

Will You Forgive God?

It's an unthinkable concept—forgiving the One who grants you life—yet countless believers feel betrayed by God. Instead of harboring bitterness toward him, you can learn the truth about walking in total forgiveness.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went. ... [And yet God] gave him no inheritance [there], not even a foot of ground" (Heb. 11:8; Acts 7:5, NIV). God's Word states clearly that the land of Canaan was to be Abraham's inheritance, his possession. But according to Acts 7:5, Abraham did not get it, not even a foot of ground.

The same can be said for all those people of faith described in Hebrews 11. They all were commended for their faith, yet *none of them* received what had been promised (Heb. 11:39).

What? They didn't receive what God promised them? That is what it says.

It must surely have occurred to Abraham that he had been deceived by God. After all, where was the inheritance he had hoped for? Yet it was the outstanding virtue of Abraham that he withstood this temptation to believe God had let him down—a fact that came from faith alone.

Abraham succeeded in breaking the "betrayal barrier"—something each of us must do if we feel God has let us down. I will explain this later in the article.

Still, the fact that Abraham (and others in the Bible) did not receive what had been promised to them begs the question: Does God (at times) betray us? My belief is: No. God does not betray us—ever. It has never happened. It never will happen.

But for some of us, our perception is that we are betrayed. In

other words, some of us *feel* betrayed. And, as strange as it may sound, we must forgive God if we feel that He has betrayed us.

It must have been how Abraham felt, having been promised the land of Canaan but getting not even a foot of its ground. Perhaps *disappointed* is the better word. Or, simply, *let down*. I do know that Jeremiah said, "O Lord, you *deceived* me, and I was deceived" (Jer. 20:7, emphasis added).

Why I Felt Betrayed

In my own experience, I have been absolutely certain I heard from God—and can only conclude that, if I did, I was surely betrayed. And yet I do not believe I was betrayed. I repeat: God never betrays us. I do not believe God truly lets us down; we only feel let down. Here's my story:

Many years ago, while I was a pastor in Palmer, Tenn., and attending Trevecca Nazarene University, I began to have visions. These visions—a dozen or more—came passively and unexpectedly during a period that lasted roughly six months, beginning in late 1955—shortly after when Jesus Christ was made so real to me.

One of my first visions was of my dad sitting in the front row of a large tent in which I was doing the preaching. He was smiling and clearly approving of my ministry. This greatly encouraged me, as I feared he would be unhappy with my recent theological change and different denominational direction that was at hand.

He had named me after his favorite preacher, Dr. R.T. Williams, general superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene; so my dad had great plans for me in that denomination. I knew from that vision, however, that he would be happy with me.

But when I returned home from Trevecca in June 1956, having

resigned my church in Palmer, he was displeased and even accused me of breaking with God.

As it happened, that same summer I was part of an evangelistic campaign near my hometown of Ashland, Ky. We purchased a huge tent that seated 2,000.

I also thought this fit the vision. But my dad never came near that tent meeting, and he continued in his outspoken opposition to my new direction.

The tent meeting closed down within a month. We never had more than 30 people or so attend. It was a total failure and a massive embarrassment to me.

I felt betrayed. I had not asked for that vision. It was so real. I was convinced it was from the Holy Spirit. Could it have been?

There were other visions. Some of them were fulfilled; others were not. They all came to me unsought and seemed credible.

These were not dreams. If they weren't of God, you could have fooled me! They were absolutely real. And yet some were literally fulfilled; others were not. Why?

But I didn't give up. I was determined to break through the betrayal barrier.

If you feel that God betrayed you or grossly let you down, I urge you to achieve the greatest challenge a believer can accept: to break the betrayal barrier. It means to not give up; to keep trusting the same God who promised certain things even though you feel He has not kept His word in some areas. It requires persistent faith (the faith that achieves what God envisages for you)—the faith exemplified in those men and women of Hebrews 11.

Breaking the betrayal barrier is a spiritual achievement. I don't mean to be unfair, but my pastoral experience suggests

that not very many people actually break the barrier. Sadly, most never-ever-discover what their inheritance would have been.

