

# ANGRY AT GOD

## PREVENTING THE BITTERNESS FROM RUINING YOUR LIFE

By Ray Boetcher

Jeffrey was 12 years old when his 10 year old brother became ill. He was scared when his brother was admitted to the hospital, and worried so much that he couldn't sleep at night.

Because of his age, he was too young to be allowed to visit his brother in the hospital, so he stayed home ... crying out to God to help his brother get well. He would do anything if only God would just heal his brother and bring him home again.

His brother died. That was 35 years ago, and he is still angry at God for not responding to his prayers and saving his brother's life.

My friend, Andrew stutters. He has stuttered his whole life. There's not a day that goes by that he doesn't pray to God to cure him of his stuttering. In his prayers, he asks God ... why is he being punished. It's just not fair. But he keeps on hoping that one day, he'll be able to talk like everyone else ... without stuttering.

Andrew attended a prophetic healing conference, and had the visiting minister pray for him. He was surrounded by believers, and they all put hands on him, and prayed for his healing. He felt warm all over, it was like electricity running through his veins. They asked him to speak.

He spoke, and he wasn't stuttering. He was so full of joy he could hardly sleep that night.

In the morning, he was stuttering again. He cried out to God, "why would you get my hopes up like that and then just squash them?" "I've been faithful, I've been good, I was sure you had cured me." "Why can't I be healed of this? God, you heal others, why not me?!"

Rebecca strayed away from God during her teen years. She was into drugs and partying, and became totally uncontrollable. She did as she pleased despite her parents attempts to protect her from this sure path of destruction.

But miraculously, when she was 18, she turned her life around. She began going to church again, she got a whole new set of friends, and she got accepted to the University of Virginia. Her whole life was mapped out, and she was back on track again.

A year later, she died in a car accident. Her parents were devastated and tormented as to why God would let this happen?

They quit going to church. Family, friends, and coworkers were very uncomfortable being around them, because they were always so angry.

My friend, Thomas has been a believer for about twelve years now. He's a member of a great church. He's a faithful giver and tither, yet he can't get his head above water. He's constantly in debt and sees no hope of getting out of debt in the near future. No matter how much he prays or how much he gives, he is still going to be in debt. He doesn't understand why God isn't helping him. Why isn't God helping him!?

Recently, a bomb went off at the Boston Marathon. Three people were killed. One of them was an eight year old boy. Over 200 people were injured ... 14 of them lost at least one limb. Many people wondered ... "How can a loving God let such a thing happen?"

If we look at the above examples, we see they all come down to one of two factors:

1. The individual is angry because God did not prevent something negative from happening.
2. The individual is angry because God did not do something positive for the person.

Julie Exline, a psychologist at Case Western Reserve University, did a study which was published in the January 2011 issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Her study, "Anger Toward God: Social-Cognitive Predictors, Prevalence, and Links with Adjustment to Bereavement and Cancer," examined college students, cancer survivors and grief-stricken family members over a ten year period. She found that anger toward God often coincides with deaths, illnesses, accidents or natural disasters. Yet anger is not limited to just traumatic situations. It can also surface when people experience personal failures, disappointments, or interpersonal hurts. Some people see God as ultimately responsible for such events, and they become angry when they see God's intentions as cruel or uncaring. They might even think that God has abandoned, betrayed or mistreated them.

Let's look at examples in the Bible of men who became angry at God ... Jonah, Jeremiah and Job. First, let's look at Jonah.

The Lord spoke to Jonah, commanding that he go to Nineveh to demand that they repent from their wickedness to the Lord. But Jonah did not want to go. He thought the people of Nineveh deserved the wrath of God, so he attempted to flea to Tarshish.

A great wind, a sea, and a big fish later, we find that God's grace and mercy, and His Will brings Jonah to Nineveh where he reluctantly preaches repentance. And the people of Nineveh repent. This angers Jonah. Even though Jonah knew God was full of grace and mercy, and enjoyed that grace and mercy himself, he resented that God also gave grace and mercy to the people of Nineveh. Jonah wanted to see God destroy the city, so Jonah expresses his anger at God.

Let's read Jonah 3:10, 4:9,11: When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked ways, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. ... But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, and abundant in



loving kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." . . . "I am angry enough to die."

So we find Jonah angry at God for showing grace and mercy to the sinful people of Nineveh. Which is not how a prophet of God should react or feel when a group of people repent and turn back to God.

But, God didn't become angry when Jonah became angry, because God loved his prophet. He loved Jonah so much, that He tried to teach him the extent of His mercy and grace. . . He made a plant grow that gave comfort to Jonah, and then He killed the plant ... Jonah pleaded with God to save the plant, but he never prayed for God to save the people of Nineveh. Was Jonah's anger justified? No. But God loved him anyway and continued to show mercy and grace on both Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

Another prophet that became angry at God was Jeremiah (see Chapter 20)

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was around 20 years of age in the tiny kingdom of Judah. The people at that time didn't act like God's people at all. They were worshipping all kinds of other gods from the nations around them ... pretty much like the people of Nineveh.

