

In South Africa, news reports recite a litany of stories related to crime, corruption, trade union strikes, political unrest, and other human tragedies. At times the bad news feels so overwhelming that I have to “unplug” from the media.

How surprisingly familiar it feels to read of people bringing Jesus a “breaking” news story, one of murder and persecution. In their conversation, another news item is raised—the tower collapse that killed eighteen. The people are trying to make sense of unexpected death and tragedy, as each of us does when we watch the news. Interestingly, Jesus doesn’t give them clear-cut answers, except to say that the suffering and death did not result from the victims’ sins. Jesus does, however, use the stories as a call to self-examination and repentance.

The parable that follows reminds us that fruitfulness indicates genuine transformation. Repentance and productivity are expected. Like the gardener in the parable, Jesus patiently tends us—watering, fertilizing and pruning our lives, nurturing us to bear fruit for him. Yet, just as the fig tree, we may remain unfruitful and be cut down.

Yes, we live in a world inundated with tragedy and hardship. From Jesus we learn that our appropriate response does not involve discouragement or denial. Rather, we bring our sorrow and confusion to him; we examine our lives closely, ensuring that we are allowing the Holy Spirit to develop fruit in us.

The antidote to the bad news in the world is for Christ’s followers to live fruitful, righteous, and engaging lives and to bring light into a dark world. As we do this, we will make some joy-filled breaking news stories of our own!

Lord, help me not to be discouraged or indifferent to the happenings around me. May my life reflect your love and light to a hurting world. Amen.