

What You Must Do When Your Emotional Well Runs Dry

Francine had scheduled several appointments, but she had canceled each one a few hours before we were to meet. When she called yet again to ask to meet with me, I wondered if I should double book because of her track record.

This time, however, she didn't call to cancel. When she walked in, I could tell she was distressed.

I had barely introduced myself when she blurted out, "I've given up on God. I pray, but He doesn't answer. I plead, but He doesn't hear." She took a deep breath. It was obvious she felt ashamed of her conclusions about God. That's why she had missed so many appointments.

But now she was desperate. "In the past few months, my life has been turned upside down. Before all of this [COVID-19 crisis], I had enough trouble trying to cope with two generations in our family. My mother is losing her memory, and she requires constant attention. She lives with us now, but we can't go on like this much longer. We've been paying for a home health nurse to come in three times a week, and that's gone on for the past year, but our savings have been depleted. The other major difficulty is with our son. He graduated from college, but he hasn't gotten a job. And now, with so many businesses shut down, there's very little hope of him getting one anytime soon." She paused for a second and then added, "Yes, he lives with us too. I'm exhausted, our finances are in shreds, I love my mother but I can't care for her, and I'd like to strangle my son."

I asked, "Francine, when you began, you talked about some struggles with prayer. Would you tell me more about that?"

She began to cry. "I've given up on God ... I guess because He's

given up on me. My husband feels the same way, but he won't admit it. He thinks it'll make him look weak. He's a pastor, and he wants to stay strong for the people in the church. What should I do?"

Dig Deeper

I can answer Francine's question—one many of us who have become overwhelmed with our circumstances and disillusioned with God ask—with an analogy. In parts of Texas that get little rain, farmers have some of the biggest cotton fields in the nation. Irrigation has enabled them to draw an enormous amount of water from underground aquifers.

But there's a problem: the vast fields of cotton are threatened because the water is running out. The farmers have a solution, though. It's to dig deeper to tap into resources not previously available. That's the solution for all of us during times of emotional, financial and spiritual drought. We have to dig deeper—in prayer.

God invites us to come to Him with our requests—big or small, clear or not. When we're anxious, we pray for relief, for God to change the circumstances that cause us such worry and heartache. There's absolutely nothing wrong with those prayers, but how do we respond when God doesn't give us the relief we long for?

What happens when, if our situations are anything like Francine's, the health of those we love declines, our finances dwindle away, opportunities are lost, and our sense of hopelessness goes through the roof? When the well is dry, we have to dig deeper.

In her book *Passion and Purity*, Elisabeth Elliot comments about God's purposes in "unanswered prayer": "The deepest spiritual lessons are not learned by His letting us have our way in the end, but by His making us wait, bearing with us in love and patience until we are able to honestly pray what He

taught His disciples to pray: 'Thy will be done.'"

When we pray, God sometimes miraculously changes our circumstances, but more often, He changes *us*. He refocuses our attention on Him and His promises instead of our problems; He reminds us that He's God and we're not; and He gives us assurance that He'll accomplish *His* purposes, but not necessarily *ours*. Is that enough for us?

At different points and in different circumstances all of us come to a crisis of faith. Will we cling to God or drift away? Will we trust in His goodness when we don't see evidence of it? Will we wait on His answers when our pain screams for relief right now?

The temptation to be angry with God for not coming through isn't new to us or our circumstances. The Scriptures give us many examples of times when His people railed against Him for not giving them what they wanted or perceived they needed at the exact moment they wanted or needed it. Just consider the Israelites. They complained when they were enslaved by the Egyptians (see Ex. 2:23-24, 3:7-9). Then they complained—more than once—after God led them out of Egypt, away from their captors. They got so fed up they claimed they had been better off when they were in bondage! Sometimes we are like the Israelites: we want God to make our problems just go away—now. But we have to remember that even when we feel like giving up, God is there. When we believe all hope is lost, God has a plan. When we feel crushed under the weight of worries, God says, "Trust Me. I have a way forward."

God Is Good *and* Great

Troubled times are watersheds for our spiritual lives. Heartache either drives us closer to God or further from Him—and if we're honest, many of us would admit that although our biggest problems initially were barriers in our connection with God, they ultimately became paths of growth. When life

makes no sense, prayer becomes a lifeline—not to magically make everything better all at once but to take us deeper into the heart of God. There we find Him to be good and great. If we view Him as only good, we might have pleasant feelings about Him, but we wouldn't trust Him to do a powerful work in the depths of our hearts. And if we see Him as only great, we might think of Him as a mighty King but one who isn't necessarily concerned about us.

No, our God is infinitely good and infinitely great. We can come to Him, pour out our hearts, ask Him for anything and rest in the fact that He will accomplish His purposes. {eoa}

This article was excerpted from Chapter 7 of Peace for Your Mind, Hope for Your Heart by Tim Clinton (Charisma House 2020).