

Indispensable Truths for When Tragedy Strikes

The Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, commands believers to be in a constant state of readiness: "...always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15 NASB). Never is this command more practical or potent than when religious leaders are involved in a tragedy, especially one which hits national and world news. Even in my wildest imagination I never would have anticipated being involved in a scenario like what the Lord sovereignly brought to pass through the Sandy Hook tragedy.

All of a sudden, the world's eyes were focused on our small, rural town. People were clamoring for an answer as to how such a devastating and horrible event could occur. The church phone rang with media asking for interviews, and emails flooded our in-boxes. While the world was trying to understand such tragedy, loss, and evil, many Christians also recognized this as an opportunity for the promotion of the Gospel of hope.

Many religious leaders who spoke up about social ills made such unbiblical and audacious claims as: "We believe God would never cause tragedy to happen. He is there to comfort families." One person who was offended by my television expression of God's sovereign and gracious hand in taking these little ones to Himself, sent an email stating, "My God doesn't *take*."

It seems like at every turn people want to give the impression that God was sleeping at the wheel or caught off guard by the events of December 14, 2012. That is not the God of the Bible, Who does indeed exist. He Himself establishes: "I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these" (Isaiah 45:6-7). The Church must be a faithful ambassador to introduce the one true God and what His mind is on the subject and events at hand.

If you don't know the biblical answer, then please step aside for God's answers to difficult situations. He has *not* been silent and neither must we. Tragedies happen regularly in our fallen world, but God's Word has provided much wisdom for navigating the issues of life. Below are a few of the many passages of Scripture that provide a sufficient word from God on how to handle a difficult event in life. Hopefully these verses will not only edify your own soul but will also provide an arsenal of rich, biblical truths for when the Lord provides a platform for you to bolster the confidence of others in our sovereign and gracious God.

These shorthand thoughts from Scripture are a kind of quick reference guide for when the Lord brings such a Gospel opportunity to you:

- Death has been around since shortly after the creation (Cain and Abel--Genesis 4). The villain was Cain's heart, not his club. If you take away a killer's gun, knife, or club, he can still strangle you with his bare hands. It's a matter of man's wicked desires and sinful pleasures (James 4:1-2).
- Killing is a spiritual act. Satan is a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). Man is not just body but is soul as well; therefore, both need to be dealt with. He's empowered by the wicked one to wreak havoc.

- Keep it simple and assure people of the priesthood of Christ and the providence of God; He's still a Savior and is sovereign.
- What man or Satan meant for evil, God will use for good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28-29).
- Though we don't know what God has in mind, His plans and purposes are great and are designed to bring Him glory. God never answered Job's question of *why* but did answer *who*, offering Himself to be worshipped (Job 19:25-26). Job was *never* clued into the heavenly challenge/purposes.
- In regards to the death of little ones; God gathers them to Himself. We *know* this, not just wish it, as Scripture affirms it. Young children haven't yet reached a condition of accountability, where their hearts are hardened in sin; they are graciously covered by the atoning death of Christ. This is the truth that comforted David (2 Samuel 12:23).
- Know that the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart (Psalm 34:18); that He is too wise to be wrong and too good to be cruel (Psalm 118).
- The multiple deaths were tragic, yes...but in God's sovereignty, this was each individual's appointed time to die (Hebrews 9:27).
- Job 37:24 declares "therefore men fear Him"; God does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit but desires that man might tremble and trust in Him. One of God's purposes in pain is to humble sinners so that they will turn to Him in repentant faith.
- How about the hypocrisy of national slaughter through abortion? People are outraged about safety issues in school, yet our nation massacres millions of babies—living souls, made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). The womb should be the *safest* zone.
- Why is there evil in the world? We live in a post-Genesis 3, fallen world. Trouble and tribulation is part and parcel to life in this fallen world; plan on it (John 16:33).
- As in Jesus' teaching in Luke 13:1-5, don't let the deaths of the Sandy Hook victims be in vain. Repent and turn to Jesus before you perish as well. Just as Jesus took these children to heaven instantly, you can join them there through saving faith. God is not interested in mere sentimentality but in true repentance and change.
- The cross is the only real answer to evil and Christ is our only hope. If you ignore it, you will grieve without hope. There is a vast difference between the way in which a believer and an unbeliever grieves (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- Pain helps lessen our clutch on the world, as we look forward to millennial reign of Christ when the curse is lifted and all wrongs are righted. Injustice, pain, tears and mourning will continue until the Prince of Peace returns and reigns (Revelation 21:4). We are looking forward to the new heavens and earth. This is, in all likelihood, not the last tragedy and possibly not even the worst.
- We empathize with those who are hurting and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).
- When dealing with such a tragedy, I wonder who is adequate (2 Corinthians 2:16). Our confidence is through Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4), not ourselves (v5).

Our adequacy is from God (v6) Who made us adequate as servants of the New Covenant.

- We must embrace *every* opportunity to present the Gospel, always being ready to make a bee-line for the cross. Just as R.C. Sproul said, “When the Gospel is at stake, everything is at stake.”
- We present a living hope (1 Peter 1:3-12).
- Hope is found only in a life of saving faith. You’re under a delusion if you think you are in control. You’re only one heartbeat away from eternity. God is the creator and sustainer of life.
- The Church is salt and light (Matthew 5). Do what is consistent with your identity in Christ; shine as a bright light of Gospel hope. Don’t be drawn off track. The focus is the Gospel, Gospel, Gospel! Sin and Salvation!
- We are to be an island of sanity, on Gospel clarity, against the sea of false gospels (Gal 1:1-10). While others look at social stigmas or moral modifications, it’s the Gospel that deals with sin and delivers us from the present evil age that matters.
- Tragedy is a picture of man’s depravity, not of any inherent goodness in man. All have sinned, there is none righteous, and none seek God (Romans 3). “From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it” (Isaiah 1:6).

The Sandy Hook school tragedy will not be the last painful and wicked event to occur and possibly not even the worst. Such events will not end until the Prince of Peace comes. So let’s use every opportunity that our sovereign, good God gives us to make Him more famous, proclaiming the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)!

Soli Deo Gloria,

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*Note, this was written shortly after the shooting in my hometown of Sandy Hook, when I lived there.