

Facing The Disappointments of Life!

by Dr. Edward Watke, Jr.

A young lady started to work as part of the office staff of a Bible College. She was a 20-year-old, cheery, friendly, bright-eyed and greatly liked. Three months later, a massive tumor was found in her abdomen. Doctors concluded she had only 3 months to live. Debbie left for a hospital that specialized in cancer treatment. Later when she came back to work and the cancer was in remission, it seemed as though she was cured. You can imagine the tremendous feelings of relief, and joy in the family and among her friends at the school. But the cancer did start to grow again and Debbie died some months later.

- Can you visualize what it must have been like to be lifted to the heavens , as it were, with those great feelings of joy and anticipation of a new lease on life only to have all hope dashed to the ground?
- During that time Debbie had to fight a tremendous sense of disappointment, as did her family and friends.
- The temporary promise of healing only heightened the disappointment.

Life can be so full of disappointments and we all have them.

1. You take a new job only to find out that it is a terrible environment.
2. You have a promotion coming - but someone else gets it instead who is less qualified and unexperienced.
3. You can be deeply disappointed in your children's actions -- or youth, or after they left home and have fallen into deep sin.

A women who had long been a Bible class teacher said, “ *Long ago I given up on God and on prayer. For 19 years I prayed that my daughter would grow up to be a missionary. Not only has she not become a missionary, but she is now married to an unsaved man.*” Looking wistfully into the distance, she said, “*I don't want to ask God for anything else because I don't want to be hurt and disappointed again.*”

We could all tell story after story about disappointments -- jobs that did not pan out; losses that we never expected to face -- marriages that did not succeed -- husbands that won't lead -- wives that are unwilling to allow the husband to lead -- financial decisions that brought loss and hurt. The list could be endless.

I. HAVING DISAPPOINTMENTS IS NORMAL

The Bible tells us about a time of severe disappointment experienced by the Children of Israel. I think in this we see many lessons: (Exodus. 15:22-27)

1. They had just gone through the Red Sea that God had so gloriously opened up for them.
2. They had witnessed God's great power and mighty hand in their deliverance. They had seen the many plagues on Egypt and were aware of the awesome power of God.
3. The first part of Exodus chapter 15 records their response to what God had done. The song is so full of ecstatic praise that you are sure they will trust the Lord even in the most difficult of situations.

4. But the heights of ecstasy did not last long in Moses day! *Maybe that is so often true in our day as well?* Tramping across the hot desert sand quickly reduced Israelites' supply of water to a sip now and then and none at all.
5. For 3 days they looked for water and found none. Repeatedly the scouts had nothing good to report. It is clear from the narrative that anxiety was increasing. Let me assure you that this all was very real and what is often true of that part of the world.
6. A report came - we have found an oasis - there is water ahead -- **wow - glory** -- parents probably had encouraged their children -- just a bit further and we will be there. Yet when they arrived they discovered water so bitter they could not drink it.
7. Grumbling set in as doubtless they had experienced a tremendous feeling of exhilaration as they approached the oasis, convinced the need will be met -- *Now it seemed as if God was playing games with them? He led them to an oasis and their hopes soared -- only to be dashed to the ground.*

II. DISAPPOINTMENTS ARE A TEST:

- We can learn some lessons about overcoming disappointment from this experience of the Children of Israel. We will ask some questions:

A. First, What causes disappointment?

1. It comes from a wrong focus of thinking.

- a. The Children of Israel had their minds and hearts set on finding water particularly and an improved circumstance in life in a general way.

We do not totally fault them in this, but think with me! When we have our hearts set on something in this world -- we stand a tremendous chance of experiencing bitter disappointment or resentment.

You have your heart set on a promotion for example; you feel it is done- its in the bag, you deserve it, when it is given to another the bottom drops out of your world.

Or maybe you have your heart set on marriage, for example -- you meet another person with the same desire. You sense that it will work, in the Lord. Yet soon after the wedding, you realize he's not the kind of husband you expected. As the years pass, the differences grow, as does the strain in the marriage relationship.

- b. Initially the disappointment is mingled with the hope that things will get better.
- c. As the days roll into months and years, there is less hope and more disappointment.
- d. Why did God let this happen to you is your question! And we become bitter, resentful, and directly or indirectly we blame God for our lot in life!

In both of these illustrations, as in Israel, the focus was on circumstances, not on God. You were hoping circumstances would bring you joy, forgetting that joy comes ONLY out of your relationship with Jesus Christ! (Jh 15:11 -- Phil. 4:4 -- Neh 8:10)

As long as our hope is based on something or a combination of circumstances in this world -- the risk of disappointment is very great.

