

Torrey 2003 Life outside the Box

By Colleen Swindoll Dane

Speaker 1:

So let's go ahead and open in prayer as the rest of those that are coming in can come in quietly, we'll just bow and ask the Lord's favor on this afternoon. Dear gracious Heavenly Father, Lord God of this universe and God of this place. Thank you, Father God that we can call this place by your name and we come before you now lifting your name up on high, giving you glory and honor. Thank you, Father God, for the time that we can set aside classes and just focus on you, who you are, what you say in your word, what you've done in our lives, what you've done in the lives of those we've heard. Thank you, Father God, that you are great and want to be honored. We want to come before you this morning, Lord, and submit our hearts to you and ask for you to teach us. Teach us from Colleen's experience. Teach us from your word. Teach us, Lord, so that we can be faithful to teach others as well. Thank you, Father God, for this day, this afternoon, this weather. And we give you all glory, honor and praise in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, you've already seen most of you sing Colleen Swindoll Dane this morning and thoroughly enjoyed her talk. She has quite a gift of speaking. She's since then spoken at a luncheon. So she's just gone from speaking to speaking to speaking all day. So she is quite a dynamo full of energy. I want to tell you a little bit about her. She's a graduate of Trinity College. She was a biology student here and she sat in the pews you're sitting in after she went on from here to graduate and get married. She moved about 13 times in a period of nine years. So she's traveled around quite a bit. She now is a speaker who travels. She has three children that are Ashley is eleven and then

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Austin's nine. Jonathan is six. You heard a little bit about them earlier today. If you heard her earlier. She is also the aunt to Ryan and Chelsea Swindoll, who may be here today and won't make them stand up Biola students. She's the wife of a pastor of Chino Hills Community Church.

So those of you that are in the area looking for churches, you can go and visit her husband, Mark's Church there. And her passion is teaching God's word. So we're so excited that she's going to open up God's word to us today from the Book of Habakkuk. She's going to be teaching on life outside the box. So please, let's give her a great Biola. Welcome, Colleen Swindoll Dane. Colleen Swindoll Dane:

What are we doing? With a.. All right, good to see you again, guys look familiar. I hope you're after your lunch was good. I'm still trying to get myself squared away up here. I have some as the results are coming in and settling in, I want to start out by saying a few things about America. Only in America can pizza get to your house faster than the ambulance. Only in America are there handicapped parking places in front of the ice skating rink. Only in America do people order a double cheeseburger, large fry and girls what we say a Diet Coke. Only in America do we use answering machines to screen our calls and we have call waiting so we don't miss a call from someone very important. Only in America do they have at the drive of ATM machines with Braille lettering on them and we see why. Here are a few wide questions. Why don't you ever see a psychic win the lottery? That doesn't make any sense to me.

I think that if they knew what was ahead, they would win it. And the last one, why didn't Noah kill those two mosquitoes before they got in the boat? Anyway, those are a few fun little things that I wanted to do as I open up our afternoon session together, as we said, a lot to teach. I love

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to teach from God's word because I find that it is lasting and true and it penetrates any part of our lives that we have a question about several years ago, I don't know if you all will remember, but a man named Robert Folbre wrote a book titled Everything I Needed to Know.

I learned in kindergarten. And in the introduction, he says all that I really needed to know about life. I learned in my kindergarten class wisdom was not at a graduate school level, but in the sandpile at the Sunday school. Here are some things that I learned. I learned to play fair, don't hit people, put things back where you found them, clean up your own messes. Some years remain the same. That to one another. Don't take things that are not yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Take a nap every afternoon, flush and put the lid down. When you go in, when you go into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together. It would be so nice if life fit into those simple rules. Play fair, be nice, stick together, clean up after yourself. All those little guidelines that make up a thoughts that we would call our lives every person in this room has inside of them. Kind of. I forgot my box. Actually, I usually have one, but they have a box that what goes in are the activities that we have, the things that we do, the pursuits that we want to follow after dreams and goals. And then we kind of fit God into that box as well. But there are times in life where with the best of planning and intentions, life falls outside of those boxes. Let me give an example.

Several years ago, with three small children, we decided camping was the cheapest, easiest way to have a family vacation. So we bought this pop up camper and the kids were much younger. So they were always excited to go out and it was spring break coming up. So we had planned to go

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to this very beautiful place in Oklahoma. Now, coming from California to Texas, Texas tends to be a little flatter and going up to Oklahoma, it has maybe a few hills, but it's not real hilly.

