

How You Can Respond When Tragedy & Hardship Invade Your Life

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

1. Reaffirm God's Sovereignty

The Lord is king forever and ever. To be sovereign means that God has absolute power to do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, wherever He wants, with whomever He wants at all times. God cannot ever be *not* in power. God cannot ever be *out* of control. God has established His throne in the heavens and His sovereignty rules over all. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does – in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. God sits as the eternal Potentate actively ruling and reigning over every event, moment, atom, and molecule in human history. Everything happens at His bidding.

Responding to hardship and tragedy must begin with a robust recognition that God is utterly sovereign. God rules and reigns. God exists as the eternally good, wise, loving and omniscient Creator. When tragedy strikes, the believer must tell himself — thus counseling his own soul — that God is actively involved and willing, able, and available to help. God is not far; He is near! In disaster and turmoil, rather than listening to self and all the complaints and accusations that man could contrive against the Sovereign, God's people must talk to themselves rather than listen to themselves. To listen to self is to complain, foster anger, and create bitterness. But to tell the soul to trust in God, to hope in Him, to wait for Him, to rely on His good providence results in tremendous hope and joyful expectation. In moments of hardship and tragedy, the Christian should say among the nations: "The Lord reigns!"

2. Rest in God

There is no rest for the wicked, says the LORD. Those who deny the Lord and refuse to bow the knee to His sovereign love have no rest — real, lasting rest — no matter where they try to find satisfaction, meaning, and pleasure in this life. Jeremiah told the people of Judah who had rebelled against God to return to their old ways; to follow the old paths. When they find those ancient paths and walk in them, they will find rest for their souls. Jesus commanded those around him to come to Him to find rest for their souls for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. How the man and woman of God must rest *completely* and *entirely* in the kind providence of God. In hardship, the Christian should not allow himself to get anxious, worried, tense, or autonomously independent. Rather, the believer should open His Bible, actively trust in God, aggressively pursue God in urgent prayer, and rest in the *unchanging* character of God in the midst of the changing circumstances of life.

3. Remember Your Salvation

In hardship and tragedy, the perspective of people becomes incredibly earth-focused, temporal, and self-absorbed. The Christian must, however, strive for the exact opposite. The Word of God commands the believers to remember Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead and a descendant of David. To remember salvation puts everything in proper perspective. To recall what God did in the salvation plan is to catapult a soul from earthly turmoil to eternal truths! It is to extract a mind away from the temporal troubles of this age and rightly affix them to the triumphant truth of eternity.

For the Christian to remember his salvation is to put everything in proper perspective. This must be the case because the gospel begins with God – His character. God’s sovereignty pervades all things, His holiness is eternally undefiled, His justice and righteousness endure forever. Therefore, every single human being stands wholly condemned and entirely guilty before this Righteous Judge. The sinner deserves nothing *other than* the immediate, eternal, just, good, and righteous wrath of God. Anything other than this is sheer, undeserved, dazzling grace coming from the merciful hand of God. When tragedy and hardship invades a life — no matter how hard it may be, how blinding it may be, how severe it may seem to be, how crippling it may feel — to remember the gospel of Jesus Christ must remind the Christian that even the good things that still exist are from the wondrously kind hand of the Lord.

Of course, Jesus Christ came to seek and save the Lost. He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. He lovingly, sacrificially, perfectly humbled Himself by clothing deity with humanity and obeying the Father in every respect. He died substitutionally. He bore wrath vicariously. He endured God’s judgment because He loved His very own sheep. This gift of eternal life is received by faith alone, by repenting of sin, by turning from sinful ways and turning to the one, true, Living God. When a believer remembers this — regardless of the tragedy, hardship, or circumstance in which He finds Himself — it must encourage His soul because His very own mind and heart has been elevated off of the earthly troubles and back on the rightful object — the eternal Lord of heaven and earth and the gospel of grace which He freely gives.

4. Recall Scripture’s Promises

“Remember” is a word that occurs repeatedly in both the Old Testament and the New to remind the people of God to go back to Scripture, back to the Word of God, back to the Truth of God, back to the revelations of God to find hope, sustenance, strength, and joy. In times of hardship and confusion, God’s people must not impulsively ask God for new revelation or for some new sign of God. Rather, they must turn to the completely sufficient Word of God (contained only in the 66 books: Genesis – Revelation) and take the age-old promises of God and freshly apply them to present circumstances. God never needs to reveal Himself with new revelation that He has ‘left out’ of Scripture; God’s people must recall the promises of Scripture that plunge the person of God under the weight of the immense faithfulness of God to *His own* character and also to *His very own* people as well. To recall Scripture’s promises is to remember Scripture’s glory. To recall Scripture’s promises is to remember God’s glory. To recall Scripture’s promises is to put trust, hope, and reliance on God and His perfect Word rather than anything else.

5. Rejoice in God

The Bible commands God’s people to rejoice always. In every circumstance, Christians must rejoice. To rejoice is to be glad. To rejoice means that a saved sinner can exult in triumphant, internal, unchanging, irrevocable joy that has as its rock-solid foundation the character and work of God Himself. In moments of madness and times of tragedy, Christians must take their eyes off of self, circumstances, pain, and confusion. For if this consumes his heart, he will sadly, inevitably, and sinfully become depressed. But if he can intentionally, deliberately, daily, and obediently open the Word, affix His eyes to the wondrous character of God and the glorious works of God, He can have joy and peace. This can only happen when the Spirit empowers, enables, and fills His people to obediently follow the glorious Word. Thus, God’s chosen ones have a joyful shout. God’s people are blessed forever and thus they have joyful gladness in God’s presence. So in times of tragedy, the man and woman of God must remember the command of the Lord to rejoice in God. It is a settled certainty that God is in control. That is something to rejoice about!