God called Jeremiah to warn His people that if they didn't turn back to God, Jerusalem would fall to an enemy attacking from the north.

They ignored Jeremiah. For 40 years in the face of hostility and rejection, Jeremiah brought this message, over and over again to God's people in Jerusalem ... even the King ignored him.

We find in verse 7, that Jeremiah became angry with God and felt that he was deceived into becoming a prophet.

*O Lord you deceived me, & I was deceived You overpowered me and prevailed, I am ridiculed all day long, Everyone mocks me.*

In verse 8 we find that he is being ridiculed as a prophet for speaking out for God ...

*Whenever I speak, I cry out Proclaiming violence and destruction So the word of the Lord has brought me Insult and reproach all day long.*

So Jeremiah decides he is going to stop. He is no longer going to be God's prophet. For those of you in ministry, perhaps there are times that you too have become frustrated in your ministry, and like Jeremiah you were ready to give it all up? I know I have.

But Jeremiah re-asserts his faith, and instead of praying for God's grace and mercy for the people of Jerusalem, he prays for God to bring judgment to his enemies, but then we get to verses 14-18 we find Jeremiah back in the pits and angry at God again ...

Verse 14 *Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!...*

Verse 18 *Why did I ever come out of the womb To see trouble and sorrow And to end my days in shame?*

So like Jonah, Jeremiah became angry at God and was not all that afraid to express his anger to God.

But, is it OK to be angry with God? The answer is "Yes and no"

Jeremiah was angry with God, and he wrote about it in his prophetic word. God, apparently didn't mind him being honest about it and sharing it with the reader. After all, God chose for Jeremiah's angry words to be included in text of the Bible. So God can deal with our anger.

BUT, there is an anger that leads to a renewed relationship with God -- and there is an anger that distances ourselves from God.

One of the most important things to do when you're angry with God is to talk to God about why you're angry. Tell God honestly where you are. It's good to be honest with God, but be careful what you say. Remember God is God, it is His Will that is to be done. We don't need to understand why He does what He does. Yes, God is slow to anger with us, but He is also a God of justice and righteousness.

When we express our anger, our words should not be accusatory. We cannot attack God or His sovereignty, our words should only address our feelings, or lack of understanding. We must remember, that He is God and we are not. His will is sovereign. His will is just.

Unfortunately for many people, when they become angry at God, they tend to avoid any further communication with God. They find it hard to pray ... or maybe they view it as pointless. Worship is out of the question, as they are too angry to worship. Which means that they are pretty much left with nothing but their anger.

Here's what Ephesians 4:26-27 says, *Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Vs. 31 adds ... *Let all the bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice (also found in Colossians 3:8).*

Ungodly anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and can rob us of our joy and peace. Holding on to anger will allow bitterness and resentment to fill our hearts.

We must confess it to the Lord, and then in His forgiveness, we can release those feelings to Him.

Therefore, we need to take our grief, anger, & pain to the Lord through prayer.

Anger at God is a result of an inability or unwillingness to trust God even when we do not understand what He is doing. Anger at God is essentially telling God that He is not in control, and that He has done something wrong. But God is always in control, and everything He does is perfect. So it isn't right to hold bitterness towards God.

God understands that we sometimes become angry, frustrated and disappointed. But our anger and frustrations can become misdirected. After all, we should all know that it is not God who comes to kill, steal and destroy.

We should pour our hearts out to God in prayer, and trust that He is in control, and that His perfect will is being done.

Fortunately, we have a God who loves us even when we are angry with Him. He loves when we come to Him seeking understanding, strength, patience, or whatever else might be missing in our ability to love and serve Him, and trust His ways.

When something tragic happens in our lives, we ask God the question, "Why?" Of course what we are really asking is "Why Me, God?" or "Why my family?"

This cry for an answer shows two flaws in our thinking.

First of all, we expect to live our lives as though life should be easy, and free of hardship and tragedy. When we experience troubles, sometimes some of us get angry with God.

But nowhere in the Bible does it say God promises us a rose garden. Job reminds us in Job 5:7, that "man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward."

And that life is short and full of trouble (Job 14:1) ... "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil."

Even Jesus reassures us in John 16:33, "in this world you will have trouble," but through Him we can have peace in spite of the storms all around us.

Second, we don't understand the extent of God's sovereignty, and we lose confidence in His ability to control the world around us, as well as our circumstances and the people in our lives. When things don't go as we would want them, or expect them, we become angry because God isn't controlling the universe that "revolves around us."

