Dealing with Disappointment



There seemed to be a gigantic collective gasp at the 2016 Rio Olympics when American gymnast Simone Biles bobbled on the balance beam and had to steady herself with her hands. Instantly, the girl expected to win five gold medals lost the gold, even before finishing her otherwise excellent routine. She still won a bronze, but Simone (and the entire media machine) knew she was capable of a gold.

How disappointing!



Simone handled her letdown with grace and realism, limiting her disappointment to the one missed skill rather than globalizing—as we so often do—by saying things like, "I am such an idiot! I can't *believe* I did that!" Then, quickly moving beyond her setback, she delivered an almost perfect floor exercise the next day, earning her fourth gold medal and propelling her into gymnastics history.

What is the wise, biblical, God-honoring way to handle disappointment?

Fortunately, we have lots of examples of people in the Bible who wrestled with disappointment:

- Women carrying the pain of years and years of infertility (measured month by month)—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, the Shunammite woman, Elizabeth.
- Joseph served for years with faithfulness and integrity inside a prison for a crime he did not commit; after correctly interpreting the dreams of fellow prisoners with access to the pharaoh, his hopes of being freed were dashed when the cupbearer forgot him.
- David was anointed as future king, but the years dragged on as he was chased by a mentally ill king consumed by paranoia.
- The Psalmists anguished numerous times: "How long, O Lord?"

Solomon, with his wisdom super-power, wrote in Proverbs that "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). The distance between our hopes/expectations and reality—"hope deferred"—constitutes disappointment.

The way to handle disappointment doesn't change, because ***the key is re-focusing on God***, and He doesn't change. He is good, and He is faithful, all the time. No matter what.

I have found two "power tools" for dealing with the pain of

when our hopes and expectations are deferred or, worse, obliterated.

First, take a firm hold on the comforting truth of the sovereignty of God: ***a good and loving God is in control***.
He permits nothing to touch our lives without His express permission, with a perfect purpose. If God allows disappointment to darken our days, it is His good gift of a "something better" later. (Please see my post "Rejection is Protection.") Disappointment may be preparation for something in the future. It may be a just-right tool for producing Christlikeness—spiritual maturity—in us. It may prevent something bad we couldn't possibly foresee.

The other power tool is **God's command to give thanks** *for* all things (Ephesians 5:20), *in* all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We don't have to *feel* goose-bumpy, warm-and-fuzzy thankful; giving thanks is a choice of the will. When we give thanks for something God has chosen to allow into our lives, we are acknowledging He is Lord, that He is "large and in charge." We are acknowledging that He has the right to allow disappointment to cast its shadow on our lives, and it keeps us connected rightly to our Creator, as His creature. "Lord, I thank You for allowing this deep disappointment into my life, even though I don't understand how You could possibly redeem it and make it okay." That's what trust looks like, and it pleases the Lord. It also helps us maintain an eternal perspective, that everything—*everything*—is part of a much bigger picture we cannot see.

Olympic athletes aren't the only ones to encounter disappointment. It is inevitable in a fallen world. How will *you* respond?

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on August 23, 2016.

Baylor the Lap Dog

This is Baylor, our Golden Retriever. He is a giant sucking funnel of attention and affection. He does not understand the concept of "enough." And he worships—he ADORES—my husband Ray. His favorite position to do that is in Ray's lap. But last week, the center of Baylor's universe had hip replacement surgery. Needless to say, nobody, especially Baylor, is allowed in Ray's lap.



And Baylor does not understand this.

All he knows is that his lord and master, his sun, moon, and stars, went away for a couple of days and when he came back, he was walking gingerly, leaning on a strange silver contraption to help him walk, and not allowing Baylor in his lap. Not even next to him in his chair. Thus the sad, sad picture.

Watching this heart-wrencher unfold, I am reminded of a major spiritual truth: just as Baylor cannot possibly understand why he is not allowed in Ray's lap, much less the concept of hip replacement surgery, we cannot possibly see the whole picture of any trial or disappointment or suffering we experience.

