

## Doorways through Disappointment

Disappointment is a common experience, a part of life. Things don't always work out as we had hoped. A relationship didn't work out, and it died. A job was taken from us by redundancy. We feel let down by a church or group that seemed to promise much. We attempted something and feel disappointed that it did not flourish. We tried to help someone and they pushed us away.

Sometimes we are disappointed in ourselves – we know we didn't stick at something. Sometimes we are disappointed in others. Sometimes we even feel disappointed with God. Something we felt sure he was going to do did not eventuate and we are left flat and confused, even angry.

It is important in these places to watch that we don't get stuck there. Disappointment can become like a quicksand that sucks us down into despair and hopelessness. Our view of life gets very warped.

One day a while back a light went on when I was reading Ecc. 3:10 *'He has put eternity in our hearts.'* 'Eternity in our hearts' is not just about our longing for God – it is also about our longing for all the *qualities* of eternity – for truth, transparency, love, compassion, beauty, perfection, justice, holiness.... We want the nature of eternity to pervade this world/our lives NOW! This is what is meant when we pray *'Your Kingdom come....'* And this is why we are so intolerant of anything less. The longing for eternal realities to be ours here on earth is deep within us. And we keep being disappointed by how elusive they are. That day will come eventually, but in the meantime we need to find the grace to forgive over and over, (the proverbial 70 x 7) - forgiving both ourselves and others.

But what about our disappointment with God? That's a hard one to own. We often cover it with complaints about others... or burying ourselves in work... or we become ill with suppressed anguish. Disappointment with God is actually very common. We may be outwardly dutiful, but not far under the surface are unanswered questions – a simmering anger.

'Where were you God when my loved one suffered and died?'

'Why did you let me go through that redundancy?'

'Why is my teenager ruining her life.... I did my best... I have prayed for her repeatedly... God why?'

'Why do my relationships never work out? God why don't you give me someone I can really rely on?'

'I thought you had spoken to me and I was doing your will. But it all fell apart. What was that all about? Can I trust your voice?'

I am watching a man in his late 40s struggle with a deep confusion and disappointment with God. I have had a few conversations with him, and he seems to be in a doorway. Sometimes he steps back into the shadows and goes over his anguished questions yet again 'God, did I hear you wrong? Why did it all fall apart? What is my purpose in life now? I seem to only be keeping my head above water... Why don't you explain yourself?' Then I will hear his worship and passionate intercession for the lost and think...'he's getting back on track'.... But then he has more down days...

What do we do when we are disappointed with God? When he doesn't explain himself – and we feel stranded and confused and unable to trust again? There is danger here.

- We back ourselves into a corner when we think God must always answer our prayers our way or he proves himself untrustworthy.
- We become warped if we are always looking back and thinking why doesn't he do what he did 20 years ago and step in and rescue me?

- We become brittle when we always ‘have to know’ or ‘have to understand’ before we will trust him and act in faith again.
- We become blind to his work in lives around us if we are always envying what he is doing for them and sulking because he is not doing the same for us.

You can hear these feelings and questions right through Scripture.

*Moses* wrestled with God on a number of occasions. He made bad choices, he misinterpreted what he was supposed to do – he acted in anger... he got grumpy with God.

*The Psalmists* describe anguish, confusion, despair... but also hanging onto their certainties.

*The Prophets* were not averse to complaining to God... Why?... What?... Lament and complaint.

*Job* wrestled with all the disasters in his life...

*Jesus* – chose the cross... but cries out ‘My God... why?...’ ‘I thought you would BE here!’

*Paul* – set off to go somewhere, then ‘The Holy Spirit forbade me.’ Huh? Twice he got his signals wrong.

Beaten, left for dead, imprisoned, shipwrecked... ridiculed... abandoned by colleagues. Why didn’t God protect him? What was his answer to all these trials and disappointments?

He is probably the one character who does not seem to go into a downward spiral of disappointment and despair. Why? What could he see that we don’t? What was he doing that we fail to do?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 now.

Paul had a very big picture of the *greater reality* of what God was up to in all of his trials.

- He is able to *rest* in the greater realities and not become distressed,
- he *anticipates fruitfulness* from his trials,
- and he is able to *pray* from an eternal perspective.

1. “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay...*” v.7

Treasure in earthen vessels... The treasure is the incredible privilege of Christ in us – his life in us – but the vessel remains earthen. God has decided that we are worthy of this treasure... and it doesn’t matter how battered and cracked the vessel is – his light intends to shine through the cracks! His living water wants to flow through the fractured places. He doesn’t need perfect people – quite the opposite. He delights to use imperfect ones. Can we accept that, for ourselves, for others?

2. “*So then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*”v.12

The hardships and disappointments in life can be seen as a pruning that will produce more fruit and more life for others. Every loss has in it some life that others can gain. In a long dark period in my life a friend told me over and over, ‘This will become your place of fruitfulness for God.’ I once read that “miserly leads to ministry, and confusion leads to compassion.” Surrendering to the potter in our places of brokenness and disappointment will eventually release life for others. This is the way God works. Paul knew this. Every place of loss and death can become a channel for his life to flow. This is a key principle of the Kingdom. Nothing is wasted. Nothing takes God by surprise.

3. “*I believed, therefore I have spoken.*” V.13

What we say in these times is crucial. We must speak out our beliefs, even if we don’t feel them. Joseph experienced so much injustice. We could understand it if we heard bitterness and disillusionment in him. But instead he says, ‘*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.*’ The key is “Say it until you see it.” What are we saying about the hard experiences of our lives? It is crucial to speak out our faith in conversation – in prayer – and in declaring Scripture, and in worship. Worship and the Word shift our perspective. And don’t isolate yourself. Let the faith and prayers of others nourish you and lift you.

The Psalms are an incredible help when we feel disappointment or despair. There is such an honesty there about the pain of loss and betrayal. But the writer comes back to the greatness of God. Bill Johnson, an

astute teacher, has said “Read the Psalms until you find one that echoes your heart and camp there. Stay in it, saying it over and over, until it has brought you to a place of peace, where you can truly praise God again.”

4. “*We are accumulating eternal glory as we fix our eyes on the unseen.*” v. 17-18

Deliberately look at what God is doing, not what he is not doing. Luther said it this way. “Faith is the ability in trials, to hear God’s YES, above and below his NO.” This statement revolutionized how I viewed trials. I now look for the YES. I look for his goodness in all the hard places.

Are you living from an eternal perspective? What is the lens through which you view the ups and downs of life? Knowing the answers to all the little details will not deliver us. God does not owe us an explanation of every part of our life. He is sovereign. His ways are not our ways.

There is a place of surrender that brings us to peace. It has been said, “We must surrender the right to understand if we are to receive the ‘peace that passes understanding.’” Only then are we in a place to hear him clearly. Only then do we begin to see his goodness again.

Kath Wells

[www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz](http://www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz)