

Why Does Bad Stuff Happen to Me?

A sermon based on 1 John 4:16.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was maybe my worst day ever. You see, I had went to sleep with gum in my mouth (because, I mean, I was a kid), and I woke up with gum in my hair. While getting out of bed, I tripped over my skateboard, because, like most kids my age, my room was always a mess, or, what I would tell my mom, organized chaos.

Fast forward to breakfast where my siblings had opened their favorite boxes of cereal and discovered these awesome toys (back when they used to do that). I eagerly opened mine to find...cereal (surprise, surprise). And then, at school, my teacher told me I was singing too loud at singing time. My best friend Paul told me he didn't want to be best friends anymore. At lunch, all my friends pulled out their tasty treats their moms packed for them, like pudding cups and Hostess cupcakes. Guess whose mother forgot to put in dessert?

Then there was the cavity at the dentist's, my brother pushing me into a muddy puddle and then laughing at me while I was sitting there, sobbing, which then made him call me a crybaby. And then I punched him and got in trouble for hitting and for being all muddy. My bath was too hot, I had to wear my least favorite pajamas. The only solace I seem to find was when my eyes finally close, ending what was...a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

You recognize that? A few excerpts from popular children's story *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. You hear some of the downers in a rather rotten day for Alexander...enough to make him want to leave it all behind and run away to Australia. And, as you read, you just have to chuckle at the apparent bad luck Alexander had, how things kept getting worse and worse.

Unless that's been you. Have you ever had days like that before...where it felt like everything was going wrong, where nothing was going right...it was just bad news after bad news after bad news? Or, maybe for you, it feels like life is just one constant string of never-ending problems and struggles and headaches and stress and heartache and grief. Has that been you? Is that you?

Do you ever want to just run away from it all, maybe not to Australia, but Hawaii sounds pretty good...a place where you can say "aloha" to all your troubles and worries?

Sure, you might have your good days, but it's those bad days that stick with you and monopolize your emotions and your attention, don't they. I remember being rejected in high school by a girl, who I thought was into me, but she gave the infamous excuse, "I have to wash my hair." I remember breaking my finger while playing kickball (I know, kickball!) and having to get a tetanus shot and stitches in my palm after falling backwards onto a random board with a rusty nail sticking out of it. I remember the anger and frustration of my car breaking down in the middle of nowhere, a couple of hours away from home, as it was snowing out, having to get it towed and then learning how much repairs were going to cost (money I didn't really have). I remember the pain of finding out my wife had miscarried, how instantly the elation deflated to agony...some rather terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days.

And I'm sure you've been there, too, wondering, "Why does bad stuff happen to me?" Why does my mom have cancer? Why did I lose my job? Why is my sister in college and pregnant? Why are my son's grades slipping? Why is he being bullied? Why does my life feel so unstable? Why me? Why does bad stuff happen to you and me?

What answers have you been able to come up with? I can think of three (three lies) that the devil, the world (or society), and our sinful natures love to dangle in front of us when things go wrong.

Lie #1 – "God is punishing me for what I've done." Now, that one can kind of go both ways. I saw this picture of a sign on social media the other week and here's what it said, "Everything happens for a reason. Sometimes the reason is you're stupid and make bad decisions." And that can be true. If you're experiencing problems in your marriage because you're being selfish, or you've been lying to your spouse, or you cheated on them, then yeah, that's God's punishment, the direct consequence, for your sin. If you're failing a class because your teacher caught you cheating on a test or because you aren't doing any of the work, then yeah, you're the cause of your problems. If you've been smoking like a chimney for years and now the doctor's diagnosed you with lung cancer, you can see where the problem lies...with you.

But maybe you're dealing with some form of cancer or some other serious disease, and you've done nothing but be active and healthy for the last number of years. And Satan tries to play the blame game with you, "What did you do wrong that God is punishing you with this?" Or, you've had bad luck in relationships where you constantly put yourself out there and make all the sacrifices to make it perfect, and Satan's accusations are the same.

Lie #2 – "Maybe God doesn't love me." Have you ever said or thought, "If God really cared...then he'd (fill in the blank)." If God really cared, he'd make work not stink so much, so that I'm not coming home every day wondering why I even go in. If God really cared, he'd see this is the one thing in life I want the most (a job, a house with no structural or maintenance issue, a child), and he'd give it to me. If God really cared, he'd put honest leaders in place who were interested in what's best for me instead of all of these puppets who are only in it for themselves. But he hasn't, so maybe he doesn't love or care about me.

