

# Dealing with Disappointment with God

## Introduction

Good morning. We are in the midst of a sermon series called – “Great Questions” and have been addressing some questions that you have submitted. And they have been great questions – and Sean has done a nice job tackling them. Over the next three weeks we are going to look at three related questions.

How do I handle disappointment  
    With God  
    With Others (Christians specifically)  
    With myself

We are going to look at the causes and then look to God’s word for some answers. Today we are going to look at disappointment with God.

## Prayer

Let’s open in prayer –  
Father – this is a very difficult question – but it’s a great question. I would ask that today – use this time - by the power of your Holy Spirit to touch those who are deeply disappointed with you. And Father – for those of us who are just one troubling event from being disappointed, use these words as a guard rail against going over that cliff – In Jesus name.

## The Importance of This Message

This is an extremely important topic because most of us – no matter where we fall on the spectrum of faith – at one time or another have been disappointed with God. In the past couple weeks I have heard from people ranging from fully devoted followers of Jesus to full skeptics. We all can articulate some form of disappointment with God. You may be here today and not even believe in God or haven’t quite figured out the Jesus thing – but I suspect there was a time when you did look to God and became disappointed. Very often disappointment with God can lead us away from the faith. I got a note this week from a strong Christian brother who has been out of work for more than ten years. He felt that God had abandoned him. He was angry, bitter, disillusioned and he felt betrayed. He said:

I had no desire to be with Him anymore. I almost chucked the whole Christian thing because “what was the point?”

Learning about this is very important for all us – for those of us who are followers of Jesus – to know how to handle disappointment with God so that it doesn’t derail our

walk with God. For those of us on the fringe – perhaps learning God’s perspective can help us begin or rejoin the faith journey.

## My Experience with Disappointment with God

My first big disappointment with God came when our youngest daughter was 15. A couple of years earlier she had some health problems that we were told were going to plague her for the rest of her life. My father’s heart welled up inside me and I said “No!” – I don’t want this to happen to my little girl. And I committed myself to some serious prayer. After about 3 days, we got a call from the doctor telling us that the irreversible condition had inexplicably reversed.

So fast forward two years and she again got sick and no doctor could diagnose the problem. Abby once said, that she had so much blood work that she not only knew the names of the technicians and their children’s names – but their dog’s names. She missed a very large chunk of high school.

We prayed and prayed – for 4 years – Where was God in all this? Why didn’t He answer? He answered before through an incredible miracle – why not now?

## How Other’s have experienced Disappointment with God

Many of you have experienced this. Some of you are in that place now. I want you to know that you are not alone. No matter where you fall on the spectrum of faith – you can experience disappointment with God. C.S. Lewis was one of the greats at helping us understand and defend the faith. He had written scores of book addressing many of our questions about God. Yet when his wife died of cancer just a few short years after they married, listen to some of the things he said:

He questions God’s promise to help us in our time of trouble:

Meanwhile, where is God?... [If you] go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. And after that silence.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever felt like that? God being silent in the face of your need?

He even questions God’s character:

What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, ‘good?’ Doesn’t all the *prima facie* evidence suggest exactly the opposite?

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<sup>1</sup> *A Grief Observed*

The conclusion I dread is not, “So, there’s no God after all” but “So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.”<sup>2</sup>

But our disappointment doesn’t have to spring just from tragedies. I talked with two of you in the past couple of weeks who were disappointed with God because you felt He had led you to do something – and it didn’t work out and it proved to be very costly.

## Defining Disappointment

Before we open the Word of God - Let’s start with a definition:

Disappointment happens when our experience of something doesn’t meet our expectations.

This happens in two basic ways. With people, we can be disappointed when they don’t do what they say they are going to do. Your Dad promised to come to your ball game and then doesn’t show – for the fourth time.

Another way disappointment happens is when someone acts outside of their character as you know it. One of you shared with me this week about a friend who was a model follower of Jesus and you found out that they have been having an affair for the last three years. That’s disappointing.

Both of these happen with us and God. We get disappointed with God when we hold on to one of his promises and He doesn’t come through – His promise to comfort – to protect – to guide.

### And

We get disappointed with Him when He acts or doesn’t act in ways that are consistent with our understanding of his character – His love – His faithfulness – His care.

