

Youth Culture Lesson
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Paris Tragedy

And Dealing with Disaster in Our Own Lives

By Paul Asay

What Happened

It had been a normal night in Paris Friday, Nov. 13, 2015. People streamed into Stade de France to watch a soccer game between France and Germany. Fans packed the Bataclan Theatre to hear the Eagles of Death Metal. Parisians filled local cafes.

Shortly after 9 p.m. in Paris, Islamic militants launched a series of attacks across the city. Suicide bombers set off their explosive vests around the stadium. Killers opened fire on the streets. Around 10 p.m., militants barged into the Bataclan Theater shouting “Allahu akbar,” firing their AK-47s and taking an estimated 60 to 100 hostages. They soon began shooting again, leading police to assault the theater.

By the time the attacks were over, more than 130 people were dead, 87 of them in the Bataclan Theater. At least another 350 were injured, nearly a hundred of those seriously. It was the deadliest day in France since World War II.

The terrorist organization known as ISIS later claimed responsibility for the attacks, allegedly in retaliation for France’s involvement with civil wars in Syria and Iraq. However, while those civil wars are military affairs, ISIS attacks were carried out on civilians—people who were simply living their lives. Ironically, Islam forbids the killing of civilians in war.

Most Muslims condemned the attacks, with Iranian president Hassan Rouhani calling them a “crime against humanity.” The rest of the world felt much the same way, with President Obama calling the tragedy “an attack on all of humanity and the universal values that we share.” Paul Ryan, the new Speaker of the House, said, “All of Paris needs our prayers tonight,” and many Christians around the globe held special prayer vigils for Paris.

Talk About It

Tragedies take many different guises. Some are very public, such as 9/11 or the Paris attacks. Others are very private: We lose someone we care about, suffer a deep loss; and often, such as the case in Paris, we never see it coming. Disaster hits when we least expect it. Before anger and grief, we often suffer from shock, disbelief, denial that something so horrible could happen.

Have you ever suffered a tragedy in your life? If so, what emotional stages did you experience? How did you face that tragedy?

It’s not easy to come alongside someone who’s suffered a personal tragedy. It’s hard to know what to say or do. Often, though, we don’t need to do much other than be there—be there to listen or cry with the person. Just being there can be a deep comfort when no words or deeds seem adequate. What other advice would you give someone who wants to help someone else in a time of great need?

Most of us can't physically be present for the people of Paris, but we still can be with them in a way—through prayer. Has your church or youth group prayed for the people of France? What else could you do for the people who are hurting there?

What the Bible Says

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” (Ps. 46:1-3).

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

Paul Asay has written for Time, The Washington Post and Christianity Today. He writes about culture for Plugged In and has published several books, including his newest, Burning Bush 2.0 (Abingdon), available now. He lives in Colorado Springs. Check out his entertainment blog at Patheos.com/Blogs/WatchingGod or follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.