisdom way and an agape way. His influence is there, and he is strong enough to see you through this. He'll give you an energy that doesn't come from your own. He'll give you, if you're open to it, a wisdom that doesn't come from your own, and he'll use this to grow you. Which doesn't mean just sort of give up and accept it, no. Part of his wisdom may be showing you how to minimize and how you can grow around it. But, as long as it's there, he can use it for kingdom purposes to grow you. And so, just say, "God, I'm putting myself in a position where I need to make you bigger, to get me stronger to rise above this. This thing will squash me if I rely on my own power, and I don't want to become that. I don't wanna become the kind of person who's just miserable, no. The kingdom says that I can have a joy in all circumstances and a peace that passes understanding." Well, now it's cash time. If you say that so easy before you had chronic pain, or so easy before a relational issue, now the storm comes, now it's time, you know, the proof of the pudding is in the eating! Now let's test this! Really, there's joy, unspeakable glory full of peace that passes understanding? There really is! But it means that you're probably going to have to more fully rely on God and dig down deeper than you ever have before and practice the presence of God and other things of that sort.

From Ben. "If the Devil is behind evil and God is not, why did God crate the Devil?" Brilliant question! My answer would be that God did not create the Devil. Wait. Never quote that out of context. God did create the one who became -- I think, is there someone back there who's supposed to get these? Hold on to it. If I have time to get to it, I'll get to it.

God did create the one who became the Devil, but he wasn't creating the demonic one, the adversary, Satan. So far as we can discern from scripture, he was creating the bright and morning star, Lucifer in Latin. Became his name, Lucifer. God created Lucifer, and Lucifer created himself to be the Devil. We, by our own decisions, form our character in one direction or another. And God's always influencing us to turn towards the good, to turn towards light and conform ourselves to his will, but we're free so we can resist that. And from what we can tell in scripture, God created Lucifer with this tremendous capacity to brilliantly manifest the glory of God. He had a lot of authority and a lot of power, but he also had freedom, because

without that he would have been robotic. He wouldn't have been an agent who was capable of choosing love. As far as we can tell, Lucifer and a myriad of other angels chose to rebel against God and now we have that to put up with. You might ask the question: Why doesn't God just incinerate the Devil the minute he rebelled? Why not just blow him away? But you could ask that about any agent who eventually turns to be irrevocably evil. Why does God let them continue on? And what I would propose is this: If free will is the capacity to go this way or that way, can you all see this analogy, I can go toward God and agree with God to this degree, I have this amount of say so and this amount of power, then I have to be able to go this way to this degree, to this amount of power, and God can revoke that. I use the word "can." It's not that God doesn't have the power to. Of course, he does. But the very meaning of free will is that I can go this way or that way. And if God revokes my ability to go that way because he doesn't like the way I chose, well, then he virtually is predestining me to go this way. Therefore, I don't have free will. By definition, if God gives free will, he can't just revoke it when he wants to. There's always conditions and other things around it. But the meaning of free will is that you have the power to go this way to this degree or that way to that degree. And so the Devil had the power to bless for this amount of time and then also to curse for this amount of time. The good news is that it's finite and will come to an end.

Next question. From Anonymous. "If scripture says God will only allow us to go through the trials we can handle, how can we know for sure that it's not God who puts us through those trials?" Excellent question. There's an important distinction, I believe, that needs to be made between two things. One is God allowing us to go through trials for a purpose and putting parameters around that; and, on the other hand, is God putting us through those trials? I can't say that God never puts us through trials. There may be times where he says, "What you need right now is this," and actually brings it upon us. But there's other times where I would say that God isn't at all. I have to reason to think at all that every time we go through a trial is a God-orchestrated one. Sometimes the trials we go through, maybe even usually the trials we go through, are our own doing. We bring them on ourselves. Now, God will be there. He'll always be there as the power you can lean on, always influencing you to go in the right direction and all of that. So God is smart enough to anticipate any trial you would ever go through, and he has a plan on how to turn it to your advantage, and the kingdom advantage, if you will work with him. That's that promise there. But I don't need to think that God specifically set up the trial for you to go through. I say that with a passion, because sometimes the Church has said some very nasty things to people that, and they have the best of intentions, but some of the stuff is just cruel. For example, last night talked to a lady whose child died, and the pastor told her that perhaps the reason that God is sending her through this trial, why God took her child home, is that she had an inordinate love for her child and that she loved her child more than God, so God needed to remove the competition. Sounds like Al Capone! "Yeah, I gotta take out your kid!" No! Ugh! What would that do to your picture of God if you believed that? No.

