

“DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS” (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

Life can be a conundrum for many people. The life of a believer has often been compared to a giant jigsaw puzzle. The problem is that we are not given all of the pieces at the beginning nor are we given a box with the picture on it to guide us. It is only over time as we are given more pieces that we can begin to understand the picture God has in His mind for us.



It is only when we finally get to heaven, we'll look back over the pathway of life and see that through all the twists and turns and seeming detours that God was with us all the way. His way was the perfect way. We just didn't see that at the time.

REALITY OF DISAPPOINTMENTS

Life is not about getting your own way on everything. There are many examples in the Bible where God disappoints even His choicest of servants. If you've ever experienced God saying "no" to your desires and plans, then you're in good company.

MOSES & PROMISED LAND – Moses dishonoured the Lord by a fit of anger and pride in Numbers 20 when he smote the rock with his rod. Moses' punishment for this is severe, "*And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*" (Numbers 20:12) For failing to treat God as holy, Moses' ministry will end in the wilderness. He had dreamed of leading Israel into the Promised Land for 40 years and completing the task that God gave him to do. But now another person would finish the job. Moses will die outside the land. This is a sad end of a powerful ministry. If you were to ask Moses about the things he regretted in his life the things that I think would be at the top of his list would be the this occasion.

DAVID & THE TEMPLE – David was a King that was consumed with the glory of God. His heart composed beautiful and profound Psalms to honour the Lord. One of the first things David did as King was to try to bring the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem near him. Then, once the kingdom was secured, David's next thought was to build a great temple to house the Ark, "*And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.*" (2 Samuel 7:1-2)

David rightly wants to honour God with a beautiful temple. He reasons wisely that God should be honoured more than him. This he cannot reconcile with him living in a beautiful palace and the Lord's Ark in a curtained Tabernacle. This was a good desire of David and God was impressed,

And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. (1 Kings 8:17-18)

David longed to honour God as much as he can in the time he has left on earth. By contrast, his son Solomon collected gold and wives, built palaces and gardens, wrote books and loved to wine and dine foreign guests showing off his wisdom and glory. But not David! He just wanted to glorify the Lord.

God fully recognised that David had a wonderful motive in wanting to build a temple. But despite having a good motive, the Lord decided it was not His will. He sent Nathan with a message of refusal,

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? (2 Samuel 7:5-7)



The Lord is tender but firm with David who He refers to as “my servant.” His response begins by reminding David that God is the sovereign Master and David is only His appointed servant. The Lord then points out to David that He never asked for a permanent house to dwell in. God then

reminds David in v8-9 that He alone was sovereign and had raised David up from nothing to be a great king. Maybe this was a gentle admonishment – I am God not you!

DAVID & HIS SON - In 2 Samuel 12 God sent a fatal illness to the boy conceived in an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, “*And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*” (2 Samuel 12:15b-16) For a week David fasted and besought the Lord to save the life of the boy but the Lord decided “No” and “*And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died.*” (2 Samuel 12:18a) That was hard for David to accept. Few kings would have cared about an illegitimate son but David does. God does not stop David praying – he needed to spend this time in prayer and fasting after the previous 9 months of backsliding. But God has the sovereign right to say “NO.”

In both these two incidents the Lord rejected the plea of David. It is a stark reminder to us all that it doesn't matter if your motives are right, your plan is a noble one, and even if your closest friends applaud it that it doesn't mean that this is God's will. Every plan we design *for* God isn't necessarily *of* God!

PAUL & THORN IN THE FLESH – In 2 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul revealed that he had a severe burden, “*There was given to me a thorn in the flesh the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The word for *thorn* here is a *stake so this was a limitation that was painful and significant. He felt continually hurt and limited by it. This went on for 14 years. We are not told what this painful limitation that impaled him but simply that God placed it in his life. God and GOD alone decided Paul would be struck by this. The same God gives us the thorns in our lives.*

Paul recognised that the thorn was from the Lord. He also knew the Lord could remove it at any time. Hence he pleaded repeatedly for the Lord to remove it, “*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me*” (2 Corinthians 12:8). Despite his repeated pleas, the Lord refused to remove it. Eventually God gave him the reason, but not the answer he sought. The Lord had a better plan. For God revealed there was a higher purpose behind letting Paul suffer from this thorn, “*the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*” God knows best how to deal with a man like Paul and He permitted this thorn in the flesh to control any fleshly desires of the Apostle to be proud of his amazing achievements and talents.

