

**“WHY OH WHY OH WHY”**  
**Psalm 22**  
**Baraca Class July 16, 2017\*\*\***  
**Lawrence Webb**

**INTRODUCTION**

A twenty-year-old gunman went into the grade school in Newtown, Connecticut, last December and shot and killed twenty children and two teachers. With any senseless shootings such as this one, people raise questions.

Jason Coker is a Baptist pastor in Wilton, Connecticut, about a half-hour away from Newtown. His son was a first grader, the same age as those children who were gunned down. Pastor Coker wrote an article about the conversation he had with his son about the incident as he was about to take his son to school on Monday after the fatal shootings.

The preacher told his son, “A man who was very sick in his head came into a nearby school and hurt a lot of children and teachers.”

His son asked, “Is he going to come to my school and hurt me, Daddy?”

The father assured, “No, son, he can never hurt anyone again.”

“Why, Daddy?” the boy asked.

The father said, “Because he died, son.”

“Did he go to heaven, Daddy?”

The father said, “I don’t know, son. I hope so” (Coker).

Many questions will *remain* unanswered. Those directly affected by the Connecticut massacre will ask unanswerable questions the rest of their lives.

Why did the gunman kill the children and teachers?

Why did he kill his mother?

Why did she have guns so easy for him to get hold of?

How did he manage to get into the school and start shooting?

Why didn’t God stop the killer?

Why did this happen to innocent children?

Why?

Why?

Why?

This question posed at Newtown might well be called The Great “Why.”

This is one of those “Questions We Keep Asking.”

You may be grappling with a nagging question you’d like to have some help in finding a biblical, a Christian answer for. If you have such a question, let me know. If you’re in our class here at Anderson’s First Baptist Church, jot down your question and hand it to me. If you’re in the radio class, send me a note in care of First Baptist. I’ll try to deal with your question in a future lesson.

I should warn you up front: These questions don’t have easy answers. That’s why we keep asking them. But there’s nothing wrong with asking questions about life, questions about God.

**PSALM 22**

The 22nd psalm asks hard questions.

It begins with an anguished cry:

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

*Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

This is a cry many of us have raised at points in our lives. This may be the cry of your heart this morning.

Psalms 22 is a song, a religious song. The Psalms are the song book for Jewish worship. Many of the psalms express discouragement. Why would the compilers of the Psalms put such unhappy songs in the book to sing when they gather to worship?

We have a few songs of that sort in Christian song books. Consider this one by John Newton, the man who also wrote "Amazing Grace":

How tedious and tasteless the hours  
When Jesus I no longer see;  
Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers,  
Have all lost their sweetness to me;  
The midsummer sun shines but dim,  
The fields strive in vain to look gay.  
But when I am happy in Him,  
December's as pleasant as May. . . .

Dear Lord, if indeed I am Thine,  
If Thou art my sun and my song,  
Say, why do I languish and pine?  
And why are my winters so long?  
O drive these dark clouds from the sky,  
Thy soul cheering presence restore;  
Or take me unto Thee on high,  
Where winter and clouds are no more.

Sad songs are in Jewish and Christian hymn books to help us understand it's OK to raise our complaints to God. Such songs usually have happy endings. That will be true of this 22nd Psalm. But, at first, the singer is so low he has to reach up to touch bottom:

He has prayed day and night but gets no answer

*O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest (v. 2).*

He is from a godly family, a godly ancestry. Listen again to verses 4-5:

*In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.*

*To thee they cried, and were saved; in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.*

The blessings God gave this man's ancestors haven't continued with him. Maybe the statute of limitation expired.

He feels like a worm, not a man

*But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people (v. 6).*

People mock him as they view his troubles:

*All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;*

*"He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (vv. 7-8).*

This doesn't seem right to the singer. He has believed God for as long as he can remember:

*Yet thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts. Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me thou hast been my God (vv. 9-10).*

What's going on here, God?

