

# Disappointed with GOD

by Paul Anderson

Has God let you down? You were expecting a raise and you were laid off. You prayed for a healing, and death took your loved one. You trusted God for a restored marriage, and now you live with a shameful divorce. Have you waited for something so long that you finally quit believing? Why hope and be disappointed again? You no longer expect God to come through. Then maybe you can identify with Elizabeth.

Bearing a child was beyond possibility for Zechariah's spouse. If my wife was no longer able to give birth, she would not want me praying for a miracle. Zechariah had by now probably given up hope. Praying for perhaps three decades or more seemed long enough. Why keep asking? Maybe we *wouldn't* make good parents. People talked, increasing the pain: "She must have displeased God for her womb to be closed. She's not as religious as she appears. I knew she was a hypocrite."

A surprising question from Zechariah to a heavenly messenger suggests that a touch of resentment attached itself to his soul. Skepticism grows in the soil of disappointment. When what could have been/should have been isn't, the shattered hope sickens the heart and makes faith a difficult proposition. When you realize that what you believed won't happen, you quit trusting. Can you blame him?

Gabriel did. He expected more of the mature man, who was described with his wife as "*upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly*" (Luke 1:6). That made the unbelief of his inquiry more serious.

Did Elizabeth share his skepticism? If she did, she abandoned it during her five months of seclusion after God finally answered the prayers. The godly woman could have gone to her grave bitter. Her life didn't go according to the plan—at least not hers. She didn't choose the title "barren" that was used against her. But God proved to be right on schedule, and she affirmed, "*The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people*" (1:25).

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## Is God Good?

What was God showing her in the years that preceded the visitation? In fact, the same mercy prevailed, but it didn't feel like mercy. The silence of God is often interpreted as absence or as displeasure, and questions bombard our fragile hearts like, "He's done it for thousands of others; why not for me? What's wrong with us?" For some, an even more dangerous question invades their soul: "What's wrong with God?" At that point, trust is trumped by cynicism: "God isn't as good as I thought He was. He is kind, but not that kind."



The first temptation questioned the goodness of God. The serpent made Eve believe that God was withholding from them, that they could circumvent Him in order to live wisely. Satan boldly attacks the character of God, and he will press charges in the midst of your struggles. Don't give him the joy of convincing you that God treats you differently from others, that you are the single exception to His grace, that He waits with a degree of impatience for you to get it together.

No person in the universe is accused of more than God. He remains the object of the most rage, since our judgments find Him a convenient target. We feel the need for answers when questions float to the surface, and when they don't arrive, we charge Him with inaction or at least wonder about His inactivity. And our feelings may block us from perceiving His silent presence.

Andrew Murray says, "What comes to mind when we think of God is the most important thing about us." If your conclusions don't echo the revelation of Jesus concerning His Father, you will extend your time in the desert. God has plans to bless you, to bring you from the tunnel to a broad place, to demonstrate His power by working miracles in your life as well. But if resentment has quietly crept into your heart, closing your hands into fists, you will not receive His grace. You will mimic the elder brother rather than the prodigal, who said, "*All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me*

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*"To the faithful you show yourself faithful..."*

Psalm 18:25

*even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends"* (Luke 15:29). He frustrated the kindness of a good father, who responded to him, "*Everything I have is yours*" (v. 31).

Unfortunately, the son could not access anything because he developed hardening of the arteries. He would have described his father as unfair, partial toward his brother, stingy, and overly tolerant, the opposite description his younger brother would give. How we view God determines what we receive from God. If we view Him out of the lenses of our own pain or sin, that impacts what we receive. If your experience tells you that God is stingy rather than extravagant, the very belief accurately prophesies the outcome.

## Is Your God Good?

Don't let your disappointment with God make you passive, where you quit doing good and put it in neutral. The first two servants in the Parable of the Talents invested what they received and were commended for their faithfulness. The third servant buried his investment because he perceived the master as a hard boss, just like the elder son. Both paid for their wrong picture.

What you perceive is what you receive. *“To the faithful you show yourself faithful...to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd”* (Ps. 18:25,26). If He is not as good as you thought, then you won’t eat when He sets a table before you in the presence of your enemies, and you won’t “taste and see that the Lord is good,” because you have already concluded, based on your experience, that He isn’t that good.

Elizabeth showed her maturity in the way that she responded to God’s gracious activity in her life. She let Him lift the shame she had borne throughout her adult life. God took away her disgrace and she was able to access His favor. At that point her broken heart was healed. My friend Joe Johnson says, “You know you are healed when you can thank God for how He has used the pain of your past.”

