

Everything Everywhere Always at Once

God at the Movies 2023, Pt. 5

[Everything Bumper 2:48]

Welcome to God at the Movies 2023. We're almost done – next week we wrap up with our final film. But today we've got a doozy. I first saw *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* in the theatre with my daughter and I cried my eyes out. Now, every movie I see I ask myself, "Could this be God at the Movies material?" Sometimes I know right way, usually I jot down some notes and go back at the beginning of the year and read through the notes as I choose which films we will use.

This film was actually the *last* one to make the cut for this year's series. As the credits rolled, I knew I had just seen a work of absolute genius...but I didn't know if I understood it enough to make a coherent sermon out of it. I guess it will be up to you to determine if I actually did! But I went back to the theatre a second time to see the film, this time with my wife. And this time I began to see the pattern. And I cried again, by the way.

I just wished my daughter and my wife would have seen it together, because for all it's weirdness and action-adventure, at it's heart this is a movie about the power of mother-daughter relationships, both for good

and for bad. And that's why it was a no-brainer for me to pick this film to talk about on Mother's Day. You may think it's madness – and I wouldn't really argue with you – but I promise there *is* a method to my madness.

Now, full discourse, when I took Deanna to see this movie, she did not cry when it was over. Unless maybe from relief that it *was* over. Because my wife *hated* this film. No we have different tastes in film to be sure and we don't always watch the same things – but we will each cross genres for one another a few times through the year. But one of the reasons she will often give for disliking a film that I liked is, "That was weird!" And I always reply, "You say that like it's a *bad* thing."

See, I am drawn to a philosophical form of art called Absurdism. Webster's Dictionary defines Absurdism as a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe. I've read a number of novels by Albert Camus, who is considered the the father of Absurdism. He laid out his argument most clearly in a book called *The Myth of Sisyphus* in which he argued that the likely metaphor of human existence was Sisyphus endlessly pushing his rock up the mountain only to see it roll back down again once he reaches the top. Some of you have jobs like that. Camus says we all have *lives* like that.

You may say, “Time out here, Anthony. How can you be an absurdist when we come here every week and you actually *point* us to the source of meaning and order in the universe?” Well, that’s because I am a “Christian Absurdist”. Yes, that’s a real thing and is best encapsulated by another of my favorites, Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher who could be extremely critical of religious organizations, but believed everything in life ultimately revolved around the relationship between human beings and the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

You see absurdism is a critique of the failures of rationality. This is what our post-modern world is in the throws of, discovering what comes next after the rationality of the Enlightenment era has failed us. And of course it has failed us. The imminent threat of nuclear war that could wipe out 99% of the world’s population – I looked that number up – is absurd.

But we don’t have to go that far. Last week, I watched 10 high school basketball players carry my 18-year-old nephew’s casket to his gravesite. That’s absurd. How can you live in a world where that level of chaos could envelope you at any moment? The day before I tweeted, “In times of sudden tragedy, one is reminded of two things. 1) Life is absurd and incomprehensible. 2) The gospel is true and the only lasting comfort. Both of these things can be true at the same time.” That’s the philosophy of Christian Absurdism.

Now, I understand why my wife did not like this movie. I understand why many of you did not like this movie. Because the film makers, “the Daniels” - Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert - made a very interesting choice to tell their story. *Everything, Everywhere* is a mix of very high-brow philosophy with very low-brow action/comedy. So it sort of has something to tick off everybody. Now, I like *both* of those things, and so I thought the film was genius, but I understand why a lot of people didn’t like it.

But Hollywood *loved* it! And again, I realize that can strengthen your argument either way. But this film received a field-leading 11 Academy Award nominations, winning 7, including Best Picture. It also took home all three acting prizes that it was nominated for, most notably, for Michelle Yeoh who became the first Asian woman to ever win the Best Actress Oscar.

Which is fitting because this is in many ways, an Asian film; Asian-American certainly. And I think that’s a good thing. I was very excited when *Parasite* became the first Asian film to win Best Picture a couple of years ago. Asian-Americans have made a very positive impact on our country.

