

Where is God When Life Hurts?

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God, I Have A Question Series

Genesis 37, 39 and 50

This past week I received a letter from a new member of our church. She wrote to tell me how touched she was by the story I told last week about Matthias Beyer. Matthias is a 34-year old pastor from the Central Vineyard Church here in Columbus. He suffered a massive brain aneurysm and was teetering on the brink of life and death last weekend. Matthias has a young wife and two boys, age 3 and 5 months old. The good news that we found out this past Monday is that Matthias appears to be responding to his doctor's commands. He still has an exceptionally long road ahead of him. His brain has been profoundly affected by the aneurysm and there are other medical complications. But Matthias responded to a doctor's command on Monday to squeeze his hand and also to give the doctor a "thumbs up!" We're grateful for that and for the God of resurrection.

But this young woman wrote me and told me that she was very touched by the story of Matthias Beyer because it had such a striking resemblance to what happened to her. You see, her two daughters were 3 and 3 months old when her 34-year old husband died in a house fire and she was left in a coma. Pray for Jennifer and her two daughters.

Another church member wrote to me this past week about her toddler, who is named Judah. Judah was diagnosed at 6 months old with malignant cancer. He was started on chemo-therapy which continued for 5 months. The chemo-therapy was completed last July and Judah was considered to be in remission. Because of the aggressive nature of the cancer, an MRI was scheduled for Judah every month. During his second post-chemo MRI, these two parents discovered that their toddler had cancer in his heart and that it had spread to his brain. They have been told that Judah has only a short time to live. He has stopped walking; he has tremors; and he is sleeping more. Pray for Judah and his parents!

Another church member recently attempted suicide after struggling with depression for an extended period of time.

There is almost no week my 28 years as a pastor that I don't hear stories about a member in our own church who is going through an incredibly hard time in life. There seems that no one gets through this broken world unscathed, although the distribution of suffering is certainly uneven.

When we look outside the church all we need to do is open up the newspaper. We read stories about a lone gunman who entered the Sandy Hook Elementary School and murdered 20 first and second graders and several adults before taking his own life. Looking back, it is hard to believe that this horrific crime was not the deadliest school shooting in American history. It was only the second deadliest. Every American parent that day held their child a little closer. We realized that if Newtown, Connecticut wasn't safe, then no place is safe.

There are so many gut-wrenching experiences of evil and suffering every day. The mass murder of hundreds of Kenyan students last week. The suicidal downing of Germany's airplane. The suffering of Palestinians in a refugee camp in Syria. Global suffering. Personal suffering.

Pain and suffering are the chief arguments that atheists raise against any belief in God and his goodness. Many folks ask, "How can you continue to believe in God with all that you've gone through, or all that we hear about in the world?" In what sense does a good God govern this world when he allows so many terrible things to happen? Pain and suffering are a serious problem for us people of faith.

But they are not problem just for people of faith. The problem of pain is a problem for everyone.

Christian theologian, Miroslav Volf, in his wonderful book of essays titled *Against the Tide*, wrote:

Our very protest against God in the face of evil...presupposes God's existence. Why are we disturbed by the brute and blind force of tsunamis that snuff out people's lives [by a gigantic tidal wave]? If the world is all there is, and the world with moving tectonic plates is a world in which we happen to live, what's there to complain about? We can mourn – we've lost something terribly dear. But we can't complain, and we certainly can't legitimately protest. The expectation that the world should be a hospitable place, with no devastating mishaps, is tied to the belief that the world ought to be constituted in a certain way. And that belief – as distinct from the belief that the world is just what it is – is itself tied to the notion of a Creator. And that brings us to God. It is God who makes possible our protests that there is evil in the world. And it is God against whom we protest...How can I believe in God when tsunamis strike and kill little children? I protest, and therefore I believe.

In other words, if you are outraged by the hand life has dealt you; if you feel like screaming, "This is so wrong" regarding something you or a loved one is going through, or something you hear about in the world, who are you shaking your fist at? Blind random evolution? Fate? The natural order of things? Or does our instinctive protest

suggest that at bottom we're protesting against God and therefore whether we acknowledge it or not, we really do believe in God and in universal justice.