He feels completely cut off from any help

*Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help (v. 11).*

He feels he is being attacked by strong bulls of Bashan, as fierce as lions. Bashan was an area known for rich pasture land, herds of cattle, and fierce bulls (Durham 214):

*Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion (vv. 12-13).*

In verses 14-16, the Psalmist gives a series of word pictures to show his misery:

He's as out of control as water that's being poured out.

His bones feel as if they are disconnected one from another.

His heart is melting in his chest like wax.

He feels his strength is dried up like a broken piece of pottery.

His tongue feels like it's stuck to his jaw.

He feels God has laid him in the dust to die, and dogs are gathering about his carcass.

It's as if he can count his bones, as if they're protruding through his skin.

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast;  
my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death.*

*Yea, dogs are round about me;*

But the dogs are more than dogs. They are men who treat him like a dog:

*a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet -- I can count all my bones -- they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.*

Gospel writers pick up on part of this passage in describing the crucifixion:

In Matthew 27:8, people around the cross echo this psalm:

*"He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"*

Matthew reports that Jesus cries out the first verse of this Psalm:

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Jesus's human side shows through as He suffers the pain and agony of death. He expresses the feeling of isolation from the Heavenly Father. These words help us understand that Jesus shared our human suffering. Perhaps Matthew records this to remind us, "Even Jesus raised questions in His final hours, as life faded from His body."

A friend wrote me an e-mail, expressing anger at a loved one who had died. This friend was apologizing for feeling angry. I tried to reassure him, this is a natural feeling. It's not logical, but it's quite common. Unless death was a suicide, the person didn't choose to die. But we feel cheated because we don't have her with us any more. We feel she is cheating us by leaving us.

## WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar, reminds us the Psalms -- including Lament Psalms -- were an integral part of Jewish worship and still are. This means it is acceptable in Jewish worship to lay grievances before the Lord God. Dr. Brueggemann calls these “Psalms of darkness” (Brueggemann 27).

But the Christian church largely has ignored the Complaint Psalms, as if it is an act of “unfaith” to acknowledge negativity (26). But it can be a bold step to bring our grievances before God (27).

We can be honest like “Good Ole Charlie Brown” in the *Peanuts* strip. When Charlie is at a low point, Linus tries to encourage him:

“Don’t be discouraged, Charlie Brown . . . In this life we live, there are always some bitter pills to be swallowed.”

Charlie says, “If it’s all the same with you, I’d rather not renew my prescription” (Schulz).

Remember, these Psalms are not the voice of some agnostic. These songs have the blessing of the religious leaders for use in corporate worship. Life is not all “Blessed Assurance” and “Standing on the Promises.” “Psalms of Darkness” in worship are a way to acknowledge life often is rough and it is acceptable to voice our lament to God about the rough times.

## MY “WHY” FOLDER

I keep a file folder labeled “Coping.” I could call it “How Do I Deal with Difficulty?” or “When the Going Gets Tough” or “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?” Or maybe the file could be called simply “Why?”

Whatever I name it, the folder is for one of those “Questions We Keep Asking.”

From that folder, here is a lament from the obituary page of the Anderson paper several years ago. It’s a lament aimed at God (Anderson Independent-Mail):

I have a friend That is sweet as a baby.  
He has a family that loves him, and a happy life.  
We all love him to death, but something is not right.  
Everything was fine until that day    You came and took him away. . . .

I start to cry just thinking about the whole situation.  
He won’t be there to see his sister’s graduation.  
He won’t be there to see his brothers grow up  
          to be successful young men and marry great ladies.  
Or see that his little sister does her best.  
You came out of nowhere while we were unaware  
And took him away just like that.  
I just can’t believe what You have done.  
You’ve brought pain to everyone.    Why did You do this to him?  
I just keep thinking to myself, “How can this be?”  
But what I really keep thinking is,  
“Why God, why did You take him from us?” (Pammy)

Another person who struggled to find the answers was Eugene O’Kelly. CEO of a highly

successful accounting firm, he was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer at age fifty-three.