Throughout Paul's life the Lord often said “No” to him. Paul desired to travel on his missionary journeys to Rome and preach there but the Lord prevented him. Eventually, the Lord sent him there in a very different way – by sending him a prisoner in chains. In Acts 16 the Apostle wanted to go to Asia but the Lord sent him to Europe instead. God often will close a door to something we desire greatly because He has something better in mind. We should not be upset with God when He closes doors. Paul obeyed God's leading and headed over to Europe. This step of obedience will change the history of this world. By Paul's obedience, he saw God establish one of the greatest New Testament churches in a city called Philippi. The gospel was then spread throughout Central and Western Europe. God's delay here will open greater doors of opportunity and blessing.

We must be willing, like Paul, for God to overturn our plans even at the last minute. God only guides us one step at a time. The life of faith means living with uncertainty as to our next step even in the midst of doing God's will (Prov. 16:9; Isa. 55:9). There is little point in pursuing God's will if you are not willing to comply with it. The truth is that our perspective is usually wrong. Our

vision and understanding is extremely limited. Only God has infinite understanding. We judge too quickly God's ways. The truth is that we don't know Him well enough when we are impatient. If we run ahead of God, we will be painfully chastened by frustration, exhaustion, and failure.

REMEDY FOR DISAPPOINTMENTS

It is always easier for us when God lets us have the desire of our hearts. All of us like to get our own way.

MOSES – it was a very painful thing for Moses to lose the privilege of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. For 40 years he had endured great hardships to bring them to the edge Canaan. But God refused him the privilege. We know that Moses felt deeply the pain of the loss of this privilege. He gives us an insight in Deuteronomy of how he pleaded with God to rescind the punishment,

And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O LORD God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. (Deut. 3:23-26)



Despite the sincere and contrite pleas of Moses, the Lord said “No.” In fact, God warned him not to bring the matter up again, “*Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.*” Moses resigned himself to God's sovereign will. He didn't throw a tantrum, huff or complain. He kept serving the Lord and the people right to the very end. His last words were words of blessings and encouragement for the Israelites.

KING DAVID – many times the Lord said “No” to David. In the famous incident in 2 Samuel 7 the King had to accept that he must let the King of Kings decide. Many of us would be offended

at God's polite refusal of our great plans to "help Him" but David models here a beautiful picture of humility, faith and submission in his response.

Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O LORD God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O LORD God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O LORD God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, LORD God, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. (2 Samuel 7:18-22)

David feel in submission before the Lord and pours his heart out in a psalm of worship. He accepts this disappointment without murmur or anger. That is the best way to respond when God changes our plans! David was a man with incredible talents, power, wealth and achievements yet he knew that it all must be surrendered to the Lord's perfect will. It is notable just how many times he refers to himself as "thy servant" in this chapter! Instead of huffing, David used the remaining years he had to prepare Solomon and also to prepare materials for the building of the temple. David didn't need the personal glory of erecting the temple. It is enough that God gets the glory through another man. The Lord must decide for each of us. He does not want everyone to fight Goliath nor does He want everyone to build temples.

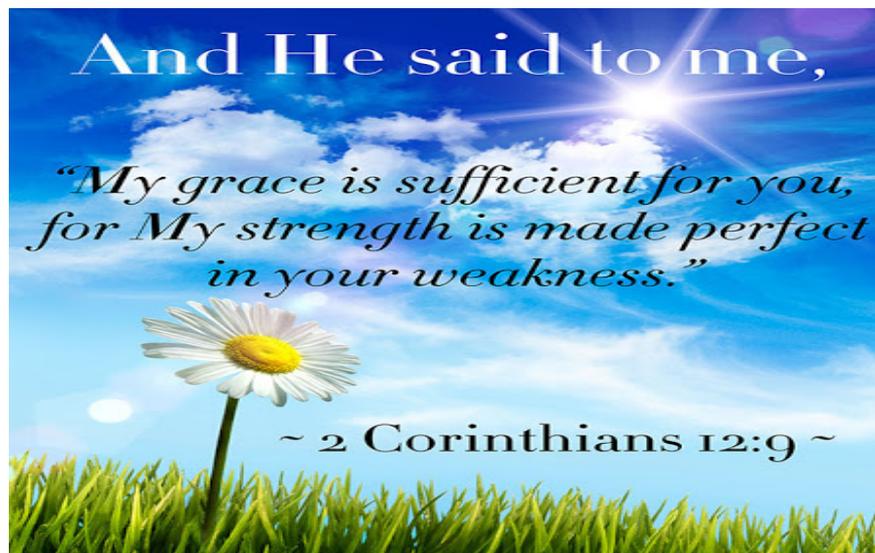
In the death of his son in 2 Samuel 12 David had to bow to God's sovereign will. We read he went to the tabernacle and worshipped the Lord, "*Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.*" (2 Samuel 12:20) The hope that gave David comfort was that he would be reunited one day in heaven with his departed son,

