

Explaining the Inexplicable

PASTOR GREG LAURIE



Crises hit hard. They hit fast. Some crises are so epic that you come to regard them as dividing points. You segment life into *before* and *after*. For Job, it was losing his wealth and all his children in one day (Job 1:13-22). For Joseph, it was being sold by his brothers into slavery (Genesis 37:12-28). For Jesus, it was watching one of His handpicked disciples betray Him (John 6:70-71; 13:21-27; 18:1-12). For me, it was my son's death.

Until tragedy strikes, we may subconsciously believe that we are exempt from suffering. Without even realizing it, we can think, *I won't get cancer. My spouse won't leave me. I won't lose someone in an accident. I won't have problems with my kids.* But these dreamy thoughts will eventually lead to a wake-up call. Crisis will come. The question is, How will you respond? Will you trust or resist God?

Typically, we ask, *Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this?* At the outset, there are no real answers. In time, some answers come—and some mysteries remain. “Why” questions can haunt us.

Turning from the Why

Frequently when a crisis strikes, we conclude it's a result of a specific wrongdoing. Sometimes that's true. Sin brings harm, and problems can be God's corrective means of disciplining and purifying (Hebrews 12:5-11). But I think it's extremely important not to assume a specific cause and effect relationship to everything. Sometimes tragedy occurs simply as a result of sin's widespread effect on all humanity, not because a specific person sinned in some specific way. After a tower had fallen and killed 18 people, Jesus remarked, **“Do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”** (Luke 13:4b-5). Those individuals' deaths, Jesus was saying, were not because their sin was worse than others'.

Death and its precursors—sickness, aging, disabilities, etc.—are a result of sin. They were not a part of God's original plan for humanity, and they will not be present in eternity with Him. But there is not a one-to-one ratio between a person's sinfulness and their hardships. Sometimes bad things happen inexplicably.

People asked me after my son's death, “Why has this happened to you, of all people?” Many seemed to assume that I get a free pass because I am a pastor. But I live in the same fallen world as everyone else. Paul was beaten nearly to death five times (2 Corinthians 11:24). Jesus promised us tribulation in this world (John 16:33). Why should any of us expect less?

The Star of the Story

In his book *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* (published by Multnomah Books, 2009), Randy Alcorn wrote, “If we come to see the purpose of the universe as God's long-term glory rather than our short-term happiness, then we will undergo a critical paradigm shift in tackling the problem of evil and suffering. The world has gone terribly wrong. God is going to fix it. First, for His eternal glory. Second, for our eternal good.” Our own personal comfort at this time and place is not top priority. We tend to think of the world as revolving around us. We are the stars of our own films, the main characters of our own novels. But the story's real star is God—and He is so much more wise, worthy, powerful, and glorious than we. When we accept this, we gain much peace. There is joy in living with a recognition of our place. We are dearly-loved children of a Father who's writing a story we don't yet fully understand (Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 John 3:1-2).

Hope that Mushrooms

Through hardship, hope increases. This may be surprising; it may seem that hope would best grow in a trouble-free life. But the best soil for hope is adversity. Paul

wrote, **“Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.**

Crisis will come.

The question is, How will you respond? Will you trust or resist God?

And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:2-5, NLT). In the same paragraph, Paul used the words “trials,” “problems,” and “God loves us.” We sometimes ask, *If God loves us, won't He remove our trials and problems?* Maybe. Sometimes. And sometimes not. That is up to God, according to what needs to happen in our lives.

John 11 tells of a man, Lazarus, who was ill. Lazarus was Jesus' personal friend, so his sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that he was sick. But Jesus intentionally postponed going to see Lazarus. By the time He arrived, Lazarus was dead. The Bible says the reason Jesus delayed was that He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:5-6). Jesus waited because His desire was even greater than theirs. They wanted a healing; Jesus wanted a resurrection.

So let's surrender our “why” questions to God. We can't always know the answer. But we can know this: Our glorious, wise, loving God has a plan. ✨