

Be of Good Cheer

I grew up with a special needs older brother and witnessed how cruel people were towards him. When I was ten, he had to be institutionalized and I remember crying my eyes out praying to the Lord to please make my brother better. This past fall I laid him to rest at the age of fifty-three following infections he developed from burn wounds he received from the abuse of a group home employee. When I was nine, we went to my grandparents' home to eat with my dad's side of the family and exchange Christmas gifts. When we arrived, I discovered my grandfather was having a heart attack and what was supposed to have been a time of cheer was spent crying over his passing. My father was a medic and fireman and tried to revive him. I'll never forget seeing him weep as he was unable to bring him back. At twelve my parents divorced and after a year and a half of living with my father, I moved in with my mother and grandparents. Before finishing college two more of my grandparents passed. By age thirty-seven my remaining grandmother and both of my parents passed. As I write this, I am sitting in a recliner having to change wound bandages from a back-to-back surgical procedure that is taking me a lot longer to recover from than I or my doctor hoped. I know I will heal, and this will be just another of my sad memories, but it feels hopeless right now. Yet through it all God has been good to me and provided peace and comfort in ways that I will never be able to comprehend.

We all understand the despair of hardships and suffering. For those who have experienced physical and emotional suffering, disappointment and struggles you know how hard it can be to be hopeful. The unexpected and unwelcome storms of suffering will come your way in many forms. Your storm may look like a lost relationship or a lost job. Your terrible tempest may include financial reversals or a health crisis. When it hits, you will ask, "Where do these stinking storms come from?" and "Can my suffering fit into God's plan?" One of the great benefits of Christianity is adopting a Jesus-centered worldview which helps make sense of suffering. Jesus declared, "In this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) In this statement Jesus reveals two truths about suffering: first, you will crash into it; and second, God will win! I cannot imagine going through this life without Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

In this life, we will encounter tribulation and suffering that stems from three primary sources: the devil, disasters, and disobedience. The devil is a real and personal force for evil who wants to hurt you. Satan's job description is to "kill, steal and destroy." (John 10:10) Jesus comes to bless and Satan comes to blast! You need to understand that the devil authors an immense amount of suffering. Another source of suffering is disasters. We live in a fallen world that is dangerous and unpredictable, making life fleeting and fragile. On the jagged journey of life, you will be bloodied and bruised when your path crosses those inevitable disasters. There will be train wrecks, pandemics, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, fires, famine, babies born with deformities and every type of disease in our flawed environment. So, don't be shocked when you have a wreck with a natural disaster in this fallen world because it comes with the territory. Thirdly, disobedience is a factor in the equation of suffering. God wired into you a freedom to choose. You can receive or reject Christ. You are not a puppet. Your choices can bring blessings or disastrous consequences for you and for others. But here is the rest of the story, Jesus proclaimed, "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world!" Jesus is the Resurrected Redeemer and His power is bigger than your problem!