Here is a trial. It's a fallen world, and it's oppressed, and this kind of stuff happens and God will use that. God will use that to bring good out of evil, but don't think that God is the one who's out there killing kids because you love them too much. That goes way back to St. Augustine, that suggestion, the one he made 1600 years ago.

Okay. Next question. Really good questions, by the way. I love 'em. "Where is God in self-inflicted crap?" That's good. No, that's excellent. A lot of our crap is self-inflicted. Not all of it, don't go thinking that what you get is what you deserve or anything like that, but let's be honest, we do stuff and make decisions that are just plain stupid, plain damaging. We go down roads and we know better and we bring it on ourselves. Where is God? Where is God? Right in the middle of it. In fact, really, all of the crap that is resulted of sin is human inflicted and sometimes directly self-inflicted, but that's the exact thing he took upon himself on Calvary. He bore our sin on Calvary, which shows us that God is the kind of God that's in the middle of, and even suffering because of, our self-inflicted crap. He's not out there standing looking at you saying, "Well, look what you did. Look what a mess you made of your life. How many times did I tell you not to go that way, to not marry that guy, and you did? I told you that if you didn't quit smoking you'd get lung cancer. I told you. I warned you. I sent all these things, and you still did it. You made your bed, you've gotta sleep in it." You know? No. It's not like that. There are sometimes natural consequences to behaviors that we do, that in this world, sometimes you just can't clean them up. You will suffer consequences for it, but God is there, always on your side. Not necessarily making the road easier for you, but he wants to say, "I am here." He suffers with us. The Bible tells us he'll never leave us or forsake us. And he's right in the middle of it. Not to shame you, but to say, "Let's learn from this, and let's grow from this and to use this to purify your character and to correct things." You know, ask the question: How did you get into this mess? What choices did you make? Not to shame you, but just to educate you so you grow from it.

So, where is God in self-inflicted crap? He's where he's at in all crap, and that is right smack in the middle. Not in a Neanderthal way, controlling the thing, and not in a Machiavellian way, manipulating the thing. But he is there in a wise way saying, "Work with me, and I'll give you wisdom about this, and we can turn this around. It may not be pleasant, but it will be productive. And, always there in an agape way, bringing good out of evil, restoring us with his love.

Got time for one more. Or I'll read this one. Got one more up there. Or should I read this one? I'll read this one! "If we have great grief in our lives because of something that has happened to us, has God given us life so he can win over our hearts in spite of this grief?" Okay. If we have great grief in our lives because of something that has happened to us, or maybe something that we did to ourselves, has God given us life so he can win over our hearts in spite

of this grief? I wouldn't say that God has given us life so he can win over our hearts in spite of this grief. He's given us life so that we can have life. And he's give us life so that we can eventually dance with him. This is what the kingdom is all about. This is what heaven is all about. He's given us life so that we can share in his love, participate in his love, be mirrors of his love, dance in his glory. That was, from the beginning, the goal. That was the purpose of everything. We, as a race of people, brought the grief on ourselves, and we individually bring grief on ourselves, and we bring grief on other people. So now, so now, to enjoy the life and eventually get the life that God wants us to have, he does have to win over our hearts despite our grief. But I want us to notice that that wasn't necessarily the plan from the start. That's the plan given our fall and given our sin. There's gonna be grief involved. And now the promise of God is that not only can he win over hearts despite our grief and the pain and the despondency that is sometimes there, but he'll even use that as a way of winning over our hearts. As a way of growing us into kingdom people. Everything, the thing about crap is that, in the right hands, if you will, and with the person who's got wisdom power, it makes great fertilizer. And things grow in crap that wouldn't grow otherwise. It smells terrible, but it's very fertile. And in some ways that's what happens with crap in our lives. God can grow it. Now, again, again, don't think for a moment that that means that God wishes, wanted you to have it. It may be that the crap that is there makes him cry and the grief and the pain, and he's on the inside of that pain, but what you can know is that it's not senseless, meaningless pain. It's pain that can grow things. And so our job is to offer up every part of our life. The good stuff, the bad stuff, the pleasant stuff, the painful stuff. Say, "God, it all belongs to you, use it and grow it. And help us to, in the middle of it all, keep our eyes fixed on your beauty." Know who God is in the person of Jesus Christ. And that that God, the God who died for you, is the God who's in the middle of the crap redeeming the moment, bringing about the healing, bringing about the restoration and the growth, preparing us for the kingdom.

