

When A Dream Dies

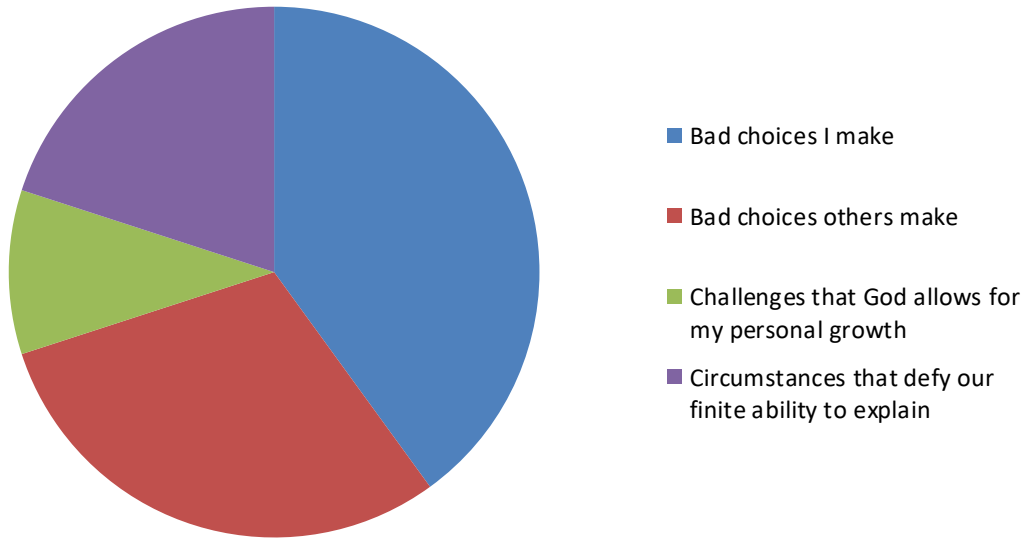
1. Warm-up Question: Think back over the last few weeks and tell us about a time when your day was interrupted by an unexpected event.
2. Life is full of unexpected plot twists. You never know what's going to happen next. Our Scripture passage for Sunday is a great example. But before we get there, we need to know the backstory, which began around 2000 BC. Read Genesis 12:1-3.
 - a. Why was God so determined to make a great nation of Abraham's offspring? According to these verses, what was God's ultimate goal?
 - b. How do you think Abraham felt when he heard God's promise? How do you think he felt years later when he died with only one child by his wife Sarah?
3. God's promise to Abraham marked the birth of a dream that Abraham and his offspring clung to. After almost a thousand years, the dream finally began to take shape. Around 1000 B.C., the twelve tribes descended from Abraham came together to form a united kingdom that they called Israel, and God raised up a great ruler named David. Under King David and his son Solomon, Israel became a powerful nation with the potential to bless the earth! The dream was happening! Speaking through the prophet Nathan, God promised King David that, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." II Samuel 7:16. How do you think David felt when he heard this promise? How do you think he imagined events would unfold to fulfill the promise?
4. After David died, his son Solomon continued to build the strength and glory of Israel, but then made some terrible mistakes. After he died, his son Rehoboam [REE-uh-bo-um] became king and everything started to unravel, which brings us to Sunday's Scripture passage. Read I Kings 12:1-17.
 - a. As best you understand it, what were the people asking of Rehoboam?
 - b. Why do you think Rehoboam responded as he did? What was he thinking?
 - c. Have you ever known someone like Rehoboam? Tell us about them.
5. As the story continues to unfold in I Kings, the nation of Israel split in two. Ten tribes succeeded and appoint a new king, Jeroboam, while two tribes stayed with Rehoboam. Talk about whiplash! Just when the dream of Abraham and his offspring finally seemed to be coming true, everything fell apart! The two resulting nations both declined and eventually ceased to exist. The dream was dead! The moral of the story being: You never know what's going to happen next. Life is full of unexpected plot twists – like when Sethe, a slave in Toni Morrison's acclaimed novel "Beloved" escaped to freedom with her infant daughter, only to be cornered 28 days later. Not willing to let her daughter return to the degradations of slavery, she killed her. Just when Sethe's dream of freedom for herself and her daughter was coming true,

everything fell apart. Do these stories of dreams that died remind you a time or experience in your own life?

6. All of this raises the question: When a dream dies, what are we supposed to do? First we talked about what NOT to do. Don't get stuck asking why!
 - a. Some people believe that everything that happens is predestined by God, so that even if something bad happens, God meant it to be. Do you believe that?
 - b. Jeff suggested a different way of thinking about why bad things happen. Take a look at the pie chart on p. 3, which offers four reasons why bad things happen, including a category of situations that defy finite human logic. What do you think of this way of seeing things?
 - c. In the aftermath of a tragedy, have you ever found yourself getting stuck asking why? Was it helpful to try to figure out why?

7. If asking why isn't helpful, how should we respond when we experience a tragedy? II Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." Jesus said, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." Matthew 17:20. Verses like these suggest that when we encounter tragedy, instead of asking why, we should ask, "What's next?" "Why?" is a backward looking question that we can never fully answer. "What's next?" is a forward looking question filled with faith that propels us forward.
 - a. What does it mean to walk by faith, not by sight?
 - b. Why is faith such a powerful forward-moving force?
 - c. Even when tragedy strikes, Jeff invited us to have faith that God has a plan, but in a different kind of way. When we say God has a plan, we typically mean God is causing everything to happen in granular detail for reasons mapped out in advance. Instead Jeff encouraged us to think of God's plan as being more like Wynton Marsalis improvising when a ring tone rudely interrupted his song. Marsalis riffed off the ring tone, incorporated it into his song, and turned it into something beautiful. Thought of this way, God's plan for our lives is interactive and involves a lot of creative improvisation. How does that sit with you?
 - d. God's work through Israel provides a great example of God's masterful improvisation. Rehoboam's sin broke everything apart for centuries. But God responded with masterful improvisation that revived Abraham's dream in a way he never could have imagined. Take a look at the timeline on p. 3. What should we learn from this timeline for how God works in our own lives?
 - e. Where in your life right now do you feel stuck? Are you ready to summon the faith to ask "What's next?"

Why Bad Things Happen



The Big-Picture Story of Israel

