

Series: HEADWINDS—February 25, 2006

**WHY ME?
Romans 8:17-28**

I. INTRO

- A. There is something in musical circles called **dissonance**. It's when two notes clash. **Dissonance** is actually a vibration caused by the clashing of two different sounds. To be honest, it sounds awful. For a musician, it's like scraping your fingernails down a blackboard.
1. But when dissonance is used purposefully, it creates a kind of tension in a song, or a story or a drama—that, when it's relieved, completes it. In a story, the dissonance is created by some evil or some injustice or some unresolved tension. Then, in about the last 10 minutes, there's resolution and everybody watching breathes a sigh of relief.
 2. If dissonance never gets resolved—music turns into noise and stories leave you hanging and frustrated.
- B. Pain creates dissonance in life. And when it never seems to be resolved, people begin to question whether life has any meaning—and whether there's anyone at the helm of the universe. Many of you would recognize the name of Frank Jones—a well-known journalist who writes for the Toronto Star. In February, 1997, Frank wrote a column entitled, **Does God exist? I don't believe so**. Why doesn't he believe God exists? Is it a huge philosophical argument--based on undeniable scientific evidence that just doesn't corroborate with the existence of God? Not at all.
1. His basic issue is **dissonance**. Frank was apparently raised in the Gospel Hall. He has some understanding of God. He just can't bring together the existence of God as he understands Him and the existence of pain in the world--and especially how those who claim to be close to God have inflicted pain on others in His Name.
 2. He's not alone. Several years ago in a private survey done on questions people had about God, the #1 question, by far, went something like this; "How can there be a loving, all powerful God when there is so much suffering, injustice and evil in the world." Either God isn't all powerful, or He's not good. This morning, I suspect that for some of you, pain in your life, or in the life of someone you know and love, has caused you to ask some private questions about God. Hard questions. Scandalous questions. You're not alone.
 - a. The book of Job is a book jammed with the questions of a person suffering intense pain. Job lost everything—including his health—and he shakes his fist at God and says, "Why me? What have I done? Why don't you meet me face to face and **answer** me?"

- b. David sometimes rails at God: “What are You doing? Why when I need You most do You seem to be hiding and silent? I don’t get it, God. Where **are** You?”
- 3. And I’ve asked that question. There have been some times when I’ve begged God to deliver me, begged Him to show me the way out—and at the time, with the perspective I had—it seemed like I all I got was...**silence!** No answers.
- 4. In this series of messages, called “**Headwinds**”—I want to talk about the times in life when it seems the gentle breezes moving us along have now turned into gale force winds. And they’re not just slowing us down—they’re blowing us backward. I need to tell you up front—the title to this message, “Why me?” is not a question I’m going to answer. But I am going to address it—and my dream, my most sincere prayer, is that you will find hope and comfort—and companionship.

II. SOMETIMES LIFE FALLS APART

- A. I want to read a verse to you that has been quoted a lot to people in pain. When you’re in pain, to be honest, it makes you want to choke and gag. Let me read it—then I’ll explain. ***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28 NIV).***

-Maybe the biggest problem we have with this verse is the word, **ALL**. I think the word "most" or "some" would work for most of us--***And we know that in SOME things...MOST things, God works for the good of those who love him...*** "All" includes too much; the times when life falls apart and we are forced to live with agonizing pain. Let’s talk about pain.

- 1. In his book, ***PAIN: THE GIFT NOBODY WANTS***, Dr. Paul Brand talks in very graphic terms about Hansen’s Disease—commonly known as leprosy. It’s a disease of the nervous system where people inflict trauma on their bodies—simply because they can’t feel pain. Pain is the warning system in our body that says, “Stop what you’re doing—or you will permanently injure yourself.” I don’t think anyone would disagree with the fact that we **need** this warning system.
- 2. This verse is found right in the middle of a passage dealing with pain.
 - a. In verses 12 and 13—Paul, the author, makes a very important observation about pain—that sometimes we bring it on ourselves. ***For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die (Rom. 8:13 NIV).*** It’s the law of the harvest. If you don’t exercise, or eat junk, or overstress your body, or do stupid stunts—you can do all kinds of damage. I think we know that.
 - b. But this passage gives us another reason for pain. Sometimes, it says in vs. 17 – “...***we share in...[Christ’s] sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*** Anyone ever heard the phrase, ***No pain...no gain!*** Pain is very often a price we willingly pay—because we know it will lead to something better—whether it’s getting an education, or saving to buy a house, or having a child—or working out.

