



DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

DEALING WITH THE "IF" IN **Life**

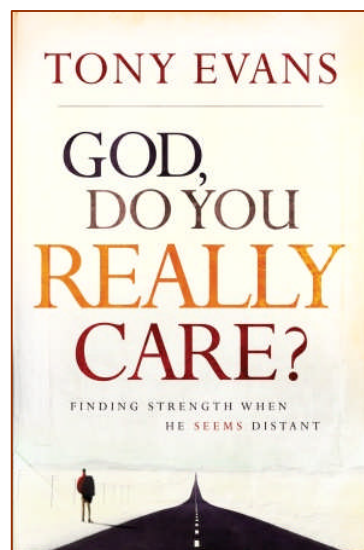


[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M DISAPPOINTED?]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 22, 2008

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



DEALING WITH THE "IF" IN LIFE

[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M DISAPPOINTED?]

Is disappointment losing something good you expected or experiencing something bad you didn't expect at all? As Dr. Tony Evans told us this week in our study, it may be a little of both. Either way, it hurts. Did you hear the story of the man who dreamed of joining a monastery. His goal in life was to become a monk. So one day he went to a monastery and talked to the head monk and said, "What do I need to do to join." Was told that it was more difficult than what he thought. In our monastery monks are only allowed to say two words every year." He said, "That sounds a bit extreme, but I've wanted to be a monk for so long, I'm going to give it a try." So he was shown to his room. And so for the next twelve months the man never said a word. At the end of his first year he was taken to the head monk, and was told he could now say his two words. Guy said, "Food's bad." He went back to his room, and was silent for another twelve months. At the end of his second year he again was taken to the head monk for his two words. This time his two words were, "Bed's hard." Head monk said, "OK." And the man went back to his room. Another twelve months of silence passed, and he was brought again to the head monk for his annual two words. This time the guy said, "I quit." The head monk said, "Well, it doesn't surprise me. All you've done is complain ever since you got here." Apparently the man in our story experienced exactly what we're talking about this morning—disappointment.

Today, as we finish Week Four of our study from Dr. Tony Evans' book, *God, Do You Really Care*, we're focusing on where God is when we're disappointed or discouraged. You'll remember that our focal scripture passage is from **JOHN 11**, the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus' death—and ultimate resurrection. To begin our lesson, let's put this in perspective by looking at two verses. Follow along as I read these verses from **JOHN 11: 21 and 32**. First, you recall that Martha went out to meet Jesus—but Mary stayed home since her brother had already died. Look at what

Martha says in verse **21** (NIV) *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Now, look down at verse **32** and see the words of her sister: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* As we said last week, that's pretty much laying it on the line, isn't it? Simply, they want to know, *"God, where were You in all this? It's been four days since our brother, Lazarus, died."* **Describe how Mary and Martha were really feeling?** [HURT, DISCOURAGED, DISAPPOINTED, BITTER, ANGRY, GRIEF-STRICKEN, ALONE]

Ok, then answer this question: **Do you believe God is OK with your expressions of disappointment?** [YES. HE WANTS US TO TALK TO **HIM** ABOUT OUR HURTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS] God is not afraid of you venting your real feelings. You can get angry with God. It's okay to question Him and ask why things happen the way they do—but be careful where you vent. Notice there were plenty of mourners all around who would have sympathized with Mary and Martha and shared their own doubts and disappointments about Jesus. But notice what Martha did—she didn't go to these people. She just took it all to Jesus, laying it at His feet. We just read verse 21, where in one breath she vents her anger, but look at the next verse –**verse 22**—where she acknowledges, *"Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."*

Do you remember our memory verse from **PSALM 50:15 (NLT)** that we've been using throughout this study? *"Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."* Mary knew where to go—to whom she could receive comfort and assurance. Jesus also would lead her into a deeper faith in Him—just like the verse from Psalm 50 says. **What do you tend to do with your disappointments?**

Philip Yancey in his book, *"Disappointment with God"* tells the story of a mom, Meg Woodson, who had two children with Cystic Fibrosis. She was a Christian. Her son died at the age of twelve. Her daughter, Peggie, surprisingly graduated from college and got a job. There was some hope that she would actually survive this dreadful disease. However, when she was 23 she suffered a

long, painful and horrible death from cystic fibrosis. This was in spite of many years of faith-filled prayer by hundreds of people for her healing. Meg, the mom, wrote to Phillip Yancey some time after her daughter's death describing how she died in faith, to the glory of God. However, in the letter she also described her reaction to her daughter's suffering while knowing that God loves his people and has power to heal every disease. After describing some of the horror her daughter experienced, listen to what she wrote: "So, it's against this background of human beings falling apart ... that God, who could have helped, looked down on a young woman devoted to Him, quite willing to die for Him to give Him glory, and decided to sit on His hands and let her death top the horror charts for cystic fibrosis deaths. I tell you Philip, it does not help to talk of the good that results from pain. Nor does it help to talk of God almost always letting the physical process of disease run its course. Because if He ever intervenes, then at every point of human suffering He makes a decision to intervene or not, and in Peggie's case His choice was to let C.F. rip. There are moments when my only responses are grief and an anger as violent as any I have ever known.... Again I wonder, how could he be in a situation like that and sit on his hands?"