But here the comparison breaks down between God and us in two ways. We break promises. God doesn’t. So if I am disappointed with God because he has not fulfilled one of His promises – it is because either

- I am not understanding the promise – or
- It wasn’t a promise for me at this time – or
- I haven’t waited long enough for it to be fulfilled - or
- It wasn’t a promise at all

And the comparison also breaks down because, although our character may not be as good as it appears, God’s character is flawless. So if we believe that God is acting out of character, it means that our understanding of God is not correct. And we need to go

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

back to the place where His character is revealed and His promises made – and that's the Bible.

## Scripture

For our scripture passage today we are going to look at the entire Bible. I hope that you're comfortable. The tech team was real glad it was summer so that they didn't have to make slides to cover the 31,102 verses. But if I read fast, we shouldn't be here more than a week or two.

Well maybe that isn't such a good idea. But we do need to look at all the Bible. We need to find the real God. We need allow God to smash our false expectations – to tip over the house of flash cards containing our sound bites about God - to clarify "Who is God any way – and what can I expect from Him?" And to do that we need to soak in all the scriptures – not just take the stories we like – not just read the promises that we desire – but all the promises and all within the context of the lives of real people.

## "Not Like Us"

One of the most fundamental things we learn about God as we look at the whole of scripture is that He is wholly other from us. He tells the prophet Isaiah:

Is 55 <sup>8</sup>"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup>"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

In all our dealings with God we have to start with this premise. He's not like us. We have our own understanding of what it means to love, to be good, to be faithful and so our expectations are that He is going to act like we act – think like we think.. But God says "I don't do it your way. I don't think the way you think. I don't act the way you act. We are not even close."

Imagine living with someone who is different from you in every way possible. Okay some of you are saying that you don't have to imagine it. But I am talking really different. Think about how many disappointments happen because you are different. Now multiply those differences a million times. This is why disappointment with God is rampant.

## What's the Solution?

So what can we do? We need to challenge our expectations in light of who God really is

If we look at the totality of scripture we see woven through the entire Bible a God who deeply cares for His people – one who will go to great lengths to love us – who gets involved in the lives of His people – to the point of the pinnacle of His involvement – when He becomes a man in Jesus. We also find a God who doesn't just observe our suffering from a distance - He enters into our suffering.

But if we read more carefully – we see some other more troubling aspects of God. For example:

## God's Timing

Remember when the disciples were in the boat and a storm came up. They were in big trouble and they were crying out. Jesus comes walking on the water – and Mark writes: and He intended to pass by them.<sup>3</sup>

What? His disciples are in trouble. Jesus is walking in the neighborhood “and He intended to pass them by?” What kind of friend is that?

How about the non-Jewish woman who came to Jesus and Jesus called her a dog and said that He wouldn't heal her because she was a dog?<sup>4</sup>

What about with Lazarus? Jesus had healed many people. Lazarus was one of His best friends. When Jesus heard that he was sick – what did He do?

So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.<sup>5</sup>

Whoa! What are you doing Jesus? Lazarus needs you now.

You might want to say in these cases – “but they worked out.” But maybe your difficult situation is going to work itself out someday too. The question is - how long do you have to wait for God to come through?

For the disciples in the boat and the non-Jewish woman – it was just a few minutes. For Lazarus, a few days. Admittedly - not a very pleasant few days.

In our daughter's case, after one year of intensive prayer – four years of seeing no answers – God told me to stop praying – she was healed. Two weeks later she was healed. It worked out.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 6:48

<sup>4</sup> Matt 15:26-28

<sup>5</sup> John 11:6

It doesn't always happen that quickly – if you call 4 years “quickly.” But how about King David? God anoints him as king and then allows Saul to chase David around for 14 years.

Or how about Abraham? God tells Abraham that he is going to have a son and then waits 25 years to fulfill it? Is that what it means to be the friend of God?

Or how about the children of Israel in Egypt? Why does God wait 400 years to hear the cries of His people? O He delivers them mightily – but there was a lot of suffering that went on in those 400 years – and it seemed to the people of Israel that He was silent. Is this consistent with our understanding of a God who is actively involved with His people?

