Where is the Hope?

Topical - Tough Topics (Tragedy)

Scope and Sequence

Students will learn a biblical approach for dealing with tragedy and be encouraged to express daily trust in God’s love.

Lesson Objective

**The greatest tragedy is not learning from it.**

Sticky

Statement

Romans 8:28

Key Verse

**Patience:** *“longsuffering and endurance even in the face of difficulties”*

Definitions

1. A PowerPoint is available for this lesson.

Checklist

1. Index cards (one for each student) (Hook and Next Steps)
2. Writing utensils (Hook and Next Steps)

Resources

and

References

1. Christianity.com. <https://teachersource.wol.org/resource/SBS20/43-1/>. Salem Web Network. 16 July 2010.
2. Strong, James. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Abingdon Press, 1890. Print.
3. Axis Ministries: [www.axis.org](http://www.axis.org)

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LESSON OVERVIEW

1. The **First** Tragedy (Genesis 1:31; Genesis 3)
2. Finding **Hope** in the Tragedy
3. Tragedy can be a great **teacher**. (James 1:2-4)

**Patience:** “*longsuffering and endurance even in the face of difficultie*s”

1. Spoiler Alert: The future is **glorious** (Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4; Romans 8:26-27)
2. **Work** **together** for good (Romans 8:28, 31-32, 35-39)

**Two Astounding Truths**

● God is for us!

● God allowed Jesus to endure the cross!

**The greatest tragedy is not learning from it**.

HOOK

Teacher’s Note: *At the start of the lesson, divide the students into two groups and have them sit on opposite sides of the room. Within those groups, have the students form smaller groups of two or three. Give each of the smaller groups an index card and a writing utensil. To help with the organization of the game, you could use two different colors of notecards to differentiate the “tragedy” from the “happy ending” stories.*

*The group on the left side of the room should use their imagination to write the beginning of a tragic story. The group on the right side of the room should write a happy ending to a story. Encourage them to use generic language, no names or specific setting information. Instruct them to limit their stories to 2-4 sentences.*

*After completing the cards, have the students pass in their cards. Put each group’s cards in separate piles. Read the tragic beginning from one card followed by the happy ending from another card. Read as many as time will allow. Some will work better than others, but you should end up with a comical exercise. You may want to write a few of your own, just in case you don’t have any appropriate ones from the students.*

*If your group is small enough, instead of forming groups of two or three, have each student write both a tragedy on one card and a happy ending on another, then separate them into appropriate piles. Mix them up and read them in random order, alternating from a tragic beginning to a happy ending.*

*Alternate ending: If you trust that the stories will be appropriate in nature, instead of putting cards into piles, have someone from the “tragedy” side read a card out loud and then have someone from the “happy ending” side read a card. Do this several times to allow students to get several endings/beginnings to their “stories.”*

*Following the reading, transition into a more serious tone. This activity should last no more than 5-8 minutes.*

Since the topic of tonight’s lesson will eventually be serious in nature, we would like to start off with a little light-hearted activity. To begin this activity, we need two groups. To make this as easy as possible, everyone on the left side of the room will be our first group and everyone on the right side of the room will be our second group.

Now, within your big group, form smaller groups of two or three. Each of the smaller groups will need an index card and a writing utensil. *[Make sure every group has both a card and a pen.]*

Alright, groups on the left side of the room, your job is to write the beginning of a tragic story. Make up a generic, tragic story using two to four lines, but don’t provide an ending. For example:

“Once upon a time a man was walking down the street headed to work. He had to cross the street in a hurry so he would not be late to work. As he stepped off the curb and into the street, he suddenly realized that the manhole cover had been removed from the street and…”

Something like that, but don’t mention specific names or places, just use your imagination to create a “tragedy.”

For those on the right side of the room, your job is to write the ending of the story, but you need to make it a happy ending. For example:

“As fast as the free-falling feeling rushed through his head (and his stomach) he landed on a bouncy house that had randomly been set up in the sewer by the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.”