I do not believe there is a more troubling or difficult problem than this one posed by Peggie's mom. If God is infinitely powerful and has pledged himself to all who trust in Christ in love as his dear children and sealed that love by killing his own Son, then why does he permit (or more biblically, "ordain that") Christians to suffer? Why are we beset with temptations to sin and why does he permit us to succumb to sin? Why does he not answer our prayers to heal our children or to cause a wayward spouse to repent? I gave you the answer to this question last Sunday-remember? There are just some things that we DON'T know. The **secret things**, according to God's word. God does reveal some things to us, but some He does not. Listen again to these words from **DEUT 29:29 (NIV)**: ***²⁹The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.***

I ran across an old story by Max Lucado about disappointment on the level of a child. He said that some time ago, he took his family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny brand new "Starlett" with a banana seat and training wheels. But, daughter Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well. Max said he explained to Andrea that she was too young. He told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler.

No luck; she still wanted a bike. He explained to her that when she was a bit older, she would get a bike, too. She just stared at him. He tried to tell her that a big bike would bring her more pain than pleasure, more scrapes than thrills. She turned her head and said nothing. Finally, Max said he sighed and said this time her daddy knew best. Her response? She screamed it loud enough for everyone in the store to hear: **"Then I want a new daddy!"**

Though the words were from a child's mouth, they carried an adult's sentiments. Disappointment demands a change in command. When we don't agree with the One who calls the shots, our reaction is often the same as Max's three-year old daughter—the same as Mary and Martha in our scripture passage this week. "Is he the right one for this job?" Or, "Don't you really care?"

Max's daughter, Andrea, with her three-year-old reasoning powers, couldn't believe that a new bike would be anything less than ideal for her. From her vantage point, it would be the source of eternal bliss. And from her vantage point, the one who could grant that bliss was "sitting on his hands."

But, we have to be careful here because there is an evil and erroneous way of dealing with this problem to which millions of professing Christians subscribe. Millions of Christians believe what I've heard many good-intentioned Christians say to someone who's suffering from an accident or illness. Beverly and I heard it when our sister-in-law died a few years ago at the age of 43 from

cancer. Several members of Linda's church told the family and Linda's two young daughters that it was, without question, God's will to heal Linda. But, the only thing hindering her healing was whether or not the family believed God was going to heal her. She died and they attributed it to a lack of faith.

That's not sound doctrine. If Linda was not healed it is our fault and if she was healed it is to our credit. Those church members and millions of professing Christians like them believe that it is God's will for Christians to never be sick or to suffer in any way and that if we do suffer it is only because of our own lack of faith. They assert that faith is believing that God will do whatever you want him to do. You need to know that this teaching is anti-Christ. It is false and is a blasphemy to God and destroys people by destroying true faith.

Look at how Jesus responded to Martha's disappointment in **JOHN 11:25-27 (NLT)**. Before He did anything, He wanted to make sure she understood something. Follow along here: ²⁵*Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. ²⁶Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."*

WOW! Did Martha respond or what? Without missing a beat, she hit the nail on the head with those words in verse 27. Notice that Martha's confession is almost identical to one from Simon Peter in **MATTHEW 16:16** when Jesus asked the disciples what others were saying about Him and then point-blank asked Peter, *"But who do you say I am?"* And, this time Simon got it right: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*

See, the real key to any kind of blessing from God—whether in times of disappointment or not—is to verbally acknowledge who Jesus Christ really is: the Son of God. For those in F.A.I.T.H classes on Tuesday, you've learned a powerful verse to do just

that. **ROMANS 10:9 (NIV)** says it this way: *"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

In the book *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey tells the story of a man he refers to as Douglas. Douglas was a sincere devout Christian whose wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. The breast was removed, but a couple years later the cancer was found in her lungs. So she had to go through the agony of chemotherapy. One night in the middle of all this, he was driving with his wife and 12-year old daughter when a drunk driver swerved and struck them head-on. His wife was unhurt, his daughter had minor injuries, but Douglas himself received a massive blow to the head. He would have sudden headaches, dizzy spells, couldn't work a full day, could become disoriented and forgetful, and developed double vision with one eye which refused to focus.