All we can see, all we can feel, all we can figure out is that

we are hurt or angry or both, and it sure doesn't feel fair. That's because all we have is our puny little limited perspective. There is always a much bigger picture we can't see, but God does. He not only sees every detail of the big picture of our situation, He also knows how our situation will play out into the future. He knows how He will redeem our pain and our confusion. He knows why it is essential to trust Him, because He loves us and He knows what He's doing.

As the great theologian Charles Spurgeon said, "God is too good to be unkind, He is too wise to be mistaken, and when you can't trace His hand, that's when you must learn to trust His heart."

When Ray and I look at Baylor, our hearts hurt for the pained misunderstanding on his sweet face. I can't help but wonder if our heavenly Father looks on us with an infinitely greater compassion when we find ourselves in Baylor's shoes—er, paws, overwhelmed by confusion and questions because of what we cannot see and cannot know.



We know that within a couple of weeks, Ray will be healed enough to welcome Baylor back into his chair and into his lap—but we can't communicate that to poor Baylor with his limited doggie mind. But God has communicated a magnificent promise to us, His children: that He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

That means we can trust Him. And, like Ray and Baylor, our heavenly Father will call us into His lap.

This
blog post originally appeared at Baylor the Lap Dog on
December 2, 2014.

Focus on What's Fixed

My husband and I recently took an Alaskan cruise. As we settled ourselves for sailaway in front of large windows on one of the highest decks, I heard a little girl ask, "Did we start moving yet? How will we know when we're moving?" I don't know what her mother said, but I do know the answer: you fix your gaze on what *isn't* moving.

I was looking at the building in this picture I took; when the ship starting pushing away from the pier, I knew we were moving because of our view through the window in relation to the stationary building.



And I thought, "Little one, the answer to your question is wisdom for life as well. Stay focused on what is unmovable, unchangeable, what is true for all times and all people in all places. Then you will be able to respond wisely to what moves and changes in your life and in the world."

This is true in both the small things and the world-shaking immense ones. Ray and I have been away from home for two and a half weeks, on an itinerary that has meant a lot of shifting and changing locations, unpacking suitcases one week and trying to live out of them the next. We remind ourselves that

the inconvenience is temporary because, Lord willing, we'll be home soon. That is a small, small thing made easier by remaining aware that "this too shall pass," that the comforting security of home and routine is right around the corner. But on the other end of the scale there are also horrible, horrible things happening in our world, particularly the explosion of Islamic terrorism in Iraq, persecuting Christians who are losing everything up to and including their earthly lives. West Africa is seriously shaken by an Ebola outbreak that is causing instability in everything. If that's not enough examples for you, Lael Arrington recently blogged here about "Five Ways to Dispel Dread."

It can feel like the world is wobbling on its axis. Even our own little worlds. It is crucial to keep our eyes on the One who says, "I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6), on the One who promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). We need to stay focused on the unchanging Word of God, in which He reveals that He knows how the future will unfold, and has everything under control-even the end-times horrors that appear to be right around the corner.

Later on our cruise, as we were sailing from one port to another, I knew we were moving—apart from feeling it—because I could see the churned-up wake next to the ship. But in order to tell how much we were rolling from side to side, I focused on the horizon which appeared to rise and fall. But since I knew it was unmovable, that meant the rising and falling was happening on the ship. I sat looking out the window, gazing at the horizon that reminded me of God's unchangeableness. A good and loving God is always, always in control. I am so glad.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/focus-on-whats-fixed/ on August 12, 2014.

Mad at God

I knelt down next to my bed, ten years old, and once more poured out my heart to God. “God, *please heal me!* You know how much I hate having polio, I hate limping, I hate going to physical therapy every week, I hate the surgeries, I hate the way people stare at me because of how I walk. I hate that no one could love me with polio. I hate this, God! I know You can take it away—please let me wake up tomorrow morning all healed and restored!” Once again, I fell asleep, hopeful that God had heard me and He was able to snap His fingers or wiggle His nose or however He did miracles. And in the morning, once again, I discovered that during the night *God had done absolutely nothing.*

And I was FURIOUS!

