

“Why?” By Joni Eareckson Tada

The world will never forget September 11, 2001, the day when terrorism rocked the United States, leaving thousands dead and injured, the buildings of the World Trade Center in ruins and an entire corner of the Pentagon smoldering. Four large airplanes were hijacked and used as weapons of mass destruction, leaving the families of the victims reeling from the shock.

In the aftermath of this terrible tragedy, people asked, “Why?” Many wondered about the goodness of God and the problem of so much evil and suffering. Their questions reflect ours as we face our own personal crises.

We can't live with answers like “God has nothing to do with terrible tragedies” or “God can't control evil men and their actions.” We cannot be stoics either, simply resigning ourselves to a new definition for “normal life” while we plod one weary foot in front of the other.

We press for meaning and look for answers. Yet quick answers don't reach the problem where it hurts. That's because the problem of suffering is not dry and abstract; the problem is not about something, but someone. It follows that the answer, then, must not be about something but Someone.

God has His reasons, and they are good. They are right and true! But having lived for thirty-five years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic, I'll be the first to tell you that when your heart is being wrung out like a sponge, an orderly list of “16 good biblical reasons as to why all this has happened,” although true, can sting like salt in a wound.

God must be at the center of our suffering. And God doesn't give advice, He gives Himself. In Psalm 18, He becomes the fortress and deliverer to those who are groping for meaning. In Psalm 10, He becomes the Father of the orphaned. In Exodus 15, He becomes the Healer to the sick. In Isaiah 9, He is the Wonderful Counselor to the confused and depressed.

The fact remains, we cannot distance the Bible's answers from the God of the Bible. When we feel as though our lives are spinning out of control and collapsing in nightmarish chaos, we can't go somewhere; instead, we must go to Someone. Someone who just might be able to do something about our plight. Like the woman with the hemorrhage in Luke 8:43-44, we want to reach out and hang onto the hem of God's robe for dear life.

Who else can we take our case to? What higher authority is there? We have no other choice than to wake up in the morning requiring Him and desperately needing Him.

When we come to God poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), when we come to God saying, “I don't get it, but I realize I need You,” things change. Like with the woman who clung to the robe of Jesus, God releases in us a new measure of strength; He imparts a greater gift of faith; He raises us up to a new plane of trust. And we can never be the same.

That God is a part of the problem of suffering may not complicate matters after all. How or to what extent He's involved in the problem is not the question. The point is, He is the answer and we need Him. In suffering, God does not give the blueprint, but Himself. He doesn't give a list of answers; He is the Answer. He's not a bunch of words; He is the Word.

This is why, as a Christian, I see the God of the Bible show His love most compellingly through His Son crucified on a cross. Here is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh—with nail-pierced wrists, spat upon and beaten bloody. These aren't merely facts about the Son of God. This is love poured out like wine as strong as fire, as an ancient once said.

We will always keep asking why, we will always challenge God's goodness unless we understand that God, too, experienced horrible suffering. The goodness of God is most clearly evident when you see His love expressed in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Remember, God who loves is a God who gives Himself as the answer: Are you broken? He is broken with you. Are you disappointed? Jesus couldn't get His three best friends to spend an hour in prayer with Him. Does He descend into your hell? Yes, for "Though the darkness is all around me," you cry, even the darkness is not dark to Him.

God reveals Himself through the dust and debris, the smoke and sadness of the events of September 11, 2001. President Bush said in his message to the congregation gathered at the National Cathedral three days after the horrific events, "Adversity introduces us to ourselves." What do you find in your heart when faced with personal tragedy? What does adversity reveal to you about yourself and about your belief in God?

The Lord may not spread before you the blueprint, explaining His plans and purposes. Rather, He invites you to come to Him by faith. Begin by dropping to your knees before the cross of Christ, laying all your questions at Jesus' feet. Yield any stiff-necked, stubborn rebellion—call it sin, if you will—that you might have toward Him. In so doing, you'll discover the answer that will suffice for all your hurts.

It is Christ who, with His blood, has paid the penalty of His own Father's judgment against your personal evil; and as you yield your life, it is Christ who will strengthen your faith. Despite all your unanswered questions, you will receive the goal of your faith—the salvation of your soul (1 Peter 1:9). What freedom, what peace! Ask Him to forgive your doubts and fears and any sin that separates you from Him. Then rise in faith and move forward into your life through faith in the One who gave His life for you. In the One who works all things together for your good and His glory. It's the only Answer that ultimately matters.

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