- c. There's another reason for pain—that is more generic. This passage says that the whole world system we live in has been subjected to long-term frustration and suffering because of the sheer weight of sin. It describes creation as **groaning...like it's in childbirth**. It's like all of creation is in pain—and it seems like nothings being born. How frustrating is **that!**

-It continues by describing our world as being in **bondage to decay**. Truth is—sin, greed, hatred, racism, lust, wastefulness, pride—all the other junk we've thought up and done is just rotting things.

It's destroying nature, it's ruining families, its degrading children and women. **Decay** is absolutely the right word for this.

- B. Let's just be honest at this point. I don't think this is the kind of pain people have in mind when they question the goodness of God. I think that's what happens when, like Job, the pain hits us, not once—but with sledge-hammer blows—and it's unrelenting. What happens seems so huge, so devastating, so immensely evil and unfair that the dissonance makes us want to scream and hold our ears.
- Remember Job? God had singled him out as blameless—bragged about him. And then he lost his livestock, money—even all his children. Then he lost his health. However, Job did **not** lose his wife—she said, “Curse God and die, Job—at least I'll be able to collect life insurance. Actually, she **didn't** say that. When Job lost his health—and his wife reacted like that, it was like the straw that put the camel in a full body cast. Then his friends showed up—and they were fine for a week, you know, when they kept their mouths shut and just grieved with him on the ash heap. But then **they** started. “You know you've sinned, Job. That's why all this has happened to you. Just admit it—and you'll have your life back!” Ever have friends who seem to have answers to your life even God hasn't revealed?
1. Philip Yancey wrote a book entitled, **Disappointment With God**—and I personally think the title is dead on. When gale force winds hit our life and knock our boat over, we're disappointed with God. Disappointment happens when our expectation of what God is going to do way exceeds our experience. We're **under**-whelmed.
 2. What **do** you expect of God? Ever thought about that? I think we expect that God is going to be fair—right? Just. That good will be rewarded, and evil/wrong will get punished. Even little kids expect this. But some people walk through life and see examples of unfairness all around them. Again, this is a very common theme in the Bible. One writer in the Psalms says, in amazement:
Surely God is good...to those who are pure in heart. As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man... (Psalm 73:2-5, NIV)

When it seems that the crooks and the thieves and the scoundrels are all doing very well—and our lives are stacked up with one hassle after another—we thing, “Gee, **what's the USE?**”

-We also expect that God will speak to us, right? I mean, it's only fair. If we have a relationship with Him as a close friend—and we have a question—He should answer, right? A lot of Christians seem to imply that God does that all the time, “Yeah, the other day I was looking at this car, and God told me...”

-We think, “Wow—God doesn't talk to **me** like that! Is there something wrong with me?” There have been times when I've prayed and said, “God—just tell me what to do. **I'll do it! No questions asked.**” Silence. What's disappointing is that even though God has promised to be a friend who will never leave our side—it **feels** like He's treating us like we're a stranger.

-He's not returning our phone calls. The letters return unopened—or at least it feels that way. David once told God, “I feel like you're treating me like I'm an alien or a stranger! I thought we were friends?”

And we're disappointed when God seems hidden. Job said over and over, “God, **just show up!**” We think, ‘How does God's seeming absence fit with a God who promises **never** to leave us or forsake us? John the Baptist experienced this. He's sitting in prison--simply for criticizing King Herod's divorce and remarriage. Jesus is free—walking around, healing people, doing amazing things. John was so puzzled by this that he finally sent out two of his disciples to ask, “Are you **really** the Messiah?” The hidden question was, “If you're really the Messiah, why don't you **do** something about me being in jail?” Pretty good question.

3. Let me just say out loud what really gets us. The fact that people who love God and serve him faithfully still get hurt. And that doesn't seem fair.

- C. What do you do with this? Talk to your friends about it? That didn't work out very well for Job. What they had to say was condescending—“Here Job, let us help you stop screwing up so you can get your life back.” Their perspective was that pain is **always** caused by being off-track with God. Get back on track—and God starts blessing you again. If you and God are cool, well, there's a miracle a day and your bank account stays full. By the way, some people still preach this stuff. Job got pretty frustrated. At one point, he said:

I've had all I can take of your talk. What a bunch of miserable comforters! Is there no end to your windbag speeches? What's your problem that you go on and on like this? If you were in my shoes, I could talk just like you. I could put together a terrific harangue and really let you have it (Job 16:2-4, Msg)!

1. How many of you ever wished you could have the presence of mind to say something like that to someone who's pontificating on your pain? He's good! Know **why** people tend to explain other people's pain in terms of something

they're doing wrong? It's because if they **can't** give a clinical explanation—it means the same thing could happen to them! And we would all like to think we can take evasive maneuvers and always avoid **pain**.

