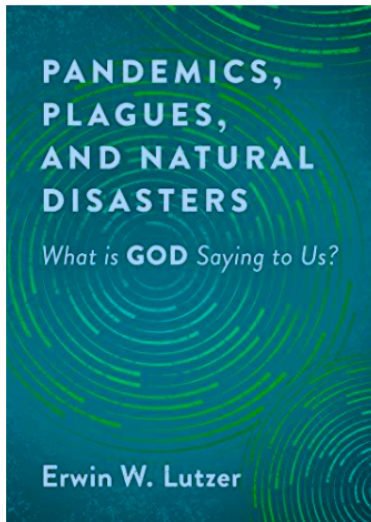


Pandemics, Plagues, and Natural Disasters: What is God Saying to Us?

By Erwin W. Lutzer

Moody Publishers, 2020, 176 Pages



Summary

Faced with mass suffering, such as the current COVID pandemic, plagues, and natural disasters, we may wonder whether God actually cares about all he has created, including us humans. In this book Erwin Lutzer (retired senior pastor of Moody Church) explains the role of God in suffering through disasters and disease. He examines how God uses tragedies throughout the Bible to speak to His people, and that ultimately God always has our wellbeing in mind, even when He doesn't relieve our immediate pain. Find reassuring perspective and relief by learning how times of widespread trouble reveals God's ultimate plans for our deliverance from temporary and eternal suffering.

Best Illustration

"Retired doctors and nurses have come back into the front line. Some have themselves caught the virus and died. They are doing what the early Christians did in times of plague. In the first few centuries of our era, when serious sickness would strike a town or city, the well-to-do would run for the hills (part of the problem was often low-lying, fetid air in a town). The Christians would stay and nurse people. Sometimes they caught the disease and died. People were astonished." Kindle location 112

Best Idea

"Let me be clear. Tragedies separate people into two camps: the dead and the living, not the saved and the damned; not the religious and irreligious. The righteous die with the wicked." Kindle location 589

Best Take Away

"Pandemics, plagues and natural disasters force us to make a decision. Do we trust God, or do we walk away disgusted, if not angry, with God? Natural disasters have a way of dividing humanity, getting to the bottom of our values and character. They have a way of revealing our secret loves and personal convictions—and whether we will continue to believe in the goodness of God." Kindle location 309

Our Recommendation

Although COVID-19 precipitated the writing of this book, Lutzer masterfully deals with the wider issue of tragedies mankind faces. The book is written for Christians and non-Christians alike. The last couple of chapters are evangelistic in nature and makes the book a good one to give to non-believers. It is also for us – dealing with the topic of eternal hope in these transitory days of uncontrollable crisis.

Best Quotes

“COVID-19 is the pandemic that changed everything. The ‘new normal’ will not be the same as the ‘old normal.’ For years to come we will talk about BC (Before COVID) and AC (After COVID). Normal may never come back.” Kindle location 65

“Churches transitioned from actual meetings to ‘virtual services’ online. Giving decreased in some churches, and some Christian ministries haven’t survived. My greatest heartbreak is for those international gospel-preaching ministries that are almost totally dependent on American funds. Fear has caused many Christians to pull back their giving; some because of genuine financial need, others because of our tendency to hoard our assets, keeping more than we need.” Kindle location 88

“The crisis brought to the fore the divisions within our country. Our states announced that only essential businesses were to remain open. These decisions, we were told, were based on science. So if you lived in Illinois as I do, ‘science’ decreed that liquor and marijuana stores were ‘essential’ but clothing stores were not. ‘Science’ decreed that elective surgery (even serious operations) were to be postponed, but abortion clinics were ‘essential’ and could remain open.” Kindle location 94

“As one person put it, COVID-19 is a watershed moment; not just a blizzard with a beginning and an end, but the beginning of a mini-ice age. Yes, eventually all of this might be put behind us, but the generational effects will remain. And so will the unanswered questions.” Kindle location 110

“This is a time when we have to think more deeply about our role as believers in a frightened and hurting world. Believing as we do in a good and sovereign God, we have to respond to questions that arise about God’s relationship to the suffering of the human beings He created for His glory.” Kindle location 122

“Glib answers to such questions are hurtful, not helpful. Sometimes we just need to sit beside those who grieve, letting them know we care, rather than talking to them dispassionately about God’s promises and purposes. Better to say nothing than to say something that appears to trivialize the horror.” Kindle location 130

“As we shall see later in this book, we need a hope that is not dependent on whether things work out, or whether the pain ends, or whether we see the answers to our prayers. Trust in God, yes; but trust in Him even in the face of setbacks, discouragement, and unending grief.” Kindle location 153

“God has not promised that we will be free from the pain of this world, but that His presence will be with us all the way to the finish line. And beyond.” Kindle location 156

"Then let us turn our grief into helpfulness, doing all we can to encourage, to bless, to give money, and to risk our own selves for the sake of others. God has not left us here simply to separate ourselves from the pain around us. We are to extend ourselves to a hurting world." Kindle location 169

