

2. I feel guilty for feeling relieved that it wasn't me.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

It's a completely understandable reaction. It's called "survivor guilt". It has the potential to do a lot of harm, especially when matched by an equally understandable sense of resentment on the part of those who have been bereaved.

We're all different, and not everyone will identify with this; but many West Cumbrians felt threatened the other day. In a sense, even those distantly removed from what happened are 'survivors', because it *could have been* any of us. "But it wasn't", we say to ourselves, "Thank goodness".

Where do we go with that feeling? If we try to get on with normal life, at the back of our mind is the question, "How can I just get on with enjoying life when so many local people are in agony?"

But then if we stop living as normal, another question sneaks into our minds: "What have I got to be miserable about when others are suffering so much?"

By the way, I'm aware that anyone who has been bereaved would give anything to have such comparatively trivial dilemmas to deal with.

Guilt is a slippery eel. We often feel guilty about things there is no need to feel guilty about. Other times we don't feel guilty when we should. Survivor guilt is an example of *false* guilt. In other words, there is nothing wrong with feeling relieved if you and your family were spared tragedy last week.

The question is, where will that relief lead? St. Paul, who wrote today's Bible reading, had experienced God's comfort in his life. That turned him into a comforter of others.

In other words, he knew that he had been comforted not just for himself, but for the benefit of others. If that mindset comes out among West Cumbrians, then good things can yet come out of last week's tragedy.

Let me give you an example of someone who survived, and whose survival led him to serve. He was one-time vicar of my last church in London.

During his entire ministry he had a framed ticket on his desk, a ticket for passage to America on the Titanic. It had his name on it. He had been ill in April 1912, and was unable to use it. All his life that ticket was a reminder that each day was a gift to use for the benefit of others.