

There's no heavenly insurance policy exempting people from life's realities, writes Janet Goodall. But that's not the end of the story.

When prayer seems UNANSWERED

In *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey reflects on those whose faith in God is seriously shaken by seemingly unanswered prayer.¹ Although earnestly asked to intervene, the Almighty still allows devastating wars. Disabling accidents or overwhelming illnesses arrive that prove fatal, despite prayers for and even claims of healing. The catalogue of permitted evil seems endless: child, drug and trust abuse abound, famines and earthquakes persist, terrorism and torture continue. We may be involved personally in some of these traumas. There is no heavenly insurance policy protecting Christians against strained or sundered relationships, failed examinations, poverty or homelessness; we are not immune to the constant strain of hope deferred. Where is God? Why does he seem so distant and deaf?

There aren't any easy answers. Throughout the Bible, God's people were kept waiting, their faith tested yet strengthened in the process. Abraham was 100 years old by the time God's 25-year-old promise was met in Isaac's birth.² Joseph was in his thirties when he was catapulted from prison to premiership and saw his teenage dreams realised.³ Moses was 80 years old when he found his true vocation and spent another 40 years struggling to fulfil it.⁴ Amongst many others, Job, Jeremiah and Hosea all knew painful times of great darkness and distress.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew dark times. On the cross, he cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'⁵ By carrying infirmities, sorrows and sins to the cross, he was able to offer us his liberating, guiding and energising Spirit.⁶ Still, he neither exempts us from pains and perplexities nor readily explains them to us.⁷ Yet

Paul spoke of delighting in his lengthy list of afflictions.⁸ He had confidence in the Lord's personal promise, offered in the midst of pain, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'.⁹ Good reasons for holding onto God's promise: 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'.¹⁰

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze... Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you... Do not be afraid, for I am with you... (Isaiah 43: 1-2, 4-5)

We need to cling to these promises, anchoring unstable feelings in the unshakeable fact that our loving Lord is with us, come what may. With this assurance, may we emerge from our trials with faith strengthened and encouragement to share.

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1 Yancey P. *Disappointment with God*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 1988

2 Genesis 12:2-4, 21:5

3 Genesis 37:2-7, 26-28, 41:46, 42:6

4 Deuteronomy 34:7; Acts 7:23, 30, 36

5 Matthew 27:46

6 Isaiah 53:4-5; Romans 8:1-39

7 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, 11:23-29, 12:7

8 2 Corinthians 11:30, 12:10

9 2 Corinthians 12:9

10 Hebrews 13:5