



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

“BUT God”

When God Worked Through Situations That Had Gone Awry

The Short Answer

Some of the most powerful turns in Scripture can be summarized with two words: BUT God. Human beings sinned. Plans collapsed. Families fractured. Enemies attacked. People failed. Hope disappeared. Death itself seemed to have won. BUT God. God intervened. God preserved. God redirected. God forgave. God restored. God redeemed. God raised the dead. The phrase 'BUT God' should not be treated as a magical formula. Not every passage examined in this study contains those exact English words, and translations sometimes render the underlying wording differently. The biblical truth is much larger than a particular English phrase. Again and again, Scripture shows circumstances that appear hopeless from the human perspective - followed by the unexpected activity of God. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. BUT God was with Joseph. Israel stood trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. BUT God made a way through the sea. Naomi returned to Bethlehem grieving devastating losses. BUT God had not finished her story. Peter denied Jesus. BUT Jesus restored him. Jesus was rejected, crucified, and buried. BUT God raised Him from the dead. Humanity itself stands spiritually helpless because of sin. BUT God, being rich in mercy, makes sinners alive with Christ. This does not mean God promises to reverse every painful circumstance during this life. Some losses remain losses. Some consequences remain. Some prayers are answered differently than hoped. Some wounds leave scars. Some faithful believers die without seeing the earthly resolution they desired. 'BUT God' is not a promise that every story receives the ending a person wants. It is confidence that sin, suffering, failure, evil, and even death never become greater than God. Sometimes God changes the circumstances. Sometimes He changes the person walking through them. Sometimes He redeems what was broken in ways no one expected. Sometimes His purposes become visible only much later. And some restoration awaits the resurrection and the new creation. The greatest 'BUT God' in Scripture is not financial recovery, relational restoration, military rescue, or personal success. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. BUT God raised Him from the dead. Because Christ lives, the Christian can know: The darkest chapter is never greater than God. And for everyone who belongs to Christ, death itself will not have the final word.

Genesis 50:15-21 • Exodus 14:10-31 • Ruth 1-4 • John 9:1-7 • John 21:15-19 • Acts 13:26-39 • Romans 5:6-11 • Ephesians 2:1-10

Opening Memory Anchor

The situation may be beyond human repair. BUT God is never beyond His ability to redeem.



RELATED STUDIES

This study focuses on how God works within situations marked by suffering, failure, sin, loss, and circumstances that appear beyond human repair. For a fuller treatment of how God can sovereignly work through sinful human actions without approving the evil itself, see 3Nails Study #226. The emphasis here is different: When a situation has already gone terribly wrong, what does Scripture actually allow Christians to hope for - and what does 'BUT God' mean when God does not simply reverse the circumstances?

PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

START WITH WHAT "BUT GOD" MEANS

The word 'but' marks a contrast. Something is true - BUT something else changes how the situation must be understood. Scripture repeatedly contains moments like this. Human beings see the problem. God sees more. Human beings reach the limit of their ability. God has not reached the limit of His. Human beings believe the story is over. God may still be working. That does not mean every difficult situation will suddenly become easy. It means circumstances never become sovereign. God is.

Memory Anchor

'BUT God' does not deny what happened. It declares that what happened does not outrank God.

1. IS "BUT GOD" A SPECIAL BIBLICAL FORMULA?

No. It is important not to turn a memorable phrase into something Scripture itself never claims. Different Bible translations sometimes use different wording. A passage may say 'BUT God,' 'Yet God,' 'The LORD was with,' 'God remembered,' or describe God acting without using either phrase. The important truth is not the exact English wording. The important truth is the biblical pattern: A situation appears one way from the human perspective. Then God acts, reveals something, redirects events, preserves someone, judges evil, extends mercy, or accomplishes a purpose human beings could not accomplish themselves. 'BUT God' is therefore a useful memory phrase. It is not a magical phrase.

