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Video:

One of the greatest questionnaires in the history of 20th century psychology had a modest start in the pages of a local Colorado newspaper, the Rocky Mountain News, in July 1985. The work of two University of Denver psychologists, Cindy Hassan and Phillip Shaver, the questionnaire asked readers to identify which of three statements most closely reflected who they were, in love. To hugely improve our chances of thriving in relationships we should dare to take the same test.

Option A: I find it relatively easy to get close to others and uncomfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

Option B: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner and this sometimes scares people away.

Option C: I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I'm nervous when anyone gets too close and often others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

Which of these options applies to you: A, B or C? Behind the scenes the options refer to the three main styles of relating to other people, first identified by the English psychologist, John Bowlby, the inventor of attachment theory in the 1950s and 60s, option A signals what is known as a secure pattern of attachment, whereby love and trust come easily. Option B refers to what's known as the anxious pattern of attachment where one longs to be intimate with others, but is continuously scared of letdown and often precipitates crises in relationships through counterproductively aggressive behavior. Option C is what is known as the avoidant pattern of attachment where it feels much easier to avoid the dangers of intimacy through solitary activities and emotional withdrawal.

Sermon:

So! Which are you? We're gonna do a little quick survey here, I'm serious. Oh, and this is to remind me to remind you to stop by at the Lift at the end of the service. So, will you remind me to remind them? Who's got a good memory in the front row? Okay, at the very end, if I forget to mention it, you say it. Okay, so, we want to do a little survey here. As you assess yourself would you say that you are secure in your relationships, or would you say that you're a little anxious, you tend to be a little bit clingy, or would you say you're avoidant, like you feel suffocated kind of quick. Would you text your answer in right now to that number and tell us what you are. Theoretically I guess we could find out who you are if we cared but we don't - really, we don't. This is anonymous, so we're just trying to figure out how screwed up our congregation is. So where are ya?

We're in the series that we're calling 4D Love. It's love in four directions. The whole gospel summed up with this call that we're to love God, love ourselves, love our neighbor as ourselves, and to love and

take care of the earth and the animal kingdom. And we're gonna be sprinkling in some attachment theory in the process of this, alright? And attachment theory is basically this: If you're secure in your relationship with your parents you're going to be more inclined to be secure in all your relationships as adults. But if you're insecure, if you couldn't count on them, if they weren't always there, whatever, you're gonna have a challenge in those areas. You're either gonna be clingy, you'll be anxious or you'll be avoidant.

Now as with any psychological theory there are always realities much more complex than that. I'm here to testify that you can have two parents who raised two children exactly the same way and they come out completely different. So every theory's got its limitations. And there's always free will and it's always possible to change in all things like that. So you're not predestined to be avoidant, or whatever, you can change those things. But it does help us kind of become self-aware of ourselves. Given our background, we tend to protect or do we tend to cling, and things of that sort. So we'll be flushing that out throughout this whole series.

What I want to do today is talk about why it is challenging for so many people to really develop a vibrant, secure, bonded, trusting, fulfilling relationship with God. And one of the reasons is - one of the main reasons is - because we live in a world that doesn't much reflect a loving, caring, always present, always accessible God. We live in a world where there is an incredible amount of pain. So how are we supposed to have this bonding, trusting relationship with God when, what are we supposed to trust him for? It seems like things kind of unfold rather willy-nilly and haphazardly, so it's not a problem of evil. So the title of this message I'm ominously entitling, the Devil's Chaplain. Too bad this isn't Halloween week, that would just fit in right now, the Devil's Chaplain. I'll think it's something scary for Halloween week. You'll see what that means here in a little bit.

So it's not a problem of evil, but first I want to just kind of quickly cover the biblical foundation for this 4D love, love in four directions. When Jesus would ask what is the greatest command he said to love Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And we like to emphasize that mind around here because the mind is for thinking so you're worshiping God when you're thinking authentically. This is the first and greatest commandment. He couldn't stop there, the second is like it, or it could be the second is a reflection of it, a derivative from it, so much so that I can't mention the one without mentioning the other. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commands.

