

Answering The “Why” Questions

This is dedicated to the many people I’ve know who have gone through great losses and asked “Why?”

One of the hardest questions I am ever asked as a chaplain is “*Why . . . ?*”— “*Why did I get cancer?*” “*Why did my daughter die?*” “*Why did God allow the Trade Center in New York to be attacked?*”

I’m not God, nor do I presume to speak for God, but may I offer a few reflections which I hope you will find helpful.

1. God is still in control. God has not hit the panic button. Lean back and leave the driving to God. If God is your *copilot*, switch seats.

2. C.S. Lewis once wrote that “*Pain is a megaphone which God uses to awaken a deafened world.*”—Whether we like it or not, when it comes to war, disease, or pain of any kind, it definitely gets our attention. It is like the old farmer who had the most stubborn mule in the county. No one was able to break him, so, rather than get rid of him, the farmer hired a big city mule trainer with the reputation of being able to tame any animal. When the mule trainer arrived he walked out into the barn lot, picked up a two-by-four board, went over to the mule, reared back, and hit the mule right between the eyes. The mule fell to the ground and got back up shaking its head. The concerned farmer ran out and said, “*Why did you do that?!!*” The mule trainer replied, “*I had to get his attention first.*”—Have you noticed how much spiritual awareness has come as a result of the terrorist attacks? Though God is not the author evil, God can certainly use it to get our attention.

3. When it comes to war or terrorism, we often mistakenly think that they increase death. Not so. They merely speed up the process a bit. 100% of every generation still dies [latest statistics]. The real issue of life is not that we die, but rather the fact that each of us lives one breath and one heartbeat from eternity. War and terrorism simply bring to our consciousness conditions which have existed ever since Adam and Eve, namely death.

4. Question: would you rather know death is coming and have time to prepare, or would you rather die suddenly without warning at the hand of some terrorist? I dare say there was not a single person who walked into the Trade Center in New York September 11, 2001 thinking, “*This is the last day of my life.*” I used to think that when it came time for me to die that I wanted death to come suddenly. “*Lord, let me have a heart attack or get run over by a Mack Truck; just get it over with!*”—I no longer feel that way. Having been a hospice chaplain, I’ve seen how many wonderful things can happen when a person has time to prepare for death. There is time to say goodbye, to heal wounded relationships, to seek divine forgiveness, and put one’s house in order.

For example, what if a woman became pregnant on Monday and had the baby on Tuesday. Would she be ready?—No. But, if she has nine months to prepare, when the baby comes she is as ready as she can be. Obviously, there are some negative aspects to a slower death, but from where I sit, when I weigh them out, under most circumstances I would choose a slower death. You’ve witnessed the grief on television of people who never got to tell their loved ones goodbye. Would you prefer to be in their shoes or have extended time to spend with your loved ones?

5. Do you love your car? Does your car love you? No. You may like your car, but true love cannot exist between man and machine. God created us as choice-makers, with free wills so that we would not be like a car or some robot. God desires our voluntary love.

What if I told you, *“I’ll take you out for lunch, and you can have whatever you want. You can have pizza, pizza, or pizza. What do you want?”*—That is no choice. God, in like manner, could have said, *“You have a choice. You can love me . . . or you can love me . . . or you can love me.”*—Again, that is no choice. For real love and goodness to exist between us and God, without us being mere robots, there had to be an alternative, a real choice: evil. As much as we hate it, that is the price tag for having freedom of choice.—We can love God or hate God. We can choose to love people, or we can crash an airplane into the building where they work. We have the potential to do great good or great evil. Why? Because love demands a choice and God gives us that choice.

6. While we have free will, a major theme in virtually every major religion is that someday there will be a day of judgment. While we have freedom of choice, there are consequences for the choices we make. We are accountable. That which we do in this life will echo for eternity.

7. The good news, from a Christian perspective, is that God is not immune to our pain, but rather entered our world, died for our sins, and is able to meet us in our pain. The message of the cross is that not only did Christ die for our sins, but that He meets and identifies with us in our pain, in the ways we’ve been sinned against. God comforts us as one who has known pain and injustice.

8. God has all eternity to pay us back for the hurts and losses we know in this life [Romans 8:18-25].

9. Quoting C.S. Lewis again, *“When the Author walks onto the stage, the play is over.”* God will not allow suffering and evil to go unchecked forever. There is a day coming when God will say, *“Enough’s enough!”* God is a God of justice. Evil will be judged, and every tear will be wiped away from our eyes.

10. Until that day, since none of us know when our day will come, it is both necessary and fitting that we be ready. We all live on the threshold of eternity; one breath and one heartbeat away. God offers comfort now, and eternal hope for the future. There is unconditional forgiveness and pardon for all who place their trust in Him [John 1:12, 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9; I John 1:9]. In the end, for those who have chosen to place their faith and trust in God, it will be *“OK!”* Good will prevail. God will reign triumphant, goodness will be rewarded, and evil will be remembered no more.

P.S. If you have never placed your faith and trust in Christ, may I suggest the following prayer. The words are not magical. The main thing is that they come from your heart.—*“Dear Lord Jesus, I thank You for loving me. I am sorry for the sin, and pride, and lack of trust that has kept me from You. I believe You died on the cross and rose again to pay for my sin which has separated me from You. As best as I know how, right now, I place my life in your hands. I invite You to come into my life. Forgive me of my sin and make me the person You want me to be. Calm my fears, carry my burdens, and open my heart to receive your love. Thank You for hearing this prayer. Amen.”*