

Question: If you can't always count on God to protect and bless you, what advantage is there to believing in him?

I believe we CAN always count on our Heavenly Father, but not in the way some may think. Is not a parent who refuses to give his/her child everything the child wants actually protecting the child? Doesn't a loving father discipline his children to protect them from mistakes that can bring great suffering into their lives? Do not wise parents bless their children with opportunities to grow and learn in life by refusing to do everything for them? The Bible says: "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). A former alcoholic told me that his parents nearly killed him by rescuing and trying to protect him instead of allowing him to face up to the evil of his addictive behavior. Our wise and loving heavenly father is always blessing and protecting his children, even when they do not understand what he is doing as a personal advantage.

But more to the point of your question is the idea that we should only serve God if we feel we have something to gain by it. How do you feel about a person who is your friend only as long as that friendship works to his advantage? Our heavenly Father wants us to trust him because he is God, even when we do not see some selfish advantage for ourselves. Consider the following biblical examples.

Three young Jewish men chose to trust God although they were threatened with death in a fiery furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, ordered them to bow before a great golden image, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego responded: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

In the midst of his suffering, Job made a similar statement. Although he did not understand why God had allowed him to suffer so greatly, Job refused to turn away from God. He said: "THOUGH HE SLAY ME, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (Job 13:15). Job knew the LORD is the only

God and that God is always just in what he does. Job was confident that he would some day stand before God; therefore, he would not be a selfish, fair-weather friend. He would trust and hope in God no matter what came.

This kind of faith is not some kind of blind faith that takes a leap in the dark. It is a faith based on the evidence that God exists. It is a faith based on the revelation of God in the Bible and in creation as a powerful, wise and good God (Romans 1:18-21; Job 38-41). Job and the three young men understood the limitation of their own knowledge. They knew that God alone can see all things from the beginning to the end (Isaiah 46:9-10; cf. Ecclesiastes 3:11). They chose to serve God not because they understood everything that happened to them in life or because they saw some selfish advantage but just because he alone is God. This kind of faith does not develop overnight. God our Heavenly Father will work with those who are willing to learn and trust him until they too arrive at this faith. It is a lifetime growing process.

From the time that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and died to save us, we have had greater reason than ever to trust God as our only God. As the apostle Paul wrote: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32; read also Romans 8:31-39).

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: universitychurchmurray.com] 2016/01/08