Today I'm beginning a series titled "God, I Have A Question." In this series I plan to tackle many of the questions folks have that we rarely talk about in church. Next week I will be doing a message titled "Can A Christian Go To War?" In subsequent weeks, I will be talking about How Christians Should Relate to Muslims, How Should Christians Relate to the LGBT Community, How We Should Understand Divorce and Remarriage. Today, my title is "Where is God When Life Hurts?" Let's pray.

Now, I immediately need to say that the issue of pain and suffering is for every single human being, at some point in our lives, not merely philosophical or theoretical. No one gets through this broken world unscathed. At some point, the issues raised by our suffering, or the suffering of someone we love becomes deeply personal. And the reason why I as a pastor have to preach on this subject over and over again is because even when we've heard lessons on this in the past and we think we've gotten some understanding that understanding feels like it evaporates with the most recent disaster, our most recent serious disappointment, or another senseless act. And so we have to be reminded over and over again about how our Christian faith relates to pain and suffering.

What I want to do today is to simply look at a few incidents from the life of an Old Testament hero named Joseph. One of our earliest encounters with Joseph is when he is 17 years old and he is thrown into a pit by his brothers. Here is what we read:

Genesis 37:23–25 (NIV)

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

I want to begin by talking about those times in life

When you're in the pit

Joseph was thrown into this deep well by his own brothers. Imagine Joseph in this dank, dark pit, cut up and bloody, screaming himself hoarse to be let out. And we know that he was screaming for help because more than two decades later when his brothers had to travel to Egypt because of a famine, they confessed

Genesis 42:21 (NIV)

21 They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

Joseph’s brothers hated him. They hated him because he was the favorite of their father, Jacob. Jacob gave Joseph a long multi-colored robe with embroidered sleeves that was a symbol of Jacob’s favoritism towards this young man. And so what did they do?

Genesis 37:23–24 (NIV)

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Have you ever found yourself in a pit? Maybe you find yourself in a pit today? What do I mean by a pit? I think of a teenage girl who goes to a party and gets herself drunk and after a night of passion wakes up and discovers that she is pregnant. She is in a pit. I think of a woman who is married for 40-50 years who is suddenly widowed. She’s in a pit. I think of men and women who discover that their spouses are having an affair with a coworker and people who are diagnosed with cancer, and folks who are standing in the unemployment line, and people caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer’s, or a couple who desperately wants to be pregnant and are struggling with infertility, or having a child who has walked away from God, or caring for a child who struggles with a mental illness. Friend, have you ever found yourself in a pit? Do you find yourself today in a deep, dark pit?

What do you do when you are down in the pit and you are screaming yourself hoarse and you can’t get yourself out? Where is God when life hurts?

Let me share with you a story. Years ago before Marlene and I had children, we went camping on the Outer Banks off of North Carolina. We didn’t know anything about camping on the beach. So we went to set up our tent as if we were setting up our tent on a campsite in the woods. I put our little tent pegs into the sand and tried to put the poles up. But the wind came off the ocean and the tent pegs pulled right out of the sand. I tried different angles for driving in the pegs and nothing worked. Finally, I was so frustrated, I said, “Marlene, let’s just get in the tent and our weight will hold it down.” She said, “I’m not getting in that tent. We’re going to be blown all over the beach.”

Then I spotted another couple way down the beach who were putting up their tent and they seemed to know what they were doing. So I walked over to them and said, “How are you keeping your tent up?” They replied, “Oh, you need these long stakes that dig into sand.” I was using the little 6” tent pegs. They were using something that was like a foot and a half length of plastic that was square and it dug right into the sand. They told me where I could buy those stakes, so I purchased some and put up my tent.

When you are in danger of being blown off your feet by some gale force wind, or to use the picture we had before, when you are in the pit, you need some long stakes that you can drive into the ground that will keep your life stable.

