

Rick Warren: 5 Ways to Respond When Tragedy Strikes

It would be impossible, in just one message, to go into all the reasons for suffering and for why God allows tragedy. Instead I want to focus on five ways that we should respond to tragedy.

1. I Need to Release My Grief

When you go through a tragedy, which is inevitably going to happen, the first thing you need to do is release your grief. Why? Because tragedy always creates strong emotions.

Did you feel any emotions this week? We don't always know what to do with our feelings. If you don't deal with them, but instead stuff them deep, your recovery from a crisis always takes far longer than it should. See some people are stuffers.

When they have emotions, they don't know how to handle so they deny them, they ignore them, and they push them down. In fact many people use God as an excuse for this, believing that God wants everybody to have a happy face all the time. But real life isn't always happy. God doesn't expect you to be smiling all the time.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:4, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* In other words, it's OK to grieve. Face your feelings. Don't repress them by pushing them down or rehearse them by repeating them over and over. You release your emotions to God. If you don't talk it out, you'll take it out on yourself or somebody else.

2. I Need to Receive From Others

The Bible says, *"Carry each other's burdens... By helping each other with your troubles, you obey the Law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2 NCV). It is a big mistake to isolate yourself from others when you're going through a crisis. Our tendency is to want to

be by ourselves, but you need other people in a tragedy.

You need their perspective, you need their support, you need their encouragement, and you just need their presence. To make it through a crisis, we need not only the promises of God; we need the people of God.

3. I Need to Refuse to Be Bitter

One of the things I've learned from being in the ministry for many years is that there's absolutely no correlation in life between your experiences and your happiness. I've seen people who had absolutely the worst experiences in life—things that would shock everyone of us, and yet they maintain this happy, cheerful, positive attitude, because happiness is a choice. You're about as happy as you choose to be.

In the ministry I've seen people who had every right in the world to whine and who chose not to do so. Happiness is a choice. You refuse to be bitter, because bitterness always hurts you. It never changes anything. Blaming others never changes anything. It only makes you feel worse.

How do you keep from being bitter when the inevitable tragedies of life are going to come?

- You accept what cannot be changed.
- You focus on what's left, not what's lost.

4. I Remember What is Important

Disasters have a way of clarifying our values and pointing out what matters and what really doesn't matter. Jesus said, "Life is not measured by how much one owns." (Luke 12:15, NCV).

Don't confuse your net worth with your self worth. Don't confuse your possessions with your purpose in life. Don't confuse what you're living on with what you're living for. A man's life does not consist of what he possesses. What matters are relationships. You're never going to see a hearse with a U-Haul behind it, so build your life on something that can

never be taken from you.

Can you lose a home? Yes. Can you lose a career? Yes. Can you lose a marriage? Yes. Can you lose your health? Yes. Can you lose your youthful beauty? Yes. Can you lose your relationship with God? No.

5. I Rely on Christ

Christians get to approach tragedy differently than the rest of the world. We get to rely completely on Christ. We get to have hope. But how? By intentionally leaning on Christ for stability, listening to Christ for direction, and looking to Christ for salvation. He is our Rock, our Shelter, our Great Shepherd, our Hiding Place.

Suffering and tragedy are inevitable in a sinful world, but Jesus Christ makes all the difference. Decide that you will rely on Him even in the darkest of hours of your life.

Editor's Note: At *and Saddleback Church*, we've all been in a place of mourning for our pastor, Rick Warren, his wife, Kay, and their entire family after the loss of their youngest son, Matthew, who ended his own life recently after a very long battle with mental illness. You can read Pastor Rick's words to the Saddleback family for yourself. We who are near Pastor Rick have drawn strength from his 30-plus years of teaching biblical truth, and out of that teaching, we've adapted the preceding transcript from a message delivered over a decade ago at Saddleback. Hear Pastor Rick's words and let them speak to you in your own places of tragedy and loss.

Instead of responding with a comment here, please consider offering a word of comfort or encouragement on Pastor Rick's Facebook Wall.