2. Know what I've discovered? This **why** question is so monstrous that people tend to come to all sorts of conclusions about how it defines either the existence of God, what He's like, or how He relates to humans.
 - a. Some people who are disappointed with God basically do what columnist Frank Jones did. They basically say, "There's suffering in the world--so God **ISN'T!**" Eliminate God--eliminate disappointment. Anyone ever heard of Madeline Murray O'Hare—probably the most famous atheist in North America? Read about her life—and you'll find her standing in her yard in the middle of storm, screaming in pain, shaking her fist at a God who doesn't exist.
 - b. When C.S. Lewis was in agony over losing Joy, the love of his life, to cancer, he couldn't deny the existence of God—he was too bright for that. -What he did doubt, for a while, was the **character** of God. He describes God as a **vivisectionist**—like a 10 year old boy who pulls the wings and legs off flies and watches them squirm. "God is great—but he's not **good**." Or at the very least, He's unpredictable. A person who believes this way describes life as being like turning the crank on a jack-in-the-box; you don't know if a good god or a mean god will pop out.
 - c. Some people simply believe God doesn't care—He's off adjusting the twinkle on stars some place. Philosophically, it's called **Deism**--that God created everything and then pretty much left everything to run on it's own. A little like starting a self-propelled lawnmower—and turning it loose. It will probably mow some grass—and also take out a rose bush or two.
 - d. Or maybe pain is evidence that God is good—but not great? Harold Kushner, the author of **Why Bad Things Happen To Good People**, basically implies that God would like to help people--but He just can't. He's this weak, grandfatherly being who really feels awful about our pain--but, "Gee, I just can't **help** you! **Sorry!**"
 - e. There is one more position--and that's to deny that pain exists. Buddha said that the secret to happiness is to eliminate desire. The Hindus say, "Pain isn't a problem, it's a **karma** problem—your soul needs to get recycled several hundred—or several thousand times until the **karma** is all worked out. Christian Scientists say, "Pain? What pain? Pain is an illusion." It makes you want to say, "How about if I kick you—and see if you have a pain illusion!"
3. I've read a lot of books on this stuff because it's such a huge issue. One was written by Ronald Dunn. He and his wife went through an intensely painful time

with a son who was severely bi-polar. And their pain hit a whole new level when they came home one day and found that their son had committed suicide. Ronald wrote a book entitled, ***When Heaven Is Silent***.

-What is really helpful is Ron's description of the stages he went through in dealing with his pain—from his friends being amazed at the peace he had—to the point where the “why” question had so angered him that he went into a deep clinical depression that lasted seven years.

-Know what Ron says—based on the huge perspective he has—from personal experience and what the Bible says? He says, “**Why?** is the wrong question. **Why?** is a dead end street. I agree.

III. THE RIGHT QUESTION

A. You know what's fascinating about the ‘**Why**’ question? God showed up and lived on this planet for at least 33 years and **never** answered it. And He had plenty of chances. One thing He did make clear—and that is that bad things don't happen to us because we're worse than others and God needs to kick us into submission.

-Let me put it like this. You come upon the scene of an accident. Someone is lying on the road, severely injured, bleeding profusely. What would you do? Try to figure out if they ran a stop sign?

Or if they had been drinking and driving, or using their cell-phone. The point then isn't “Who's at fault?”—the point is, “Get them some help!” And that's what Jesus always focused on. “What are **we** going to do about it—because God can use **anything** to display his power; even things like **this!**”

-Please hear me, because this is the **core** issue. 1)The question **why?** is virtually unanswerable. The best question is, “**What now?**” Don't look backward and do forensics; look ahead and ask, “What could God do with even **this?**”

1. The problem is that: 2) The question, “**Why? Why me? Why this?**” is almost irresistible. Job asked **why** a whole bunch of times. He misinterpreted God's apparent silence to mean that God was totally speechless—maybe a little embarrassed that he had treated Job, this wonderful man, so poorly. That is—until God breaks the silence. He in essence says, “Fasten your seatbelt, Job!” Then **God** asks the questions--over 70 of them. And it's like He turns on the Discovery Channel, straps Job to a chair, and makes him watch it.

