

Where Is God In The Midst of Tragedy

Where is God in the midst of a tragedy that you are going through? Do you not wonder? Life is so hard at times that you think it is almost unbearable. Some of you watching this show live in other places in the world that terrible, terrible things have happened to you and your family and your friends and you see no point in it. You did not have anything to do with it and yet your life is in shambles. Tragedy is something that is a part of this world. Jesus said it, "In this world you will have tribulation," and you will. I will. Any one of you could be sitting here today saying "Betty, I would like to be in on a panel discussion asking questions and telling my story and what has happened to me and what I have learned and what I have wondered about." You see, when people go through tragedy they start looking to God, but they look toward God in one of two ways usually. They will either turn to God for comfort and say "Lord, I am not going to make it if You do not hold on to me and if I do not hold on to You. I am not going to make it. I have to have You." Then there are other people who go through something maybe exactly the same and they say, "Where was God? I do not think there is a God. If there was a God He would not let anything like this happen." It was the same situation happening to two different people. What was that all about? The attitude of the heart, what is really in a person's heart when hard, hard things hit you, and that is when you find out what you really believe. Sometimes there is an even harder situation in that tragedy, that is when you ask for an answer, you look for help and you do not feel anything. You do not feel God. You do not know where He is. You do not hear Him comforting you, it is just like the heavens are silent and you think, if I were a good enough Christian surely I could hear God. And yet, do you not remember Jesus on the cross said, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It is not like you always get those answers you think you have to have. We are going to talk about it today.

(If you look at this picture, right here there is a gun right in the middle of everything. All around it are people's responses to a bad situation. You see that angry young man? He is ready to strike out at anybody, just anybody. The girl is so sad. She cannot understand what happened. Maybe she is in shock. Then you see that angry old man, maybe that is the man that says "God did not help. God was not there." Then you see this older woman in the picture and she is sad. She is very sad but you can tell she is trusting God. She has her hands wrapped around that Bible. She is looking to God and probably that is the best group of pictures I could have picked to show you visually people's responses. Pictures are worth a thousand words, are then not?)

In studying the Bible we see common tragedies. God never minimizes the truth in the Bible. He never sugar coats it. He never glosses over somebody's life. Whatever they did, they did, and you know about it; regardless of whether it is the death of a child, death of a spouse or horrible illnesses. Who am I talking about in the Bible? King David committed a moral indiscretion and it cost him his child. How about death of a spouse? That was Ruth in the Bible, she lost her husband. How about horrible illnesses? I think about King Hezekiah and the horrible illness he got and he was going to die. Isaiah came to him and said "Set your affairs in order, you are going to die." He begged and begged and begged, "Please do not let me die, give me more time." He got 15 more years and his life was a mess, a tragedy, that 15 years did not help him.

There are business failures in the Bible. Think about when Egypt went through that famine and everything dried up. What did that cause? It was a horrible situation and a place for Joseph to rise up and be who God called him to be.

There are moral failures all over the Bible. Think about Samson and Delilah. There is a moral failure. He was called to be a judge over Israel and that is a high calling. Instead of a king, they had a judge, and it was Samson. He could not leave those bad women alone.

We can see these people in the Bible and, because we have the Bible to read, we can see God's perspective on it. You know they are just like we are. You cannot always see God's perspective in what is going on when you are in the big middle of it, can you?

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What is the hardest part about a tragedy? I would say it is that deep inner pain that you cannot describe to anybody. Proverbs says, "No one could ever know the bitterness and the hurt inside of another person." You cannot really say to people, "I know how you feel. I have been through it, too. I know just how you feel." You really cannot say that because everybody is made up differently with different emotions and different personalities and yet they go through similar things. You can say things like, "I can tell you what God taught me out of it. I can tell you what God showed me. I can tell you how God helped me. I can tell you, hang onto the Lord. You will be glad you did." We can never really understand that indescribable pain. I had it one time. I went through something and went to a counselor. I said, "I am feeling pain that is so deep that if I use the words excruciating, unbelievable, incredible, unexplainable; I do not think it would even be enough to tell you."

There is a deep heartache in pain, is there not? Some of you watching know what I am talking about. Pain is its own animal. There is a loneliness in pain. Even if you have gone through something with someone else and they are hurting the same way with it, there is still a loneliness in it. Even if you have somebody to talk to, it does help to talk about it, but still you can feel that deep loneliness inside; that deep ache, the feeling that nobody really understands. You know that maybe the hardest thing is when you do not have anyone to help you bear that pain. The Bible says, "Bear one another's burdens." That is the way we get through a lot of things; with help from our friends, church friends, pastor, spouse or someone. My children are adults and they help me go through things. They are just so wise. I was talking to my daughter this morning about something I was considering, a decision that was kind of hard to make. She gave me great wisdom. It is just wonderful to have adult children.