Another way to put it is when you are in the pit, you need to hang onto certain things about God that become your faith-stakes in the ground. Here is the first faith-stake in the ground:

What I hang on to: God is good whether I would choose this outcome or not

Behind all the tragedy of life we always have to see the utter goodness of God. God is good and the plan that God has for this world and for our lives is good. When all is said and done in Joseph's life, we read these words:

Ge 50:20

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Behind all of the tragedy in the life of Joseph we must always see the utter goodness of God. God's plan for this world, and God's plan for our lives is always good. This is the plan that God had from the beginning in Genesis 1. God, after seeing all that he created and the world that he made for men and women, said:

Genesis 1:31 (NIV)

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Psalm 34:8 says:

Psalm 34:8 (NIV)

8 Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

We might say, "Lord, I don't understand why I'm going through what I'm going through. Lord, I am not seeing signs of your goodness. I don't know why this is happening. I am confused; I am perplexed." But the Christian always says, "I know that my God is utterly good." Like that gospel song:

*God is good all the time
All the time God is good.*

When I want to know what God is like, I always look for God in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is my stake in the ground. I see his goodness towards people who are suffering. I

see him standing by the tomb of Lazarus, weeping alongside of his friends, Mary and Martha. And I know Jesus has a good heart towards the grieving. I see the goodness of God in Jesus Christ as Christ welcomes children, as Christ protects a woman, who is being publicly shamed by a jeering group of men because she's been caught in the act of adultery. God is good.

I see the goodness of God in Jesus Christ as Christ reaches into the sores on a leper's body, as he heals the man who was blind from birth, and as he forgives his friend, Peter, who stabbed him in the back.

What do you hang on to when you are in the pit? God is good all the time. All the time God is good.

Joseph was taken down to Egypt and sold as a slave. In Genesis 39, Joseph began to regain his feet. He was a slave in the household of a man named Potiphar. Everything is going well for him, except for one thing. Potiphar's wife has the hots for Joseph. Here is what we read in v. 6,

Genesis 39:6–10 (NIV)

6 ...Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (NIV)

Joseph resisted temptation day after day. He obeyed God. He did what was right.

Someone listening today may be facing sexual temptation. You have the opportunity to have an affair. Why shouldn't you just go for it? Someone listening to me today may be having an affair. Why should you end it? Let me suggest three things to you why you shouldn't enter an affair and why if you are having an affair you should end it right now.

#1 – Because if you are a Christian, this affair will absolutely drive a wedge between you and God. It is impossible to feel connected to God while you sin against him through marital unfaithfulness. God will withdraw his presence from your life. God will become more and more of a distant idea to you. You will find it easier to turn your back on God, if you have an affair. It is impossible to continue a relationship with God while you are involved in marital unfaithfulness.

Why not have an affair? Why break off an affair? The Christian author, Max Lucado, in one of his books asked a really convicting question of any mother or father, who is thinking about having an affair. He wrote:

Mom, dad, would you intentionally break the arm of your child? Of course not. Such an action would violate every fiber of your moral being. Yet, if you engage in sexual activity outside of your marriage, you will bring much more pain into the life of your child than would a broken bone.

Mom, dad, would you force your children to sleep outside on a cold night? By no means. Yet, if you involve yourself in an illicit affair, you will bring more darkness and chill into the lives of your children than a hundred winters.

And you, single man or woman. You wouldn't desecrate a Bible or make a mockery of a cross. Yet, when you have unmarried sex, you disregard one of God's holy acts.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV)

19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

So, Joseph obeyed God. He said no to this affair. And what happened? Potiphar's wife falsely accuses him of molesting her. Here is what we read in Genesis 39:19-20:

Genesis 39:19–20 (NIV)

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

So what do you do

When you are treated unjustly?

God, I did everything you wanted me to do and you still let this happen. I can understand if I was disobedient. I understand the moral principle that runs through the universe that you reap what you sow. But it doesn't seem so in the life of Joseph. Here is what we read in Gen. 40:15:

Genesis 40:15 (NIV)

15 I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

This isn't fair. When you feel like you've been treated unfairly, what do you hang on to? What's the faith stake in the ground regarding God that you need to remember? We

talked about God is good. We drive that in one corner of our tents. God is good whether I like the outcome or not. But here the second faith-stake that I need to drive in the ground when our lives are in danger of being blown over by injustice:

What I hang onto: God is not a negotiator; God is a giver

What do I mean by God is not a negotiator? So often in our heart of hearts we think: I'm going to trade my obedience for God's blessing. There was a fabulous movie a number of years ago called Amadeus.

