

June 1, 2010

Gleanings

Why Do Good People Suffer?



Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.
President

On Sunday, May 2, I was out of town at a family wedding. My good friend and fellow church elder, Paul Kramer, taught the 11:00 a.m. worldview class at our church. I have been the primary teacher for the class, but on this Sunday Paul was teaching in my absence.

Paul is the chief facilities engineer at a major hospital in Dallas. Just a few days before May 2, Paul told me that the hospital was going to conduct a test of its emergency electrical system overnight May 1 and 2. He also told me that, depending on what happened, he might not get any sleep that night.

He was correct. Though the test went well, his wife told me that Paul didn't arrive home until around 7:30 a.m. Sunday morning. He took a shower, changed clothes, and went to church. The reports that I received on his teaching of the worldview class were excellent, as always—Paul is a wonderful teacher. Though exhausted, Paul was well prepared and delivered the message with a freshness that can only be explained by the empowering presence of Christ.

After the class, Paul received a call from the hospital. Despite the successful overnight test, there were electrical issues. Paul departed for the hospital. Shortly after arriving, Paul and a power company representative were examining a large old transformer located in an enclosed space in one of the buildings. During this process, an explosion occurred. Paul received second and third degree burns over 30 percent of his body, which required him to be hospitalized.

Paul's job description did not require that he personally accompany the power company representative to check out the electrical problem. As a supervisor, Paul could have delegated this to one of his subordinates, but that is not his style. Though Paul is only an employee of the hospital, he treats his work with all the care and diligence of a proprietor.

When I think of Paul, many descriptive words come to mind, such as, trustworthy, dutiful, faithful, thorough, diligent, excellent, hard-working, detail-minded, honest, efficient, effective, loving, kind, generous, righteous, disciplined, student, teacher, and humble. Need I say more? I think you get the picture—Paul is one of the most righteous men I know.

So why did Paul suffer this horrific accident that nearly took his life? If God is in control and is a loving God, why would He allow Paul to experience such a traumatic event? Or to put it in theological parlance, why do the righteous suffer?

The question of the suffering of the righteous is incommensurable. Why does a good God who is in control of His universe allow suffering? I can understand wicked people suffering, but what about good people? And even more vexing is the question: Does God use suffering to accomplish His will?

To help us understand the conundrum of the existence and purpose of suffering, consider the suffering Jesus endured in His death on the cross. Surely this was one of the most brutal events in all of history. If you saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, you saw a reenactment of the brutal treatment that Christ endured and the cruel death He suffered. According to Genesis 3, death is the result of sin. But Christ was sinless; in fact the only sinless person to ever live. So why did He die? Why then did He have to suffer death?

Most Christians know the standard answer that Christ suffered the punishment for sin that each of us deserve. This is the wonderful gift from God that we know as salvation. The challenge for us is why did God choose this way to redeem mankind, that is, the way of suffering?

Given the limited knowledge of man and the limitless knowledge of God, it is not surprising that there are

Strategies@Work, LLC
Solutions That Transform

Services

Consulting
Planning
Coaching
Training

Affiliate Consultants

theological issues humans don't understand. Suffering is surely one of these issues.

If God is by nature sovereign, intentional, and purposeful, then He has a purpose for everything, including suffering. And His purpose for suffering may not be fully comprehensible to us, but we can gain a rudimentary understanding from Scripture.

For example, as brutal, painful, and horrific as the death of Christ was, it was also the greatest event in history. God worked "good" through the suffering of Christ, which is God's nature (see Romans 8:28). But what does this mean? Since "good" is a divine attribute (see Luke 18:18–19), this suggests that "good" implies alignment with the nature of God. Therefore in accordance with the purpose of God, Christ's death was the basis for the redemption of mankind from the penalty of sin (Ephesians 1:7, 11). So the brutal suffering and death endured by Christ brought incredible good.

The death of Christ is an example of the suffering of the righteous and how God uses this suffering to accomplish His purpose. In some way, God will also use Paul Kramer's horrible industrial accident to do something good in and through Paul.

Someone may object that Paul is not as righteous as Jesus was and therefore the comparison to Jesus is not valid. Granted Paul, as with any human, is not sinless as Christ was, but among professing Christians, Paul is a very righteous man. What is revealed in the sufferings of Christ is insight into how God works. This truth of working good through suffering is part of the nature of God. If God works good through suffering with Christ, wouldn't you expect that God would do the same with humans?

Furthermore, the apostles Peter and Paul weigh-in on this issue. The apostle Peter noted the call of God for followers of Christ to suffer for being righteous and uses the suffering of Christ as an example (1 Peter 2:21ff). The apostle Paul took the concept a step further. He stated that just as it has been granted to us to believe in Christ, so also it has been granted to us to suffer for Him. This implies that, in some way, suffering is a gift or privilege (Philippians 1:29). (Most of us would decline the gift.) Paul Kramer is clearly a man who has been granted the gift to believe in Christ and so now, through this industrial accident, he has been granted the gift to suffer.

While praying for Paul's healing, I was impressed that Satan was seeking to stop Paul because of his growth in Christ and his effectiveness as a disciple of Jesus Christ. My sense of this situation is that what the enemy intended for evil, God will turn to good.

Fire can be either destructive or purifying. When fire destroys, it kills life. When fire purifies, all impurities are removed. The enemy wanted to destroy Paul's life, but God will use this suffering to purify Paul to make him even more fit and effective for his work as a Christian.

From the standpoint of judgment, suffering and death are reminders of man's fallen state (see Genesis 3). Even the best of us deserve to suffer and die because of our sin. In the final analysis, there is really no one, other than Christ, who doesn't deserve suffering and death. By the grace of God, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved from the suffering and death associated with the judgment for sin.

From the standpoint of purification, God graciously uses suffering as a purifying tool to make us more fit for His service.

Gaining this perspective is very comforting and encouraging. Knowing that God uses suffering to accomplish His good purpose is not necessarily a pleasant thought, but it makes the suffering a little more understandable.

Finally, the apostle Paul encouraged us to view suffering in light of our ultimate glory with Christ. Note his words in Romans 8:18:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (NIV)

May God give us all grace to trust that whatever sufferings are assigned to each of us, God is working through these circumstances to purify us and to better prepare us to accomplish His will. And may we always remember that whatever pain we may endure is nothing in comparison to the glory of God that will ultimately be revealed in us.



Free PodCasts
Click here to subscribe.

View online
Print

<http://StrategiesWork.com>
info@StrategiesWork.com
972 473-8655 USA

Learn a Biblical Worldview of Life and Work
Upcoming Training Venues

Need	Training Venues	Information <small>(click on date)</small>
Inspiration	Lunch Event: Executive Forum	September 23, 2010
Purpose in Life	Seminar: Strategic Life Alignment	August 26-28, 2010
More Help Finding Your Life Purpose	Seminar: Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event	July 16, 2010, in Texas
	Webinar: Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event	September 2010
Biblical Principles of Work	Webinar: Financial Management I	June 2010
	Webinar: Financial Management II	Fall of 2010