2. WHAT IS ONE OF THE CLEAREST OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES?

Joseph. Read Genesis 37. Joseph's brothers hated him. They threw him into a pit. They sold him into slavery. They deceived their father. Joseph was taken to Egypt. Then Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned. From the human perspective, much of Joseph's life had gone terribly awry. Yet Genesis repeatedly tells the reader something Joseph's circumstances did not make obvious. Read Genesis 39:2 and 39:21: 'The LORD was with Joseph.' Joseph's circumstances were terrible. BUT God had not abandoned him.

3. DID GOD CALL WHAT JOSEPH'S BROTHERS DID GOOD?

No. Years later Joseph told his brothers: 'You meant evil against me, BUT God meant it for good.' Read Genesis 50:20. Joseph does not rewrite the betrayal. He calls it evil. God's redemption of an event does not require pretending the event itself was good. The brothers intended harm. God accomplished something they never intended. Through Joseph, many lives were preserved during famine. The evil remained evil. BUT evil did not get the final word.

Memory Anchor

'BUT God' never requires calling evil good. It means evil cannot prevent God from being God.

4. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN ISRAEL WAS TRAPPED AT THE RED SEA?

Read Exodus 14:10-14. Israel had escaped Egypt. Then Pharaoh changed his mind. His army pursued them. The Israelites found themselves trapped. Pharaoh's army was behind them. The sea was in front of them. From their perspective, there was no way out. They became terrified. Moses told them: 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD.' Then God opened a path through the sea. Read Exodus 14:21-31. Israel could not create the escape. BUT God could.

5. DOES "BUT GOD" MEAN PEOPLE SHOULD DO NOTHING?

No. Trust in God is not passivity. At the Red Sea, God told Moses: 'Tell the people of Israel to go forward.' Read Exodus 14:15. Israel could not divide the sea. But they still had to walk through the path God provided. Throughout Scripture, God's action and human response frequently appear together. God provides. People respond. God commands. People obey. God opens doors. People walk through them. Trusting God does not mean refusing to act. It means recognizing that human action is never the ultimate source of salvation.

6. WHAT ABOUT A SITUATION GOD DOES NOT IMMEDIATELY FIX?

The book of Ruth begins with loss. Read Ruth 1. Naomi experiences famine, relocation, widowhood, and the deaths of both sons. When she returns to Bethlehem, she says: 'I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.' Naomi does not pretend she is fine. Scripture allows her grief to speak. But the book is not finished in chapter 1. Ruth remains with Naomi. Boaz enters the story. Provision comes. A family line continues. Eventually Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of David. Naomi could not see any of that when she entered Bethlehem grieving. Her pain was real. BUT God was still writing a story she could not yet see.

7. DOES THAT MEAN EVERY LOSS WILL BE REPLACED?

No. Ruth should not be turned into a formula: 'If you suffer enough, God will eventually give you something better.' Scripture never promises that every lost relationship will be replaced, every illness healed, every financial loss recovered, every broken dream restored exactly as hoped, every marriage repaired, every child returned, or every earthly tragedy given an obvious earthly explanation. Sometimes God dramatically changes circumstances. Sometimes He does not. Biblical hope rests in God's character - not in a guarantee that every earthly story will unfold according to personal expectations.



Pastoral Safeguard

Do not tell a grieving or suffering person: 'Just wait - God will give you something better.' God has not promised that every earthly loss will be replaced in this life. It is faithful to hope. It is also faithful to grieve. Romans 12:15 tells believers to weep with those who weep. 'BUT God' should strengthen hope. It should never silence pain.

8. WHAT IF THE SITUATION WENT AWRY BECAUSE OF MY OWN SIN?

Scripture contains those stories too. Consider David. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of Uriah. Read 2 Samuel 11. When confronted by Nathan, David confessed: 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Read 2 Samuel 12:13. God forgave David. BUT forgiveness did not erase every consequence. The narrative records the death of the child born from David and Bathsheba's adultery, and David's household later experienced devastating conflict, including sexual violence, murder, rebellion, and deep family fracture. Read 2 Samuel 12-18.

Those events belong to David's particular story and should not be turned into a formula for predicting how God will respond to every repentant sinner. But they make one point unmistakably clear: Forgiveness is real. Consequences can also be real. When the broken situation was partly or entirely created by personal sin, the faithful response is not: 'BUT God will make everything work out, so what I did does not matter.' The faithful response is: Confess. Repent. Accept responsibility. Make restitution where appropriate. Seek forgiveness. And trust God's mercy.

