

When Bad Things Happen

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Today's Treasure

*The minute I said, "I'm slipping, I'm falling," your love, God, took hold and held me fast.
When I was upset and beside myself, you calmed me down and cheered me up. . . .
GOD became my hideout, God was my high mountain retreat.
Psalm 94:18–19, 22 MSG*

The phone call came while I was just about to embark on writing this chapter. It concerned my friend Mona—my beautiful colleague and helper who has traveled with me and had my back for endless gatherings—and her youngest son, Mitchell. Only twenty-three and newly graduated from college, Mitchell was good looking, fun loving, with an amazing future in front of him. But there had been an accident. Suddenly, in a squeal of tires and the crunch of a motorcycle helmet, Mitchell was gone. And Mona, a woman of strong faith, was absolutely devastated.

I'll never forget my friend's frantic sobs as we gathered around her, desperate to find a way to help. "When will it get better?" she kept asking. "Please tell me there will be a time when it doesn't hurt this much."

I know so many people—faithful Christians, who loved God and trusted Him—who have been transported against their wills to the place where Mona was traveling now, a place you could call Traumaland. They've experienced one (or more!) of those out-of-sequence, out-of-order watershed moments that turn all of life upside down. Events that send you into shock, then you wake up one morning and find yourself living in what seems like a foreign land, where everything looks completely different.

It may have happened to you too—that phone call or discovery that tilted your world on its axis. At this moment you may be living through your own personal or family trauma. Or you may hear of disaster on the news and realize, with a catch in your throat, that it could happen to you too.

The truth is, it could happen to any of us. That's one of the painful consequences of living in a fallen world.

Trouble may hit with tornado force and then move on, leaving you to blink in the sunshine at the ruin of your “normal” life. It may creep in slowly, insidiously, like a fog or a drought, gradually obscuring the landscape and leaving nothing but exhaustion in its wake. Or a seemingly insignificant incident could unfold into one devastating revelation after another.

Any of these experiences is quite sufficient to turn your life upside down. And most of them bring other problems with them as well. A death (even an expected one) brings shock, grief, confusion...then the difficulties of rearranging life to cope with loss. A divorce brings legal issues, worries about children, grief and anger, perhaps a drastic change in standard of living. A chronic illness involves financial strain, fear and worry, the logistics of hospitalization. A house fire may bring cascading experiences of loss as the extent of the damage becomes known—not to mention issues of insurance, living space, rebuilding.

Trauma, in other words, changes the very fabric of normal.

It also changes the entire dynamic of seeing and being seen by God.

Because when bad things happen, “God sees you” can be problematic. Because then you have to face the question of where God is when bad things happen. More specifically, it’s the question of what he’s doing—or not doing—to make things better.

That’s not a new question, of course. Book after book, sermon after sermon, have been written about the so-called “problem of evil.” I’ve heard quite a few in my day—attempts to explain how evil can persist in the presence of an all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God. In my experience, these discussions tend to fall into two types.

One is an argument, a theological speculation, an exploration of ideas.

The other is a cry of need.

And while hashing out ideas can be helpful—or unavoidable—it’s that cry of need that matters most to me in my life and the lives of those I care about.

Sometimes it does come in the form of *Why*: “Why has this happened?”

Just as often, in my experience, it's a plaintive cry of "How." How will I ever survive? How will I make it through my doubts? How can I move forward? Will life ever be normal again?"

There's a "When" element, such as in Mona's question: "When will my life feel normal again?"

And in the midst of it all is that cry of *Who*: "Who is this God Who has asked me to trust Him, Who promises to be with me and care for me and redeem and restore me? Now that all this has happened, how can I trust Him? And where is He anyway? And why isn't He doing anything to help me. Is God even there?"

Over the next two weeks, we will consider that question in the context of scripture and why we can cling to the promise of God's presence, the One Who sees us when bad things happen.

PRAYER

Oh LORD, *The minute I said, "I'm slipping, I'm falling," your love, God, took hold and held me fast. When I was upset and beside myself, you calmed me down and cheered me up. . . . You, GOD became my hideout, You, God were my high mountain retreat. (Psalm 94:18–19, 22 MSG)*

Adapted from:

The God Who Sees You: Look to Him When You Feel Discouraged, Forgotten, or Invisible by Tammy Maltby; David C. Cook, 2012