Although, we could rightly understand why God shouldn't love us. Take a look at your life. Take a look at God's commandments. How do they match up? If you're like me, not great.

And then, there's Lie #3 – "With everything going on in this world, it's all too much for God to handle." Or, at the very least, he's let me slip through the cracks. Right, do you ever think that way? How they say bad things typically happen in threes, but maybe God lost count or stopped counting with me...because it seems my life is one bad thing after another?

Why is it easy to think God can't handle this? Because we see sin and immorality still running rampant with no end in sight. It's also because I know it's too much for me to handle, and that's just my life.

We all have our opinions about why bad stuff happens, and maybe you don't like those answers. Maybe you're still wondering, "Why is God doing this to me?" He's not. God doesn't do evil. Sin does. And we all have that. We all do it. So, maybe the blame's on us...and rightfully so.

You want to know the truth? Why does bad stuff happen to you and me? And the answer is? ***“God is love.”***

God is love. What?!? I don't understand. How can that be? How can there be so many bad things in someone's life - in my life - if God is love? Wouldn't a loving God just erase all the bad stuff and only give them good?

Well...no.

Think about this. Your kid needs shots. You love them. They cry with pain as the nurse pokes them with the needle. Are shots “bad”? You need surgery. It's going to hurt and take some time to heal. Your doctor cares about you. Is surgery “bad”? Or how about this? After Adam and Eve fell into sin, God kicked them out of the Garden of Eden...paradise on earth. He made it so they could never come back. And it seemed bad, but think what would have happened if Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Life and live here, forever, in sin...never getting to go to heaven. Was God's punishment bad?

So much in our lives looks like “bad stuff,” but, friends, really, it is “good.” I want to share with you a story I heard not too long ago...a story about Chloe and Claire...twin sisters. At 13 years-old, they were both running the 800m in track...twice around the track. About halfway through, Chloe felt something pop in her thigh, fell to the ground, and cried. Her race was over.

Claire, leading at the time, heard her sister's cry, stopped running, went back around the track, saw her sister couldn't walk, put her on her back, and carried her the rest of the length around the track so they both finished the race together...in dead last. Something bad happened to Claire, who could have won the race...all because she loved her sister.

Jesus defined what love is for us when he spoke these words, ***“Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.”***

You know, for all the bad stuff we have happening in our lives, we can see even worse happened to Jesus on Good Friday, didn't it. Jesus was falsely accused of breaking the law, even though, in reality, he's the only person in this world's history who ever lived a perfect life...no sin...exactly what God wants. He was whipped, mocked, and executed on the cross, the sinless Son of God, crucified, given the treatment as the worst criminal ever. That is some really bad stuff for Jesus, but we still call it *Good Friday*.

Do you know why? Because of all that bad stuff on Good Friday, Jesus removed all of our sins and all of our guilt and says, “I took those for you. I made them mine.” Jesus sees you as his friend...as his brother, as his sister, and for us from the worst (not just bad, but the worst) punishment of an eternity in hell, he laid down his life. Jesus has such tremendous love for us that he took away the punishment we deserve as sinners by dying on the cross and suffering the punishment himself...all so that the bad that's keeping us away from God is now gone, so now we have an eternal future in heaven with Jesus we can look forward to.

Bad for him, at the time. So incredible for us. But that...is love. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us is love. God is love.

But maybe you still have that question. Why does bad stuff still happen to us? And the answer is still, ***“God is love.”*** A commentator on the book of Ecclesiastes, which we read from earlier, had this to say,

“By thoroughly disgusting us with the world, and by making us realize its absolute vanity, God means to draw us to himself...Through much tribulation must our hold on earthly things be loosened and ourselves enter into the kingdom of God.”

Friends, the truth is, Jesus has a plan for us, and sometimes it means difficult days. But, even in those days, his love is still there, shining. Even in those days, his love is still there, waiting for us to turn from the “bad” so he can remind us of the “good” he’s done for us. Jesus promises to be with his believers every day, even when difficulties enter their lives. As he has saved us from our sins, we also learn he has the power to help us through everything that we experience. Even when bad stuff happens, we trust God’s plan as we grow to count on the unfailing love...the unfailing love of our Savior.

I wish I could tell you life gets easier or a lot better...that you’ll never again experience the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days like our friend Alexander. I’m sorry I can’t. But I can tell you where to turn. I can tell you where you’ll always see the good. It’s in Jesus...because in Jesus is only love. Jesus is love. And in the good days and the bad, he’s there. And he’ll be there until the end, until he takes you to heaven, the place where there is no bad and the good days will never end. That makes every day a good day! Amen.