Picture of Amadeus

It was the story of Mozart. But more than the story of Mozart, it is the story of another musician that most of us never heard of before this movie, Salieri. In this scene, Salieri is an old man and he is thinking back on his childhood and a deal that he thought he'd struck with God.

VIDEO CLIP – Amadeus

Now, why did Salieri think that God would accept such a proposition? Because, like so many of us, he thought God was a negotiator. If I do this, if I obey God, then God will give me that. Maybe I will do you a favor, God. I will really go out of my way. Then, God, of course you will reward me with the things I really want – a job, a husband, a child. If I give this up that I know you hate, then I know you will give me what I really want.

Miroslav Volf, who I quoted earlier, said this:

If God were basically a negotiator, human beings would always end up with a raw deal. For one thing, God doesn't need anything we have to offer.

In other words, what do you have that God doesn't already own? We're always offering God his own stuff. I will give you my creativity. Well, your creativity belongs to God and he can take it back anytime. I will give you my energy; I will give you my hard work. I will give you a bunch of money. It all belongs to God anyway.

And second, even if we could entice God into making a deal with us, we would have no way of enforcing compliance. Since God doesn't need anything we have, and God's power infinitely exceeds ours, God can break any deal we think we've made with him. How are we going to enforce it anyway?

God is not a negotiator. God is a giver. Christyn Taylor wrote a blog in which she describes a horrific period of her life when she was in the pit. Her 7-year old daughter was hospitalized for more than 6 months with surgeries for a disease of the pancreas. Her husband was fired from his job. Several family members died and another was

diagnosed with brain cancer. Christyn was pregnant with child #4. Here is what she wrote in her blog:

Multiple hospital stays with my daughter were exhausting, but I held faith. Losing Brian's family members one by one, until there was only one left, who was then diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer, was incomprehensible, but I still held faith. Being hospitalized 7 ½ weeks with a placental abruption was terrifying, but I held faith. I held to the faith that God works for my good and though I did not necessarily understand the trials, I trusted God's bigger unseen plan.

God and I had a deal – I would endure the trial that came my way as long as he acknowledged my stopping point. He knew where my line had been drawn, and I knew in my heart he would never cross it.

He did. I delivered a still-born baby girl. With my daughter, Rebekah, still at home on a feeding tube and her future health completely unknown, it was a foregone conclusion that this baby that we so wanted and loved would be saved. She wasn't. My line in the sand was crossed. My one way deal with God was shattered.

Everything changed in that moment. Fear set in, and my faith began to crumble. My "safety zone" with God was no longer safe. If this could happen in the midst of our greatest struggles, then anything was fair game. For the first time in my life, anxiety began to overwhelm me.

Talk about being in the pit. Christyn Taylor concluded her blog this way:

I spent weeks trying to figure out why a God I so loved could let this happen to my family at such a time. The only conclusion I came to was this: I have to give up my line in the sand. I have to offer my entire life, every minute portion of it, to God regardless of the outcome.

My family is in God's hands. No lines have been drawn, no deals made. Peace has entered where panic once resided, and calmness settled when anxiety once ruled.

At some point, you will be brought to the place Christyn was brought to. I have been brought to that place where I have knelt down on the ground and said, "Lord, nothing that I'm doing is producing the result that I want. It is obvious that you are not a negotiator. So I surrender." Is there any deal you think you had with God, any line in the sand you've drawn that you need to surrender?

If you try to negotiate with God, you will be overwhelmed with anxiety. Our only hope for peace is when we surrender to God.

But here is a third faith-stake that we need to drive in the ground regarding God when we find ourselves blown around by injustice.

What I hang onto: God is with me whether I feel his presence or not

It is not wrong, friends, to go to God and to cry out, “Why is this happening? Why did my child have to die? Why has my child rebelled like this? Why have I been treated so unfairly when I tried to obey you?” We want rationality.

