

When God Disappoints Us

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Have you ever trusted God and been disappointed? You placed your trust in God and He let you down. After many such disappointments, we can lose hope. When we lose hope, we are tempted to despair or walk away from God. If we manage our expectations at the start, we spare ourselves a lot of anguish.

Faulty Expectations

We must be careful when we place our expectation on God. God isn't manipulated. Yet we try to manipulate Him by our actions and words. We believe if we say or do the right thing, we can get Him to do what we want. That may work on people we know, but it doesn't work on God. God is sovereign and He operates outside of cause and effect. He behaves in line with His will and purposes, not ours. Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done (Matthew 6:10), so it's foolish to try to get God to align with our wills. Don't expect God to do what you want Him to do. That kind of expectation will lead to disappointment.

Many years ago, when my boss invited me to start a software business with him, I prayed about it and felt I got God's approval and blessing. So I sold my half of my house to fund the business. After a couple years, all the money was spent and the business failed. I couldn't understand how God could have misled me. After much prayer and reflection, I realized that God never promised success. In retrospect, I learned more from the failure than I would have from success. My biggest mistake was having placed faulty expectations on God.

Misplaced Trust

Our trust is often misplaced. We believe we are trusting in God but don't realize we are trusting in a substitute. We're trusting in a specific outcome or desired result from God. We're trusting in our knowledge of God or doctrine. We're trusting in a message delivered by a person or by God Himself. We're trusting in our pastor or priest or spiritual director. All these things can be

replacements for trusting in the person of God.

In my book, *Four in the Garden*, Cherished declares he will trust in Creator's help. Creator responds by saying, "In your time of need, look to Us, not to Our help. If you expect the help We aren't intending to give, then you may lose hope when your expectation isn't fulfilled. Our help will come, but We are more apt to give you endurance than rescue you. Endurance creates more character than rescue." Like Cherished, we need to learn to place our trust in God alone, not in His help or rescue or answer. When we look to the latter, we envision how the answer will appear and set ourselves up for disappointment when God doesn't deliver our imagined answer.

Don't misunderstand. It's okay to ask God for specific things, but we don't place our trust in the answers. We place our trust in God, believing He hears us and will act according to His mercy.

God's Promises

We trust in God's promises, but even that can be misplaced trust. The Bible declares that God's promises are sure, so we do well to believe them, but we shouldn't pin our hope on them. Our trust ought to be in God alone. We pin our hope on God. Some people regard God's promises as an ace up their sleeves, something they can pull out to save themselves when needed. God is the one who saves us, not His promises. Trusting in promises can lead to disappointment when we misinterpret them. Instead of trusting in a promise, it's better to trust in the One who made the promise.

Many of God's promises are spiritual and conditional, but we can twist them into false expectations. The benefits God promises are often spiritual blessings, such as contentment, wholeness, inner abundance, or joy. Earthly blessings like prosperity aren't guaranteed, so expectations of earthly comforts or rescue often go unfulfilled. The conditions attached to these promises usually involve putting God or others first, so selfish interests tend to invalidate the

promises. I believe God's promises are not intended to be enticements for reward. Rather, they are statements of consequence. Our motivation shouldn't be to gain reward but to live with integrity as its own reward. By doing so, we discover that God's blessings will follow (consequence).

Our focus needs to shift from God's promises onto God Himself. These promises are statements that reflect God's nature and character. Our core trust is in God's character, God's person, not a collection of promises. So we believe in the promises, but we trust in God. Promises give us something firm to hang our hopes on, so it will feel less substantial to trust in God only. We may feel more insecure trusting in God alone, but that is the nature of true faith and will keep our expectation centered on God, not outcomes.

The Strength of Relationship

Promises also have an unspoken condition, that of relationship. Promises are usually given within the context of relationship. What weight does a promise have if we have no relationship with the person who makes the promise? The strength of a promise is often tied to the strength of the relationship. If you are relying on God's promises, make sure your relationship with God is active. "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23. After these people give noble reasons why they should be accepted, Jesus declares to them, "I never knew you." God will not reject those who have nurtured a relationship with Him. In these verses, Jesus says that the one who does the will of His father will enter the kingdom of heaven. The way we learn God's will is through having relationship with Him. Relationship is the basis for receiving all the promises of God.

In the end, it is relationship that saves us, not our knowledge or doctrine or good deeds or church attendance. It is whom we know, now what we know. It is whom we trust, not what we trust.

What Can We Expect of God?

So, how can we insure that our expectations are sound? What can we expect of God that won't leave us disappointed? We can trust in God's love and His ability to guard our souls. He doesn't protect us from lack, but He can protect us from want. Those who trust God know they will be okay, no matter what. In this sense, we will be okay in that we are taken care of by God within our present circumstance, even when our resources are completely gone.

Don't confuse the loss of resources as God abandoning you. God is present in loss and can inject His love and care when poverty visits us. At such times, God's provision is most pronounced because that's when it's most needed. When I was without food and had no money to buy it, I rejoiced and told God I relied on Him to feed me. That day, a classmate brought donuts to morning class, a stranger gave me his extra sandwich for lunch, and a friend treated me to dinner. God's care was never more real than that day.

In summary, we trust in the person of God, not in what we want Him to do for us, believing He is trustworthy and that His will is good. If we trust in God's love and maintain relationship with Him, we won't be disappointed.

Reflection

- 1) Identify one thing you are trusting God for. How might that one "thing" distract you from trusting in God Himself?
- 2) Revisit a situation where God let you down. What was your expectation at the time? What was your expectation based on? Looking back, how might you have changed your expectation to be more God-centered and less outcome-centered?
- 3) Identify one way you can strengthen your relationship with God so that it might be easier to trust Him.

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