

After the Crying...After Asking Why...Then What?

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

The Crying

It was our sixth trip to the ER with chest pain in a little over a year. After open heart surgery plus three stents had stabilized Bette's heart condition, we dared to believe we were finally done with these anxious trips to the hospital. But there we were again. And all the old fears grappled for our thoughts.

"Will this mean yet another procedure that sets us aside for the next several months? Or are You through with us, Lord? Are You putting us on the shelf? Is it time to hang up our spurs and call it quits?" Our hearts cried out to the Lord. We were overwhelmed by the uncertainties of the future and the emotional strain of those uncertainties.

You may not have had this exact experience, but you've had similar ones, haven't you? We all have times in our lives when we cry out in confusion and pain to the Lord. This is part of the human experience and none of us escape it. The sun shines and the rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). And it's all right to cry. In fact, it's good to cry. Let it out. The Bible says over one-hundred times that the Lord hears our cries and has compassion on us. Your kids cry out to you when they get hurt and you run to their rescue. Our Father God cares for us even more!

The Asking

As we traveled the half-hour in to the hospital, fear slid another step into our thoughts. "Why now? After five months free of heart symptoms, why is this happening again? Why are You letting this happen, Lord?"

These questions reverberate with familiarity, don't they? The words may be different, but you've asked "Why, God?" more than once in your life, haven't you? We all have...from Moses to David to you and me...we turn to God in our confusion and ask Him "Why." It's the pattern of most our lives – first we cry and then we ask "why." We ask like we can't even imagine anything bad happening to sweet little

me...like we deserve only good in this life.

There is something wrong with our expectations!

Like the Apostle Peter reminds the early Christians, *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you* (1 Peter 4:12). Trials and suffering are not strange, they are part of the whole package we call life. And for those of us who walk with Jesus, the trials and pain have purpose if we let Him do His work in us through them:

- They prove to others our faith is genuine (1 Peter 1:7)
- They actually result in praise, glory and honor to Jesus (1 Peter 1:7)
- They help press us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29)
- They show others how faith really works (James 2:18)
- They make us "done with sin" (1 Peter 4:1-2)
- They give others hope (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

This list is certainly not complete. God does all kinds of good stuff in and through our trials. But there's something rather curious about this list – out of the six purposes for suffering, only two mentioned are actually *for* the sufferer. The other four purposes are about other people.

A few months ago, we met a friend's brother-in-law. Although he described how he had gone through open heart surgery and subsequent medical problems years before, he now was the picture of vitality and usefulness. His story filled us with hope. If God can do that for him, He can do that for us. Now we know this good man did not go through all his suffering just to, years later, give hope to one couple. But **we are one** of the purposes for his suffering. And we know others have been given hope through his testimony as well.

The point is – our trials and suffering are not *only* about us! They impact others in a profound way as well.

Our trials and suffering are not only about us! They impact others!

Through our first seven years of marriage, we had no problems or challenges to speak of. We had a good relationship, three healthy children, Harold had a secure career in the Navy, and after he resigned his commission and we went to seminary, we went straight from seminary to what looked like a fantastic church staff position. Life was golden. But then the gold began to peel off the under belly of that church staff and we began to see why people were leaving out the back door as quickly as others were coming in the front. We resigned under very painful circumstances. Nothing hurts quite like "friendly fire."

And then a friend from college days called, and her assessment of our situation amazed us. She confessed that she had never come to us with her own heartaches because she thought we couldn't understand them. We were too "blessed." She didn't think we would be able to understand her trials because we hadn't experienced any of our own that she could see.

The trials and pain we suffered during and after that church staff experience were not simply for our college friend. God did an incredibly deep work in our lives through it. But it was *for her* as well. It opened a relationship door that never would have been opened otherwise. Our suffering was not just about us.

We are convinced the saying is true that "Things happen *to* us, so that things will happen *in* us, so that things will happen *through* us." Trials and suffering always have transforming purposes. Things cannot happen *through* us if things do not happen *in*

us. If God protected us from the trials of life, how would He then transform us?

Then What? (cont')

And how would He demonstrate His gracious and transforming power to those around us?

As our friend Steve Pettit (counselor and speaker) writes, "He is a glorious intruder – He interrupts, intervenes, intrudes with no invitation. Often, His transformative and gracious love comes in disguise – the difficult person, the unwanted illness, the derailed plans [you know, the things we call 'trials']. He comes proclaiming truth, not to discuss, debate, or take a vote. He shatters our illusions of sovereignty and control, of strength and willpower. Yet He comes in love. He ALWAYS comes in love!"

Yes, we cry and often ask why, though when we are honest with ourselves, we already know some of the "whys." We simply want to debate and take a vote against God's inconvenient intrusion. But when the crying and the asking is done, we have a choice...then what?

Then What...?

We've got to resolve the "then what." If we don't, we're going to wallow around in misery for a long time.

Perry's only son died at a very young age.. He was paralyzed to think God would allow such searing pain to cut into the heart of his family. He cried. He asked "why." But he could make no sense of it. So he blamed God and ran from Him as fast as he could. He ran straight to a place called misery. Alcohol became his anesthesia, numbing the pain as well as all other feeling. His relation-

ship with his wife and daughter became more and more distant and tentative.

Perry wallowed in his deep misery for over 20 years...until a series of events brought him back to the starting gate. It began with a simple strep infection, but within days he was in a deep coma. For several months he lay comatose, with no response to life around him. But strange as it may seem, there was plenty of life going on in his coma, culminating with an encounter with Jesus Himself. Jesus took his hand and led him into a beautiful meadow and showed him heaven just beyond the horizon. He told Perry he could choose to go on to heaven, or he could choose to stay on earth and finally become the man God always wanted him to become. Perry replied, "Lord, let me live for you and become the man You want me to be."

**Trials and suffering
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transforming purposes.**

He woke up to the doctors and his family standing around his bed, having been advised that perhaps it was time to turn off the life-support machines. This story is very dramatic, but it's true. And it shows the enormity of the danger that lies in choosing misery instead of God's purposes. Perry's life turned around. He began living for Jesus. He recaptured his relationship with his wife and daughter. But Oh, the wasted years!

The prophet Jeremiah faced the same kind of choice that Perry did...like you and I face when heartache deluges us. Chapter 3 of Lamentations summarizes his struggle. He starts right

out in verse 1: *I am the man who has seen affliction...* And Jeremiah was right – he had seen more affliction than you or we will ever see. He describes the bitterness of his life as God's intrusion, and then sums it up in verses 18 and 19 by declaring, *My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord. I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me.*

And then, something remarkable happens. Jeremiah turns from his crying and asking why, and makes a conscious choice to embrace God's purpose in his life. *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.* (vv. 21-24)

This is intentional living! This is purposefully choosing to believe God instead of our own deceptive feelings egged on by satan's lies. One leads to life...the other leads to death.

So...then what? It's our choice. It's always our choice. After the crying. After asking why, will you choose to believe that "the Lord will fulfill his purpose for you" (Psalm 138:8)...that He has a profound purpose for every trial with which He intrudes uninvitedly into your life? Will you respond by confessing, "I can't face this trial, but You can, Lord"? This is the choice that leads to life and joy. This is the choice we made last month on our sixth trip to the ER with chest pain.

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