Again, don’t mention the names of real people or places. Simply write a happy ending. Now, we realize that you will not know what types of tragedy the group on the left will be writing, but it will all work out.

Does everyone understand? Alright, you have three minutes or so to come up with your part of the story. *[Allow about three minutes for the students to write.]*

Alright, if you wrote a “tragedy” card, put them all in a pile. If you wrote a “happy ending” card, place them in a different pile. When you have collected them, bring them forward.

Teacher’s Note: *Read the two parts of the stories as directed in the instructions above. Be sure to read the card silently to yourself prior to reading it out loud so you know what is written is appropriate. When you are finished, thank the students for their creativity.*

Unfortunately, life doesn’t always work this way, does it? A happy ending, or seeing the brighter side of tragedies, often takes time; but the tragedy is not the end.

Our lesson tonight is part of the four-lesson series called *“Deal With It: A Biblical Approach to Tough Topics.”* The goal of the *“Deal With It”* series is to do what most are afraid to do with a difficult topic, deal with it.

Tonight’s topic is tragedy. When tragedy does strike, a very common verse that Christians will quote is Romans 8:28. *[Read Romans 8:28.]* “All things work together for good”? Is this really true? When you think about some of the tragic events that you have dealt with, when you think about the tragic events that have happened in the world, can “all things” really “work together for good” or is that just a “made-up, happy-ending” story?

It is difficult to believe that tragedies, or their results, can be described as anything close to the word “good.” It seems like tragedies would only lead to more heartache. If your world is rocked by something like a massive flood, a major mudslide, or a major car accident, your life can be altered permanently. But here is the truth, ***tragedy*** does not have to equal a ***tragic life***. We can thank God for that. God can use tragedies for good. Tragedies can teach us valuable lessons, lives can be changed, and working through that tragedy can provide an incredible perspective. When it comes to tragedy, **the greatest tragedy is not learning from it**.

LESSON CONTENT

A sudden house fire, a natural disaster, a school shooting, and things like that are all tragic. No matter what the tragedy, life can change in an instant. When tragedy does occur, we can find a small amount of comfort in knowing that we are not the first to experience a tragedy.

1. The **First** Tragedy (Genesis 1:31; Genesis 3)

What is recorded in the beginning pages of the Bible is a tragic event. In fact, the Bible records many tragic events. At the beginning of human existence, all of humanity (not just the first two people) was impacted by an ***unprecedented*** tragedy of global proportions.

*[Have a student read Genesis 1:31.]* At first, life on planet Earth was described as “very good.”

God had just completed creation.From creating light to forming the first man, God’s creation was perfect. God called His creation “very good” and it was! Only ***one thing*** could mess it up, and, as you might have guessed, that one thing happened!

Satan, in the form of a snake, tricked Eve into eating from the ***one*** tree that was forbidden by God. Adam decided to join her in this and willingly disobeyed God. It didn’t take the first humans long to choose to do the one thing that could mess up creation. That one thing was sin.

Life, as they knew it, changed in an instant. No longer could they ride sharks or play hide and seek with grizzly bears, if that is what they did. No more walks with God in the garden. Work and childbirth were both linked to pain. Relationships were now strained and broken. With one choice, life changed, and not for the better. This was the first tragedy and a tragedy that would impact more tragedies in the future!

Many times, it is very difficult to find an explanation when a tragic event occurs. Why would God ***allow*** a hurricane to wipe out a city? How can God be described as loving, but ***allow*** violence in our schools and terrorism in our world? Let’s get personal. Why did God ***allow*** – you fill in the blank – to happen to you?

Genesis 3 provides us with an explanation of why some tragedies happen. Sin brought with it death, destruction, and tragedy. Disease, natural disasters, and violence were never a part of God’s original design. But now, after the Garden of Eden is long gone, these tragedies are a part of our world. Brought on us as a result of the first tragedy.