-God's answer to the **Why?** question was, basically, “Guess what—3) **you're not God!**” That's tough when the inquiring mind **wants** to know? God says, in essence, “**I know what I'm doing—and you're going to have to trust Me!**” 4) **I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING! TRUST ME!**

(Note: Slides 1, 2, 3, 4)

2. Remember what Romans 8:28 says: **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28 NIV).** The theme is **trust**. It says **AND WE KNOW**. In the

Bible, those are always words of certainty. Words you can strap your life to and hold one. We **know**. But notice where the trust is. Is it in **all things**? How many of you think that you can look at all the circumstances of your life and tell by the way everything's stacking up that a whole bunch of good is coming your way? If that happened--I wouldn't have to talk on this subject. That doesn't take any faith. -You really can't **trust** circumstances. So...**so** you have to trust God—because, see, He's the one that can take **anything**—even His Son hanging on a cross—and use it for our ultimate good, and the good of the world.

- a. Now, there's something I need for you to notice—and that's who this applies to. It applies to people who **love God, who have been called according to his purpose**.
- b. Let me just net it out. The **only** way this kind of good can come out of headwinds is because of the power of God's Spirit. It's an inside job. Responding to God's offer of grace and forgiveness is what **we** do to invite the Spirit into the core of our lives. It's from that control center that He comforts us, strengthens us and directs our lives. Know what God's purpose is for us? How many of you think it's for us to have a cushy pain-free life—and be the glittering success we always hoped we'd be—and then die old, rich and happy? It's not. His purpose—the good God is working toward in **ALL THINGS** in our lives—is to make us like Jesus.

See, contrary to what you sometimes hear, God is not like our personal genie that we keep tucked away in a bottle—largely ignored--until we run into something we can't handle.

But when He's invited to the core of who we are—well, He can use any ingredient that's thrown our way. A few months ago I did a cooking show. Anyone remember the bananas I used to make banana bread. They were disgusting, slimy looking things. God can use stuff that seems rotten and useless to us as part of a recipe to make something really good.

- c. There's something else you need to know. The trajectory of our lives is headed for another shore—and eternal one. God's plan is a **long-term** plan. What that means is that you and I may experience pain in this life that still doesn't make sense on our deathbed.
- d. The problem with just blaming God for the problem and the pain, as I see it, is biting the only Hand that can reach into the swamp where you find your soul—and rescue you and use the pain for your ultimate good. As I see it, we have two options; #1--to be disappointed with God. And you need to know, He has broad shoulders. He can handle your disappointment. Option #2--to be disappointed **without** God.

3. What is this verse really talking about when it says that God can work in all circumstances for **our good**?

- a. You may be disappointed—but one thing it **doesn't** mean is that you will have a healthy, wealthy pain free life. God is at work in our character—the finish line is on a distant shore—not the shore of Lake Ontario—or Lake Simcoe. God reminds us of this in Isaiah 55:8-9:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

-When our daughter Kelly was about 2, we were visiting Lori's parents Etobicoke and Kelly fell down their stairs and drove her one front tooth right up into the gum. Well a short time later, she needed a root canal. So I sat in the chair and held her in my lap while they did a root canal. On a two year old! It **still** makes me shudder.

-Now, do you think she understood at the age of 2 why her Dad, the one she trusted, would take her to a strange place and hold her tight while some dentist drilled into the nerve channel of her tooth? I don't think so. Was it necessary? Absolutely!

-In the book of Job, both Satan and God agreed on one thing: **Faith that depends on health and prosperity and success is not genuine.** Who wouldn't at least pretend to love and worship a God who instantly gave you everything you wanted? My wife Lori has often said, "God doesn't owe us an explanation.

- b. I find extreme comfort in the words, **all things**. There are no loopholes. Life is not a giant crap shoot. God is massive enough, wise enough and powerful enough to take quadrillions of shards from the brokenness of our lives—and fit them together into something that's breathtaking. For some reason, He finds us too valuable to do otherwise.

B. Know what maybe the bigger question in all of this is? What do you do when you're stuck right in the middle of suffering that seems incredibly unfair and almost unbearable?

1. Well, one thing you have to do is remember that winter is a legitimate season of the soul. I'm going to be talking about that during the Easter season. Let me ask a question I've asked before. How many of you would say you've grown most when the sun's shinin', cotton's high, Mama's pretty, and Daddy's rich? Not me. As much as I hate and dread pain—that's when I've grown the most. Job put it like this, "Should we accept the good and not the bad?" In fact, the Bible uses some very interesting images to describe suffering.

It's described as a smelting furnace that purifies precious metals. It describes it as threshing—beating wheat to separate the grain from the straw. It's described as stomping on grapes to release the juice. The most helpful picture is of childbirth—that awful, painful process that ultimately produces a living, eternal soul.

