

Greg Laurie: Here's Why Karma Won't Help You

Have you ever been insulted? Have you have been taken advantage of or hurt by someone else? Has someone ever wished you ill? If not, I'm wondering whether you're human.

The Bible tells the story of a man named Joseph who faced all that and was able to actually extend forgiveness to those who had wronged him.

What a unique thought that is in the times in which we are living. In our uptight and angry culture of road rage, cyberbullying and frivolous lawsuits, we prize revenge as a virtue. When is the last time you saw a movie celebrating forgiveness? I don't know, but we can find plenty of movies that celebrate payback.

But payback is not what we see in the life of Joseph. Joseph shows us a better way: the way of forgiveness. Years after his brothers had sold him into slavery, he was able to say to them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended all for good" (Gen. 50:20a). In other words, "As wicked as you guys were and as horrible as your plan was, God was in it, and He was ultimately in control."

If Joseph had a theme verse from the Bible, it would have been this one: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). That was really the theme of his life. Whatever happened, God used it for His glory.

Joseph, against all odds, faced the worst circumstances imaginable. The story of his life had all the earmarks of a real page-turner: an over-indulgent father, a somewhat spoiled son, jealous brothers and an international food crisis. But Joseph's story is more than that. It is also a story that

shows the hand of God at work in every scene, ruling and overruling the decisions people make. In the end, God built a hero. He saved a family and created a nation that became a blessing to the world: the nation of Israel.

Joseph wasn't just a world-changer; he was, quite literally, a world-saver. The decisions he made changed and saved the lives of thousands of people. Joseph's life is a classic rags-to-riches story as he rises from complete obscurity, facing constant setbacks, to become the second most powerful man on earth.

This is a man who used his faith. Like a muscle, faith needs to be put into practice and applied. And Joseph certainly did that.

In fact, as we look at some of the other heroes of faith in the Bible, we see that some of them struggled with doubt. Abraham certainly had his doubts when he lied about his wife Sarah, saying she was his sister. He was afraid of what would happen to him if he were discovered. We know that others had momentary lapses of faith. But in the story of Joseph, we cannot find a single shade of doubt.

Talk about a guy with little promise. He was a simple shepherd boy, the 12th of 13 children. In some ways, he was a spoiled young man, given to visions of grandeur. He didn't seem to really like hard work.

Like many teenagers, he had dreams. But in Joseph's case, these dreams came from God. In fact, Joseph's dreams got him into trouble in the beginning. But years later, other people's dreams got him out of trouble.

From Joseph's story, we learn how to overcome adversity, how to face envy from others, how to resist sexual temptation and how to lay hold of and have faith in the promises of God. But the most significant lesson from the life of Joseph is how to forgive those who have hurt you. With the exception of Jesus,

there is not a better example of forgiveness in the entire Bible. Joseph showed forgiveness on an epic level.

Not only did Joseph's brothers sell their young sibling into slavery, but they also broke the heart of their father, who was devastated. And though Joseph was abandoned by his brothers, he was not abandoned by God.

There are no accidents in the life of the Christian, only providence. There is no dumb luck. There is no karma. There is Christ. We don't believe in fate. We believe in faith. We believe that God is in control.

We need to know this because things happen in life that don't make sense. When that happens, we wonder, "Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve such a fate?" I don't know that I have the answer, but I know that God is in control. I know that God is powerful. I know that God is sovereign, which means that He is in control of all things.

I also know that all things work together for good. The Bible says "all things." David wrote of the Lord, "Your regulations remain true to this day, for everything serves your plans" (Ps. 119:91, NLT).

This does not necessarily mean that all things are good things. This is where we misunderstand. When a bad thing happens to us, some well-meaning Christian may come up to us and say, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

True. But wait a second. When someone is suffering, when someone is in pain, maybe that is not the first verse we go to. There might be another one we choose instead. What happened to that person is really a bad thing. You should go and say, "I'm sorry this happened to you. I care, and I'm here for you."

There are bad things that happen that will remain bad, and they never will be anything but bad. God doesn't say He will make every bad thing good. He doesn't say that bad things become good. He says they work together for good. Ultimately it means that, in God's master plan, good things will result.

But for whom? For everyone? Is this verse true for every person walking the earth? No. It is for Christians. Notice what it says: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

We may not have full resolution on some things until we get to heaven and God explains them. Or maybe just looking in God's face will explain it all. But whatever it is, it ultimately will work together for good. {eoa}

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