

## FOUNDATIONS

### Part 5: God is Absolutely In Control

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



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**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- Do you know someone who doubts the existence or character of God due to the problem of suffering in the world? (Or, perhaps you yourself once were a doubter?) Tell us about it.
- When you encounter difficulties, which of God's traits are you more likely to doubt? Why that one?
- Read Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. Are you troubled or relieved by this divine-human interplay—and why?
- How much—if at all—did the “Front of House / Back of House” distinction help you? Explain.
- **Why** do you think most people are quick to admit that we're not remotely as powerful as God, but are not nearly as willing to admit that we're not nearly as smart as God is?
- Do you have any bitterness toward God for the “hand he's dealt you” in life?



**Confused or in pain from God's plan?**  
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## Application-Challenge

- Trust God. Our careers and destinies are in his hands, not our bosses or the government. Nothing can touch us that God does not will.
- Pray. God is in control, so take your concerns to him. If you prevail with Him, then even the most wicked person must do you good!
- Refuse bitterness and resentment. If others have done you evil, God will hold them accountable. God—and no one else—ultimately is responsible for all that befalls you.
- Recognize our inability to understand many things of God. Make peace with the fact that, compared to God, we have “dog brains”.
- Buy and read Jerry Bridges' magnificent book, **Trusting God Even When Life Hurts**.

# Sermon Summary

We live in a painful, confusing world with way too much evil and injustice; how can we make sense of it? Believers have a hard time reconciling all the pain and evil in the world and the existence of God. Does God cause or allow these evils? What are the theological implications if he does—and if he doesn't? Pain and evil comes in all sorts and sizes. Natural disasters occur all the time. Politics creates even more heartache. Tragedies also occur on the individual level.

Three attributes of God create a quandary for believers: the Bible teaches that God is all-loving, all-powerful, and all-wise. But the existence of these tragedies suggests a lack in one or more of these attributes. Maybe God loves us, but he's not wise enough to foresee tragedies or powerful enough to forestall them? Or, maybe God is wise and powerful enough—but he just doesn't care? The murder of Jesus Christ is the ultimate test-case for this issue. Did God somehow not love Jesus? Did God somehow not have the strength necessary to protect Jesus? Did God somehow not have the wisdom necessary to out-smart Jesus' enemies? No, no, no (Matthew 3:17; Romans 1:4; Isaiah 46:10)!

So, how do we explain the death of Christ? This may sound like blasphemy, but the Bible teaches that the Father was responsible for Jesus' death (Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28)! At first glance, this may seem like a monstrous doctrine—but consider the alternative: God just didn't care? He was too weak or stupid to do anything about it?

The biblical teaching is that God did it and he used wicked men to accomplish his purposes. Just as restaurants have areas designed for the public called the "Front of House", while the behind the scenes areas—kitchen, pantry, dish-washing, and such, is called the "Back of House". We humans populate and function in "Front of the House", God operates in the "Back of the House". The Scriptures never present us as puppets on strings. We make exactly the choices we want to make. But back in the kitchen someone else is also acting too! All of this is rather confusing stuff; we're just not smart enough to understand how God runs the universe. Compared to God, we have dog brains!

Scripture says that God works all things after the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11; Job 12:23; 14:5; 38:8-12; Proverbs 16:33; 20:24; Genesis 45:5). All human actions—whether they take place on an international scale or within our own lives—involve both the front and the back of the house. It seems as if we alone decide and do, but God is the ultimate controller of all. And this is a great comfort to God's children (Psalm 56:11; Proverbs 21:1).

Sometimes the idea of God's absolute sovereignty—that he even employs evil to accomplish his good plans—causes us to recoil in horror, but imagine for a moment the alternative: God isn't in control. Then who is? Satan? Evil rules God?! Or, nobody's in control? Life is just meaningless and chaotic? Scripture does not explain how God combines his control with our willing and significant choices—and I'm confident that we wouldn't be smart enough to understand it if he did explain it to us. Rather than deny a plain teaching of Scripture simply because we cannot understand how apparently incompatible elements fit together, it is better to humbly accept both in an attempt to remain faithful to the teaching of Scripture. And God promises that his reasons for bringing pain into our lives are just as good as his reasons for bringing pain into Jesus' life.

## Talking To Others About This Week's Message

If a neighbor or friend at work asked you, "*What kind of stuff do they talk about at your church?*", how would you summarize the most important elements of this week's sermon and the key lessons you intend to apply to your life? Can you explain it in **plain language** anyone could understand?

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

*Let's explore the extent and nature of God's control (even if we can't understand it)...*

- According to each of the following passages, over what does God's control extend?  
Psalm 103:19  
Psalm 104:14  
Psalm 104:21, 28  
Job 12:23  
Psalm 139:16  
Psalm 75:6-7  
Proverbs 16:33  
Romans 8:28  
Psalm 7:12-13  
2 Chronicles 33:13
- According to each of the following passages, how is God's preservation of the universe described?  
Hebrews 1:3  
Colossians 1:17  
Acts 17:28  
2 Peter 3:7  
Job 34:14-15 & Psalm 104:29
- According to each of the following passages, how is divine / human cooperation seen?  
Genesis 45:5-8  
Exodus 4:11-12  
Joshua 11:6  
Ezra 6:22  
Philippians 2:13
- According to each of the following passages, how is God's governance of the universe seen or described?  
Psalm 22:28-29  
Psalm 103:17-19  
Daniel 4:34-35  
1 Timothy 6:15  
Matthew 10:29-31
- What was the significance of the diagram to the right?  
Which of those characteristics do you tend to doubt first or most?  
What one word would you use to describe a god who...
  - ...was loving and powerful, but not wise?
  - ...was loving and wise, but not powerful?
  - ...was wise and powerful, but not loving?

