

When it Feels Like God Has Turned His Back on You

Let's say you're praying with a suffering friend who blurts out to God,

"I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me."

Would you wince? He just accused God of being cruel! Yikes. Would you want to quickly pray a correction? "Lord, we're just so thankful that You are sovereign over everything and for the reality of Romans 8:28!"

Well, your prayer might be biblical, but so would be your friend's prayer. In fact, your hypothetical friend's prayer is actually in the Bible (Job 30:20–21, ESV) and came out of the mouth of the man God considered the most blameless and upright on earth in his lifetime (Job 1:8).

Thank God the Bible Is So Honest

Let's read Job's frank prayer again:

"I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me."

Doesn't reading that anguished prayer of a godly man make you thankful? I love how honest the Bible is. The Bible just says it like it is, and sometimes just what it feels like. I love the fact that almost all of the Bible's heroes are unvarnished, clay-footed sinners with warts we can all see. I love that sometimes they even wonder if God is just plain being cruel. Because that's what we shortsighted, weak, doubting, clay-footed, sinning stumblers wonder at times when we're suffering. It means there's hope for us when we feel

overwhelmed and disappointed and confused and disillusioned. The frankness of the Bible is a great mercy to us.

Our Feelings Are Unreliable Reporters

Can you identify with Job? You cry out to God in your affliction and nothing seems to change. It's like God is just standing there watching you writhe. It feels cruel.

But this is not, in fact, what's really happening. That wasn't really the case for Job, and it's not really the case for us. What's true is that God is doing far more in our affliction than we know at the time.

For Job, he didn't know that he was putting Satan to shame by trusting in God despite his desolate confusion. He didn't know that his experience would encourage millions for millennia. He just knew that his pain felt unbearable at times, and it didn't seem like God was doing anything to help. And like Job, we don't know what mind-blowing designs God has in store for what may feel unbearable and appear cruel today.

But we do know this: God was answering Job when it seemed He wasn't. And God was remembering David when David cried, "Will you forget me forever?" (Ps. 13:1). And when Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46), God had turned His face away from our sin, only to raise His Son from the dead to undying, unsurpassed and eternal glory.

These texts and Job's prayer and many others in the Bible help us remember that sometimes it feels like God's being cruel when He's really not. They remind us that we can't trust what it feels like God is doing. We can only trust what God says He is doing. We all know from a thousand experiences that our feelings are unreliable reporters.

Be Quick to Listen, Slow to Correct, and Take Heart

But these texts also remind us that godly people sometimes

feel and express these intense emotions. And often what they need from us in that moment is not an immediate remedial theological course. What they need is a fellow groaner who will sit in silence with them and, when it's helpful, point them to the empathetic saints of Scripture who felt similar things and found God faithful after all.

Your or your loved one's suffering may be inscrutable today. But in reality it is preparing for you or them "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). Take heart and hold on. If God feels cruel today, you will discover someday that it was a pain-induced mirage and that He had graces planned for your joy beyond anything you ever dreamed possible.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

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