9. CAN GOD STILL USE SOMEONE WHO HAS FAILED BADLY?

Peter gives a powerful example. Read Luke 22:54-62. Peter had confidently promised loyalty to Jesus. Then, under pressure, he denied knowing Him three times. Peter failed at the exact moment he believed he would be strong. He went out and wept bitterly. But Peter's failure was not the final chapter. Read John 21:15-19. After the resurrection, Jesus met Peter. Three times Jesus asked whether Peter loved Him. Three times Jesus entrusted Peter with care for His people. Peter was not restored because denial was unimportant. He was restored because Jesus is gracious. Peter failed. BUT Jesus did not discard Peter.

10. DOES RESTORATION MEAN PRETENDING THE FAILURE NEVER HAPPENED?

No. Jesus did not pretend Peter never denied Him. Restoration is not denial. Biblical grace brings sin into the light. It allows repentance. It provides forgiveness. And sometimes it opens a path toward renewed usefulness. The scars of failure may remain part of a person's story. But they do not have to become the entire identity of a repentant person. In Christ, failure can be real without being final.

Memory Anchor

Failure may become part of the story. BUT grace can keep failure from becoming the end of the story.

11. WHAT DOES "BUT GOD" HAVE TO DO WITH SALVATION?

Everything. The deepest human problem is not merely difficult circumstances. It is sin. Read Romans 5:6-8. Paul describes humanity as weak and sinful. Then comes one of Scripture's great contrasts: 'BUT God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' God did not wait for sinners to repair themselves. Christ came for sinners.

12. WHAT DOES EPHESIANS 2 SAY?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul begins with devastating language. Human beings are described as dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, living according to sinful desires, and deserving judgment. Then the direction of the passage changes: 'BUT God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...' made believers alive together with Christ. This is far greater than God rescuing someone from a difficult week. The spiritually dead are made alive. The guilty receive grace. Those who cannot save themselves are saved by grace through faith.

13. WHAT IS THE GREATEST "BUT GOD" MOMENT IN SCRIPTURE?

The resurrection of Jesus. Read Acts 13:26-30. Jesus was rejected. Condemned. Killed. Taken down from the cross. Placed in a tomb. Human beings had done their worst. Then Luke records the turn: 'BUT God raised him from the dead.' Everything Christianity claims ultimately depends upon this reality. Jesus did not merely survive in people's memories. God raised Him. Death appeared to have won. BUT God.

14. WHY DOES THE RESURRECTION CHANGE EVERYTHING?

Because death is humanity's greatest earthly enemy. Every human rescue before the resurrection is temporary. Joseph eventually died. The Israelites who crossed the Red Sea eventually died. Naomi died. Ruth died. David died. Peter died. Every earthly rescue eventually encounters death. BUT Jesus rose. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26. The resurrection means death itself will not have the final word over those who belong to Christ. Christian hope is therefore greater than: 'God will improve my circumstances.' Christian hope says: Even if death comes, Christ has already defeated the grave.

15. WHAT SHOULD A CHRISTIAN REMEMBER WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS TO HAVE GONE AWRY?

The present chapter is not the whole story. That does not guarantee knowing what the next chapter will contain. But Scripture gives reasons to trust God. Joseph could not see Egypt's future from the pit. Israel could not see a road through the sea. Naomi could not see David's family line while grieving in Moab. Peter could not see Pentecost while weeping after his denial. The disciples could not see resurrection while Jesus lay in the tomb. Human perspective is limited. God's is not.

QUICK REVIEW - PART ONE

1. Is 'BUT God' a magical biblical phrase? No. It is a memorable way of recognizing a repeated biblical pattern.
2. Did Joseph call his brothers' actions good? No. He called their intention evil, BUT God accomplished good through what happened.