Great, we’re stuck in a tragic world! Are we just supposed to accept that for what it is? Where is the hope in that? Well, that was the bad news. Let’s talk about three ways you can deal with tragedy. Each of which holds at least a little hope.

1. Finding **Hope** in the Tragedy

Before we discuss ways to find hope in your tragedy, it is important to state the obvious. When a tragedy happens to you, ***your*** life has been rocked by that tragedy! The emotions that ***you*** have experienced, are experiencing, and will experience, are real. The truth is, those around you don’t know ***specifically*** how ***you*** feel, how ***you*** have been impacted, or how ***you*** have been hurt. We must never forget that! We must be sensitive to that fact.

But, if tragedy has struck your world, ***tragedy*** does not have to equal a ***tragic life***! There will come a time when you have to decide that the tragedy that you endured is ***not*** going to define you and that God never wastes pain. From the ashes, you can begin to ask yourself, “What can I learn from all this? What is God teaching me? How can I grow stronger?”

So, let’s breathe deeply and get ready to hear a few things we all ***need to*** hear, even if we aren’t ready to hear them yet. As we do, let’s pray that God will be the God of comfort that He is (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) and a “very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Teacher’s Note: *This may be a great time to stop and pray, asking God to help you to speak the truth while being sensitive to those who have dealt with or are dealing with the shock of a tragic event.*

1. Tragedy can be a great **teacher**. (James 1:2-4)

When you endure a tragedy, ***learning from it*** is often not something you care to hear. But looking back, the lessons you learn through tragedy and difficulty are some of the greatest lessons you will learn in life. Tragedy can be a great teacher and as we said before, **the greatest tragedy is not learning from it**. *[Ask for a student to read James 1:2-4.]*

Several times, the Bible refers to the tragedy that you may face as “trials.” Here, in this passage, there are a couple of keywords we will highlight.

First, the word “when.” There is no “if” when it comes to trials and tragedies. As we learned earlier, the sin in the Garden of Eden brought tragedy to our world. Tragedies and trials will happen. You must allow tragedy to be a teacher in the “classroom” of life. Will you learn from them? How much stronger will you become because of them?

The other keyword in this passage is *“patience,”* which is “*longsuffering and endurance even in the face of difficultie*s.” Patience is a result of enduring trials. This word means to endure and persevere through any situation, no matter how tough, and come out the other side stronger in your faith. Notice the end result of this process. *[Re-read James 1:4.]* Learning to be patient builds a level of maturity. In the trial, you learn to develop patience. Through patience, you are maturing, becoming complete, lacking nothing.

Tragedy can be a great teacher if you let it. As you face the lessons of life’s classroom, learning from the difficulty, you could be a better “student” tomorrow than you are today. You have two options. You can choose to get angry. You can try to “get even with God” by shutting Him out or choosing a sinful lifestyle; or you can allow the tragedy to make you stronger in your faith, to pull you closer to Him. Tragedy can literally change your heart for God, in one way or the other. Which way will you let it?

It will be hard to see the change when you are going through it, but years down the road you will be able to look back and see how the tragedy shaped your life. You can see how the tragedy changed you. The change might be greater compassion for others, spiritual maturity, a strengthening of your faith; or it could be bitterness, resentment, and rejection of God. The choice is yours.

After each tragedy, we might never know why it happened. That question, “Why?” might not ever be fully answered until you get to heaven, but you can learn from it. Tragedy can be a good teacher. Remember, **the greatest tragedy is not learning from it**.

Now that we know that tragedy can be a good teacher, let’s shift gears a little bit.

Imagine for a moment that the biggest movie of the year just came out last night. Since you had to work, you weren’t able to go but you have already purchased tickets for an evening show tonight. Throughout the day, you do your best not to read any posts on social media just in case there is a spoiler out there. Since your best friend also had to work last night, you both head to the theater and you cannot contain your excitement. With popcorn and a slushy in hand, you open up the theater doors and proceed to your seats. As you do, you overhear the conversation of two people leaving the theater.

