



“What lesson is God teaching me?”

What lesson is God teaching me? I hear this question frequently, most often as a desperate plea from people going through great trials and tragedies in life. When something goes horribly wrong—when life grinds our nose in the dust, we might wonder if God is trying to teach us some mysterious lesson.

It’s almost as if once we learn the lesson, we can move forward. Honestly, while the quest for answers is an expression of genuine humility, I think the question itself smuggles in extra painful assumptions that we would do well to discard.

If we think that God imparts wisdom through any circumstance, no problem. But if we view our painful circumstances and afflictions as a lesson sent by God, then God becomes the first cause of every trial. Then, when the tragedies start accumulating, it becomes harder and harder to trust that God is good and that God can be trusted. Then God becomes the cruel headmaster and we’re reduced to either the class dunce who fails to pass the test or the victim of a bully teacher’s cruel pedagogy. This inevitably leads to distrust and resentment.

For these reasons, I recommend moving on to healthier premises and a better question.

Here’s one approach, based on my chapter, “God is Good and Sh*t Happens” in *A More Christlike God*.

1. Sh*t happens. Slips happen. Injuries happen. God never causes them. Ever. No need to blame God or blame yourself. Why not simply blame the fragility of human bodies in a hard world?

Our loving God doesn’t manipulate human freedom. Our choices open and close doors—God works with, around and through them, even when we make bad decisions. The lesson? As my 12-step sponsor says, “Sometimes the toilet seat is just up. It doesn’t mean anything.”

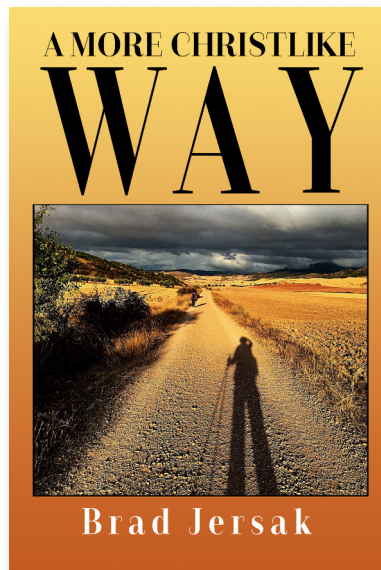
2. God is good. We can assume that. Assume that God is for you, that Christ cares about your

life and that the investment he brings to the table is YOU and his great love for you. God’s care doesn’t levitate you whenever you slip—life doesn’t and can’t work that way. But Trinity’s care *does* include real caregiving—it must. How so? That is my question:

3. “God, open my eyes to your care for me today.” What does God’s care look like in this situation? These questions seem better to me than the “lesson” question because they assume Christ’s care and draw our attention to God’s ways of caregiving with which we can participate willingly. But the lesson question diverts us from recognizing the ways of God’s care and may even cause us to resist God’s active participation in our lives.

Indeed, a good prayer exercise of self-reflection might be, “How did I welcome your care today? And how did I resist it?” From there, we are empowered to surrender and to sync up with God’s goodness in our lives. If a lesson is to be learned, that alignment with God’s mercy might just be it. □

Brad Jersak was a pastor and church-planter for 20 years prior to becoming editor-in-chief at CWRm.



Coming in 2019!

A More Christlike Way
by Brad Jersak

sequel to
A More Christlike God