So we did our research and we found that there was this mountain, apparently in Oklahoma, Queen Wilhemina State Park. So we told the kids, guys, we are going to go have this great time camping. Why spend four days out there? It's going to be beautiful. I mean, we built up the expectation that it was going to be the greatest vacation they would ever take. So we go in the seven hour drive with our Rottweiler, who weighs as much as I do in the car.

And we arrive at this state park, which is about four for slab cement things surrounded by nothing. And we all kind of went, oh, my gosh, this is not what we expected. We did all of our planning. We did all of our study. We did on top of that. But when we got to this place, it was just horrible. So after unpacking a tent trailer, did any of your camp or do you know, did OK, tent trailer stuff, you just have to it explodes.

The next morning we decided we're going to pack it all up, drive a few hours north and we'll go to the place that we usually go to, which is beautiful. Drove in about seven o'clock that night. It was getting dark, unpacked, put our camper in apparently what was a reserved spot. Well, we didn't know that, so we got all set up. In the next morning, the park ranger comes around and says, y'all are in a reserve spot, you're going to have to move your camper.

So we packed up the dog, packed it, the camper, packed up the kids. I was ready to pack myself up and go home. We scooted everything over and we had one day left and it rained the entire

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day. I was so mad. But that is what happens. We we try to have as much fun as we could.

However, due to all the planning, all the arranging, it just did not work out like we wanted it to do.

So it is true. With our life box, we want God and our activities to fit into these comfortable parameters because we know what to expect and we know what to count on. However, I have found that God that we worship and that we have faith in is way outside of any kind of box that we would make. And that can kind of throw us off in our walk. I think Larry Crabbe has a wonderful quote in his book *Shattered Dreams*, where he says, We have shrunk Christianity into a neat little package full of blessings that, if opened, will empower us to feel good now and feel a little better in the next life.

It is not primarily about getting saved out of hell and heaven. It is not primarily about living a certain way that creates fewer problems to make us makes us feel better about our lives. Yet we arrange our lives to minimize suffering. And we believe that Christianity offers a God who will cooperate with our plans. To be very honest with you, for much of my life, I want God to cooperate with my plan. As you heard earlier this morning, he did not cooperate with my plan. In fact, he had a much better plan, but I had to adjust and let go of my boss.

An excellent illustration of this in the Bible is in the Book of Habakkuk. How many of you have ever studied the book of her back? I'm so impressed when to go well for the rest of you is going to be an experience. I have never studied the Book of Habakkuk. When we moved to Dallas several years ago, I entered Dallas seminary, planned on finishing up and took my hermeneutics class in that class, Dr. Bailey taught on the Book of Habakkuk.

It was the only class I was able to take because Jonathan became so ill that I had no other time to do it. But if you will open up to the Book of Habakkuk, which is near the Old Testament, take your time. It's not one that we open too often. And while you are searching for it, I want to give you a little bit of a background. Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets. He is one of the only minor prophets that did not speak directly to the people.

He was in dialog with God. In fact, it's a journal. Some are similar to what Lamentations is to the Book of Jeremiah. Lamentations is Jeremiah's journal. Habakkuk is a journal that he wrote as he was working out the fact that God is outside of the box. Evidently, in the situation that Habakkuk finds himself in a small but very powerful military force is coming up and Judah is going to be overtaken and Habakkuk's complaint, is how in the world, Lord, are you going to use these more wicked people to overtake us and destroy our land?

That doesn't fit into my little box. In fact, Chapter one and I of my chapter one versus two, therefore says, How long a war must I call out for help? But you do not listen or cry out and say violence, but you do not say, why do you make me look at injustice and why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me and there is strife and conflict. Therefore, he's saying as a result, I am saying the law is paralyzed.

Justice does not prevail. The wicked triumph and the righteous and justice is perverted. Basically, Habakkuk is stating for chief complaint number one, the law is paralyzed. He believes there is a law, but evidently it's not working because the Chaldeans, which were very wicked, are coming

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up in power and God then seem to be stopping that from happening. The second complaint he has is that justice does not prevail. He finds that even the most unjust people are the ones executing justice. So there's going to be no justice. The wicked surround the righteous and justice is perverted.

Habakkuk is wrestling with the fact that God is saying to him, I'm going to allow this to happen and it's not going to fit into your comfort zone. But it is for the ultimate purpose of my plan. Habakkuk is not the only person that has ever struggled with this in scripture. Three different passages in Psalms. The writers are saying the same thing. Psalm tends Psalm Ten is a psalm of moral outrage. And it says, Why, oh lord, do you stand far away?