“You’re *God!* This is an easy one for You! What’s wrong with You that You won’t do something so easy as healing me???” Then, my little ten-year-old heart gasped, “I’m mad at God! People aren’t supposed to get mad at God!” And I gathered up my explosive anger and stuffed it into the emotional basement of my heart, along with all the other times I had begged God to heal me . . . and His silent inactivity kept saying no.

Once I trusted Christ as a college student, a wise woman saw my heart full of anger, bitterness and resentment, and prayed that God would show me my heart, knowing that my anger at God was a far bigger problem than legs that don’t work right. Remembering this ten-year-old memory, and the awareness there were a lot more just like it, was an answer to her prayer.

So I prayed, “God, I don’t have a clue what to do. My heart is full of anger, bitterness and resentment. I am angry at You, Lord, because You won’t give me what I want. I’ve never heard a message on ‘What to do when you’re so mad at God you want to spit in His face.’ Please show me what to do about it.”

God understands why we get angry at Him, just as a parent, possessing adult perspective, understands why a child gets angry at her. That adult understanding allows the parent to experience—and to show—grace toward a child tormented by angry confusion and a juvenile sense of entitlement to what he or she wants. Just as a child can't possibly see the big picture, much less a parent's motive and intention, that's why we get mad at God.

It's about what we can't see. And God understands.

He knows we cannot see anything but the pain and frustration of the moment. We can't see the reason(s) God is allowing us to suffer. We can't see the greater evil that a loving heavenly Father is preventing us from experiencing through the lesser evil of pain in that moment. Or season. We can't know what's going on the spirit realm, just as Balaam's donkey (Numbers 23) saw the angel of the Lord blocking their path with a sword but Balaam didn't, and he unrighteously punished the donkey.



We can't see the eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17) and beauty that God is creating in our souls through our pain and suffering, and He usually doesn't tell us. But He did tell my friend Ann. In prayer one day she had a body memory of being sexually assaulted by a man who had paid her father for the right to have access to his little girl. She asked Jesus about what felt like a heavy blanket over her during the abuse. He gave her a mental picture of Himself lying protectively on top of her, taking into Himself much of the violence of the assault. Ann saw that before the man could even touch her, he had to go through Jesus as her shield, protecting her from the worst of the assault. In answer to her heart's cry of "Why?", the Lord told her, "You are My precious gem. My Father's hand is on the chisel, creating unimaginable beauty in you. He has used every assault on you to create yet another facet of a brilliant jewel. I

promise, when you see yourself in heaven, you will say, 'It was totally worth it.'"

Now, I do realize that many people would gladly choose a less highly polished gem over the pain of abuse and suffering, but this was deeply encouraging to my wise and mature friend. I have watched God use her in mighty ways to minister hope and comfort to others in pain because of her willingness to relinquish her anger at what happened to her and trust God to bring good out of evil, to work all things together for good in her life (Rom. 8:28).

When I prayed, "God please show me what to do about my anger," He answered by teaching me about His sovereignty. I learned that a good and loving God is always in control, and nothing can touch me without His express permission. His perfect love and purpose for me—and His kingdom—is a shield around me (Ps. 28:7). By the time anything reaches me, whether it is a polio virus that crippled me for life or the disappointment of living in a fallen world, it has His fingerprints all over it. He taught me that all the available facts are not all the facts. He taught me that I can only see a tiny sliver of the whole picture that He sees, and I need to trust His goodness with what I don't see.

There's more to the story, but you can read that here.

What do we do when we're so mad at God we want to spit in His face? Repent of the wrong belief that we see the whole picture, and choose to trust the God who sees everything and has a purpose in it.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mad_at_god on August 14, 2013.

Headed to the Courtroom

June 18, 2013

Yesterday I was selected to serve on a jury for a trial that is anticipated to last three to four weeks. The jury selection process was an all-day affair, lasting over twelve hours and creating quite a sense of camaraderie in the process.

I keep thinking about the three major take-aways from this experience.

First, the multiple defense attorneys for the four defendants (thus the long trial) repeatedly reminded us that the American justice system is built on the foundation of "presumed innocent until proven guilty." And that is a very, very good thing, as horror stories emerge from countries where instant "justice" is meted out in cutting off or crushing limbs of those accused of stealing. And in countries where "mob justice" is part of everyday life. (See my blog post When God Does Nothing About Injustice.)