“I can’t believe the hero dies. No one would have expected the sidekick to save the day. What a crazy ending! I loved it, just loved it!”

As your brain processes what you just heard, the images of these two leaving the theater with slushy-colored hair and popcorn-covered clothes also flashes through your mind. With no warning of that spoiler, you walk with your head down into a movie, already knowing the ending.

In movie theaters, there is an unwritten rule, “Never talk about the movie’s ending until you reach your vehicle.” Right? If you are going to discuss a movie’s ending, at least give the people around you a “spoiler alert” so they can know what is coming.

Well, in the Bible, there are “spoiler alerts” all over the place. But the spoiler alert found in Romans 8:18 is anything but negative; it won’t “spoil” anything. It is information about the end that you will ***want*** to know. The Bible gives hope to the hopeless. *[Read Romans 8:18.]*

1. Spoiler Alert: The future is **glorious** (Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4; Romans 8:26-27)

Romans 8:18 points to the future days of glory. Notice the specific wording of this verse. The Apostle Paul, a man who faced so much tragedy in his life, carefully penned the words. He never shies away from the fact that there is suffering. He doesn’t deny it exists. He doesn’t blame God for the trouble. What he does is demonstrate that all of life is connected, that the tragedy doesn’t have to mean a tragic life. The sufferings are not the end. He calls them “the sufferings of this present time.” He is implying that there is something better in the future. The Apostle John describes this glorious future in Revelation 21:4. Listen to this description. *[Read Revelation 21:4.]*

The promise is of a day when all the tears, pain, and tragedy will fade away. Although it is difficult in the wake of tragedy, one of the best things you can do is look to eternity. Hold onto the promise that God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, the sufferings of this present time don’t even compare to the coming glory. For those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the writer promises, not a “happy ending” to life, but a glorious future for eternity.

All throughout the passage of Romans 8, the Apostle Paul just keeps it real. He talks about the groanings and the pain of life. He talks about the longing to be saved from the present struggles and the eager expectation and hope that there is something better than these present circumstances. In fact, he openly admits that this struggle is so great that he doesn’t even know how to pray (Romans 8:26)!

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? There is hope! In the middle of your tragedy, the Holy Spirit helps your weakness. *[Read Romans 8:26-27.]* When we are so weak that we can’t even pray, the Holy Spirit, the one who intercedes for us according to the will of God, prays “for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Even in the darkest day, God is still working all things together for good. It’s true! This is His promise.

1. **Work** **together** for good (Romans 8:28, 31-32, 35-39)

*[Ask for a student to volunteer to read Romans 8:28.]* Ah, there’s that verse again! “All things work together for good.” This verse is dangerous if not understood correctly. To the believer in Christ, it can be a great comfort and a reason for hope, but if used harshly, it can feel like a dagger to someone working through the struggles of a tragic event.

The keywords are ***not*** “for good.” The keywords are “work together.” Again, the author did not write that “all things will work out in the end” or that “all things are good.” What he does, in light of all the difficulties he has faced, is lean on the truth that the Holy Spirit can comfort in a way that is beyond words.

His hope is in the ***fact*** that God is working, even in the midst of tragedy. His understanding is that tragedy is not an isolated event. “All things work ***together***.” The event may not be good, but in all things, God works for our good. The Apostle Paul never allows the difficulties, the tragedy, to warp his understanding of how God feels about him. Listen to his conclusion. *[Read Romans 8:31-32.]*

In light of the tragedy you are facing, these two verses highlight two astounding truths.

**Two Astounding Truths**

● God is for us!

● God allowed Jesus to endure the cross!

Listen carefully to these verses again. *[Re-read Romans 8:31-32.]* Those are two amazing truths!

