

“DEALING WITH ANGER TOWARD GOD”

by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

Introduction

Being angry or disappointed with God is a troubling subject for many believers, and a common one for all. I once knew a man who tragically lost his young son whom he loved dearly — it was such a catastrophic experience for him he never got over it. He since has passed away. Ultimately, he laid the blame for his son’s death at God’s feet, thus severely affecting his relationship with God. “How could a God of love take my son from me?” was his ever-languishing cry (Jn 11:21, 32, 37). The long and short of it was, he was never able to completely resolve his anger with God, or love and serve Him in the same way he did prior to his son’s death. Some believers found it easy to judge him for being angry with God, and even questioned the genuineness of his faith — yet none of them had ever experienced the excruciating pain he endured. It is always easy to pass judgment on someone when we have never walked in their shoes, yet for some reason we all seem to do it rather easily. The truth is, most of us are masters at justifying our own anger or disappointment over far less significant things; be it the loss of a job, bankruptcy, theft, automobile accident, malice, rejection, natural disasters, illness, or a myriad of other problems. Obviously, there are times when life can be a very sobering experience. We have all seen the weekend golfer mess up a shot, and get so angry that he tosses his golf club (or maybe even his entire set of clubs) into a water hazard. There just seems to be something about our humanness that insists on having its own way.

Paul reminded the church at Corinth that as believers “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed... perplexed, but not despairing... persecuted, but not forsaken... struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus (emphatic!) that the life of Jesus (emphatic!) might be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:8-11). As **William MacDonald** says, “There is seeming defeat in our lives on the one hand, yet perpetual victory on the other.” From a human standpoint, we are often perplexed when we see no way out of our troubles. The apostle Paul himself often did not know how a solution was even possible in his difficulties — no matter what his experiences were, however, God never abandoned him. We may wonder why the Lord allows His people to go through difficult testings and trials, but the Scriptures teach us that God, in His marvelous wisdom, sees fit to allow us to be touched by sickness, sorrow, affliction, persecution, difficulties, and distresses (MacDonald, pp. 1834-1835). We must remember that God controls trials and uses them to strengthen us in our faith. All of the difficulties we go through in life are designed to cause the death of our flesh, that the light of the gospel might shine forth more clearly through us. God’s glory is manifested through broken vessels (2 Cor 4:7; Job 10:9), through people who endure troubles by relying on His power.

Anger with God is as old as time — it goes all the way back to “Cain” and the first human family (Gen 4:5)... and even to “Abraham” (Gen 18:23-25), who was angry at God for His apparent readiness to destroy the innocent people of Sodom along with those who were guilty. So if you have ever responded to suffering and tragedy by raging at God, you’re not alone. People get angry at God

all the time, even about everyday disappointments. A new study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Jan, 2011) reveals that being angry with God is a common emotion that stems from the belief that God is responsible for bad experiences. Case Western Reserve University psychologist and researcher, **Julie Exline**, says that “anger isn’t an indication that someone is turning his or her back on God... people can be angry at God while still feeling love or respect toward God... in other words, the feelings are not mutually exclusive” (Pappas). Exline has been researching anger toward God for the past ten years, conducting studies with hundreds of people, believers and non-believers alike (Exline). She and her colleagues have collected data on people’s feelings toward God from five separate studies... though the participants spanned many religious traditions, Christians predominated in all of the groups.

One of the surveys revealed that 62 percent of people on occasion were admittedly angry at God; people who are more highly educated, women, and younger individuals all showed a slightly greater tendency toward God-directed anger... and Jews and Catholics were slightly more angry than Protestants. Exline found that people seem to achieve more peace with God as they age, that the older people get, the better they handle negative circumstances. Among college students, 87 percent of believers reported feeling negative emotions about God after a personal setback or loss... and 47 percent of grieving people reported anger at God. Interestingly enough, in both groups positive feelings about God outweighed negative emotions (Exline).

It is also interesting to note that even people who do not believe in God are often angry at Him. College students and bereaved people who were atheist or agnostic reported more anger at God than religious people in the same demographics. It should be noted, however, that many atheists and agnostics had stories of anger dating from their religious pasts. Exline comments: “The believers are talking about a God they think is real, and people who aren’t believers are talking about an idea based on cultural conceptions of God” (Pappas). Whatever the case may be, **Rabbi Brad Hirschfield** believes these studies tell us that “there is a human desire to express outrage at the existence of evil and tragedy, [and that] there appears to be a need to ascribe authorship and evil will on the part of that author, when we experience tough times” (Hirschfield).

People tend to become angry with God when they see Him as personally responsible for negative events and when they interpret His intentions as being cruel. Some people see God as ultimately being the One who is responsible when things go wrong — they become angry, thinking He has abandoned, betrayed or mistreated them. In that way, people relate to God much as they do to other people. So God may seem treacherous or cruel when bad things happen, just like another individual might. Exline notes that it can be hard for people to acknowledge negative spiritual feelings, particularly for highly religious people, who may believe they should only focus on the positive side of religious life. But religion and spirituality are like other parts of life, which can be challenging as well as rewarding, and “anger with God is just one of those struggles” she says (Exline). People who feel angry toward God also need to be reassured that they are not alone — many individuals experience such struggles — “even people who deeply love and respect God can become angry” (Exline). On the other hand, many people stay positive about God even in the face of tragedy, especially people who view God as fundamentally kind. Says Exline, “When people trust that God cares about them and has positive intentions toward them, even if they can’t understand what those intentions or meanings are, it tends to help resolve anger” (Landau).

Hirschfield says that “anger at God and faith and positive feelings about God are entirely compatible. The notion that belief in God demands calm acceptance of everything that comes our way is simply absurd. Anger at God, dissatisfaction with the state of the world or the shape of our lives is not only compatible with faith, it is an act of faith. From Abraham to Moses to Jesus (Lk 14:21; Jn 2:15)... realizing the unacceptability of the status quo, not simply accepting it as God’s will, was the spark which lit the fuse of a new spiritual explosion” (Hirschfield). **Jeff Crim**, a chaplain and bereavement coordinator at *North Star Hospice* in Calhoun, Georgia, has found that it is important for a person to find a way to express their anger at God in order to deal with it, because expressing anger can be cathartic, and help a person move forward (Landau).

