

Billy Graham: Why Does God Allow Suffering?

On Nov. 21, 1980, when the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas burned, survivors were brought into the Convention Center, where our Crusade meetings were being held. In an interview, Governor Robert List talked about the good times at the MGM only 24 hours before. "And how quickly," he said, "the music has stopped."

Some day, for all of you, if you don't know God, the music will stop. It will all be over. The Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

The Bible says that Job suddenly lost all of his wealth and his children. The devil said to God, "If You take all those possessions away from him, he'll curse You and turn from You." But God replied, "You can do anything to him, except you can't kill him, and then we'll see" (Job 1:11-12).

Job never asked why those things were happening to him. The closest he ever came was when he said, "Show me why You contend with me" (Job 10:2). Job was sharing his agony of spirit with the very God he could not understand.

Suffering carries a message of mystery. The Bible says, "Great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). When I was asked to explain the tragedy of the fire at the MGM Grand Hotel, I had to say, "There's a mystery to tragedies like this. We don't know the answer." And we may never know until God explains all things to us.

For humans, there is a mystery as to why God created the earth. There is a mystery as to why He put people on this earth. But God has revealed answers through the Bible and through the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. In the Bible you

will find the answers to the questions and the problems of your life.

But man rebelled against God. Man said, "I don't need You, God. I can build my world without You." God said, "If you take that position, you will suffer and die." Man took that position, and he began to suffer, and he has been dying ever since. Physical death is just the death of the body, but the spirit lives on. If your spirit is separated from God for eternity, it will be lost forever.

The Bible teaches that Satan is the author of sin. Sin is the reason that we have afflictions, including death. All of our problems and our suffering, including death itself, are a result of man's rebellion against God. But God has provided a rescue in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. That's why Christ died on the cross. That's why He rose from the dead.

Messages That Move Us to Action

In suffering there is also a message of compassion. Jesus said, "for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:35-36).

As fire swept through the MGM Grand Hotel, I saw the emergency crews, the military people, The Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the doctors, the nurses and the people coming to donate clothes and food. I saw compassion in action.

In suffering there is a message of unity. Jesus prayed "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (John 17:21). And that's the way we ought to be as Christians, one in Christ. If you have been born into the family of God, you are a child of God. You are brothers and sisters.

Suffering holds a message of comfort. In Second Corinthians we read:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Because tragedy happened to you, it gives you a greater sense of oneness with others who experience tragedy. You can feel for them in that suffering situation. Because we have been comforted through the Word of God, we in turn may be able to comfort others.

What should be our attitude toward suffering?

First, it should be one of worship. We ought to say, "O God, I believe You are the great and mighty God. I don't understand all the things that are happening in my life, but, O God, I trust in You."

Second, we should ask God to teach us all He would have us learn about Him, about ourselves, about others and how we can minister to those who are suffering.

Third, our attitude in suffering should glorify God. People are going to watch us as Christians. They will ask, "How is it that Christ is so in control of his or her life that he or she was able to help others?"

Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross, but God raised Him from the dead. Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of God the Father, and He sees our suffering. He sees our life every day and knows exactly where we stand.

The Bible teaches that we are to be patient in suffering. That's the hardest thing of all, to be patient, to have songs in the night. Ask God to help you have a trusting, patient attitude, and flee from bitterness.

In suffering there is also, I believe, a message of warning.

Are you prepared to meet God? What do you have to do to be ready? God took the initiative in giving His Son, Jesus Christ. God says, "I love you. I want to forgive you. I want you to go to heaven." But you must respond to Him. Find hope, peace, and security today.

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