

A silhouette of a person with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or victory, standing against a bright sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. The word "TRIUMPH" is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters across the top of the image.

TRIUMPH

IN TRAGEDY

By Jeff Tolle

Tragedy is a normal part of our lives. It doesn't matter where you live, how much money you have or how old you are – tragedy will come to your life in one way or another. It might be the death of a loved one, a cancer diagnosis or other sickness, or even the loss of a job.

I remember a tragedy that impacted my life a few years ago. For many years I was a youth pastor and I had the privilege of officiating the weddings of many of the young people I pastored. A few years after planting a church, one of those couples joined our church. Both of them were very involved, serving faithfully in the church. A little while later, while on a trip, they were in a car accident and the husband died.

That is one of the worst tragedies I have ever experienced in my life. I had disciplined that young man for years, and as an adult, he had a lot of influence in the life of one of my sons. That tragedy impacted me personally, and it also impacted my son and my wife. Not only that, but it impacted the young man's wife, with whom we had a close relationship. Also, the death of that young man had a very big impact on our church.

That is the kind of tragedy where there is no escape... the impact was present in every area of my life, relationships, and leadership. ***What do we do when these types of tragedy come into our lives?***

That is a good question!

I want to answer that question in two ways - what to **BELIEVE** and what to **DO**.

I'm going to give you **5 truths from God that you can trust** and **4 actions you can take when you face tragedies**.

The reason I'm sharing this with you is simple... I want you to believe that God can give you **TRIUMPH IN TRAGEDY!**

Every time tragedy comes into our lives, we have a decision to make. We can get closer to God or we can move away from him.

The truth is that tragedy is one of the greatest tests of our faith. This is important to understand. I have seen people react in two different ways when they experience a tragedy ... they draw closer to God or they move away from him. When we decide to draw close to God in the midst of tragedy, we create space in our lives for God to fulfill his will in us.

What does the Word of God teach us about what God will do in and through our tragedies? What are we to believe?

I want to recommend five biblical beliefs about the tragedies in your life.

First, I want to start with a fundamental truth that will lead us to four other truths that I want to share.

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This Season Will Pass

I think one of the mistakes we make when a tragedy comes is to believe that the tragedy will last forever. But that is simply not true ... every tragedy will have an end. God is forever, you and I can live with Jesus forever, but tragedy never lasts forever. And yes, sometimes the memories and pain of tragedy continue with us for days, or even years, but in Jesus we know that it will all be removed in eternity!

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking in Lamentations 4:21-22, said, **“Are you rejoicing in the land of Uz, O people of Edom? But you, too, must drink from the cup of the Lord’s anger. You, too, will be stripped naked in your drunkenness. O beautiful Jerusalem, your punishment will end; you will soon return from exile. But Edom, your punishment is just beginning; soon your many sins will be exposed.”**

**EVERY
TRAGEDY
WILL HAVE
AN END.**

This is an interesting passage. Israel, by her own disobedience, had lost the Promised Land. God used various nations to discipline the people of Israel. The book of Lamentations is a book full of sadness, but even in the midst of punishment, in the midst of pain, and in the midst of despair, God’s promise declared... “your punishment will end”!

If God declared those words to Israel, a disobedient nation, how much more will God declare those same words over your life? And so it is... punishments, tragedies, and difficulties will always have an end. No bad thing is forever. Have faith!

Interestingly, God changed the focus of punishment from Israel to Israel's enemies. So it will be with us. The day will come when our suffering will stop and the enemy of our souls, Satan, will receive the punishment he deserves.

In other words, all tragedy is temporary, but triumph will be final (and eternal!). The next four truths will show how God's triumph comes into our lives in the midst of tragedy and give us answers about what our lives will look like in eternity.



Joy for Depression

In Isaiah 61, Isaiah shares a prophecy to the people of Israel very similar in concept to what Jeremiah shared in Lamentations 4. In verse 3 of Isaiah 61, he says, **“a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair”**.

