

## **PART FOUR - DEALING WITH ADVERSITY: WHERE WAS GOD DURING THE PANDEMIC?**

Where is God on our bad days?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Age-old questions, just ask Job and a litany of other biblical characters. Or just ask the average person affected by the pandemic. You'll get interesting answers in return.

As a pastor, chaplain and counselor I heard questions like this from people over and over.

We, you and I may have struggled with the question, but we likely came close. We may not have hit the "doubt button", but we likely entertained thoughts. And that's OK. The struggle was, and is, real, and the questions are worth, especially for the masses of fervently religious to rank unbelievers who may have navigated the pandemic without a faith element.

Some lost hope in hope itself. Image losing hope, being mired in uncertainty, and being paralyzed by fear AND not having the connection to community we enjoy?

If we are to provide the "Good News" of God's love and salvation to a freshly damaged world, we must deal with this difficult question. And, we mustn't dismiss those who struggle with it. Imagine losing someone during Covid and not being with them as they died.

Imagine losing a job with nothing in sight due to the Covid economy and worrying about feeding the family.

Imagine getting the virus and worrying about who you might infect – or being in total isolation and losing all connection and community – for months on end – and through it all questioning or blaming God.

“How could God let this happen to me and the world?” Is not a new question. The problem of suffering has been on the front burner for eons, as has, “If God is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good, what gives?”

During World War II this question was personal to millions of Jews. Elie Wiesel saw a young boy dangle from the gallows at Auschwitz and heard a man say, “For God’s sake, where is God?”

T.D. Burnette wonders if this is a “question without response”, or a question with no hope of being answered?

I believe it can be answered with a caveat or two, but not necessarily reassuringly or with ease.

Contemplative author James Finley amps us with the dialogue when he wonders if the question must be turned around with God asking: “Where was I during the pandemic, the holocaust or choose a natural disaster?” I’m intrigued by his thinking and although it gives me a theological headache, I’m going to dance with it for a time. Well, I may also dance with Paula D’Arcy who wonders if “God comes to us disguised as our own lives, as our own suffering life.”

Both Finley and D’Arcy place the onus on us and not God, which in the end is a plus. I will never figure out God, or life in general, but I may be able to figure out me, myself...

So where was God in 2020? In essence God was where God is right now and at Auschwitz he was hanging on the gallows with, and in, the little boy. During the pandemic He was in the ICU with, and in, the sick and dying – He was in the hospital parking lot and in the E.R. on December 23 at midnight when a friend of mine lost her mother on the same day she informed her she would be a grandmother for the first time.

Burnette calls these the “thin days”. Thin days come when adversity and suffering force us to look the enemy in the eye as we stand face to face, we can feel fear or doubt, both are easy, but we can also feel the love emanating all around us. God

is there too. God is never removed from our pain as our pain is His pain. And God is not alien to pain itself. There was the cross after all.

God was quite active during the pandemic. Burnette adds, “if God is there, then love is there, too.”

God was doing “God – business” in 2020.

Once we make peace with this theological reality all we have to do is take it to the questioning masses, but there’s another layer.

People also ask, “why do bad things happen to good people?” How did the world become so sad and bad?”

The baseline answers here go far in explaining God to non-faith people. When did sin come into the World? We know the time to be after the Fall, when humans utilized their free-will, free-choice to gratify themselves rather than be in pure communion with God.

This is difficult to unpack for unbelievers but the more we, followers of Jesus, embrace it, the more natural it is to convey.

Essentially sin and evil ramped up as more and more of us made bad choices, choosing to be more selfish than selfless. God, who created us to be in union WITH Him called His people to be uniquely spiritual, filled with hope and love and by living holy, positive lives bring others into a relationship with Him,. Over time there have been more and more disease, crime, war and natural disasters, even pandemics, all leading to more and more suffering. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is where we find ourselves today. We have much to do, so let’s discuss and plan.