Everything Everywhere All at Once is about naturalized Chinese-Americans Evelyn and Waymond Wang. As the film begins, they're desperately preparing for an IRS audit of their failing laundromat, around which their entire lives revolve. Evelyn in particular is a picture of Sisyphean torment, where the rock she's rolling fruitlessly up a hill is laundry and taxes in an endless loop. There's never enough money to compensate for the fear.

And like so many immigrants who sacrifice language, family and familiar surrounds to come to what they still call "The Beautiful Country", there are plenty of cultural challenges. You know, just recently, the Asian population in Austin surpassed African-Americans as the third largest ethnic group in the city. This is due in large part to our boom as a tech hub in recent decades.

In fact, much of America's current economic success in the tech sector can be traced back to Austin's own Lyndon Johnson, who signed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, abolishing the inherently racist National Origins Formula, which put a cap on how many Asians were allowed to immigrate to America - about 1,000 per year. This replaced the Magnuson Act of 1943, which replaced the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which replaced the Page Act of 1875, which banned Chinese *women* from migrating here at all; because no women, no babies.

During this stretch of time, every single Chinese community in the U.S. was attacked, burned to rubble, the survivors left to rebuild or to flee, while their key role in finishing the transcontinental railroad was erased from history. They were primarily allowed to be cooks and launderers: "women's work." But that's been changing to the point where modern Asian stereotypes about being good at math and science are making many other ethnic groups say, "Hey, could we get in on some of *that* racial bias?"

But this film gets it right, for all of their success in this country, it's not all good news for Asian-Americans. Since the COVID Pandemic, Anti-Asian hate crimes have been on a dramatic rise in the US, reaching a stunning 339% increase in 2022 for the highest counts ever recorded. I was talking last weekend to my wife's cousin - a minister - who lives in DFW and I somehow referenced that the largest Vietnamese church in the world is in Garland, Texas, to which he replies, "It feels like we're being invaded."

I told him I didn't like that word "invade", but he insisted, "That's what it is." That is inherently a white supremacy worldview. Because when immigrants from Western European nations came to these shores - inhabited by native peoples, let's not forget - we are "pilgrims" and "pioneers", but anyone from the eastern or southern world are "invaders".

I think Christians who understand the global nature of the Kingdom of God have to be especially sensitive to those biases. And so I like stories like this that help humanize our American melting pot of beautiful diversity.

But when you get right down to it, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* tells a very human story – regardless of your background. The conflict between parents and children – in this case, very specifically mothers and daughters. Evelyn and Waymond have a daughter named – hopefully and heartbreakingly – Joy. She longs for her mother to accept her for the chaotic mess that teens often are. The instance we see revolves around Joy’s desire for Evelyn to introduce her non-traditional relationship partner, to her very traditional grandfather who has just arrived from China.

Well, that didn’t go well and so Joy walks out in frustration, only to be followed by her mother who...doesn’t *quite* find the right words to comfort. I know there are a lot of stereotypes about Asian “Tiger Moms”, but come on, we live in the Circle C area, overbearing mothers are not limited to any race or culture. Let’s take a look at this early clip from the film...**[FAT 1:07]**

As we see Joy drive away in tears, we are reminded that Evelyn is burdened by her own father, who we learn basically disowned her when she chose to marry Waymond and move to America. It’s a reminder of the complexities of adult parent/child relationships that make holidays like ours today – let’s face it – bittersweet for a number of women. Mother’s Day is not emotionally neutral.

Parenting can be especially hard for immigrant parents when they were raised with one set of culture values and their children a different one. But that is more and more true of native families as well. The world my children will inherit – thanks in large part of the development of the World Wide Web – is drastically different than my own, and we all feel that tension. Parenting is harder now. Being an adolescent is harder now.

I’m currently reading a brand new book called *You and Your Adult Child* by professor of family psychology, Laurence Steinberg. I’m reading it because I have two of them now and I really want to do it right – but it’s challenging. There’s been very little written on this subject. You realize we don’t even have a simple recognizable term to describe the parenting relationship of children in their 20’s and 30’s the way we have labels like “infants”, “toddlers” or “teenagers”. We’ve got loads of books on those relationships.

But until recently, young adult relationships were focused more on their roles as students, employees or spouses but not as people with ongoing bonds to their children. But the social realities are changing that. The economy has changed. Today's jobs require more years of schooling than they did a generation ago. Some of you know you could have a solid middle class existence with a job at Motorola right here in Austin, with just a high school education. Those days are gone.