When mourning and despair have invaded our lives, we have a God who is fully capable of turning our sadness into joy. Many times, when we are in the moment of pain, we think the pain will remain forever. We think that sadness will never end.

But God declares something completely different. Your sadness will have an end! And instead of that sadness? The joy of God!

I encourage you, as you experience the sadness of the tragedies in your life, seek the joy of God. Depression is something that makes us weak in this life. But, as it says in Nehemiah 8:10, **“Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”** Sadness and depression keep us in a state of weakness and illness. When we open our lives to the joy of God, we receive renewed strength.

***YOUR
SADNESS
WILL HAVE
AN END.***

Those who live with the joy of God will walk in victory and triumph, because nothing that the enemy throws at us will be able to stop the move of God in our lives.

Beauty for Ashes

Also in verse 3 of Isaiah 61, the prophet says, **“He will give a crown of beauty for ashes.”**

This part of the verse is shocking to me. I want you to put the image of ashes in your mind for a moment. ***Do you see them? What image comes to your mind?***

When I think of ashes, the image that enters my head is the ash in the fireplace after a fire. Another image I have is the ashes of the coal on the grill, after grilling a rib-eye steak over a charcoal fire. Just thinking about it makes me hungry!

As you think about ashes, I want to ask you a question: ***What are they for? That is, after cooking the meat, what are the ashes for?*** They are useless. I can't use them for anything else. There is nothing else to do but throw them in the trash.

The ashes were used by the Jews in times of mourning. When mourning, they would put ash on their heads. The ashes represent loss and weakness. For that reason it's very interesting to see that God says that he will give a crown of beauty. A crown is also placed on the head. But instead of loss and weakness, the crown represents strength and authority.

***GOD IS ABLE
TO CREATE
SOMETHING
BEAUTIFUL
AND GOOD
OUT OF ANY
TRAGEDY IN
OUR LIVES.***

God is able to create something beautiful and good out of any tragedy in our lives. Although your tragedy appears to be a pile of ashes, God can turn your tragedy into something extremely beautiful and powerful that will be a blessing in your life and in the lives of others.

Your defeat appears to be ashes, but your triumph is a crown placed by God on your head!



Peace for Confusion

When we face tragedy in our lives, it's normal to feel confused. Many times, there is confusion related to "why" and also "now what". Many times our thoughts are running a thousand miles an hour and we don't know what to do.

Like fear, confusion is something that can paralyze us. Suddenly, although the tragedy affects us, the confusion after the tragedy can put us in a position where it is impossible to move forward, because we simply don't know what to do. Confusing thoughts can take up all the space in our brains, leaving no space for thoughts that help us stay healthy and strong, which would lead to taking necessary steps in our lives.

So what does God say about it?

There are two verses that I really like. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul says, **"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."**

Verse six gives us the foundation for the promise that we find in verse seven. Paul speaks clearly that there are things in our lives that can disturb us; which lead us to have requests. I think a life tragedy in definitely fits in that description!

What does Paul recommend? Bring those requests to God in prayer, thanking God in advance, because we believe that God is faithful to respond. When we do that, we are putting our futures in the hands of God.

And what happens when we put our lives and future in God's hands?

PEACE!

But not just any peace. We receive the peace of God. The peace of God is something that we cannot humanly understand. When we receive the peace of God, we receive something that will take care of our hearts and thoughts.

That is such an important truth. Think about the following question: *After a tragedy, what place in our lives has the most confusion?*

I would say in the heart and in the mind. The heart is the location of our emotions and the mind is the location of our thoughts. When we bring our requests and concerns to God... when we turn our confusion over to Him, God has a unique and incredible way of bringing His peace that is different compared to the peace of the world (John 14:27).

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God's peace will fix and align our emotions and our thoughts. In other words, in the place where there is most confusion after a tragedy, you and I have access to the peace of God that will remove all confusion, bringing order and tranquility.

Your triumph in tragedy is found in the peace that only Jesus is able to offer.



