

The Terror of Randomness: Searching for Sense in Tragedy

Psalm 91:1-6, 11

Introduction:

The numbers 9/11 strike a responsive cord in all of us as the evil of that day has been etched permanently in our collective consciousness. It is the same terrifying silence that grips us when we hear the latest report of another senseless shooting — Columbine, Virginia Tech., Ft. Hood, Tucson ... And each time we are left to wonder — *Why?* Tragedy, which seems to happen so randomly, makes our world a very scary place.

The problem is not that something bad happens to innocent people — accidents, for example, happen daily. The “Why?” question, however, is always the same. If there is suffering in the world (and there is), we at least want some reason for it, predictability to it, and preparation for it. It is the apparent *randomness* of tragedy that is most terrifying.

Veterans of war understand the terror of randomness as the arbitrariness of death on the battlefield has left many a soldier asking the same haunting question.

And those left unscathed (physically) often feel guilty, angry, and empty. *If only I had stayed longer ... taken another route ...* Thus, in a strange sort of way, we blame ourselves.

Discussion:

I. Two Questions

- A. “**Why?**” The reason for the *Why* question is because we expect order in life. God, after all, orders His world (Gen.8:22; 1 Cor.14:33), and so we try and order ours. We surround ourselves with watches, clocks, and calendars — because we want order. But it doesn’t always work.
- a family lives comfortably in a Midwestern town and suddenly their lives are shattered by a storm
 - a middle-age man eats right and exercises to fight off heart disease and comes down with cancer
 - a woman enjoys years of marriage and motherhood only to be raped as she jogs near her home
 - a husband takes a long-awaited trip with his family and a terrible crash occurs the result of a drunk driver
1. Where is the “order” in each of those situations? And how do you answer “the” question — “*Why?*”
 2. One day we wake up and realize what only wisdom will deliver — that much of what happens is outside of our control. Sometimes there are no satisfactory answers. Or sensible pattern. Or rhyme-reason (at least to us).
- B. “**What if?**” The second question places blame upon ourselves. It says in essence, *If I had done something differently, this would not have happened.* **Think:** Do we really want the power that accompanies the 2nd question? Do we really want to know future events so we can protect self and loved ones from pain? If so, we are asking to be God — and that option is not available to us.
1. The best thing we can do is strengthen the roots of our faith so that when buffeted by the storm (James 1:2), we will survive. Like trees bent to the wind but which survive the storm because of their roots, so it must be with our faith.
 2. That is why some weather storms better than others. Some learn (and it is a learned trait) to live in hope — hope that in spite of tragedy, life is still worth living.

II. Two Stories

- A. _____: **a story of prosperity and virtue.** Behind human eyes there was a confrontation over the faithfulness of this man (1:9-12). We can read the story and know the outcome, but Job lived it (and he couldn't skip a few chapters ahead). Job's perspective changed when he finally stopped talking about God and came to know God (38:1-4,9-12; 40:1-4; 42:1-3). Through it all, Job learned two important truths:
1. *He learned that behind the apparent randomness of life, there is the awesome and almighty Creator.* God is in control even though Job could not always see it.
 2. *He learned that in suffering, God gave him power — the power to decide how to respond.* Job's response impacted others. And his response mattered to God (and so does yours).
- B. _____: **a story of blessing and betrayal.** We get to the end of his story and the end ... is not the end. Like Job, there is a story within a story — and one he could not see. God's providence was at work (even in tragedy) to bring about a higher purpose (Gen.50:20).
- C. The Job & Joseph stories remind us that our lives fit into a holy plan beyond what our minds can comprehend.
1. Job and Joseph had no idea how their hardship would impact lives for generations. The same is true with you.
 2. Your life is like a huge landscape that extends far beyond what the eye can see. And who knows ... how one experience — so singularly horrible — can set in motion a chain of events that will bring about good for years to come (Rom.8:28).
 3. God can triumph over evil — if you let Him work in your life.

III. Two Truths

- A. **Suffering is part of the freedom of _____.** God gives to each the freedom to choose. And some will make wrong choices! — choices that affect others in tragic ways. However, because some make evil choices, do you want God to take away the right that He gives to all mankind?
- B. **Suffering is no respecter of _____.** "Why me?" Perhaps the better question might be — "Why not me?" What makes me so special as to be delivered from all pain and loss?

Conclusion:

A world of fairness gives us what we want. A world of grace gives us more than we deserve.
Sometimes there are no answers. Like Job, we must, at times, close our mouth and acknowledge the workings of God even in ways we do not understand.