3. What happened at the Red Sea? Israel had no human escape, BUT God opened a way.
4. Does God promise to replace every earthly loss? No.
5. What should happen when our own sin created the problem? Confession, repentance, responsibility, and trust in God's mercy.
6. What happened after Peter denied Jesus? Jesus restored him and entrusted him with renewed service.
7. What does Ephesians 2 say about spiritually dead sinners? 'BUT God,' rich in mercy and love, makes believers alive with Christ.
8. What is the greatest 'BUT God' moment? Jesus was killed and buried, BUT God raised Him from the dead.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

16. DOES ROMANS 8:28 MEAN EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IS GOOD?

No. Read Romans 8:28 carefully. Paul does not say: 'All things are good.' He says that God works in all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. There is a major difference. Cancer is not good. Abuse is not good. Betrayal is not good. Death is an enemy. Sin is not good. God's ability to work within circumstances does not transform evil into righteousness. Genesis 50:20 makes the distinction especially clear. Joseph says: 'You meant evil against me, BUT God meant it for good.' Evil remains evil. BUT God remains capable of accomplishing good.

17. WHAT IS THE "GOOD" IN ROMANS 8:28?

The next verse helps answer. Read Romans 8:29. God's purpose includes believers being 'conformed to the image of his Son.' That means Romans 8:28 should not be reduced to: 'Something bad happened, so God will give me something materially better.' Sometimes the good God produces includes greater Christlikeness, deeper faith, endurance, wisdom, compassion, freedom from idols, or opportunities to serve others. Romans 8 eventually points beyond present suffering toward final glory. The ultimate good is much larger than comfortable circumstances.

18. WHAT IF NO GOOD IS VISIBLE YET?

Scripture contains people who waited. Abraham waited. Joseph waited. Israel waited. David waited. The exiles waited. God's people waited for the Messiah. Some biblical promises unfolded across generations. Hebrews 11 even describes faithful people who died without receiving everything promised during their earthly lives. Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 39-40. Faith does not require pretending the answer has already arrived. Sometimes faith says: 'I cannot see what God is doing. BUT God remains trustworthy.'

Memory Anchor

Faith does not require seeing the resolution. It requires knowing the One who holds the story.

19. DOES GOD ALWAYS CAUSE THE SITUATION THAT WENT WRONG?

This question requires care. Scripture teaches that God is sovereign. Nothing ultimately escapes His rule. But Scripture also distinguishes God's holy character from human sin. James 1:13 says God does not tempt people with evil. People make sinful choices. Natural suffering occurs in a creation subjected to corruption. Other people may cause harm. Sometimes Scripture explicitly reveals God's purpose behind an event. At other times it does not. Christians should therefore be cautious about confidently declaring why a particular tragedy happened. Trust in God's sovereignty does not require claiming knowledge God has not revealed.

20. WHAT ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF BAD DECISIONS?

God's grace does not always remove them. A forgiven crime may still carry a legal sentence. A forgiven betrayal may still damage trust. A forgiven financial decision may still create debt. A forgiven addiction may still leave physical or relational consequences. A forgiven word cannot always be unheard. This is important because 'BUT God' can be misused to avoid responsibility. Grace is not permission to pretend choices do not matter. Sometimes God's redemptive work happens while consequences remain.

21. CAN GOD REDEEM SOMETHING WITHOUT RESTORING IT TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE?

Yes. Redemption and reversal are not always identical. Sometimes restoration does involve returning something that was lost. But sometimes God creates a faithful future that does not reproduce the former situation. A widow may remain widowed. A broken relationship may not be restored. A lost opportunity may never return. A physical injury may remain. A painful history cannot be erased. Yet God can still produce faithfulness, wisdom, compassion, service, healing of the heart, deeper dependence upon Him, and new opportunities for love. Christian hope does not require returning life to an earlier version of itself.

22. SHOULD "BUT GOD" BE USED TO EXPLAIN SOMEONE ELSE'S SUFFERING?

Very carefully. There is a major difference between a suffering person saying: 'I cannot understand this, BUT God is faithful,' and someone standing outside the suffering saying: 'BUT God! You should be happy because He is going to use this.' The first may be an expression of faith. The second may become insensitive. Job's friends demonstrate how harmful confident explanations can become when people do not actually know why suffering occurred. Read Job 42:7. God rebuked Job's friends because they had not spoken rightly about Him. Sometimes the most faithful ministry is presence, listening, prayer, practical help, protection, grief, and refusing to invent explanations God has not provided.

