

What In The World Is God Doing?

A Response To The Terrorist Attacks On The U.S.

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What in the world is God doing? Good question! As we continue to acclimate to the shock and horrors of the terrorist attacks on our nation most of us come back to questions regarding God. Why did He allow this to happen? How can a good God allow evil at all? Others are rushing to declare that the end times are here, as they did when the Gulf War broke out. The majority of people however, are still reeling with pain and confusion, trying to find a way to make sense of the tragedy. Maybe we should look first at what God may be telling us personally?

Peter Jennings did a special report asking men of faith "Where is God when bad things happen?" The answers were not particularly satisfying. As we hear about people talking to their children about the attack this is the number one question they want to avoid. Christians all over the world have been asking that same question since time began. Questioning God in times of distress doesn't make you any less of a Christian. David did it often (Psalm 22), as did Job (Job 24:1), Elijah (1 Kings 19) and others. I guess that leaves us in good company! What separates believers from unbelievers however, is what they do next: Believe.

Answers to Evil:

In my theological studies over the past 20 years I have not found a mental answer that FULLY satisfies the deep cries of our hearts in the face of pain. We could look at any number of theological reasons, such as the doctrine of sin, pointing to a fallen world, and even blame the Devil who is ruler over this world. While all of these are true, the only answer that comes close to comforting myself and others is to say "I don't get it, ...but God does." I have to realize that if all the oceans of the world can fit in the hollow of His hand (Isaiah 40:12), then He probably can understand something here that I cannot. This answer moves me forward into a new experience of God and victories I never would have known without the current crisis. I believe God wants to use this crisis as an opportunity to do His will in our lives.

While God does not cause evil (James 1:13), God in His sovereignty takes evil and brings good from it (Genesis 50:20). And He uses us, his children, to do it. The Sunday prior to the tragedy a missionary from came to speak at our church. She had come home to the U.S. to stay, and die. Her terminal cancer is now her main microphone. "I realized we are ALL terminal" she said. "And God has made me for such a time as this." God used

the crisis of her cancer to draw people around her to a saving faith in Christ. Her faith and peace in God, in the midst of her storm, was the witness of the power of God in her life. This radical acceptance of painful cancer shocked more than a few of us at church that day. It is the same power I believe, that we have as believers in a sovereign God. As we look to God in faith amidst terrible times, people who yearn for the same hope will stand up and take notice that there is a God –in your life.

On the other hand, I can't help but wonder if God would use this to discipline His children (Heb 12:3-11) or to expose our waywardness as He did Israel (Isa. 29:23-29:4). The idea that God would allow or cause pain toward Christians has not been a prominent feature of our modern theology. As a church we often seem to fit the declaration of Isaiah 29:13 " These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me amounts to nothing more than human rules learned by rote". Will we respond as Israel did when they said "Shut up, we don't want to hear anymore of your reports. Don't tell us the truth. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies"? (NLT) Or will we allow the Lord to use whatever He wishes to sift us, purge us and "bring about a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it." (Heb 12:11) Shouldn't we examine closely our own hearts before we blame God or speak of the end times to our neighbor?

Personal Application:

What in YOUR world is God doing? I am amazed at the impact the tragedy has had on me personally. Even though I seek to minister everyday, God has shown me how much my heart has strayed from His purposes for my life, and how easily I get caught up in the trivial and mundane. God has shown other believers around me how strained their relationship is with Him and with others and they long for intimacy again. Others have realized that what they were pursuing in life or fighting over in their marriage had little lasting value. (How easily the world can stop all of those "important things" when faced with tragedy.) What is He showing you about your life, your relationships with others or with Him?

Three changes:

I propose that all of us can make three immediate changes (yes, this means they can help you, too:

- First: Take time out to examine your life in detail. Write down the contrast in your perspective before and after the disaster. Give God permission to show you His desire for your life and allow Him to "mess it up" in His glorious ways. Write down what He wants you to prioritize in life – and schedule it. Louie Giglio, a national college minister, once told us in a Bible study at Baylor University that "If you don't plan God into your life something or someone will plan Him out." I believe this extends to His plans for your

life as well. When you approach God enter into a time of personal and intimate worship. Do it alone. Go back to that "sacred" place (mine is my car) and let God into your heart deeply, submitting all of your struggles and all of your hopes to Him. He will change you forever.

- Second: Read the stories of Israel (Judges, Chronicles, Kings) out loud to your children. If you don't have children, pretend you do. Notice that God allowed destruction in the hometowns of His chosen people, yet he kept the faithful safe. The safest life, in God's view, is when we live in obedience to His words, as holy and wholly devoted to Him (Ps. 18, Eph. 5:1, II Tim 4:17). We should help our children understand that we live in a pain filled world. They need not be scared of our good God. He takes care of His own and sometimes uses us in our pain and faith to bring even more glory to Him. Remember, this is our life purpose (Eph. 1:12,14). Get an eternal perspective on your history and your destiny. This may also be the opportunity you were looking for to start a prayer and share time in your family routine.
- Third: "Make the most of every opportunity" (Colossians 4:5, Eph 3:15). Look for the open doors God has provided to you with people you already know. Talk to them compassionately about the tragedy. Find out how they "make sense of God in all of this". One pastor friend told me that they were expecting a 20% increase in church attendance the Sunday after the terrorist incident. Another friend told me that their usually vacant church was packed that Sunday. People all over seem to be more open to spiritual discussions as they look for hope, healing and help. Maybe you could be the one whom God uses to take evil and make it into an opportunity for His good. I can think of no better way to repay Satan for this evil than to use it to save souls (just like in the persecution of the early church). So look for God's open door to tell them the good news of eternal life in Jesus.

God is doing what He always has done in the world. He is meeting people right where they are, meeting their needs and inviting them into a personal relationship with Him. He wants you to join Him there.

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