Not surprisingly, the angry feelings tended to match up with a patient’s general level of mental distress — more distress was linked to more anger at God. What does seem clear is that a passing anger at God is nothing to be alarmed about, regardless of how theologically troubling some people find such emotions. Exline says, “We all get mad at people every day. Since it usually passes quickly, it’s probably not going to affect our mood or our mental health all that much. When it turns into a grudge, however, that’s where anger tends to become more of a problem for us. It’s the same sort of thing with anger toward God” (Pappas).

Believers everywhere get angry with God — mostly because they don’t get their way. None of us wants our spouse to divorce us... a loved one to die... or some terrible trouble to befall us. In our everyday life some of us curse the bad driver in front of us, rant and rave about the flooded basement, and become enraged when anything else doesn’t go our way. Anger is just a part of human nature. Florida pastor **Plane Williams** says, “In some ways it’s impossible to not get angry... [so] it’s how we respond in our anger that makes all the difference” (Williams). Why do we get angry? We get angry at people or objects that interfere with us getting our way. When we are denied things we strongly desire, it is not uncommon for us to direct our anger toward God; conversely, when things happen to us that cause us pain, God becomes the target of our anger. Some believers see life as just one negative experience after another, and thus conclude that God doesn’t like them... that He is punishing them for something... or that He is simply out to make their life miserable — but that is not at all what Scripture teaches. The truth of the matter is, God loves His children and never punishes them. Nowhere in Scripture does God ever punish His children — He punishes unbelievers, but not His children. He chastens His children (Heb 12: 5-11), but He never punishes them — never! Though punishment and chastening may be equally painful (Heb 5:11), chastening is always corrective in its orientation; never punitive. God always has our good in mind, growing our faith, making us more like Christ, and fulfilling His plan for our lives — everything He does in our lives has these goals in mind. Furthermore, He guarantees that “His purposes” will ultimately be accomplished in each of His children (Rom 8:28-31; Phil 1:6).

When it comes to being “angry with God,” for whatever reason, we know subconsciously or consciously that God is the ultimate power in the universe and that if anyone can make things go better for us, He can. Obviously, if God is GOD, He can do anything. Since God made the universe and everything in it, it certainly wouldn’t be a problem for Him to keep us from some trouble (Jn 11:32, 37). With that said, there are four basic facts we are left to ponder (Williams) —

- God has the capacity to prevent all trouble.
- God doesn’t choose to prevent all trouble.
- There must be some reason why God allows trouble.
- Someday God is going to permanently eliminate all trouble.

Ultimately, the root cause of all trouble is the fact that we are sinful and our world is broken... but beyond that, says Williams, there are three sub-roots (Williams) — I added the last two:

- We make bad choices that bring us trouble (and other people)
- Other people make bad choices that bring us trouble (and them)
- Nature brings us trouble (disease, disasters, broken stuff)
- Satan is the author of some of our troubles (to cause us to doubt God; Lk 22:31; Job 1:6-12)
- God causes some of the trouble we experience (to refine us and to bring Him glory — cf. Is 45:7; 48:10; Jn 9:2-3; Eph 1:11)

Regardless of the root of the trouble, however, many of us ultimately place the blame on God — since He is the One who superintends everything, it is only natural that we get angry with Him. Though some believers actually believe that God is “*deistic*” in some sense; that is, that He is *somewhat distant and impersonal* and has chosen not to interfere with the laws of the universe that He has established (that He essentially wound-up the universe and is letting it take its own natural course), that is not at all what the Bible teaches. Scripture tells us that God is *immanent* (actively present) in the lives of His people (Is 57:15), that He dwells in them as His holy place or temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). The truth of the matter is, God is intrinsically involved in the smallest details of our lives — nothing happens to the believer that does not first go across God’s desk and get His “*stamp of approval*” (Eph 1:11; Ps 37:23; Prv 16:1, 9; 19:21; 20:24; Is 55:12; Jer 10:23); and everything that happens to us in life, God uses to accomplish His purposes (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11). There are no accidents in God’s economy.

Is it Wrong to be Angry with God?

Being angry with God is something that both believers and unbelievers wrestle with. When some extreme difficulty or tragedy happens in our lives, we naturally ask God the question — “Why?” This response indicates two flaws in our thinking — first, even as believers, we all have the tendency to *operate under the impression that life should be easy and pleasant* (especially if GOD is our God), and that God should prevent tragedy, difficulty and pain from happening to us (Jn 11:37); so when He does not, we get angry or disappointed with Him (Jn 11:32). Second, when we do not seem to be able to reconcile the extent of God’s sovereignty, *we lose confidence in His ability to control all of the circumstances we go through in life*. When we lose faith in God’s sovereignty, it is actually because our frail human flesh is grappling with our own frustration and our own lack of control over events. All of us tend to live life in such a way that we can positively affect the outcome of situations... that everything will work out as we have planned; as such, we believe that we are the ones who ultimately determine our fate — when good things happen, we generally attribute it to our own efforts; so when things go bad we are quick to blame God, and get angry with Him for not preventing it. Deep down we believe we should be immune to unpleasant circumstances (flaw number one as noted above), especially if God loves us.

Tragedies and suffering bring home the sobering truth that we are not in charge... that God is the One who ultimately determines what happens in our lives... that everything is either caused or allowed by God. Remember, He is GOD. We can complain, get angry, and blame God for what is happening, yet if we will trust Him and yield our bitterness and pain to Him, acknowledging the prideful sin of trying to force our own will over His, He can and will grant us His

peace and strength to get us through any difficult situation (1 Cor 10:13). We can be angry with God for many reasons, so we all have to accept at some point that there are things we cannot control or even understand with our finite minds. As **Michael Houdmann**, CEO of *GotQuestions.Org*, says: “Our understanding of the sovereignty of God in all circumstances must be accompanied by our understanding of His other attributes: love, mercy, kindness, goodness, righteousness, justice, and holiness. When we see our difficulties through the truth of God’s Word — which tells us that our loving and holy God works all things together for our good (Rom 8:28), and that He has a perfect plan and purpose for us which cannot be thwarted (Is 14:24; 46:9-10) — we begin to see our problems in a different light. We also know from Scripture that this life will never be one of continual [circumstantial] joy and happiness” (Houdmann). Job himself reminds us that “man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7), and that life is short and “full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Just because we come to Christ for salvation from sin, does not mean we are promised a life without problems. Jesus told His disciples, “In this world you will have trouble, but take courage, for I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). God enables us to have peace within, in spite of the suffering we go through and the storms that rage around us (Jn 14:27; Phil 4:6-13).