I want to talk about a big mistake that people make when there is the death of a child. I think that maybe that is the hardest thing you can go through is to lose your child, whether it is a small child or they have been an adult, or maybe you are older but your adult child still dies ahead of you. It is just hard to deal with it; especially with a little child. One of the big mistakes people make is to say, "Well, God needed an angel and that is why He took her." No, God did not need an angel. Angels are not humans. Angels are angels and humans are humans. They are two distinct creations of God. In fact we are going to judge the angels, so we better get real busy knowing God's will, God's ways and God's laws because someday you are going to be called on to judge the angels and you are going to have to know what you are talking about.

Another mistake people make is if there is an accident or something like a car wreck they say, "Well, it was God's will for that to happen." No, it was not. Accidents happen in this world. God is still in control ultimately and He can bring good out of it. He can bring something out of it, but accidents are just plain accidents. Sometimes people say, "The devil caused that." Sometimes that is also wrong. I had a friend whose son was in a pickup with a friend. A dog crossed the road and the young man driving swerved the pickup to miss hitting the dog and flipped the pickup and our friend's son was killed at 16. We were all just devastated. On my way over to her house, I thought, "Is this the devil, Lord? Did the devil do this?" I knew in my heart, no, it was just an accident. This is a faulty place to live. There are all kinds of accidents that occur. In fact, one time when Jesus was talking, he was talking about a building that fell on some men who were building it in Siloam. He said, "Did that building fall and kill those people because they were sinners?" No, it was just an accident.

I want you to underline John 16:33 in your Bible. The Amplified version says, "I have told you these things so that in Me you may have perfect peace and confidence. In the world you will have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration, but be of good cheer. Take courage. Be confident. Be certain. Be undaunted, for I have overcome the world. I have deprived it of its power to harm you and have conquered it for you." You see, Jesus was God, but He came to earth willingly to live as a human, to go through all the things that we go through; all the hurts, all the disappointments, all the sadness. You know He saw His best friend, Lazarus, die. He conquered it all. He said to cheer up and be confident. I have conquered all of this. You have to learn, and it is a learning process, how to go in to this process of being confident in Jesus and even having cheer and joy in the middle of great sadness. I have seen Christians do it. I have seen them go through the worst things in the world and when you talk to them, they say, "But I trust the Lord. I know the Lord is good. I know He loves me and I know He has a plan for my life. I know He is taking care of everything and I love Him." You see it and you know they mean it.

When does tragedy come usually? In Ecclesiastes 3:9 it says, "Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come, as fish are caught in a cruel net or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly on them." That happens to us. When I am thinking about a fish caught in a cruel net, I am thinking about dolphins. Have you seen what happens to dolphins when they get caught in fishing nets? It is a cruel net. They are ruined forever. They are just swimming along and the next thing you knew, "Bam", it happened. That is the way tragedy is so much of the time. You are just living your regular life and then five minutes later your life will never be the same.

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I read an article about a woman who was in an automobile wreck and she was paralyzed from the neck down. She had been a runner. She said, "You never get used to it. You never get over the feeling of disbelief that this happened to me because it was so unexpected." It was not in her plans. Even truly religious people blame God. Did you know that? It is not just people who do not have faith. It is not just people who do not know the Bible. How do I know that? I saw it in the Bible with Elijah. Elijah was a man of God with strong faith in the middle of a terrible situation where he had to run for his life, where people wanted to kill him. He thought he was the only Christian around or the only believer around. You know Elijah was a strong, strong believer. In fact, on the Mount of Transfiguration, he and Moses were picked to stand there and encourage Jesus for what He was getting ready to go through. It is not what most people think. We are not talking about a weak Christian who blamed God. He was a human and sometimes you do that.

I need to stop right now. There is something the Lord is telling me to tell one of you. There is somebody watching this show. You are a very strong Christian and you have been through something so bad that you lost your faith. You felt like you lost your faith and became really angry at God. You turned away and I believe the Lord wants me to tell you today that you are a strong believer. You do know your Lord. You do know His mighty works. You do know how powerful He is and you have seen Him do many miracles for you. That is what I am feeling the strongest that God is telling me to tell you. You have seen it. You know it is true. The Lord wants to say something to you to encourage you today and this is it, "Get back up on your feet. Start walking again. Put your hand in My hand. I am leading you. I love you and I believe in you." Do not allow this momentary lapse of fear and faith collapse stop you. Start going again. You have spent, whoever you are that is watching this show and you know I am talking to you, you have spent too many years walking with your God. You have spent too many years faithfully serving Him to leave it now. Hang on and you finish strong. Even if you do not understand why things happened the way they did, you quietly trust your Savior because He died for you. He loves you that much. He died for you.

