

What Does Luck Have to Do with It?

Jim Elliff

Joni Eareckson Tada is one of the most gracious and effective Christians in the world. She has lived with the results of a diving accident that broke her neck during her teen years. At 50 she continues to radiate Christ to a listening world. Joni is known by thousands of Christians, perhaps millions, through her books, radio program, and conference speaking.

Once my brother asked Joni how she made it through the difficult battle with her paraplegia. I later heard her give the same answer in a large conference in Orlando. Her reply will surprise you. “I suppose what helped me get through this more than any other thing” she said, “was reading Loraine Beottner’s *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*.”

Now that caught you off guard, didn’t it?



What she was saying was that she came to understand through this book that God is in control. And if God is in control then her accident wasn’t just a fluke, but a purposeful arrangement by a loving God. She could trust a God like that. That accident cost her freedom and brought chronic suffering. But to Joni, that diving accident was a huge gift from God—a platform for speaking to the world about her favorite subject, Christ.

I know that it might seem insensitive to say that God is in control. But this is what the Bible teaches, like it or not. When we analyze national tragedy we sometimes recoil from the notion that God could be in control of His world. We seek to protect God from such an accusation. But the Scriptures don’t do this.

The Bible teaches that all good things, as well as all tragic things, come from God. (See Lam. 3: 37-38) They usually come via secondary sources, that is, they are delivered on your doorstep by other people or through the convergence of events and complex connections. Without being a tempter or evil (James 1:13), God determines all things, while still leaving men responsible for their actions.

Complicated? Sure. But true nonetheless.

A clear illustration of this can be seen in the death of Christ. Is the death of Christ a good thing? Of course. Did God just “hope” that everything would work out to accomplish the greatest event of the universe? Did God feel lucky that it all worked out as He projected?

The early Christians did not think it was luck that brought about Jesus’ redemptive death. Here’s the way they put it in a prayer meeting:

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27-28)

We can think of all events, tragic or good, under two categories. They are either for the punishment or for the benefit of the person, but they’re all in the end for the glory of God.

Now think carefully. First, realize that *everything* that happens to a non-believer is a tragedy. Even mercies from God, if sinned against, work out for the worse to the non-believer. Every apparently good thing coming to a person who will finally reject God, only serves to make his judgment more severe. (See Rom. 2: 4-6)

But for the child of God, life works out exactly the opposite. The Bible says, “All things work together for the good of those who love God, the called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28).

So, when a difficult thing comes into the life of a believer, as in Joni’s swimming accident, then the end result is good. It is for a loving purpose. Even discipline from God toward true believers is for the good. And when sinful people are involved, we can say with Joseph, “You meant it for evil; but God meant it for good.” (Gen. 50:20)

As one theologian said, “Tragedy is anything that happens to a non-believer.” And we can add, “Good is anything that happens to a true Christian.”

This can only be said because God is in control. And luck, well, it isn’t even there.

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