From Sarah. "What do you tell a non-believer about God's love when they've been through lots of trauma?" Good. What I find is that many times non-believers are non-believers because they have a Neanderthal view of God and most the time they got it from Christians. Or just from the general culture where we still refer to, I just heard this yesterday, what happened in Japan as an "Act of God." And so, when they go through trauma, they have, even if they're not part of the church, been somewhat conditioned just by the culture to think that God must be pulling this, God is the disaster maker. And so one of the first things you can do, whenever I meet a non-believer, and I do frequently, is not to try to convince them but to explain God on their terms. First is to adjust or to try to talk about what picture of God are you rejecting? And usually the picture of God they're rejecting is one I would reject. And then to introduce them to another way of looking at God, and that is by the cross. You're going through trauma. You know what? God knows what that's like, because God did, too. And you point them to Calvary. I find most the time the problems that people have with belief in God and the inability to

integrate with suffering is because they've got this Neanderthal picture of God. Point them to Jesus Christ, and it changes. It's a game changer, changes the discussion completely.

Okay. Another question from Mike. "What about passages in the Bible that seem to imply that God is behind the crap?" Uh, next question! Okay. Because, see, this is a dissertation. This is always the dangerous thing because I'm writing the book on this, so all of the sudden the whole book comes to the forefront, and then I get log jammed. I had twelve years of speech therapy because I stutter, because everything tries to come out at once. I had to learn how to slow down, and this is the kind of question that makes me stutter because, and then Charlie's up there saying, Greg, you've got two minutes, and you just spent 20 seconds of it explaining why you can't give an adequate answer. Oh, yeah? But I would say this, in a nut shell, some of the time, some of the time God is behind the crap. God's dealing with a situation where it's not a question of what's his ideal will, but there's so much crap going around, it's what version of the crap do you want? And so God's working, like, you see this throughout the Old Testament. You've got these nations that are all sort of violent and whatever, and there's just no chance of making them peaceful. They're gonna be violent, so the only question is: How do you put that violence to good use? And so God, in some sense, gets involved with that because, if God doesn't get involved with violence, then he would be involved with the world because the world is intrinsically violent. And so there's a way in which God lifts his hand and then Assyria is allowed to do what they want to Israel and God uses that to teach lessons and all these other sorts of things. But God's not the one who made Assyria that way. Assyria already was that way, and now God's just saying, "How can I work with that?" But, in a sense, God is not this prissy God who's afraid of getting manure on his hands. If he was, he'd never deal with us! No. He's a God who dives down, dives head in, and that's what the cross is all about. He takes it upon himself. Sometimes, in some of the portraits of God, I think that part of that is God acquiescing to the way that people think about him. You find that in the book of Job and other places in the Bible where this is how people think about God. They do see God in more deterministic ways, and God works with them in that, but I would argue that if you look at the whole context of the cannon, the whole Biblical narrative, you see God constantly revealing more of his true self, confronting their false images of him and, ultimately, revealing his definitive, who he really is, through the person of Jesus Christ. The most important thing I'll say, and this is the last thing I can say, I can only get to one more question, is this: It is, I think, absolutely crucial when we ask a question like that, more than the particular answers that we give, would be how do we frame the question? And it's vital that, as we know, who believe in Jesus, as we read the Bible, we do it with a Jesus lens on. You know, it says that Jesus said to the Pharisees, "If you really believed in the scripture, you'd believe in me because all that scripture is about me. And then, on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, as he's appearing to them after the resurrection, they're on the way, and it says that then Jesus revealed to them how all scripture points to him, but they needed a revelation to see that.

So, when we read the Bible, we have to read it with this assumption that somehow it is all there to point to Jesus, and we look at it through a Jesus lens. We now know who God really is in the person of Jesus Christ, and that reframes everything. Now, as we look back at the Old Testament, we've gotta ask the question, knowing what God really is, what was going on when he appeared to be other than this? It's a little bit like some novels you might read or movies you might see, like the "Sixth Sense," if you saw that movie, where the last 10 seconds of the movie redefine the whole movie. Or what's that other one, "The Book of Eli," where the last 10 seconds all of the sudden reframes the whole movie. Then you gotta go back and watch the whole movie again because you didn't know that ahead of time. So here, the last chapter is Jesus Christ and, when Jesus shows up, it's like a detective novel, where all of the sudden, boom, everything's redefined. Everyone's surprised. They had thought you could come and get a kick-butt Messiah who had just beat up the Romans and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Instead, he gets crucified. What? And that reframes everything. We need to read all those passages now through a Jesus lens.

