

# When Tragedy Strikes...(How People Respond)

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Once again, a terrible tragedy befell the families and friends of nine people who lost their lives recently in a helicopter crash. Many other families and people around the world also mourn their loss. Much of the attention centered on Kobe Bryant the famous former basketball player – certainly among the greatest who ever played the game and his daughter Gigi whose basketball team he helped coach. Of course, the other seven people who lost their lives are mourned with no less profound sorrow and grief. It is a very hard time.

Like some of you, Gigi and I also experienced the personal loss of a child in a tragic way. I once spoke at the memorial service of a child who had drowned. Many of us lived thru presidential and political assassinations, 9/11, among other local national and even international tragedies. Yet, the truth of the matter is that most tragedies are personal without notoriety or press that happen to people like you and me – just as grievous and devastating though world does not know or those who mourn with us are few.

As I was flying home last night, the Holy Spirit put on my heart to devote this week's podcasts my next blog and video – not to this tragedy specifically – but how people process tragedy in our lives. As a Christian teacher, minister, and author, my words come from God's Word that comfort some yet annoy or even anger others. But it is in such times, above all others, the truth needs to be shared because more people are leaning in to listen.

In my forty plus years of ministering in the lives of people of all ages and from all walks of life, two responses to

tragedies are more prominent than the rest. The first is

***People blame God and ask the WRONG questions.***

Blaming God goes back to the book of Genesis.

*“The man said, “the woman You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.””* Genesis 3: 12

Clearly the easiest place to lay the blame, point the finger, or direct our anger and defiance is at God. He does not strike us dead for doing so or yell back. We generally do not see or experience any repercussions from such an affront to His character. The truth is most people who blame God do not know Him and many do not really even believe in Him to begin with. They just need someone or something to blame because they are profoundly overwhelmed and hurt. God understands that.

Polls today suggest that most believe in “god”. I used a lower case ‘g’ because the god most people say they believe in is not Jehovah God of the Bible. Many argue He is, but you do not have to drill down very far in a conversation with them to understand their god is one created in their minds. Their god is loving, kind, and shows up when they need him. He is a good God full of grace and mercy **on demand**. But “goodness” is defined on their terms depending on their circumstances or place in life.

So when life is fun, the party is rocking, and job and relationships are going well, this god stays in the background as he should. But when something goes wrong, and they need for him to step in and fix something, they *throw up a prayer* and expect him to show up and do something. This is more akin to *rubbing a lamp* and a god more like a genie than God of the Bible.

Sadly, the god most people imagine or conjure up in their minds is just that—a figment of their imaginations who cannot

satisfy the longing abyss in the heart or soul of man and is sure to disappoint during such hard times. King Solomon wrote,

*“(God) has made everything beautiful in its time...He has put eternity into man’s heart...”* Ecclesiastes 3: 11

As human spirit beings, we have a sense of eternity in our souls—an innate knowledge that there is something more to life than what we can see and experience in this life.

With that as our background, I will use the rest of the time to help answer the two questions that most frequently arise when tragedies happen as they have from the fall of man and will until Christ returns to claim His people and throne.

The first question is this:

### **Where was God when this happened?**

Where was God when that helicopter went down, the twin towers fell in New York killing thousands, the assassins’ bullets took the lives of JFK and MLK Jr, Hitler murdered millions of Jews, and many other human atrocities?

The answer will satisfy some and make others even angrier. The theological answer completely based on the Bible in which God speaks to man is this—He is omnipresent. Ever present, all-powerful, all-knowing, unchanging Jehovah God. Everywhere at once. Near and far. Fully present in time and space. Never absent, never late. Present in and having all-power over His creation, yet distinct from it. He exists outside time and space that He created. Pantheists and other religions believe god is in or part of everything. That is not biblical.

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, said this about God of the Bible in John 4:24,

*“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in*

*spirit and truth."*

The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1: 17,

*"And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*

Then why doesn't God step in and do something before terrible things happen? Do what? Do what you would do? Do what you think is right or wrong, good or bad in that moment? This mindset goes back to what I said above—people say they believe in God, but, in reality, create a form of god in their minds based what they think he should do and when.

Despite the fact that some would like to have Him perform this way, God is not a vending machine into which we insert a prayer when we need something quickly expecting our answer to fall out of the bottom. He is not a slot machine that occasionally pays off giving us what we want, maybe even a lottery winner.

My friends, I am very sorry if that is what you believe or how you think, but that is not Jehovah God of the Bible—Who He is or how He works. But here is good news, no matter what happens – good or bad in your mind – God is near and loves you. And He wants you to know Him for Who He really is as He tells us in His Word...the only written place He does so.

Now let's address the hardest and most often asked question:

***Why do bad things happen to good people?***

That begs the question who is good or bad? Who decides? You? History has shown that even some considered among the good and famous people had issues others consider bad – extramarital affairs, divorced-some numerous times, issues with alcohol or drugs, forms of violence, abusive or foul language when the camera isn't rolling or even when it is. And that is where human reasoning comes into play – relativism

and comparison. Not the wisdom of God.

Most people answer this question by becoming “the judge” based on “the scales of justice” they create that determine what should or should not happen and to whom it should or should not happen. And bad things simply should not happen to **good** people (as they see it).

The sad truth many will not accept is that we live in a fallen, sinful world. In Bible-speak it is referred to as the “Genesis 3” world. Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve and, from that point forward, bad things (humanly speaking) happen randomly and intentionally and there is nothing we can do about it. “Being good” will not stop natural disasters any more than it will keep evil or evil people from impacting our lives.