And the lengthening time – and cost! – of education has had cascading affects on every other level of young adult advancement. More years in school delays entry into full-time occupation, which prolongs economic dependence on parents, which in turn pushes marriage, setting up an independent household, and parenthood well into the future.

Steinberg says:

According to my calculations, using statistics, published by the Census Bureau and other government agencies, today it takes the average middle-class young adult about 13 years to go from graduation to starting a family. It took their parents generation about eight years to make the same journey. A five-year difference may not seem like much, but it should alter the metric by which you evaluate your child's progress. Someone who hasn't yet settle down by the age of 30 may seem like a slacker to their parents, but they may be right on schedule by today's standards." [p.8]

Our adult kids are under way more pressure than most of us were at their age. This is why we have to be so careful with our "in my day" speeches. You know what I'm talking about. I've caught myself in the middle of "when I was your age" monologues. That's crushing these kids. Let me demonstrate why, with just a couple of "when I was your age" examples.

My son will be attending the University of Texas in the fall and even living in my old haunts, Jester Dorm - I tried to warn him! My mother reminded me the other day that when I was his age, I could work a summer at Wal-Mart – for \$5 an hour! – and make enough to pay for an entire year's tuition at UT. Plus have something left to drive my car and go to the occasional Rangers game with my buddies. If Ari worked at Wal-Mart all this summer – at \$15 an hour, that was lawyer money! – he would make about \$6,000, *before* taxes. That would not be enough to pay for his tuition at a state college.

Here's another "in my day" example. When I was 25 years old, Deanna and I – already married for two years – built our first house. A 4-bedroom, 3 bath house on a half acre lot for...\$95,000 dollars. Do you know what you can get in today's Austin housing market for \$95,000? You can get the heck out of Austin!

And if we're not careful, we can push our kids with totally unrealistic expectations because we don't realize how much the world has changed. And the pressure today that our kids are under is immense. I mentioned a few weeks ago the current studies on mental health - anxiety, depression and suicide – that are reaching crisis proportions in just the last decade. It's chaos out there. It's absurd.

And our film has a way of depicting that chaos in a very creative way. I was thinking about what genre you would categorize this film into. Last week's is simply listed as "Musical biography". The week before was "comedy/drama". IMDB describes *Everything Everywhere* as "action, adventure, comedy, fantasy, sci-fi".

The science-fiction element surrounds a device that allows the user to access the entire life experience of a parallel self in one of an infinite number of parallel universes. By the way, for a more in-depth treatise on the serious theology behind multidimensional theory, I would refer you to our God at the Movies sermon from 2015 on *Interstellar*. But for our purposes today, the basic idea is that every choice we make leads to a different version of ourself that exists in another universe. There's a universe where I became a lawyer instead of a pastor and that Anthony is wealthy beyond his wildest dreams...and on his third wife and second liver!

What it all means for our story is that the holder of the doodad can merge their conscience with that of another possible version of their self from another dimension gaining their developed skill set. You can be a great chef, for instance, or a famous martial artist, or a cartoon, or a rock. Now, the farther away the version of you is in terms of divergent paths taken in their lives, the more unlikely an act you have to perform in order for the machine to "bridge" the space between you.

It's like the Infinite Improbability Drive powering the spaceship in Douglas Adams', *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* that I read when I was a teenager. Shorthand, the more random an action, the more powerful the interaction. And it is the absurdity of these actions that lead to the film's most unsettling moments. In order to gain more and more power, the characters – both heroes and villains – do increasing unspeakable things to their bodies. And I do mean that I will not *speak* about them in a sermon! Even if I enticed you to watch them in the movie itself. You will survive. The Bible contains worse imagery, I promise you.

Well, in the midst of her IRS audit – conducted delightfully by Jamie Lee Curtis, what a fun role - Evelyn is warned that something transdimensional is making its way towards her - a source of great destabilizing power called Jobu Tupaki, that is looking - for whatever reason – to destroy every version of Evelyn in search of “The One.” There’s a little something of *The Matrix* in this film – which was in our very first God at the Movies series.

