



"Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."  
—Albert Einstein

**19-Feb-21**

## **Catastrophe to Blessing**

The apostle Paul writes in [Romans 8:28](#), "And we know that all things work together for good to those who [love God](#), to those who are called according to His purpose." His words presuppose a situation in which matters seem dire, but he encourages us to realize that things will work out for God's people in the end.

This idea links to a term coined by author J.R.R. Tolkien, *eucatastrophe*, which is literally a "good catastrophe," a monumental, tragic, grievous event that turns out good in the end. For instance, the life of Joseph exemplifies eucatastrophe as much as anyone's in the Bible. He goes from one terrible trial to the next, suffering much of the time, but we find out that God Himself sent him along such a harsh path, which Joseph discloses to his guilt-ridden brothers: "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God" ([Genesis 45:8](#)). He later explains, "God meant it for good, in order to . . . save many people alive" ([Genesis 50:20](#)). We learn that God controls our destinies, and sometimes He uses hardships, even catastrophes, to shape us for our good.

I can see this principle at work in my own life. I have endured some severe setbacks, even calamities, but they have worked to help matters come together at the right times for me.

After graduating from high school, I found work as a painter's assistant at a local hospital, to which I took a bus to a nearby Chicago suburb. A human resources employee thought I would be a better fit as a radiology assistant, working the 2:30-11:00 PM shift. Though the bus I took ran in the daytime but not at night, and I did not have a car—or even a license—I said, "Yes!" to the position. However, I soon passed the driver's license test, and the next day, my father gave me an ancient, very used car. A few days later, I started my new job.

Nearly a year later, on my way to work, for some reason, I made a left turn at a place that would have taken me out of my way and made me late for work. Making that fateful turn, I was hit on the driver's side by a bus whose brakes had gone out. An ambulance took me to nearby Lutheran General Hospital, where I spent the next ten days in intensive care and another forty in the rehabilitation unit. Forty years have passed since that fateful June day, and I cannot let the opportunity pass to acknowledge God's involvement. While it was a tragedy—a catastrophe—it set my life on a new path, playing a vital role in my calling. In the end, it was a good thing.

I ended up working full-time at Lutheran General. I received a settlement from the accident, and for a while, I lived a rather good life. With the money I had invested, I was making a decent income. I decided to buy a six-unit apartment building in Chicago. My cousin, who was in real estate, told me that his fiancée's father had a line on a twenty-unit building in a western suburb. "Think about it," I remember him telling me. "Just let the money roll in!"

To call me incompetent and naïve would be too generous. I put up 20% as earnest, but when the lenders balked and I began having second thoughts, the realtor warned me that I would lose the money. So, despite knowing nothing about real estate and without any good counsel, I bought the building mostly with cash. I was committed. Even when the lawyer asked me if I wanted him to find a way out of the deal, I told him, "No."

Events turned what could have been a disaster into a eucatastrophe. About six months after I purchased the building, a fire started in one of the apartments. Thankfully, no one was injured, but the entire ten-apartment second floor and one apartment on the first were uninhabitable. Once repairs had been completed, I rented the first apartment to a single mother. I worried about her because a church, the Worldwide Church of God—which I had never heard of—would be paying her rent. Although I considered myself a Christian, I did not trust a church, but a woman who co-managed the property with me said she knew of Herbert Armstrong, its Pastor General. He never asked for money, and he faithfully paid his bills.

After the new tenant moved in, I drew close to her family, and we often talked about God. One day, after a series of minor catastrophes, including another comparatively minor car accident and a hit-and-run on my truck, her mother suggested that maybe God was calling me.

And, indeed, He was. I sold the property a few years later for more than the purchase price. But I had taken out some huge loans, and by 1992, I was bankrupt. If I had directed my calling, I would have chosen a much gentler route!

A friend told me recently that he believed God had a purpose for an auto accident in which he was recently involved. Before it, his life had gone along reasonably well; he had very few complaints. He had considered himself to be a faithful Christian, but he has developed much closer relationships with both the Father and His Son since the accident.

Paul writes in [Romans 8:16-17](#), "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with [Christ](#), if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." When the Word became a man, He took on human nature to relate to human beings and understand our weaknesses. Paul's words imply that we must suffer with Christ to understand and appreciate Him and what it takes to be a child of God.

[James 1:2](#) reads, "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great [joy](#). For you know that when

your [faith](#) is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" (*New Living Translation*). The apostle also writes, "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and [merciful](#)" ([James 5:11](#)). His correction is more often, not punishment for something wrong, but a shocking or painful nudge in the right direction—for our good.

My wife's boss sent some insightful and encouraging reflections to her team:

We're all right where we are meant to be. All of the hard things we're all going through as well as the good things, it's all for our good, and it's all creating and shaping us into the people we were meant to be. You don't mature by sitting around on the clouds. . . . The joy of maturity comes from having your rough edges hewn off so that you become more polished up and shiny. So, it makes me thankful for the ups and downs as they help me grow into the person God wants me to become. And you're right where you're supposed to be too. You're on the right journey. Right where you are.

Remember, God promises that all things work together for our good—the blessings *and* the catastrophes. The obstacles that we face in this life are tools preparing us for a much greater good in the future. We are being shaped and molded by the hands of a Master Sculptor. Be patient because *everything* that He allows to happen to us will bring us closer to what He wants to see in us. He will finish the job by bringing ultimate good out of all our catastrophes.

- John Reiss

---

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

---

## From the Archives: Featured Article

**Joy and Trial**

by Mike Ford

What does the Bible mean when it says we should count it all joy when you fall into various trials? What is this joy we must experience? How do we come by it? Using his personal experience with his wife's cancer, Mike Ford shows how joy and trial go together.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---