



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

## Counseling and Family Services

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### Tragedy and Suffering Part 1 in a series of 3 articles.

#### INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where tragedy and suffering are a present reality. Our awareness of these painful circumstances shift from vague realities that exist in our world to a fire that consumes when tragedy and suffering strike the things we love. They leave questions and hurt that cannot be ignored by the one who has experienced such difficulty. However, we can have hope because of God's faithfulness as referenced in *Lamentations 3:21-26*. We will not always feel hopeful nor will we always feel that God is merciful, but may we know these things to be true in the midst of circumstances that lead us to the darkest of nights. It is important to acknowledge that when questions arise from tragedy, no answer will remove all the pain one experiences when difficulties occur. Tragedy and suffering hurt, because they always involve loss.

This article is meant to outline helpful truths from a biblical perspective for those who have experienced tragedy or wrestle with all the tragedy they see in the world. If you are in the midst of tragedy, be patient with yourself and know that healing after experiencing tragedy is a process that takes time. Remember that the truths outlined here are to be read from a tone of compassion, love, and patience. Applying these truths without the grace and patience our Lord graciously bestows upon us would be approaching tragedy and suffering outside of a biblical context. This article is not meant to be exhaustive but to touch on some of the essential truths that can help the believer who is experiencing suffering or wants to better understand suffering from a biblical viewpoint. Without a doubt, questions will remain. May we, by the grace of God, attempt to focus on the answers we are given in Scripture rather than the questions that have not yet been answered.

#### TRAGEDY AND SUFFERING ARE PAINFUL – “SHOULD THE BELIEVER HURT?”

The believer has many wonderful and encouraging promises to dwell upon. In dwelling on these promises, it is important neither to minimize the surety of them nor to extend God's promises beyond what they are.

For example, we are promised sufficient grace (*2 Corinthians 12:9*), but we are not promised to always *feel* as though God's grace is sufficient. Though we, as believers, would like a life without difficulty we are not promised such a life. In fact Jesus tells us in *John 16:33* that we will experience tribulation. God does not ask nor expect His people to be free from hurt. In fact, God has created human beings with a unique ability to connect. This ability is one of the great pleasures in life but also brings the possibility of deep pain. *Job 3:1-3* shows how intense the pain can be from experiencing tragedy.

Those who are experiencing suffering must be allowed to hurt. God understands this and knows you feel pain when tragedy occurs. He does not enjoy or take pleasure in your pain, but He knows you will experience it when experiencing tragedy. We must also acknowledge that where there is hurt there are often difficult questions and intense emotions. In the midst of pain, whether our own or others, we must try not to deny or avoid these questions. Too often, Satan tries to get the believer to buy into the lie that “if

I had enough faith” then I would not experience pain or question God. Pain and the questions that arise from it is not necessarily a product of lacking faith. Instead, they are often a product of difficult situations. We will and should desire to shift out of the pain and questioning over time. To stay stuck in our pain and questioning for too long is not helpful, just as denying pain or the questions we have is not helpful. Instead, we need to acknowledge the pain and questions so we can move through them to a place where we more clearly see God and our need for His ongoing refining work in us.

*1 Peter 1:3-9 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”*

## **WE LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD – “WHY IS THERE SO MUCH SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?”**

Prior to “the fall,” the world was a place where pain, death, and loss did not exist. There was no such thing as tragedy and suffering. One day Paradise will be restored. Until then, tragedy and suffering are a part of the world we live in and personally experience. We do not have to look far to see those who are experiencing excruciating circumstances, and some of you are currently in the midst of such circumstances. Your heart aches because of a loss or tragic event, and that ache likely leads to difficult questions.

The creation account in *Genesis 1:31* tells us that as God reflected on what He had created, He concluded that it was very good. Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God is the first tragedy recorded in Scripture; and one that affects each one of us. When sin entered the world, it led to the corruption of creation which includes our bodies, the earth, etc.

*Romans 5:18 “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; ...”*

Sin has led to the presence of suffering in the world. It would be correct to say that all tragedy can be traced back to the sin of Satan, Adam and Eve. However, the suffering we see all around us today may or may not be directly linked to sin.

Tragedy and suffering have one source but different causes:

- The source of all tragedy is Adam and Eve’s sin.
  - Their sin has affected the whole of God’s creation (i.e., We live in a fallen world.).
  - Therefore, we experience natural disasters, disease, death, etc.
  - In this general sense, all of mankind experiences suffering in that we live in a fallen world.
- Sin’s direct and indirect causes of tragedy.
  - Direct – someone’s sin leads to a tragedy.
    - A drunk driver kills someone.
    - Murder, rape, etc.
    - Lying, deceit, etc.
  - Indirect – tragedy occurs but not as a direct result of someone’s sin.

- A child is killed in an accident.
- A tornado.
- Cancer.

Sometimes tragedy occurs as direct punishment by God (e.g., see the story of Korah in *Numbers 16*) or a consequence of an individual's sin (e.g., consequences in the life of King David), but other times tragedy occurs simply as a result of living in a fallen world where death and sorrow are a reality. For example, a natural disaster may not be the result of God punishing the sin of those who experience it. Tragedy can also occur from sinning against each other. More often than not, we are not able to determine a specific cause of suffering. Therefore, we must be very careful about assigning blame or labeling the causes of suffering. For example, those who came to be with Job blamed him for his suffering, but they were wrong in assuming Job had done something which was leading to the suffering he was experiencing and were chastised by God for it (*Job 42:7-9*). In another instance (*John 9:2-3*), the disciples asked Jesus about whose sin caused blindness in a man, his sin or his parents' sin. Jesus responded, "*Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*"

While these truths do not diminish the pain of tragedy, they can be helpful to focus the believer from trying to identify the source of tragedy to acknowledging that pain occurs in a fallen world. Not only does pain occur in a fallen world, but we are not due answers about why tragedy occurs (*Job 38-42*). Instead, we are to be pointed to God through our pain and long for a day when we will be in the presence of our great God.

*Philippians 3:20-4:1* "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."

Tragedy and suffering affect us all through the events that occur in our lives, causing us to feel grief and loss. For more information about dealing with grief and loss, please visit our website at [www.accounseling.org/emotions](http://www.accounseling.org/emotions) or call ACCFS at 309-263-5536. Next month we will continue discussing the theme of tragedy and suffering, focusing on God's love for His people and His sovereignty over this world.