

How Bad Is It? The Ways God Helps Us to Live in a Broken World
From the Series “Life Answers in Genesis”
By Phil Brainerd
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Introduction

As many of you know, I love a good joke. There are lots of different kinds of jokes. One type is the “How Bad Is It” joke. You’ve all heard these. The person telling the joke says, “It was really bad”. The listener says, “How bad was it”? The teller says, “It was so bad...” and then they give a laugh-line.



Let’s give this a try. You’re looking at a picture from New York City during the blizzard of 2016. You know, during the blizzard, it was cold. You ask, “How cold was it”?

- It was so cold, the statue of Liberty had to put her torch in the ground and rub her hands over it to stay warm.
- It was so cold, the mail carriers stopped worrying about being chased by dogs.
 - They had to worry about being chased by polar bears.
 - In fact, it was so cold, one of those polar bears was seen in Macy’s buying a fur coat.
- Finally, it was so cold, the politicians had their hands in their own pockets.

You get it...

Now, let’s leave the joke zone. When you look at the world around you, it looks bad. If you were to ask, “how bad is it?”, I would have to say: It’s really bad.

And that, sadly, is no joke.

We're in our series, "Life Answers in Genesis". We all have questions about life. It's amazing how many answers you can find by opening the Bible and reading the first book.

Our world is full of problems. We've learned in our series why this is.

- The world is broken.
- And we broke it.

If you hear that the world is broken, here's the next question: "How bad is it?" Well, we're going to find out.

Before we get depressed about how bad it is, I'll let you know that God is aware of how bad things are, and he's given us things to help.

Our outline has two simple points:

- I. How Bad Is It?
- II. Ways that God helps us.

With God's help, it is possible to survive and even thrive in a broken world.

I. How Bad is it?

After Adam and Eve took from the forbidden tree and ate its fruit, God had these words for them:

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:17-19)

This is where we get the well-known words that we hear at many Christian funerals: "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust". What does this tell us about how bad things are?

A. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed, everything is under a curse.

“Cursed is the ground because of you...”

When you think of a curse, what comes to mind? Nothing good, of course.
Here’s my Definition: *A curse is a supernatural barrier to health and success.*

Here it says, “Cursed is the ground”. Actually, the curse goes much further. The apostle Paul talks about this in the book of Romans: “For the creation was subjected to frustration... (Romans 8:20 NIV)”. Some translations say “futility” (ESV, KJV).

When you’re “frustrated”, what kind of a feeling is that? There is some place you want to go, **and you can’t get there**. There’s a goal you want to reach, **and you can’t reach it**. There are challenges. There are barriers. The other translators use the word “futile”. To be “futile” means no amount of effort will bring you success.

In other words, everything is broken. Nothing in creation reaches its full potential. The great King Solomon described the situation like this:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”
says the Teacher.
“Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

What is crooked cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted. (vs 15)

Well, that’s bad. How does this affect us? Let’s look at Genesis 3 again. “...through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life (vs. 17).” Our toil, or our work, will be painful.

Work was meant to be a meaningful gift. God works. He worked hard to create the universe and he works hard to maintain and care for it. He wants us to be like him, so he shared the gift of work. Now, that gift has become corrupted. Now, work can be painful.

If someone came in here off the street and heard me say that work was meant to be a meaningful gift, they might wonder what planet I’m from. Lots of people hate their work. In 2018, Forbes Magazine published an article entitled, “10 Shocking Workplace Stats You Need To Know”. Here are some statements from that article: “...53 percent of Americans are currently unhappy at work.”

Understand – We’re currently experiencing a good economy - Maybe the best that many of us will see in our lifetimes. On top of that, we live in one of the richest nations not only today, but in all of world history. And yet, over half of Americans say they’re unhappy at their job. Even those who like their jobs would say work feels frustrating and futile at times.

This is with all the modern amenities we have in the 21st century. This is with comfortable, modern buildings and automobiles and public transportation to get us to work. Imagine living in ancient days. You're a farmer. You must dig and plant with your bare hands or simple tools. Sometimes, farming works that way today.



You're looking at Cambodian rice farmers. There's a saying in the Philippines: "Planting rice is never fun". These workers have to go out in the mud and plant individual rice seedling by hand. As you can see, it's back-breaking work. Imagine spending all day hunched over like you see in this photo.

That's when things are going well. What if it doesn't rain?



This is what happens when it doesn't rain. The ground dries up. Your harvest is destroyed. Imagine doing the hard work you just saw in the previous photo, and this is what you get.

Now, understand, to say that the creation is under a curse doesn't mean that things are always at their worst. It's just that, sometimes they are. In fact, often times, they are. Sometimes, we make progress. Sometimes, we're pushed back. Sometimes, we create things and enjoy a lot of what we make. Sometimes, we lose it all.

