

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: In the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks, I'm having a great deal of difficulty in explaining to my 10-year-old why these kinds of bad things happen, and why God doesn't always protect us from bad things. Can you help?

ANSWER: Although the question is easily asked, the answer has many facets. Often times people don't like the answer. **This is a wonderful, but difficult, opportunity for you and your child to have numerous heart-to-heart conversations.** Realize that YOU might grow far more from these conversations than your child. It is critical that parents have a well-developed set of theological convictions, from both Scripture and life experience, which they can impart to their children. You will never be able to explain or convince that which you do not solidly know yourself. Sit down, pray, and write the answer to your question. Then rewrite the answer in the language of a 10-year-old. **How you handle this question is pivotal to your child's understanding of God...**it may in fact determine whether or not your child will embrace the existence of a strong and good God. Some underpinnings to help you...

"Why do these kinds of things happen?" The short answer, that few people find satisfying, is: "Bad things happen because we live in a sinful and fallen world, and people are not basically good. God allows us, individually and collectively, to reap the consequences of sin."

For Christians, there is really no such thing as gratuitous evil. We should be surprised that there is as much "good" in the world as there is...not that there is abundant evil. Looking at our sinful world that way is not very attractive to most people these days. Because we were created in perfect, for the Garden, "bad things" cut us to the heart. Why doesn't God remove the "bad things?"

1. Removing all the "bad things" in life will not build the kind of faith God wants us to have. **In this fallen world, faith is fortified by endurance through struggle.**
2. Some "bad things" require the use of miracles for their elimination. **Miracles do not ultimately produce the kind of faith God wants.** The effect of miracles on building faith is short-lived (e.g. The Children of Israel in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt).
3. God **chooses to limit himself** (The Hebrew concept of *zimsum*.) so people are free to choose and act. (See #6.)
4. Faith and trust in the midst of "bad things" are the best ways to show our **true love** for God.

5. God **chooses to postpone** the miracle of eradicating all evil until Heaven for those who die, and until the Last Day for those yet living. We will never have the perfect life on earth. God desires that we long for Heaven.

6. God **chooses to use us** to ease many of the effects of “bad things”. With the coming of his Holy Spirit in us, God delegates much of his work to his church. We Christians have the opportunity and duty to war against evil and help mitigate “bad things.” (See #3.)

7. God wants us to develop a relationship with him that **stands apart** from circumstance. This is most difficult for us.

8. **We don't see the whole picture**; we exist in the temporal. We don't know how many “bad things” God continuously prevents...things that might have happened.

9. God is just and will not eliminate all the consequences of sin in this world. Because of sin, we have to endure “bad things”. Not only that, because of sin, we deserve “bad things”. “The wages of sin is death.” This is the answer that we really don't like.

10. In addition, our analysis of situations is based on a **false assumption** about God's priorities. We assume that God's primary role in this world is to eliminate pain, suffering and struggle while always preserving physical life. We incorrectly believe that God's primary job is to make us healthy, wealthy and happy. In reality, God's priorities in THIS world are to (1) forgive us (so we can have a saving relationship with him for eternity), (2) transform/sanctify us (into the image of Christ), and (3) send us (out into the world as salt and light).

Your words will be ineffective if your child doesn't see them lived out in your faith-walk. Your child will watch how YOU handle “bad things”. Philosophical arguments in the absence of deep convictions and lifestyle are rarely persuasive. Understand that some questions cannot be answered completely in this world; some problems have no good solutions in this world.

A misunderstanding of “bad things” often causes a crisis of faith calling into question the goodness, strength and existence of God, propelling the child to doubt either the character or existence of God.

Your child will look to you and ask such questions multiple times in his life...listen to his concerns, use gentle touch, pray with him often and have some solid answers along with offering Christian hope.

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