But let’s go back to good people for a few minutes. I have more bad news. According to God, we are all guilty of sin in our lives no matter how good you think you are or bad you consider someone else.

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory (perfection) of God.” Romans 3:23*

No exceptions. No good and bad people. Just sinners lost and without hope—all of whom will die at some point. To pile on here, you must know that sin is sin in the eyes of God. This biblical truth is reinforced by Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). There are no big and little sins. No one is better or worse than you or me as God sees people with one exception. We will come back to that.

The “lost world” struggles with relativism in their view of justice and evil which makes perfect sense. So the *sin is sin truth* is very difficult for people who do not understand the God of the Bible and what it means to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. The world is full of cynical, unbelieving people who use tragedies as fodder to support their notion

there is no God. Or they may say if He does exist, He isn't good if He lets bad stuff happen. He is a crutch for weak-minded Christian fools who lean on Him when we need help.

One of the main reasons people respond as they do is because when tragedies strike, whether natural or manmade, is because they feel helpless – helpless to have prevented it and helpless to change the results. We are out of control, and we hate that. We have no human power or control over nature or evil. That leads people back to those wrong questions.

We frequently hear people say ***all things happen for a reason***. Christians say this because of the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 8: 28. But I think we are safe to say things happen for a reason because God is completely intentional in His purposes.

**And His intention is to get your attention...whatever it takes.**

**Now the Good News.** God created a perfect world with perfect people and perfect intentions. The sinful decisions of man, then and now, have nearly destroyed the paradise that was. Despite the fact that all of us are sinners—none “good” in the eyes of God, He loves us unconditionally. No matter what you have done or where you are in life, God loves you.

**That begs the final question:** *What about my sin?* If I cannot do enough good things or be good enough to get to earn God's favor and get to Heaven, am I condemned to die and go to Hell? What kind of loving good God is that? Great question and the right one!

God our creator and Father loves us so much He would not leave us without a way out of this muck and mire of our world today no matter where you are in life – good place or bad. He made a way out when there was no way out. He gave us hope when there was none. And this hope no one can steal or take away – not even death whether tragic or expected.

The greatest tragedy in history is one that man caused—this death sentence for our sins. Yet the love of God through Jesus Christ stepped in and made a way to prevent the eternal consequences it brings. Jesus did this to make a way of salvation—to save your soul. Yet up to this point some neither recognize nor receive it as the only way out of death and Hell.

It went down like this. Jesus Christ, God and man, bloody death on the cross and buried. But it did not end there. That was just the beginning. On the third day, just as prophets and Jesus Himself said, ***He conquered death through His resurrection so that you can have eternal life without the fear or pain and despair of more tragedies in your life.***

This is great news! The great tragedy of God removed fear and hopelessness our impending death brings, IF you receive Jesus as your Savior. When you do, on the other side of your death—no matter how it comes,

***the best is yet to come.***

If you continue to reject God and His love through Jesus, then your death will indeed be a tragedy because on the other side of it,

***the worst is yet to come.***

I cannot make this any plainer because this is how Jesus Himself spoke it in the Bible. Heaven is real – in glory forever with your Father and all the family of God in Christ. Hell is real – a place of unspeakable torment forever. I hope you understand this now in a way you never have before. I pray you choose Jesus and eternal life that alone bring hope and assuage fear.

For Christ's sake Who alone is our comforter,

*Walter*

## **This Page is for Christians Only**

**The final question is this: How should Christians respond to tragedy?** Our initial response probably looks a lot like that of our fellow humans – full of emotions, hurt, anger, disbelief, profound grief and uncontrollable tears. Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus. David grieved and mourned the loss the death of his child and again cried out to God in anger over the destruction of thousands of his people because of his sin.

But after we recover from the natural emotional responses which God embraces, the differences are profound. As I said before, God's intention in all things is to get our attention and focus it on Him. And those who know the God of the Bible do that. We turn our thoughts and prayers to Him because we know He is our refuge and strength in times of trouble. We have the Holy Spirit in our lives Whom Jesus sent to be our Comforter in and thru such times. We hurt and mourn with others over their losses as part of Paul's admonition in Galatians 6 to *bear one another's burdens*.

**Jesus – the author and perfecter of our faith – even in times like these.**

The memorial service for a born-again Christian often looks like a worship service and Homegoing celebration because it is. Despite the sorrow and tears from the loss of life and the temporary feeling of emptiness, there is joy and comfort in knowing our brother or sister made it Home before we did – safe in the arms of our Savior. No more sins and griefs to bear because He did all of that for us. So, we rejoice and praise God our loving Father Whose very kindness led us to repentance and that to salvation in Christ alone.

With that said, why are so many Christians silent in their witness to those who are lost and hurting desperate and without hope – in need of the Savior Who alone can fill their void just as He has ours. Why do so many withhold the good news – the only news that can bring real comfort? I am not suggesting we confront people in such times with untimely or unwanted words. But it is always the right time to ask someone if you can pray for them. Don't just say one of the tritest phrases in Christendom, "I'll be praying for you." Stop, put your arm around them or hold their hand, and pray. You will be amazed at how the Holy Spirit uses that.

My dear brothers, we have hope that lost hurting people seek. We have comfort they can't find. Point them to the outstretched arms of Jesus Who awaits their sorrows and tears. He alone can dry them and breathe life and eternal hope into those groping around in the darkness hoping to find a way out. Jesus is the Light and the only Way out!

Our foremost responsibility this side of Heaven is to guide the lost and hurting to our Savior. I hope this message disturbs you so much you fall on your knees confessing this sin of omission and get on with His command we call the Great Commission.

For Christ's sake Who alone is our comforter,

*Walter*