

# When Tragedy Strikes

September 25, 2016

Welcome to a place where we come to find the peace that passes understanding.

In times of shocking sorrow and tragedy, we often find ourselves either needing comfort or trying to extend it. But, whether receiving or offering, the greatest comfort can only come from our Father, who rules and reigns by the power of His Spirit, and reveals His great love through His Son.

**The thing is: how do we find comfort in a Creator who's supposed to be loving enough (as revealed through His son), and powerful enough (as ruled through His Spirit), to have stopped the disaster and all the suffering in the first place?**



Reflexively in tragedy, grief-stricken and sincere questions of “*Why?*” subtly mutate into angry accusations of “*How could you?!*”

**“Is God not loving enough to have stopped this?”**

**“Is God not powerful enough to have stopped this?”**



Those are the two big questions. “*So which is it?!*”

Let's face it: **suffering feels like the *absence of God's love and power***. *But is it?* Feelings are so fleeting and perspective so limited.

**Is God preoccupied or lacking in power?**

On the eve of history's deepest, darkest, disaster (the killing of the One who personified love), Jesus said:

“In this world you will have trouble.” **[Why?]** – John 16:33b NIV

Because, *this* isn't home – it's just a brief stop in a dimly lit outpost on the way, where the Light came into the darkness, but wasn't recognized, where **freewill is a double-edged sword wielded by both the kind and cruel alike**, the hurting *and* the hurtful, the loving *and* the hateful.



And *nobody* gets out of this battle alive, down here in the dark. Not even God's own *Son*, the Light *itself*.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and **he was heard because of his reverent submission**. **[Yet, it didn't stop the cross]** Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation ... – Hebrews 5:7-9a NIV

So ... when Jesus was crying out with tears of suffering, that ultimately led to His crucifixion, do you suppose the Father wasn't *loving* enough, or not *powerful* enough, to stop the cross?

Or, is there a third option?

**Why didn't Jesus' faithfulness and loud cries stop the cross?**

**Because of God's plan and Jesus' purpose, that turned the worst tragedy in history into the greatest triumph over evil and, became the *ultimate expression of God's love and power!***

But, who could've possibly seen that coming? *Nobody.*

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." – Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV

**Jesus' eternal purpose far outweighed His temporary pain.**

*As does ours.* But, here in the dark it's so hard to see.

**Yet, remember, it still came with tearful cries for answers.**

*As does ours.* And, He was heard. There was and is great purpose.

Even people without faith understand that growth comes through hardship; that endurance and resolve offer insight, empathy, and credibility that you wouldn't or couldn't have without it – to relate to others down here and to carry into eternity.

Even the greatest "greats" of the faith had to endure down here in the dark.

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance [from the outpost]. And **they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.** [That's a huge part of our greater purpose] People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ... a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. [Home. Heaven.] – Hebrews 11:13-16 NIV

*And, this isn't it!*

Mother Teresa once said: In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures ... will be seen to be no more serious than a night in an inconvenient hotel.

**If you're the one offering comfort, chances are, it comes from a place of personal tragedy.**

**You can relate. You can connect. And, you can bring Light into darkness and Life into death.**

In the face of tragedy, theology isn't very comforting.

But then, comfort has never come as a theological theory; it's supposed to come as ... *you*, the arms and embrace of the One who is all-loving, all-powerful, *and* all-purposeful who has come!

The harsh reality of this life *is* that no one gets out alive down here.

And, the only reason it comes as such a shock when it does, is that we spend so much effort mentally avoiding the unavoidable moment of impact.

Tragedy forces us to face the inevitable we need to prepare for.

So, let's put our faith in the only hope we have beyond the grave: the Light that comes into the darkness. **He's the One who did ultimately get out alive, defeating death and paying the price for our passage in the process.**

Created purpose versus temporary pain – who can figure that out?

*Nobody.*

**We can only trust that we're heard by a Father who has more than proven His love and power.**

**His ways are simply higher than ours.**

**And, they're loving and powerful and ultimately, eternally, significantly, purposeful.**

But then, you've been given the freewill to disagree.

Just remember: **freewill will serve or enslave, depends on the user.**



**So, does the presence of suffering signal the absence of God? No, it signals the sovereign authority of absolute purpose.**

But what does it mean to be all-powerful? Does omnipotence mean that God can do *anything*? No. It means he can do anything that's *possible*.

For instance, **because He's omnipotent it's not possible for God to make mistakes** (that requires being weak) which He isn't. So, God *can't* make mistakes.

**Can the Lord make a rock so big that He can't pick it up?**

**No. It's a *mistake* to try to create a self-contradiction.** It would be like trying to create a world where people have freewill and yet no potential to sin or cause harm. *Impossible*.



**God is all good: all loving, all powerful, and, all purposeful.**

**The good must come with the bad.**

**The Light must come with the dark.**

To think otherwise is to think a man could design and construct a beautiful house, and then *not* be able to change the light bulbs.

Just by running its destructive course, freewill and this world reliably, and sadly necessarily, shake us out of our complacency and procrastination toward all things good, loving, and eternal.

**And, remind us to appreciate our fragile life and precious loved ones, while at the same time reminding us to look beyond this temporary mortal world for our ultimate fulfillment.**

Jesus said:

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” – John  
16:33b NIV