

How Can a Good God let Bad Things Happen?

The pastoral relevance of this letter is intended to assist you in your ministry when the question arises from one of your congregation: ***"How can a good God let bad things happen?"*** That is the title of a book by *Mark Tabb, and published by Navpress*, in which he draws from the life of Job in a very sensitive pastoral manner in answering the question. I trust you will find this letter useful in assisting those in your pastoral ministry who love Christ and yet who find their circumstances more than they can handle.

He writes:

"We must accept bad things in the same way we accept every other blessing from God, (*Job*) tells his wife. Pain and suffering are blessings. They are gifts from God.

There. I said it. I called bad good. I pulled the oldest dodge in the book when it comes to pain and suffering and the presence of evil in the world by redefining it as good. Sorry. I didn't have any other choice. Telling you God sends suffering your way not because he hates you but because he loves you is not an attempt to sidestep *"almost intolerable intellectual problems."* Nor am I trying to pull a Pollyanna and tell you to look on the bright side of everything. Job didn't say to look on the bright side or adopt a rose-colored perspective on reality. He told us to accept bad things from the hand of God for the same reason:

- ***Paul told the church*** in Philippi, *"You have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him" (1:29).*
- ***Jesus did the same thing*** when he called *the poor and sad and persecuted*, blessed by God (see *Matthew 5:3-11*).
- ***He went beyond Job*** by telling us to leap for joy when we are hungry and weeping and mocked and cursed (see *Luke 6:23*).

I don't think the Savior was speaking metaphorically, Peter and James echo Jesus' words when they tell us to consider the wide range of troubles surrounding us, as opportunities for joy (see *James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7*).

And then there is this: *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28)*. We've condensed it into the handy little saying *"Everything will work out for the best,"* yet that isn't what the verse says. Everything will not work out one way or the other by itself.

- ***God is the one who works, He weaves together everything we experience, every moment of joy, each devastating heartache; all of them come together in his eternal purposes to bring about his good in our lives.***

I'm struck by the larger inference of the promise. God doesn't respond to unforeseen tragedies in our lives by trying to make something good out of them. He is not the ultimate *"lemons into lemonade"* maker. ***Instead, the verse and its context clearly imply that bad things happen within the framework of the work God is already performing in our lives.*** How this works is a mystery, for much of what happens in our lives is anything but good. Yet God demonstrates his majesty by working through everything, even the darkest of days, to accomplish his ultimate purpose in the lives of those who love him... ***An unforeseen tragedy does not cause God to scramble for some sort of plan B that will still take us to his ultimate destination for our lives.*** He knows all of the twists and turns our lives will take, both good and bad, and he has laid out his plan for our ultimate good through them.

The Bible resounds with this message throughout both the Old and New Testaments. God allows affliction and sorrow and hardship in our lives as a means of accomplishing the good work he wants to complete in us.

Pain is not inherently evil. It is, in fact, a tool through which God accomplishes good purposes. Don't confuse this with looking on the bright side or making the best out of a bad situation. Making lemonade out of life's lemons focuses on trying to make something good come out of bad... But that is not what I'm talking about.

- ***To accept bad things from the hand of God does not mean tolerating them until something good can be made out of them. Instead, we trust in God's wisdom with the hope that he is already working through everything, good or bad, to fulfill his higher purposes.***

So what good is God trying to do that makes it necessary for him to make my life miserable?

- ***If suffering did nothing more than cause us to hate this world and long for the world to come, that would be enough. The more we hurt, the more anxious we become for something more, something better, something not corrupted by sin. We long to go home and be with the Lord.***

But God longs for this even more. His Word speaks of a unique kind of fellowship we share with him in suffering (see *Philippians 3:10*), fellowship we cannot experience any other way. Trials also make us holy.

- *Peter tells us that choosing to suffer for Christ means making a break with sin (see 1 Peter 4:1).*
- *Both Paul and James describe the road to maturity as leading through the land of trials and tribulations (see *Romans 5*; *James 1*).*
- *Without suffering we would remain spiritual infants.*
- *Suffering purifies our faith, refining it like gold in a furnace (see 1 Peter 1:7).*
- *Pain teaches us to rely upon the grace of God rather than our own strength (see 2 Corinthians 13).*

All these benefits come as we suffer, not after suffering ends.... Suffering is more than a tool in the hand of God; **it is one of the essential ingredients of the Christian life. Without it we will never grow in our faith or become mature in Christ.**

Yet that doesn't explain why the anguish we go through must be so intense. I can understand how God uses disappointments and setbacks to purify my faith... But where is the benefit in *Job-sized* suffering? **Telling me Job had to lose everything he owned just so God could make a point makes God sound cruel, especially when I think of Job's ten children. Why did they have to die?**

I know God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose, but how can the deaths of ten innocent children be good? It all seems so extreme, so beyond any reasonable explanation. God may have a reason for doing something this severe, but it is hard to believe...

- **We can choose to believe that this present suffering is part of God's plan that will ultimately result in good, or we can stay mad at God the rest of our lives. It is not an easy choice to make..."**