How bad is it? It's bad. But, it gets worse.

B. We live painful and frustrating lives, and then we die.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.
(Genesis 3:19)

We will all at some time die. Period. End of story. No one escapes. No one survives. The greatest minds of all time have been working on this one ever since the garden, and no one has succeeded. That's because we are all under a curse. The curse was created when Adam and Eve disobeyed. They brought sin into the world. And sin brings death. Note: I don't have time to prove this, but if you read everything the Bible has to say about us, any of us would have done the same. We can't just blame Adam and Eve. We are all stained by sin.

So, when Adam and Eve sinned, they brought all of creation under a curse. We all suffer from lives that are at their best frustrating. At their worst, our lives can be tragic.

Here's another important question. ***When you say we're all stained by sin, how bad is that?***

Let's read another passage. Warning, this is going to get a bit more depressing, but hang in: After our next point we'll move on to more encouraging material.

Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
"Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles." (Psalm 2:1-3)

What does this mean? This could be a whole sermon, so let's give a one-sentence summary:

- *Our whole planet is in rebellion against God.*

Psalm 2 was likely written around 1000 BC. Even back then, they were true. The nations conspire to throw God off his throne. Many of you have heard about the television series, "Game of Thrones". This is the greatest game of thrones. A long time ago, the Devil attempted a rebellion against God. He failed - But, he has never given up. We don't have time to go into the details of how he did it, but he has gotten most of the human race to join him. Here's the most tragic part: Most people don't realize they're doing this. They think they're just living life.

What does this mean for us right now?



You're looking right now at a frightening image: On June 4, 1940, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi armies invaded Paris. This about this: One day, you're free. The next day, you live under a military occupation by cruel invaders. What would that be like? Christian writer C.S. Lewis used this as an illustration of what our world looks like spiritually. He suggested that the whole world is like France in 1940. We who live on this earth are occupied and controlled by a cruel force.

If you lived in the days of World War II and the Nazi occupation, you had a choice to make.

- You could join the Nazis (Collaborate).
- You could be indifferent.
 - You could say, "I don't like the Nazis, but they're here, and so I'll work with them."
- *Or, you could join the rebellion.*
 - You could actively work against the invaders.
 - You could try to win over others to join you.
 - You could dream of the day when liberators would come to free you and your homeland.

How bad is this? I am a pastor. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't warn you. Please understand: Invaders like people who join them. They like collaborators. Invaders don't like people who fight against them. Things can go very badly for resisters.

There is an organization called, "Open Door USA". It's one of many groups that monitor persecution around the world. This group watches the top 50 counties where Christians experience persecution. Here are some statistics that they have published:

- 1 in 9 Christians experience high levels of persecution worldwide.
- 4136 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons.
 - On average, that's 11 Christians killed every day
- 1,266 churches or Christian buildings were attacked.
- 2,625 Christian were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned.

Could this ever happen here in the United States? There are some very dark trends occurring in our country. I hope that everyone in this room can live in peace until the day they die. Sometimes though, the darkness comes with surprising speed. That's how it was for France in 1940. I'm afraid it's entirely possible here.

So, we live in a broken world. How bad is it? It's very bad, I'm afraid.

So, should we be despondent? Should we live in fear? Of course not, because God gives us things that help us to live in a broken world.

What are those things?

II. Things God Gives Us to Help Us Live in a Broken World

A. He gives us Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (I Peter 1:3-4)

How bad is the world? The Lord of Glory, the Son of God came to offer peace to a world in rebellion. The world crucified him. But, he rose from the dead.

God's reaction to a broken world wasn't to destroy it. He certainly could have done that. God's reaction to a broken world wasn't to sterilize it and clean up all the evil. God's reaction to a broken world was to be born into it and to live in it with us. He knows all the pain we feel.

There are always two groups in the crowd when I write. The first group has never come to the point in their lives where they've understood the need to turn their lives over to Jesus. Are you in that group? Maybe everything I'm saying is making sense, and you're looking for help. Jesus died for your sins. Now is the time to invite Jesus into your life. Let us tell you how. You can contact us at Trinity Church in Teaneck, NJ (TrinityTeaneck.org). Or, you can visit Billy Graham's site, PeaceWithGod.net.

Then there are those who have invited Jesus into their lives. You enjoy the salvation of God. But sometimes, our broken world feels like its crushing in. It's hard to be part of the rebellion. But Jesus demonstrated that he is more powerful than all the forces of our rebellious world when he rose from the dead. Here are his famous words: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)"

Jesus knows how to overcome the world. If you let him, he will show you how. We have hope through Jesus Christ.

The next thing God gives us to help is his word, the Bible.

B. He gives us his Word, the Bible.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

We've spent a lot of time in our series on the importance of giving God's Word priority in our lives, so we won't spend a lot of time on this point. For now, let's give a practical example, as it relates to our topic.