One thing is certain says **R. C. Sproul** — inappropriate anger is sin (Gal 5:20; Eph 4:26-27, 31; Col 3:8). Though there are manifold references in Scripture of believers bitterly complaining and almost accusing God of unfairness or harshness, that doesn’t mean we have the prerogative to conclude that if Moses, Job, David and others can do it, then it must be okay for us to get angry with God as well (Sproul). As Job struggled with his afflictions, he found it impossible not to grumble that God would let one as righteous as him suffer so greatly. Eventually, however, God answered him with a stern rebuke: “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2-3). Job then humbly admitted, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3b, 6). Likewise, Habakkuk the prophet complained bitterly that God was not being just by allowing wickedness to go unchecked. He demanded an answer from God, and when God gave it to him, Habakkuk said, “I heard and my heart pounded; my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones; and I trembled in myself” (Hab 3:16). So by considering the scope of the Bible’s teaching on this subject, we may conclude that it is acceptable to bring all our cares and disappointments to God, including matters that may move us to frustration or anger... however, we cannot conclude that it is okay to go to God in a spirit of complaint or anger against Him, for it is never proper to accuse God of wrongdoing (Sproul) — that is the essence of being disappointed and angry with Him.

Writes **Houdmann**, “Yes, it is wrong to be angry at God (cf. Rom 14:23). Anger at God is a result of an inability or unwillingness to trust God even when we do not understand what He is doing. Anger at God is essentially telling God that He has done something wrong, which He never does. Does God understand when we are angry, frustrated, or disappointed with Him? Absolutely. He knows our hearts and He knows how difficult, [frustrating], and painful life in this world can be. Does that make it right to be angry with God? No. Instead of being angry with God, we should pour out our hearts to God in prayer and then trust that He is in control and that His plan is perfect” (Houdmann). Holding on to our anger will only allow bitterness and resentment to spring up in our hearts — therefore we must confess it to the Lord, and then by His gracious forgiveness, release those feelings to Him. Since God knows our hearts, it is pointless to try to hide our feelings; so talking to Him about it is the best way to handle our frustrating circumstances. We must

often go before the Lord in prayer in our grief, anger, and pain. If we do so humbly, pouring out our hearts to Him, God will do His work in us, and conform us more to the image of His Son.

The bottom line is, “Can we trust God with everything in our lives?” Yes, we can, says **Michael Houdmann**, “because our God is compassionate, full of grace and love — therefore, we can trust Him with all things.” When tragedies happen to us, we know God can use them to bring us closer to Him, strengthen our faith, and bring us to maturity and completeness (Ps 34:18; Jam 1:2-4). Furthermore, we can be a comfort to others when they experience trouble (2 Cor 1:3-5). Trusting God, however, is not easy — it requires a daily surrendering of our own will to Him, the affirming of His attributes, a faithful study of His Word, prayer... and the application of truth to our own situation. By doing so, our faith will progressively grow and mature, making it easier to trust Him to get us through the next tragedy that most assuredly will take place (Houdmann).

Baptist preacher and author, **John Piper**, reminds us that when we experience excruciatingly difficult times, all of us can become very angry, even at God. A common definition of anger is this: “An intense emotional state induced by displeasure” (Merriam-Webster). We can be displeased by a thing or by a person — we simply don’t like the effect of the thing (the flat tire, the dead battery, the grain of sand in our eye, or the rain on our picnic)... but when we get angry at a person, we are displeased with a choice they made and an act they performed; anger at a person always implies strong disapproval. This is why being angry with God is never right — it is always wrong to disapprove of what God does and permits, because God only does what is right and just (Gen 18:25; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 16:7). Nevertheless “we all still experience the sinful emotion of anger against God” — that is simply what it means to be human and inhabit sinful flesh. The question is, “How do we handle our anger?” We confess it. Obviously God knows what we are feeling... He sees our hearts... so if anger at God is in our heart, we may as well tell Him so, and then tell Him we are sorry, and ask Him to help us put it away by faith in His goodness and wisdom. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He removed forever the wrath of God from our lives. God’s disposition toward us now is one of total mercy, even when it is severe and disciplinary in its orientation (Rom 8:1). Though we may cry in agony, “God, where are you?” We should soon follow that cry with these words: “Into Your loving, merciful hands I commit my spirit” (Piper). Before delving more deeply into the subject of being angry with God, let’s first look at the essence of “anger” and its theological impact upon Christian thought down through the centuries.

Anger, Depression, Stoicism and Asceticism

Well known Christian psychologist **Jay Adams** states in his book “*The Christian Counselor’s Manual*,” that “anger is a powerful emotion,” though in and of itself “it is not sinful” (Adams, pp. 348-367). We learn this from the apostle Paul’s careful distinction between “being angry” and “not sinning” in his letter to the Ephesians (4:26). Dr. Adams goes on to say, however, that Scripture is explicit regarding the ventilation of anger — because that is sinful. Note the following passages: “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but the wise man holds it back and quiets it” (Prv 29:11). “It is prudent for a man to restrain his anger” (Prv 19:11). “He who is quick tempered acts foolishly” (Prv 14:17). Adams writes: “One controls his anger best when he is solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented,” and that “love must replace anger.” It is important to remember that love is not a feeling but an action... and that love must first be expressed and learned as giving, because that is the root of love — as a person gives, loving

feelings will ultimately follow (Adams, p. 354). The apostle Paul said: “If your enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink” (Rom 14:2). It is always giving with which love begins (Jn 3:16), and that giving should be as concrete and specific as a cup of cold water (Mt 25:35). It is the spirit of giving that creates an atmosphere where communication and reconciliation flourish.