But it's not like that before God. Not a single one of us can protest innocence. Not only is every single one of us a sinner from conception (Ps. 51:5), but God knows every thought we think before we ever act on it. A totally holy, perfect God knows that we may be innocent of crimes before other men, but we are not innocent before Him.

Except that Jesus swapped His perfection and righteousness for our messed up guilt. It's like the judge coming down from his elevated seat, taking off his robes, and saying to a defendant that was just declared guilty, "I'll be taking your punishment for you." Amazing.

My second takeaway is gratitude for the teaching and experience in filtering life through a biblical filter. I am especially grateful for the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17—"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." All of us potential jurors were strongly encouraged to use common sense, and evaluate carefully everything we would hear. And (not surprisingly), the defense attorneys asked us not to draw any conclusions until we had heard everything. Those could be just platitudes, but since I know that God's Word said it first, it is my determined course of action.

The third takeaway is the importance of embracing God's right to put a long trial on my calendar. He is God; He has the right to interrupt my plans and put whatever He wants on my schedule. I had an idea of what I would be doing during the day over the next month, but God had different plans. I choose to trust Him and keep letting go of my impatient, wrong-headed belief that I should get to decide my agenda.

Then in one breathtaking moment, I had a paradigm shift that erupted in a heartfelt "Oh, *thank* You Lord!": the realization that this is nothing compared to the way a cancer diagnosis crashes into one's schedule, with a very different set of unwanted appointments on it. I'm pretty sure my sister Nanci, fighting breast cancer, would swap her chemo treatments with my courtroom dates in a heartbeat.

So the adventure with God continues . . .

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/headed-to-the-courtroom

“Does God Cause Bad Things to Happen?”

On Facebook my cousin asked me this question: “You know how they say everything happens for a reason, whether good or bad? Some people say that God has nothing to do with what happens in our daily lives, so He is not the one to blame for things going bad. But isn’t it possible that bad things happen because God wants them to happen, because of His overall plan? For example, a woman gets raped and has a baby. Since God chooses when and where you will be born, is God to blame for the woman’s rape so that baby would be born?” How would you respond?

Your cousin has asked about something that has perplexed Christians for a very long time. It actually marks a significant division between Christians theologically. Who is responsible for what happens on earth? Some believe God ordains everything that happens. Some believe He knows everything that will happen but He doesn’t always cause it (especially sinful things). Still others believe God doesn’t know everything that will happen in the future, so He can’t be blamed in any way.

The Bible indicates that God is sovereign over the world and nothing happens apart from His plan. Daniel 4:35 reads, “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and [God] does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?'” In Isa. 45:7 God says, “I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I, Yahweh, do all these things.” Typically when God brings disaster on people, it’s as punishment. However, some hard things He brings our way are for the sake of discipline, to strengthen our faith and lead us into the way of righteousness (see Heb. 12:3-13). Even Jesus “learned

obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8).

What God isn't to be blamed directly for is our sin. If we sin, we are responsible. Sometimes God lets us go in our sinful ways so that we learn to obey, but that doesn't make Him blameworthy for the sin we commit. So, somehow God is working out His plan, which includes some bad things, yet we are responsible for what we do.

Regarding the example given, since it is hypothetical only a hypothetical answer can be given. Let's assume that the woman hadn't done anything provocative herself, and that she hadn't knowingly put herself in a bad situation (although other people can't excuse their sin against us because of what we do, we can put ourselves in situations where there is a good chance we will be sinned against). This kind of situation is especially perplexing. There is no way of knowing directly why God would allow rape to occur. Will it change her life and point her in a different situation? What will the child grow up to accomplish? What will it mean in the lives of family and friends? God, through one act, can accomplish several things in several people's lives. In hindsight she might be able to look back and see some good that came out of this evil, but that doesn't always happen.