Pastoral Safeguard



Never use 'BUT God' to pressure someone to stop grieving, remain in an abusive situation, avoid reporting wrongdoing, reconcile prematurely, or pretend serious harm did not occur. God's ability to redeem evil does not remove the responsibility to confront evil. Hope and truth belong together.

23. WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS, "EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON"?

That phrase may express trust in God's sovereignty, but it can also imply more knowledge than Scripture gives. Sometimes Scripture reveals the reason behind an event. Sometimes it does not. Joseph eventually understood something of God's purpose. The book of Job never records God explaining to Job all the heavenly events revealed to the reader. Christians can confidently say: 'God is sovereign.' 'God is good.' 'God can redeem.' 'God will ultimately defeat evil.' Christians cannot always confidently say: 'I know exactly why God allowed this particular thing to happen.'

24. WHAT DOES THE MAN BORN BLIND TEACH ABOUT EXPLAINING SUFFERING?

Read John 9:1-7. Jesus' disciples saw a man who had been blind from birth and immediately asked: 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Their question assumed that the suffering must be traceable to a particular person's sin. Jesus rejected that explanation. He did not allow the disciples to turn another person's suffering into a simple equation. Scripture certainly teaches that suffering exists in a world affected by sin, and sometimes specific choices do produce specific consequences. But John 9 warns against assuming that every individual hardship can be explained by identifying someone's particular wrongdoing. Jesus redirected attention away from speculation and toward what God would do. The man's blindness was real. The disciples did not understand it. BUT God was not absent from the story.

Memory Anchor

Not knowing why something happened does not mean God is absent from what happens next.

25. CAN GOD BRING GOOD OUT OF HUMAN EVIL WITHOUT APPROVING THE EVIL?

Yes. This pattern appears repeatedly in Scripture. Joseph's brothers betrayed him. BUT God preserved life. Pharaoh oppressed Israel. BUT God delivered His people and displayed His power. Human authorities crucified Jesus. BUT God accomplished redemption and raised Christ from the dead. God's sovereignty is so great that human evil cannot force Him into becoming evil in order to overcome it. God remains holy while defeating purposes opposed to Him. For a fuller treatment of this distinction, see 3Nails Study #226.

26. CAN GOD USE MY WORST FAILURE?

He can. But that statement needs an important qualification. No one should deliberately sin because: 'God can use it later.' Read Romans 6:1-2. Paul rejects that reasoning. Grace does not make sin useful enough to pursue. But when sin has already occurred and genuine repentance follows, failure does not place a person beyond God's mercy. Peter is one example. Paul is another. Before becoming an apostle, Paul persecuted Christians. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Paul never called that persecution good. Instead, he treated his life as evidence of Christ's extraordinary mercy. The message is not: 'Sin boldly because God will use it.' It is: 'No repentant sinner is beyond the reach of Christ's grace.'

27. WHAT IF I CANNOT FIX WHAT I DID?

Some damage cannot be undone. A person may confess and still be unable to restore everything that was lost. Biblical repentance does what can faithfully be done. Confess honestly. Seek forgiveness without demanding it. Make restitution where possible. Accept appropriate consequences. Change behavior. Seek accountability. Then entrust what cannot be repaired to God. Human inability to reverse the past does not limit God's ability to work in the future.

28. DOES GOD SOMETIMES PREVENT THE SITUATION FROM GETTING WORSE?

Yes. God's providence is not visible only when something dramatic happens. Sometimes His mercy appears through restraint. A plan fails before greater harm occurs. A lie is exposed. Someone intervenes. A door closes. Wisdom arrives before another bad decision. A person receives help. Scripture also contains examples of God restraining sinful action. Read Genesis 20:1-7. Not every act of providence looks like dramatic rescue. Sometimes the 'BUT God' is that the disaster did not become as great as it could have become.

29. WHAT ABOUT PAUL'S "THORN IN THE FLESH"?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul repeatedly asked God to remove his thorn. God did not give Paul the answer he requested. Instead, God told him: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' This is crucial for understanding biblical hope. Sometimes: BUT God removed the problem. Sometimes: BUT God provided a way through the problem. And sometimes: BUT God gave sufficient grace while the problem remained. God's faithfulness cannot be measured only by whether circumstances change.

