

STUFF HAPPENS

A couple of weeks ago a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck Japan, followed by a tsunami. Together, these two catastrophic events took about 20,000 lives. Many, many good people perished.

“Why did God let that happen?” We’ve all heard someone ask that question. Maybe we have even asked it ourselves after some tragic event occurred in our lives or in the lives of someone we knew and cared about, or in the aftermath of some horrific natural disaster.

On the surface, it’s a very good question. After all, isn’t God a god of love and mercy? Isn’t he in control of the universe? In the emotion of the moment, it is an easy question to ask and for many, it’s easy to blame God for what happened. After all, our sense of fair play tells us bad things should only happen to bad people, not to good decent people or innocent children.

Today, we’ll look more closely at the question, “Why did God let that happen?” It is a tough question and a good question; a question that people shy away from thinking too deeply on. That is ***exactly*** why it needs to be looked at.

His shift was over. Tim had already clocked out and was about to head home. For a reason we will probably never know, Tim turned around and went back to the job site. He and

his crew were working a turn-around at the Celanese plant a few months ago. As Tim arrived back at the work site, something triggered an explosion. Tim was badly burned and suffered a severe blow to the head from a piece of iron that was blown at him by the force of the explosion. Tim held on for several days, but his heart finally gave out. He left a wife, children, step-children and three grandchildren. Tim was a good man, generous and kind.

The daycare children were playing on the playground on one of the islands of Indonesia. Screams and commotion were heard in the distance. The day care attendants looked up saw the cause of the commotion and tried to herd the children back into the building as a wave of water and debris raced toward them. The Tsunami overtook them and swept them away in a churning mix of water, furniture, cars, people and animals. Innocent children and dedicated teachers perished together.

Robert was a kind and generous man. He fell in love with Nancy and knew she was the only woman he would ever love. But Nancy hardly noticed Robert. She fell in love with Kenneth and married him, leaving Robert heartbroken and devastated.

Naomi's four year old daughter was the light of her life. Naomi had her daughter with her as she drove home from the grocery store one night. A drunk sped though a stop sign and struck Naomi's car on the side where her daughter was sitting.

Naomi was not seriously injured but her daughter died at the scene. Naomi quit believing in God that day.

Hundreds of miners die every year but the Chilean miners who were trapped underground for over 60 days were all saved. They thanked God for saving them and moved closer to Him because of the disaster.

Jim was a ne'er do well and a wife abuser who lived in a trailer park. One night a tornado ripped through the trailer park killing several kindly older residents, but it lifted over Jim's mobile home and set down again a block later, destroying dozens of more homes. Jim and his home were spared. Jim got drunk to celebrate his good fortune. Later on, he beat his wife.

Several people survived the collapse of the World Trade Towers while thousands of others perished.

Why! Why do bad things happen? This question practically screams at us at times. To try and understand this, to get a grip on why things happen, it's necessary for us to step back and look, really look at the earth and understand how it works, to look at the people and God's relationship with us. This is gonna' be hard to do in the next fifteen minutes but, while we may not find all the answers today, we should at least gain some understanding and... find some peace.

There is often a good side and a bad side to events in our lives. Most things are not all good or all bad. Let me give you an example. A lonely frog went to a fortune-teller. The fortune teller said that he had good news and bad news. "What's the good news?" The frog asked. The fortune teller said, "You will meet a beautiful young girl and she will want to know everything about you." "That's great," said the frog, "When and where will I meet her?" "That's the bad news," the fortune teller said, "Next semester, in biology class." Let's look at the good side and the bad side of a few things.

To make the earth work, to make it habitable for mankind and at the same time beautiful, God put natural laws into place to govern it.

Gravity for instance. The same law of gravity that holds everything together, that keeps the earth going around the sun, that keeps everything from flying off into space, that allows rivers to flow, that creates beautiful waterfalls, that allows us to flush our toilets and water our lawns, that makes roller coasters work and enables us to drink our coffee, also has a dark side.

That same gravity also causes injury or death to people when they fall; it can cause disabled planes to drop from the sky; flooded rivers to rage as they flow downhill to the sea; objects to fall on people; avalanches to rush down the mountainsides;

your glasses to fall out of your pocket and get scratched or your good china to strike the floor and break when you drop it.

Rain. It waters the earth and cools the air. It smells good. It also ruins picnics and baseball games, floods homes and sometimes drowns people and animals.

Fire. What smells or feels better than a fire in the fireplace or a campfire? We cook with it and use it to heat our homes and our bath water, yet fire destroys forests, homes and lives.

We all love mountains. Their lofty snow capped peaks are inspiring, yet the processes that builds mountains, plate tectonics, where one huge section of earth slides under another, causes widespread devastation through earthquakes, landslides, tidal waves, volcanoes and lava flows. The earth would probably be lifeless, or at least without *human* life, without plate tectonics. The process reworks the earth, recycling carbon dioxide, recharging the atmosphere and keeping the earth dynamic and alive.

The snow that is so beautiful and that we so long for at Christmas, that makes for wonderful skiing, can also produce tragic avalanches and death by freezing. It can disrupt transportation and cause widespread power outages.

There are many other examples of the natural laws that God put in place, how they have a good side and a bad side. But let's look now at human endeavors.

