

When You Think God is Wrong

Even when there is no explanation for what you're going through, God's love is more than enough for your need.

Mary and Martha, whose story is told in the Gospel of John, must have asked the same question as they struggled to understand why Jesus hadn't intervened to heal their brother, Lazarus. They had sent for Jesus to come, and when He didn't come quickly, they probably assumed He didn't care.

And now, even though Jesus had finally come, it was too late. Lazarus had died.

Mary crumbled, sobbing, at the feet of Jesus. As she lay with her shoulders shaking and her chest heaving, wracked with pain that was too great to bear, the friends who had followed her voiced their own despair over her grief, and they wept too.

At the sight and sound of the poignant scene, Jesus "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John 11:33, NIV). The text indicates He felt more than just grief; He felt anger.

Several years ago, I received an urgent call from a person who was at the local hospital, telling me that one of my dearest friends was dying. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

I had spoken with the friend only the day before, and she had been healthy and happy. What could have gone so terribly wrong? As I rushed to the hospital, I kept praying, "Lord, help! The one whom we love is sick-dying!"

When I made my way into the hospital waiting room, I found her extended family huddled in tears and shock. I was told my precious friend had somehow breathed in a virus that had acted like a hand grenade in her body, exploding and destroying her internal organs.

In grief and shock myself, I was urged to go into the chapel,

where her husband and children had gathered to pray. As I slipped into the darkened sanctuary and virtually collapsed onto a pew, I heard the whispered prayers and sobs of her loved ones. Then the stifled grief erupted in a chilling, heart-wrenching cry as her son yelled out: "God, it's not right. It's not right! It's just not right!"

Later, when her family made the decision to disconnect her from life support and my beloved friend went to her heavenly home, her son's agonized, angry grief echoed in my ears, and I thought: He was right. This is wrong. Terribly wrong! This was never meant to be.

Death was not a part of God's original plan. He created you and me for Himself. He intended for us to live with Him and enjoy Him forever in an uninterrupted, permanent, personal, love relationship.

But sin came into our lives and broke the very relationship with God for which we were created. All of us are affected by this broken relationship because all of us are infected with sin.

When your loved one dies and your grief is tinged with anger, don't direct it toward God. He's angry too. Direct it toward sin and its devastating consequences.

That day in Bethany, as Mary wept and her friends wept with her, a tumult of grief and anger and compassion and empathy welled up in the heart of Jesus. In a voice that must have been choking with emotion, He inquired, "Where have you laid him?"

Those around Him replied gently, "'Come and see, Lord'" (John 11:34). And when Jesus was invited by the mourners in Bethany to "come and see," He wept! (See vv. 34-35.)

Jesus, the Creator of the universe, the eternal I Am, the Lord of life, knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Yet

One so strong, so powerful, so wise, so human, stood there with tears running down His cheeks! Why? Because He loved those gathered at the tomb so much their grief was His.

When my youngest daughter, Rachel-Ruth, was small, she wore long braids as a means of controlling her naturally curly hair, which she hated. I will never forget an incident that followed the visit to our home of a beautiful young woman who had long, sleek, glossy brown hair. As soon as the door closed behind the young woman, Rachel-Ruth ran into the living room, jerking at her braids, tearing at her bangs, covering her face with her hands, and hysterically sobbing, "I hate my hair! My face is so ugly! I'm not pretty at all!"

Not knowing what had triggered this outburst, I just held her and wept with her. I looked up to see my other daughter, Morrow, standing in the doorway, weeping too. We wept because Rachel-Ruth was so distraught, and we loved her. Her torment was our own.

When was the last time you wept into your pillow at night, thinking no one cared? Is the pain so deep and your hurt so great that you cry night after night?

In your misery and loneliness, do you think Jesus is emotionally detached? That He just doesn't care? Or that He's simply too busy to notice? Or that He is callous because He sees a lot of pain that's worse than yours? Or that He couldn't possibly understand how you feel?

Do you know that Jesus weeps with you? Do you know He puts all your tears in a bottle because they are precious to Him? He has said in all of your afflictions, He Himself is afflicted. Why? Because Jesus does understand! And He loves you!