Memory Anchor

Sometimes God changes the situation. Sometimes God sustains His people within it. Both can display His faithfulness.

30. WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE ANSWER TO STORIES THAT NEVER GET FIXED IN THIS LIFE?

Resurrection. Read Revelation 21:1-5. Scripture does not end with every Christian receiving a comfortable earthly life. It ends with God dwelling with His people. Death is gone. Mourning is gone. Crying is gone. Pain is gone. God makes all things new. Some stories will not receive complete resolution before death. Christian hope can survive that reality because death itself is not the end. Jesus rose. And those who belong to Him will be raised.

31. WHY IS THE RESURRECTION BETTER THAN A SIMPLE "COMEBACK STORY"?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

A comeback story usually means someone loses something and later regains success. The Gospel is much larger. Jesus does not merely recover from a setback. He defeats death. Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. The resurrection announces that humanity's deepest enemies - sin, death, judgment, and separation from God - will not finally triumph over those who are in Christ. The Gospel is not: 'Life went badly, BUT God will make you successful.' The Gospel is: 'We were sinners unable to save ourselves, BUT God loved us. Christ died for us. Christ rose. And salvation is offered through Him.'

32. HOW DOES THE GOSPEL CHANGE THE WAY CHRISTIANS FACE BROKEN SITUATIONS?

Christians can grieve without surrendering hope. They can confess failure without believing grace has disappeared. They can confront evil without believing evil is ultimate. They can endure uncertainty without pretending to understand everything. They can lose earthly things without believing everything is lost. They can face death knowing Christ has already entered the grave and come out alive. Christian hope is not optimism. Optimism says: 'Things will probably get better.' Christian hope says: 'Even when circumstances do not get better in the way hoped, God remains faithful - and resurrection is coming.'

HOW "BUT GOD" POINTS TO JESUS

Every smaller rescue in Scripture eventually exposes the need for a greater rescue. Joseph preserved people through famine. BUT Joseph eventually died. Moses led Israel through the sea. BUT that generation eventually died. David received forgiveness. BUT David eventually died. Peter was restored. BUT Peter eventually died. Humanity needed more than another temporary rescue. Humanity needed victory over sin and death.

That is where the Gospel brings the greatest turn in the story. Romans 5 describes sinners unable to rescue themselves: 'BUT God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' Ephesians 2 describes people spiritually dead: 'BUT God, being rich in mercy...made us alive together with Christ.' Acts 13 describes Jesus rejected, killed, and buried: 'BUT God raised him from the dead.' There is the center of Christian hope. BUT God loved. BUT God gave mercy. BUT God made alive. BUT God raised Jesus.

The resurrection does not erase the cross. The wounds were real. The death was real. The tomb was real. BUT none of them were final. And because Jesus lives, everyone united to Him has a hope that circumstances cannot ultimately destroy.

Memory Anchor

The greatest 'BUT God' is the Gospel: We could not save ourselves. BUT God acted in Christ.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

WHEN LIFE GOES AWRY: Tell the truth about what happened. Faith does not require pretending everything is fine.

WHEN THE PROBLEM IS BEYOND YOUR ABILITY: Do what faithfulness requires and entrust what you cannot control to God.

WHEN YOU CAUSED THE PROBLEM: Do not hide behind providence. Confess. Repent. Accept responsibility. Repair what can be repaired. Trust God with what cannot.

WHEN SOMEONE ELSE HURT YOU: Do not call evil good merely because God may eventually redeem something from it. Truth and hope can exist together.

WHEN GOD DOES NOT CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES: Ask for grace to remain faithful within them. Paul's unanswered prayer did not mean God had abandoned him.

WHEN YOU CANNOT SEE WHAT GOD IS DOING: Do not invent an explanation. Trust what Scripture clearly reveals about His character.

WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS SUFFERING: Be slow to explain. Listen. Pray. Help. Grieve with them. Do not turn 'BUT God' into a slogan that minimizes pain.

