

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

I feel abandoned in my trial. Why does God seem so distant when I need Him most?

Scripture: Psalm 88:6; Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; 1 Peter 1:3–7

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Why does God seem so distant when I need Him most?

You're troubled, so you pray. You're distressed, so you cry for God to bring you quick relief. But all you hear in reply is silence--a silence so deafening it drowns out every thought but this: God isn't listening.

Is that your testimony? If so, we want to help you attain a biblical perspective by providing a few principles for you to reflect on. We trust these thoughts will bring you comfort and hope.

Yours Is a Common Experience

Feel left alone? Other believers have felt the same way. Peruse the writings of Oswald Chambers, Charles Spurgeon, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and you'll discover they knew well the agony you experience. Spurgeon wrote this autobiographical account in his comments on Psalm 88:6:

He who now feebly expounds these words knows within himself more than he would care or dare to tell of these abysses of inward anguish. He has sailed around the Cape of Storms, and has drifted along by the dreary headlands of despair.

After C. S. Lewis lost his wife to cancer, he called out to God for comfort but sensed no reply. Confused, he asked, "What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?"

But you don't need a large library to know your experience is common. Just turn through the pages of your Bible, especially the Psalms, and you'll read several distressed cries for God to act:

- Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am pining away; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are dismayed. And my soul is greatly dismayed; but You, O Lord--how long (Psalm 6:2-3)?
- Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? Has God forgotten to be gracious, or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion (Psalm 77:7-9)?
- O God, do not remain quiet; do not be silent and, O God, do not be still (Psalm 83:1).

Psalm 22:1 contains perhaps the most well-known example, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning." Jesus echoed that psalm on the cross: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:46).

A key passage in 1 Peter will help you appreciate that times of distress are common and are for the good of God's children. Amid the rich details of God's glorious grace, resides an affirmation that those who rejoice in their salvation will also experience distress due to various trials. Take special note of the second paragraph:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7).

Take solace in knowing that sorrowful times--even periods of feeling God has withdrawn His presence--are an integral part of your spiritual experience. God hasn't utterly abandoned you, though you feel He has. Other believers have successfully traveled the dark path you walk and completed their journey.

Peter acknowledges that trials produce grief in believers--and grief is a common experience. He also touches on two further principles that will help you understand and patiently endure your trouble:

Yours Is a Temporary Experience

Feeling distressed by trials--such as sensing the absence of God's presence--would crush a weakened believer if it had no end. And so Peter adds that the distress is only "for a little while." Your trouble is temporary. God will not leave you in your distress forever. It will cease--maybe not as soon as you'd like--but it will come to an end. Once the trial has served its purpose, you will benefit from its results and regain the joy of your heavenly Father's warm embrace.

Yours Is a Purposed Experience

Peter anticipates your next question, "Why does a believer have to experience grief-producing trials?" He replies, "These have come so that your faith ... may be proved genuine" (v. 7).

As one of God's children, you are promised His presence, though for now you feel alone and without help. Rest in knowing God your Father has good reasons for bringing you into your trial. He is committed to making you holy, even if it means taking away your happiness for a time.

You will derive benefit from your trial, not by ignoring it or fainting under its weight, but by understanding its purpose. When you realize God is using the trial to make you aware of His grace in your life and fit you for eternal glory, praise, and honor, you'll be equipped to endure it even though it brings you into distress and heaviness of soul.

Suffering in silence will also:

1. Make you more obedient (Psalm 119:67).
2. Deepen your insight into God's Word (Psalm 119:71).
3. Increase your compassion and effectiveness in ministry (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
4. Teach you to wait patiently on God (Psalm 27:14).
5. Make your joy less dependent on circumstances (Habakkuk 3:16-19).
6. Make you appreciate God all the more when He restores you (Job 42:7-17).

Allow those principles to mold your perspective. Learn to respond biblically and not emotionally to your trouble. Lean on the revealed character of God. He is allowing you to experience a temporary sorrow that will provide you with the greater benefits of increased holiness and deeper assurance (cf. Romans 8:18).

Here are some other resources that will help you overcome the *feeling*

God's absence:

- Spiritual Depression* , by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- Faith Tried and Triumphant* , by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- [*Benefiting from Life's Trials*](#) , John's audio series on James 1:2-18

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