

Why Doesn't God Do Something?

John 11

Intro

As Christians it's hard to say: "I'm disappointed with you, God!" It feels wrong, even blasphemous. The critic in us reminds us that the Christian life is supposed to be one of victory. No one wants to stand up in a prayer meeting and confess that God has let them down. We want to say the proper spiritual thing, the thing that makes others applaud and say amen!

Although we don't admit it very often, I think we all want to give the right answer rather than what we think might really be true. But hear me on this: the compulsion to say the "expected right thing" explains why so many of us have fallen spiritually sick.

If such a thought—that God Himself has disappointed you—lurks in your soul, then open the door and let it out! Do we honestly think we will shock God if we tell Him how we really feel? Do we imagine that we do our souls any good by pretending and hiding behind false pretense?

Disappointment is part of life. When we fail to acknowledge this fact, we tend to view disappointment as a disaster rather than a chance to learn and grow. We must learn to recognize disappointment as a turn in the tide and not the end of the journey.

Listen, God is big enough and His love is inexhaustible to deal with anything we feel or go through. So let's stop pretending and confess the truth: that at times life can deeply disappoint us. God's Word doesn't shy away from it, so why should we? The Bible has stories of people who at one time or another got disappointed with God. One of these stories we find in John 11 with two sisters named Martha and Mary.

Lessons from Martha and Mary

These sisters not only faced the tragedy of their brother's death but became disappointed that the Lord did not intervene soon enough. You know the story. They sent for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus, their brother who was very sick. They were confident that Jesus could heal him and prevent his death, and that He would do so, for they knew how Jesus loved Lazarus and them.

They sent out their cry for help, but we read in John 11:6 that "*...when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days.*" He loved them but He didn't come to their rescue. Why? I can see Martha and Mary waiting by the side of their sick brother, expecting Jesus to walk through the door any moment. But as hour by hour passed, Jesus didn't show up. And Lazarus got worse and worse, and they watched him die.

Do you think they wondered if Jesus really cared? Imagine that they must have felt disappointed with Jesus, to realize that He could have come and healed their brother. But He chose not to. Have you ever felt that way? As believers we all go through similar reactions when there are no answers.

"Why?"

One of the first words we learn to say as a child is "Why." If you have a child under 5 in your home, you probably hear that word many times each day. It seems from the very beginning we want explanations and answers. But what do we do when there seems to be no explanations and answers?

I tell you quite frankly that there are times when I can't find an answer for things that happen to me and to others. Sometimes I bombard Heaven with my "*Whys?*" but at times heaven seems silent. You've begged for explanations, and you wait and wait, wondering if you will get an answer.

I suppose that's what happened to Martha and Mary. They waited and waited wondering if the Lord would come through.

When Jesus finally arrived, it was too late; Lazarus was already dead. Martha was disappointed and we read in John 11:21 that she said to him, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*"

I find Jesus' response to her at this time very interesting. He did not defend His actions; He did not say, "Martha, let me explain to you exactly what happened or why it happened." No, when Martha was looking for answers to her unanswered questions, Jesus took her to the basic fundamental truth.

Jesus said to her, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" He responded to Martha with the reality of who He is, and caused her to change her thinking.

You see, if Martha believed that Jesus was the resurrection and the life and that because Lazarus had believed in Him, Lazarus would live forever, then this temporary separation would look very differently to Martha.

Jesus wanted her to think beyond the immediate and look at the eternal hope.

He wanted her to focus on who He is and the power that He has. And she confessed out loud, "*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*"

When you don't have answers, stop and ask a different question: Who do you believe who Jesus is? Do you believe that He is the resurrection and the life? If so, confess out loud exactly what you believe about the person of Jesus. It's important that you say it out loud, so you can hear your own confession of faith.

We may never know some of the answers we're looking for this side of heaven, but we can always confidently know the answer to the question: Who do you think Jesus is? By focusing our thoughts on who He is we will have the peace and strength we need for those unanswered questions. If that was the question Jesus asked Martha when she wanted answers, then surely it is the starting place for us today when we want answers.