At the same time, God was showing His mercy to Mary who decided to visit her older relative. The young girl would need the wisdom of age during this blessed but troubling time. As soon as Mary appeared at her home, the baby of Elizabeth, now about twenty centimeters long, leaped in her womb. She was filled with the Spirit and prophesied a remarkable revelation. Rather than being jealous of her kinswoman, Elizabeth praised God for the privilege of being with “the mother of my Lord.”

God was pouring down grace. Elizabeth had weathered the long storm. And so will you if you don’t question the goodness of God in the midst of your trials. When our emotions fluctuate, some things must stay the same and, most importantly, the character of God. If that goes, everything is up for grabs. Hold on tenaciously to God’s kindness—until you see it demonstrated once again in your life. Elizabeth did—and the utterly amazing prophecy shows that her spirit was clear water, not a stagnant pool. She affirmed Mary, who, unlike her husband, had received the news with a trusting heart: *“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished”* (Luke 1:45).

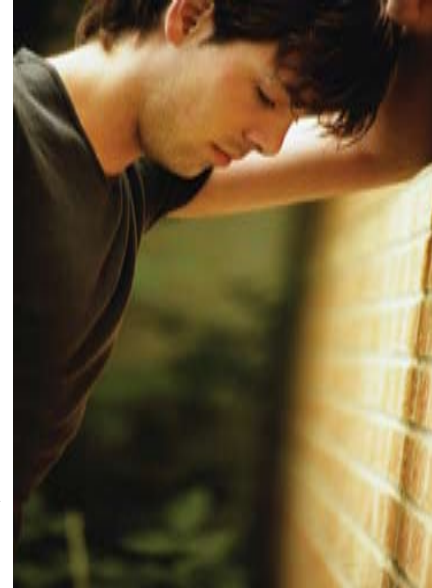
They finally were given their child—maybe you weren’t. Perhaps your marriage wasn’t restored or your business turned around. Maybe you still struggle with finances or rebellious children or painful loss. You lived for years on the hump of questions, but you no longer ask them, because you are trying not to care, not to hope. We know God is good and all that; we just don’t think He could be that good, not to us anyway. We hear of Him showing His power and love to people in stunning ways—and we make ourselves the exception—because it appears that God has. Even the Almighty seems to live with a limit on His goodness. After all, my life includes as many pains as pleasures.

Elizabeth held out for the best, though her heart told her otherwise. David wrote after a near-death encounter, *“You, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living”* (Psalm 116:8). Dear friend, you will too.

*“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,  
for His mercy endures forever.”*

Psalm 37:3

How do we call God good when our experience tells us otherwise? One way: *“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”* We can either trust our battered conclusions, or we can trust in the time-proven truth of Scripture. Down through the years the saints of God have sung the refrain, *“O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for his mercy endures forever.”* I challenge you to live with integrity in the desert, in the barrenness of your situation, in the quietness of unanswered



prayer. The psalmist reminds us to *“trust in the Lord and do good”* (Psalm 37:3). The most powerful deeds of compassion and devotion arise out of a broken heart, not a full one.

God is, after all, better than we can imagine Him to be. It takes ongoing revelation to be able to understand just a little of His goodness. Only as we open up to His revelation can we receive from His generous hand. *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,”* (1 Cor. 2:9). And that includes you. You will see His goodness. You can afford to trust Him. You don't have to key on your experience. He has prepared goodness for you, even as He was preparing it in silence for Elizabeth. He is not overlooking you.



So how should we respond if we are disappointed with God? Should we pretend that we are not? Here's my suggestion:

- ♦ Let God know what has disappointed you and why. David did on many occasions, and it often led him to a fresh revelation of God's mercy.
- ♦ Be built up by the honest struggles of David in the Psalms. Statements of positive faith should not replace the real bouts in the desert.
- ♦ Be willing to trust in the goodness of God that you are not experiencing in the present. Sometimes the voice of the enemy is louder than the voice from heaven. At such times, our faith actually grows as we confess what we know to be true even when our experience tells us otherwise. It is not the final arbiter of truth; Scripture is!

You are not an exception! God plans to show you how limitless His goodness is. You have every right to trust Him. Elizabeth gave birth to John, right at God's appointed time. *“Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy”* (Luke 1:58). No doubt some of these had only a year before found it easy to judge the one *“who was said to be barren”* (1:36). God's miracles masquerade behind impossibilities, just like they did for both Elizabeth and Mary. Divine breakthroughs come after human sorrows— as surely as spring follows winter and morning overtakes night. Whether Elizabeth said, *“I told you so”* or not, God told her so, and she praised His goodness! And so did the priest who had been on a silent retreat for nine months! Mary did as well, and that hymn of praise has been sung down through the ages!

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