Faced with death, he applied the same intentional, focused approach to dying as he had to working. It was all he knew how to do. He quickly put into place a succession plan [in the company] . . . wrote letters to old friends. He spent more time at home with his wife & family. He tightened his circle of friends closer as the months crept on and his death loomed near.

Listen to what he wrote as he faced death:

I was blessed. I was told I had three months to live. You think that to put those two sentences back to back, I must be joking. Or crazy. Perhaps that I had lived a miserable, unfulfilled life, and the sooner it was done, the better. . . . Hardly. I loved my life. Adored my family. Enjoyed my friends, the career I had, the big-hearted organizations I was part of, the golf I played.

And I'm quite sane. And also quite serious: The verdict I received the last week of May 2005-- that it was unlikely I'd make it to my daughter Gina's first day of eighth grade, the opening week of September—turned out to be a gift. Honestly. Because I was forced to think seriously about my own death. Which meant I was forced to think more deeply about my life than I'd ever done . I'd attained a new level of awareness, one I didn't possess the first 53 years of my life.

It's just about impossible for me to imagine going back to that other way of thinking, when this new way has enriched me so. I lost something precious, but I also gained something precious (Howell 12-13).

A husband and wife in Texas asked The Great "Why" when their 19-year-old daughter was raped and murdered. Here are some of their thoughts several years after their daughter died:

The most difficult thing was dealing with anger, and the whole issue of forgiveness and bitterness.

We have to come to grips with the fact that this is something we cannot change, and "Why" is something we will not have an answer to that would ever satisfy us.

It is a meaningless question.

Several places in the Bible we are told, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," but I always thought that meant that God was going to get even for me. What it came to mean was that God was going to carry the problem that I couldn't handle. I had to let God carry the load of anger and bitterness and vengeance, because it was too big for me (Martin).

This grieving couple cited Second Corinthians at a time when Paul had despaired of life itself:

*For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God*

*who raises the dead; he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).*

The couple's closing comment tells what they found concerning God in grave difficulty: "What is true is that He will carry us when our pain and grief are too great even to think about."

### **THE WILTON PASTOR**

Answers to "Why" are slow coming to rich or poor, small or great. The pastor who talked with his son about the shootings in Connecticut reminds us, authentic answers come slowly. He said . . .

In the aftermath of the tragedy, people wanted answers. Many turned to clergy and other care providers for help. Personally, I was looking for answers myself and was trying to find

someone to follow who had all the answers.

To my shock, I discovered that everyone in my purview was looking to me for answers. I was the pastor, and for many this made me the mouthpiece for God (Coker).

In that environment, ministers, social workers, and other professionals -- acknowledging they didn't have all the answers -- banded together to help people in their struggle. Pastor Coker tried to be a "non-anxious presence," encouraging people to raise their question of ministers and of God.

### **NOT ALL ABOUT PHYSICAL DEATH**

It's not always about physical death.

Joe has college degrees. He had an office on the twelfth floor as he moved up the corporate ladder. Then he got downsized. Now he's a short order cook at Bojangles. And to keep food on the table for his wife and kids, at night, he cleans toilets in a building such as the one where he had his own office and his own secretary. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Sarah's husband walked out on her and their three young children. She's hundreds of miles away from her relatives. No one to leave the kids with. No money to put them in day care. Now, she's on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program -- SNAP. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

### **SHARON RANDALL**

Sharon Randall writes a syndicated column. Highly autobiographical. Over the years, she wrote extensively about losing her husband to cancer at a relatively young age. She guided three children through adolescence and then watched them fly from the nest. After several years of widowhood, she remarried and moved to a new state with her new husband.

In one column, Sharon wrote about her grandfather's explanation of March winds:

It's simple, he told me: God sends the wind in springtime to clear the Earth of all that's dead -- crumbling leaves, broken branches and other casualties of winter --

to make room for new growth and shout out the promise of everlasting life.

Then Ms. Randall said,

I don't know much about wind. But I know something about the winds of change. They come howling through our lives when we least expect them, ripping up plans, forcing us off course, stripping away what was -- no matter how dearly we loved it, or how fiercely we try to hold on to it -- to make room for what will be.

