

Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

Lesson 7

Tragedy and Adversity Among Loved Ones Biblical Examples and Related Spiritual Dangers

Introduction

We now turn our attention away from large-scale tragedies that may be far from affecting our daily lives and turn towards those situations that affect our family and friends. Here we will consider situations where a loved one is suffering from an illness or from the effects of an accident. Circumstances where old age diminishes the capacity of a loved one to enjoy life or where they are living in constant pain. We will consider the death of a loved one, and in particular where that death seems so tragic because of its suddenness or the youthful age of the deceased.

To a large extent, we have already examined the answers that God provides to help us understand why these situations occur. The answers provided through an understanding of the nature of a fallen world have many applications in a consideration of tragedies among our loved ones. But we must be honest with ourselves. Answers that are accepted when we are considering large-scale tragedies are difficult to cling to when we look at the suffering of a loved one. It is even harder to avoid reacting with mere emotion when adversity or tragedy strikes close to home.

Bible and Real Life

The Bible does not shy away from the difficulties of life. Nearly every problem or adversity that you can imagine was experienced to some degree by someone in the Bible. The travails of loved ones are a key part of many Bible stories. Before we look for the keys to accepting the adversities endured by our loved ones, we should reacquaint ourselves with the stories of tragedies in the Bible.

1. Loss of a Child

- a. Widow of Nain Luke 7:11-17
 - i. What other tragedy had this woman endured?
 - ii. How did Jesus feel toward her (vs. 13)?
- b. Jairus' Daughter Luke 8:40-42, 49-56
 - i. Describe how the father asked for help.
- c. David's Child II Samuel 12:15-23
 - i. What is different in this story than the two above?
 - ii. What did David do before the child died?

2. Death of a Relative
 - a. Mary and Martha's Brother Lazarus John 11:1-44
3. Sickness of a Child
 - a. Daughter of Syro-Phoenician Woman Matthew 15:21-28
 - i. How persistent was this mother in seeking help?
 - b. A Demon-possessed Son Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29
 - i. What request did this father make for his son (Matt. 17:15)?
 - ii. How long had the child suffered?
 - iii. Explain the father's faith and lack of faith (Mark 9:22-24).
4. Starvation of Loved Ones
 - a. Gideon's City Judges 6:1-16
 - i. Why was Israel suffering? What was the suffering (vs. 4-6)?
 - ii. When told the Lord was with him, what was Gideon's question?
5. Sickness of a Friend
 - a. Paralyzed Man and His Four Friends Mark 2:1-12
 - i. To what extent did the friends endeavor to help the paralyzed man?
6. Please list additional stories from the Bible to discuss in class:

Spiritual Dangers

All of the parents, siblings, and friends, in the accounts above, shared a common concern for their loved ones: an intense desire to see their suffering relieved, their illness healed. But the results were not always the same. In most of the stories, the loved one was cured, but David's child died, and the scriptures are full of other accounts of unrelieved suffering. All of us know this to be the case in day-to-day life.

It is important, therefore, to recognize the danger to our souls when our desires for our loved ones go unfulfilled. Look again at Lesson 2 where we examined the temptations faced in such situations. Remember that Satan is prepared to use our despair as an opportunity to produce doubt.

Answer the following and be prepared to discuss in class:

1. A Christian with a strong faith prays intensely for her young close friend with cancer to survive. When the friend dies:
 - a. What temptations will this Christian face?
 - b. Do you expect her faith to give way to despair and doubt? Why or why not?

2. How would you answer the questions above if the Christian was a recent convert with an immature faith? What if it were an unbeliever who lost her friend?

3. Given your answers above, and a consideration of the dangers of sorrow to our souls; do we need to be careful about what we say to Christians when they lose a loved one? In other words, do we assume too often that they feel God cares for them or should we be on the lookout for signs that their faith is struggling? Remember the plea of the father in Mark 9:24 regarding his faith.

What we want to remember, and what we want others to remember, is that God truly cares for us. So many passages stress this but consider the following:

Hebrews 13:5b-6 *“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So that we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”*

Romans 8:31-32 *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*

In the next lesson, we look at some practical considerations in dealing with the adversities and trials faced by those we love.