

“What Do You Do When Your Life Is Turned Upside Down?”

Psalm 46

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I suppose it started like any other beautiful late summer day in New York and Washington. Most workers in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were sipping on a cup of coffee and turning on their computers. They were settling in for another day of work when all of a sudden their job became trying to escape a burning building.

What about the passengers on those four airplanes? Perhaps the seatbelt sign had just been turned off and they had begun to relax for a long flight across the country when their worst nightmare came true.

How quickly life can change. The events of last week reminded us of that, didn't they? Of course, we already knew how unpredictable life could be, but the attack on America brought it home again.

What do you do when your life is turned upside down without any warning or time to prepare? That question has been on my mind all week. I thought of the thousands of people who suddenly lost loved ones last week. The last thing any of them thought was that Tuesday morning would be the final time they would see their husband or wife or child or parent or brother or sister. They never dreamed their world would come crumbling around them in a matter of seconds. Yet, it happened and their lives will never be the same.

What do you do when your life is turned upside down? What do you do when you get a phone call telling you that a loved one has died suddenly? What do you do when a doctor tells you that you have cancer. What do you do when you get a call from a police officer telling you that your child has been picked up on a DUI? What do you do when your mate announces he or she wants a divorce? What do you do when your daughter tells you that she is pregnant or your son confesses he is gay? What do you do when your employer tells you that he is going to let you go?

What do you do when your life is turned upside down? Let me share some suggestions. I think there are two things you don't do and two things you do.

First of all, you don't ignore or deny reality. Wayne Oates wrote in his book, Life's Detours, that you can't pick up the pieces if you don't see them. Denial may be a coping mechanism for shock but it prevents healing if it persists. Wishing life were different or repeating the words, “If only” will only delay recovery.

I've told you about my friend that is a counselor who coined the phrase, “Camera Check.” “Take a picture of your situation,” he says, “Quit looking for what you want to see and see what is actually before your eyes.” I know we have a natural tendency to turn away from anything unpleasant, but at times we must look it squarely in the face.

Secondly, don't give up or quit. Again, Oates says that we need to learn the difference between a detour and a dead end. Changes lead to dead ends only if we let them.

When Churchill spoke at Harrow School in England on October 29, 1941, his message was brief and poignant. Included in his remarks were those inspiring words, “Surely from this period of ten months, this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty-never give in except to

convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.” Good advice from someone whose world had been turned upside down.

Thirdly, reach out to others for help. Allow friends and family to encourage and help you. Seek the advice of wise counsel.

How fortunate we are to be members of this wonderful church. At Smoke Rise, you are alone only if you want to be because this church is filled with compassionate members who will respond to you in your time of need.

One of my favorite stories focuses upon the redwood trees in California. These massive trees can grow to be over three hundred feet tall with branches that seem to brush the sky. Experts estimate that some are over 2500 years old. It would seem logical that a tree that tall and old would have a very deep root system. Most trees have roots as deep as the tree is tall and as wide as the branches. This is not so with the redwood trees, though. Their roots are very shallow, hiding just beneath the surface. What is the secret to their ability to stand so tall especially in storms? They grow in clusters or groves and their roots intertwine. To knock one down, you must knock them all down. Each tree supports and protects the others.

Jesus wants our lives to intertwine, too. He wants us to “bear one another’s burdens.” And when we do, we are being the church at its best.

Finally, reach out to God. In Sunday School last week, my class members talked about the Attack on America. I asked them what scripture came to mind as they watched the events of recent days unfold. Several were mentioned, including Psalm 46. It was one that I thought of as fear gripped our nation.

Psalm 46 is a magnificent hymn written in majestic language. It was the inspiration for Martin Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

It was written by someone who knew both danger and fear. His security was being threatened either by an invading army or the wrath of nature. One thing was sure. The very foundations of his world were crumbling. What had seemed so permanent and unchangeable was gone and replaced with chaos and confusion.

What was he to do? With no hesitation, he said he would place his faith and future in God’s strong and eternal hands, encouraging others to do so, too.

I told my class last week that one reason we need to put our faith in God is because He is adept at turning chaos into order. That is His specialty. He did it at creation and has been doing it everyday since.

He can do that for our nation. He can do that for you, too. When your world has been turned upside down and what you thought was permanent has disappeared only to be replaced with chaos and confusion, don’t despair. It is time to “Be still and know that I am God.”

Join me in a moment of silence as we listen for His reassuring voice and then respond by singing Luther’s hymn.