

## STRONG AT THE BROKEN PLACES: WHY DO THE INNOCENT SUFFER?

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### Key Texts:

1. **John 16:33 (NIV)**

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble.** But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

2. **Job13:15 (NKJ)**

*"...though He slay me, yet will I trust HIM!"*

OPENING HYMN: *"TRUST AND OBEY"*

CLOSING HYMN: *"IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL"*

### Max Cleland

On January 20, 1977, just four hours after he had been sworn in as president, Jimmy Carter asked to see as his first official appointment, a young man, Max Cleland. He was to be appointed as Head of Veterans Administration.

Max was a triple amputee. Nine years earlier, with only one month left to complete his tour of duty in Vietnam, Captain Cleland was asked to set up a radio relay station on a distant hill. Taking his supplies, he got into a helicopter and was dropped off on the hill. As he watched the helicopter lift, Max noticed a grenade on the ground where he had landed. Realizing that it might be his, as grenades sometimes fall off the web gear, he bent down to pick it up and suddenly there was a blinding explosion.

When Captain Cleland regained consciousness, he couldn't move, since both of his legs were blown away at the knees; he couldn't reach out for help, since his right arm was blown away at the elbow; and he couldn't call out, because shrapnel had cut his throat.

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Describing the journey from sudden tragedy in Vietnam to the pinnacle of serving others during the Carter Administration, Max Cleland wrote his story in a book entitled: *Strong At the Broken Places*.<sup>1</sup>

The title is derived from Hemingway's 1929 classic, *A Farewell to Arms*: "The world breaks us all, and afterward some are strong at the broken places."<sup>2</sup>

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There is not a person, family, community, or people group living that has not experienced some form of brokenness, whether it be domestic, economic, social, or the loss of life.

The question, however, is not whether we have been broken—that is clearly understood; rather it is — how have we processed that experience of brokenness? It is not primarily the events themselves in our lives that get us down, but rather the emotions due to our interpretation of these events. Looking even closer, it's not only the emotions, but the energy itself powering the emotions.

Key Text: John 16:33 (NIV)

33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

So, what can be done about the negative energy and overwhelming emotions that arise, even within us as Christians? Is there any way to get past a negative event that may seem so devastating that we feel we simply can't overcome the consequences of it?

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STORY:

***"I can't let go !" ..... "I can't let go !"***

The lifeguard on the tower snapped his head to his right to hear the sound of the voice. A voice that sounded like a loud audible whisper. There to his horror he saw a young man, his Physics Lab partner, Andrew, being electrocuted, hands frozen on an ungrounded turnstile leading into the swimming pool. In two leaps he was at his side. First he tried to pry the hands loose, but the electric jolt he received made him quickly let go. He then stepped backward and ran towards him straight-arming him to give him a hard shove and break him loose from the turnstile. Andrew fell backwards onto the cement floor of the Pacific Union College swimming pool. The life guard, Tim Sing, then hurdled over the turnstile, went into the Life Guard office and pressed the RED BUTTON on the wall that would immediately ring for paramedics from Angwin's Volunteer Fire Dept. He ran outside and immediately began applying CPR—no response. When the paramedics arrived within minutes, they tried electroshocks to revive his heart—no response. They rushed him to the St. Helena Hospital & Medical Center, and emergency measures were taken—no response. He finally he was pronounced dead at 4:14 p.m. **Dead from a Cardiac Arrest !**

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You might wonder, how is it that I can describe details of this incident so vividly?

Andrew, a Physics major, just two weeks from the end of his freshman year, who died on the afternoon of May 17, 1992 as a result of cardiac arrest by electrocution, only 18 ½ years old **was my son**, Josué Andrés "Andrew" Rosado. He was a 3.7 G.P.A. student whose life was snuffed out by institutional negligence from an Ungrounded swimming pool circuit.

Yes, these details, although the incident occurred over 24 ½ years ago, are still vividly etched on my mind as it were

yesterday. And every time I walk past Paulin Hall towards the PUC Sanctuary and look at a Redwood tree that is planted alongside the sidewalk leading to the church, I am reminded of these details again and again.

One question, is still on the surface of my mind: **W H Y DID HE HAVE TO DIE ? ! !**

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**“CHILDREN, AREN'T SUPPOSED TO DIE BEFORE THEIR PARENTS, . . . . ARE THEY ? ! !”**

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How do we relate to God when an unexpected tragedy, catastrophe, suddenly strikes in our life: be it a tsunami, a financial collapse, unemployment, death, divorce, disfigurement, injury, or cancer? “and those other serious events that result in emotional overwhelm?”<sup>3</sup>

This question, “why do Bad Things happen to G O O D people?” **is the perennial question at the heart of human existence**, over which many people **express anger toward God**.<sup>4</sup> More people have become atheists, agnostics, and irreligious as a result of a struggle with this question than with any other issue.