One of the ways God's Word helps us is to give us Wisdom. The book of Proverbs is a good example of that. If you're thinking about what to read next in the Scriptures, think about reading one chapter of Proverbs each day. It offers great wisdom to help us.

Here's a sample: We've said that our world is under a curse. That makes it undependable. One day, we work and see at least some profit from our labors. The next day, we may see nothing. How should we respond? Let's look at one proverb about a lowly animal, the ant.

Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!
It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest. (Proverbs 6:6-8)

The little ant gets it! No one teaches it or gives it orders. It just goes out every day and gathers food for itself and its family. The lesson for us? Yes, the world is undependable, but don't sit around moaning about it. Don't wait for someone to tell you what to do. Work hard anyway. Work hard every day.

Note: I didn't say that what God gives us is always easy. However, you'll find that most people who work hard all the time do better than people who don't.

If you're a student, work hard at school. If you have a job, work hard at your job. If you don't have a job, a famous man once said your eight-hour-a-day job is to find a job.

Again, we've spent a lot of time on God's Word and why it's important, so let's move on. Here's another thing God gives us to help us live in a broken world.

C. God Give us His Church

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
(Colossians 1:18)

This is yet another topic that we could spend weeks discussing. For now, let's consider 3 important points about the church.

1. As we just read, the true church is the representation of Jesus Christ.

- It's more than a building.
 - It's the body of Christ.
- He is its head.
- So the church is vitally important.

Notice I said "true" church. Yes, there are lots of fakes out there, and that's sad. My heart breaks when I hear stories of all the things people have gone through in buildings that bear the name "church", but which are really fakes. For now, let's just say we're working hard to be a legitimate church at Trinity Church of Teaneck.

2. It's an important resource for us as we face a broken world. Here's a verse we've looked at before in our series:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
(Hebrews 10:24)

We need to attend church so that we can encourage each other. Here it says, "spur one another on toward love and good deeds". The writer warns us that we shouldn't give up on attending church. We need to worship together. We need to study together. We need to grow together. The Church provides the environment for that.

3. Finally, we need to support our church

We need to support our church with Prayer. We have to remember that we are in a spiritual battle. Spiritual battles must be fought with spiritual tools. Please pray for the leaders of our church. Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ as we all face a broken world. In future sessions we'll talk about how to pray intelligently and effectively.

We have to support our church through participation. Once you come, you then have to participate. How do you do that? Well, lots of ways. For now, participation means you must do things that take time.

Finally, we have to support our church through giving. Here's one that tends to be misunderstood.

Recall that we discussed work. God works. He wants us to be like him, so he offers us work as a gift. When God created Adam and Eve, he put them into the Garden. There, he told them to tend the garden. That's work. Because the world is under a curse, work, which was meant to be a gift, has become defiled. As we said earlier, the fact that work has become defiled doesn't mean we stop. We looked at the proverb of the ant. The ant faces a broken world by working hard every day.

In the same way, God offers us the privilege of participating in the work of his church. We can support our church through giving. Here's an example:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. (slide picks up here) The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. ***These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*** (Luke 8:1-3, Emphasis mine)

Jesus was totally capable of providing miraculously for his followers. However, he accepted gifts from people who wanted to support him and his followers. This is because people who follow God want to be like him. God is generous. He encourages his followers to be generous, too.

We don't talk a whole lot about giving in our church, because many organizations have abused this. That's a shame, because giving is a privilege. ***Although we don't talk about it a lot, we will discuss the topic from time to time because giving an important part of growing in the knowledge of God and experiencing a fuller Christian life.*** If you'd like to know more about how to participate in God's work through giving, please talk to us.

Conclusion

Let's pull this all together.

How Bad is it? Bad – And that's no joke. Our world is hopelessly broken. Fortunately, God offers us help in at least three ways that we've learned about today.

He offers us help through Jesus Christ.

We used the illustration of France when the Nazis invaded. If you joined the resistance, you eventually saw the armies of the allied nations come to free the people of France. If you were a Nazi, things did not go well for you. If you joined the Nazis, if you were a collaborator, things did not go well. If you were part of the resistance, you enjoyed and celebrated with the victors.

Someday, we will see the armies of God come to retake the earth. You want to be on the right side before that happens. If you've never called upon Jesus to save you from your sins, now is the time!

If you've done this, if you're a follower of Jesus, you can enjoy the fact that Jesus knows how to overcome the world. He's done it! He'll teach you how, if you let him.

He offers us help through his Word, the Bible.

He offers us help through his church.

With all these gifts, God has given us everything we need. With these things, we can not only survive a broken world, but thrive. May God grant us the ability to recognize and receive his wonderful gifts.

References

All references to the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version. Used by permission.

Statistics on Christian Persecution: Open door USA

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Referenced on November 14, 2019

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