And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. (2 Samuel 12:22-23)

David accepts God's sovereign will even when it is painful. He is not bitter or expects God to overlook his sin because of his position or his past "good." So must we. We must constantly remind ourselves that God is God and not us! Ruling this world and our lives is not a kind off joint-authority! It is providential that the child dies. He would have grown up with the stain of David's sin and illegitimacy hanging over it. David was not the best of fathers when it came to discipline and we could imagine how he would have indulged this son. It also showed the world that God upholds the public honour of His law.

APOSTLE PAUL – God sent the thorn in the flesh to Paul. He made it clear that He would not remove it. Instead, the Lord told Paul to embrace the limitation and lean more on Him, "*And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Cor. 12:9a) The answer to Paul's prayer did not take the form he had expected or desire. But that is why God is God and we are not. The Apostle did not argue, get angry or get bitter. Rather Paul embraced the

thorns because it was for His good. *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* (2 Cor. 12:9b) The thorn now became a blessing and not a curse.



In Acts 16 the Lord overturned Paul’s plans and sent him to Europe instead of Asia. When God says “NO” to us it is not necessarily a rejection but a “re-direction.” We have to trust that He knows better since His ways are not our ways. Someone once observed, “We may be in the will of God, doing the work of God, walking with the Lord, our motives may be pure, and still the Lord may not grant our desires.”

Sometimes God says “no” permanently whereas others He says “No for now.” Paul eventually ministered in Rome and Asia but not the way or the timeframe that Paul desired or even anticipated. Elizabeth and Zechariah prayed many years for a son but God said “No for now.” It was only many decades later that the Lord said “now is the time.” God answers prayers, and very often, we get the answer we don’t want. No prayer prayed goes unanswered. However, the answer just might not be what we expected.

CONCLUSION

If we look back on our lives in hindsight, we will soon discover that life turned out very different from what we hoped or expected. The life of faith is an adventure with God. We must willingly embrace God’s sovereignty over all our affairs. Let God close the doors and let God open the doors of your life. When He says No – accept it. When God bolts the door, don’t try to get in through the window!

HOW DO YOU RESPOND WHEN GOD SAYS NO? DO YOU HAVE SOME SHATTERED DREAMS IN YOUR LIFE TODAY? HAVE THINGS NOT TURNED OUT AS YOU HOPED AND PLANNED THEY WOULD? ARE YOU BITTER AND FRUSTRATED? Many of the problems of churches and individual Christians are not that we do the wrong things, but that we are doing good things at the wrong time. Patience, humility and meekness are needed when God is working silently in our lives. Sometimes God says “Go” to this job, career, university, home or church and other times He says “No.” Sometimes He directs us to this relationship and sometimes He says “No” or “Wait.” The people who have the highest and

clearest view of the sovereignty of God have the most patience. God's servants must learn to accept the disappointments of life. A.T. Pierson used to say, "***Disappointments are His appointments.***"

Every believer has experienced God saying *no* to his or her most sincere requests. Our best reaction to God's sovereign choice is humility and co-operation. Rather than fight God's will we must learn to bow before the Lord and say, "You are in charge. I am not. I will fully trust you with every detail of my life." To one God says "Yes" and to another He says "No" but the Lord always has the best plan for each of us! When God declines even our most genuine prayers, we must trust like the Psalmist and cry, "*As for God, his way is perfect.*" (2 Samuel 22:31) That's awfully hard to do. Dreams die hard!

One writer was perplexed by her life. She studied the weaver working on a tapestry. The back of the tapestry that she could see was a mess of coloured threads, knots, and loose ends. It was only when the writer saw the front that she realized that what is clear on the front is opaque on the back. She thought that beautifully illustrated life, as we get to see only the underside of all God is weaving together in this world. Only in glory will we see the upper side and be amazed at the wonderful pattern God weaved in our lives. The writer was so moved that she wrote a wonderful little poem, "The Master Weaver's Plan."

**My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.**

**Of't times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.**

**Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.**

**The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned**

**He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.**