So we jump back and forth – at fractured pace, I hope whoever edited this movie took a long cruise afterwards – but we follow Evelyn through a number of other versions of her life. Including one in which she doesn’t marry Waymond, stays in China and essentially becomes Michelle Yeoh, a legendary martial artist who became a famous actress in Asian theatre. In this world, Evelyn runs into Waymond at the premier of her latest movie and they steal a moment together in the alley for a sad dialogue of what might have been. You see, all this existential sci-fi stuff really revolves around these intimate family relationships.

Including the big villain, Jobu, who turns out to be...Joy herself. This is Frankenstein’s monster. In the “Alpha Universe”, Evelyn put so much pressure on her daughter that she broke her spirit. So out of her despair Jobu/Joy has created a black hole at the

center of the meta-universe – in fact, it is the center of the film, appearing at *exactly* the 1:00 hour mark – but the black hole threatens to annihilate all existence, including her own. She wants her mother to join her and she explains why in this clip where Joy shows Evelyn that the black hole is actually...well let’s see.

[BAGEL 1:29]

“Nothing matters.” The problem with the Philosophy of Absurdism is it leads to nihilism – the belief that life is meaningless. Albert Camus wrote in his diary in 1963, “The modern mind is in complete disarray. Knowledge has stretched itself to the point where neither the world nor our intelligence can find any foot-hold. It is a fact that we are suffering from nihilism.” And he died before Facebook!

Well, the Alpha Universe warriors want our Evelyn to kill her Joy, so that Jobu Tupaki has one less host to jump into. But Evelyn can’t. She decides rather to fight for her daughter, which at first actually means *fighting* her daughter. She’s keeps accumulating skill after skill from the multi-dimensions – many to very humorous affect. But Joy has mastered the power of chaos. You try to shoot her with a gun and it blows bubbles. She can blow a cop a kiss and turn him into confetti. So Evelyn decided to fight chaos with chaos.

But of course that can't work. In the Genesis account of creation, we seek a picture of 7 days – 7 steps – in which things on earth start out “formless and empty”. In other words the beginning really was nihilism and chaos. Nothing mattered, everything was meaningless. But then God brought light to chase away the darkness. And then borders between land and water. And then atmospheric rotation that produced night and day. And then vegetation and then animals and then humans. We know the story.

But whether you consider that story 7 literal days of creation, or a metaphor for some divine evolutionary process, the clear lesson of the story is that our Creator God is orderly. That He is continuously moving *away* from chaos until He reaches the pentacle of order which is...*us*. This is why there was no death before the Fall and banishment from Eden. Because as I've said, death is absurd. We weren't meant for it.

And therefore, you can't fight the enemy with the enemy's own tools. Satan is not a creator, he can only twist what God has already created. Too many Christians today are trying to fight chaos with chaos. “We have to lie because they lie. We have to grasp political power before they do. We have to use violence to protect ourselves from their violence.” But that's not the way of the gospel. That just sinks us further into the chaos. It's taking us back from created order and into the formless and void.

So Joy and Evelyn battle across the multiverse neither making any headway until eventually they reach a universe where they are just two rocks sitting on a vast expanse. This is maybe my favorite part of the film. I'd play you a clip, but it's difficult because it's just silence with subtitles. Rocks don't talk after all. But in the silence, Rock Joy begins to speak from her heart. “I've been sitting like this for so long...experiencing everything...I was hoping you would see something I didn't...that you would convince me that there was another way.”

Another way than annihilation. Escape from the seeming inevitability of the everything on a bagel that seems to doom us all. She wants hope. And that's what all our kids want. They want to know that as bad as things may be...as different as their challenges from ours...that there is hope. That they can make it.

I think parenting our adult children is more vital than ever. They need us. But it won't work if we try to match chaos with chaos. Power with power. Paul writes (**Ephesians 6:4 CEV**) “*Parents, don't be hard on your children. **Raise them properly**. Teach them and instruct them about the Lord.*” The little Greek word there that is translated “raise them properly” is a word that means “to nourish”. It means to nourish or to replenish or to build into – this is a very, very relational word. It's opposite of being harsh.