All of these examples deal with God's timing. God is re-defining for us what it means to be a “promise keeper.” You and I wouldn't try this at home.

## God's Character and His Promises

But it isn't just the timing of God's actions that causes disappointment. Why does God allow Pharaoh to kill all the male Hebrew babies yet spares Moses?

Why does God allow Job to lose all of his children? In order to win a wager with Satan?

Why does God allow every one of his faithful apostles suffer a martyr's death when He had promised them in John 16:

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.<sup>6</sup>

Do you think Stephen was thinking about that promise as he was stoned to death? “Nothing will injure you.”

Do you think Peter was thinking about that promise as he was crucified upside down outside of Rome? “Nothing will injure you?”

We must be very careful with the promises of God – some are universal – and apply to all of us for all time. Some are conditional and are fulfilled based on our fulfilling our part. And many are temporary and local – just for a period of time for a specific place. And some mean something different than what we see on the surface.

We also must be careful with our understanding of God's character. One of our false expectations about God is that if He is loving and caring, He would not let bad things happen to us. Sean addressed this a couple weeks ago. And we can hear his sermon and nod our heads – but when bad things happen to us – we are all like C.S. Lewis and

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:19

question God's very integrity. We must soak in all of the scripture and all God's promises.

Here's one of the promises of God we don't like to have in our promise box. Jesus told us:

In the world you will have tribulation;<sup>7</sup> [and trouble]

Please hear me on this. The wonderful peace, prosperity and affluence that we have experienced here in the West have dulled us to the way things really are and lulled us into thinking that God is different than He really is. For with all of the wonderful promises of God, He has not promised us that we will be spared from tragedy, illness, cancer, and death.

Let me demonstrate this to you. Think about the names Jesus gives the Holy Spirit:

Helper  
Counselor  
Comforter

Have you ever thought about why Jesus gives the Holy Spirit those names? When do you need a helper, a counselor, or a comforter? When you are in trouble!! If we were to be spared trouble, God would not have so named the Holy Spirit.

## God's Silence

But maybe you're saying right now

Okay Bob, maybe I misinterpreted some of the God's promises. Maybe I don't understand His ways and the things He allows to happen to me. Maybe I don't need to know the "Why's." But He said that He has promised to be with us and to never leave us. I went through something like C.S. Lewis did and it seemed to me that God bolted the door shut. He was not a helper – He was no counselor – He was not Comforter.

Here is my understanding of the way this works. There are two things that I have noticed when God appears silent and distant in my life.

The first is that when I have become so worked up and so emotionally and physically into the problem I am experiencing, I don't experience God's presence or hear his voice. When Abby was sick those 4 years, it took a long time for me to be able to hear from God again because I was so disappointed. We are like a drowning man who cannot be saved because he is flailing about so much. We don't hear or experience God because our focus is on the problem.

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<sup>7</sup> John 16:33

The other time God appears silent to me / when I cannot experience His presence is when I have lost faith that He will speak. The Bible tells us:

he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.<sup>8</sup>

### The Necessity of Faith

And that should tell us something. At the heart of every one of the disappointing stories I have cited – there is one thread that runs through all of them. God was seeking a people with faith. God is seeking a people with a raw faith and trust in Him no matter what the circumstances. God is using horrific situations to test and to strengthen our faith.

I don't understand why God waited 400 years to deliver his people. I don't know why God waited 25 years to fulfill His promise to Abraham. I don't know why He waited 4 years to heal our daughter – but I know He was looking for faith.

### Faith in the Midst of Disappointment

Jesus tells a story about a woman who had bad things happen to her. And she repeatedly seeks relief. Jesus ends that parable:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?<sup>9</sup>

God is looking for faith. He wants to find faith when He comes back because our faith is very important to Him. And that can set us up for disappointment. Let me try to illustrate this.

We get disappointed with another person when they choose for us one or more good things over some good thing that I wanted. For example, when I was 5 years old, I desperately wanted a pony for my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. And there is nothing wrong with a pony. It's a good thing. .But my parents chose what they considered some higher goods. They chose the economic stability of the family given how much this pony would cost to obtain and maintain. They chose the good of following the zoning laws in our town over the good of giving their son a pony. And on my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was disappointed.