Our fleshy selves become frustrated at our own ability to control events. When good things happen, we attribute them to our own abilities and success. But when bad things happen, we are quick to blame God, and we get angry with God for not preventing it.

Which brings us around full circle in our flaws ... which is our flawed thinking that we deserve to be immune to unpleasant, hurtful, and undesirable events.

Continued on page 13



### Angry at God

Continued from page 11

Tragedies bring home the awful truth that we are not in charge. The world does not revolve around us.

God is in charge. Everything that happens is either caused to happen by God, or allowed to happen by God.

We can complain, get angry, and blame God for what awful thing is happening in our life ... but if we were to simply trust Him, and yield our bitterness and pain to Him, acknowledge our sinful pride of trying to force our own will over His ... then He will give us the peace and strength to get us through our difficult situation.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

There are some things that we cannot control or even understand.

We must rest our faith and trust on God's love, mercy, kindness, goodness, righteousness, justice and holiness.

We must look at our difficulties we face in life, through the truth of God's Word ... which tells us that our loving God works all things for our good.

Romans 8:28 says, *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

We must realize that whatever happens in our life cannot separate us from God's love for us, nor prevent His perfect plan and purpose for us from materializing.

Isaiah 14:24 adds to this ... *The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand."*

Perhaps the greatest example of how we should express our anger to God is Job.

The book of Job, starts with a cosmic wager: Satan bets God that Job, the most righteous man on earth, will not remain righteous if he undergoes great suffering. So God allows Job to undergo great suffering, without any sort of explanation.

His friends, on the other hand, have plenty of explanations, which center around 'God only punishes those who have grievously sinned, so you need to repent of whatever it is you've done wrong.'

So what is poor Job to do? He hasn't done anything wrong. Will he turn his back on God?

Despite his wife's urgings, we find in Job 1 that Job responded to all his suffering with worship and acceptance ... The Bible says:

*"His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (Job 2:9-10).*

In Job 1:22 we find an important statement: *Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

Which brings us to the paradox of this book of the Bible, because Job spends the rest of this book telling his friends that God is being unfair.

Here are a few quotes. As you read them, ask yourself, • does Job sound like he is angry with God? • does Job sound like he is questioning God's fairness?

*"Does it please you [God] to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?" Job 10:3*

*"He [God] throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes. I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me." Job 30:19-20*

*"Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense - let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing." Job 31:35*

*"As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul..." Job 27:1*

*"...then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice." Job 19:6-7*

It sounds very much like Job is both angry at God and questioning His fairness. It's like Job is telling God that his suffering is unjust, and that God is unfairly punishing him. Job wants to know the truth, why is this happening to him.

Throughout the book, Job is crying out for an encounter with God, so that he can justify himself to God. Job is seeking the truth and wisdom to understand what is happening to him. Yet when God finally does speak, Job says nothing, and instead repents of his hasty words. Why, because the truth was revealed to him. Job acknowledges God's sovereignty, and Job is just thankful to have had an encounter with the living God:

*"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6*

However, God's verdict on Job's words comes just a verse later when God expresses His displeasure with Job's friends:

*"After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." (Job 42:7 ESV).*

Did you see that? The pious-sounding 'God never punishes righteous people and He is entirely good and not to be questioned' friends' speeches are declared wrong by God. Instead, God declares that Job is righteous and has spoken of God rightly.

Job is praised for his righteousness, for his questions, for his truthfulness. For all his anger and questioning of God, it is Job who really knew God and sought after Him. He pleaded for an audience with God, and when given an audience with God, Job didn't plea his case at all, nor did he beg for the suffering to end.

Job's desire to be vindicated was not as strong as Job's desire to meet with God and know the truth.

Shouldn't that be our desire when we feel angry at God. Shouldn't our trust and love for God be so strong that we seek His presence as we face things, events, and happenings that we don't understand.

Our anger should never turn into resentment or bitterness which pushes us further from God and communion with Him.

If you are angry at God, you should seek His presence, because the only thing that will take away that anger is to present God with your questions, your sorrows, your confusion and fear. God already knows the source of your anger. God knows your emotions and feelings. God knows all about your situation. God intimately knows the inner working of your mind and spirit, and God knows your limitations. But God needs to know you love Him, and trust Him, and that you acknowledge His sovereignty, and He will give you the peace you seek ... free from bitterness, free of torment.

Just remember, God is great in power and utterly in control of all that happens. Yes, he is kind and understanding towards us when we're angry with him -- but he's also a God of justice and righteousness. Be careful in what you say to him, but do not be afraid to bring your questions, sorrows, and unhappiness to Him. He will bring you through it.

Do not give up on God, because He never gives up on us. He will never abandon us,