Good for Bad

Romans 8:28 says, **“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”**

That is such a shocking verse. I want to give you a broad perspective on what this verse means. Paul is saying that there is a unity, a cooperation between all things that exist for the good of the children of God.

EVERYTHING!

All of creation, all of the universe, all that is good and all that is bad has been designed and taken into account to form a plan that will be for your own benefit. How incredible!



Recently, one of my daughters asked me if we were going to lose our memories of life here on earth when we get to heaven. I told her my perspective. I believe that when we get to heaven, we will not lose our memory of what happened here, but we will have a redeemed perspective on everything that happened here.

In other words, we will look at everything that happened here on earth and we will say, “Now I understand! God is great! Amazing!” Instead of memories of bad things causing anger or sadness, with our redeemed perspective we will look at how good God is and how he used those experiences to our advantage.

Although we cannot see the end result of every bad thing that happens in this world, one day we will see the big picture, the wide perspective about what happened. So have faith! God is not simply going to turn bad into good, but God is actively coordinating everything... bad, good, and everything that exists, for your benefit as a child of God.

Soon you will see how your greatest defeats in life will become your most exceptional triumphs!

Keep on believing and you will see how God will give you...

- ☺ Joy for depression
- ☺ Beauty for ashes
- ☺ Peace for Confusion
- ☺ Good for bad

**SO HAVE
FAITH!**

Now, it's good to know what to believe... that is the foundation of everything. But afterwards there's another question: ***What do I do now?*** That's a good question. I want to give you four action points that will serve you well as you go through life's tragedies.

Trust in God

The first thing we should do is trust in God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”**

What an important verse. Trusting God means that we are not depending on our own understanding. As I mentioned before, when a tragedy occurs, we try to understand the **“why”** of the tragedy.

We ask God questions: *Why did God let this happen to me? Why does God allow me to go through this suffering? Doesn't God love me? Where was God when this happened to me?*

We ask ourselves questions: *What did I do to deserve this tragedy? Where am I wrong? What could I have done differently? Why did I fail in that way?*

The problem with all these questions is that we are trying to understand what is happening - in other words, we are depending on our own understanding. That is why you have to trust with all your heart! Not in half or a portion, but with everything. Again, let me repeat: trusting God means not depending on my own understanding.

When we trust him, God shows us which way to go. Sometimes (or many times) we will not understand the “**why**” of what has happened in our lives, but we **CAN** understand the “**now that**”... the next step to take. So I encourage you to trust in the midst of tragedy and you will see the hand of God working in a powerful way in your life.



We experience

JOY

when we
learn to

TRUST

Continue Giving

Many times, when we face loss or difficulty, the human tendency is to protect ourselves. We especially protect those resources that are low at that moment... it can be money, energy, etc.

As a result, we stop being generous with what we have in our hands, because there is a fear that we will lose what little we have.

People around the world have suffered as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Many have lost family and friends without the opportunity to visit them in the hospital. That has been a very great tragedy. Another way the pandemic has affected people has been through job losses. Many millions, and even billions of people, have had to stop working. As would be normal, after losing a job, a person would do everything possible to save what little money they have.

There is nothing wrong with that concept. But it does have a flaw. When I protect what little I have and you protect what little you have, neither of us take advantage of our resources to help each other.

When Paul, the apostle, spoke about the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8:2, he said, **"They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity."**

Those churches, in the midst of great difficulty (many troubles) and few resources (very poor), had an abundance of joy in their souls and generosity in their resources. They had no limitation on their joy or generosity, because they knew where their provision came from.

What a great example for us. When we keep giving in the midst of affliction, tragedy, or difficulty, we are placing our trust in God, believing that He is the Provider. And trusting in God and committing ourselves to being generous will make us feel great joy. Joy in the midst of tragedy is priceless!

