

Death, Dying, Tragedy

Many cling intuitively to the idea that God provides the Christian with some special protection from terrible things that would otherwise happen. Tragic is a recent case where parents refused to take their child to hospital and the child died unnecessarily. They have been charged with willful homicide.

Death, dying, illness, suffering, the lack of miraculous interventions, is a serious challenge to an individual's faith in the goodness and love of God. In the book, Tuesdays with Morrie Mitch Albom describes his visits to his former professor who is terminally ill. When discussing the biblical person Job, who lost everything, the professor observed, "I think God over did it."

What is the relationship of God to human suffering? Many religions, including some Christians, teach that all suffering is the consequence of divine wrath or demonic activity. Some counter this by quoting the words of Jesus: His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (John 9:23).

Others understand illness, death, dying as the natural consequence of God's curse on creation and humankind (see Genesis chapters 2-3). We live in a world where moral evil, suffering and death are universal. All of us will die, regardless of our devotion to God. Christians and non-Christians seem equally subject to all kinds of illnesses and death. God does not make the Christian more immune than the non-Christian.

The Bible clearly demonstrates that God is sovereign. There is no force, demonic or otherwise, greater than God. Jesus demonstrated his power over nature, demonic forces, terminal illness and death through his miracles and by his personal, bodily resurrection.

Both creation and the Christian "groan" while waiting for their liberation which occurs at the resurrection of the saints and establishment of Christ's earthly reign. Romans 8:18-28 emphasises that "weighed in the scales of true and lasting values, the sufferings endured in this life, are light indeed, compared with the splendour of the life to come - a life undisturbed by anything hostile or hurtful.

Many cling to the phrase "all things work together for good" but in doing so put a cruel twist on events. The beheading of John the Baptist was not "good." It was an evil act. On learning of his death Jesus went away, not to call a praise meeting, but to mourn. Many things that happen are tragic, horrible and evil. Don't fall into the trap of calling evil good.

So where does that leave us today? How is a person of faith to respond to the tragedies of life? First, is trust and confidence in God to give us grace to deal with each day. According to the Bible, Job never learned why God allowed him to suffer so deeply. Secondly, rest in the wisdom, love and care of God. Thirdly, ask God to comfort you through the Bible and through Christian friends.