The wonderful thing about being in a relationship with God is that terrible events aren't the end of the story. Too often people use the word "ruined" to talk about the life of someone who has suffered terribly. I think of ruined as meaning *ended*, no good anymore for anything, destroyed. But we aren't forever ruined by disaster. Slowed down, re-directed, changed deeply maybe. But if we are willing to rest in God as sovereign over us and trust Him, we can let these things help shape us and guide us in the way God wants us to go. Difficulties come our way "that we may share [God's] holiness," the writer of Hebrews says. "For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"

(12:10,11).

None of this excuses the sin. I can’t do something bad to you and then tell you to just accept it because God must’ve wanted it to happen. God doesn’t need our help to guide people into righteousness!

I think that people usually want a very short answer to the question, is God to blame or not? Either yes or no. But I don’t think simple yes or no answers are typically sufficient for understanding. The issue has to be put into a bigger context. For example, when thinking about a tough football coach I had a long time ago, if I only think about whether he was to blame for letting that bigger player knock me silly in a round of “bull in the ring,” I would miss the whole point and misjudge him. He wasn’t being mean; he wasn’t trying to hurt me. He was making me learn how to be aware and be ready so I would be a better football player. Similarly, what God does (or allows to happen) has a reason or many reasons. The only way we can fully profit from it, though, is by being in a good relationship with Him through Christ and allowing ourselves to be shaped by it. I hope you and your cousin is in such a relationship with Him.

Thanks for writing.

Rick Wade

Posted Sept. 26, 2012

When God Does Nothing About

Injustice

“If God is so good and loving, why does He allow pain and suffering?”

This one question is probably the biggest obstacle to faith in Christ for most people. There are good answers, but since we are very limited in our perspective, many people continue to stumble over the problem of evil.

Because we are made in the image of a just God, our souls long for justice in the wake of injustice. We want *someone to pay* for hurting us or hurting others. We want to exact our pound of flesh. We wonder why God doesn’t *do something* about bad people doing bad things, especially when it invades our personal space.

For years, when addressing this issue, my husband has cautioned his listeners that immediate justice may sound good when we think about dishing it out, but we wouldn’t like to be on the receiving end of it.

Recently we had the privilege of teaching at a couple of church leadership conferences in Burundi, Africa. Ray asked his audience to consider what it would be like if God zapped us with an electric shock every time we thought or said or did a bad, or even uncharitable, thing. He said, “You’re probably sitting there thinking, ‘I wish that speaker would just be quiet and sit down. It’s been a long day and I’m tired of listening.’ But that’s not very nice, and let’s say you got buzzed with a shock for your thoughts.”

Then he got off the platform and stood before one of the men. “I don’t like your shirt. I don’t like your jacket. I don’t like your FACE!” And then he pretended to get a gigantic electric shock, flailing his arms and head, and fell down on the floor. The men roared with laughter. Ray stood up and

said, "*Now* aren't you glad God is patient? We need to be careful, thinking that justice in the moment would be a good thing. None of us would survive!"

Lots of smiles and nodding heads. They got it.

But we also experienced a terrifying example of why immediate justice would not be good.

On our two-hour drive from the capital city to the city where the conference was held, it had grown dark. Ray was in a taxi carrying him and one of the interpreters, along with some of our luggage. As our convoy made its way through one of the villages where a lot of people were gathered along the road, a man that the driver thinks was drunk ran out in front of the speeding car, and the driver hit him. He was thrown onto the hood of the car and smashed into the windshield. As the driver slammed on the brakes, the injured man fell off the car and lay motionless on the pavement.

Horrified, Ray could say or do nothing as the driver backed up and then drove around the man, leaving the scene—and a man who was either seriously injured or dead. The onlookers swarmed the taxi, and that of the car behind them, also containing our people, and started banging on the doors and windows. To the amazement of us Americans, all the drivers just kept on going, leaving the crumpled man and the angry crowd behind.

When we got to our destination, the horror was explained to us. If the taxi driver had gotten out of his car to check on the man he'd hit, the crowd would have killed him on the spot, and possibly Ray and our interpreter as well. In that culture they practice immediate justice—"mob justice," it was called. Our Burundi host said that in that culture, the drivers did the right thing to protect the visitors by not stopping and not opening the door to check on the man.