Ask yourself this question: ***Could it be possible that my generosity in the midst of tragedy will open the door to the triumph I am waiting for?***

Learn the Lesson

Similar to what I mentioned before, more important than asking “Why did this happen to me?” is asking “Now what should I do?” When we say “**now what**”, we are asking God what the next step is, what the next “thing” is that He wants to do in us and through us.

In other words, it is asking “why” for the present and the future rather than “why” for the past. We cannot change the past... the tragedy has already happened. But we can *respond* to the tragedy. We can learn what God wants to teach us... interestingly, we learn much more through tragedy than victory.

There is an interesting story in the Bible that has impacted me for many years. It is found in Mark 4:35-40. It says,

“As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.’ So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

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Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, 'Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?'

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Silence! Be still!' Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, 'Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

We can see the contrast of Jesus and the disciples while in the storm. Jesus was completely calm and comfortable, even though there was a fierce storm. But the disciples were scared by the situation. When they woke up Jesus, he stopped the storm, but then he said something interesting – "Do you still have no faith?"

What was Jesus referring to? It is obvious that they had enough faith to believe that Jesus could save them... that's why they woke him up! ***So what was their lack of faith?***

I suggest that their lack of faith was believing that they couldn't pass through the storm to the other side, knowing that Jesus was with them.

The disciples wanted the miracle, mistakenly thinking that they were going to drown. What they did not understand is that if Jesus was in the boat, that boat was the safest place to be. You and I, if we have Christ, are in the safest place, even in the middle of a storm.

What does this have to do with the concept of learning the lesson? It's simple. The disciples wanted the miracle, but not the lesson. They wanted to be free from the storm, instead of riding through the storm with the presence of Jesus. I recommend that we be a little more like King David, who was able to say in Psalm 23:4, **"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me."** And also in verse 5, **"You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies."**

King David understood that in the middle of the most difficult circumstances, he could count on God's presence and provision. He learned his lesson. I ask you... ***Are you learning what God wants to teach you in the midst of tragedy?***

When you go through difficulty, ask God... ***What do you want to teach me? What do you want to change in me? What do you want to develop? What do you want to transform?***

Those are valuable questions for your life in the midst of a tragedy.



Push into Community

Similar to what I mentioned previously, when we go through a tragedy, the tendency is to want to close ourselves off and do nothing... and that is especially true in our relationships. We don't want to talk to anyone and we don't want anyone to talk to us.

But God has created community especially for moments like these. So, in the middle of the tragedy, some friends, pastors, leaders, or family are very important!

Galatians 6:2 says, **“Share each others burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ”.**

God has designed us for the community. You have things that you need to receive, and you have others to whom you can give. Imagine a world where each person suffers in silence, suffering alone, and has no one to share with. That would be a cold and limited world... an unhealthy one.

Isn't it good that God showed us that this is not the way to live? When I open up to others in the midst of the tragedies I experience, I put myself in a position to receive help, comfort, prayer, and love from someone else.

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And also, by experiencing community in the midst of our own tragedies, we will be more prepared to help others when they go through their tragedies. It is a great network of blessing, where needs are supplied in the most difficult moments of life.

So, what can we do?

- ☺ Trust in God
- ☺ Continue giving
- ☺ Learn the lesson
- ☺ Push into community

Perhaps when you began to read my words, you thought that I was going to give you the “reason” for your suffering. I’m sorry to tell you that that’s impossible. In the end, only God knows exactly the reason for the tragedies in our lives.

But, I hope that through my words you have received hope. God always has the final word!

I encourage you to believe in the promises of God and to do what he tells you to do... and through that, you will experience... Triumph in your Tragedy!

God bless you!



About Jeff Tolle



Jeff Tolle is the pastor of CityLife Church in Los Angeles, a multilingual and multiethnic church reaching people of all ages. His studies (D.Miss.) as well as work with in the Latino community has made him an essential voice in reaching different cultures and generations with the Gospel. Jeff is married to Evelyn, and together they have five kids. Jeff may be contacted at hola@jefftolle.org.

Published by



FMP ©2021
Foursquare Missions Press