

## **“Walking Away from the Cemetery of Broken Dreams”**

**Luke 24:13-35**

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Stone Mountain, Georgia  
April 25, 2004

Do you handle disappointment well? I'm not sure anyone does. Burying a dream, large or small, is about the most difficult thing anyone does. At least it is for me.

Disappointment is written all over this story near the end of Luke's gospel. On Sunday evening after the crucifixion, two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus discussing the events of the weekend when a stranger suddenly joined them. He asked what they were discussing which caused them to stop in their tracks. *“Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?”* Cleopas asked.

*“What things,”* the stranger asked? *“About Jesus of Nazareth,”* they replied. *“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him, but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but did not find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he is alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see”* Luke 24:18-24.

Did you pick up the point where hope gave way to disappointment? *“But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”* This has resignation and defeat all over it. These are the words of someone walking away from the cemetery of broken dreams. Sadness and sorrow are everywhere. Despair is not far behind.

**Have you ever been this disappointed in Jesus?** This may be a tough question for you to answer. Even if you have, you might not want to admit it. I understand. I am sure it was difficult for these two disciples to voice their disappointment. However, I have heard people do the same thing these disciples did, express confusion and disappointment. Let me share some of the things I've heard.

*“I thought Jesus would heal my loved one. I cannot believe he let her die, especially with so many believers praying for her.”*

*“I thought Jesus would secure my job and not allow me to be laid off. He knows I have a family to support.”*

*“I thought Jesus would protect our soldiers in Iraq and not let any get killed. After all, our cause is a noble one.”*

*“I thought Jesus would help me get a good grade on the final exam. He knows how much I need a scholarship.”*

*“I thought Jesus would help me make that sale. He knows how hard I have worked.”*

I hear disappointment in God more often than you might think. Sometimes it is voiced in anger and at other times in quiet disbelief. I try to listen carefully and compassionately because I know how painful this kind of honesty is. Disappointment is like an open wound that needs special attention. I try to be mindful of this. **So, what do I do when people are hurting this badly? Like Jesus, I try to get them to talk.**

Didn't you find Jesus' initial response to these two dejected disciples interesting? When he asked what they were discussing that made them so sad and they asked him if he was a stranger that was unaware of what had happened that weekend, how did Jesus reply? He asked them to tell him what happened.

Why did Jesus do this? Did he not know what they were discussing? Sure he did. So, why did he ask them to tell him as if he did not know? He wanted them to verbalize their grief. He

wanted them to talk about it. Why? Evidently it was healthy and beneficial for them to do so. Talking about their disappointment would help them process it and find ways to work through it.

I do this with people that are despondent and depressed, too. I encourage them to verbalize their disappointment, being as specific as possible, so they can clarify and understand it. As long as frustration and disappointment are not identified, they cannot be overcome.

You must not overlook the fact that Jesus did not share ancient scripture with them, beginning with Moses and the prophets, until he knew the source of their disappointment. When they became specific, so did he.

Verbalize your grief. Identify your disappointment. It is the first step in healing.

**The second step is to listen.** After the disciples talked, it was their turn to listen. Luke said that Jesus began with Moses and worked through the prophets to help them understand that their disappointment was the result of a misunderstanding. They thought his purpose for coming to them was to redeem Israel and failed to realize that he came to redeem all people everywhere. He did not come to liberate them from Rome but to free them from sin and selfishness. He did not come to make their lives less stressful but to show them how to live in good times or bad. He did not come to solve all their problems but equip them to deal with them. He did not come to give them an easy life, but abundant and eternal life. He did not come to do their will but the will of his Father that sent him. And he succeeded in his mission and was ready to help them discover and succeed in theirs, too.

There is great value in listening to others' perspectives on our disappointments. Many times they can help us to see that our confusion is based upon wrong expectations or the need to quit rolling in pity and head in a new direction. I think this is what Jesus did for these two disciples and what he and others can do for us.

In Tom Kempenski's play, "Duet for One," he tells the story of Stephanie, a noted violinist that contracted multiple sclerosis and was confined to a wheelchair unable to play the violin any longer. The entire drama takes place in the office of her psychiatrist, Dr. Fellman.

At first, Stephanie projects a strong image and acts as if she can handle her illness and her husband's affair with his secretary, but finally she breaks down and admits that living with broken dreams is tortuous. Then she turns on the psychiatrist and berates him for not helping her. At that point, Dr. Fellman, who has listened to her with kind patience, explodes. It was time for Stephanie to stop whining and listen.

"What a coward you are and what a quitter! So what if you have lost your career. So what if you must spend the rest of your life in a wheelchair. Don't you know how precious life is? So what if you have been traveling down a beautiful road and now you can no longer continue on it. You don't simply quit because you have come to the end of that beautiful road. You go back to the last fork in the road and take another way. You continue in another direction. Maybe you won't like it as much at first, but it is a good road, too. All roads in life are good roads and one day you may find this road as beautiful as the one you were on."

**The third thing I do when I talk to someone that is struggling with confusion and disappointment is encourage him or her to trust God** with pain in their hearts and tears in their eyes. Just because Jesus did not do what these disciples wanted him to do did not mean that he was insensitive and unaware of their needs. He was deeply compassionate and fully aware of their deepest needs, just as he is ours.

Often, I remind people that even if Jesus did not do what you requested, it does not mean that he does not care about you, did not hear your petition or is unaware of what you need. He does and you must be patient and trust Him to provide what you need when you need it and not a moment later than you need it.

I appreciate the work of Vance Havner, who authored twenty-seven books. Though I Walk through the Valley chronicles the death of his wife of thirty-three years and his attempts to adjust to it. At lunch one day, a friend reminded him of something Spurgeon wrote that helped him greatly. "God is too good to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. When you cannot

trace His hand you can trust His heart and His heart directs His hand.” I find a lot of comfort in this and hope you do, too.

Luke 24:31 is powerful, “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” This occurred at the dinner table when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Perhaps they saw his nail prints or were reminded of what he did when he fed the five thousand on the hillside. Something happened in that moment, though, that revealed his identity to them and they were ecstatic. They ran back to Jerusalem to tell other disciples about their experience.

I believe that enlightenment will come to us, too, if we keep our hearts and minds open and are patient and faithful. Just as Jesus did something that evening that helped these disciples move beyond their disappointment, he will do something for you and me. And when he does, we will have a dynamic testimony to share just as these two disciples did.

Annie Johnson Flint’s poem has spoken to me on many occasions.

God hath not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our life through;  
God hath not promised  
Sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow  
Peace without pain.

But God hath promised  
Strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor,  
Light for the way,  
Grace for the trials,  
Help for the above,  
Unfailing strength,  
Undying love.