

“Mending Fences ~ Invisible Fences” [3.9.08]

Today we are going to tackle a painful question ~ subject matter that is considered OFF LIMITS in many well-grounded circles.

Let’s jump right in ~ so here’s the question;
What am I supposed to do, when I find myself disappointed or angry w/God?

Listen today with fresh ears...

- Set aside any pious – guilt related feelings that are associated with the very notion that somehow it is innately wrong to be mad @ God.
- Please know, your raw emotions are not going to offend God ~ He already knows our hearts; His shoulders are broad enough to authentically share our disappointments & frustrations with Him; there’s no hiding from God!
- Allow God to meet you where you are today ~ not where you think you should be!

Let’s PRAY [Come Holy Spirit, Come minister to God’s people!]

Consider this true story of Michele Novotni’s grandmother who endured the Armenian Genocide of 1915 – 1921.

Michele writes that her grandmother was twelve yrs old in Armenia when the persecution broke out; she watched her father shot & killed for his faith & her brother put in a house & torched; as the persecutors made the women & children watch. Her grandmother recalled the smell of flesh burning & the Turkish troops taunting them saying, “Where is your God? Isn’t your God strong enough to make a rain cloud to come and put our fire out? And if He chooses not to, why would you continue to worship Him?” As a young child her grandmother’s faith wasn’t that strong ~ & their words really rocked her faith. She concluded, they were right; serving God does absolutely no good. This was compounded by her experience of stepping over dead bodies & all sorts of horrible stuff. She saw pregnant women have their stomachs slashed & the Turkish tormentors smashing the babies. Horrible-unspeakable atrocities!

So when she finally arrived in America; she was angry. She related how different people from the church would take her in and she would confide, “You know, I’m mad @ God,” and they would say, “HUSH!” You are not supposed to be mad @ God.” So here she was mad @ God & she wasn’t supposed to be, sadly she had no idea how to break out of this painful trap of offense. So she lived her whole life sort of tormented between two ideas; there is NO God & there is a God who is bad ☹

Michele’s grandmother obviously didn’t have her children go to church & so when she came on the scene as a little girl, the neighborhood church would have VBS, Michele would ask here grandmother “How come we don’t go to church?” Her grandmother would tell her that there is NO God or that God was bad ☹

Painful stories of disappointment with God smatter the pages of the Bible; go with me to:

I. Biblical Examples of Disappointment

A. (Jacob) = (R) Genesis 32: 24 – 32

- v. 28 “...b/c you have fought w/God & w/men”
- Poor man limped for the rest of his life ☹

- B. (Aaron) = (R) Leviticus 10: 1 – 3 [3rd book in Bible]
 - v. 3 “...Aaron was silent”
 - Youthful disobedience cost the lives of his (2) sons

- C. (Moses) = (R) Deuteronomy 34: 1 – 8 [2 books to the right]
 - v. 4 “...you will not enter the land”
 - Tough punishment ~ striking rock in wilderness of Zin in Numbers 20:12

- D. (Elijah) = (R) I Kings 19: 3 – 5 or p. 277 in pew Bible
 - v. 4 “...I've had enough Lord, he said. Take my life”
 - Discouraged after landslide victory day before

- E. (David) writes in = Psalm 22: 1 – 2 or p. 422 in pew Bible
 - v. 1 “...why have you abandoned me?”
 - Foreshadows (Jesus) in Matthew 27: 45 - 46 or p. 760

- F. (Paul) = (R) II Corinthians 11: 21 – 28 or p. 888 in pew Bible
 - Paul lived in the constant shadow of disappointment

Being disappointed with God can start with a simple question: “God, why did you allow this to happen?”

[insert] Reflective scenarios

Being disappointed or angry with God is a miserable space to find yourself!

[insert] PICTURE of Daniel Torrence

- 1st time I recognized it in myself began in February 1999; I watched my close friends Randy & Manny's son Daniel battle thru the torment of leukemia
 - I spent 9 months with Daniel & his family in the BMT; I witnessed some of the best physicians and nurses I've ever had the privilege of meeting.
 - My close friends & I prayed for a miracle every day; spent many moments on this BMT ward; in 9 months I never saw a child leave
 - We never lost hope - - every set back we were sure that God would answer our best intentioned prayers; because me and God had a long standing track record of successful answered prayers - - God is so faithful!
 - I did not lose hope until late October - - early November 1999; these were bleak days - - every procedure produced further pain & no relief; watching a little boy struggle with the painful after affects of chemo; this picture will weaken the strongest resolve.
 - Monday November 13th, I finally broke - - the hardest thing was to tell Randy that I had finally stopped praying for Daniel's recovery - - I just wanted him not to suffer any more. On Saturday November 18th, our prayers were answered; & Daniel's pain subsided - - but that sure wasn't what I wanted!!

- Hard days - - difficult questions followed - - I was deeply hurt and disappointed w God for the 1st time I had no idea how to resolve these painful questions, I hated being let down by God

For the concluding moments here are some things I personally learned about the mystery of suffering & how my theology needed to be adjusted;

II. Coming to Grips w/Disappointment

A. 1st learning ~ addressing a “Flawed Theology”

- Isaiah 52: 7 says, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news of peace & salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!”
- I unintentionally neglected this basic principle of scripture.
- Somewhere along the way I convinced myself that God, the all powerful creator of the universe used to be in charge of this world & I believed that @ the 2nd Coming He would be in charge @ the end.
- Where I got confused was the DASH = the interim period?
- Because of the mystery of suffering I began asking some hard questions;
 - Is God in charge here & now; or has He momentarily lost His grip?
 - Is God all-powerful [in control] or is He a benevolent – gracious God who chooses to not to intervene in human suffering & pain?
- I read Rabbi Kushner’s book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, and this NY Times best selling author concluded that God was not all powerful but that He was kind and benevolent!
- This position made me re-think my belief system concerning God; I could not buy the 18th century philosopher’s idea that said, “...that God perhaps created the universe in the beginning, but then wound it up like a clock & left it to run on its own.”
- This picture of a kind & benevolent God that casually walked away from the world leaving His creation to fend for themselves did not match the integrity of scripture!
- I concluded that Chuck Swindoll was correct, “God’s calling the shots. He’s running the show. Either He’s in full control or He’s off His throne!”
- If God was in charge @ the beginning & will be in charge @ the end; He certainly is in charge of the DASH!

B. 2nd learning ~ Trusting God is a Decision

- Trusting God does not mean that we will never have questions - - doubts, or fears (these thoughts are natural as we face difficult issues)
- Trusting God means that in spite of our questions - - doubts - - & fears we draw upon His grace & continue to believe that...
 - God is loving and that...
 - God is in control and that...
 - God is always working for our good!

Such trust helps us to continue doing what is good & right even in difficult times!

- [insert] Missionary pilot Jim Bowers

- Your view of God will have a profound effect on how much you trust Him;
 - If you do not believe that God is both sovereign and good ~ trust will be an elusive thing;
 - To believe that God is loving but not in control is simply “a heavenly Santa Claus...who means well, but can not always insulate His children from trouble and grief.”
 - Such a god offers little security & hope ~ that’s not the picture of God in scripture that speaks of our hope...

“This hope is strong & trustworthy anchor for our souls.” Hebrews 6: 19

My cleanest learning:

I’m not supposed to fully understand the mystery of suffering; I just need to intimately know the One who will hold my hand & never leave me! Well, we can’t conclude until I tell you the “Rest of the Story” I began with; Michele Novotni writes: [insert] Conclusion...

Romans 5: 1 encourages,

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.”

Are you ready to be at PEACE?