



The Rain Will Fall on the Good and the Bad ... Then What?

by CLAUDETTE COOMBS

As we go through life we experience things which may cause us to question or assign some ultimate motive within the universe. For example, when things go terribly wrong and we see no logic or justification we ask, "Why would God let this happen?" A gambler will believe... I can win the jackpot if I stay at "my" machine or carry this lucky charm. We joke that we have bad luck because we broke a mirror or walked under a ladder. In reality, many things we experience in life happen as a result of a collection of events and conditions over which we have no control.

According to Matthew 5:45, *good, and not-so-good, things will happen to each of us*. This is independent of our behaviour, personalities, motivation or history. We sometimes assume that bad things have happened because we (or someone else) deserve(s) something bad to happen. Fortunately for us, it doesn't work that way. We aren't always rewarded with good when it might be deserved, nor must we endure all the bad that may also have been earned. Things can "just happen" beyond our control and influence.

Are we ever responsible for bringing on the rain?

We are quite capable of bringing a degree of comfort or difficulty upon ourselves by the choices we make. Although we may have influence over some of the things that occur in our lives, we do not control everything that happens to us. In some cases our choices cause a chain reaction of events which result in very negative consequences for us. In other cases our level of control is limited to our response to the things that come our way. When the rain falls, we must be careful to examine whether this particular rainfall was a result of our poor planning and choices, or a result of conditions outside our control.

Why do we stand in the rain?

Short term exposure to the pain and sadness around us can enhance our abilities to deal with the people and events that we encounter. This is helpful in generating an understanding of others and preparing ourselves to handle our own obstacles. Our interpersonal relationships

become richer, our discipline and guidance become more supportive and our personal coping potential is magnified. The risk here is one of standing too long in the rain. Sharing in the distress of others is beneficial in gaining insight, but holding onto the distresses we experience can lead to a depressed view of life and may rob us of potential happiness and contentment.

Sometimes we surround ourselves with a cloud of negativity as a misguided means of self protection. We may adopt unhealthy mottos to live by such as: "If we don't expect much we won't be disappointed." Or, "If we expect the worst we can be pleasantly surprised when it doesn't happen." The real danger here is that we can create our own negative reality. If we look for or expect bad, then that's what we see.

How can we use the rain?

Have you ever been stopped in your tracks by a downpour? You know the kind, when you run under the shelter of a building or pull over to the side of the road just to wait it out. Those brief pauses can allow opportunity to reflect.

A collection of life's little (and big) adversities, all happening in the same time frame, can force us to put all else on hold until we are able to sort through the disorder.

A sudden appearance of health problems, coupled with the emotional realization of inevitable lifestyle modifications, is often the driving force for personal change. This forced pause may be just what is needed to encourage us to re-evaluate our lives, priorities and direction. With renewed motivation we can filter out what really does and does not matter in our lives. We can re-establish contacts, identify needed supports and begin a process of acquiring the resources we need to meet life's challenges.

After the rain, we can come out from under the shelter with a fresh outlook for our lives.

How can we prepare for the rain?

Many rainstorms can be predicted. Anticipating the predictable turbulence in our lives provides the opportunity

to plan for effective, healthy management. We know that exams and term reports pose their own unique stresses. We also know that changes in living arrangements, job positions and relationships will require added patience, planning and support. Unfortunately we sometimes don't pay enough attention to the potential impact of other anticipated events. The commencement or completion of our children's education, or the decreased independence of our parents require a new set of coping skills. For some people, these events happen all at once and the saying: "It never rains but it pours!" rings loudly. Minimizing that overwhelming sense of being caught in a downpour without an umbrella, takes planning!

To our own jeopardy, we tend to plan more for the positive things we expect than the negative things we dread. Often we resist talking or thinking about the things that we hope to avoid. It's as if we believe that if we don't talk about it or don't plan for it, then maybe it won't really happen. We even express the view that "talking about it will make it happen". We have certainly experienced the added pleasures of planning for something good. Christmas is so much more enjoyable when we select presents with a personal touch, start special family traditions and schedule time to spend with those we love. Furthermore, we likely have experienced the unnecessary confusion and discomfort of being faced with a demanding situation while having no plan. The irritation, annoyance, mistakes, wasted time and hurt all start to accumulate. The rain is streaming down.

When we anticipate events we are wise to take an inventory of our resources. This includes an assessment of our capacity in appropriate planning, personal and interpersonal coping skills and acquiring additional human and material support. A critical review of our strengths and weaknesses also puts us in a better position to identify our needs. When we determine the gaps, it is necessary to fill them.

Unfortunately, we are unable to anticipate some significant rain storms. For these, it is essential that we start out with maximum potential. That means always being prepared. Start out healthy – practice behaviours and routines which will promote and sustain good health. These include areas of nutrition, exercise, relaxation and self awareness. Adopt realistic personal goals and expectations. Maintain supportive relationships and fine tune skills in communication, conflict resolution and stress management. Finally, regularly perform a self analysis – know how you are feeling, how your needs are being met then quickly identify and correct any deficits.

Watch for the Rainbows

The optimistic side of us seeks to find a lesson or something of value in even the most difficult of times. That lesson may be hidden by our biases, fears, or rigid thinking. We lose sight of the potential for positive change if we become fixed on the idea that this rainfall is unfair, we didn't do anything to deserve this, or someone else is to blame. Of course it may be unfair. If we believe that life is supposed to be fair and we will accept nothing less, then we have lost before the rain even starts. Even when we follow all the rules and try to do everything right, bad things will still happen. That's the first lesson to learn. After we have mastered that one, we are ready to move on to others. Some lessons relate to ourselves and the new skills we cultivate. Other lessons relate to our understanding and acceptance of other people. Our challenge is to find and assimilate as many strands of the rainbow as possible.

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