“IS LIFE FAIR?”

“**Is life fair?**” **is the cornerstone question of life**. The strength of your spiritual union with God depends on your answer.

This is the one area where most Christians still struggle in their faith-walk with God. What’s even worse is that many pastors, life counselors and even medical staff that deal with trauma have not been able to adequately address it.

My brother, Caleb, recently said to me, “I myself had no acceptable answer to this question, even when I led out at

Josué Andrés’ funeral in May 1992. It has only been recently that I have come to grips at great depth with the truth of what lies behind this dilemma.”

This one question — **WHY do the innocent suffer?** — is so important to get right that the oldest book in the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Job — poses this human query. **It is the oldest question ever raised to the face of God.**

At the heart of this question—“*Is life fair?*”—lies a deeper issue, the question of the “*true nature of God.*”

It’s not whether life is fair, but whether God is fair!

The real underlying questions are:

- What is the true nature of God?
- Is Love the essence of God?

### THE NATURE OF GOD: The Trinity

As Christians we believe that divinity is expressed as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Godhead is:

- Omnipotent—all-powerful;
- Omnipresent—all-places; and
- Omniscient—all-knowing.

Now it is these three divine, interconnected qualities that give us problems.

In the face of catastrophe, we often focus on God’s Omniscience and Omnipresence: **AND; If God is Omnipotent, then why didn’t He stop it? If God is Omnipresent then where was He when I needed Him? Ultimately, how could I trust such a God?**”

We must also examine the third quality of the character of God, the one that we tend to overlook! God’s Omniscience, His all-encompassing knowledge of all the factors and forces at

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play in any given event or circumstance. This is the least one we may ever understand.

Isaiah explains clearly:

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

—Isaiah 55:8,9.

If God always answered the “**WHY questions**” at every life detour, disaster, and doubt, **what would be the need for faith?** Where would “*free will*” be if God’s plan for us was so airtight that there was no room for doubt, and we only had to follow a pre-scripted drama?

God does promise this: “**For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you**” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

God has no intention to bring us harm. He does not get pleasure in seeing humans suffer. So, did something slip past God that took Him by surprise? That is in Josué Andrés’ death? **No.**

Can we then put our trust in a loving, sovereign, and all-knowing God, who has our best interest at heart, and accept the realization that He sees the end from the beginning? Most certainly, “**YES !!!.**”

Consider Job, who more than anyone else could have cried out, “life isn’t fair”, and done as his wife suggested, “Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9).

Instead, he exclaims: “**The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord**” (Job 1:21).

Therefore, “**though he slay me, yet will I trust in him**” (Job 13:15).

The difficulties Job experienced led him to the inner recesses of his soul, and he surrendered at the deepest level to God’s wisdom, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and Love.

In the end, he declared: “**I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you**” (Job 42:5).

**Job went from knowing about God to experiencing God.**

People who respond to life’s hard experiences with faith come out the other side as nominal believers no longer.

**HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO SUFFERING?**

**The question is:** How is each one of us going to respond to suffering?

Some Christians try to rationalize this discussion with temporizations such as:

- “Well, I believe in the ‘limited omnipotence’ of God.” Is there such a thing? Either he is 100% Omnipotent; or, he is not.
- Other Christians try to help out God’s reputation by saying that God has set laws in motion in the universe, so if a car starts to go over a cliff, gravity will automatically pull it down.
- God’s hands are tied, such that He just can’t help us out.
- Some, like Job’s wife, become openly bitter and judgmental due to feeling they are victims of God’s acts of omission or commission. She simply said, “Curse God, and die!”

### Continuum of Life

Where does the idea that “life is not fair” come from?

It seems to be from setting up a false continuum of life, an age range from birth to 100 years. The closer people get to 100 when they die, the fairer we think life is. The closer to birth, the more unfair life is.

Tell me, at what point on this continuum are we willing to accept death as a “normal aspect” of life and not quarrel with the will of God? At age 80? At 70? How about 50, is this pushing it? How about age 35, 25, or 18, when my son died? For sure anything below this age life has to be unfair, right? At birth? Come on God, You’ve got to be kidding?!!

**What about other bad things that happen to good people?** When we say, “life is fair”, are we saying: “evil is deserved” or “evil is not really evil”? How can one say that the rape of a little child was “deserved”, that the slaughter of innocents was “justified” like it riveted our nation in Connecticut recently at Shady Hook elementary, or recent terrorist attacks, or Police shootings of persons of color, or that genocide is not “murder”? The list of such merciless events is endless, and that is not what is meant by saying, “life is fair”.