So there's two commands but really there are two sides of one command: You are to love God and then out of that love relationship with God you're to love your neighbor as yourself. And on this hangs all the law and the prophets. And law and prophets is simply a Jewish way of saying the whole Bible. So everything hangs on this - our being able to love like this. We'll see throughout this series that love is the sine qua non of Christian ethics. It's the "that without which nothing else matters". If we get this one down, if we can love like this, then everything else we need to get down will get down. But if we don't love like this, if we fail to love like this, then it doesn't matter what else we get down - it's altogether worthless - 1st Corinthians 13.

So there we have the three loves that we're talking about. The fourth one comes from a reading of Genesis. In Genesis 1 we read that God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves." Here we're entrusted, given this authority, to take care of the earth and the animal kingdom. And we're to do that in a way that reflects the way God lords over us. We're to have a loving dominion, the way that God has a loving dominion over us. We're to care for and steward the earth and the animal kingdom. So this encompasses the whole of what we're called to do: Loving God and loving ourselves, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and then loving everything in earth and the animal kingdom.

You could diagram it like this if pictures work for you. And this really just kinda sums up the whole message of the Bible. God is Cross-like love. First John 4:8 - God is love. First John 3:16 - love is defined by the cross. Here's how we know what love is - Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. So do the math. God is love, love is the Cross, God is Cross-like love. The triune God, Father Son and Spirit (that's why I have it as a triangle), is united by the

kind of love that's revealed on Calvary: A perfect unsurpassable, unwavering, infinitely intense, other-oriented love. That's who God is.

Now out of that fullness of love God creates human beings. And God creates us in his image. And part of what that means is that we have a sort of God-shaped vacuum inside of us. But we're never to experience a vacuum, it was meant just because God wants to pour his whole life into us. And then out of the fullness of the life that we received from God - where we get our identity and our worth and our significance and all that, our love-ability from God - then we overflow in love towards other people. And as we overflow with love towards other people, they overflow with love towards us. And we, together, then all take care of the earth and the animal kingdom. This is how God designed it to operate. This is God's goal.

And see as that happens, when that becomes realized, now the whole creation will reflect the love of the triune God. We're encompassed by the triune God. This is part of what it means in First Peter when it says that we are participants of the divine nature. We're caught up in the triune love, and all of creation is caught up in that triune love. And when this is fully realized, when it's fully actualized, and praise God someday it will be, Amen? When it's fully realized, God's love will define every square inch of the cosmos. Everything would be sort of like a fractal of the triune love of God. And in that way God's love has been expanded and now all of creation glorifies God. And that just means it puts back the beauty of God's love on display. As we're caught up in that love, and we share that love, and it circulates over the earth, this is reality as God intends it. That was the plan. That is the kingdom of God; the dome over which God is king.

To the extent that God is reigning over a person's life, or over a group's life, it will resemble that, it will be moving in that kind of direction. And that was the plan, that still is the plan. It's about bringing God's will, seeing it done, on earth as it is in heaven. That's been the goal all along. Now someday that will be realized, but our job is to manifest it now. As followers of Jesus our job is to put on display that 4D love as much now as possible, to give the world a preview of what the whole world's gonna look like later on. Okay, so we're calling to manifest this now but I want us to notice: Everything hangs, the spicket that introduces the love of God into this world, comes through the individual. It's as we are aligned with God and our relationship with God is secure and it's life-giving, as transformative. To the degree that that is true we will then be overflowing with love towards others and taking care of the earth and the animal kingdom, but to the degree that that's not true the whole thing falls apart.

So it brings us back to this fundamental question: How do you have a stable bonded trusting relationship with God when you're living in a world where random, capricious things can hit us? A world that's so ... at least it doesn't consistently reflect the character of God. And sometimes it dismally reflects the character of God. Sometimes it seems to reflect the character of the devil. How do you trust God and what do you trust them for? Your health? That might go tomorrow. Your job? That could leave you tomorrow. I mean, we live in this very iffy world. How do you develop a bond and trusting relationship with God in a world like that?

We're gonna watch a video here, and this video is an interview with Stephen Fry from this one reverend, and I forget his name, but Stephen Fry is this professor who's also a well-known atheist over in England. And this is - I think - one of the most passionate, one of the most eloquent and powerful statements on behalf of atheism I've ever heard. But we here at Woodlands Church, if what we're believing is true, should have nothing to fear, right? So our attitude is "let's hear what he has to say; let's bring it" alright? Now it might rattle a few cages, so be ready for that. But you're worshiping God when you're thinking, so keep thinking. And as much as you may be mesmerized by Stephen Fry's comments don't forget to keep one eye open to capture the response of the Reverend because it's kind of entertaining. Let's watch.