This experience was deeply disturbing to my husband (who was thankful that I was in another taxi ahead of him and didn't

see anything). We prayed together about the awful images burned into his memory and asked the Lord for peace.

And we can both appreciate, at a whole new level, why God's patience in not dealing with evil and pain when it occurs is a measure of His grace and mercy. He *will* bring resolution one day, and we can rest in that. That He is patient beyond our understanding is a good, good thing.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/when_god_does_nothing_about_injustice
on March 2, 2010.

Car Wrecks and God's Care

I received quite the birthday present from God this year.

My husband was in a car wreck on the way to speak at a church, and was taken by ambulance to the hospital where he was checked out because his chest hurt. A lot. (Airbags hit your chest at 200 mph!) No broken bones, just a scratch on the forehead, a lot of soreness, and a residual (but slowly subsiding) sense of fragility.

When I walked into the exam room, Ray murmured wryly, "Happy Birthday."

And it was, because my beloved husband was all right. God protected him from serious harm, and I am so thankful! That was a wonderful gift to me.

This was the second time I was called to the ER. Several years

ago, Ray was “T-boned” on the driver’s side by a car speeding through a red light. He received a concussion and nine months of soreness, but again nothing broken, no internal injuries. He still has no memory of being hit (or even being extracted from his totaled car or taken to the hospital by the paramedics).

There was a big “no accident” to the timing and location of that first wreck. He was hit three blocks from home, just a couple of months before our older son started basic training in the Air Force. My mama’s heart was of course concerned about what could happen to our son in the military during a war. I got the message loud and clear: “Ray wasn’t safe from danger three blocks from home, and I protected him. You can trust Me to protect Curt no matter where he is or what he’s doing.”

The Lord knew that both of Ray’s accidents were going to happen. Months before, I had been invited to speak at women’s retreat in Germany. I was excited about the invitation, but as I prayed about it, God gave me a resounding “NO!” in my spirit. I had no idea why He wouldn’t let me go, but obediently, regretfully declined. When Ray had his wreck three days before I would have been scheduled to fly to Europe, I was so grateful for God’s goodness in the timing. I was grateful for the “no.”

For years, I have been hanging into what is probably the most important truth I have ever learned in my life: ***a loving God is in control.*** This year, for my birthday, God gave me the gift of saying, “Yes, I am, and let me show you once again how true that is.”

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blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/car_wrecks_and_god’s_care
on March 16, 2010.

Ash Plumes and the Sovereignty of God

Sunday, April 18, 2010 – This is not a story with a happy ending, because the story hasn't ended yet. Ray Bohlin, Todd Kappelman and I, along with millions of other travelers stranded around the globe, are in Frankfurt, Germany far longer than the eighteen hours we expected to be here on our way home from Minsk, Belarus.



For two weeks, we were privileged to share some of Probe's worldview and apologetics material with young adult believers and future church leaders in Belarus. This country was part of the former Soviet Union, located between Poland and Russia. Until "freedom came" (their term) in 1991 with the fall of the USSR, it labored under the oppression of communism. The spiritual darkness of this country is part of the oppression as well. One of Ray's spiritual gifts is discernment, and he feels the weight of oppression and darkness from the moment we get off the plane. Even though God has blessed me with a sunny disposition, the unending ugly gray, featureless, monstrously huge apartment buildings thrown up by the government to house millions of citizens as if they were animals, depresses my spirit as well.

But it was a good, rich time with our friends in Belarus; they appreciated our teaching styles, the (very different!) material we presented, and the way we loved them. The warm

reception from those we spent time with last year was encouraging to us, as were the tears at the farewell ceremony from this year's new friends. We have been invited back with opportunities to expand our ministry there, and we look forward to returning next year.

Belarus is not kind to people with disabilities. As one now living in the throes of post-polio syndrome (muscle weakness, fatigue and pain), the ubiquitous stairs make getting around more difficult than I am used to in the U.S., especially since many of my supporters and friends gave generously to allow me to buy a mobility scooter. Neither a scooter nor a wheelchair are of any use in a country with lots of stairs but not elevators or usable ramps, so we don't bring them to Belarus.

