



Tragedy and Suffering Part 2 in a series of 3 articles.

We live in a world where tragedy and suffering are a present reality. The questions and hurt associated with such circumstances can be difficult to understand. Thankfully, God's faithfulness and the truths of the Bible can help us grasp suffering from a biblical viewpoint. Last month we presented information on the hurt associated with tragedy and the reasons there is suffering in the world. This month our discussion continues, focusing on the love of God for His people and His sovereignty.

God Loves His People – “Does God care about my pain? Is God good?”

Scripture paints a picture of God as being loving (*1 John 4:10 & 16*), abundantly merciful (*1 Chronicles 16:34*), and deeply connected to His people (*Jeremiah 29:11, John 11:33-35*). We must hold onto this view of God, as it is how He describes Himself in Scripture. We don't find a distant God in the Bible; instead, we find a people who *feel* pain and distance from God. This is consistent with our experiences today. Many who are hurting wonder where God is and feel as though He may have left them. Job certainly felt like God's presence was very elusive, despite his belief that God was there. In *Job 23:8-10* he expressed it this way, “Behold, I [*Job*] go forward, but he [*God*] is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” We can take courage and comfort in the fact that we do not find an abandoning God in Scripture. Instead, we find a God whose ultimate desire is to care for and heal our wounds, as stated in *Isaiah 61:1-3*.

The gospel message is that God desired to reconcile His people to Himself and was willing to do so even though He knew it would cost Him. The cross is God's ultimate expression of His love for His people. He knew He would have to allow and destine His Son to bear what was rightfully due those who killed His Son (*Acts 2:23*). This was God's plan because of His mercy and love for His creation. There is no more powerful way to demonstrate love for another than to lay down your life for them (*John 15:13*). There is no clearer display of God's heart toward us than the cross. Surely we must conclude that God cares more deeply about us than we can imagine, as He was willing to remedy our greatest need through experiencing His greatest pain. Jeremiah captures God's heart toward His people in one of the Bible's most familiar verses.

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

These words contain comforting truths. Do you think Jeremiah was feeling good at the time he penned these words? While we don't know for sure, we do know that Jeremiah faced difficult circumstances when these verses were written. In fact, Jeremiah and those he was communicating with were in captivity. False

prophets were telling the people lies, one of which was that their captivity would be short (*Jeremiah 27:16*). Jeremiah responds with the true message from God in chapter 29. Many Christians hold onto the hope and good news from *Jeremiah 29:11*, and they rightly should. However, what we often don't remember or realize is that Jeremiah and the people he was sharing this message with were in captivity and were going to be in captivity for some time. Therefore, it is important to remember God's thoughts toward you are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end," even when finding ourselves feeling difficult emotions and experiencing excruciating circumstances.

God is Sovereign – "Is God in control?"

This question is asked in many different forms. In *Revelation 6:10-11* God is asked why He has not judged the wicked. Most of us don't understand how God can be in control when awful things happen with seemingly no consequence to the wicked (See *Psalms 73*). Even in the passage from Revelation noted above, the question is asked to God, and the response is simply to wait and know judgment will come.

God is never confused or surprised by what happens to us. He is grieved when sin occurs and when He sees individuals hurting, but He is not taken by surprise. God knows the beginning, middle, and the end of our life stories. Scripture teaches that everything that happens in this world will be used for the ultimate good of God's people (*Romans 8:28*). This is not to say that all things are good, but that God knows and holds the outcome in His merciful hands. The good news for every believer is that the end of the story is written, and it ends well for God's people. God is in control of the story.

1 Peter 4:19 "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

Even when tragedy and suffering occurs in your life, God means them for good while Satan means them for evil. Perhaps there is no way for this truth to not come into question, at some level, for an individual who is experiencing suffering. In the midst of tragedy we hurt and do not understand why the tragedy occurred or how God could use it for good. More times than not, we do not see how this can be true, yet we are to move toward believing that God is faithful to His promises and that we will have a new perspective in Heaven.

In the midst of our questioning, the Lord tells us He has a plan and a purpose. We are asked to trust Him in this though we do not understand. In the end, evil will be judged and our pain will be removed; until then we are asked to trust God in the midst of our pain, believing He will give us the grace necessary to go forward. *2 Corinthians 12:9* "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

The process of moving through our hurts and questions takes time. May we thank the Lord for His patience with us and pray for wisdom to know when to just allow ourselves/others to experience difficult emotions and when to push towards moving through hurt. Believing God is in control does not mean that we understand what God is doing, nor does it mean that we always "feel" it to be true that God is in control.

Instead, belief in God's sovereignty is simply holding onto the truths we read in the Scriptures , that God's ways are "higher than ours" as we are reminded in *Isaiah 55:8-9*. The truth is that God is good, God is in control, and God cares about you.

Nahum 1:7 "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

Holding onto these truths is extremely difficult when circumstances and emotions push them into question. We need the grace of God and the community of believers around us to hold onto these truths for us when the pain of tragedy is too intense for us to hold onto them ourselves. May we encourage each other to this end!

Tragedy and suffering affect us all through the events that occur in our lives, causing us to feel grief and loss. For more information about dealing with grief and loss, please visit our website at www.accounseling.org/emotions or call ACCFS at 309-263-5536. Next month we will conclude our discussion on the theme of tragedy and suffering, focusing on the believer's hope of Heaven and the ultimate goodness of God.

(ACCFS logo/letterhead)

ACCFS is thankful to announce the addition of two new staff members, Bro. Arlan Miller and Bro. Kaleb Beyer.

Arlan Miller recently joined ACCFS as Church Outreach Director. In this role, Arlan directs teaching services to Apostolic Christian congregations, including the offering of training, seminars, presentations, Bible studies, website resources, and publications.

Kaleb Beyer's role at ACCFS is as a staff counselor. Kaleb's clinical specialties are in pre-marital, marital, and family therapy as well as anxiety and depression. He will be working primarily with adults.

For more information and to browse our numerous resources, please visit our website at www.accounseling.org. There you are able also to sign up for our informational emails and newsletters.