I love that guy's face - What did I get into? I'm wondering, like, what do you think God thinks of Stephen Fry? Maybe to some it seems obvious but, like, I imagine that a lot of Christians just assume that anyone who's

gonna give an answer like that is gonna -- excuse the pun -- fry. [laughter]. Hey, if you think Fry's gonna fry, is God up there ready to throw a thunderbolt at him, or could God be applauding that? Here's the thing, if I assumed that God was behind every parasitic bacteria, viruses, everything that inflicts pain on animals and on humans.

If I thought God was behind that, God designed things that way, then I'd be in his camp. And it seems to me that there's something praiseworthy about his willingness to say that. He's kind of admirable. He's putting truth above his own self-preservation. He's essentially saying, okay look, you can damn me if you want. You've got the power to, but I'm not gonna bow down and lick your boots and pretend like you're all good and all loving when you openly acknowledge that you are the one behind all this misery and all the suffering.

If that was true, well, then there's something praiseworthy about this. I won't do it. I'm not gonna pretend, saying you're all loving all good, all beautiful even though you do these horrendous things. Why would God be mad at that? If in fact that's a false picture of God, and I think it is, God applauds people getting rid of false pictures of God and that's false picture number one. And so it seems to me that God would be applauding that. I worry about - frankly, if I can be honest up here, I'm just thinking out loud - but I kind of worry about folks who have that picture of God but don't reject it. They are willing to bow down and they believe that God is behind every single affliction that affects people, every parasite, every disease - - God's behind all that, in fact God predestines all that. And yet you are supposed to say God's all good and all loving, even though, maybe, for all I know you predestined my newborn baby to go to hell. Maybe my whole family to go to hell. But I still will call you good and I still call you loving, because if I don't then that indicates that maybe I'm gonna go to hell.

It's a "save yourself" theology, it seems to me. Take my kid! It's a hangman theology. Take my kid, I'll still call you good, just don't take me! It seems to me that, given the two, God would be looking at Mr. Fry more favorably. If I die and go to the pearly gates and I meet a monster God who claims to have done all these sorts of things, I'm gonna assume it's a test - my last test. And I think God will want me to respond more like Fry than like a lot of Christians. But in any case the question still needs addressing. If this world's created by and sustained by an all-good, all-powerful, all-loving God why is it so screwed up?

Now some of the suffering is easy to explain, or at least it's not that hard to explain, I think, because human on human violence, that's not too hard to explain once you understand that the goal of the whole thing is love. And love has got to be chosen. It can't be coerced. And so love presupposes free will, and free will presupposes you have the power to do this or to do that. This being the good thing; that being the bad thing. And if God gives you the power to do this and to do that then God can't take away that power because you're going to do that. Because if God took away the power because he didn't want you to do that, well then he didn't give you the power to do this or to do that. Which means he didn't give you free will. Following this? If you have free will you have the power to go do this or that which means God can't just intervene and revoke that. And this is why there are things God can't do - not because he lacks the power but because of the kind of world he created. A world where love is the goal, so free will is the means and there's no way to create that world that's capable of love without risking the possibility of evil coming in because you give agents free will. And so that isn't that hard to explain, I don't think, human on human violence and in our capacity to harm the environment with our decisions. That I can explain.

But what do you do with what's called natural evil. What do you do with some of the atrocities that are in nature? The parasite that its whole life cycle is a worm into the eyeball of a child and eats it from the inside out. We got parasites there that, we just had this happen this summer where this kid contracted this little tiny one-celled bug in his ear that ate his brain. There's a bug out there in our lakes, and it's in a bunch of states, that once it gets in, they can get in the ear. It goes after the brain and almost always kills the victim. If not that it will leave them mentally impaired. And we have that in our lakes here. Why would God design that?! That's a good question. And there are tons of examples of this. Things that seem specifically designed to inflict maxi-

mal suffering.

