

## Not To Reason Why

Moving Forward in Faith

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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When things like this happen, God allows us time to mourn. Jesus wept with those who grieved. It's a good thing—a natural thing; necessary thing—but almost immediately, we begin to ask questions. There is nothing wrong with that. We're naturally curious beings. We like answers to explain what we are experiencing. Most of all, we want to know why. Why is this happening? Why did it happen? Sometimes we feel guilt. We think, *What part did I play in all of this? Did I cause this to happen?*

In our case, as members of God's family, we ask, "Why did *God* allow this to happen to us?" In our devastation, we want reasons—we want good reasons—for what we are suffering, the pain we are going through. It's a natural reaction. We are humans; it's what we do.

Ministers are asked these kinds of questions all the time when tragedy strikes because people want to know. While we try to provide a soothing and comforting answer that aligns with what we know of God and His plan for us, we do not have conclusive answers. We do not have any kind of crystal ball to look into and say, "This is why it happened." At best, perhaps, we can come up with a good guess that has good spiritual underpinnings.

People ask, "Why did the tornado come through our town?" Or, in our case, "Why did the hurricane come directly at our Feast site just before the Feast?" "Why did the earthquake strike our city?" "Why did mom (or dad, sister, brother, or child) have to get that horrible disease?" "Why did our house burn down?" "Why did he (or she) have to be there when the terrorists struck?"

Sometimes it's not even a personal tragedy, yet we still ask these kinds of questions. We're asking now, "Who's going to win this election" Afterward, we are going to say, "Why did he (or she) win this election?" "Why did this party and not the other party win the House or the Senate?" "Why has God allowed the progressives to make all their gains over the past few decades?"

"Why did the plant down the street shut down, and so many lose their jobs?" "Why is there so much poverty amidst all of our prosperity in this country?" And the age old question, "Why did the wicked prosper?" Why? Why? Why?

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We want to know why. We demand answers so that life makes sense, so that our suffering can maybe have a noble, worthwhile reason for it. We want to be able to rationalize that our experiences have meaning and are not some just random occurrence, an accident, a hollow probability, a fluke, or that they are not our fault. I think we especially want to know that. *What did I do to contribute to all of this?*

But have you noticed—and if you're honest, you will have—that we rarely, if ever, receive a satisfying answer? Occasionally, someone will offer a reason that makes some sense to us. But most of the time, we consider most of the answers we receive from people to be platitudes. They do not know any more than you do, and they are just trying to help. They come across as platitudes because we simply do not know. The answers elude us. Some scientific or medical explanation may be plausible, even correct, but why *God* allowed it to happen to us or to a loved one goes unanswered. Like I said, we may have guesses, but we just do not know for sure.

In Luke 13:4, Jesus reports on the eighteen who died when the tower of Siloam fell. He asks,

**Luke 13:4** . . . do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?

This is part of what we think after a disaster or tragedy strikes. *God struck down those who are sinners, or God gave me cancer as a punishment because I sinned.* No, Jesus doesn't go there at all. Not like us; we are always thinking about our guilt or somebody else's guilt. Jesus doesn't paint God as a vindictive tyrant at all. He answers His own question in verse 5:

**Luke 13:5** I tell you, no [meaning, "No, they were not the worst sinners."]; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

He doesn't answer the *why* question at all, and maybe He's hinting that is perhaps the wrong question to ask. Instead, He instructs us—the observer—to respond by repenting, because it is through repentance—that is, change toward God's way of life; getting rid of the old man; putting on the new, as it were—that we have true life, eternal life.

This suggests that the correct question is not, "Why did this happen?" but "How does God expect *me* to respond to this tragedy? What are we to learn? What are we to do?"

Remember the lines from "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson? Probably you younger people do not even know that it exists. But we old people had to learn, or at least read, this in school when we were younger. But it's a great poem. I recommend anybody going and reading the whole thing.

One of the lines in the second stanza is,

*Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.*

These lines follow the admission that in the army hierarchy, someone had blundered. The six hundred men of the light brigade were sent too painful, bloody, but glorious, death under the Russian guns because of a mistake—an error, a blunder, a screw up. But as soldiers under orders, they did not ask why. Their job was to charge forward, to accomplish their orders, to finish the mission, to reach the goal, to break the Russian lines—which they did. But, as Tennyson tells us, the six hundred did not return.

When tragedy strikes, ours is "not to reason why." We think we deserve to know why. We think we deserve to know why we are suffering as we are. But God doesn't want us to waste our energies or get sidetracked by a fruitless exercise. Getting stuck on *why* often leads to more pain, to more depression, more sorrow, more feelings of devastation and despair and loss and loneliness, because you think you're all alone. In the end, we will still probably *not know* the true reason why the tragedy happened. As Solomon said, "It is vanity—a chasing after the wind."

Instead, our task is to move forward in faith toward the goal we've been given. Whether we take the tragedy as a warning or a wake-up call or a spur to action, we need to understand it as God getting our attention, making us aware that life is brief, time is short, and that this is our day of salvation. We do not have any time to lose, because death is real. It's real for all of us.

So, we have to think that in His sovereign goodness, God has brought this to pass, and we can go forward assured that He has acted in love—because that is what He is. That is how we always acts. He does nothing that is not in love. And though we may look at it and say, "This is painful; it's tragedy; it's loss, God looks at it as an act of love.

Job lost everything but his wife in a series of tragedies that God allowed to happen to him to test his faith and loyalty. He was actually put on display before Satan to say,

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"Look at My servant job. He's a righteous man." After losing wealth, property, children and even his own health, sitting there on a heap of of shards, Job replies, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Ours is not to reason why. Ours is to respond and faith and give God the glory for His love, though we do not understand it.