If we are not careful, tragedy can lead us to think God is against us. “If God loves me, why did He allow this to happen to me? If God is for me, He wouldn’t have let this happen.” This is a skewed way of thinking.

***God is for you!*** At the center of God’s plan to save mankind from sin (the very first tragedy), He allowed His own Son to endure a completely undeserved death. This “tragedy” worked for the good of all men.

Teacher’s Note: *Please keep in mind that the word “tragedy” in relation to the death of Jesus refers only to His death from a human perspective. Crucifixion and the suffering He endured is a tragic way to die. This statement in no way suggests that it was a tragedy that Jesus died, as in, it should not have happened.*

At the end of this passage, we see the Apostle Paul’s conclusion. A truth so profound it can solidify your hope if you will choose to believe it. He begins by asking a question. *[Read Romans 8:35.]* Who can separate us from God’s love? Notice the list: can tribulation separate us from God’s love? Can distress? Can persecution? Famine? Nakedness? Peril or the sword? Those are some pretty tragic events! And so, he asks if these things can separate us from God’s love. You could ask it this way, “If I have to face these things in life, does that mean that God doesn’t love me?”

His response comes in Romans 8:37-39. *[Read Romans 8:37-39.]* Wow! Wow! Wow! In the middle of those tragic events, we are more than conquerors! Nothing can separate us from God’s love! Nothing! All things work together for good!

Teacher’s Note: *If you have the time and desire to tell a story of how God worked triumph from tragedy, consider telling the story of Jim Elliott, Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Peter Fleming, and Ed McCully. A shortened version of their story taken from a Christianity.com article can be found here.*

*Jim Elliott was a missionary to the Quichua (keech-wah) Indian tribe in Ecuador. Jim and his missionary friends were able to have great victory there and saw many of these Indians trust Christ. But there was another tribe called the Auca Indians. This was a violent tribe that were killing many of the Quichua Indians. Elliott knew the only way to stop this was for the Auca to hear about Jesus.*

*So, Jim’s friend, Nate Saint, began to drop gifts from his plane to the Auca people. Soon, trust began to build and the group of missionaries was able to share a meal with two Auca Indians. Several days later, they met again. This time, it was not friendly. Jim Elliott, Nate Saint, and three other missionaries were killed that day at the hands of the Auca Indians.*

*But the story does not end there. Not even two years later, Jim Elliott’s wife and daughter, and Nate Saint’s sister, Rachel, came back to share the Gospel with the Auca people. This time, hearts and lives were changed. The whole tribe turned to Jesus. Rachel Saint was a missionary there for 36 years. Nate Saint’s son also moved into the village to help.*

*At first, when the news broke of the murder of these missionaries, it was devastating. But God worked together for good. Jim Elliott had a gun with him that day, but he and his fellow missionaries made a promise not to kill the tribe members because they didn’t have an eternal future with God… at least not yet. Because of that decision to not shoot, and to give their lives, the Auca people got their chance to trust Jesus. While it was a tragedy that five men lost their lives, God used this sacrifice to soften the hearts of a savage people group to hear the Gospel. Lives were lost, but many lives were changed for all of eternity.*

CONNECTION

At the beginning of our time together, you were able to write the beginning and end of stories. Wouldn’t it be nice if you could do that in real life? At the stroke of a pen, you might change something about your family situation, change the way you look, or the way you style your hair. While you’re at it, plan out your career, where you’re going to live, the car you will drive, and the dog’s name.

But there is a reason we do not write our own stories. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). It is good to make plans, be organized, and use a schedule but there is no section on your phone calendar for tragedies. That’s not something you plan.

Since only God controls your future, it makes sense to trust Him with your life. Put your life in God’s hands. It starts with trusting your eternal destiny to God. Trust that Jesus is the only way to have a relationship with God and give your life to Him.