WHEN YOUR FAILURE FEELS FINAL: Remember Peter. Repentance does not guarantee restoration to every former role or relationship. BUT failure does not place a repentant sinner beyond Christ's mercy.

WHEN DEATH FEELS LIKE THE END: Remember the tomb. Jesus died. BUT God raised Him from the dead.

A SIMPLE "BUT GOD" SELF-CHECK

AM I TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?

AM I TRYING TO CALL SOMETHING GOOD THAT SCRIPTURE WOULD CALL EVIL?

AM I TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY OWN CHOICES?

AM I EXPECTING GOD TO PROMISE AN EARTHLY OUTCOME HE HAS NOT ACTUALLY PROMISED?

CAN I TRUST GOD EVEN IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT CHANGE?

AM I WILLING TO GRIEVE WITHOUT GIVING UP HOPE?

AM I USING 'BUT God' TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE - OR TO SILENCE LEGITIMATE PAIN?

DO I BELIEVE GOD CAN REDEEM WITHOUT REWINDING THE PAST?

IS MY HOPE ULTIMATELY IN BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES - OR IN THE RISEN JESUS?

QUICK REVIEW - PART TWO

1. Does Romans 8:28 say everything that happens is good? No. It says God works in all things for the good of His people according to His purpose.
2. What is part of the 'good' described in Romans 8? Being conformed to the image of Christ and ultimately sharing in glory.
3. Must Christians always know why suffering happened? No.
4. What does John 9 warn against? Assuming every individual hardship can be explained by identifying a particular person's sin.
5. Does forgiveness always remove consequences? No.
6. Can redemption happen without returning life to exactly what it was before? Yes.
7. Should 'BUT God' be used to silence grief? No.
8. Can God use a repentant person after serious failure? Yes, although restoration does not necessarily mean returning to every previous role.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

9. Did God remove Paul's thorn? No. He gave Paul sufficient grace within weakness.
10. Where does complete restoration ultimately occur? In resurrection and the new creation.
11. What is the greatest 'BUT God' message? Humanity could not save itself, BUT God acted through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

KEY TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

1. 'BUT God' is a useful biblical memory phrase, not a magical formula.
2. God's redemption never requires calling evil good.
3. Joseph's brothers intended evil, BUT God accomplished good.
4. Israel could not open the Red Sea, BUT God made a way.
5. God does not promise to reverse every earthly loss.
6. Grace does not erase personal responsibility.
7. David was forgiven, BUT real consequences remained.
8. Peter failed seriously, BUT Jesus restored him.
9. Forgiveness and earthly consequences can exist together.
10. Romans 8:28 does not say everything that happens is good.
11. Christians do not always know why God allows particular suffering.
12. John 9 warns against simplistic explanations that assign every hardship to a particular person's sin.
13. Redemption does not always mean returning life to what it was before.
14. Sometimes God changes circumstances; sometimes He gives sufficient grace within them.
15. 'BUT God' must never be used to minimize abuse, grief, trauma, or wrongdoing.
16. Some stories will not receive full resolution in this life.
17. The resurrection guarantees that death will not have the final word for those who belong to Christ.
18. The greatest human problem is sin, and the greatest 'BUT God' is the Gospel.

FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- The situation may be beyond human repair. BUT God is never beyond His ability to redeem.
- 'BUT God' does not deny what happened. It declares that what happened does not outrank God.
- 'BUT God' never requires calling evil good. It means evil cannot prevent God from being God.
- Failure may become part of the story. BUT grace can keep failure from becoming the end of the story.
- Faith does not require seeing the resolution. It requires knowing the One who holds the story.
- Not knowing why something happened does not mean God is absent from what happens next.
- Sometimes God changes the situation. Sometimes God sustains His people within it. Both can display His faithfulness.
- The greatest 'BUT God' is the Gospel: We could not save ourselves. BUT God acted in Christ.