2. The second thing to remember is that God can handle your honesty. Did you know that God is not waiting for you to quote verses and do God-talk when you're hurting? What He longs for is your honesty. If what you believe about Him doesn't match your experience with him—**TELL HIM!**
3. Third, sometimes there are tough days when the lights go out—and all you can do is what you know to do. Keep walking.
 - a. I once heard a missionary from Vietnam give an image of this that I've never forgotten. He said he used to watch workers go out into the rice paddies early in the morning carrying a set of old bicycle pedals. They would hook the pedals up to a paddle wheel that moved water from one rice paddy to another. He'd watch them come back at sunset carrying their pedals. "Hey, what have you been doing all day?" "Oh, **pedaling. Just pedaling.**"
 - b. That's not a pleasant thought for microwave, Pentium 4, instant messaging, I-want-it-**now!** people." But sometimes all we can do is—pedal. In the darkness, there's something better than light. Faith—and that's how we have to live. In an incredible chapter on suffering, Paul says:
For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18 NIV).
4. Fourth, God knows firsthand what it's like to suffer. If you're struggling to make ends meet, Jesus understands poverty. He was born into it. You've lost someone you love? Jesus lost his Dad—very likely as a young man. Jesus was betrayed by a best friend; Jesus was mocked and laughed at and misunderstood. Want to talk pain? Jesus was almost beaten to death—and executed by the most painful means humans have been able to think up.

-And He knows what it's like to feel the silence of God when life hits its lowest point. Remember his cry in his last moments on the cross? "My God, my God—why have **You** forsaken me?"

-But it goes even deeper than that. The Spirit of God dwells inside every believer—and what we go through, **He** goes through. The shame of failure; the feelings of being unwanted and unloved; betrayal; pain; mental and emotional

breakdown; the heartbreak that comes from parenting; the unspeakable pain of losing a child—He **knows** it because He is there, simultaneously, with 2.1 billion people who have invited Him into their lives. He's with those who starve to death, those who are tortured to death, those who are sold into slavery, taken into the hills of Ethiopia and crucified. He knows. He feels.

5. Maybe more important than anything, friends, we have to realize that even though our pain seems so stupid and senseless—we only see a tiny part of the whole picture of what is going on—and what God is doing. You got a puzzle piece as you came in today. If anyone can guess what the whole picture is from that one piece, I'll give you 20 bucks.

Hold that puzzle piece right in front of one eye and close the other. What do you see? This is my point--you can't develop your whole theology and philosophy of life around a tiny piece of an infinitely big puzzle.

-If you can't figure out what a puzzle is based on one piece, then don't judge an eternal God and all of reality based on a tough, painful era of life. You need perspective.

- C. When it comes to the bottom line in all over our suffering, what brings hope and comfort is not knowing more **facts**, but knowing someone.

1. Imagine your 15 month old child going up to a lamp, grabbing the cord, yanking it—and getting shocked. They're sitting there screaming in pain.

-So, you run up with your little easel, flipchart and pointer and you explain that how a lamp cord works—and how when it's plugged in, the rubber is supposed to shield one's hand from electricity—but should that rubber be.... They don't need an answer—they need the **Answerer**. They want someone to hold them, comfort them.

2. And when we suffer—we need Someone. We need to be held—by God, and by the arms of people who know Him. And God offers us what we need most. Himself. He says, "Throw your cares on me—I **care!**" As our Shepherd, God offers us a safe place to rest. Direction for when we get lost; protection when we're afraid; and forgiveness when we fail."

3. I want to tell you about something that is really critical in making it through tough times. Know what it is? **Roots!**

Roots are not gorgeous, magical things. They're gnarly and hairy—but they keep you standing when it feels like the headwinds are going to blow you off the cliff. And you and I need roots. Roots that go deeply into God—and roots that go deeply into the community of his people. Roots that keep us nourished and standing firm when the headwinds are howling around us!

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. How many of you have noticed that there are sails **all over** the place here? There's a reason for that. There are people on this planet who **pray** for there to be good strong winds. And it's not just people who use the big propellers to create electricity. It's sailors. See, for sailors, a good stiff wind means more power—because wherever the wind comes from, they have a way of moving the sails to catch as much of it as possible—and move ahead.
- B. At the end of the book of Job, what you find is a man who asked all his questions; was honest about all his doubts—and his anger and his frustration—but, who, in the end spread his sails. I'm sure there were things about his experience that he never understood—but his confidence was not in his own understanding—but in the immensity of a God He knew, without a shadow of a doubt, **loved** him. And that's the legacy he leaves for us.
- Today, you might want to write on your puzzle piece what it is that puzzles you about God—and keep it. You may want to write on it the situation you need to trust Him with—and trade it in for bread and wine—symbols of what seemed, for a short time—to be a senseless tragedy. Don't go into spiritual hiding—spread your sails! Catch the wind! I think you'll find that God is in it!