Got time for one more. From anonymous. "How would God instruct Israel to destroy a tribe then tell them they could keep some of the virgins?" Oh boy! Come on! Is there a problem? Is there a problem? Okay. Now, look it. You find, you find this ties into my previous question. I love it. This is good. This – and, by the way, you don't have to agree with me on any of this. Just chew on it. You find some laws in the Bible and some narratives in the Bible that look absolutely Neanderthal. This is one of them. Show them no mercy. In fact, there's an inconsistency there because sometimes God says, when he's sending them into Canaan, show them no mercy, slaughter them all, even the animals. But then he turns around and says, "But you must not marry the virgins?" Uh, no, no. You must not intermarry with them. Well, if you just slaughtered them all, why is that a question? But then some passages say, "Oh, but you can keep the virgins as spoil." Ugh. Booty. War booty. I did not intend the double entendre there. Booty of war, what they call spoils of war. Don't they call it booty? How do I – see, this is why I stick to the notes.

So, when I look back on that, here's the question if I'm honest here, and I just am so done with trying to convince myself of stuff and dancing around stuff. No. If I'm honest, I know God is in the person of Jesus Christ. I have all these reasons for believing in Jesus, then I find these passages that look absolutely contradictory to that. So then, the ultimate question is: What's gonna have more authority to tell me what God is really like? Some folks think you can read the Bible as a flat book where every passage is equally authoritative. Though, they're kidding themselves, because no one does that, and I'm glad about it because, otherwise, you'd be acting on verses like that. No, no. We understand that there's a progress of revelation that goes on here, and so I have to say here, okay, what is more weighty? Jesus said that John the Baptist had a testimony that was weightier than all previous prophets, but that his testimony,

Jesus' testimony, was weightier than John's. So not all things are equal. The first thing to establish is where are you gonna go to get your cues from God? I suggest to keep your eyes stuck to Jesus Christ and now look back and try to figure this out from the perspective of Jesus.

Now, there's a number of explanations people have tried to offer about this. All would agree, I think, or most would agree, that this is, at least, a matter of God acquiescing to a barbaric, primitive people by playing the roles that they expect him to play, because this is what it is to work with these people. If you wanna be related to these people, you have to do it on their terms in order to move them forward. And so, God stoops. As I'm saying in this book that I'm writing now, The Crucifixion of the Warrior God, God condescends to stepping into the framework, the limited and fallen framework of his covenantal people because that's what you have to do if you're going to be relating to them. And then you gradually grow them in a certain direction. A little bit like this.

There was a missionary couple that I knew of. I didn't know them, personally know them, but I did know the person that knew them, who was, a number of years ago, a missionary to this tribe in Africa, an unreached people group, and I guess the word they use now is "primordial," indigenous population there, and they practice female circumcision, which is this brutal, unthinkable brutal, patriarchal practice of ensuring male rights over women. This couple went to this tribe, and they had to for three years, participated for three years in ceremonies surrounding female circumcision. Because you have to go native. You can't demand that they step into your world. You have to step into their world. That's incarnational. If you were looking at that couple during those three years and didn't know anything else about them, you would think they condone female circumcision, maybe even celebrate female circumcision. They loathed every minute of it, but if you're ever gonna grow that tribe out of female circumcision and do it for Christ-like reasons, well, you have to earn the right to be heard. You have to meet them at their level. They've been doing this for a thousand years. You can't come in like the great, wonderful westerners are gonna come liberate them. No. You have to come down. It's incarnational. This is what God does. He's a missionary to earth. He has to step into our violence, step into our barbarism, step into all of that crap in order to grow us out of this. You find even God sometimes, it appears, as though he's celebrating polygamy and celebrating concubines. He says to David, "David, how could you have sex with Bathsheba? I gave you all these wives; I would have given you more of them if you wanted them, and all these concubines." Now, we know from Genesis all the way through that God does not approve of polygamy. No. He's a monogamist, but there's times in some cultures and some places that polygamy is the lesser of evils. So God enters into it. He's not a prissy God. And so, reading these passages from the perspective of Christ, we know what the missionaries really believe and now we've gotta go back and reinterpret all of their other behavior leading up to it.

Appreciate the questions, good questions. The ones we didn't get to, which is the majority of them, they'll be on the Table on the website. Amen. Amen. I will close in prayer. I wanna ask the prayer teams to come up here, and if you have any need whatsoever that you'd like to have prayed through, I encourage you to come up here and pray with these folks. We'll continue this crappy series next week. If you're not signed up for a small group, I encourage you to get involved in a small group and go through the material. You get a lot more out of it that way.

Father, thank you for being a God who is bigger than all of our situations, all of our circumstances, all of our pain, all of our disappointment. Help us to be a people that fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, and who rely on you to grow us through the crap. In Jesus' name we pray, and all of God's people said, Amen.

God bless you guys. Go out into the kingdom and love on people!