

# WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, October 15, 2017*

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Here's the secret about difficult circumstances and crises: they don't do things to you, so much as reveal what's in you.

Do you know the old adage about boiling water? The same boiling water makes hard rice soft, and soft eggs hard. It's not the water or the heat that makes the difference; it's what you're made of.

Jesus said (Luke 6:45), *"A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."*

So, what do tough times reveal about you?

*For one thing, they reveal what you treasure most.*

Because when times are tough you will hold tighter to what you treasure. That's one reason that Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Luke 12:24). (Thus, crisis causes some people to withdraw, imagining that distance and solitude may prevent any further tragedy from striking them. But calamity is not an infectious disease.)

Togetherness will make your sorrows only half as heavy.

Do you know what else hard times reveal?

*Tough times also reveal what you have to give.*

If you don't crawl into a cave because things are hard, you'll give to others what can help them. (Because of Jesus, we recognize that only in giving away what we've been given will we find real security and replenishment. Generosity has the strongest return-on-investment.)

Jesus said (Mark 8:35), *"If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it."*

## Take a Break

We've all had our fill of the North Bay wildfire news. It has filled the networks and pre-empted most other world events for the last seven days.

I know you want to stay abreast of the situation; so do I. I know you need up-to-date information; so do I. But sitting in your easy chair in front of the TV is not the only way to get it!

I'm going to challenge you again: turn off your TV and get out of your house or your office and *help someone*. Anyone.

### **How to Help (Really)**

Helping people who have suffered great loss seems like a daunting task, especially when you imagine that you have to resolve their situation. Of course, you CAN'T resolve their situation: they have experienced loss, and you can't erase that experience or restore all they have lost. Still, you CAN help them—really.

First, by your presence. Just being attentively present with them displaces much of their burden.

And then, ask simple, caring questions: "Are you all right?" "How are you holding up?"

Then, just listen.

Hear their story from *their* point of view. Learn the details that are important *to them*. Pay attention to their *unspoken* feelings.

You can do three very important things for such people: Empathize. Encourage. Evangelize.

Empathize, means to "get inside their skin" and sense their feelings. Not what you *think* about their feelings, but how they themselves are feeling.

Encourage, means to promote *their* best response to the circumstances. Help them to imagine a positive response to a negative event.

Evangelize, means to point them to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Not with a speech about conversion or sanctification, but simply helping them to recognize that God has not abandoned them, in spite of their circumstances or feelings. Wherever you can, help them to see how He has already intervened on their behalf.

Do all this without correcting their theology or condemning their thoughts or feelings. Do it without trying to fill in the blanks or gaps in their understanding for them. (We all have more questions than can be answered, and we can all trust God in our darkness or confusion.)

Urge them to direct their questions to God (who alone can satisfactorily answer them), who will either give them an answer or give them His comfort in the meantime.

## **Lessons from Job**

We can learn important lessons about life with God from Job (a contemporary of Abram). Job was a righteous man (God said so!). That means He had God's approval. In fact, God thought of Job as the most righteous man on the earth!

But Job had built his own sense of righteousness in isolation from others. How do we know that? Because, when calamity struck, he had no one to turn to, no one to confide in, no one to lean on. His own wife urged him to curse God and die!

When his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) came to comfort him (Job 2:11), at first, they just sat in silence (for a whole week!), because honest words (genuine words) had not been a part of their relationship. The counsel they eventually offered seemed to Job impersonal and inappropriate.

Your counsel will seem the same if you don't learn to ask your friends good questions (personal, open-ended questions) and then listen to their answers (the WIDE variety of answers they may offer).

## **Our Compassionate Father**

God Himself is not unfamiliar with tragic circumstances. Not just *our* circumstances, but His own.

What could compare to seeing your Son—your only Son, your holy Son—endure ridicule, scorn, abuse, torturous pain, and the prolonged agony of crucifixion?

Jesus Himself was so confused by this turn of events, even though He knew they were coming, that He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Have you ever imagined that your circumstances were the result of divine abandonment? I think we all have. But they weren't. God has promised that He will *never* abandon us.

The Son's deep pain and sense of loss was mirrored by the Father's own heartbreak.

When Jesus drew His last breath upon the cross, the grief of God blotted out the noontime sun.

Our Father's pain tore the great veil of the Temple in two from top to bottom.

But our God is able to work all things together for our good (Ephesians 3:20). He is *never not* working for your good.

If there's ever any conflict between what you choose for today and what you need for eternity, your eternity is more important to God than your today.

He may give, and He may take away, but He is always on your side—for the LONG term, for your destiny.

You may have a boatload of questions about the uncertainty of life, about the unfairness of life, about the meaning of life—and many of those without any solid answer yet—but God has time for your sincere questions, and is not offended by them. Do you have the same kind of patience for His answers?

Bad things will happen, but God's goodness will win the day.

Remember this: If you will trust what you DO KNOW about God (through Jesus Christ), *regardless of the circumstances*, He will carry you through all you DO NOT UNDERSTAND about Him.