

Why, God, Why?

Message for Sunday, August 25, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

Introduce worship theme, as we sing “Blessed Assurance”

Fanny Crosby was a famous song writer who wrote more than 8,000 songs. When she was 6 weeks old, she got a cold, and then her eyes turned sore and red. The family doctor was out of town, so her parents took her to another doctor. This other person was just a fake, though, and didn't know what he was doing. He put hot cloths on her eyes, and told her parents to leave them there. She soon got over the cold, but white scars were left on her eyes, and she was blind.

Fanny Crosby was never bitter about what happened, however. In fact, she once said of that man, “If I could meet him now, I would say thank you, over and over again for making me blind.” She felt that her blindness was a gift from God to help her write the hymns that flowed from her pen.

Someone once asked her how it felt to be blind. She replied, “God closed these eyes (pointing to her eyes) so that he might open these eyes (pointing to her heart). Yes, this talented woman allowed her tragedy to make her better instead of bitter.

1) Why, God, why?

- A family is driving down the highway, coming home after visiting friends. The driver of the car coming towards them is drunk. Just before they pass, the drunk driver swerves into their lane, making a head-on collision. The drunk driver has a broken leg. In the other car, the mother is killed instantly; the father is paralyzed from the waist down; one child is in a coma; the other child is bruised and cut, but not seriously.
- An 85 year old man has seen most of his friends die. Now it is his turn. He develops a terminal illness, but it takes five months for him to die in the hospital. During that time, he is almost constantly in pain. No one comes to visit him.

You can add your own story of human suffering. Perhaps you or someone close to you has gone through some kind of trial.

When pain and suffering and tragedy occur, we feel upset over the loss of someone/something loved. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, or the loss of a job, there is a process of grieving. You may recognize some of these feelings:

- Angry and bitter: “Why me? What have I done that was so horrible? It's not fair!”
- Helpless: “What's going to happen next?” “What's the world coming to?”
- Full of doubts and questions: “Why does God allow this?”

DISCUSS: When trouble strikes you, what goes through your mind?

Let's look into the Scriptures to find out just what God has to say to us about suffering.

2) Don't try to figure out what caused the problem

Some people wonder whether they are having troubles because God is punishing them. Other people believe that people die because God ordered it to happen. I suggest that it's futile to try to figure out what causes troubles. Here are some examples from the Bible that show why.

a) It's just part of life

Matthew 5:45, Today's English Version:

“[God] makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil.”

In other words, good things and bad things happen to everyone alike. It's just part of life.

Also: disease is natural. God has provided our bodies with an incredibly complex system for fighting off germs when they invade our bodies. There would be no need to have this system if disease and sickness were not an everyday part of life.

b) Suffering can be caused by ourselves or others

I've lost count how many murders are described in the Bible. This verse describes the first one.

1 John 3:12, New International Version:

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him?

Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.

Whether accidental or deliberate, a lot of suffering is caused by our own actions, or by other people. I once saw a poster, which read:

Everything happens for a reason. Sometimes the reason is that you're stupid and make bad decisions.

c) It is Satan who causes illness

Job 2:7, New International Version:

Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

d) God causes illness as punishment for sin

Jehoram was one of the kings of Israel, and 2 Chronicles 21:6 tells us "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord." This was the outcome:

2 Chronicles 21:18-19, New International Version:
The Lord afflicted Jehoram with an incurable disease of the bowels. In the course of time, at the end of the second year, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great pain.

e) It's an opportunity to show God's glory

In John 9 the disciples of Jesus ask if a man was born blind because of someone's sin. Jesus answered sin had nothing to do with it.

John 9:3, New Living Translation:
"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him."

And that's just what happened. When Jesus healed the man, the people who knew the man were greatly interested in Jesus.

f) God causes illness because he loves you

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes from Proverbs chapter 3:11-12:

Hebrews 12:5-6, New International Version:
"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

The writer of Hebrews then draws this conclusion:

Imagine someone who is struggling to cope with some tremendous hurt and pain. They will wonder, "Is this just part of life, or is it happening for some purpose? Should I rebuke the devil, or ask forgiveness from God, or should I thank God for it?" Trying to find out answers we were never meant to have will only lead to having a nervous breakdown!