As a parent, you need to ask yourself, what do you want out of your child? What do you want when they grow up? You say, “I want them to be successful, to be moral, to have stability, to be a good citizen.” Ok, those are all thing you want for *them*. But what do you want for *you*? I know what I want from my adult kids. I want to have a relationship with them. I want them to *want* to have a relationship with me.

And there’s really only one way to get it. But unfortunately - like Evelyn – most of us do the thing that gets us the exact opposite of what we want. You see, parenting experts tell us there are really only two means of interacting with our kids, control and influence. Now when our kids are little, we have all the control in the world. I’m just bigger. I can pick you up and strap you in a car seat whether you want to go or not.

Even as a teenager, I have economic control. You can’t drive. You don’t have money for eating and living in doors. You are dependent on me. But here’s the tricky thing...do *you* like to be controlled? I mean if your boss today used physical control on you you’d sue them. But there’s plenty of political and economic control in your workplace, right? Does that draw you into a relationship with management? Or are you looking for the first opportunity to jump ship?

What you have to do is get to influence – not telling, but listening. Not taking, but giving. Not ruling, but serving. Not criticizing, but encouraging. In fact, the only way to get to influence is to *give up* control. And the reality is, as parents, we have to begin to give up control way earlier than we think we do. But too many parents don’t do it.

And once the kids are too old to pick up anymore, or they are of legal adult status, parents can continue to attempt to maintain control in two primary – but destructive – ways: guilt and bribery. You know how it works? The kids haven’t been around to visit recently so it’s, “I guess grandparents just don’t matter anymore.” Or “We’ll contribute to your car payment, but you’ve got to drive it to our house at least twice a month.” All that’s going to do is make them resent you.

It takes a great deal of personal security to be able to to relinquish control. Remember we said that part of the negative control that Evelyn was directing towards her daughter was a direct reflection of what she was *getting* from her own father. And this is one of the big problems that affects the relationships of parents and their adult children – insecurity.

We know there are huge challenges – physical, emotional, relational, occupational – that come with transition from adolescence to adulthood. But there's another big change that happens in life when all those things are equally true. It's called the "mid life crisis." And unfortunately for many parents, the two happen at the same time. Psychologists talk about what can result as a "double inferiority complex." My daughter turned 20 the year I turned 50. Hmmm, we're both anxious about changes we don't fully understand

Think about it. At a time when the adolescent is beginning to *develop* the physical characteristics of adulthood, the parents are beginning to *lose* theirs! Ari is finding his muscles growing and his physical strength increasing. My strength is very clearly declining. Every year I have to work out more to get the same, or less, result. In her early 20's, Anika is coming into her peak beauty, while Deanna...well, that's a bad example, because my wife just gets more and more beautiful! (That was close!)

But do you see how if we are waddling in insecurity as parents, we are not going to have the emotional capacity to be nourishing to our children. We're going to be trying to get nourishment *from them* to fill our inadequacies. And in our myopic insecurity we will reach for means of control instead of influence.

Ironically, the key is to embrace the weakness and not try to grasp for more strength. That was Evelyn's big mistake. Here's where our movie is the opposite of *The Matrix*. Like Neo, the Evelyn of our film is, in fact, "the One," though not because she's the best Evelyn. But because she's the worst: the most despairing, the most useless, the one who made every possible "bad" decision in her life to lead her to this moment, having accomplished nothing and about to lose everything.

And the more she fights that, the more she grows distant from her daughter. But when she embraces the failure...I said this is ironic, but it's very Biblical. The Bible contains all kinds of ideals counter intuitive to the world, but that's what makes Christianity absurd. Paul records in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, a prayer he had in which he asked God to take away an ailment. "*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

This is the absurd nature of the gospel. And in our film it is depicted perfectly in one character – Waymond. The husband and father is the comic relief. Sweet and kind, but seemingly useless. He’s so much in the background that he can’t even get his wife’s attention to serve her the divorce papers he had reluctantly produced. But there’s more to gentle and meek Waymond than meets the eye.

