

## November 11, 2007 “No Easy Answers”

### Stan Part 1:

I have to admit the idea for this service came a few months ago while I was watching a movie with my son Harry. Watching a movie with “Daddy” is one of his greatest pleasures in life. I think this must be a developmental thing...Harry is 6 and my daughter Annie is 9. When Annie went through this phase it was Cinderella and...the one that almost drove me completely over the edge...Mary Poppins. We had to watch that over, and over and over. Ugh. Harry though, loves Civil War and World War II movies—gee wonder where he got that?! His favorites are Patton, A Bridge to Far, Glory and Gettysburg. Anyway, this one lazy Saturday afternoon Harry and I were watching Gettysburg together—mind you the movie is three hours long—but we were watching it, the whole thing...again. The movie is a historical fiction of the Battle of Gettysburg which happened in July of 1863 during the American Civil War.

This battle was a three day affair that saw over 50,000 casualties. On the third day of the battle General James Longstreet was ordered by his commanding general, Robert E. Lee, to attack Seminary Ridge. This attack became known as Pickett’s Charge for Virginian George Pickett’s charge over uphill and open ground.

The result was the utter destruction of Pickett’s corp. In the movie version that Harry and I were watching...shortly after General Longstreet had given the command to attack, there is a poignant scene that shows General Longstreet in deep prayer. Longstreet had urged, begged even, Robert E. Lee not to make the attack...Longstreet knew the attack would be a disaster, but as a subordinate, he had no choice but to give the order to attack. Now—if you put yourself in Longstreet’s shoes, can you imagine what he was praying for? Courage? Victory? Maybe...forgiveness? I don’t now. But what struck me personally like a ton of bricks was a simple question from a then 5 year old...”Daddy, does God help the bad guys too?”  
Now, I don’t know how often you get those theological zingers in your house, but WOW...”Does God help the bad guys too?”

Honestly, I was secretly hoping that was one of those questions that if I ignored it long enough, he’d forgot he asked it...no such luck...”Daddy, Daddy...Well, does God help the bad guys too?” I

want to be flat honest with you, no amount of seminary prepares you for 5-year-old theologians. That question is the foundation of our message this morning.

To help us explore questions like that today are the reflections of World War II veteran Carver McGriff who is the former senior pastor at St. Luke’s. Several weeks ago we interviewed Carver who has written a new book called *Making Sense of Normandy*. In his book he reflects back at his experience in fighting in World War II.

### WWII PPT Setup:

Many of you have heard me say that I used to teach history. It will probably be no surprise for you to learn that my two favorite areas of United States history were the Civil War and World War II.

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To me one of the most fascinating ways to understand history, or any human phenomenon, is through statistics. The statistics beneath any event tell a story all on their own. Let’s take a look now at some statistics that help shape the story of World War II we’ll explore today...

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In the process of finding the answer to today’s question with Carver, what I found along the way was a depth of appreciation and understanding for what Tom Brokaw has called the greatest generation. No amount of reading, studying or seeing a movie about World War II can capture its essence quite like a first hand account—let’s listen:

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### Video Part 1 (2:00)

*The only way out was through a little town called Saint Lo*—Carver describes getting out of Normandy, trying to take a hill, and the number of casualties incurred.

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### Stan Part 2:

You know, to be honest, a lot of what many of us know about war does come from movies. As a kid I really loved war movies...so I guess Harry comes by in naturally—anyway as I think back, I’m pretty sure I didn’t separate the reality from the movie...and it really used to agitate me when I taught history when I would show a movie clip in class and kids would respond by saying...”cool.” What I was attempting to was show the reality of war...I’m afraid I might have been off the mark.

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## [Video Part 2 \(1:20\)](#)

*Saving Private Ryan*—Carver discusses how the movie isn't exactly how things were.

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## [Stan Part 3:](#)

Well, I finally got around to asking Carver *the* question..."Does God help the bad guys too?" However, as any good teacher would do, he answered the question with a question. He said, "You know I think there is another question you could also ask. Does God help the good guys?" From that point we began to discuss the common experience of both the Germans and the Americans in the eyes of God.

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## [Video Part 3 \(3:00\)](#)

*It Killed Germans as well as Americans*—Carver talks about his experience of being wounded and captured in combat, but then describes what happens when he is placed on a stretcher next to a wounded German soldier.

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## [Stan Part 4:](#)

You know, I was really struck by Carver's experience with that young German soldier...what you didn't hear me ask him was at any time did either one of you think about trying to finish the deal? Try to kill each other? In a strange way, I believe God was at work there. What Carver and that young German soldier were experiencing is the core of our first Bible passage from Galatians which says:

*In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.*

In God's eyes, even in war there can be no division, in this case into German and American. Yet, these young men are left to make sense of all the killing...

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## [Video Part 4 \(:45\)](#)

*Part of God's ongoing process with us*—Carver describes his thought that there must be some greater purpose for the war other than killing Germans.

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## [Stan Part 5:](#)

Many of us struggle with the idea of a higher purpose in our everyday lives and in the world around us. Hurricanes and earthquakes cause massive loss of life and displace families. Car wrecks, sudden loss of life...things happen that cause us to question a higher purpose and what might be behind it...let's listen.

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## [Video Part 5 \(3:00\)](#)

*I do believe in the power of prayer*—Carver talks about his deep connection with God even though he believes that God does not "interfere" in our daily lives—"If you believe God could stop me from being killed, then you have to believe God could have prevented the war." He goes on to talk about free will—"being a person of integrity means nothing if you didn't have choice." Does God change things in the physical world—"I admit sometimes things happen that are hard to explain."

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## [Stan Part 6:](#)

As I neared my time with Carver, what I began to realize was that Harry's seemingly simple question to me..."Daddy, does God help the bad guys too" didn't have an easy answer. The truth in life is that many of the things that are the most important to us don't have easy answers...

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## [Video Part 6](#)

*I didn't come out with easy answers*—Carver explains that to manufacture an easy answer for the massive loss of life in Normandy would be a terrible dishonor to them to come out with any easy answers.

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## [Stan Closing Narration:](#)

Often times for me the things that I know will have tough answers I tend to push down, put out of site, or as Carver said, put in the basement—I think though, the key in moving forward is bringing things out to have a look again...Something Carver said really spoke strongly to me:

*As though I opened that room up and brought these things out too look at again, and I realized that to make sense of it, requires finally and ultimately*

having to accept that it did happen--the damage is horrendous.

As we wrestle with these tough life questions, I'd like to leave you with our second Bible passage from Proverbs which says:

Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; God's the one who will keep you on track. **AMEN**