

When Bad Things Happen

By Susan Vogt



creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/ 1

You may be familiar with the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold S. Kushner. It explores a classic conundrum that has mystified people for ages: When we are trying our best to pray and be good, why are innocent people still suffering and dying? Why is there divorce, suicide, accidents, war, poverty? Begin to come to your own peace with this ancient question.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Winter

Needed

Bible, pen or pencil, printed copy of this activity

Prepare in Advance

Decide whether to do this activity alone or with your spouse or trusted friend.

Activity Plan

1. Take a moment to remind yourself of the presence of God. Pray in your own words or use the following prayer:

Loving and compassionate God, are you really loving and compassionate? Sometimes it doesn't seem that way. If you really are all knowing and powerful, how come there still are tragedies and other evil things happening to me and the people around me? Help me to understand. Amen.

2. **You're not the first one.** Throughout history, human beings have tried to make sense of the bad things that happen. Some cultures dealt with this by creating gods like the Greek gods of the Sun (Helios), Water (Neptune), War (Mars), and others. Some turned to witchcraft or mythology.

Christians, who believe in one God united in the Trinity, also struggle to understand the reality of evil and pain. To help put this issue in perspective, consider the following biblical stories. Skim through the designated chapters in your Bible to get a more complete sense of each story.

- *Noah and the Flood* (Genesis, chapters 6–8). Although building the ark allowed Noah, his family, and selected animals to survive the flood, it didn't turn out so well for the rest of humankind and the other creatures.
- *Abraham Prepares to Sacrifice Isaac* (Genesis, chapters 21–22). Even though God eventually provided Abraham a lamb to substitute for Isaac as the worship sacrifice, this brinkmanship may seem inconsistent with God as loving Father.
- *Joseph in Egypt* (Genesis, chapters 37–50). Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him out of jealousy, but sold him into slavery instead. Joseph eventually saved multitudes of Egyptians and his own



relatives during years of famine. When Joseph was in the well and in prison, however, he didn't know it would turn out that way.

- *Job Loses Everything* (Job, chapters 1–2, 42). Job lost his children and his property, his animals and servants. He experienced severe physical pain. Job started out strong and accepted his losses: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Eventually, though, Job fell into despair. His saving grace was his honesty and humility before God.

3. **Whose fault is it?** Think of a problem or tragedy that has befallen you, someone close to you, or the planet. (For example: loss of a job, divorce, serious illness, war, natural disaster.) Write it on the line below:

Can you claim any role or fault in this situation? If so, consider how you might make amends. Is there anything you can do now to rectify the problem?

Is this situation no fault of yours? If so, practice the spiritual discipline of acceptance. Write your own mantra or phrase of acceptance. Repeat these words to yourself as needed.

4. **Can I do anything?** Many tragedies are beyond individual control. There's no way to bring a loved one back to life or undo an accident. Before you spend undo guilt and worry over a problem, ask yourself: Can I do anything about this situation *now*—yes or no?

If your answer is yes, then do something. Take a step, even if it is a small step, to fix the problem. The step I will take is:

If your answer is no, make understanding and prevention your goal. Reflect on why the situation happened. Was it just a fluke accident, the way of nature, bad luck? Even though you can't change the past, is there some way you could work with others to prevent a similar situation in the future?

For example, if your child died from an accident or illness, you might donate to an organization that is dedicated to accident prevention or medical research. If your marriage is on the rocks, you might become involved in a group that teaches communication skills. If the situation is too big to tackle on your own—poverty, war, climate change—your role may be to join an organization that works to improve such situations.

If no means of prevention seem plausible to you at this time, rewind to Step 3b above and practice acceptance.