Our time with Belarusian believers was wonderful, but we gladly flew to Frankfurt, where we were grateful for simple things that are easy to take for granted, like absorbable and flushable toilet paper, and safe tap water. Before leaving Minsk we learned about the volcanic eruption in Iceland, but it was too far away to have any impact on our flight. We checked our bags all the way through to DFW from Minsk, since we only had a one-night stay in Frankfurt. My small sack with nightwear and a change of clothing was inadvertently stuck in one of the checked bags instead of a carry-on, but I shrugged it off since it was only one night.

That's what *we* thought.

The Frankfurt airport was closed to air traffic at 8 a.m. Although the lines to rebook flights were impossibly long, Lufthansa (my new favorite airline) designates an office and waiting area for special needs passengers, especially those with handicaps. They got us confirmed seats on the next day's flight, and Lufthansa gave us vouchers for hotel rooms and that night's dinner in the hotel restaurant. Since the rooms would not be available till after 2 p.m., we enjoyed a leisurely lunch in the airport. There were so many people it

reminded me of being at Disneyland on New Year's Day.

A shuttle took us and a bus full of other passengers to the hotel, ten minutes from the airport. And here we stay, so grateful to have been provided a bed to sleep in and three meals a day when thousands of people are stuck at the airport because their airline does not cover these needs, or their visa does not allow them to leave the transit zone.

As the world now knows, the ash plume continues to push its way into Northern Europe, at the same high altitude as the jets fly, where they can suck in small, jagged pieces of volcanic rock and glass that also conduct electricity and cause total engine failure. No one knows when it will be safe to fly again. No one knows when we will get to our destinations. And there is no one to get angry with, no one to blame, no one to sue.

Processing this experience through the grid of a biblical worldview colors the way we think about our "adventure."

We know that God is in control of volcanoes, and eruptions, and winds, and the timing of it all. He is in control of the world's flight systems. He is in control of our schedules. He knew when He allowed us to be stranded in Germany that Todd had classes to teach at Dallas Baptist University, that Ray had a number of events and meetings scheduled in his role as president of Probe, that I had several Christian Women's Club luncheons to speak at in New Mexico this week. And He allowed us to be stranded in far-easier Germany, not in Belarus; twenty-four hours later, and our flight out of Minsk would have been cancelled. He provided food and shelter for us. He has given grace for Ray and me to have our laptops with us with easy internet access from our room, and He helped me find and disable the virus that infected Ray's computer last week.

We don't know how long we will be here, or when we'll see our luggage again. We DO know that God is good, and the fact that

we have been blessed with so much favor doesn't mean that He loves the people stuck inside security at the airport any less. Or that any of us did anything wrong to have Him punish us.

And we are aware that the more the world grows flat and interconnected, the greater the fragility of the systems. So much of our comforts and our technology relies on everything continuing to run smoothly without interruption. It is good for us as human beings to be reminded that we are *not* the masters of our fate or the captains of our souls, as the obnoxiously humanistic poem *Invictus* declares. God is bigger and more powerful than we are; a nature that has been impacted by the Fall, producing things like the disruptions from volcanic eruptions, is bigger and more powerful than we are. We are tiny and insignificant in the face of something like Iceland's exploding mountain; and yet, God still counts the hairs on our head and is still Immanuel, God with us, whether in an "adventure," or a disaster, or the blessedly uneventful days of blessedly uneventful routine.

The bottom line: God is still good. He is still loving. He is still sovereign.

And we rest, as trustful children, in these wonderful truths. All the way to the end of the story, however it ends.

Addendum: April 20, 2010

It *is* a happy ending!

Late yesterday afternoon, Lufthansa summoned their international passengers to the airport because they were going to let a handful of flights depart. One of them was to the U.S., and Ray said, "It doesn't matter what city it is, if it's on American soil. We can always get to Dallas, if we can just get out of Germany!" Although this flight to Chicago was fully booked, not all the passengers made it to the airport, and all three of us were given seats. We arrived in Chicago at

midnight, and to our amazement, all our bags were on that flight. Since they were tagged for Dallas/Ft. Worth and there was only a small window of time from when we received our boarding passes, we were amazed and delighted to see them.