In I Kings 17-20 there is another person who had a faith collapse. It is the Shunamite woman Elijah used to stay with. She could not have children and then finally had a son. The son got sick and died. She asked, "Why did you let him die?" Elijah said, "Hand me your son." It says, "He then took him from her bosom and carried him up to the loft where he was staying and laid him on his bed and then he prayed. He did not pray this big faith-filled prayer that was just this mighty Elijah that could come against the prophets of Baal, could come against Jezebel, could come against unbelief. That was not his first prayer. What was his first prayer? "Oh God, my God, why have You brought this terrible thing on this widow who opened her home to me? Why have You killed her son?" You see, there are just times we it is really, really hard to hang in there and say the right things. Did he quit?

Did he throw up his hands and say well that is it? I do not care if God did stuff for me in the past, he did not help me now. This lady needed me. Of all the people in the world that God should have helped, it should have been this woman. That is it God, I am out of here. No, he did not do that.

He prayed seven times. He prayed and he prayed. What do you think he prayed? I will tell you one thing, he did not pray little light prayers. He was pleading.

I know a man personally who raised his mother from the dead. I asked him about it. At first he did not want to tell me about it. It was a very private thing and then he decided that he wanted to tell me. He said, "My mother was very ill and my brothers and my sisters called and said, come quickly, she is dying." He is a pastor, a very renowned pastor. He got to the house and she was already covered up with a sheet and she was dead. He told all of the brothers and sisters to leave the room.

He got down and he began to pray. I said, "How long did you pray?" He said, "I probably prayed 45 minutes. I prayed and I prayed and I prayed and nothing happened. I kept crying out to God saying, Oh God, this family needs this woman. She is in the ministry. The people need her Lord.

Please have mercy and let her come back to us." He said, "After about 45 minutes I just quit praying and all of a sudden I started praising Him. I praised God and I praised God and still nothing was happening. After about 15 minutes all of a sudden, she threw the sheet back and said, "What happened? What happened?" They helped her up. I know this woman. She is alive and she is still serving Jesus, so it still happens today.

What happens though when they really die and they do not come back no matter how hard you pray? Is it wrong to ask God why did this happen, whatever your tragedy is? That is what we are talking about, any tragedy that has happened to you. Is it wrong to ask God why did this happen? I do not think it is. Some people say, "Oh, we should never ask God why." Some people say, "I never ask God why." If it is a big enough deal to me, I ask God why. If He does not answer I have not lost anything, but so many times I have asked God why and He told me why. I can give you a good example. My mother had a lot of struggle with being bipolar in the days when they did not have any

Example: My mother had a lot of struggle with being bipolar in the days when they did not have any medication for it except electric shock treatment. She suffered so greatly with it and it was a really hard thing for our family when I was growing up. When I was 21 she had a heart attack in my arms and died. I was doing everything I could to give her mouth to mouth resuscitation and she died. I was 21 and needed a mother. I had just fallen in love and was ready to marry this man. I was not sure about anything. I needed a mother. I said, "Lord, why did my mother have to die?" Very quietly, in the deep part of my heart I heard, "Because I had mercy on her." I realized right then, and I did not know very much about the Bible or God, but I realized right then that God deals with the person on the day of their death as an individual. It is just them and God. God is doing what is the best for that individual. Yes, He cares about the rest of us hurting, sure He does. He is a kind and good and gracious God, and He cared about my mother.

I had a friend whose son died in a car crash. This son lived a very wild life. In fact, the whole family was wild. They all lived a wild life. They have been in jail. They had done drugs. They were alcoholics. They were fighting. They were just wild. He died. In the meantime, the father had become a Christian because I led him to the Lord. He called me and they were devastated. They were up in Ohio. They called and said, "We do not know if Johnny was saved or not. We are just broken hearted." I told them to ask the Lord. "You can ask that?" I said, "Sure, Ask Him. Who knows what will happen." They called me back and said, "You know, we did that. We found a poem in his Bible that was all about how you needed to know the Lord in order to go to heaven. You needed Jesus because He was such a wonderful answer to all that was in your life." It gave them peace.

Look at this second Scripture in II Corinthians 1: 3-4. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

Remember, let God comfort you. Know the Bible. Know this verse if you do not know any other verse. Comfort others with the comfort that God has comforted you with. God bless you. I am praying for you.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What does Jesus say about tragedy (John 16:33)
2. What happens to our perspective when we go through tragedy?
3. What does the Bible say about supporting others through tragedy?
4. How does scripture help us in times of tragedy?

To watch the video on GOD IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY, Pillar Five, Relational Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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