

Burden Bearing

• Lesson Four •

Burdens Are Bridges to Repentance and Faith

1. Tragic events teach the need for repentance
2. Hardships are healthy training tools

Worship

When tragedy strikes, we often ask *why*. It is not so much a question as it is an accusation. We want God to explain how he can let such things happen.

Rather than sinning by charging God with wrongdoing, faith responds to tragedy with repentance and trust.

Read responsively Job 42:2-6. These are Job's words after his encounter with the Lord.

A: I know that you can do all things;

B: No plan of yours can be thwarted.

A: You asked, "Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?"

B: Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

A: You said, "Listen now, and I will speak;

B: I will question you, and you shall answer me."

A: My ears had heard of you

B: But now my eyes have seen you.

A: Therefore I despise myself

B: And repent in dust and ashes.

Prayer: Lord, today help us to see that we need to repent daily, and let us understand how hardships help us do that. Amen.

Introduction

Martin Luther once said, "Fear of God and confidence in Him, must stand side by side, and we must pass through both, that a man may not turn presumptuous and too secure and trust in himself. This is one of the reasons why God so severely tries the saints" (Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 1, p. 480).

You could say Luther was answering the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? How would you answer that question?

Studying God's Word

Tragic events teach the need for repentance

Joseph's wife had just died. They had buried her that morning. That evening, he and two of his sisters drove out to the cemetery to visit the grave. On the way, their car was struck by a train. Joseph and one of his sisters died, the other was critically injured.

Life is always shorter than it should be. Often it ends abruptly and in a horrifying manner. Let's try to understand what God wants to teach us by such catastrophic events.

Read Luke 13:1-9.

1. What two types of events are represented by what Pilate did to the Galileans and by what happened at Siloam?
2. What does Jesus say should be our attitude when we see or hear of such events?
3. Why is this the proper response?
4. Agree or disagree: When people aren't producing enough fruit for God, he "chops them down" with disease or disaster.

His Word in My Life

You and Frank are well acquainted. You do business with each other from time to time. You go on an annual fishing trip together with a group of guys. You are members of the same church, although Frank attends only once or twice a year.

This year Frank didn't make the fishing trip. He had a heart attack and triple bypass surgery.

When you visit him at the hospital, what spiritual message will you bring to him? Will you say anything about his worship attendance?

Refocus on the key point

Luther wrote: "This is the reason why God disciplines His own with so many evils . . . His own are to see that the hand of the Lord has done this, that is, they are to mortify reliance on their own righteousness and feel that they are nothing; to despair of their own wisdom, righteousness, and power and to expect help from God" (Plass, What Luther Says, Vol. 3, p. 1391).

The tragedies and hardships of life are constant reminders that we are not strong enough to sustain ourselves without God, that we need to humble ourselves before him and rely completely on his care.

Hardships are healthy training tools

The Russian boxer punched so hard that he killed Apollo Creed. Now it was Rocky Balboa's turn to face the towering mass of muscle named Ivan Drago. That's the plot of *Rocky IV*.

No one thought Rocky had a chance against the ferocious strength and steroid-enhanced performance of Drago—except Rocky himself. We see him training in Siberia, trudging through snow with a log on his back, hoisting boulders, running up mountains. Rocky wins.

This is a fictitious story. Yet in real life, we need to become strong if we are going to win against the struggles we face. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but . . . against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). God puts us through rigorous training because he knows the strength of our spiritual enemies.

Read Hebrews 12:1-13.

1. What are some ways in which living a life of faith is similar to running an endurance race?
2. Burdens and persecutions serve as God's disciplinary tools. What is he aiming to accomplish in us by such discipline?
3. The toughest word in discipline is *no*. As a child, if your parents had given you everything you wanted, it would have been harmful and wrong. Compare this to our lives under God and what we ask of him in prayer.
4. What is the writer of Hebrews getting at when he concludes this section by saying, “‘Make level paths’ . . . so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed”? Who are the “lame” that you are to help?

His Word in My Life

Jesse stood before the altar for the confirmation ceremony. Like the others, he promised to suffer anything, even death, before denying or abandoning his faith.

A year later Jesse and one-third of his confirmation class weren't attending church anymore.

If you were a youth counselor in the church, how might you try to reach Jesse and others like him to keep them active in the practice of their faith?

Refocus on the key point

Whenever we get knocked off our feet by a physical problem, let's not think God is treating us cruelly. He knows there are much worse enemies seeking to devour our souls. He works to protect our eternal well-being.

Summary

Jesus made it plain: “No one is good—except God alone” (Mark 10:18). None of us is inherently good or has reached a level of inner goodness where there is nothing more to be improved.

God uses tragedies and hardships to teach us to live in repentance, admitting that we cannot sustain ourselves. By making us bear burdens, God leads us to deeper trust in him as our only Savior.

Give examples of characters from the Bible whose humility and faith were deepened through the trials God asked them to endure.

Life with God

- Day 1: Read Psalm 71—perhaps as a part of worship at your family altar. Memorize verse 5.
- Day 2: Read Job chapter 22. Compare what Eliphaz says about Job (verses 5-9) with what God had said of him in 1:8. What sin was Eliphaz committing?
- Day 3: Read Job chapters 23 and 24. What does Job want most of all?
- Day 4: Read Job chapters 25 and 26. Bildad’s final words correctly state the power and holiness of God. What else should he be saying, however, to his friend Job?
- Day 5: Read Job chapters 27 and 28. Why is wisdom so hard for humans to find?
- Day 6: Learn more about the value of spiritual wisdom. Read Proverbs chapters 2 and 3.
- Day 7: Read Proverbs chapter 4, which is also on the subject of wisdom. Why is godly wisdom so important when facing hardships in life?