We were able to get some of the last seats on a 6 a.m. flight to Dallas, and a few hours later we were back at home, grateful, blessed and tired.

And ready for a shower and a change of clothes!

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"Could God Have Ordained the Holocaust?"

I have read an article titled "God, Evil and the Holocaust," and I have also read an article called "Did God Ordain the Holocaust?" at http://deoxy.org/godholoc.htm. Both talk about the Holocaust, but in different terms.

From what I have read on articles on evil and suffering, it really seems to me that there are two views or ways of looking at evil and suffering. 1) Those who think of suffering or evil as part of the Fall and a way Christians are tested in their faith in God. 2) God intended evil for good (punishment or a necessity) or He is not powerful to intervene or "Why can't he intervene if He loves us so much when the suffering or evil in the world today is too unbearable?"

Honestly, I really trust and agree with the article on the Probe website. I have always and still believe in a God who is loving and merciful and just. Yet, the article in the other website which I have pasted (the link above) does provoke me

to think differently about the Holocaust. Is the author of that article's reasoning flawed? Is he correct in saying that God ordained the Holocaust? He does form a good argument out of the bible.

Thanks for your letter. You ask an interesting and important question. The question not only touches on the problem of evil, but also on the nature of Divine sovereignty and human freedom. Concerning the latter issue, please see my previous response to the question, "Does Calvinism Make People into Choiceless Puppets?" I think this response will be helpful in rounding out the discussion.

For more on the problem of evil, please see Rick Rood's article The Problem of Evil and my brief e-mail response at "Is God the Creator of Evil?". Finally, please visit bible.org for a large array of articles and e-mail responses dealing with the problems of suffering and persecution at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=77.

Now for my own brief response. First, I'm personally hesitant to say that we should apply (without any qualification) the OT references cited in the article you mentioned to the suffering of Jewish people in the Holocaust. God did say these things, of course. And He did bring such suffering on His people in the Assyrian invasion of Israel (722 B.C.) and the Babylonian invasion of Judah (605-586 B.C), as well as at other times. However, in my opinion, God is no longer relating to the world on the basis of the Old Covenant and Mosaic Law. Rather, a New Covenant is now in effect (see Hebrews 8, etc.).

Second, the author of the article you cite seems to deny any human responsibility in the Holocaust. But the Bible clearly affirms a measure of human freedom and moral responsibility (see my e-mail response mentioned earlier). Of course, the Bible is also very clear about God's sovereignty. Ephesians 1:11 describes God as "Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will." A good example of

God's sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility can be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus (see Acts 4:27-28).

I think we're forced to conclude that God did at least permit the Holocaust. And some Christian theologians would indeed say that He ordained it (in the same sense in which He has ordained whatever comes to pass). How one understands the details of this is rather controversial among evangelicals and I'll leave you to think through this on your own. Everything which happens in history, some argue, is simply the outworking in time of God's eternal decree. Nevertheless, the Bible also seems to affirm that man has some genuine freedom and is therefore morally responsible for what he does. Thus, the Nazis acted freely in the Holocaust and are morally responsible before God for their sins.

Much more could be written on this subject. For more information, please visit the links above. Also Rick Rood, at the end of his article, lists the following resources for further study:

Resources for Further Study:

• Blocker, Henri. *Evil and the Cross*. Tr. by David G. Preston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
• Briggs, Lauren. *What You Can Say…When You Don't Know What to Say: Reaching Out to Those Who Hurt*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985.
• Carson, D.A. *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.
• Craig, William Lane. *No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990.
• Dobson, James. *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.
• Dunn, Ronald. *When Heaven is Silent: Live by Faith, Not by Sight*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994.
• Feinberg, John S. *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

Publishing House, 1994.
• Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Deserted by God?* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
• Geisler, Norman L. *The Roots of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.
• Kreeft, Peter. *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986.
• Lockyer, Herbert. *Dark Threads the Weaver Needs*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1979.
• McGrath, Alister E. *Suffering & God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
• Plantinga, Alvin C. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.

Hope this helps.

Michael Gleghorn

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