

Fires, Shootings, Violence: 4 Things to Remember When Hope Hurts

Why does God permit so much evil?

The quick answer: God doesn't. In reality, God in His mercy has kept us from seeing how bad things around us could become. If He withdrew his protective hand from sheltering us, we would never ask this question. Try to imagine—what would happen if all the forces of nature were unleashed on us at the same time? The fires, the hurricanes, the tsunamis, the earthquakes, every wild animal given to their natural predatory instincts?

But evil is still present. Exactly why God allows evil in His creation at all, He doesn't bother to tell us. He doesn't need to. He's God. We can't understand everything about God, but we have enough information to satisfy many of our basic questions. God chooses to let us go through whatever evil or trouble we may be facing at the moment. He could have prevented it and allowed us an easy skate rather than the tough slog some have to endure. He could end it entirely, but He didn't and probably won't until He's through using it for His purposes to bring about our best.

Is your situation too difficult to be hopeful? Here are four things to remember when faith feels small:

1. **Evil is an intruder.** If we take an in-depth look at both the Old and New Testaments, we notice something interesting about evil's presence in the world. It's an intruder into God's good creation. It's allowed to prowl about for a time, and with a considerable degree of freedom. But it's always within bounds.

Sometimes it may look as though it exceeds all limits. The simple reason is when good seems to run out of steam, evil never tires. But just when we think God's hands are tied, He yanks the chain and brings it to heel. God is the sovereign, powerful ruler of every single thing. He never uses good for evil purposes, but He blatantly exploits evil for good purposes.

2. **God exploits evil for *good*.** The stories of the patriarchs in Genesis are wonderful illustrations of evil being exploited for good. They never denied the existence of evil; they cried out to God and expected him to bring *good* out of their suffering. Due to the fall, we share in pain and suffering in this life. It is guaranteed. But God also promises to bring His best for us out of every evil directed our way.

One of the clearest pictures comes to us in the account of Joseph. Young Joseph is violently abused, falsely accused, tricked, kidnapped, enslaved and imprisoned. Yet every time he's kicked down, he is mysteriously bumped up one more rung of the ladder. He moves from the deep hole in the beginning of the story to the high position of the prime minister of Egypt at the end.

God used all the evil directed toward Joseph as raw material to construct not only his preservation from starvation and death but also the rescue of those who abused him and the *salvation of the entire nation* he served. As Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, in order to bring about as it is this day, to save many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

3. **Good out of evil is God's blueprint for His people.** This pattern presented early in the Bible became the blueprint for how God has chosen to deal with evil in his realm for the rest of history. He may permit a certain amount of wickedness to occur, but He always

twists it for his own purposes.

What we see in Genesis continues into the New Testament, throughout early church history, through the centuries of the martyrs, in the subsequent eras of the church and up to the present day. This is God's will for the remainder of time until He brings down the curtain. After every tiny scrap of evil is dealt with in the complete justice and fairness of God, He intends to re-create a new heaven and new earth where evil is no longer even a possibility.

4. **God creates the best from the worst.** The manipulation of evil for good ends is one of the most powerful aspects of God's plan on earth. He uses the bad things around us in ways we couldn't possibly expect. He brings good out of the bad not *in spite of* it but *because of*.

Over the years, our family has discovered that some of the best things that ever happened to us came as a direct result of the worst things that ever happened to us. If we take the apostle Paul seriously "that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28a), we'll eventually see how God still writes His superior, more sophisticated script over all others.

So when your heart is heavy, and when you're weary of evil, remember: God promises us that evil will not have the last word. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death.' Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away'" (Rev. 21:4). {eoa}

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