Why do you hide yourself from trouble? The writer is saying on a moral level in the area, I don't see that you are working. And it seems like it's getting worse. Some thirteen shortly after some ten is the song of David where he is crying out. How long? Oh Lord, are you going to ignore me forever? How long are you going to turn your face for me? Why is it that he's crying that out? Because he has been hunted for about 12 or 13 years by his father in law to kill him.

If you think about that, running from your father in law, a very powerful person for 10 to 13 years is quite a long time. So I can understand that David would say, hello, Lord, where are you? I'm calling out to you and I don't have any response. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever said to the Lord, My heart is deeply troubled and I know your word says that you're going to rescue me and be my comfort and my shepherd and that I'm a sheep.

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But I do not feel your comfort. I do not sense your presence. Some seventy four, again, is mostly about either the county, an invasion or the anti persecution. One of those to the riders, are they are they, you know, discuss all that something negative is happening. And some seventy four says, why have you rejected us forever. Oh God. Will you, why do you hold back your hand from us. The conclusion from her back at the beginning of that chapter and these riders in Psalms is Lord, either you don't care about my situation, which is contrary to his character.

Either you are indifferent to my situation, which is contrary to what he says about his love for us, or you are not able to stop this from happening, which is contrary to the fact that he's all powerful. So what do we do with these things? What we do with them is we have to analyze the kind of box that we want God to fit into. God, I want you to do justice within these parameters. God, I want you to exercise control and justice in my way, and that's not the God that we serve.

Jamie Phillips has a book titled Your God is Too Small. I think it's out of print that you can get it on Amazon.com. It is a short book, but it offers 13 preconceived ideas that we have about God and how we see him and want him to fit into these little boxes when really he is so much bigger and at work in your life and in my life in such a bigger way than this tiny little box that we want to put him in. As we go back to her backpack, her backpack continues in Chapter one to talk to the Lord, saying, you know, this is what I see.

And I don't think that you're hearing me. And I don't think that you care in a very Collene paraphrase, the dialog goes the Lord responds to back and says, if I told you what I was going to do, you probably wouldn't believe it back. It says, Oh, yes, I would tell me I'd believe in the

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Lord. No, you wouldn't believe it if I told you. Yes, I would. Finally, the Lord says, and the beginning of Chapter two, sit down, write down what I'm going to say, and I will tell you what I'm going to do and back response responses.

I don't believe it. I cannot believe it. How often? That is my response. OK, Lord, come on. Just give me some direction here. And he gives me direction and I go. I can't believe that because that requires that I step out and say that means that I won't know what two steps down the road is. I will have to trust you because this does not fit in my box, in my expectations of what life is to be about.

The theme verse for her back. It is chapter two. Verse four. It is a very simple, simple statement, but it is profoundly difficult to live by in our human condition. Verse for the end of the verse, says the righteous will live by faith. I don't know how many of you have had experiences that have required faith where you had no idea what the next step would be, and yet you continued to trust in the Almighty God.

This morning I was telling you all about Jonathan and our journey with him through physical and neurological challenges and planting churches. And what I didn't mention was this last year was probably the hugest step of faith because it became abundantly clear that we were to relocate. Market started the church in Dallas and was desiring to go back to the senior pastor position. I had eight doctors in place that oversaw Jonathan's continued work. My other son, Austin, had language processing issues.

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So we had him in different therapists. And the I mean, it's just so clear that God was moving us to a place outside of Dallas to I don't know where. And that was probably one of the hardest things in my life, because it meant releasing all that was in place, all that fit into my box. These doctors, they're right here, these therapies for my children, teaching them how to read and how to do their step. This is all in my box.

God, you want me to let go of that and step out and say believing that you will take care of us. He may be telling some of you through the experience of being at my own university to step out of the way outside of a box that fits your comfort zone. And it is scary. I'm not saying that this is easy. Just kind of step off the cliff and go, oh, here we go. Let's hang on and he'll catch me.

It is a step of faith that requires us to count on the character of God because he's the one doing the moving. As we read to the end of the chapter of Habakkuk, it is a prayer that he writes down in his journal. God has told him what he's going to do. God is going to allow the evil force to take over and he is going to wipe out a bunch of people and have back its response. Is this chapter three, verse 16 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound. Decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled. Basically, guys who say in this news scares me to death because it means persecution. It means death. It means injustice will occur. And that scares me to death. Then he says the fig tree does not burn and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crops fail and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls. I mean, that pretty covers it for his life right there, though I see no possible work that could be good in this.

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I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God. My Savior, the sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer and enables me to go to the heights. The only way it appears that Habakkuk was able to write down in his journal exactly what the Lord had told him, and to live with the thought that that would occur was to say, I will trust in the sovereign work of the Lord and I will watch this unfold as you and I grapple with the the way that we would like life to be in this little box.

