

Why You Need Not Fear God When You Mess Up

Our family experienced several significant losses recently, leaving my emotions raw and agitated. Little things caused oversized reactions from me.

I did and said things that were out of character—things that didn't reflect who I am. I was not acting like me, a child and ambassador of God.

For the Sake of My Name

I could have blamed my behavior on the losses and the crazy year we all experienced. But conviction of the Holy Spirit would not excuse me. As I was reading in the book of Ezekiel during my devotion time one day, a verse leapt out at me. "But I thought better of it and acted out of who I was, not by what I felt, so that I might be honored and not blasphemed by the nations who had seen me bring them out" (Ezek. 20:14, MSG). The New International Version of that verse reads, "But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out."

Immediately before that verse, God, through Ezekiel, recounts how Israel had rebelled against Him in the desert after all He had done for them. God was understandably hurt and angry. It says He "seriously considered unleashing My anger on them right there" (Ezek. 20:13b, MSG). But He did not. Instead, He acted out of who He was; He acted in a way that would glorify His great name—which is also who He is and will be forever.

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments in Exodus 34, He also told Moses who He is. In verses 6-8 (NIV), God says He is "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to

thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

He Does Not Change

Thinking back to Ezekiel, even though God was furious at the unfaithfulness of His people, their actions and those circumstances did not change who God is or how He behaves.

Ezekiel continues to recount the rebellious history of Israel, and how time and again God did not treat them as they deserved. Instead of judgment, God promises to reveal Himself to them by responding out of who He is, or the sake of His name.

“But, dear Israel, you’ll also realize that I am God when I respond to you out of who I am, not by what I feel about the evil lives you’ve lived, the corrupt history you’ve compiled” (Ezek. 20:44, MSG).

The New International Version reads: “You will know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name’s sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices you people of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

How God Acts

As I pondered this, I was reminded of two great truths. The first, God will always respond out of who He is. His character and nature will not change when circumstances change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). He is our Father, and He loves us. So, when I am unfaithful, He is still faithful. When I mess up, disappoint or anger Him, I do not need to fear retribution. He will act out of compassion and grace, love and faithfulness.

This also applies to His response to the actions and misdeeds

of others. Even when we think God should rain down fire from heaven on the wicked, God is slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness (), not desiring that any perish (Matt. 18:14). Because that is His desire, it should also be our desire. Instead of getting worked up, disillusioned or disheartened when we see perpetrators of evil, we should recognize they are prisoners of Satan, in bondage themselves, and plead with God for their salvation. This is not always easy to do without allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us.

Please don't misunderstand; God does not condone or overlook wickedness and evil. Neither should we. He gives every opportunity for repentance before His wrath is felt. But He will act to protect the oppressed. When He does, His judgment is swift and final. Our hearts should ache for the objects of His wrath. Without His saving grace, it could be us!

How I Should Act

The second great truth applies directly to me—and you, if you are a child of God. As His children, and ambassadors for Him in this world, I must also act out of who I am and not how I feel. Since we carry His name, our actions must also be for the sake of His name.

As we all know, this is not easy. But the apostle Paul encourages us to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation’” (Phil. 2:12b-15a).

So, when I am feeling unsettled, overwhelmed, angry, disheartened or any number of other negative emotions, I cannot react out of those feelings. When circumstances are grim or my environment is not comfortable, again I cannot react to them. Instead, as a child and ambassador of God, I am

called to respond as He does. My words, social media posts and actions should reflect His love, mercy and truth. When we fail, we repent before God and, if possible, those at the receiving end of our tirade or behavior. We also take down anything we have posted online that misrepresents the Lord.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

For His Name Sake

Our response to irritations, challenges or problems may be the very thing that causes someone else to reconcile with God through Christ! As we work out our salvation (which is totally free through the death and resurrection of Jesus), and the Holy Spirit works in us, our response will be that of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Throughout history, God has acted for His name’s Sake, to reveal His loving kindness to a sinful humanity. The apostle John tells us, “your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12b, MEV). Because we are beneficiaries of His forgiveness and are adopted into His family, we too must do all for His name’s sake.

We are children of God, representatives of Him to a hurting world. He will always act out of His loving nature to rescue the perishing. And so must we! {eoa}

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