One of the things that caused Charles Darwin to lose his faith as he was really getting in touch with all the suffering that's been going on throughout the whole evolutionary process. He was like, what kind of God would design things like this? He was really impressed by this one wasp. It's called the Ichneumonidae wasp. Why they give these wasps these long Latin names, I don't know. But this wasp, it lands on a Caterpillar and immediately paralyzes it with this poison that paralyzes the caterpillar but doesn't harm it - the thing is just frozen. Then it implants its larvae, hundreds of them, inside of this caterpillar. And the larvae feed on that caterpillar for seven to ten days, eat it from the inside out. But they know, somehow, exactly which organs not to harm to keep the caterpillar alive to the very end. There's an intelligence there, but it seems like there's a design there, but it's not a benevolent one, not a kind one.

And so Charles Darwin, he was trained to be a minister actually at one point in his life, but he lost his faith because of how is nature so red in tooth and claw? It's vicious. It's nasty. Why is that? He wrote this to a friend of his. He said, "What a book, a devil's chaplain," and here's the title, "What a book, a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy wasteful blundering low and horribly cruel works of nature." What he's saying is that if there's a story being told here, it's a story that's told by the devil's chaplain. It's got a demonic side to it in other words. If there's an intelligence at work it's not an altogether good intelligence. And he ended up thinking that there wasn't any sort of intelligence at work. So what do you do with this?

Now I'm gonna give a response to that and I'll give you a warning here: Number one, we are gonna worship God with all of our minds, so prepare to think. Number two, if you've never heard me talk on this topic before it might make your head spin. You may have never heard it before and so I encourage you as you're listening to this, if it sounds really weird, like - what? I've never seen creation this way - is ask yourself the question: Am I being biblical? That's the only relevant question: Is this biblical? And then three, I'll give you another warning, I'm going to prove you that it's biblical by deluging you with a bunch of Scripture.

So let's go. Get ready. And if ever you were a person to take notes, now would be a good time to take notes. And also it's 8 minutes to 12, so this might go with some rapidity. Get ready for your head to spin. For some of you people this will be a review but a very important review. For one thing, in Genesis 3, you might have noticed that it's only after Adam and Eve rebel, the Lord says that there'll be thistles now and thorns, and the grounds gonna be hard to work, and there's gonna be pain in childbirth and nature becomes unpleasant. But that only happens after the Fall. Now I don't take this as a scientific report. I don't think it was intended like that, but it is revealing a truth, that there's something off with nature as we now find it. It wasn't supposed to be this nasty.

Here's a second consideration. In the New Testament we read a lot about principalities and powers and rulers and authorities and dominions. These all refer to different categories of high ranking spirit agents, many of whom rebelled. And the understanding in the first century - and you always have to compare to understand what a text means, you have to look at what it would have meant in this context - in that context, rulers and authorities and dominions, they refer to these high-ranking spirit beings who had authority over nature. And some have authority over a human society. And they're supposed to use that authority to bless us and to work in line with God. God always works through mediators; they're supposed to be one of the mediators. Just like God gave us the authority over the earth and the animal kingdom, and we're supposed to bless the earth and the animal kingdom. But when we fall we can now use that authority, that say-so, at cross purposes with God and bring destruction on the earth, the animal kingdom as well as on ourselves.

Well the same thing is true on a cosmic level, it's just that they have more authority. And so the understanding is that when they rebel against God they now use that authority because it's irrevocable; God can't take it back once he gives it, otherwise he didn't give it. And so God now has to work around these agents but if they had authority to bless the creation they also have authority to curse the creation. And I submit to you that every

aspect of nature that does not reflect the benevolent character of God, I think, comes from wills other than God; it comes from the corrupting influence of these agents.

Then we find the fact that Satan is, in the New Testament, given some incredible titles. There's no Jewish literature in the ancient world that comes close to ascribing this much authority to Satan, or to any other of these fallen agents. But Satan is referred to as the Prince, the Archon of this world. Archon referred to the highest position in a given region; the CEO. Doesn't mean you're the highest position everywhere but in this region you're the one in charge. And Jesus says that of Satan. I meet people here and there who say I can't believe in Satan. I can't believe in spirit beings. Yeah, I think that's medieval stuff. And my response - I don't always say this, but - it's like, well, tell you what, If you die and rise from the dead I'll listen to you more carefully. Meantime, this guy's got the credentials. Yeah I got a good reason to think he's the son of God, so if he thinks that there's a Satan who's the prince of the world I'm gonna believe there's a Satan who's the prince of the world.