SCRIPTURE PATH FOR FURTHER STUDY

JOSEPH - EVIL DID NOT GET THE FINAL WORD: Genesis 37; Genesis 39-45; Genesis 50:15-21

ISRAEL - NO HUMAN WAY FORWARD: Exodus 14:10-31

NAOMI AND RUTH - GRIEF BEFORE THE REST OF THE STORY: Ruth 1-4

DAVID - FORGIVENESS AND CONSEQUENCES: 2 Samuel 11-18; Psalm 51

PETER - FAILURE AND RESTORATION: Luke 22:31-34; Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-19

SUFFERING WITHOUT SIMPLE EXPLANATIONS: Job 1-2; Job 42:7; John 9:1-7

PAUL - GRACE WITHIN UNCHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

GOD WORKING THROUGH SUFFERING: Romans 8:18-39; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; Hebrews 11

'BUT GOD' AND SALVATION: Romans 5:6-11; Ephesians 2:1-10

THE GREATEST 'BUT GOD': Acts 13:26-39; 1 Corinthians 15

THE FINAL RESTORATION: Revelation 21:1-5

FINAL REFLECTION

Some stories in Scripture reach moments where everything appears to have gone wrong. Joseph is in a pit. Then slavery. Then prison. Israel is trapped between an army and the sea. Naomi walks home grieving her husband and sons. David stands exposed by his own sin. Peter hears the rooster crow after denying Jesus. A man has lived from birth with a condition other people are trying to explain. The disciples watch Jesus die. A stone is rolled across a tomb. Humanly speaking, these are endings. There is no obvious path forward.

And Scripture never asks readers to pretend those moments were painless. Joseph calls evil evil. Naomi grieves. David confesses. Peter weeps. Jesus refuses to reduce another person's suffering to an easy explanation. Jesus truly dies. Biblical faith does not survive by denying reality. It survives by recognizing that reality is larger than what human beings can presently see.

Joseph's brothers meant evil. BUT God meant good. Israel could not divide the sea. BUT God made a way. Naomi believed she had returned empty. BUT God had not finished the story. David sinned grievously and suffered consequences. BUT God's mercy was still real. Peter failed Jesus publicly. BUT Jesus restored him. The disciples did not understand why a man had been born blind. BUT God was not absent from what happened next. Humanity was powerless to rescue itself from sin. BUT God demonstrated His love through Christ. Human beings were spiritually dead. BUT God, rich in mercy, made believers alive with Christ.

Jesus was rejected. Jesus was crucified. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. BUT God raised Him from the dead. That final statement changes every other story.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

It does not mean every disease will be healed before death. It does not mean every broken relationship will be restored. It does not mean every financial loss will be recovered. It does not mean every unanswered question will receive an explanation. It does not mean every consequence of sin disappears. It means none of those things are God. None of them rule history. None of them can cancel the promises of God. And for those who belong to Jesus, not even death is permanent.

Sometimes God opens the sea. Sometimes He changes the circumstances. Sometimes He restores what was lost. Sometimes He creates a new future that looks nothing like the past. Sometimes He refuses to give the explanation people are demanding. Sometimes He says: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' And sometimes the believer dies still waiting. BUT God.

The Christian story does not end at the grave because Jesus' story did not end at the grave. That is why biblical hope can look directly at suffering without pretending it is good. It can look directly at failure without pretending it does not matter. It can look directly at questions without pretending every answer is known. It can look directly at death without pretending death is harmless. And then it can look beyond all of them toward the risen Christ.

The greatest 'BUT God' is not: 'My life fell apart, BUT God made me successful.' It is not: 'I lost something, BUT God gave me something better.' It is not: 'I suffered, BUT God explained everything.' The greatest 'BUT God' is: We were sinners who could not save ourselves. BUT God loved us. BUT God showed mercy. BUT God sent Christ. Christ died. Christ was buried. BUT God raised Him from the dead.

And because Jesus lives, every person who belongs to Him can face the unfinished chapters of life knowing that the Author has not lost control of the story.

Final Memory Anchor

The circumstances may say: 'It is over.' Failure may say: 'You cannot come back from this.' Suffering may say: 'Nothing good can remain.' Unanswered questions may say: 'You cannot trust what you do not understand.' Death may say: 'This is the end.' BUT God. God remains sovereign. God remains good. God remains merciful. Christ is risen. And for those who belong to Him, even the grave does not get the final word.