Do you believe that Jesus is trustworthy? Do you believe what He promised that He would never leave us or forsake us? Do you believe in what He promised that He would be with us to the very end of the age? And finally, do you believe that He loves you with an unending love? That if you were the only person on earth that He would lay down His life just for you. Notice how many times we read the word *believe* in chapter eleven – 5 times. Jesus wants us to believe and trust in Him no matter what.

We all remember the end of this story; Jesus did meet their need by performing an incredible miracle and raising Lazarus from the dead. In this case, Martha and Mary finally got answers, as they saw their brother come alive after 4 days in that tomb. And that miracle was the talk of the town for days and weeks, as you can imagine. As a matter of fact, many people believed on Jesus when they saw and heard about Lazarus' resurrection.

So, eventually Martha and Mary could say to each other, "When it looked as though Jesus had disappointed us, He really was working on our behalf to do something even greater than we could imagine."

Sometimes it works out like that. We go through the no-answer period, the circumstances which make no sense to us whatsoever, but at a later time, in God's time, we are able to see what God's purpose was.

Some of us are now in that tough place where Martha and Mary were initially. You're wondering why Jesus didn't intervene; and perhaps you're feeling neglected by Him. Please do take courage and remember that often we misunderstand God's timetable.

(It may be that you will soon see the deliverance of God and your eyes will be opened to understand the whys.)

But what about those of us who don't get those answers that we are looking for? Our Lazarus never comes out of the tomb and we're left to face those unanswered questions.

After all, we're supposed to have answers, aren't we? We've always told people that Jesus is the answer; Jesus can meet all our needs. Therefore, those unanswered questions can undermine our faith and cause us to doubt the God we serve.

Well, I'm certainly not going to tell you that I have answers to your unanswered questions. I don't, and the older I get the more I know there are times when I throw up my hands and say, "I don't understand it but I trust Jesus."

Disappointment and Frustration are Normal

I want to say to you who have unanswered questions that anger and frustration are normal. God is not going to condemn you for asking the questions, for feeling disappointed at the unjust circumstance(s). He even understands that you're likely to go through a period of being disappointed with Him. God is big enough to handle it.

But how do we deal with it? Well, I think the Psalms are of great help to us here, for frequently both David and Asaph expressed their frustration at the lack of answers.

In Psalm 44 David says to the Lord, "*But now you have rejected and humbled us... You have made us a reproach to our neighbors... You have made us a byword among the nations;... All this has happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant.... Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? ... Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?*"

That's a disappointed man, expressing it openly to God. And at that moment, with no answers to his questions, his disappointment was vented toward God.

Now, I don't want to imply that I think we should yell and scream at God when we please. But I do want to say to those of us who are living with those difficult, unanswered questions that it's okay for us to tell God exactly how we feel.

Please tell God; He knows your feelings and thoughts anyway, and if you don't vent those thoughts, or try to deny or ignore them, they will turn into bitterness and spiritual depression.

Who better to tell than the Lord? He understands us completely, and no one will be fairer or gentler to us than He will be. He didn't rebuke Martha and Mary for their questions. He didn't zap David and Asaph for voicing their disappointment.

And isn't it interesting that all of that is recorded in Scripture for us to read. That's not an accident; it's there to show us how to deal with unanswered questions. So, if the questions and the disappointment are eating away at you, get alone with God and voice them to Him out loud if it helps.

I notice that every time David or Asaph voiced their frustration about the unanswered questions, soon they were led back to that basic trust in God, which was the cornerstone of their lives. One of David's frequent phrases was "*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God*" (Psalm 43:5).

Conclusion

Don't Live in Despair or Disappointment

Finally, why had Jesus not made every effort to reach Lazarus while he was alive? The answer is that God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). And God "does not give an account of all His doings" (Job 33:13; Det. 29:29). Jesus delayed because His purpose was not to heal Lazarus but to raise him from the dead and thereby bring glory to Himself and to the Father.

When the questions seem to have no answers, we have to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing and in the end it is for His glory and honour. But we don't have to live in despair or disappointment; the same God who for whatever reason does not answer our questions is the God who will bring us comfort and strength to face them.

I often think of the question Jesus asked His disciples when many of His followers who were disappointed were forsaking Him. He said to the Twelve, "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" Simon Peter answered, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.*" (John 6:67-69).

Friends, where else will you go with your unanswered questions? If there seems to be no answer from God on this side of eternity, then trust Him to see you through.