When Yancey met with Douglas to interview him about his disappointments with God, Douglas told him: "To tell you the truth, Philip, I didn't feel any disappointment with God ... We tend to think, 'Life should be fair because God is fair.' And if I confuse God with the physical reality of life – by expecting constant good health, for example – then I set myself up for a crashing disappointment."

Life is unfair; God isn't. The Bible is full of accounts of good people, living in the will of God, who experienced the unfairness of life. Last week, I mentioned the book of JOB for you to re-read to see a guy who really suffered—when he did nothing wrong but someone Satan wanted to test. Listen to one comment that Job made after his world had fallen apart, literally. From **JOB 13:15 (NASB)**, ¹⁵*"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him."* You want to hear disappointment—read the life of Job this week.

Does anyone ever watch the Fox TV show "American Idol?" Each week the contestants sing and then the American people vote on

them. It's all up to America. You may recall several years ago, we saw a perfect example of big-time disappointment with a girl named Jennifer Hudson. It had finally come down to three very talented black girls whom most people considered to be the best of the lot: Fantasia Barrino, La Toya London and Jennifer Hudson. But, Jennifer Hudson got unceremoniously voted out of the competition. There was a big uproar with some people thinking that the public voting was somehow "fixed." Perhaps her plus size, her lack of viewer popularity, and/or distinct musical style were out of sync with the "American Idol" image. No matter, a brilliant Fantasia won the competition...and, it seemed, all the glory and the fame. What a disappointment—or so it seemed.

But, fast-forward two years to 2006 when Jennifer Hudson landed the role in *Dream Girls*—the hit Broadway show that was being made into a movie. Who did she beat out? None other than Fantasia who had beat her and eventually won American Idol. You know how it ended? She was brilliant in the role, winning the National Board of Review (for "Breakthrough Performance"), New York Film Critics [Award](#), Phoenix Film Critic's Society [Award](#), Golden Satellite [Award](#), Golden Globe [Award](#), the British Film [Award](#) and, finally, the coveted Oscar itself as best supporting actress to complete the fairy tale ending. This past week she released her first album and what's destined to be success.

PSALM 34:18 says, *"The LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* And don't forget another great memory verse we keep coming back to, **PROVERBS 3:5-6 (NIV)**, *⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*

Why is it important that we acknowledge God? What are some ways we can acknowledge God? How can we make acknowledging God a regular part of our life?

Do you remember the Todd Beamer story of 9/11? He's the one who was on that flight #93 and said, "Are you guys ready? Let's

roll.” How do you think his wife, Lisa, is surviving? It’s called the grace of God! It’s the only way any of us can survive the suffering of this life! God’s grace isn’t just given to save us but also to enable us to live no matter how tough life might get! Listen to these words from **HEBREWS 4:15-16**, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Mary and Martha found out it’s WHO you know—not what you know. Of course, we’ve got to know what we believe and why we believe it, but the bottom line gets down to a relationship with the Son of God—Jesus Christ. Martha wasn’t going to get her miracle until she went to Christ and confessed verbally His relationship with the Father and His true identity.

Jesus knew that Mary and Martha were disappointed—bitterly so. He also knew that they had much to learn in the midst of their disappointment. Thought they didn’t realize it in the turmoil of their sorrow, He had a plan to turn that disappointment into praise. This is a God who cares when we are disappointed—even when the disappointment is in Him.

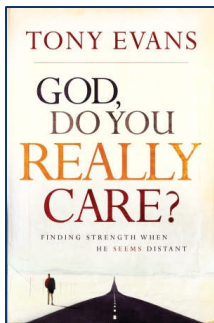
As we close, listen to these words from **JEREMIAH 32:27 (NCV)**: *27“I am the LORD, the God of every person on the earth. Nothing is impossible for me.* You have a handout with that verse on it to memorize this week. We need to hear that God is still in control. We need to hear that it’s not over until he says so. We need to hear that life’s mishaps and tragedies are not a reason to bail out. They are simply a reason to sit tight.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, “When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through.” The way to deal with discouragement? The cure for disappointment? Go back and read the story of God. Read it again and again. Be

reminded that you aren't the first person to weep. And you aren't the first person to be helped. Read the story and remember, the story is yours! Unfairness happens because life happens. Everyone experiences unfairness to one degree or another. Not even God Himself is immune. And He weeps and mourns for the unfairness that we endure.

Jesus offers no way out of the unfairness, but rather a way through it to the other side.

Let's pray!



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JUNE 22, 2008