"A pandemic—just like any other disaster—can either strengthen our faith or destroy it; it can either make us seek God or turn away in disgust." Kindle location 195

"Why grieve for those who were in the presence of Christ? Earth was transitory; heaven was a reality. They thought of how fortunate it was for their relatives and friends to go before them into heaven where Christ was waiting for them. With the apostle Paul they could say, 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Philippians 1:21)." Kindle location 233

"Tragedies of all kinds give us the opportunity of serving the living and the dying. Luther would tell us that through the tragedies of others, we have the opportunity to be pried away from our comfortable lifestyles and enter the suffering of the world." Kindle location 248

"We are living on a once perfect, but now terribly flawed, planet. God has not promised deliverance from the evils of this world, but redemption for the world to come." Kindle location 304

"Disasters clarify our values, they challenge our faith, and they reveal who we really are." Kindle location 318

"God has not relegated calamities to His hapless archrival, the devil, without maintaining strict supervision and ultimate control of nature. No earthquake comes, no tornado rages, and no tsunami washes villages away but that God signs off on it. No pandemic stalks the earth but that God allows it." Kindle location 411

"I personally can accept tragedies much better if I know that they have come from God's hands than I can if I am the victim of uncontrolled random forces of nature. If COVID-19 is out of God's hands, then I am out of God's hands. After all, I could die of the virus." Kindle location 452

"These disasters are also used by God to test our faith and to give us the opportunity to become involved in the pain around us. As a church, we are called to be a beacon of light and a help to a very hurting world." Kindle location 462

"Cruel as it sounds, death is determined for all of us, whether by cancer, an accident, a natural disaster, or COVID-19. Death is a scheduled, divine appointment. Tragedies rid us of the overconfidence we have that we are in control of our destiny." Kindle location 605

"We should see COVID-19 as a wake-up call for us to invest in eternity and not the fleeting values of time. Though we are here today, we could be gone tomorrow." Kindle location 628

"This is one of the reasons why we will never know all of God's purposes in mass disasters—we simply do not know the thousands who turned to God when

threatened with COVID-19. Spiritually careless people are forced to take God seriously in a time of crisis. Some harden their hearts but others turn to God in desperation." Kindle location 685

"Every day about 7,500 people die in the United States, and over 150,000 die worldwide. That's about 55 million deaths per year. Natural disasters only catch our attention when they are of great magnitude with many simultaneous deaths and enormous costs in property damages. They are a dramatic acceleration of what happens all the time. The process of death is just intensified during a mass disaster." Kindle location 747

"In the Bible, hope is always presented in terms of eternity, not time." Kindle location 818

"Pandemics, plagues, and natural disasters are previews of the upheavals and suffering that is to come. I just recently reread the book of Revelation to see how many of the coming judgments have already been taking place on planet Earth, many since the beginning of creation. In the future tribulation, there will be pestilence, earthquakes, famine, powerful wind, and plagues too numerous to mention." Kindle location 836

"Recall that the RMS Titanic went under with 1,522 people going to a watery grave. Even if we attribute the sinking to a series of human errors, God most assuredly was able to keep the ship from sinking without any violation of the human will. This is another reminder that the God who permits such unthinkable tragedies is one who is to be feared." Kindle location 1075

"We must begin any discussion of tragedy by grieving for those who are in pain. Many of us are better at trying to explain the whys and wherefores of pandemics and disasters than we are weeping over them!" Kindle location 1099

"Disasters cause us to pause, they cause us to ask hard questions, and if we care about the world, they drive us to tears. Can anyone stare at the destruction of an earthquake or the devastation of a worldwide pandemic and not weep? Surely a heart of human compassion takes the time to identify with the loss, the suffering, and the hopelessness of fellow human beings. We should not approach disasters with an accusatory finger or a detached attitude. Grieving hearts can only be touched by other grieving hearts, sharing pain and mingling tears." Kindle location 1120

"Any catastrophe should remind us of all of the blessings we take for granted; it should lead us to deep and lasting gratitude. Before we ask why so many die in natural disasters or due to an epidemic, we should ask a different question, 'Why are so many people—we included—still living?' How many people who are angry with God never give Him thanks for beautiful weather and the numerous benefits that nature regularly bestows upon this planet?" Kindle location 1132

"Let's tell our friends that pandemics and natural disasters force us to decide how we will respond to God. We can accuse Him, or worship Him, but neutrality is impossible. When disasters strike, God is not on trial, we are." Kindle location 1208

"John Piper calls COVID-19 'a bitter providence' but says that the believer can find sweetness in it, 'knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn't, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it.'" Kindle location 1316

"If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that we can't predict the future." Kindle location 1316

"God is our refuge. A refuge, a shelter, a safe place where you run when everything else is disintegrating around you. God is unaffected by the fluctuation of events of earth; He is always there, solid, unmoved. When the mountains are tottering into the depths of the sea, and the ground beneath you is shaking, when we run to God He will be there for us." Kindle location 1461