And I can't fill in anybody's box for you. You know what that looks like? You know what you've got in your life that feels comfortable, that same stable, the plan that you have for where you're going to go after you graduate from here, most likely God will have a much bigger, much different plan in some area that will require, just as the back was called, to an amount of faith that rests on the character and the sovereignty of God.

So here are a few things that I try to incorporate into my life as the Lord pushes me outside of my comfort zone. I encourage you to have these written somewhere or put them on the mental tablets of your mind, because they will help when God moves you in a way that you think. There's just no way I cannot do that. I'm not able to face that challenge. I'm not ready to be moved across wherever. I'm I'm not able to take this job.

I don't know if I can go forward in this relationship. Whatever it is, the step of faith is scary, but it's the coolest way to live because then God does all the work. The first thing that I do in living by faith. What does this practically look like to jump outside of my box? No one expectations. I

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have to identify and encourage you to identify. What do I expect in my life? Where do I expect to be a year from now?

How do I expect my education to affect the path for my life? What do I expect from this person that I'm dating that I may marry? What are my expectations that I have I've got do I expect him to kind of agree with my plan or and I'm expecting him to move me out into a place of total dependance? Expect that, because that's usually what he does. We have to look at what our expectations are and also what our desires are.

Another thing that we put into our box is our desire to be at this place. At this time, I have goals that I want to accomplish that's in my box. Sometimes what the Lord brings along in our lives interferes from those goals. So what do we do? We have to adjust. God, you are in sovereign control. You give and take away and I will readjust the goals that. I have for my life one of the things that was very hard for me to get out of the box before we left Dallas, my husband and I had designed and built our dream home.

We never moved into that house. It was a wonderful home. That was a desire that fit in my box. But we would be in Dallas the rest of our lives. We were close to Mark's family, close to my family. You know, this just fits right here. Now, six weeks from the time we were to move into the house, we moved out to California, never living in that dream house. God, that is outside of my box.

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He's given us a wonderful house. But what did it learn? What did I learn from that? My happiness cannot be found in a house that is now what I have inside my box. Does that make sense to you guys instead of what I put in there? God, you've put in the desire to honor you and to live wherever you want us to live in whatever kind of house you want us to live in. And I'm at peace with that.

All part of our expectations. Secondly, we go to the area of realization that some of God's ways, in fact, I have found most of God's ways are unexplainable. As I mentioned this morning in Isaiah. Fifty five, eight to 10. I'm going to turn to that and read it to you because I just love it. Isaiah fifty five eight to 10 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 higher than your thoughts. This passage does not say my thoughts fit into your thoughts and your box. My ways fit into your ways and your box.

Oh, just love it if it said that because then I wouldn't have to surrender. I wouldn't have to release. But God said no, my legs are much higher, are much different than what you have. So realize that ahead of time and it makes surrendering a whole lot easier, we come to the realization that sometimes God will not explain himself. As I said this morning and Job's case, Job never was given the reason why and never told about the discussion between Satan and God.

That's that was God's way. Realized that sometimes he will not explain why he has moved you to a different place, to a different path of study, to a different relationship. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. I encourage you to think on what the expectations you

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have for your life box and next, look at what needs to be realized. I realize more your ways are not my ways. Your thoughts are not my thoughts.

You're going to not fit in this little tiny box that I had following that. We go to contemplation. We contemplate a lot of times when God does not work in our way. Why? Why is one of the biggest questions that I have had over the last ten years? Lord, why have we had to move so much and why have we had to plant two churches? Why, why, why? When really I have been asking the wrong question, what I need to be asking is God for what purpose?

For what purpose are you moving outside of my little set comfortable world? For what purpose? It could be that he wants you to cross paths with someone else that you would have never met. As we talked about it much, it could be that going down one path would result in something that would eventually be to moral destruction. I don't know. God does. So instead of pondering and contemplating why? Because I wanted it my way. Say, Lord, for what purpose do you have for my life in this direction?

If you're calling me to ministry and calling me the across the world, for what purpose? Not why, God, for what purpose are you moving me? It will shape it. He will shape our character. He shapes our responses. He shakes how we are as friends. He changes us as he forces us to move outside the box. So no one expectation no to the realization that he's going to work outside of our comfort zone. Number three, contemplation. For what purpose is this occurring in my life? How can I serve Christ through this?