The founders of the *Minirth-Meier Psychiatric Clinic* in Dallas, Texas — Christian medical doctors **Paul D. Meier** and **Frank B. Minirth** — say in their book *Introduction to Psychology & Counseling* that “pent-up anger is the root of nearly all clinical depression.” Regrettably, they say, many parents discourage their children from sharing angry feelings, even appropriately; as a result their children grow up learning to “fear anger,” thus they grow up feeling guilty when angry feelings surface and believe expressing them will result in rejection or punishment, even though angry feelings in and of themselves are not sinful (Meier & Minirth, p. 261). The Bible says, “Be angry and sin not” (Eph 4:26) — the issue is to deal rightly with angry feelings; those who do not maturely rid themselves of anger daily increase the likelihood of experiencing clinical depression. Depression feeds on itself and becomes increasingly more painful — people who feel hopeless, helpless, worthless, and guilty, become very self-critical and self-debasing; thus resulting in more inappropriate thinking. Minirth and Meier remind us that depression affects people physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Meier & Minirth, p. 258). In David’s psalm of penitence (Psalm 38), we are given a biblical description of how an individual feels when he experiences symptoms of depression. *Depression is a painful, emotional reaction characterized by intense feelings of loss, sadness, worthlessness, failure, or rejection that is not warranted by an objective view of events.* It is distinguished from grief, which is a realistic response to actual loss or suffering. Depression is often a disproportionately intense reaction to difficult life situations (Meier, p. 258).

To overcome depression, most people merely need to get back in touch with their basic needs for self-worth, for intimacy with others, and for intimacy with God. Because Christians have a “new spirit” within them (Jn 3:6), they have a potential resource for solving day-to-day problems. The Word of God and prayer can help a person become stable and strong in times of trouble (Jn 8:32; 1 Jn 5:14-15). By loving, studying, affirming, and meditating on the Word, a person can receive tremendous help in overcoming the bondage of depression. It should be noted, depressed individuals seldom realize how angry they are — it is only after recognizing and admitting one’s anger, and gaining insight into it, that improvement occurs (Meier, pp. 274, 279).

The Stoics of the ancient Greco-Roman world believed in “mastering their passions” and not being ruled by them — obviously, they saw the danger of letting their passions rule their lives. These **ascetics** focused on rejecting the world and bodily pleasures through sustained self-denial and self-mortification, with the objective of strengthening their spiritual lives. They believed their chief enemies in life were their passions and lusts, because they perverted their judgment; as such, they resolutely strived to put them aside (Walker, pp. 7-8). Stoicism was a major school of Hellenistic thought that concentrated almost entirely on “ethics.” It taught that a man becomes virtuous through knowledge (*as opposed to the cross of Christ*), which enables him to live in harmony with nature and thereby achieve a profound sense of happiness and freedom from those emotions which insulate him from the vicissitudes of life. This is very similar to the present day humanistic approaches to mental health as postulated by modern psychology. One further note — whereas the Stoic’s spirit is ultimately one of “pride,” the Christian’s spirit is to be one of “humility” (Elwell, pp. 1150-1151).

Ascetic theology deals with the means of attaining Christian holiness and perfection — it deals with the renunciation of personal desires, the mortification of the flesh, the forsaking of sin, the surrendering of one's will to the will of God, the imitation of Christ, the pursuit of charity, and the practice of positive Christian virtue. Down through the centuries asceticism has been commonly practiced in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and numerous other religions. It was ***Clement of Alexandria*** (the greatest Christian scholar of the second century), under Stoic influence, who stressed “the passionlessness of inward detachment and purification from passions as a condition for the soul's ascent to God” (Elwell, p. 105). The basis of ascetic theology in Christianity can be found in the teachings of Jesus (cf. Mt 7:13-27; 9:15; 19:12; 19:21; 24:42; 25:13; Mk 8:34; 10:28; Lk 9:57-62; 12:33; Jn 15:4-8)... the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27; Eph 4:22; Col 3:5; Rom 8, Gal 5), as well as those of James, John and Peter. It is the unified witness of the New Testament that the Christian life is a discipline, a struggle, and that success in this struggle is enabled by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit (Elwell, pp. 104-105). By humbly depending upon the Lord to rule in one's life, the believer is able to overcome his flesh with its passions and lusts, and thereby experience the freedom, joy and peace that God wants him to experience (Jn 15:4-11; Rom 5:1-5; Gal 5:22-25; Eph 5:9; Col 3:12-15). With that said, let's return once again to the subject of being angry with God.

Our Response to Difficult Circumstances

Though God's answers to our prayers often don't come when we want them to, and frequently differ from the ones we seek, we must learn to trust Him during the times of testing. **Laura Seil Ruszczyk** shares her journey through anger and how she dealt with it on her website. She tells how her faith was tested while dealing with a very serious stressor with one of her children. In a weak state she cried out to the Lord and angrily decided to give up on Him — she was done praying and listening. A few days later she shared her anguish with a couple of close friends: “How could God, the person who claims to love His children, throw another stressor on my family in addition to my chronic illness? Doesn't He know we have had enough and need a break? We prayed! We followed the rules! We did everything right! Couldn't He solve this problem? It has gone on for months — it is time for it to end! But no, it just keeps on going, and I am mad at God!” The amazing thing, writes Laura, is that “I stayed angry!” A short time later while she was driving around on errands, however, she began talking with God... and the most remarkable thing happened— “God was there, listening,” she said. His peace completely overcame her, even though her situation had not changed. God had miraculously given her the grace to see His hand in it, and He gave her the strength she needed to attend to the situation. He brought people into her life she had never known before, people who ultimately became invaluable to her, both as friends and spiritual advisers. Laura learned that “God never leaves us no matter how angry we get — we just need to [reach out to] Him and He will come and assist.... We all go through seasons in our life when we turn from God instead of to Him, but He is always there waiting” (Ruszczyk). Laura's experience reminds me of the words of Jeremiah — “The lovingkindness of the Lord never ceases; His mercies are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23). The truth of the matter is God never leaves us or forsakes us, no matter how frustrated or angry we become, or how excruciatingly painful the journey may be (2 Tim 2:13; Heb 13:5)... the work He began in us, He has promised to complete (Phil 1:6), and everything we go through is simply an integral part of His transformational plan (Rom 8:28, 31, 36; Eph 1:11).