17 times Job asked the question, “Why?”

Job 3:11 (NIV)

11 “Why did I not perish at birth,
and die as I came from the womb?

Job 3:12 (NIV)

12 Why were there knees to receive me
and breasts that I might be nursed?

Job 3:16 (NIV)

16 Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,
like an infant who never saw the light of day?

Job 3:20 (NIV)

20 “Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,

Job 3:23 (NIV)

23 Why is life given to a man
whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?

Why, why, why? It is OK to not understand why something is happening. One of my favorite phrases that I’ve shared many times with others, who are experiencing hardship and don’t understand it, they don’t know what God is up to, is in 2 Corinthians 4:8 where we read:

2 Corinthians 4:8 (NIV)

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

You can be perplexed. You can say: I don’t understand what is happening to me. I don’t understand why it is happening to me. Paul was perplexed, the psalmist was perplexed,

Job was perplexed – but that doesn't mean you are sinning by being perplexed. You don't need to despair. You can be perplexed, but not in despair. You don't have to give up on your faith, or throw in the towel on prayer.

Why do we think we are going to understand every thing that's happening to us in the moment? The prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 55:8-9:

Isaiah 55:8–9 (NIV)

8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In other words, God is God. He is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely huge. He understands all of life. He controls all of history. How could we possibly completely fathom his designs. Even if God told us what he was up to, many times we wouldn't understand, or we wouldn't be able to receive it because of where we're at in the moment. It's OK to not understand. the Bible tells us that because God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways we often won't understand what God is going on.

But here again is the faith-stake in the ground. When we don't understand; when we are treated unfairly,

God is with me whether I feel his presence or not.

Genesis 39:20–23 (NIV)

20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Here's the thing, I don't know if Joseph knew that the Lord was with him while he was in prison. It says the Lord was with Joseph, but did Joseph know that the Lord was with him? Later on it says that he was forgotten in prison for two years. I don't know if during that time he said to himself, “I know that God is with me” or whether God was with him and he felt abandoned. But whatever we're going through, God is with us whether we feel his presence or not. Listen to Psalm 139:7-12:

Psalm 139:7–12 (NIV)

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

You can't be anywhere where God is not. If I go into the ICU, God, you are there. If I go to a funeral home, Jesus, you are there. If I visit my child in prison, Jesus, you are there in prison. God is with us not sometimes, not most of the time, not just when I feel his presence. God is with us all of the time. Just like God is good all the time; God is with us all the time.

If ever we need to know that God is with us in suffering, we have Jesus, who is called Immanuel, God with us. I don't know anyone who did a more masterful job of showing how God is with us even when we're in the pit, even when we're treated unjustly; even when the most horrible things occur to us and every line of safety we've drawn in the sand with God has been crossed, I don't know anyone who has portrayed better that God is with us in our worst moments than the Jewish artist Marc Chagall in his painting, *The White Crucifixion*.

Picture of *The White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall painted this while he was living in France and heard of the horrors that were going on in Germany following Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, where the Nazis unleashed mobs of their followers to terrorize all of the Jews in Germany in 1938. They burned hundreds of synagogues, smashed and looted thousands and thousands of businesses, murdered thousands of Jews, and then charged the Jewish people in Germany with the bill to clean it all up.

I want you to just look at this painting for a moment. In the upper right hand corner there is a synagogue burning and a man with a Nazi armband outside the burning synagogue. In the bottom right hand corner, we have a man carrying all of his belongings running away probably from a crazed mob. And at the very bottom in the right hand corner we have a woman, it's hard to see, but she's holding a little child. In the bottom left hand corner there is a man holding a Torah, the Jewish scrolls, trying to

protect what's sacred. And there is another man with his hands outstretched in blue as if to ask God, "Why? Why is this happening?"

On the left hand side of the painting there are folks fleeing in a boat trying to get away. In the upper left hand corner there are houses burning; this not in Germany, but in Russia. These are Jewish houses burning from the pogroms. In the center of the painting there is Jesus. And this Jesus that Marc Chagall painted is wrapped in a Jewish prayer shawl, a tallith. Over his head, written in Hebrew, are the words: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The patriarchs are hiding their eyes because they can't bear to look at the suffering of the Jewish people. But Jesus is identifying with his people. What the Germans did to the Jew, Chagall is saying they did to Jesus!

