

What is the purpose?

We ask, “What is the purpose?” about a lot of things. As you drop your iPad on the table you say to yourself, “So what is the purpose of this meeting?” Or, what is the purpose of a tire under a mat, under a flap in the “Basement” of the car’s trunk if it is so small? Or perhaps as a server presents eleven different sauces to put on what has been described as the signature dish on the menu, you feel compelled to ask “What is the purpose of all those sauces?” With your heart breaking, perhaps it is the “what is the purpose” question that keeps reoccurring when you stand at the grave side of a family member who died much too soon. When the red rimed swollen eyes of a parent of a new born courageously asks “What is the purpose of this death?” words seem to fail.

Amazing, we can explore the business topics or the food fare, with logic and by leaning over to a fellow at the table and quietly repeating the question “What is the purpose?” But when it comes to asking about the purpose of a death of a teen who died of a drug overdose or an infant who perished at or after birth or perhaps an adult who was innocently in the wrong place at the wrong time, we have to ask: “What is the purpose?” If that death was your loved one, that question is not some tiny voice in your head any more. It is the one that shouts in your mind day and night. Adding to the coping needs of the grief stricken who are trying so hard to stay in control, that question heaps hot coals onto the broken heart.

Your question may be in another version. “Why did God let this happen?” Or the ever popular, “Really, God, Really?” Volumes have been written containing sweet words that just plain miss the point of the question. “What is the purpose of this death?” As a Christian, the answers may not be for you in this article, but perhaps the elusive answer will be at the end of a pathway that his article sets you upon.

The passage from ROMANS 8:28 NIV ***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose,*** those words ring hollow. When the tears of grief and loss pour forth with each breath that is taken when a loved one has died you may say “No, that

can't be right." But there is truth in it. Our limited vision that only glimpses at this moment and this day, can't see "The Purpose." The "Why" feels at that moment of "woundedness" like a blanket of betrayal cast over our confidence and trust in God.

The amazing thing about God is that he is omniscient. Which means, unlimited in both time and space, or any other measurement that man has devised. We don't understand how prophecy and or biblical assurances can work in our limited understanding of events. But time has proven to be 100% accurate from a biblical point of view. Isaiah foretold of the birth of the Christ Child, long before it actually occurred. You can look at the scripture from Romans and think of it as a prophecy, a promise of comfort which is a foretelling of things to come. Is it possible that things can work together for good? And Yes, we want to get to the heart of understand the purpose this very minute, this season, but the clarity does not roll in like a wave upon the shore. It is often so far out in the distance that not even a wispy cloud of understand is visible to us at this point in time.

Now what do you do with that? Christian faith is based on faith. Faith that all things will be well is the promise in that scripture. It is based on God's faithfulness to keep his word. It is based on God's promise to be with us. Matthew 28:20b NIV ***And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*** Matthew 1:23 NIV ***The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us").*** Over and over God's faithfulness is quoted in the bible. We have but to trust that he is good at his word. And that somehow a good, or good will come of this horrific experience. God keeps his promise. Not our promise that we would put upon Him as we pray for things, but with open hearts and minds that He will never fail us.

What does that look like? Remember Adam and Eve? They sinned and they told God that they were afraid and necked. (Genesis 3:10) They did face the consequences of their sin, they were evicted from their lovely place to live, never to return. But God in his love and lovely caring for them, made them clothes. (Genesis 3:21) He provided coverings for them, to ease their fears. Our heavenly father provides for us as well. It may not be sin that has created the tragic loss and grief, but it may in the fact be that we live in a fallen world that is full of free willed people that offer our teenagers drugs or it may be an illness that

tells your child that suicide is the right solution for the struggles that they are facing or it may be a form of disease such as cancer that takes the life of our loved one. In the loss and death of an infant, miscarriage, still born, death may be stated simply as a tiny body that fails to sustain life. Not necessarily an event, but a pattern in life that retrieves souls much too soon by our count.