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The next one, which sometimes can be the hardest one, would be submission. I can go through the cognitive exercises of finding out where my expectations are, of contemplating for what purpose. But then in my heart, it is submitting to what Christ calls me to. I mentioned at our lunch time together an individual named Nancy Guthrie, who has written a book called *Holding On to Hope*. Nancy had Nancy and her husband had one child very healthy. Their next child had a syndrome called Zellweger Syndrome. And basically what that means is the child dies within the first six months of life. They found out if they continue to have children, most likely they would have another one. So they chose a surgical procedure to keep her from getting pregnant. Evidently, that didn't work. And she ended up pregnant again. And the baby also had the same illness. So she buried not one but two babies. I know that's not even in or near what my life box would be, but what she talks about in her book is submission to God's work, God's way when it doesn't make any sense.

This is the part where as children, when I'm training my children and I ask them to do something, I actually tell them to do something. They can do it. Like they can sit down on the outside, but they are standing on the inside. We can do that spiritually as well. OK? God all go all right to this, but I am standing on the inside. That's not the heart of submission. Nancy says submission is a quiet, though sorrowful acceptance of God's plan and God's timing.

Giving up the plans that I have had and bringing them under the submission of Christ, my Lord, I will be very honest and tell you that is the hardest piece of this whole talk for me, because I'm so determined and strong willed that God, when he moves in a way that is counter to my comfort zone, I just don't want to submit. But then that is not living by faith. I challenge you to ask

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yourselves in a quiet moment, and I submitted my soul to the work of Christ. It may be sorrowful. It may be painful. It may be not what I expected, but am I submitted to and given over to the Lordship of Christ in my life. The other side of that is total freedom. So I don't know why it's so hard for me to get there, but it is. Once I get there. It is. It's so cool. Lord, whatever you want to do, however you want to work. I've cleared my expectations.

I realized that your work is going to be far different from mine. I am contemplating the purpose that you have or possibly could have, and I freely submit my will to your work. And lastly, that is what's called the sanctification process, believing that God's plan for me is always better than my plan for myself running to the path that he has for me. I do not try to change his thoughts or his timing because his thoughts and his timing is perfect.

I want the grace to accept that his way is right and I want to embrace his plan for my life. I want to close with Hebrews Chapter 11, which everybody in this room knows is all about those who walks by faith. This morning, as I was contemplating how I would close our time together, I looked through the end of the chapter because it talks about the character issues and the situations that these people face and how they walked with boldness and with strength as they walked in.

Faith, listen to what this this this is just so cool and is speaking about those that is written who have lost my faith in the earlier chapter, who, through faith, conquered kingdoms administer justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouth of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword. These are all things done as people followed Christ,

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whose weakness was turned to strength, who became powerful in the battle, and routed foreign armies.

Women who receive back the dead raised from raised back to life again, others who were tortured and refused to be released so that they may gain a bed of resurrection. Some faced jeers and floggings, while still others were chained and put in prison. Does this sound right? I read this, I think. Oh my gosh. As they watch my fate, they may face some persecution. They faced difficult issues. These aren't things that we just walk into and go, Oh, super, I want to walk my faith.

But this is what God looks on and us to as we walk by faith as believers. They were stoned, they were sawed into it, they were put to death by the sword, they went about in sheepskins and goatskin, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in the desert and then the mountains and the caves and holes of the ground. These were all commended for their faith. Yet none of them received what they promised.

God had planned something better for those, better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. I want to ask you if you have ever encountered someone who truly lives by faith, the people that I've encountered that live a life of faith, surrendered to Christ are amazing to me. The world is not worthy of them. And I pray that God gives you and empowers me to walk in a way to follow him in a way that illuminates my little parameters, my thinking.

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It's not easy, but it is very, very exciting as we end our time. I just challenge you in the days and weeks ahead to contemplate where God is, maybe calling you to step out and say where he is, maybe asking you to go where it may not be as comfortable or where you thought you would be, and then to simply say, yes, I will do this as much as it scares me. You will take care of me, Lord. I believe that. Let's pray together before we go.

Oh, Lord God, how nice it would be if we had these life maps that told us where we were going and how to get there and what the results would be. That would be easy, but it would not be faith. The faith that you call those who say they believe in you is one of challenge and excitement and heartache and loss, joy and expectation. So many things that in our human capacity we cannot confine, nor can we imagine. I pray for every student in this room as they follow you, as they study you, as they know you, that they would integrate a walk of faith into their knowledge and into their lives. So the world may say we were not worthy of them. Thank you that you gave us your son, as an example who lived by faith, died for our sins on a cross and rose again. Lord, we love you. We thank you for your patience with us when we are afraid and we ask you for comfort as we step out in the days ahead in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.