

When Tragedy Strikes

By Doy Moyer, adapted

What exactly does one say to another when tragedy strikes? We all wish that we had the perfect words that will appropriately capture what everyone is feeling, words that will comfort and encourage even the most downtrodden. We want to come up with deep statements about how “this is life” and “here is what you should be thinking at this time.” The reality is that we feel at a loss, unable to speak what we are feeling deep inside, unable to communicate what we think those who are suffering need to hear when likely they don’t want to hear anything at all. Bumper sticker philosophy and theology hardly provides much comfort when our hearts have been torn by real tragedy. Likely, the silence before we speak is going to be the most profound and appropriate response, at least initially.

Job’s friends understood this at first. When Job suffered his astounding tragedies, one after the other and no break between, his three friends came to comfort him. For a full week they sat there with him in silence, unable to capture in words what they were witnessing and unwilling to say what they were thinking. Yet it was during this time that they were their wisest and the most comforting to Job, for after they began speaking, Job could only say that they were miserable comforters.

Silence is sometimes the best response. Once we have had time to reflect, however, we usually can find important lessons that will be embedded in our minds from then on. If we can learn those lessons, then we can be the better for it.

When tragedy strikes, we are forced to consider several important issues:

1. **Why?** It is not trite to say that sin has caused the tragic problems of this world. Once sin came into this world, everything changed. Everything became subject to futility (Rom 8:20). The mark left by sin is tragic and ugly. This is the reason the gospel is such an important part of our understanding.
2. **The Relative Value of Material stuff.** What does it profit us if we gain the whole world and lose our souls? (Matt 16:24-27) Losing stuff isn’t as much a problem when we put it into perspective.
3. **The Value of Loved Ones.** People are always more important than things. When tragedy strikes, we look for the people we love first. This is as it should be.
4. **The Value of Time.** Tragedy will force us to prioritize our time, reconsider how we are using it, and try to use it wisely from then on (Eph. 5:15-17).

5. Our Relationship with God. Must we be reminded that there is no more important relationship than that with God? Will we use tragic events as an excuse to run from God, or will we use them to draw closer to Him? (Psalm 73)

6. The Importance of Eternity. What we can see is temporary; what we cannot see is eternal. Therefore, we must look to the eternal and recognize that our real goal is to please God because one day we will be brought to judgment (2 Cor. 4:16-5:10).

7. Our Perspective on Everything. How will we react to difficult times? What will we say to others? What will we do to cope? Will we pray? Will we meditate on God's word? Or will we be anxious, worried, and troubled? See what Jesus says about worry and anxiety in Matthew 6:24-33. How much we are willing to trust God speaks volumes about how we deal with matters that cause anxiety. That may be "easier said than done," but it is the perspective we are taught to embrace.

Terrorism. Natural disasters. Crimes. Heartaches at every turn. What does it take to wake us up and make sure that we are right with God?

Tell your family that you love them. Quit the quibbling and fighting. Who cares who started what? Let's get over ourselves and seek the welfare of one another. Let us humble ourselves before God and make sure that our priorities are where they should be.

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).