



Why Bad Things Happen

Lesson Overview

1. Good or Bad?

A Chinese proverb shows how bad might be good.

2. Watch a Video

Watch parts of *Why Bad Things Happen—Swedenborg and Life* at bit.ly/BadHappen (1hr 22min 15sec).

3. Discuss

Why do bad things happen?

New Church Concepts Permissions

There are no "laws of permission" that are simply that, or that are separate from the laws of divine providence. They are the same thing; so saying that God allows something to happen does not mean that he wants it to happen but that he cannot prevent it because of his goal, which is our salvation.

Whatever happens for the sake of our salvation is in accord with the laws of divine providence, since divine providence is always moving away from and contrary to our own intentions. It is constantly focused on its goal; so when it notices we are straying from that goal it leads us away from evil and toward good. This cannot be accomplished without allowing bad things to happen. See *Divine Providence* 234

General Church Education
267-502-4949
gced@newchurch.org

FaithBuilder 1 | Lesson 29 | Divine Providence

Good or Bad?

An old Chinese Proverb goes like this...

A farmer and his son had a horse to help plough their fields. One day, the horse ran away and their neighbors cried, "Your horse ran away, what terrible luck!" The farmer replied, "Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see."

A few days later, the horse came back leading some wild horses to the farm with him. The neighbors called out, "Your horse has returned, and brought several horses home with him. What great luck!" The farmer replied, "Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see."

Later, the farmer's son was trying to break one of horses, but the horse threw him off, breaking his leg. The villagers cried, "Your son broke his leg, what terrible luck!" The farmer replied, "Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see."

A couple weeks later, soldiers from the national guard marched through town, recruiting able-bodied boys for the army. They did not take the farmer's son, who was recovering from his injury. Friends shouted, "Your boy is spared, what tremendous luck!" To which the farmer replied, "Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see."

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What goes through your mind a "bad" thing happens?
2. What would life be like if nothing bad ever happened?
3. Can we know if a happening is "good" or "bad"?
4. Does the Lord see events as "good" or "bad"—or just as "happenings"?
5. Why does the Lord let bad things happen?

Watch a Video

Watch *Why Bad Things Happen—Swedenborg and Life* at bit.ly/BadHappen (1hr 22min 15sec). (Enter link in web browser bar at the top of your screen.) Pause after the first 1min 9sec to consider:

1. How would you answer the question, "If there is a loving God, why doesn't He shield me from bad things?"
2. What is the payoff from bad things happening?

Read

Good and bad things happen because God gives each person the freedom to choose between good and evil. If we are to choose good we must see our selfish thoughts and feelings for what they are. This would be impossible to do if we did not experience evil and its consequences. Through experiencing bad things we are able to

see our evils and reject them as sins against God.

Unless evils were allowed to break out, a person would not see them and therefore would not acknowledge them, and thus could not be induced to resist them. Evils cannot be repressed by any act of Providence; for it they were they would remain shut in, and like a disease, such as cancer they would spread and consume everything vital in the person. See *Divine Providence* 251

If the Lord did not allow evil things to happen He could not lead people away from evil and towards heaven. This may make it seem as if the Lord wants us to experience temptation, but the truth is that He does not tempt us. He is constantly looking at the good we can be led into by getting rid of evil actions and longings.

Continue Watching the Video

Continue watching *Why Bad Things Happen—Swedenborg and Life* at bit.ly/BadHappen. *Start at 42min 12sec. Watch to 45min 40sec.*; 3min 28sec.

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. How are evil acts punished? Does evil itself bring punishment? Or do angels or the Lord punish?
2. Apply the concept of “logical consequences” to an evil act.
3. What does “hitting bottom” mean? Why does it take “hitting bottom” before a person turns towards loving the Lord and the neighbor?
4. Would human beings be able to go to heaven if nothing bad ever happened? Why or why not?
5. Can evil ever be in total control of a person’s life? Why or why not?
6. How does the Lord control evil? What does He do to bring good from it?
7. Does the Lord want evil things to happen?
8. Why can’t the Lord stop evil from happening?
9. Give an example of how good can come from evil.

Continue Watching the Video

Continue watching *Why Bad Things Happen—Swedenborg and Life* at bit.ly/BadHappen. *Start at 48min 54sec. Watch to 51min 02sec.*; 2min 8sec.

The events in this video segment take place in the spiritual world. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 8574).

1. In what two ways is the Lord present with a person when he or she is experiencing attacks from evil?
2. How do people feel after overcoming evil?
3. Could a people feel a deeper connection with the Lord and greater commitment to heavenly values if they did not fight evil?

New Church Concept The Lord’s Leading

The nature of the Lord's Providence is such that it is linked together with foresight; the one does not exist without the other. For evil things are foreseen, but good ones are provided; and the evils things that are foreseen are constantly being turned towards what is good. Nothing is allowed to happen except to the end that something good may come out of it. But because a person possesses freedom that enables him to be reformed, he is turned from evil towards good so far as he freely allows himself to be turned. See *Arcana Coelestia* 6489

There is no such thing as chance, that is, evil happening by chance, but all evils are controlled in a way that not a single one of them is permitted to happen to a person on earth or to a soul that does not lead to good. Furthermore, nothing is permitted to happen that has not been foreseen, for otherwise it cannot happen. Consequently, all evils are bent in such a way that just those, and not any others, do happen, because it cannot be helped in view of the corrupt state of humankind. See *Spiritual Experiences* 1088

Evils cannot be set aside unless they come to light. This does not mean that we have to act out our evils... but that we need to look carefully not only at our actions but also at our thoughts, at what we would do if it were not for our fear of the laws and of ill repute. We need to look especially at which evils we see as permissible in our spirit and do not regard as sins. *Divine Providence* 278