

“For whoever wishes to save his life... will lose it.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, there was a skinny, 100 lb., high school sophomore by the name of Eugene Orowitz. With a name like that, one would need to have something going for oneself, which, unfortunately, Eugene did not. His name was almost as bad as **“a boy named Sue!”**

At any rate, one day the boys’ gym coach held class in the middle of the track infield. He wanted to show the students how to throw a javelin. After the coach finished his instruction, he let the kids try their hand at it. One by one, they threw the six-foot spear. The longest throw was 30 yds.

When everyone but Eugene had tried it, the coach looked over at him and said:

“You want to try and throw it, Orowitz?”

Eugene nodded.

“Well, go ahead,” he said impatiently.

The other kids laughed at Eugene.

“Hey, Ugly, can you lift it?” one shouted. **“Careful, you might stab yourself!”** shouted another.

A strange feeling came over Eugene, as he stood there holding the long spear. He pictured himself as a young warrior about to do battle with an enemy. He raised the javelin over his head, took six quick steps, and let it fly. It soared 20, 30, 40, 50 yards. Then it crashed into the empty bleachers. Eugene’s throw went twice as far as any of the others!

When Eugene retrieved the javelin, the tip was broken. The amazed coach looked at it and said,

“What the heck, Orowitz, you broke the thing. You might as well take it home with you. It’s no good to the school any longer.”

That summer, Eugene began throwing the javelin in a vacant lot next to his house. Some days, he spent six hours throwing it. By the end of his senior year, Eugene threw the javelin 211 feet, over 70 yards—farther than any high schooler in the nation!

Eugene earned an athletic scholarship to the Univ. of Southern Calif. He began dreaming of the Olympics. Then, one day, he didn’t warm up properly & tore the ligaments in his shoulder. Even with the best of surgery, it put an end to his javelin throwing, his scholarship, and his dreams.

All his hard work went down the drain. It was as if God had slapped him in the face after He performed a minor miracle with his puny, 100-pound body. Eugene dropped out of college and took a menial job in a warehouse somewhere.

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*The tragic story of Eugene Orowitz raises a few vexing questions, namely:*

*Why does God let misfortune wreck the lives of so many good people?*

*Why does He let suffering bring tears to the eyes of so many fine individuals?*

*Why did God let tragedy tear the prize from the hand of Eugene, after he had worked so hard?*

*Perhaps you’ve seen the musical South Pacific. Or maybe you recall its show-stopping song,*

**“Some Enchanted Evening.”** Referring to the mystery of love, the song says that...

**fools can give the reasons, BUT...wise men don’t even try.**

*Well, my friends, the same is true of the mystery of misfortune:*

**Fools can give the reasons, BUT wise men don’t even try.**

*Yet, being a bit of a fool myself, let me suggest one reason. Jesus hints at it in today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Matthew, when he says:*

**“Whoever loses his life for my sake... will find it.”**

I realize what Jesus is saying is incredible, seemingly insane — especially to someone who doesn't have faith! He is saying in effect:

**“Whoever accepts suffering/misfortune in life... (for my sake), will find a whole new/better life.”**

And it will not only be in a world to come, it will be right here in this world, as well. Jesus suggests that it will be a far richer life than the one lost by misfortune or tragedy. In other words, God can use tragedy to guide people into newer and better lives.

**For example**, take the case of Eugene Orowitz. I left him with a menial job in a warehouse. Well, one day, he met a struggling actor, who asked him to help him with his ‘lines.’ Eugene got interested in acting himself & enrolled in an acting school. His big ‘break’ came when he was cast as Little Joe Cartwright. The show ran on T.V. for 14 years—“**Bonanza**.” Later he got the lead role in the long-running show, “**Little House on the Prairie**,” and finally... “**Highway to Heaven**.”

You guessed it, Eugene Orowitz became, none other than, Michael Landon. And today, were Michael Landon alive, he would tell you that the best thing that ever happened to him was the day he tore the ligaments in his shoulder. What seemed a tragedy, at the time, turned out to be an incredible blessing. It guided him into a life that surpassed, by far, the dreams of his old life.

**“So-o, how do we apply this in our own lives?”** you ask. (And you thought I forgot!)

**Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

**If we are a young person**, who dreamed of making the basketball team, **BUT** were ‘cut,’ or didn't ‘make the cut,’ we should pick up our cross & follow Jesus. He can lead us to a far richer life, as he did Michael Landon.

**If we are an older person**, who dreamed of being a success in business, of having the world's greatest family, of having the world's greatest marriage, **BUT** ended up having none of these, we should pick up our cross and follow Jesus. He can mend our broken dreams and lead us to a renewed appreciation of life—a life that we never dreamed possible.

NOW... being perfectly frank, none of this still explains **the mystery of misfortune**. In the end, all we may be able to do when it strikes ...is... trust in Jesus, Who says:

**“Whoever loses his life for my sake, (i.e. with faith), will ...find ...it.”**

We may **never** understand the **mystery of misfortune** in this world, **BUT** this much **is** certain: we **will** understand it in heaven. I can testify to the above, for I have experienced all of this in my own life and it is the reason why I am standing here before you this morning/afternoon with a happy heart! I now close with this poem. It is an attempt to tell us how to deal with the inscrutable in our lives.

**“Up in the attic of an old house, as raindrops pattered down on the roof,**

**I sat paging through an old schoolbook.**

**I came to a page that was folded down. Across it was written in my own childish hand:**

**‘The teacher says we should leave this for now. ‘Tis too hard to understand.’**

**I unfolded the page and read it. Then I smiled and nodded my head and said:**

**‘The teacher was right; now I understand.’**

**There are many pages in the book of life that are ‘hard to understand.’**

**All we can do is fold them down and write:**

**‘The Master says to leave this for now. ‘Tis too hard to understand.’**

**Then, someday... in heaven, we'll unfold the pages, reread them, and say,**

**‘The Master was right; now I understand.’ ”**

May our Masterful God, our Abba, bless you,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.