Anger with God can lead us in one of two directions: Either we try to find a way out of the disappointment and pain of anger, and stifle our emotions until we become apathetic towards God... or we use the passion of anger to engage with God even more fully and stay engaged with Him until He shows Himself to be who He is — the God of all blessing. Anger as a fork in the road can be seen in 2 Samuel where David became angry when the Lord struck down Uzzah for touching the ark when it was nearly upset by the oxen (2 Sam 6:8). And then there is the anger Jonah expressed toward God for the mercy He was showing toward the Ninevites. God replied to Jonah, “Have you any right to be angry?” Interestingly enough, God did not punish Jonah for his anger, instead He tried to use his anger to engage with him. He caused a vine to grow over Jonah, killed the vine and then blazed down heat on Jonah’s head. Again God asks Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” Jonah brazenly replies, “I do! I am angry enough to die!” Again, God did not strike Jonah dead for his anger, but used it to engage him by saying, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow; it sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about this great city?” God tried to use Jonah’s anger to open his eyes to see that what he viewed as a disappointment was actually a huge blessing. Did Jonah’s anger cause him to disengage from God so that he didn’t have to deal with a God who didn’t do every thing the way he wanted Him to? The text never says. Instead the Bible just leaves the question hanging and by doing so poses a question to each of us: What will we do with our anger with God when He does not do things the way we want them done? Will we allow our anger to push us away from God until we sink into a state of apathy and resistance towards God? Or will we continue to engage God more fully until we end up worshipping Him as passionately as we were angry with Him?

Selfish anger places distance between friends and prevents friendships from growing. Jesus is well aware of the destructive power of selfish anger. Therefore He said, “If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there and first go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and present your offering” (Mt 5: 23-24). His message is this: Don’t pretend that things are all right between you and God if your human relationships are marked by selfish anger and strife. Our hearts are far from God when we hold on to selfish anger — selfish anger in our human relationships obstructs our friendship with God. Jesus suggests that His Father’s response to our rebellion against Him was to send His Son to repair the damage we had done to His friendship — rather than holding a great deal against us, He responded with perfect love and mercy. Carefully think about that last statement. Our friendship with God is harmed when we have selfish anger toward others, because we show a lack of trust in God who is committed to our good regardless of our circumstances. In short, our selfish anger toward others rests on our anger toward God for not giving us the lives we want. **Anger toward God is always selfish,** and selfish anger is always preoccupied with selfish interests. God has no flaws and makes no mistakes... He never does us wrong (though in the moment we may not see it that way)... so if we find ourselves angry with life or with God, we need to know that He is not the problem — we are. We are not in a position to tell God that He should have done things differently, nor are we in a position to presume that God cannot bring good out of whatever suffering it is we are called to bear. Jesus showed us this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed: “Father, not what I will, but what You will” (Mt 26:39).

It can be very difficult to trust God. We may hold deep grudges against Him for allowing the undesirable circumstances of our lives... for many of us it has been one difficult circumstance

after another. The common complaint that “*a loving God would not allow us to suffer*” is really a masked expression of anger against God. God can always be trusted, but until we actually learn this lesson in the furnace of affliction, we will have trouble trusting Him. What a gift, then, can emerge... from anger toward God!!! Such anger can be an opportunity to recognize and to *confess our selfish willfulness*. We can see the depths of our need to receive God’s grace. We can ask for His grace and yield to its transforming power. Through all of this, we can ask for help every step of the way — by the way, *we all need help every step of the way*, because destructive selfishness lurks around every corner of our lives. It is important to remember, we cannot receive God’s grace if we are angry with Him. Letting go of anger toward others must start with being reconciled to God by receiving His forgiveness and experiencing His friendship. We must put first things first, and God must be first — in putting Him first we then find freedom from selfish anger and all else that destroys us, and it is then that we experience abundant living. The material in these last two paragraphs was taken from an article written by the faculty of *Loyola University Chicago*, a Catholic Jesuit university. They concluded their study with the words of a provocative poem titled “*Love Gives*” (Loyola University Faculty):

Love Gives

*You say love gives.
But then You take
and You withhold
the things I want the most.*

*If you loved, so loved me so,
with all Your power
Why?
Why, if You so loved me so,
Why
don't You
won't You
can't You
see
that this just is not love to me?!*

*If You loved me as You say,
You would give to me my way.
Life would not be near so hard
And I would be fully in charge.*

*You say love gives.
And all I have
is life
the way that I don't want.
Can You give me something else?*

How to Handle Anger with God

Radio host, author, and Episcopalian minister **Ian Punnett**, was interviewed by “*The Blaze*” regarding a book he had written about being angry with God. When asked the question, “Is it okay for Christians to be angry at God?” he responded: “I would turn that question this way — Is it okay for Christians to be human to the Divine?” Anger, he said, is a human emotion that is tied to feelings of disrespect. When things pile up and we feel that our relationship with God is failing us, it’s easy to experience strong feelings of anger. If we are feeling anger toward God, then who do we think we are fooling by NOT just admitting it and healthily working through it like we would any relationship? So, is it okay for Christians to be angry at God? Absolutely, as long as we don’t live in that anger and allow it to define or even end the relationship — that’s the greater sin. The important thing is to be honest with God and tell Him exactly what you are feeling. Says Punnett, “Instead of treating God like some kind of proctor who is about to judge your oral exam, think of Him as your best college roommate to whom you could tell anything — tell God everything [that’s bothering you]” (Punnett), and seek His resolution in the matter.

Pat McCloskey, Catholic priest and the Franciscan Editor of *St. Anthony Messenger Magazine*, recommends in his book, “*When You are Angry with God*” (Paulist Press), the following helpful points on how to bring your anger and other honest feelings before God —

- 1. Admit your anger if that’s what you feel.** Every human emotion has an important function for us. We can decide not to face an emotion, but we cannot stop an emotion from surfacing. We need to see “our feelings” as being one thing (they are often fleshly temptations), and “our behavior” in response to them as being quite another thing (it is at this point where we apply our faith — this is where the rubber meets the road). Feeling angry with God, then, is not bad in itself — once we admit we feel angry toward God, we become free to see the many ways in which we can express that anger. A person who feels angry with God has several options available to him — he can turn his back on God, curse the next person who tells him not to be angry with God, or express that anger honestly in prayer and come to terms with it and God. Because some ways of expressing anger are admittedly very destructive, we need to choose ways which reflect our deepest Christian values.
- 2. Don’t restrict yourself to “nice” feelings.** Dividing our feelings into “nice” and “not nice” categories encourages us to deny those feelings we label as “not nice.” Such denial, however, severely limits our possibilities of dealing with them. Many Christians would tell us that “nice people don’t question God or ever get angry with God.” Adults often deny the existence of conflict so that they can be “nice” — but is a relationship between two people which is so weak that it cannot withstand any quarrel or disappointments worth maintaining? What kind of God is so fragile that we cannot admit our honest feelings of disappointment or anger to Him? Those who are in the habit of denying their emotions may settle for a faith that refuses to face life with any real depth or honesty. In the late 1960s, **Elisabeth Kubler-Ross**, in her popular book titled *On Death and Dying*, showed that often dying persons have fewer problems in admitting their condition than friends or relatives who cling to denial in order to protect their own feelings. In the final stages of a terminal illness, in fact, a dying person who has come to acceptance will avoid people whose own need to deny the situation is stronger than the dying person’s need to live honestly with it.