There is a scene, late in the film when the battle is seemingly going against the good guys. In fact, both the good guys *and* the bad guys are fighting Evelyn because...well, chaos. And suddenly Waymond breaks in to the madness. This scene takes place across multiple universes and thus multiple Waymonds, but there is a central core philosophy that comes across. And I will warn you, you’re going to have to read some subtitles. Let’s watch...**[BE KIND 2:09]**

Humble, humble Waymond. He may seem weak. He may seem naïve. But this is strategic, this is intentional, this is the way he fights the chaos. And in this moment, Waymond gives us a picture of Jesus. **(Philippians 2:6-8)** *“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, **he made himself nothing** by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”*

In the Kingdom of Heaven – the Kingdom in which Christ rules – the way up is down. The way to get is to give. The way to win is to lose. The way of the cross is not a dominating power over, but a serving power from below. Now, just about everybody I know – including many Christians – would call that absurd. But it’s the only way to defeat the chaos. This is what I mean by Christian Absurdism.

And at last, Evelyn gives into it. She decides she is going to begin to fight Waymond’s way. She will return blessings for curses. Kisses for slaps. Love for hate. And as the enemy combatants rush at her from all sides, she begins disarm them...in kindness. A commando’s gun becomes a soft cuddly rabbit. She grabs another by the neck, but instead of breaking it, she channels some distant chiropractor Evelyn and gives him a healing adjustment. “Thank you I feel much better.”

Until finally she reaches Joy. This is the ultimate prize. This is the thing she wants most of all but has been unable to achieve, a loving relationship with her daughter. But Joy continues to resist insisting on losing herself in the bagel of nothingness. So Evelyn grabs her tight. But that’s a power move isn’t it? It looks loving, but again she is using her will to attempt to control her daughter’s. And so finally she realizes what must be done...and lets go.

And suddenly we are back in the present reality. The Wang family had been planning a Chinese New Year Party in the laundromat that had become literal chaos. Honestly, I think you can kind of take *Everything, Everywhere* in the same spirit you do *The Wizard of Oz*. All of the fanciful stuff is just a metaphor what's happening in the real dull world. If Oz is the multiverse, Kansas is the laundromat.

But in this reality, Evelyn decides to embrace her weakness and be honest with her daughter. She chases her once again into the laundromat parking lot. The same parking lot where she had previously lacked the self-confidence to embrace weakness and show vulnerability. How will the mother-daughter relationship end after two hours of literal and metaphorical combat? It's a little longer clip, but it's worth it...**[NOTHING MATTERS 3:13]**

Did you catch the end? "Nothing matters." When Joy says "nothing matters" at the bagel scene, it's the last cry before self-harm in the face of chaos. When Evelyn says it to her after all that happens has happened, it's a mother and daughter reaching a point of mutual acceptance despite their mutual weaknesses and failures and awkwardness, and an embrace of love and kindness and hope.

My favorite review of the film was written by a man who had become estranged from his own Asian immigrant parents. And as he wrote it his mother was in hospice. The movie had been very personal for him and he ended his review with this beautiful summary. "Everything Everywhere All at Once is about the messiness of being human, as well as the glory of it: how you know it's all going to pot but you do it anyway, because life is for the living of it. It's about how suffering is continuous, yet the moments of happiness, however brief and however rare, are enough to keep you warm, if only you could learn to blow those embers into a fire. I wonder if my mom will be able to have this kind of clarity before she goes - that she was in love and loved, and nothing else really mattered. I hope so. I want that for her. I want it for me, too."

Yeah, I want that for me too. And I want it for all of you. It's easy to get so caught up in all the irritants of daily life that we lose sight of what we really want out of life. On Tuesday of this week, I had a denominational meeting up in Dallas and it went badly. Really badly. I was riding back home with a colleague and I kept talking about how unbelievably brutal that was. And then I remembered the funeral I had been at four days earlier. And I suddenly said, "You know, my son is alive. Nothing else really matters." I want to live in that spirit everyday.

Parents nurture your children. Raise them up. It's scary to be a parent. I know we're all filled with insecurities. But we must minister to our children the way Christ ministered to us. Not power that dominates over...but love that lifts from below. Not control that gets what we want...but service that gives what they need. And above all, be kind, especially when we don't know what's going on.

And over it all embrace the Gospel of Absurdity, following the rule that Jesus laid out for *all* of us – no matter our family status, our age, our race, our nationality, our occupation, any of it. There's one rule to live by, **John 13:34-35**, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

Let's pray...