Those who had gathered to support and comfort and help the family of Lazarus observed the famous young Rabbi weeping and concluded, "'See how he loved him!'" (v. 36). Even though

Jesus knew the glory to come and the demonstration of God's power that was about to be displayed, He wept!

He wept because He loved this precious family and they were weeping. Jesus was entering into their suffering, just as many of us entered into His when we repented of our sin, died to ourselves and received Him by faith.

The story of Lazarus is the account of perhaps the most magnificent miracle Jesus performed while on Earth. But it is really the story of Martha's faith—and the necessity of placing our faith in Jesus alone if we are to live life triumphantly and experience the greatest miracle of all, that of passing from spiritual death to eternal life as we are born again into the family of God.

Surrounded by a crowd of friends, family and just curious onlookers, Jesus gazed at the scene before Him. I expect Mary and Martha followed His focus, which was fixed on the cave carved out of the hillside that served as Lazarus' burial place. A large stone sealed off the entrance to the tomb.

Martha was jolted out of any grief-filled reverie that preoccupied her thoughts when she heard His familiar voice command quietly but with absolute authority, "Take away the stone" (v. 39). Nothing could have been more appalling to her!

It seemed as if reopening Lazarus' tomb would serve no purpose except to reopen the fresh wound of her heart. How could Jesus say such a thing? How could He even think such a thing?

Martha, with what surely was a look of horrified indignation on her face, blurted out, "But Lord ... by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days" (v. 39).

Jesus turned His full gaze onto Martha with a look that melted her resistance and silenced her argument. With patient firmness, He challenged her not only to obedience but also to expectant faith: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you

would see the glory of God?" (v. 40).

Something in Martha must have quickened as she saw the intensity in the Lord's eyes. She knew this was no longer the time to talk about it or pray about it or think about it.

The spark of faith was suddenly fanned into flame, and without further question or word, she just did it! She ordered the stone to be rolled away. Simply because He said so. Her obedience, her dependence and her expectance were in Him alone. He was all she had.

With every eye fastened on Him, Jesus boldly, loudly lifted His voice as He prayed: "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me" (vv. 41-42). Jesus was letting everyone know that if Lazarus was raised, the power to make it happen came from God.

same voice that had brought the world into being, the same voice that had called Abraham from Ur, the same voice that had reverberated from Mount Sinai, that same voice thundered, "Lazarus, come out!" (v. 43). The voice of the Creator was commanding into existence that which had no existence!

Every eye must have strained toward the cave, peering into the black hole where the stone had been. And then, out of the deep, shadowy recesses within, there appeared a mummy-like figure "wrapped with strips of linen, and [with] a cloth around his face" (v. 44).

Was there a collective gasp? Or was everyone frozen into place, temporarily paralyzed by the shock of seeing something that just couldn't be?

Dead men don't come back to life! But Lazarus did! At the command of the One who is the Resurrection and the Life, he appeared at the entrance of the tomb.

After all the pain and suffering and anguish and doubt and resentment and misunderstanding and tears, God had answered the sisters' unspoken prayer. Although Jesus had not come when they thought He would, He had restored Lazarus to health.

In His own time and in His own way, God answered abundantly beyond what they could have thought to ask for—beyond their wildest dreams. Their brother was raised from the dead!

At long last, Martha understood. God's purpose was made clear. God's power and glory and love were revealed, and her grief-stricken plea wrenched from their broken hearts was abundantly answered. Jesus was all they needed! Jesus was enough!

And if He could raise Lazarus from the dead after he was in the tomb for four days, is there anything He cannot do for you or me? What miracle do you think is beyond His power to accomplish?

When you don't understand why, just trust Him!

Don't wallow in your "whys." Don't throw a pity party or remain in your misery. Understand that you may not understand this side of heaven.

Respect God's silences. Claim through your own experience ... the blessing that follows brokenness, the life that follows death and the glory that follows suffering!

Trust God to sort it all out in the end. He can break the bonds of your suffering—now! Trust Him! He will bring you through.

Read a companion devotional.

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