DISCUSS: Which of those "answers" have you used to explain why something happened? How was it helpful?

3) Respond with faith

All of us have painful experiences, some more than others. The question for us is: *How do Christians respond to bad things?*

a) Let your hurt out; don't keep it bottled up

Christians respond to suffering the same as others: upset, angry, helpless. This is normal. There is nothing wrong in feeling these feelings. It is OK to cry out, to be angry with God. This is what Job did, and that is how he learned to accept his life. Jesus wept when he found his friend Lazarus dead.

At a funeral, when people talk about "staying strong," what they usually mean is they are afraid of the tears, afraid of what others will think. So they shove all their feelings into a closet and then nail the door shut.

When I visit with people at the time of death, I usually reassure them that it's alright to cry. In fact, it's good for you. I believe "tears are God's way of letting the hurt out." Trying to keep it all inside will only make things worse.

b) Practice the power of prayer

Although the Christian will naturally have many of the same emotions as others, you also have special privileges that others may not know about. The greatest of these is prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7, New International Version:
Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which

transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The most important thing you can do in facing your trial is to ask Jesus Christ to fill you with his healing grace. This isn't just a one-time prayer; it is continually soaking yourself in God's presence, receiving all that love like a sponge.

Under the harsh circumstances, it may be difficult for you to pray. But just pour out all your misery to the Lord, as a child who is hurt would cry out to an earthly parent.

c) Saturate yourself with the Scriptures

Norman Vincent Peale told this story about a woman whose daughter was suddenly and tragically killed, falling from a horse. When the mother learned that her daughter was dead, she blindly drove away from home. Late that night she came to a country inn and asked for a room.

She paced the floor in her agony of spirit. On the dresser was a Gideon Bible. Something made her open it at random; she found herself staring at the beginning of the Book of Psalms.

She read the first Psalm, "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water..." She kept on reading, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul."

The heat in the old inn went down, and the room grew cold. She wrapped herself in a blanket and kept on reading. She was fascinated, and a strange sense of peace came over her. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom... for he shall give his angels charge over thee." She read all the way through these magnificent poems of faith and hope and courage, right to the very last verse, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

Later she said, "That reading of the Psalms did something very wonderful to me. All of life was there: joy and sorrow, happiness and heartbreak. I found my answers deep and satisfying. My heart was comforted. When I started reading, I wanted to die; when I finished, I wanted to live."

That's what the Scriptures can do for someone who is sorrowing. But it has to be a massive dose. A verse or two isn't enough. The Bible is spiritual medicine, and it's important to get it to work quickly to fight the infection that is killing your spirit. Countless people over the centuries have turned to the Bible for healing. The reason why: it works. It heals wounded minds and hearts.

d) Help others with their troubles

There is a Chinese proverb, "When I dig another out of trouble, the hole from which I lift him is the place where I bury my own trouble."

The human mind can only hold a few thoughts at a time. So if you make your life busy and useful, if your attention is focussed on serving your Lord and others, there is less room for getting lost in your misery. God simply made us this way. I know of no other way to put it.

Think about it: if a woman has breast cancer, if a husband or wife or child dies, if someone is paralyzed—who better to walk with that person through the dark valley than someone who has already been there?

DISCUSS: Which of these responses have you used? How was it helpful?

Well, I think I did a pretty good job of dodging the question of why bad things happen to people. Not really! I'm just saying it's not a helpful question in the first place, because there is no definite answer.

Instead of analyzing, we are far better off to accept the reality of what is happening, and then open ourselves to God's love and the love of others, to help with healing the hurt. May we all do just that.

Next Steps:

- Give up trying to find answers to the unanswerable. Instead:
- Pray: as the song says, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." In particular:
- Pray: spill out the pain and hurt to God. Don't keep it inside.
- Pray: let God be your com-fort ("with strength")
- Turn the bad into good, by offering yourself to others in similar situation.