

All Things Work Together for Good

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When we're going through something "bad" in our life, it's usually really tough for us to see the good in it. Sometimes it's impossible at the time. We can get so caught up in our own suffering or the suffering of those we love that we can't step outside the situation to the larger picture and a greater plan. We may ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" We may not know the answer to that question at the time something "bad" is happening, but I do believe that "... in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

I recently saw the excellent movie "Invictus" starring Morgan Freeman about Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa. I must admit I didn't know much about Nelson Mandela until I watched that movie. I became interested in his story and read a book about him called *Mandela's Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage* by Richard Sengel. What I found fascinating was Mandela's attitude towards life and others after having spent 27 years in prison before he became President. Some consider him to be a martyr, while others believe he deserved to spend all of those years in prison. That's not what is important to me—what is important is that those long years in prison changed him for the better. He was able to make the best of a bad situation and to see the "good" in it.

This summer I have been receiving training in "Hope Coaching" through the "Challenging Cancer" series from the American Association of Christian Counselors. I hope to, God willing, coach cancer patients and their caregivers. I believe God has been leading me in this direction. The DVDs in the Challenging Cancer series include interviews with a number of cancer survivors. They do describe some "bad" experiences that they went through as a result of their cancer and their treatments. What stood out to me, though, was how much their cancer changed them personally for the better. They were able to see the good in their experiences.

So, what "good" can be the result of bad experiences such as having cancer?

- A person may come to treasure everything in life, such as the people around them, God's creation, and all of their other blessings.
- It can bring them closer to God through prayer and the reading of comforting scriptures such as in the book of Psalms. Psalm 40, written by David, is one excellent example.
- "Bad" experiences can make us empathetic to others who are going through similar trials. We can learn to be compassionate. The Apostle Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."
- Our "bad" experience may bless others. They may notice how you handle things and be inspired by your attitude. They can be provided with opportunities to serve and to show empathy themselves.

I trust that God loves us and wants the best for all of us. The Bible says that He “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). We may only see small glimpses of the “good” in this life, but much better things await us in the next life, and I hold onto that with confidence. I take heart in what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Now that sounds good to me!