

“Where Are You God?”
by Cathy Love
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2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Have you ever been mad at God? I mean really mad at Him? Have you not only questioned Him but challenged Him over things that are occurring or have occurred in your life? Why is this happening to me, how could you let this happen, why me, my family, my partner, my child? I thought You loved me. Why should I trust God if this is allowed to happen to me?

Have you ever made promises to God only to “forget” to follow through? Maybe as a student you promised, God if you help me pass this test, I will go to church on Sunday. As a parent maybe you asked God to watch over your children and you would (insert promise here) or if you just got that job, that promotion, made a friend, recovered from a health scare, the list is endless as to what people pray for in a negotiation with God. If you..., then I... is our mantra.

We forget about listening for His presence in the midst of our chaos and pain and we make it all about us. We sometimes forget to pray, God be with me, help me see my way through this.

Have you ever asked God to make a change in your life so you could learn to follow Him? Have you ever denied Him because you were too busy? Many of you know my story of how I came to be up here. Many years ago, Rev. Frances asked me if I would become a Worship Leader. She and others saw something I did not recognize in myself. I said no, I thought there were others who knew God more intimately than I did, who knew their Bible better and were just all around better Christians and people; plus, I didn’t have time and, it was scary up here.

Frances did not push me, and I went on my merry way until shortly after when I was sidelined from life by an incredibly painful pinched nerve in my neck. Life as I knew it was completely changed, the things I took for granted were nearly impossible – every movement was planned for a very long time.

That was in 2015 and although I am doing well, I still have the effects of it affecting my life and now I am standing here not only introducing some songs and prayers but giving the message. Because even though I couldn’t do much, I

could pray, read the Bible and listen to music. I learned you don't say no to God.

Mother Teresa herself is quoted to have said "I know God won't give me anything I can't handle. I just wish He didn't trust me so much." Another quote attributed to her is "Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts."

If we look around there is pain, there is suffering, there is devastation. People have asked me how I can continue to have faith when so much has gone wrong in life and in the world. Having faith in God, I explain, doesn't mean I will never have trials or sorrows, it just means I have someone leading me through them. One of my favourite verses, although I am not so good at living it is Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Words to live by as challenging as they are!

In researching this message, I came across some incredible stories of faith. Many of these stories are heart wrenching. One such story is of a firefighter Josh Ingram from Atlanta, Georgia and his family's terrible tragedy. They were finishing up a camping trip, packing to go home when his 2-year-old son Briggs wandered off. Josh found him in the water. He performed CPR on his own son for over 30 minutes until help arrived and, although Briggs was treated for several days in a children's hospital, he died from his immersion in the water.

His mom Meshea wrote "Words are failing me, but God hasn't. His ways are so much higher than mine. I see the thousands of souls touched through this tragedy and that is how I keep my faith. Please don't doubt your own. God heard us. He just sees what we don't, and that is why His will is so so perfect." She tells of her son's death and goes on to say, "The heartache is insurmountable, but God is our refuge and strength." She then quotes 1 Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Neither have entered into the heart of man, The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

I often tell you about the stories behind the songs which are frequently written in a time of pain and sorrow for the musician. Out of tragedy, sometimes comes great beauty which is celebrated by so many people for decades.

Remember Job? What a life he lived. He was wealthy, had 10 children, many servants and livestock numbered in the thousands. Job 1:3 says He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. Satan one day questioned God about Job's faith believing that if God took everything from Job that Job would curse God to his face. God gave Job over to Satan and said everything Job had was in Satan's power however, he was not to harm Job.

Well, the story is long and includes Job losing everything he values but not his faith in God. Although he mourns his loss, he praises God. He even says to his wife who encourages him to curse God and die, in Job 2:11-13 "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In the end, Job was richly rewarded for his devotion to God.

So where am I going with this? Well, quite a while ago, I listened to a YouTube video by Joni Eareckson Tada. She talked about her journey with God in a very honest, very sobering interview. I sent it to Sharon and Frances. I knew there was a message in it. Frances and I have talked about this ever since, but the timing wasn't right before. In preparing for today, I rewatched the video and decided it was too much for a Sunday service, you can listen to her other videos on YouTube at your leisure. I researched her other videos, prayed to God to help me tell the story He wanted all of us to hear and selected this one.

I am not going to say much for an introduction, but Joni was an athlete, a tennis player, a horse back rider, and a member of an active family who lived a beautiful life. Joni is the last of 4 girls and her dad wanted a boy which is why she was called Joni. She states her athleticism is likely what had her making a dive into shallow water at the age of 17 which resulted in her hitting her head causing a fracture between the 4th and 5th vertebrae. She became a quadriplegic.

Joni Eareckson Tada is currently described as a mouth-painter, singer, writer, disability activist, and a quadriplegic. She does incredible work through Joni and friends.

In a moment, we will watch part of her story. In this video, she doesn't speak of her year plus in the hospital strapped to a Stryker frame. She has quoted numerous Bible passages two of which we read today. She says when she has tough days, she grabs hold of favorite scriptures in different translations in the Bible. She says it is just a way of giving an old truth a fresh perspective.

One of these scriptures was Romans chapter 5 from The Living Bible. "We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials because we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady."

She says, in her book "A Place of Healing", suffering can:

From Psalm 119 vs 67 Turn us from a dangerous path

From 2 Corinthians 12 vs 9-10 Remind us where our true strength lies

From Colossians 1 vs 27 Restore our first love for Christ: "Heartache and physical pain reach below the superficial, surface places of our lives, stripping away years of accumulated indifference and neglect" proving that Christ in us is our hope of glory.

From Psalm 18 vs 6 Heighten our thirst for Christ: "In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help."

From 2 Corinthians 4 vs 16 Increase our fruitfulness: Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Joni says "The Bible tells it like it is. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. No one goes to Christ's heaven who doesn't first share in Christ's sufferings."

She also says, when she has to manage her heart, she turns to hymns to help her get back to Jesus where she belongs. She says sometimes, she cannot put 2 words together in prayer due to her chronic pain but when she turns to hymns, the words are just there.

"This is my Life story" is a short version of the story about her life and maybe it will answer the question "Where are you God?"

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVXJ8GyLgt0>

Please join me in prayer.

Loving God, thank you for your undying love. We pray that in our struggles, we will be inspired by these testimonials to know where you are in the midst of our pain. May we always feel your loving presence. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.