

**McCabe UMC**  
**When Christians Get it Wrong: When Bad Things Happen (part 5)**  
**Job 2:11-13 \* John 10:14-18**  
**May 12 & 13, 2012: Pastor Rick Fossum**

I had a young friend. His name was Brad. I officiated at his wedding. One day, he was out snowmobiling and he had an accident. He was only thirty-years-old when he died. Why? Why do bad things happen?

I had another friend. She was going home one night when she got caught up in a senseless act of violence. She was murdered and when her murderer was asked why he did it, his only response was to shrug his shoulders and say '*just because*'. Why do bad things happen?

I know a family that belonged to a church that I once served. They had a sixteen-year-old son who took his own life. The family was devastated. They couldn't understand '*why. Why our son*'? Why do bad things happen?

A teenager pulled out of the parking lot of her high school and was broad sided by another car. She died. When her friends gathered together to grieve, their only question was "*Why? Why their friend? Why did this happen to someone so young? Why?*" Why do bad things happen?

These are only a few of the stories that I could tell you about. I'm sure you have your own stories . . . stories of people who died too young and too tragically. The '*why*' question gets asked more than any other question during these times. Why do bad things happen?

Ann Nicole Nelson was born in 1971 and she died on September 11, 2001. She was born and raised in Stanley, North Dakota, graduated from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota and also studied at Cambridge in England. Did I tell you she spent a semester studying in China? She placed a great value on education and believed that the world was her classroom.

Ann died as the result of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center where she worked on the 104th floor as a bond broker for Cantor Fitzgerald. At Minot State University, there's an auditorium named in her honor. Why? Why do bad things happen?

This is this fifth message in a series called *When Christians Get It Wrong* based on a book with the same name. It's been a good series. Throughout this series, Ray and I have been wrestling with the question, "**why are young people, ages 16 through 29, staying away from the church in record numbers?**" Today, we'll take a look at one more reason.

Sometimes, God gets blamed when bad things happen.

A young mother wrote, **“our baby died this past spring when he was six weeks old. So many Christians we have encountered since that time tell us, *“this was God’s plan.”* Before this tragic event, I guess I thought this was how life worked too. But, there is no way that the death of an innocent six-week-old and our inability to get pregnant again is part of some master plan. And if it is then I’m simply not interested in the God that has that plan.”**

Could you feel her anger? She wrote about well-meaning Christians trying to comfort her, but instead of comfort they drove her away from God. She wrote, **“If God is responsible for my son’s death or if God is to blame or if God is somehow testing me, I don’t want anything to do with that kind of God.”**

Some of us grew up with the idea that God is behind everything that happens. A piano accidentally falls on top of someone. Oops! It’s part of God’s plan. A choir member sings off key. Don’t blame the choir members, it’s part of God’s plan. Someone falls asleep during my message today. Don’t blame my message, it’s part of God’s plan. The field goal kicker for the Vikings misses a field goal and the Vikings lose the Super Bowl. Don’t blame the kicker, it’s part of God’s plan.

Do you see how easy it is with that kind of thinking. We don’t have any responsibility, God gets all the blame.

A man lost his job during the recession of 2008-2009. He blamed God. **“What did I do that was so bad that God is punishing me like this,”** he asked. And when he couldn’t find another job, he blamed God again.

In his mind, God planed the entire recession just to punish him. The loss of jobs, the stock market failure, and the housing bust were all a part of some master plan just because God wanted to punish this one man!

People have struggled with this ‘*why*’ question since the first days of the Bible. In fact, in parts of the Old Testament, God is seen as the author of all bad things. If you suffer or if you have something bad happen to you, it’s because you have sinned. God is punishing you.

But, in the middle of the Old Testament there is a book that was written to counter the idea that God is to blame. The book of Job is the story about a man who is righteous, very righteous, yet he suffers greatly. He didn’t do anything that would deserve punishment. His friends arrive to comfort him and at first they do a wonderful job. Listen again to the first part of Job when his friends gather around him:

*Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.*

-Job 2:11-13 (NRSV)

This is what friends are supposed to do. They just sat in silence with Job. They didn't try to explain anything. They didn't presume to have the answer to Job's suffering. They just sat with him in silence and grieved with him.