3. **Be wary of a faith which is always “nice.”** Admitting our anger with God does not destroy faith, rather it forces us to clarify what we really believe and why — it moves us from an immature childlike faith to a more mature adult faith. Though refusing to admit anger with God may seem like a protection of one’s faith, McCloskey believes in the long run it does more harm than good. A lack of transparent honesty and openness is to live with a sense of denial, and never come to terms with the spiritual realities that inhabit our sinful flesh.
4. **Let your honesty lead to growth in faith.** By choosing to deal with our feelings, rather than pretend that they don’t exist, opens the door to a more adult faith and a greater understanding and appreciation of the present moment and of God’s divine providence. A life of denial frequently results in developing a faith that simply “goes through the motions”... but a life of transparent honesty leads to a deeper, richer faith; one that is able to put its arms around all of life... even the last chapter of life.
5. **Be careful how you speak of “God’s will.”** People who refuse to admit ever being angry with God, and who immediately describe a tragedy as “*God’s will*” may have the best of intentions, but experience shows that those who simply speak about suffering as God’s will, have yet to experience the transforming effect of affliction in their own life. Standing by people in their grief and loss, and helping them see their options for expressing their sorrow is probably the most faith-filled response we can make (Jn 11:35; Rom 12:15; 2 Cor 1:3-5; 1 Pet 5:7, 10).
6. **Express your feelings honestly when you pray.** People who pray honestly in anger can grow into a faith which may not be as “nice” as before, but is obviously more transparent, honest and real. Moreover, these are the people who are most ready to understand and assist others who are bandaging up life’s physical or emotional wounds (2 Cor 1:3-5). If we can face an emotion like anger with God, see our own freedom in responding to that emotion, pray honestly if not elegantly, then we might be able to help another suffering person put his or her life back together again. But if we refuse to recognize “bad” feelings in ourselves, or believe that genuine prayer must always be serene, undoubtedly we will become an obstacle to someone else’s faith. Writes McCloskey: “Praying amid my own anger or encouraging someone else to pray honestly in his or her anger may feel awkward and not much like any prayer I’ve ever known. From such soil, however, God may nurture a faith unlike the one I had – or the other person had – when everything went very smoothly and there was no reason to pray in anger.”
7. **Recognize when it is time to move beyond anger.** We become angry when we suffer significant loss. If we will admit our anger and deal with our anger, we will not become a person who is “*frozen in anger*.” Dealing with anger can lead to growth, to deeper compassion, and to a deeper faith in God. Though dealing with anger will not necessarily erase the sorrow, it will enable us to live honestly, and to help others who have experienced great loss as well. If anger becomes a permanent condition, however, that individual’s spiritual growth comes to a standstill long before his journey is over. *Our goal in life must be to possess an honest, realistic, mature faith in God* — however much that may resemble or differ from the faith in God we had as children. Adults who are ready to grow in their faith can face their anger, recognize their God-given freedom in the face of it, and encourage others to do the same.

Is there a Correlation between Hatred and Anger?

Webster Dictionary describes hatred as “intense animosity or hostility,” thus it is a strong pre-disposition against something. The opposite of hating something is liking something. When we “like” something, we connect with it in a positive way... when we “hate” something, it produces a strong desire to distance ourselves from it. Wikipedia defines hatred as “a deep and emotional extreme dislike that can be directed against individuals, entities, objects, or ideas” (wikipedia.org). Both the Old and New Testaments deal with hatred — David thanked God for destroying those who hated him (Ps 18:40; 25:19; 35:19; 59:13; 63:9; 69:4; 89:23; 143:7-12; cf. Ex 23:27; 2 Sam 22:41). David’s sons hated each other — Absalom killed his half-brother after he raped his sister... after banishment, Absalom hated his father and tried to destroy him. The Old Testament also contains condemnations of hatred — “you shall not hate your brother in your heart” (Lev 19:17)... as does the New Testament — “whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn 3:15); the present tense verb here indicates a habitual pattern of life where “hatred” is the ongoing reality that characterizes one’s life (as opposed to a temporary moment of dislike).

In psychoanalysis, **Sigmund Freud** defined hate as an ego state that wishes to destroy the source of its unhappiness (Freud, *The Instincts and their Vicissitudes*). The *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* defines hate as a “deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards a person, group, or object.” Because hatred is generally believed to be long-lasting, many psychologists consider it to be more of an attitude or disposition than a temporary emotional state. Obviously, anger contains the seed of “hate” — what is important for the believer is that he come to terms with his hatred, and not let it germinate in his soul, consume his heart, or boil over into an uncontrollable rage (Eph 4:26-27; Ps 4:4; Phil 4:6-7; 1 Pet 5:7). Hatred is simply the flesh demanding its own way... and we all inhabit sinful flesh.

Importance of Maintaining a Balanced Perspective

Most of us do our best to “make life work” by doing what is right, and by being diligent, ethical, responsible, and hard-working — when things go well for us we are encouraged, grateful and pleased... but when things don’t go well most of us become discouraged, disappointed, angry and ungrateful. Reality teaches us that we really don’t have the “final say” in the matter... and try those as we may to influence a much desired positive outcome, most of us recognize that all our efforts aren’t the sole determining factor, but that it essentially rests in the hands of our sovereign Creator (Prv 16:1, 9; 19:21). I find it interesting that most of us are quick to “thank God” when things go right (a parking place opens up for us in a crowded parking lot... we get served quicker than expected at the bank... the cost of fixing our car ends up being much less than we thought it was going to be... the crowded freeway suddenly starts moving quickly when we’re in a hurry... we’re invited to spend a three-day weekend at the beach with friends, and they will also be providing childcare for our children). On the other hand, most of us get “frustrated and disappointed” when things go wrong (we sit in line in a parking lot waiting for a parking space to magically materialize... the line we stand in at the bank moves three times slower than all of the other lines... the cost of fixing our car ends up being twice as much as we thought it was going to be... the traffic on the free-way comes to a standstill when we are already late for an appointment... we are asked to work overtime the entire weekend, even though we had made plans to go away for the weekend). Notice how easy it is to “thank God” when things go well,

and how easy it is to be “disappointed in Him” when things go bad. The experiences I listed above are simply the routine ones we are all subjected to every day. The truth of matter is, when life works it’s a joyful, likable experience... but when life doesn’t work, it’s a painful, unlikable experience... and none of us like painful experiences. Ultimately, when life becomes too painful, we then let God know about it, and ask Him to let up... and should He continue to let the storms rage, the vast majority of us then become angry and disappointed.

