

# SHINING THROUGH

## Part 1 - Random Acts of Violence

Have you ever found yourself praying for help during difficult circumstances, only to realize that any divine being on the other end could have prevented those troubles in the first place? This feeling that pain should be avoidable and life should be easily explainable may be one reason so many people reach for explanations when things go wrong, speculating that tragedies represent God's judgment, or that, "the end is near." It's interesting that the earliest disciples of Jesus never let the chaos of the unknown distract them in this way. In fact, the people who wrote the new testament didn't seem to see tragic times as something that faith in God was supposed to *explain* at all. Instead, they understood the random, chaotic nature of life on Earth as precisely the *reason* a relationship with God was important in the first place; because when things go wrong, nothing makes sense except the fact that people need help, and people need hope. This means that every instance of suffering is an opportunity for the hope we have in Jesus to make a real, tangible difference in the world.

### Start Talking

1. What takes the cake for the worst trip or vacation you ever took? Why? What went wrong?
2. Have you ever had a comically-long streak of good or bad luck? When? How did the people around you respond?

### Looking Back

1. After taking intentional inventory of your mental activity over the past week, where in your life have you been devoting energy to "figuring it out" instead of jumping in to help the people around you in keeping with the teaching of Jesus?
2. When were you tempted to let your individual rights get in the way of your personal responsibilities this week? How did you respond?
3. In five years, what would you hope has become the story of the American Church during COVID19? What did you do this week to help write that story into existence?



4. In addition to giving to our general Be Rich initiative, which of the causes or partners that we've highlighted did you find yourself especially passionate about? Did you follow up by taking steps to extend your involvement on this front after the Be Rich season is over?

### **What About You?**

1. Has your faith ever taken a hit because of random, unnecessary, unexplainable suffering? Either yours or somebody else's? Did you recover? If so, how?
2. Why do you think we are so prone to tether our faith or confidence in God to how well things are going?
3. Have you ever experienced inexplicable hope or joy in the middle of a tough time? What happened?
4. What events or circumstances in your life do you still have a hard time accepting?

### **Look It Up**

*Read the following passage before answering the questions below: Acts 12: 1 – 24.*

*1 Peter 3 – 9. 1 Peter 5 : 7. 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 14. Hebrews 4: 14 – 16.*

1. Given the horrific nature of the trials facing early followers of Jesus, what do you think explains Peter's confidence in the goodness of a God who– he admits– doesn't necessarily guarantee our favorite outcomes in life?
2. If you could talk to first-century followers of Jesus, how do you think they would describe their outlook on uncertainty and suffering based on these passages?
3. When you read these kinds of accounts from Acts, which tragedies do you find yourself wishing God would have prevented?
4. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 one more time. What does the author encourage his readers to tether their faith to?

### **Putting It All Together**

1. How can you intentionally implement Peter's outlook on suffering this week?
2. What will it look like for you to "approach God's throne of grace with confidence" when things go wrong this week? What does that phrase mean to you?
3. How can you prioritize this process?
4. How could a "living hope anchored to the resurrection of Jesus" change your view of what's happening in your life right now?
5. How do the accounts of early Roman persecution affect your perspective on living through our current chaos?