What we are saying is that in the larger scheme of things, beyond our limited human perspective, **there are at play divine forces which will ultimately override the manifested evil for the highest good, even though this may not be immediately evident.** *If Satan had known, for example, that the suffering and death of Christ on the cross was going to bring salvation to the world, he never would have crucified the Lord of Glory.*

**Surrender to the sovereignty of God** means accepting the truth that ultimately goodness will prevail even when there is no present evidence for such a conclusion. **This is faith.**

Was that insight clear? **F A I T H** is our surrendering to the **SOVEREIGNTY and Omniscience OF GOD !**

There is **justice** in the universe, and no one gets away with anything.

The Bible makes it very clear. *“Do not be deceived [don’t think you can get away with it]: God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap”* [Galatians 6:7, NKJV]. God ultimately will have the last word. That is what the death of Christ was all about—Love triumphing over evil.

Recall the story of Joseph and his brothers. Their intention was one of evil, to kill him, but when a financial opportunity arose they sold him as a slave instead. Years later when Joseph was on his deathbed he forgave his brothers and told them. *“You meant evil against me, but God turned your evil into good”* (Genesis 50:20, NKJV and New Century Version).

**It was Joseph’s surrender and trust in God that opened up the potentiality of miracles,** so that God was able to work through him to bring about His desired purposes. What if Joseph had become bitter over his shattered dreams and life setbacks, and had turned his back on God? On the other hand, **it was because of his full trust in the sovereignty of God that Joseph recognized the larger purposes of God and told his brothers.** *“It was not you who sent me here, but God”* (Genesis 45:8, NIV).

What a powerful statement of faith and insight!<sup>5</sup>

**DUALISMS & RATIONALIZATIONS**

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We often resist such an understanding and prefer to perpetuate the dualisms of victim/perpetrator and oppressed/oppressor, due to “the emotional payoff or energy that holding on to that position provides to the ego.”<sup>6</sup> All of which leaves us “stuck” with a victim’s mindset, whether at the level of the interplay of nations or in individual experience, and nowhere to go except to lash out in anger at God or against others. This is because “the ego does not trust God and thereby thinks it has only itself to turn to for sustenance, survival, and pleasure. The ego has faith in its own mechanisms and not in God.”<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, “Spiritual research indicates that all suffering and emotional pain result from resistance.”<sup>8</sup> In resisting God’s will, we create “if only” rationalizations that assign blame and torment our souls.

- “If only I had not gotten distracted, then . . . .”
- “If only she had done what I told her, then . . . .”
- “If only he had not taken that shortcut through the park, then...”
- “If only the turnstile had been properly grounded, then . . . .”
- “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died” [John 11: 21].

### Jesus and the Death of Lazarus

It is not like God does not understand. Take the case of Jesus and Lazarus. Jesus very well understood that Lazarus was gravely ill and would soon die without divine intervention. He could have rushed to his side when he first received the news. Yet, he chose to linger for four days until Lazarus died before going to the side of Mary and Martha. Why? Was he insensitive? Did he not care? “Lord, if you had only been here, my brother would not have died” cried Martha. Do you not love

us? Yes, for when he saw Mary weeping “he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled,” and “Jesus wept” (John 11:33,35).

So why had he not intervened earlier? After all, they were his closest friends. **God often allows events to happen for the highest good—things of which we may have no understanding.**

So, Jesus delayed his coming in order to bring them, and us, to that same choice point to which he brought Job, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, the three Hebrew worthies, and all the “faith heroes” in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11 who suffered beyond human belief.

**The choice is to put our TOTAL TRUST in Him for He is God, even when His purposes and plans conflict with our expectations of a loving God. Faith and trust is what God desires, and this faith changes “our experience of brokenness.”**

This is why he told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.”  
“Martha said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (vss. 23, 24).

Jesus looks directly at her and says, “Martha, focus! Look at me! I am not talking about the final resurrection; I am talking about right now! Your brother will rise again. But you need to experience a “mini” death and resurrection right now, dying to erroneous ideas about life not being fair and all those ‘if onlys’, and resurrect to **a trust in me.**

Look at me! I am the resurrection and the life.... everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” And Martha said, “**Yes, Lord; I believe.**”

And this is the same question that God asks of us in our darkest hours.

- “Believest thou this?”
- “Do you still regard me as a friend...”

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- “Am I still Lord of your life?”
- “Does your faith still hold in the face of unexplainable events?”

### It is the Resurrection that proves that life is fair!

It shows that God is in control, even over death.