Just over one hundred years ago, prolific gospel song writer **Johnson Oatman, Jr.** penned the words to the popular hymn “*Count Your Blessings*.” It fast became a favorite hymn not only in America, but also in Great Britain. Commented one song writer, “Like a beam of sunlight it has brightened up the dark places of the earth.” Carefully reflect upon its words —

*When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

*Chorus: Count your blessings name them one by one;
Count your blessings see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings see what God hath done.*

*Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.*

*When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings money cannot buy,
Your reward in heaven nor your home on high.*

*So amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged God is over all;
Count your many blessings angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey’s end.*

Accepting the fact that “Life is Not Fair”

Life is not fair — it never has been, and it never will be. Some people are born with powerful advantages; others are born with crippling disadvantages. Life is not fair. We constantly hear of bad things happening to innocent people, and of wicked people prospering and seemingly have everything go their way (Ps 73). In a perfect world, one would think, the righteous should prosper and evil doers should suffer hardships, but that does not describe our world. It doesn’t seem fair that Bill Gates has made billions of dollars by developing software for computers, or that Steve Jobs has made billions of dollars with Apple Computer, or that Sergey Brin and Larry Page have made billions of dollars starting Google, while hundreds of millions of people can’t

even afford a place to live. The truth of the matter is, it is not fair. **Bill Gates**, in a speech he gave at a High School a few years ago, spoke about eleven things they did not and will not learn in school. He talked about how feel-good, politically correct teachings created a generation of kids with no concept of reality and how this concept sets them up for failure in the real world. Of the eleven things he mentioned, the very first one was, “Life is not fair — get used to it!” (Gates). **King Solomon**, the wisest man who ever lived, put it this way: “I saw other things in this life that were not fair. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the strongest soldier does not always win the battle; wise people do not always get the food; smart people do not always get the wealth; educated people do not always get the praise they deserve. When the time comes, bad things can happen to anyone!” (Ecc 9:11; also cf. Job 1:21; 2:10; 1 Pet 4:12).

Life is filled with hardships and disappointments, blessings and joy. Unfortunately we struggle with the misconceptions that life is supposed to be a “happy experience.” There are many hymns that proclaim that we should always be happy and that there are no more sorrows. The truth of the matter is, if we fail to realize that this world is not our home, the hard times will be an even greater struggle. Jesus made it clear that good times and hard times happen in every life (Mt 7:24-27). If our expectations are that God should insulate us from unhappiness or struggles, we will be greatly disappointed. The natural tendency for each of us is to look at circumstances based on what is in it for us personally; as such, we will always feel shorted when the things we go through take away from our comfort, benefit or immediate happiness. The difficulty comes when we forget that this world is passing away and that our reward lies on the other side of life. It is critically important for us to learn the truth that God is completely counter-culture to our human nature. Nothing in this world has eternal value — the best car on the market will one day be completely worthless, because it will totally disintegrate over time... yet the little “door ping” we get on our new car makes many of us furious!

The Bible calls **Job** a “righteous” man. God’s favor was on every part of his life... until he pretty much lost everything he had: all ten of his children (think about that!), his crops, barns, animals, all other possessions, and his health. Is that fair? Is this how God treats His most faithful followers? **Joseph** was chosen by God while still a child living at home. Before he was grown, his eleven jealous brothers sold him into slavery. While serving in Potiphar’s house, he was wrongly accused of rape and spent the next thirteen years in prison. A fellow inmate told Joseph that when he got out, he would plead for his release... but he forgot his pledge. Is that fair? **Daniel** was raised in a God-fearing family of nobility... his future look promising until the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. These idol-worshipping warriors kidnapped Daniel and other young men of his caliber. He was ripped from his family, home, school, country, and everything that was familiar to him. He was forced to learn a new language, live in a pagan culture, and eat food too rich for a Jewish diet. Where is a loving God in all of this? Is that fair? Rebecca Barlow Jordan cites the words of **Dr. R. T. Kendall** on her website (he is the senior minister of Westminster Chapel in London). Dr. Kendall believes “100 percent of all true believers will go through a period when God seems to let them down... and [sadly] over 90 percent of them will fail to break through the feeling of betrayal and abandonment by God” (Jordan).

David Godfrey, pastor of *Mosaic Church* in Mudgeeraba, Australia, said: “We understand from a very young age that life is not fair... you work hard at your job and the lazy guy gets the promotion... and your spouse gets cancer while you are in your prime — that’s not fair” (Godfrey). We all ask the reflex question of why. Why if God is good does this happen? Why if God is all

powerful can this not be stopped? Why? Unfortunately, the Bible does not really resolve the why question in the way we would like. It never really gives us the key to avoiding or alleviating suffering in this life. We want to know why so we can make sense of what is happening, prevent it from happening in the future, or perhaps so we can stop it in the present. Yet, just alongside the reality of suffering, in Scripture we are given a picture of the eternal omniscient One who is all powerful, who is loving, who is sovereign, and who can turn our suffering into good. While the why question is a normal, reflex question, it never really solves our problem or alleviates the pain. This does not mean that it is not a legitimate question, but it may not give us the relief we are looking for. Rather than focusing on the “why” question, Scripture focuses on the “who” question — Who is in control? Who can make things right? Who can restore all things? Who will you turn to in your pain? Who will you trust? The answer, of course, is Jesus (Godfrey). Paul reminds us of the supremacy of Christ in his writings: “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:17)... “From Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Rom 11:36)... “He is the blessed and only Sovereign... to Him be honor and eternal dominion” (1 Tim 6:15-16). So when you feel the pull to ask why, try focusing on the who. When you feel like your life is being torn apart, know that the ever-existent One holds all things together (Godfrey). If we know that God is truly in control, we know that our circumstances are by His own hand and are all a part of His plan and purpose for our lives.

