



One Day in May

We walked slowly into the funeral home together amidst a shower of cold rain and gray ash. Following him in, I can still see the collection of raindrops and ash making a paste on the shoulders of my father's black pinstripe suit. My best friend, Tim, had died after being struck by a car a few days earlier. He died while delivering newspapers from the back of a bicycle on his early morning paper route. We were there, on that bleak day in May, to express our sorrows, to pay our last respects, and to say goodbye to Tim.

A few days earlier, I had learned the pure joy of experiencing the natural intersection of blind chance, sport and self-discovery. As a late and last entrant to participate in the Mile Run at a local youth group track meet, my life was about to take off. After we'd all lined up along a curved white line and the gun had been fired, I finished well for a twelve-year-old running against much older and more experienced competitors. Although I didn't win the race on that one day in May, I'd found something I would come to make my own.

The day was May 18th, 1980. That day was the day my best friend died. That day was the day I found passion, purpose and new identity as I stepped onto an all-weather track. May 18, 1980 was also the day that Mt. St. Helens erupted into a billion little pieces in southwest Washington state. On that one day in May, all three events took place at exactly the same time.

You may ask, why would the

eruption of Mt. St. Helens in southwest Washington state matter to you from all the way across the country in western Pennsylvania? As my father and I walked into that funeral home to say goodbye to Tim, ash from the eruption of Mt. St. Helens rained down on us.

The jet-stream had carried ash all the way across the country to western Pennsylvania in just a few days. As the ash fell, mixing itself into a cold May rain, I was left with nothing but a series of troubling questions:

Why had this happened to Tim? Why did Tim's life have to end? Why did his life end on that one day in May, just as my life was really beginning to take off? Was there any fairness to any of it at all?

As a boy of only twelve years-of-age at the time, I had to learn that there are just some questions for which we have no answers. As the truth of it all hit home, I felt as if my life had erupted into a billion little pieces.

For reasons beyond me, I've had forty-three years since that one day in May to wrestle with those questions. I've had forty-three years of life that my best friend, Tim, has not. As is often the case, those questions have led to more questions: Was what happened all those years ago just a part of the plan of God? What was God's will? Was there purpose behind Tim's life ending, while my life, in a sense, had just begun?

As a Christ-follower, I always try to allow room that our Lord may well be at work in the events of our lives. Certainly, our Savior can and does redeem everything that

happens to us in our lives for good. I believe nothing in Christ Jesus is ever wasted or lost. Yet, I still wrestle with the questions.

The wisdom of the book of Ecclesiastes tells us that *there is a time for every purpose* (experience) *under heaven* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). We all know these poetic and practical verses so well. As I read them, I see that life seems to be a mixture of both the good and the bad; a juxtaposition, if you will, between that which gives to us and that which takes from us. As to a reason for why life is this way, the author gives us no definitive answer. Life is as life is, as I read it. And that, we must come to terms with.

As such, I think about that one day in May every May 18th. To be honest, I think about that day much more frequently than that. In my mid-50s now, I'm deeply grateful for the passion, purpose and limited identity that came to me through running, although those days are long behind me now. And, I wish that Tim would've had the same opportunities in a longer life that I've enjoyed. What I'm most grateful for is my life in Christ Jesus, and that one day, I believe I will see Tim once again, and will have the chance to ask our Lord and Savior the questions for which I've had no answers. Tim and I will be able to ask those questions together. Until then, as Christ-followers, we wait and hope and try to make sense of the days we've been given. We rest in him, knowing that one day, all will make sense. □

—Ed Dunn