That is why the Doctrine of the Resurrection is the greatest doctrine in all of Christianity.

Forget about all the other doctrines; if it were not for the resurrection Christ’s death on the cross would have been a meaningless act of martyrdom. Everything that He taught about God would have been a lie. For this reason Paul says, *“If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised”* (1 Corinthians. 15:14-15). **If it were not for the Resurrection, Satan would ultimately be right—God is not who he claims to be.**

**The Doctrine of the Resurrection confirms the veracity of the Gospel and makes clear the truth that life is indeed fair!**

This is why Paul is able to say with confidence, *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).”* Victory over what?

- Victory over doubt that God is in charge;
- Victory over despair for not fully trusting God;
- Victory over death as the last enemy, and finally
- Victory over disbelief in the truth of God.

### The Devil’s 4 favorite strategies:

- Doubt,

- Despair,
- Death, and
- Disbelief.

However, God..... and only God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is able to give you victory over them!

Hemingway said, **“The world breaks us all, but afterwards some are strong at the broken places.”**

How? At times like this we have but two choices.

1. Mrs. Job’s: “Curse God and die,”
2. or Job’s response, “Though he slay me yet will I trust him.” That’s it.

In the moment of brokenness, we must ultimately come to our own decision on whether life is fair or not; whether God is love or not; and whether He is all-powerful or not.

**At the moment of brokenness and personal crisis, our faith must be examined. We find out we can no longer rely on what we may have heard second-hand about God. We must find it out for ourselves in that decisive moment, since “Truth is verifiable only by identity with it and not by knowing about it.”<sup>9</sup>**

There can be no surrender or faith unless we make the decision to put our trust fully in Him Who is Invisible in a situation that is not understandable. No one can surrender for us, and no one can have faith for us. Jesus will reveal Himself as Infinite Love, just as He did to Joseph, Mary, Martha, and to countless others who have turned to Him at such moments and declared, **“Lord, I believe,” . . . . even when 18-year-olds are electrocuted.**

## STRONG AT BROKEN PLACES: Why Do the Innocent Suffer?

I don't know about you my dear friends and church family, but my faith informs me to:

- Trust in a Godhead who is GOOD, when things go bad; as well as, when life treats me great!
- Trust in a Godhead who knows the end from the beginning, and has my best interests at heart in ways that I may not yet grasp or understand.
- Trust in a Godhead who wants and yearns to spend an eternity of fellowship with me and has made the way possible for me to obtain eternal life by simply saying "YES" to their SAVING GRACE and pardon of my sins.
- Trust in a Godhead who is **LOVE!**

## WHY? versus WHAT?

I have chosen not to ask the **WHY question?** — That I've discovered leads only to anger towards God. Making this decision has liberated me from being consumed with negative energy and bitterness towards God.

Instead, I've chosen to ask the **WHAT question:** "What Lord do you want to teach me in this journey of life? It has led me in a deeper more meaningful quest of a living relationship with God. It has made me more conscious of my real need and dependence on Jesus who is eager and willing to take me home with him. It rests with me to be FAITHFUL day by day until he bursts forth in that eastern sky to take us all home with HIM !!!

Do you look forward to that day? Do you want surrender your doubts, despair, and disbelief? Then I invite you to place your faith and 100% trust in the LORD. He will heal your brokenness and you'll become STRONG IN BROKEN PLACES.

**Recite John 3:16** — Entire Congregation.

Are you willing to say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him!"

## IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL -- Horatio G. Spafford Story

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<sup>1</sup> Max Cleland. 1980. *Strong At the Broken Places*. Lincoln, VI: Chosen Books Publishing Co.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Cleland in "Introduction."

<sup>3</sup> David R. Hawkins. 2009. *Healing and Recovery*. Sedona, AZ: Veritas Publishing, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Julie J. Exline, Crystal L. Park, Joshua M. Smyth, and Michael P. Carey. 2011. "Anger Toward God: Social-Cognitive Predictors, Prevalence, and Links With Adjustment to Bereavement and Cancer." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 100, No. 1, 129-148.

<sup>5</sup> The implications of the story of Joseph to the African American experience and slavery, as well as to the American Indian experience, are mind-boggling.

<sup>6</sup> David R. Hawkins. 2011. *Along the Path to Enlightenment*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Jeffrey, Editor. 2011. *Dissolving the Ego, Realizing the Self: Contemplations from the Teachings of David R. Hawkins*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> David R. Hawkins. 2011. *Along the Path to Enlightenment*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> David R. Hawkins. 2003. *I: Reality and subjectivity*. West Sedona, AZ: Veritas Publishing, p.164.