And then he was called the prince ruler of the air and the god of this age, Paul says. And John goes so far as to say he controls the entire world. Now that's hyperbole but he's making a strong statement here: This world is now oppressed by this thief who comes only to kill, steal and destroy. He's got remarkable authority and so it seems to make perfect sense that if the world's screwed up, some of it's gonna be the result of him and the principalities and powers doing what they're doing.

Then we find that in the Bible sometimes Satan displays some authority over nature as in the book of Job. He's able to cause the lightning to come down and destroy some of Job's property and winds that blow over other kinds of stuff. You find him doing the same thing in the book of Revelation, controlling the winds of the four quarters of the earth, and that's symbolic but it's all predicated on the assumption that, of course, Satan can interfere with nature; can corrupt nature. We might see a reflection of this when Jesus rebukes the storm in Mark 4 he uses the same word that is used when he rebukes a demon; when he's casting a demon out of a person. And so he's treating this storm like a demon.

Now I don't think it means that there's a demon behind every storm but it does show that there's a demonic quality when we're supposed to have dominion in this world. And so to be in a position where there's a storm that could possibly kill you that ought not to happen, it reflects that there's something wrong with nature as it's now running. And so Jesus rebukes that. I've tried rebuking a couple storms but never to any effect so far but I'm working on it.

Okay, we find in Hebrews that it says Jesus came to destroy the devil who has the power of death or holds the key of death. That's why Jesus calls him a murderer from the beginning, John 8:44. So here's the thing: Death is simply an absolutely natural event, given the laws of physics that we have today. It's an absolute principle. Everything's got to die. We can't even conceive how it could be otherwise. And yet the passage here says that Satan is the one who is the lord of death. So what does that say about the laws as they operate now? If the laws as they operate now require death, and Satan's the lord of death, doesn't that suggest that the laws as they're operating now have been tampered with by the lord of death so that they will bring about death? I'm just saying, it seems to make sense.

Then it says Jesus came to destroy the devil and his works. This is what Jesus was doing throughout his whole ministry. The works of the devil were the sickness and disease and the deformities and all the other things that Jesus confronted. That's why the Gospels diagnose these things as coming from the enemy. And Jesus reveals God's will in contrast to the will of the enemy by bringing healing to these people. He came to destroy the works of the devil, that means that these things are themselves the works of the devil, and yet they're totally predictable given the laws of physics that we have today. The laws of physics that we have today, I submit you, are not identical with the ones that God created.

And then we find Peter summarizes Jesus' whole ministry when he is pitching to Cornelius. He says Jesus was

anointed by God and he went about doing good healing all who were under the power of the devil. What does that say if you need healing? You're under the power of the devil. I know we've got a long Christian tradition of, you know, attributing everything to God. But Peter here is summarizing Jesus' whole ministry and the whole category of those who were in need of healing are under the power of the devil. They're suffering because nature, as it now is, has been corrupted. And Jesus came to set them free. It doesn't mean that there's a demon behind every headache but it does mean that there's an enemy force behind all infirmities. Whatever there's something that doesn't work the way it was designed to work by God, there you've got interference. And that reflects the ongoing influence of the principalities and powers.

And the final thing I'll say is that in all the pictures of the end of the end of history, of heaven, in all of them we have a whole creation that has been restored. There's no violence in the animal kingdom. The lion will lay down with the lamb. The child will play with the cobra and stuff. Which tells us then that if the world right now is not that way it's because something is wrong; it's still in need of redemption. We haven't quite gotten there. I'll also add that this was the uniform view of the early church, which I think is important because these are the folks that are the direct heirs of the Apostles, and they kind of interpret the Apostles. Not that they get everything right but they should be paid close attention to.

If you were to ask anybody the first three centuries of the church, Why are there these killer parasites, and why are there droughts and famines and mudslides and bone cancer and all the other terrible things that nature sends our way? Why? No one would say, Oh, the Father's will is so mysterious. Somehow these things all contribute to the beauty. No, they don't say that. What they all uniformly say, Tatian, Tertullian, Origen, they'd say, this, an enemy has done. This world, we're living in an enemy occupied territory. We're behind enemy lines. We're in a war zone and when these terrible things happen as a result of nature, they'd say it's because nature, as it now is, is corrupted.