2. Secondly, the children of Israel had their hopes pinned on a person, Moses, rather than on God.

- a. After all, he had been involved in such an astonishing number of miracles. So when the water was bitter, they grumbled to Moses.
- b. They were not actually grumbling against Moses. Their complaint was with God.
- c. Every complaint against the circumstances, or events of life is in reality a complaint against God.

3. On a list of 10 reasons why marriages fail -- unrealistic expectations is often at the top!

- a. Communication problems, anger, bitterness, hardness of heart, etc. are there. But what is number one? Unfulfilled expectations!
- b. People expect a partner to provide what only God can do for them!

One woman wrote that she had made her *prince charming* the king of her life! When he left her after 20 years of marriage, she was no longer the queen, and it devastated her. She made little progress, despite several stays in a mental hospital, until a friend invited her to a Bible study. There she found that Jesus could meet her hearts needs in a way her husband had never been able to do.

You say, “*but my wife or my husband would never disappoint me that way*” -- but remember any human being is a potential broken reed.

- Only Jesus will never disappoint you.
- For that reason alone, your focus, even in a happy marriage, needs to be on your relationship with the Lord.

One of the most widespread causes for disappointment is the discovery that a spiritual Leader has feet of clay -- that he is not perfect -- or loses his temper -- or is rude at some point, or fails in some other way.

- Unfortunately we have our super-stars in Christianity even as the world has its superstars.
- We forget that Jesus alone is the superstar in Christianity.

B. Have you ever thought that our disappointments are God’s way of showing that there are idols in our lives that must be dealt with?

CONSIDER:

- a. Psa 73 -- The Psalmist Asaph tells us that he looked at the rich, noticed they were often wicked people. He wondered why they had wealth. He wondered why they prospered when they were so wicked. He said, “*My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*” (73:2-3) He desired what they had experienced.
- b. Then he went into the temple, God reminded him of the end of the wicked -- he quickly saw their end as Hell, and He stated , “*Whom have I in heaven by Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.*” (vs 25)
- c. The children of Israel arrived at Marah, their hearts set on improved circumstances, on an abundance of sweet water, on another great display of leadership by Moses, and they were severely disappointed.
- d. They had not yet learned that God wants us to recognize that He alone is the One who can fully meet our expectations. Materials things often take God’s place.

III. DISAPPOINTMENTS ARE AN OPPORTUNITY:

A. What is the remedy for disappointment? It is an opportunity for God to work a miracle!

1. Moses had listened to the grumbling of the people. You can take only so much of that, so he quieted them and he started talking to God. In fact He **cried out** to the Lord.
2. The Lord responded by showing him a tree that he cut down and threw into the water. Whether the tree was known for its ability to turn bitter water into sweet drinking water does not matter -- the fact is that Moses saw the tree only when he called upon the Lord.
 - a. Prayer is the mighty power that is swifter than an eagle, stronger than a lion.
 - b. Prayers puts you in touch with the resources of a compassionate and holy God.
 - c. And when Moses prayed, a miracle started unfolding. He saw a tree that turned their situation totally around, alleviated their disappointment.
 - d. God did a miracle -- God changed the bitter water into the sweetest drinking water Israel had known.
 - e. That is the way God responds to our disappointments. He changes the circumstances as we pray and look to Him.

Remember Jesus calmed the sea with but a word. Remember how the storm stopped when Jesus got into the boat after He came walking to the disciples on the water. He changed the water into wine; raised Jairus daughter; fed the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish.

3. How do you respond to great loss or disappointment?
4. What would be the great miracle that God would want to perform in your life.

IV. DISAPPOINTMENTS CAN BE STEPPING STONES?

What is the challenge of disappointments?

A. The challenge is obedience -- Notice Exod 15:25-26 *“There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them, and He said, If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandment, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, am your healer.”*

B. The experience of Marah was a test of their obedience.

1. It established a pattern that God followed through the Old Testament. And God tests us today as well!
2. God tested the Children of Israel to see what was in their hearts, to see if they would really keep his commandments or not.
3. Focus on the disappointments in your life -- that chief one you remember so well. Think of it in terms of a test permitted by God to see if you will obey Him, trust Him, believe Him that He desires the best for you.

4. He is at work to build your life to make you Christ-like. If you think of every disappointment as a test, it becomes an opportunity to say, *“God, I’m going to readjust my focus, I’m going to learn my lesson. I’m going to trust you to do what ever is needed in my life. I am going to yield to you, just take control.”*