How about, say, the automobile. It's great for getting us to vacations, our jobs, our homes, the grocery store and doctor's office, but cars also can be wrecked and those wrecks cause injuries and death. Over 4,000 teenagers a year die in automobile accidents.

Medicine. We have made great advances in medicine, but there are still people who die from adverse reactions to medicines.

Computers: enable us to solve complicated problems, informs us, keeps us instantly in touch, lets us travel electronically to the countries and museums of the world, yet each can be a pornographic shop, they can tell how to make bombs, spew venomous rhetoric and make us even worse couch potatoes.

Perhaps this is a good time to talk about people and free will. God created this world, created mankind, and gave us free will. He could have made us like robots where we would have no choice in what we do, but he didn't. For better or for worse, we get to make most of the choices in our lives. Therein lies a large part of the problem. The drunk driver who killed Naomi's daughter chose to drink that day and then to get into his car and drive.

People choose to rob, murder and hurt other human beings.

People choose to engage in dangerous activities.

People choose to do drugs or abuse alcohol.

People choose to beat their spouses or children.

People choose to stay in abusive relationships.

People know a volcano is dormant and may erupt again one day, but they choose to live at the foot of it.

And a lot of those people, when the choices **they** made bite them in their southern exposures, will blame God.

I want you to imagine for a moment what it would be like if nothing bad happened to anyone. There were, as of this last Thursday, at 10:30 in the morning, 6,910,724,525 people in this world. To have **nothing** bad happen to anyone, God would have to absolutely control each and every person. There would be no accidents, no stubbed toes, no colds, no broken bones, no broken hearts, no hurtful words. Everyone would get to marry the one they fell in love with. All the men would be tall, handsome and fit. The women would all be beautiful. All food would taste wonderful. We would have no need for tears. Machinery would always work perfectly and safely. All sporting events would end in ties.

Our children would all behave and make straight A's, write us everyday when they are successful adults and send us money occasionally.

We wouldn't have to worry about war, disease, bad credit ratings, having as much as others or being sued. Dentists, doctors and lawyers would go out of business as well as nursing homes and hospitals.

In other words, earth would be heaven. Why then would we want to behave ourselves and have faith in God so we could go to heaven if we already lived there?

And those innocent children? Well, there are 1,865,895,622 children 15 years old or younger in the world as of Thursday. If no bad things were to happen to any of them, God would have to guard all their lives each and every second of every day. There would be no bullies, no falling from swings, no scratches, no falls, no sniffles, no running to you with tears in their eyes. Again, we're talking what it is like in heaven.

I am not trying to justify bad things happening to people, I am just trying to get you to have some perspective on it, to really think hard about it.

God said stuff will happen. Let's read from Deuteronomy 19: 4-5:

“This is the rule concerning the man who kills another and flees there to save his life – one who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life.”

God has warned us that things will happen. But he has also said that he will always be there for us. He also said to pray constantly. Those weren't just empty words (God doesn't say things he doesn't mean). **Ask** him for protection and guidance every day. Jesus said that God hears all of our prayers...and Jesus can not tell a lie.

I start every day with a prayer that goes something like this. God please guide and protect me this day. Guide and protect Jean and our daughters and their families. Guide and protect our brothers and sisters and their families, Jean's mom, and all our relatives and loved ones. Guide us in our thoughts, words and deeds. And the prayer goes on from there.

Don't blame God and don't lose faith. God does not want anything bad to happen to anyone. He is a resource for us to use when stuff happens.

Naomi, by giving up on God, gave up a huge source of comfort and strength and peace. God understands our anger

when things happen. He says to us, “Let Me help you through this.”

If you want to blame someone for bad things happening, perhaps a good person to blame is Satan. I have a strong feeling he has a hand in all the bad that happens here, maybe even causing most of it.

Why do evil people sometimes survive and prosper while some good people perish or live in poverty? **What happens to someone is God's domain.** He has a plan that we are not privy to. We read Jesus' words in Matthew:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Luke also quotes Jesus saying something similar. ***“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

I don't understand it all, and if you're like me, you probably have a list of questions you would really like answered when

you finally get to heaven. It will be clear to us then and all make sense. Until that day, try to look at the big picture of life of earth.

Consider the natural forces that make this planet the beautiful place it is. Consider the sheer number of people and above all, remember that we have free will. ***Remember also that God is leaving room for human beings to act.***

He created this beautiful world, put us in it and seems to be saying, “now let’s see what they do with it and with the lives I have given them.” “I ***have*** given them explicit instructions.” Have you noticed that women follow the instructions a lot better than men? Just ask my wife. Instructions are usually the last resort for guys.

Whether earth is a proving ground for us or not, kinda’ like boot camp, we can’t know while we are here. We can just live our lives the way he told us to, loving Him, loving each other, helping each other and trying our best.

Instead of asking why bad things happen, ask, instead, what can we do about our suffering to confer meaning upon it, to create good from the evil we must each endure.

When stuff happens, keep your faith strong. Stop and think about the very nature of life on earth, the natural laws and

man's free will. Find a way to make some good come out of the situation.

Remember, we grow strong in our character from adversity, not from having everything always go exactly right for us.

Above everything else, remember how deeply God loves you and cares for you and how deeply He cares about what each of you do with the life he has given you.