Athenagoras was a second century theologian. He said this about Satan. He said that Satan is a spirit originally entrusted with the control of matter and the form of matter. He was the Archon of the material world; the CEO of material issues. And he was supposed to use that in line with God's will to bring about God's will throughout the cosmos as it is in heaven. Unfortunately the prince of matter now exercises control and management contrary to the good that is in God. Just like human beings we now offer a kind of control and management of the earth that is contrary to the good that is in God. And the result is that everything under us suffers. The same thing is true but in a bigger way, Athenagoras is saying, of Satan. So all suffering and violence and creation is the result of the corrupting influence of an evil ruling prince, and the demons, his followers.

God didn't do it, He wasn't the one who was imagining all these terrible things in nature, it's a result of corruption. This is why Paul also says in Romans 8, he says that this entire creation groans. It's experiencing frustration and decay. Now just look at that. This creation is in bondage to decay and it's experiencing this frustration, which means that the decay isn't supposed to be here. And yet look - one of the most fundamental laws of physics is the second law of thermodynamics which says that everything tends towards decay. Everything tends towards entropy. Everything winds down. But if that's not part of the original creation, well then ... Paul's saying that's one of the reasons why it groans. We're groaning in this decay. And he liken it to the pains of childbirth, like a guy would ever know. Like a woman in pains of childbirth. But obviously he's trying to grasp onto, like, what is like the worst thing imaginable. And the greatest pain, the first thing comes to his mind, is childbirth.

So it's like this creation is going, you did this to me! Experiencing the pain, expressing the pain of the estrangement from God here. But it's the whole creation that's down. A lot of Christians seem to think that the fall, the primary fall, was a human fall and that right now humans, maybe, are tainted, but the rest of the world is operating just as God intended. But I submit to you that the human fall is a footnote to the grand fall which was the fall of the angels; the rebellion of the angels. We got caught up in their downward spiral and we're still caught up in that whole thing.

But we don't have the authority to affect the whole cosmos. Yeah we can screw up the earth pretty good, we're doing a good job of that but our sin doesn't reverberate throughout the whole cosmos. There's something, someone bigger than us that is also working at cross-purposes with God, and that is the one that the Bible describes as Satan. I know it's not fashionable to believe in Satan, demons and all those things today, but I'm telling you they're real. It's real. I'll go into that some other time. But the whole creation is travailing in this - and this is my final argument on behalf of the corrupted creation - the whole creation needs redemption, which already shows that it isn't the way it was supposed to be.

So in Colossians, for example, we read this: God is at work to reconcile to himself all things. Bad things whether they're on earth or things in heaven in the heavenly realms. Heaven by the way isn't always just a pure wonderful place where God lives in the Bible. It's a spiritual realm and so it's the heavenlies. There's good stuff going on there and there's bad stuff going on there. But someday that will all be reconciled, and he does it by making peace through his blood that's shed on the cross. And we know if we hear that sacrificial language of the blood shed on the cross, it's simply a way of communicating the self sacrificial love that was revealed on the cross.

So here this author is saying that right now God is at work with the same love that redeemed us on the cross is at work to redeem the entire creation. And it's at work to reconcile everything to God; to make everything harmonious; to bring God's Shalom to all things. But that presupposes that all things as they now are are broken and in need of redemption. And here's another thing, that Christians sometimes think that we're the only things that are fallen and we think that we're the only things that God saves. What I'm submitting to you today is everything got fallen, everything is broken, and everything's being redeemed, praise God. But it shows that the creature that we have right now is still in need of redemption. And the evidence of that is that it operates the way that Fry describes it operating. You can see some of the glory of God in all creation for sure but you see a lot of other nasty stuff that reflects the influence of the enemy.

So here's three quick takeaways that I want to get from this. Number one, and these are foundational pieces here at Woodland Hills Church, it'll be a review for a lot but new to some. Number one: Don't - I encourage you, I implore you, I beg you - don't base your mental picture of God on anything that's happening in the natural world. It will screw you up. Yeah, you thank God when you have good health and things are going right and you don't have the hookworm, and you don't have the tapeworm, you're not have the parasite - that's wonderful. But don't be sure if you haven't got all that because tomorrow you might get it!