Did God take your loved one? Did he need another angel, or was it “their time?” No, God is not a mean and vindictive God who breaks our heart on purpose to punish us. He knows all about the feeling of grief. His child died a tragic and senseless death too. We do live out the consequences of our decision, like Adam and Eve, but God will be there to cloth us in our time of need as lovingly as he did for them. We can count on that. His purpose is not to hurt us. He longs for us to trust him when we need the most comfort in life’s eventful journey.

Let us go back to the passage from Romans again. Listening to the scripture and seeing it as prophecy written for those who believe in God and who trust the work of Jesus as the redeemer, will allow you to hear as you read the words of encouragement, that God is always close. Matthew 5:4 NIV ***Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted***, is another promise of God’s faithfulness to provide for those who feel so alone and sad.

As the waves of tragedy and loss continue as repeating body blows for some of us. We sometimes think that the worst is over, just as another loss heaps upon another and another. A well know counselor instructs his followers to say into the left ear of the victim, “The worst is over”. When assisting those who are struggling from illness and trauma, it is that phrase which creates hope. Psalm 39:7 NIV ***But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.*** Say that scripture out loud. Now whisper in the ear of the others who suffer with you. “The worst is over. My hope is in the Lord’s comfort.”

“Cut to the bottom line,” you may say. How does this hope and prophesy work? It begins with a decision to wait for understanding. Your decision may be made only once or for some, you will need to make the decision over and over in the midst of the storm. In God’s limitlessness, he may reveal the purpose to you in a moment or it may be at the end of your life time before you understand the purpose of this death. Be assured the purpose will be revealed when you reach

heaven. But trust above all else, is the difference between surviving a tragic death of a love one and with that, gaining the ability to thrive in the comfort of God's love for you. God has this situation -- this loss -- this grief -- in hand. He knows the purpose. The purpose will one day be understood, and it will be good.

Christ's death was tragic in our modern thought of just and unjust events. He died without sin. He did not deserve to die at all. In the hours after his death the disciples and his family were bewildered at how his seemingly perfect life had suddenly ended. Jesus's life of teaching and preaching about the love of God could not have been finished they thought. Now it is revealed to us, His death had a purpose.

To take this thought to current events, we observe the death of Martin Luther King JR annually. A senseless death of a man of God who lived to honor the work of God and to preach peace and harmonious relationships. Martin Luther King Jr Day has taken on a theme of culture importance in the United States. We make it a day with a difference. Encouraged by his memory of good works, thousands of people reach out to their community to reinvest in good works for others. Purpose? Yes, one we can see and understand with tangible results. Because with the tragic loss of his beautiful life, he has and is inspiring millions to do things they would most likely not have done had he died of other causes. A purpose has emerged as time has passed.

What is the purpose of the death or loss you are experiencing? Let me suggest just a few that have been witnessed by others in the aftermath of loss.

Family unity that was not present prior to the event may peacefully emerge.

There may be changes in commitment to faith, church attendance and scripture study for many in the circle of loss.

You may be the one and only person who will say to another parent or friend, " I understand your loss" and that statement will make a difference in their life from that point on.

There may be changes of attitude on education, job, vocation, focus of living or living as an example of a survivor who radiates strength and faith into the lives of others.

Or perhaps you will realize the purpose was for the precious person you loved so much to be one of the greeters at heaven's gate when you arrive.

One thing is for sure. You are forever changed by a death and loss of someone you love. You will take up a new role for yourself and you will be observed by others. Can they see you as a model of what "good" survival should look like to others? You will not be tomorrow, what you would have been, had your life been spared this death and loss. Keep in mind the place you are and will be is not necessarily a bad place. It should not be a bad place. It is a different place than you expected. And when you walk with the Lord, it will be a great place because God, the Holy Spirit has taken you there. He will have guarded you and walked in the really dark times with you on this journey through your grief. He will bring you to that heavenly place where your loved one now abides and where He will rule for eternity.

God bless you on your journey through grief.

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