

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY

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Pain and suffering bring us to an intersection in our lives, provoking us to either turn away from God or turn to Him. In those times of pain, we can be honest with God, pour out our hearts and be real with Him. Most of all, we must allow suffering to bring us closer to God rather than let a moment of pain lead to a lifetime of bitterness.

Suffering in the Bible

The Bible doesn't hide the problem of pain. Just four chapters into the story of Genesis, there is a loss of paradise and murder in the first family. In fact, the Bible is filled with stories of those who suffered; it doesn't hide them or sweep suffering under the rug.

People ask, "Why does God allow suffering?" There's suffering in the world because there is sin in the world. Suffering is sometimes the consequence of our own sin; sometimes we are victims who suffer the consequences of other people's sin. That just happened in this city [Las Vegas] on Sunday night [October 1st]. It was absolutely evil, a total atrocity that has affected thousands of lives. God did not do this.

God is able to provide hope after the tragic consequences of sin. The theme throughout the Bible is God redeeming us from sin. There was sin in the Garden of Eden, and out of that God promised a Son who would deliver humankind. In the Book of Genesis, Joseph was sold into slavery and suffered at the hands of his brothers. Through that, God took that evil and used it for good, saving Joseph's family and thousands from famine.

Christ's Suffering for Our Sin

The greatest moment of God turning tragedy into hope was the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. ***In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*** (1 John 4:9-10).

Sometimes we feel, "God, You don't understand what suffering and pain feel like." God the Father does understand because He intentionally sent His Son, Jesus, to die for

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our sin. In the midst of suffering we have a High Priest who understands exactly what we are going through. The Son suffered willingly so that you and I can be reconciled to the Father.

Jesus Brings Hope

Often times, God uses pain to bring us to our senses, to awaken us to our need for Him. When we are in a place where our hearts are raw with emotion, we may think about God and eternal life. At that concert it could have been any one of us injured or killed; that brings an awareness of our mortality. God desires us to turn our hearts to Jesus Christ because that is where hope begins. The first step for you to receive the hope of God is to put your faith in Jesus because, apart from Christ, your relationship with God is broken. That needs to be fixed before anything else can be fixed.

If you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior, God desires to bring you everlasting life, comfort, and hope. Will you turn your heart to God? He can supernaturally bring to you what no human, worldly pleasure, or earthly distraction can bring to you. ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation*** (2 Corinthians 1:3-4a).

Not only that, but God brings purpose in our suffering. One young man said he came to the concert an agnostic but left a believer in God because there was no possible way that he could have escaped that night without God working miracles. We believe that God is going to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are turned toward Him (2 Chronicles 16:9). God using evil to produce good outcomes doesn't mean that evil stops being evil or that the pain will stop, but it does mean that God brings hope and purpose in the midst of suffering.

Our Faith during Tragedy

As believers, we must believe what Romans 8:28 says, ***We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.*** It doesn't say that all things are good. Rather, if our hearts are turned towards Him, God can take everything in our lives and work it out for good. Ultimately, God's good purpose is to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ—that is, to have us think and live less like the world and to become more like Jesus.

Finally, believers in Jesus Christ don't have to live in despair or be overcome by the darkness. We are the light of the world and carry a message of hope that the hurting need to hear. We must bring the presence of the Holy Spirit into the midst of suffering. Be humble and filled with compassion as you listen to their stories and pray that God would comfort their hearts. Share the Gospel. God has allowed us to live in a time such as this, a time to mobilize and believe that in the midst of great tragedy God is able to bring hope to those who are hurting. 🙏

This excerpt was transcribed from a message delivered by Derek Neider, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Las Vegas, on Wednesday, October 4—three days after a tragic shooting that left 58 people dead and hundreds wounded in the city. Pastor Derek has served at CC Las Vegas since 2007.