Praise God, pray for health and praise God that you've got health but health is a really iffy thing. And so if the proof that God cares about you is that you're feeling healthy, what happens when you get the news that you're gonna die in three months? You see, thank God for whatever good comes your way. Every good gift comes from the father above but don't look to that to be the kind of proof that God cares about you. Oh, I know God loves me because he's taken such good care of me. Well you think that people who've got hell dumped on them didn't love God? Read the book of Job, it happens all the time! So thank God for the good that comes but base your mental conception of God - we say this ad nauseam here because it's worth saying ad nauseam - but base your conception of God entirely on the person of Jesus Christ, and especially on Jesus Christ crucified. He's the full revelation of God, not one revelation among others. This is what God is like, amen?

And when he says, if you see me you see the father, we've got to really trust him on that. He says don't look anywhere else. Keep your eyes focused. This is the Son. This is the one Word of God. And so here's a rule of thumb that I use. I encourage you to do the same. It's important that we can divide and separate the wheat from the tares. one is of God and one's not. And so here's a rule of thumb: If we see the father when we look at Jesus then it would seem to follow that if we can't imagine Jesus doing it we shouldn't imagine the father doing it. Now I don't know about you but I can't, from all that I've read about Jesus in the Gospels, I can't imagine him specifically designing a parasite that can work its way into a kids eye and eat it from the inside out so the

kid is blind. Something rubs me wrong about that when I think of Jesus doing that.

Or any of the other million kinds of things that can inflict maximum pain on people and on animals. I can't imagine Jesus doing that. Everything he did he was the opposite of that, and so why would I ever think - insurance policies notwithstanding - why would I think God's behind that? I operate with this perspective that everything in nature and in the world that does not reflect the benevolent loving will of God, the character of God, comes from some will other than God. Whether it's humans or whether it's angelic or a combination of the two. But to be able to separate - this is of God, this is not, this an enemy has done.

And I can't tell you the number of people that I have met who have just been liberated when they could get free of the idea that God's up there pulling all the strings, that God is inflicting your kid with this bone cancer or what have you. To get free of that, it's just allowed them to love God again and to trust God again. Don't let the circumstances of your life be the proof that God cares about you. The proof that God cares about you is Calvary, and the proof that God loves you is Calvary. The proof that God is good is Calvary, hallelujah! When all else is going on in your life keep your eyes fixed on Calvary, that's where God is revealed.

Second thing is the good news. And that is that it won't always be like this. Yes, we're experiencing the pain of estrangement right now, but that pain, Paul says, is the pain of child labor, which means it's going somewhere. This pain is going to give birth at some point and it'll be beautiful. And it will be wonderful to the point where Paul says that all the suffering of this present age can't even be compared to the glory which God has in store for those who love Him. And it's unimaginably beautiful, so it's going somewhere. It's not that God causes any of this. He's not the cause of any of the suffering and the evil in the world, but he's a master at bringing good out of evil and a master at using everything the enemy does to move forward towards his plans. And someday, praise God, that will come to pass.

That triangle that I had earlier, if you can put it up there again, that's the kingdom of God and someday God will be all-in-all. Paul says someday God's love will define every square inch of the cosmos. Someday there'll be perfect harmony reflected throughout the whole cosmos. Someday the harmony of the triune God will itself be the harmony of the cosmos and God will be all in all and it will be beautiful. And I can't wait, hallelujah. Soon and very soon.

Last thing. Important. If we're still waiting for that future reconciliation, the cross, meaning all things together, if we're still looking for that it means that we're still in the broken world. And it means that we have to accept that we're part of this broken world. We all come into this world and we inherit brokenness, and that's the starting point. Which means we've got to deal with our brokenness and be honest with our brokenness. Now here's the thing - in this toxic culture in which we live words become weaponized very quickly and the word broken has been weaponized to the point where some religious groups use this idea of "broken" as a judgment.

Like, maybe we're not perfect - but you're broken. You're defective. With the inkling, the meaning, you don't belong here. You've got the deal-breaker thing. But see, the biblical concept of brokenness should have the exact opposite effect on us if we're understanding it rightly. And it should lead us not to judgment but to compassion. We're born in this broken world and we inherit this brokenness. All of us are broken in a multitude of ways. I think far more broken than we let on. We get a picture of ourselves and it's hard for us to be really honest with it. But I'll tell you, I've had a tremendous amount of healing in my life, praise God, and it's been beautiful, but still I stand before you a broken person. I'm broken, I will admit it.