But then, after seven days of sitting with Job, they made their big mistake. They opened their mouths! They told Job that his suffering was his fault. He must have sinned somewhere, sometime. And so God was punishing him and he should repent.

Job maintained his innocence. Finally, the book ends with God blessing Job and getting angry at Job's friends for their feeble attempts to help him. The book of Job doesn't tell us 'why' Job suffered, but it does tell us that his suffering had nothing to do with what he did or didn't do.

In the New Testament, everything changes because of Jesus. In John, Jesus tells us, "**I lay down my life for my sheep.**" He means you and me. He took all of our sins and all our wrong decisions and all of our mistakes to the top of a hill called Calvary where he died for us. And in the process of his dying, he took our punishment for us. Jesus paid the price.

Consider this: If God is punishing us for sins committed, why the cross? If we're being punished for the things we do, why did Jesus die on the cross?

So, why do bad things happen? Who or what is behind our suffering? No one knows for sure, but I believe we have the freedom to make good choices in life or bad choices. We can drive a hundred miles an hour on I-94 or we can drive the speed limit. We can get a medical check up or we can ignore our symptoms. We can cheat and lie or we can be honest and trustworthy. These are all choices we have the freedom to make. When we make wrong choices, we suffer the consequences not from God, but from those wrong choices.

We also live in a world where bad things happen through no fault of our own. A drunk driver runs into your car and you get hurt. You trip and fall and break something even though you try to be careful. Or, you sit in the back yard and a mosquito bites you and you get some kind of disease. Or, a tick bites you and you get another kind of disease. You lose your job because your company is down sizing and we suffer through know faults of our own.

But I do know this: when bad things do happen to us, we're never alone. God is with us. In the middle of our grieving and mourning there is God grieving and mourning with us. It's God who helps us pick up the broken pieces of our lives and helps us move on. It's God who holds our hands when life is at its hardest and darkest and comforts us. It's God who makes a way for us when there doesn't seem to be a way. It's God.

John Ortberg in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted* tells a story about a pastor and a lady named Mabel. Mabel was in a nursing home when the pastor met her. Mabel was eighty-nine-years-old and had been in the nursing home for over twenty years.

One Mother's Day, the pastor went to this nursing home. He brought some roses to hand-out to the women in the home. As he walked down the hall, handing out roses, he looked into a room and saw a lady strapped to a wheel chair. He could tell that she was blind. She must have had a stroke or something because one side of her face drooped down closing her eye lid over her eye. She was drooling from the side of her mouth. This isn't nice to say, but she wasn't a pleasant sight to see. In fact, the head nurse would assign new nurses to take care of Mabel because, she figured, if they can work with Mabel they can work with anyone.

The pastor didn't want to, but, he walked into Mabel's room anyway and handed her a rose. To his surprise, Mabel thanked him for the rose and suggested that he give it to some other mother because she said, she was blind.

The pastor started talking to Mabel and pretty soon they became friends. Over the next few months, he would visit her on a regular basis. Sometimes, they would sing some of Mabel's favorite hymns and Mabel would talk about the words and what those words meant to her.

One day, the pastor asked Mabel a question, "**Mabel,**" he asked, "**what do you think about when you sit in your room all by yourself?**"

Mabel thought about it and said, "**I think about my Jesus.**" She went on to tell him about her Jesus and how he was always with her . . . always has been and always will be. And then, she started singing one of her favorite old hymns:

**Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all; he is my strength from day to day, without him I would fall. When I am sad, to him I go, no other one can cheer me so; when I am sad, he makes me glad, he's my friend.**

Even though we might not be able to fully explain *why bad things happen*, we can know that Christ is always with us. Through every dark valley, through every ache and pain, through every conflict, Christ is always with us grieving with us and helping us to put our lives back together.

I think *Christians Get It Wrong* when we blame God for the bad things that happen to us or when we say it's part of God's plan or God is testing us.

I think *Christians Get It Right* when we walk with those who suffer. I think *Christians Get It Right* when we become the hands and feet and voice of God, caring for all God's children and not punishing them.

Let pray . . .