I hate it when that happens. I turn up my collar; hunker down and try my best to resist--until the wind stops and I start to ask how did my neck get so stiff? Someday before I leave this world I hope to learn to weather change with all the grace and style and abandon of a hawk. Until then I'll just try to hang on to what's left of my hair (Randall).

### **POSITIVE SIDE OF PSALM 22**

The Psalms were written for singing in the synagogue--even Psalm 22 with all its wondering why God has forsaken the singer. This gives legitimacy to telling God our worst feelings toward Him. To sing the song in group worship is to remind us that we are surrounded by people with similar issues, similar feelings.

But Psalm 22 doesn't end on the sour note. After howling, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" the psalmist declares the Lord is with him --is with US -- after all.

*I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: You who fear the LORD, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. From thee comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

We're not told how the singer gets from agony to ecstasy. It's not like going from Point A to Point B. It's more like going through a maze from Point A, hunting your way to Point Z.

Sharon Randall often writes about her faith in God, but she writes as someone who has sung both parts of Psalm 22, the Song of Desolation: "My God, why have You forsaken me?" And the Song of Praise: *The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD!*

### **CONCLUSION**

I haven't offered much by way of concrete answer to The Great "Why."

I've tried to say: It's all right to raise the questions. Psalm 22 give us permission to gripe at God about the dark, disturbing areas of life as we hold on for dear life. Psalm 22 also offers the promise of a new start, a new day. If you're still singing the sad, lonely, questioning part of the song, God bless you. Try to remember: He is holding you, even though you feel you are going it alone.

### **BENEDICTION**

Now, we conclude this week's Baraca Radio Sunday School Class from Anderson's First Baptist Church, Again, I have no simple answers to life's perplexing questions. But consider three promises that will help you on your way toward answers:

God's love that will never let you go.

God's grace that is greater than all your sin.  
God's peace that passes all understanding.  
These are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## THE GREAT "WHY"---SOURCES

**\*\*\*Baraca Class & Anderson Place, May 28, 2007  
Reworked for Baraca August 11, 2013**

Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Jason Coker, "Life in the aftermath of Sandy Hook," *Baptists Today*. Macon, Georgia: Baptists Today, August 2013, page 14.

John I. Durham, "Psalms," *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Volume 4. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1971.

Eric Howell, "How the Tomb Becomes a Womb," *Christian Reflections*. Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013, pp. 12-13.

Dan Martin, "God 'carries' family through tragedy," *Baptist Standard*, Dallas, Texas, September 30, 1998, page 6.

Pammy, "In Loving Memory of Pat (Fat-Back)," *The Anderson Independent-Mail*, May 31, 2002.

Sharon Randall, "Clearing out brush to make way for change," *The Anderson Independent-Mail*, Anderson, S. C., March 5, 2007. Front page, "Life" section.

Charles Schulz, "Peanuts" strip, *The Anderson Independent-Mail*, Anderson, S. C., Comic Section, May 24, 2007.



SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 2007 [Sunday Hymn Post](#)  
[How Tedious and Tasteless the Hours](#)

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2007  
[Sunday Hymn Post](#)

When overwhelmed with doubts and fears  
Great God, do Thou my spirit cheer;  
Let not my eyes with tears be fed,  
But to the Rock of Ages led.

When storms of sin and sorrow beat  
Lead me to this divine retreat --  
Thy perfect righteousness and blood,  
My Rock, my Fortress, and my God.

When guilt lies heavy on my soul  
And waves of fierce temptation roll,  
I'll to the Rock for shelter flee,  
And take my refuge, Lord, in Thee.

When called the vale of death to tread,  
Then to this Rock my I be led;  
Nor fear to cross the gloomy sea  
Since Thou hast tasted death for me.

<http://heartkeepercommonroom.blogspot.com/search/label/Psalms%20and%20Hymns%20and%20Spiritual%20Songs>

Thomas Ken, 1637- 1713