This painting tells us that God is with us. There is no place you can go, there's no pit you can fall into that Jesus isn't there with us.

Here is the third incident in the life of Joseph.

When you're through the storm

At some point the storm passes. The storm may last for a week, it may last for a month, the storm may last for a decade. But at some point the storm passes. And you look back on your life and you remember your time in the pit. You remember the terrible things that people did to you. You remember all of your suffering, all of your loss. How do you interpret your life?

Here is the fourth faith-stake that we drive into the sand that keeps our tent and our lives from blowing over during the storm.

What I hang onto: God has a sovereign plan for my good whether I understand it at the time or not

I don't think there is any more comprehensive verse in the Bible concerning how to look back at life after the storm passes than Genesis 50:20. Here is what it says:

Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

That word "intended" is a really interesting one in Hebrew. It means to weave. Joseph says, "You, my brothers, were trying to weave this plot of evil against me, but God remove the threads. He took the threads that you used and he remove it for good." God is the master weaver. He can take anything, anything, that is horrible and reweave it to produce good.

Now, this is no way is meant to reduce the evilness of evil. What Joseph is not saying is “What you did is not so bad,” and we shouldn’t say “what happened to us is not so awful.” Cancer in my child’s body is not so terrible. The death of my husband is not so bad. The sexual abuse that I suffered at the hands of my stepfather, or my mother’s boyfriend was not pure evil. The affair that my spouse had was not anything other than pure wickedness. We never want to compromise the utter evilness of evil. Joseph doesn’t do that. But what he says is God in his infinite sovereignty will take the evil things that people do, the hurt and pain that is part of this fallen world, and he will reweave it for good.

And then there is another really interesting Hebrew word here.

Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

That word “accomplish” is a construction term in Hebrew. It describes a task or building project like what’s going on at the Highway exit at Cleveland Avenue and I-270, or on the highway that many of you are going to see this summer – lanes reduced to one lane, cranes hovering all around. We get frustrated because our morning commute is slow and we’re stuck in traffic. But the engineers know that there is a building project going on and that it will one day be over. The highway will be built.

What Joseph is saying is looking back on my life, I see how God used the yarn of evil that you intended and reweave it for good. And I see how God was involved in a building project, taking the garbage, the injustice, the hurt, my child’s rebellion, this illness, and he built something really good out of it. It doesn’t take away the pain or the sting, but God can build something really good out of the rubble of our lives.

Let me close with this, in this Friday’s Columbus Dispatch there was a wonderful story about former all-pro quarterback, Jim Kelly, who lost his son through a terrible disease that affected his nervous system. Their son died when he was 8 ½. Jim and his wife, Jill, were raised Catholic, neither was very religious. Jill said that she was so devastated over the diagnosis of this disease in her son that she went on a desperate spiritual search that ultimately resulted in her finding Christ. She said:

It was my son, Hunter’s, suffering that caused me to seek after God. And when I found him everything changed.

Jim said he was so angry at the time with God that he told his wife to not push her beliefs on him. But after his son passed away, he came to faith too. And in the last several years the Kelly’s and their foundation, The Hunter James Kelly Research Institute at the University of Buffalo, more and more newborns are now screened for the

particular disease that Hunter had so that they can be given an umbilical cord blood transplant to slow the progression of this disease in utero.

What you intended for evil, God intended for good for the saving of many lives. Here are the four faith stakes when life hurts: God is good. God is a giver. God is with us. God is sovereign. Let's pray.

Where is God When Life Hurts? (The Life of Joseph)

Rich Nathan

April 11-12, 2015

God, I Have A Question Series

I. When you're in the pit

A. What I hang onto: God is good whether I would choose this outcome or not

II. When you're treated unjustly

A. What I hang onto: God is not a negotiator; God is a giver

B. What I hang onto: God is with me whether I feel his presence or not

III. When you're through the storm

A. What I hang onto: God has a sovereign plan for my good whether I understand it at the time or not