It is not that they all reject God. Many keep going to church. Some keep busy doing religious things. Some have important positions in the church, often in leadership. But in their hearts, they are dismayed that God let them down.

Others simply wander back and forth from the church to the world. Some stop praying and reading their Bibles.

But not Abraham. Or Isaac. Or Jacob. Or Moses. Not any of those described in Hebrews 11. What about you? Will you break the betrayal barrier? You can. If you need to, I suggest you do the following:

1. Know that it's God's idea for you to break the betrayal barrier. It is what God Himself very much wants of you. God often plays hard-to-get. It is said of Hezekiah that the Lord left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart (2 Chron. 32:31). Like it or not, it is one of God's characteristics that His way of drawing you closer to Him is often to do the very thing that puts you off Him.

The next time things go terribly wrong and God hides His face from you, press on all the more. Don't give up. The breakthrough will come and is worth waiting for.

2. Accept this greatest opportunity of all to know Him intimately. Strange as it may seem, the Lord plays hard-to-get because He loves you so much. He wants to know how much you truly want Him; whether or not you will be rebuffed, put off or angry by His keeping a painful distance from you. It has been my experience, however, that any increase of anointing I have had in my 76 years has come through great hardship, extraordinary hurts—and feeling betrayed by the very One I have sought to please. As far as I can tell, whatever anointing I have has come chiefly by my saying, “Yes, Lord,”

and persisting in faith.

3. Don't complain (God hates it) and do be grateful (God loves it). This is something that cannot be overemphasized. God hates murmuring, grumbling and complaining. It doesn't work if you are trying to get God's attention! Persistent faith must be laced with gratitude. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).

We are commanded to give thanks in all circumstances; not necessarily being thankful *for* them but *in* them (1 Thess. 5:18). Learn to set your heart on replacing grumbling with things you are thankful for. Nothing will change your life like maintaining a spirit of gratitude.

4. Pray and read your Bible more than ever. How much do you pray? You show your esteem of a person by how much time you give him or her. Be assured, God likes your company. Spend time with Him—the more, the better. It is also how you get to know God's ways, assuming too that you aspire to know His Word—the Bible.

When you feel let down by God, seek Him in His Word. Spend as much time in the Word as you possibly can—any part of it. Keep praying; keep reading your Bible. It is how you get to know God and discover His plan for your life. When you feel let down, pray more than ever. When you feel betrayed, read the Bible more than ever.

5. Walk in the light God gives you. "If we walk in the light ... we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). If you are faithful in what I have suggested, here is what you will discover: God will show you things. For example, He will show you sin you didn't know you had. He will show you ways forward you had not thought about. He will show you new obedience that perhaps is long overdue. Persistent faith will be accompanied

with a sense of duty that, when embraced, will put you on the road to breaking the betrayal barrier.

What I Learned About God

I can't predict what it will be like in everyone's situation, but I can testify to what breaking the betrayal barrier has meant to me. In a word: God showed up in a way that was unmistakable. He became absolutely real to me.

This has happened more than once. I can only say that when I feel betrayed—which also has happened more than once—yet don't give up, God has a way of revealing Himself never too late, never too early, but always just on time. The breakthrough leaves me with the feeling I could never truly doubt Him again.

What God has done for me, He will do for you. He is not a respecter of persons; He does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34). I pray that you—if you have felt betrayed by God—will also experience this internal breakthrough.

I stated earlier in this article that not many experience this breakthrough. Why? My opinion is, they give up too soon. Only a few find it, Jesus said (Matt. 7:14); but it need not be the case with you.

God does care how you feel. He knows your frame and mine, remembering always that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). God knows you backward and forward—your past hurts, present aspirations, feelings and dilemmas. He remembers details of your past you have forgotten. He knows exactly what will satisfy you. He knows what will comfort you. He knows what will convince you, what will give you peace. That is the way He is and the way He works.

You will see in the end—when the light breaks through—that He did not betray you after all. He did not desert you. Your feeling let down was part of His plan to get your attention.

If you need more time before you can totally forgive God, He is OK about this. He loves you like you are. He will be there waiting for you. He is not rushing you. He will come through for you. I guarantee it—that is, if you persist in faith. Never, never, never, never give up.

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