Now, think about this. If you have placed your eternity in God’s hands, doesn’t it make sense to give your day to day life to God? If God is good enough to take care of your eternity, isn’t it wise to allow Him to take care of your Thursday? Allow God to lead you in your daily decisions.

What does all this have to do with tragedy? Well, between now and eternity, tragedy is something you will have to deal with. You will be helping your friends and family through it, and you will be walking through it yourself. When trust in God is a daily part of your life, both now and into the future, you can trust God that the tragedy was part of all things ***working together*** for good. God knows best, and no matter what comes your way, let the Lord direct your steps.

If you could simply write the ending of your story, no doubt you would write a happy ending. But we know that can’t happen. Tragedy happens. Don’t waste the tragedy.

What can you learn from tragedy? We can learn that tragedy can be a good teacher. We can learn that the future is glorious. But, in the tragedy, be sure to learn that nothing will ever alter God’s love for you! After all, **the greatest tragedy is not learning from it**.

CHOICE

Don’t wait until you are in a tragedy before you begin to trust God. You will need Him during tragedy so build your trust in Him today. Why? Because nothing will fluster your faith and test your trust more than a tragic event in your life.

Will you take a huge step of faith tonight? Will you express to God your desire to learn from tragedy and your belief in the love of God? You could say something like this if you agree:

Dear God, I know my life will have tragedy. I don’t want a tragedy to result in a tragic life. I believe that You love me. Help me to learn from tragedy and trust in Your love for me.

Maybe you are really struggling because of a tragedy that you have endured and you just can’t seem to express that kind of trust yet, but you want to. Maybe your prayer could simply be:

God, I need help. I am hurt! Help me to believe You love me. Help me to trust You through this tragic event.

Teacher’s Note: *Allow the students to pray. After they have had time to pray, take time to pray for the group.*

NEXT STEPS

Teacher’s Note: *Hand out an index card to each student. Provide a writing utensil for each student if they do not already have one from the opening exercise. This closing activity should take no more than 1-2 minutes. It doesn’t have to be completed before small groups but give the students a chance to start it.*

Let’s take some time to get real about this idea of learning from tragedy. On the top portion of the index card, write the greatest tragedy in your life. If nothing else, there is just something about seeing it written down. Now, below it, write down the lessons that God has taught you or that you are still learning as a result of the tragedy. If you are having trouble writing anything down, don’t worry. Take some time in the days ahead to see what God can teach you. Let God use your tragedy to grow you in your trust in Him. After all, **the greatest tragedy is not learning from it**.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**1. If you could write the story of your future, what would it look like?** *(It’s good to start with a lighthearted question as you will grow deeper in your discussion. Help the students think through details by asking about career choices, college choices, and where they might want to live. Have fun with creative questions about the future of the students.)*

**2. What are some lessons you have learned from tragedy?** *(While the students may not be ready to share their tragedies in their lives, this will provide an opportunity to open that window. With this question, the student will not have to go into detail about their tragedy, but it provides the opportunity to do so. Be sure to be sensitive to answers, as some student’s scale of the tragedy is much different than others. Guard against comparison.)*

**3. What makes it hard to trust God during tragedy?** *(It is important to discuss obstacles to one of the main goals of the lesson. Trust is key in overcoming the devastating effects of the tragedy. Trust in God’s love will provide great healing in tragic moments.)*

**4. What are some ways God used tragedy or difficulty in your life for something good?** *(This might be a stretch for students that are still young. It is easier to look back over time and answer this question. But encourage the students to pull the good from what most people would call bad. This is a good practice for facing tragedy in the future.)*

**5. After what you have learned tonight, how would you help a friend facing tragedy?** *(Put some legs on what the students have just learned. Many may have not suffered a tremendous tragedy, but they might know someone who has. This will allow them to flesh out the steps to healing and growth through the resources and instructions God has provided in His Word. It will also allow them to think through a biblical approach that they will need to follow when tragedy strikes their life.)*