And all of us are broken physically because we all get sick and die, but some people are more obviously broken because they have parts of their body that were designed to work a certain way, but it doesn't work that way! Whether it's a mind or an eye or an ear or what-have-you. But all of us are broken in emotional ways and if we don't inherit the brokenness through our genes we acquired through our upbringing but we're broken

emotionally and psychologically, mentally, sexually, relationally, spiritually - we're broken! And there's no point whatsoever in trying to play this stupid religious game of ranking whose brokenness is worse than whose.

The point of saying we're all broken is that that's the last word. There's no competition here. We're not supposed to be eyeing each other up on that. In fact Jesus came to free us from that and says do the opposite of what you're inclined to. You're inclined to just think your brokenness is less than another person so you can, like, feel righteous. No, in fact, assume the opposite. Whatever you see in another person, consider that to be a little dust particle compared to this tree trunk coming out of your eyes. And there's a million dust particles in a tree trunk I'm sure, so if you're inclined to judge somebody, remind yourself on Jesus' authority that you're a million times worse.

And it doesn't matter what you see in the other person. It doesn't matter if you consider yourself a million times worse, not to berate yourself or get down on yourself but to free you from the temptation to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which is a tree of judgment. What Jesus is saying is quit that game. Consider yourself the worst of sinners. If you really consider yourself the worst of sinners that might be bad news for you. I mean, you're kind of a loser aren't you? But see, you're only a loser if you're still playing the judgment game. It's just that now you're turning it on yourself and the point the whole thing is to free us from that judgment game - to have a community where our only identity is found in Christ.

And we're not sizing up, and we're not comparing, we're not contrasting, we're not looking at somebody else and wondering about their sin. If someone invites us in our life - fine - we'll share an opinion when they want it. But it's like we always say around here, if someone hasn't invited you in on your life then you're allowed one opinion of them. And I don't care who we're talking about. That guy in Florida who raped all those teenage girls and he's committed suicide in prison. Society needs to lock him up, that's for sure. And he'll see justice someday but we leave all that to God. I need to look at that guy and, like Solzhenitsyn said, that the thread of evil runs through every human heart. And I can say in different circumstances I might be him. I'll leave judgment to God there. But I can't make myself superior to him - or to anybody else. In fact, I got a tree trunk compared to that guy.

And it's so freeing to do that, because now you're free just to love and you don't have to assess and you don't have to size up. And when you get a community of people who all believe that, you have a community that's free of that kind of judgment. And that's what I love about the Tap, which is having a Christmas party by the way on October 20th. All labels off, you're just free to love.

Or I talked to Teen Challenge the other night and it's just so beautiful. When you talk with people in recovery they've dealt with that BS, they don't have time for that anymore. It's like we've been there, done that. But we all know why we're here, right? We're all addicts. We all are in need. We're all broken. We're all sinners. We got nothing to hide. We got nothing to lose. We can be free and be honest with each other. We can speak the truth in love to one another.

So folks, that's the good news, we're to be a community. Look, we're we're all part of this creation travailing in labor pains, right? But you don't blame the woman in labor for having labor pains. No, you would have compassion, wouldn't you? The point of the brokenness is to elicit compassion, not to elicit judgement. Don't let any of your mental picture of God be infected by the war zone of this world. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Go to him regularly and receive that love, breathing in deeply. And out of that comes all the transformation on our life. And when you finally get that you, in fact, are loved for free in the midst of your total brokenness, that's when you begin to be healed out of your brokenness, step by step. Amen. Because you've got to get rid of all the pretense in order to get there.

Would you stand? [Someone in the audience shouts out "The Lift!"] The Lift! Oh, thank you! Don't forget to stop by out in the gathering area. Talk to these guys. C'mon, let's get 'em over that. They need three hundred. That

should be easy for us, and then they get an extra five thousand and that's a good thing. Also don't forget the Congolese ministry. We want to be supporting these folks. And I know we ask you guys for money a lot but, you know what, it's going to a good cause, and don't you like giving to things that are a good cause, that further the kingdom? We're actually doing you a favor! You get to give to something that matters! And as we leave here can we do it as a people that are committed to always having our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and receiving his love on a moment by moment basis and sharing it with others. If you are in agreement with that, say amen and go out and love your neighbors. God bless you guys!