God does the same with us. And because His ways are totally different from ours you can guarantee that the things He values as “good” are far different than what we value. And when we look at the entire Bible, we see that God values that the development of our faith as a higher good more than almost anything else - our material well being<sup>10</sup> -

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:8

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 1:<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup>These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even



our health<sup>11</sup> and our desire for a tranquil environment. Over and over again we see God choosing to allow His people to go through trouble to develop their faith.

In talking about Abraham, Paul gives us a curious insight into God ways that we don't often heard preached on. Paul says that God:

calls things that are not as though they were.<sup>12</sup>

Think about that with me. God speaks about things that are not present as if they were present. He speaks about things that have not happened as if they have happened. Here is one of the areas where His ways depart from ours. If you or I did that we would be locked up. But God does this because He values our faith more than almost anything else. Some of you may remember one of the definitions of faith I gave several years ago

Faith is acting like it is so  
even when it's not so  
in order that it might be so  
just because God said so.<sup>13</sup>

God is seeking that kind of faith. Notice that in this definition faith is not just a right alignment of our neurons in our brain – just as Sean said last week – it involves action / doing. And He is not asking us to “just believe.” We believe in order that it might be so – things happen when we believe.

God is calling you and I to:

A faith that says with Job:

Even though He kills me I will love Him

A faith that says with David

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil  
because You are with me

And that's the phrase I want to leave you with today – “Even though.” We need to adopt this as a masthead for our faith

Even though such and such happens – I will trust God –  
Even though He doesn't look good I will trust that He is Good  
Even though I don't feel His presence - I will trust that He is with Me

I want to close by having you take these cards and pencils that were handed out when you came in. If any of you don't have one of these, raise your hand and an usher will

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though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

<sup>11</sup> The book of Job

<sup>12</sup> Romans 4:17 NIV

<sup>13</sup> Tony Evans

get you one. And I want you to take a minute as we close to write down a statement of faith that begins with the words: "Even though" And write down what your disappointment is and what your faith expectation is. Be specific.

Even though my daughter is sick, I will trust You to care for her  
Even though my retirement is in shambles, I trust that you still love me

Let's take a couple minutes. Don't put your name on them because we are going to read some of them. And then we will pass them to the center and the ushers will collect them.

If you are not at the place of being able to make a statement of faith, that's okay – just write down your disappointment and we will trust God for you in this disappointment. As soon as you are finished pass the cards towards the center.

[The following are a sample of what were passed in]

Even though my children are not close to Jesus, I still will trust that they will come back to Him.

Even though my arm is numb and nerve damaged and I am in constant pain from finger tips to shoulder and I am disappointed that I cannot exercise and sleep. I am still the beloved of God and shall rise up victorious and prevail.

Even though

... I have trouble earning money

... I have to wait for the one I love

... I have no time

I will trust you.

Even though my safety net is gone, I will trust that you care for me.

Even though I'm 22 and two incurable diseases ...

Even though You didn't heal my son when I believed you had – and even though it seems he has turned away from You ... I will believe that you hold him in Your hand.

Even though God has said "no" for years and years and years. I will keep trusting that what He has planned is good – even though to me it seems the worst fate imaginable.

Even though I am failing as a parent, worker, and friend, I will keep living and trust God to make my life okay.

Even though I don't know where the money will come from, I will trust that God will provide what my kids and I need.

Even though my wife is in constant pain, I will hope for her recovery.

Even though I have depression, I believe God can heal me

Even though I have seen my daughter suffer, and there is the specter of future suffering, and even though I don't usually see your hand at work to help her, I know that you are good all the time.

Father, we need Your Holy Spirit to be the Helper, the Comforter, and the Counselor for all of these Your children. Honor your children's faith and hear their prayers. Amen

Let us go out to the song which summarizes the core of this sermon

Blessed Be the Name of the Lord (Matt Redman)

### **Benediction**

I want to send you out with John MacArthur's definition of faith. Faith is:

Seeing the invisible - Even though we don't see Him

Hearing the inaudible – Even though we don't hear Him

Touching the intangible – Even though we don't feel Him

Accomplishing the impossible<sup>14</sup>

Now go forth in the name of Jesus – accomplishing the impossible.

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<sup>14</sup> John MacArthur