It is important to remember that the world is imbued with purpose. **Arthur Khachatryan** says, “This world exists for reasons beyond itself, not merely for the sake of fairness, but for the eternal glory of its creator. This world exists for the world hereafter. If not for the redemption of the life to come (1 Cor 15:19), the present pains and sorrows will weigh us down into an abyss of utter darkness without any hope. [The truth of the matter is], there is no fairness to speak of when there is no ultimate end. Far from inequity, the ultimate end will see the roses of this eternal weight of glory rise triumphantly white from the trampled mire of the injustice of this world. This temporary earthly injustice will then be replaced by the perfect eternal justice that reigns from the very being of Almighty God” (Khachatryan). In light of this, is anything unbearable? “For these momentary, light afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison and comprehension” (2 Cor 4:17). The truth of matter is, life is filled with circumstances that are not fair (Job 1:8; 2:3; 6:24-30); so rather than expecting life to be fair (Job 8:3-6), we need to accept the fact that life will not always be fair. **Matt Redman**, in his popular song “*Blessed Be Your Name*” (Job 1:21; 2:10), expressed it this way —

*Blessed be Your name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your name*

*Blessed be Your name
when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed by Your name*

*Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's all as it should be
Blessed be Your name*

*Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name*

*You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
“Lord, blessed be Your name”*

Steps to Overcoming Anger or Disappointment with God

In Jeremiah 31, God promises that He will fully satisfy the weary soul, and will replenish every languishing and sorrowful person (Jer 31:25). And in Psalm 23, He says “He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He refreshes and restores my soul, and leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Ps 23:2-3). God desires wholeness and healing in the broken places of our hearts and lives — and He is faithful to achieve it (Ps 103:1-3; 138:8; Is 43:25; Ex 15:26; Jer 30:17; 1 Th 5:24). As believers, our part in the healing process is to:

- Identify the true source of your hurt.
- Verbalize any anger or disappointment you have toward God.
- Repent of falsely accusing and blaming God.
- Allow God to redeem the hurt by speaking His love and truth into your heart.

The international Christian organization, “*Restoring the Foundations*,” says that a natural result of hurting is to question whether or not God “cares,” or to believe that if He does care, that He cares more about other people than about us. When we feel God has hurt, betrayed, or abandoned us, we have a difficult time receiving anything good from God. The bottom line when we are “*disappointed with God*” is a “*failure to trust Him*.” Why would the one who “hurt” us want to “heal” us? People carrying hurt or disappointment often believe that God simply doesn’t care, and such a belief can block God’s voice and affect our entire relationship with Him. The serious believer has to come to terms with such unanswered questions as (restoringyourlife.org) —

- God, where were You?
- God, if You love me so much, why didn’t You intervene?
- God, why didn’t You warn me not to get involved?
- God, why did I have to go through this?
- God, why do you permit me to suffer such anguish?
- God, why don’t You answer my prayers?
- God, why do You seem so far away, so hidden, so silent?

The fear that a caring God has abandoned us in our time of need and pain must be addressed, and this involves overcoming several obstacles — often people consider *questioning God* to be inappropriate, sacrilegious, ungodly, and even dangerous... they may see any attempt to work through honest, negative feelings as a lack of faith, weakness, or rebellion... a person may fear

that God will be angry with them and punish them for having and expressing their real feelings. But simply burying these feelings is not the answer — that will hinder our relationship with God. Without addressing negative feelings, we will forfeit intimacy with God and settle for a faith that just “goes through the motions.” A turning point occurs when we realize the root cause of our hurt is sin — “self-centeredness” — and Satan is always there encouraging sin to continue. When this principle is understood, it makes it easier to stop blaming God and begin putting the blame where it belongs. God promises to be with us through the pain, the hurt, the disappointment, the things that we don’t understand, and the grief process. Though God often doesn’t remove the pain, He does go through it with us (Ps 23:4; 46:1; Rom 3:3; 1 Th 5:24; 2 Tim 2:13). Following are the two steps one must take to experience genuine healing in life (restoringyourlife.org) —

- 1. Pour out your complaint to God** — When we find emotions of anger, frustration, and helplessness stored inside of ourselves, it is important to release these “negative emotions” to the Lord. We were not designed to carry negative emotions; they need to be released so that we can receive healing in our souls. There are many examples in Scripture of God’s people “pouring out their complaints” to the Lord — one example is that of David in Psalm 142. This is a crucial part of the healing process. We are to take the innermost issues of our heart to God – remember, we need to be real! (cf. Jn 11:21, 32, 37). We are to hold nothing back from our heavenly Father who already knows everything that is going on within us. We need to be willing to believe and trust that God wants to touch the “hurting places” in our life. This is that time when God wants to do a “great exchange” in our life — exchanging joy for mourning, healing for pain, purity for shame, love for abandonment, and freedom for captivity. As we are able to release our pain to the Lord, He is then able to heal us with His love and His truth. Remember, God is not a taker — He is a receiver and a giver. As we give Him our wounds, pain, and bondage, He receives them and in turn gives us liberty, healing and restoration.
- 2. Prepare for God’s healing** — Jesus is the healer. Healing takes place as we invite Him into our situation of hurt. When we are hurting we want to hear from Him and have Him speak to us. As we encounter Him, He will give us the truth so we can begin to change the lies we have believed into life-transforming truths. He will show us His love, and that He was there with us, even when at times we didn’t realize it. He helps us to forgive others and forgive ourselves, and to receive His forgiveness and His love. When Jesus comes, He brings with Him the full power of the cross — forgiveness, restoration, and freedom from hate, fear, anger, guilt and shame. Jesus knows what it’s like to have “pain” (Is 53:3-5; Mt 27:46)... the facts are: it was our pains He bore on the cross... it was our disfigurements and all the things that are wrong with us... it was our sins for which He suffered... it was our sins that ripped and tore and crushed Him. He took the punishment that we were to experience, and in turn made us whole — through His bruises we experience healing (restoringyourlife.org).

In addition to the various individuals stated in the foregoing study, some of the material was taken from the following authors and sources —

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