There were two men shipwrecked on the island that no one lived. The minute they got on to the island one of them started screaming and yelling, “We’re going to die! We’re going to die! There’s no food! No water! We’re going to die!” The second man was propped up against a palm tree and acting so calmly. It drove the first man crazy. “Don’t you understand?!? We’re going to die!!” The second man replied, “Don’t worry. I make $100,000 a week.” The first man looked at him quite dumbfounded and asked, “What difference does that make?!? We’re on this island with no food and no water! We’re going to DIE!!” The second man answered, “You just don’t get it. I make $100,000 a week and I tithe ten percent on that $100,000 per week. My finance chairperson and the pastor will find me soon!”

Having hope in suffering always calms our stormy heart. As we look at today’s passage, we wonder, “If God is in control, and if God is all powerful, then why did He let all of this suffering happen to Paul? If God is in control, why do bad things happen to good people? This is the question we have for today.

There are two ways to look at this question. First of all, technically speaking, there are no good people in the world. Jesus says in Luke 18:19, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” God is the standard of righteousness, and all of us have fallen short of that standard (Romans 3:23). Therefore, there are not really any good people in the world; and bad things happen to them.

On the other hand, from a human perspective there are decent people who are very nice. So, we could rephrase the question and ask, “Why do bad things happen to nice people?” They are honest. They don’t lie. They don’t steal. They treat people very well. Even though they are not perfect, they are trying their best to do what’s right for others. So why do bad things happen to them?

There are seven common answers people give:

1. Bad things happen because we live in a fallen world.
2. Bad things happen to good people because of the sins of the world.
3. Bad things happen to good people to teach and prepare us.
4. Bad things happen to good people to bring glory to God.
5. Bad things happen to good people to remind us to trust God.
6. Bad things happen to good people to help other people.
7. Bad things happen to good people to remind us we’re not home yet.

Also, often we say casually if you are “good” people, you should respond to bad things by trusting God, remembering God’s love, and looking ahead.

Honestly anyone who claims with authority that they have a definite answer is someone that I would be suspicious of. I think there is no definite answer to the question we have today. When it comes to suffering and death, we either malign the character of God, assign complete randomness, or get lost in the interplay between God and the human response which is interpreted through free will. So, I don’t think that we can fully understand why bad things happen to good people.

However, one thing I know for sure is that people are in great pain and crying out for help when sincerely they ask, “Why do bad things happen to good people or nice people?” Usually they consider their loved ones as good or nice people in asking this question. Ultimately they are saying that they are in great pain to see their loved ones are struggling because of the “bad” things happened to them.

I would like to let those who got me this question know that you are not alone in your pain. I don’t know why bad things happen to “good” people, but I know that God is with those “good” people in their suffering. Also, God’s people here at Kona and in other places are willing to be with them and support them if they permit God’s people to do so.

When hardships in our life hurt us deeply, I encourage us to look at God’s promises that give us hope. God says in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Also, God promises 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).

What may seem bad for us now may bring future blessings. I am talking about “Se-Ong-Ji-Ma (塞翁之馬)” here I wrote about in the July Newsletter. I would like to share what “Se-Ong-Ji-Ma” is once again now for those who have not read or remember what I wrote about it in the newsletter.

The word “Se-Ong-Ji-Ma” was created based on an ancient Asian story about the irony. The story goes like this:

Once upon a time a farmer captured a wild stallion. His neighbor said to
him, “sure glad to hear your good news.” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news. Who knows?” A few days later the farmer’s son asked if he could break in the horse. The stallion threw him off, and he broke his leg. The farmer’s neighbor said, “Sorry to hear your bad news.” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news. Who knows?” A week later, war broke out and all the young men in the city were drafted to go off to fight. The neighbor leaned across the fence and said, “Sure turned out to be good news, the way your boy broke his leg and all.” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news. Who knows?”

We do not see the larger picture of what God is doing in the world. Ultimately God in time is the revealer of all that is good and also all that is bad. God says in Isaiah 55:9, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God can see and understand things at a higher level than we can.

I don’t know why bad things happen to good people. But I can certainly say that if we hold on to the promises of God, the end of our journey on earth will bring us the good news for sure. Therefore, in our questioning and suffering let us hold on to the promises of God that give us hope and life. Amen.