

40 November 9th 2013

TRAINING FOR GUYS

Where's God Gone?

You are probably unique if you have been a Christian for sometime and not found yourself asking this question. You wake up one day and realise prayers don't seem to be being answered any more. Infact, prayer is difficult and doesn't bring refreshment. You don't seem to be hearing God either. Doubts creep in.

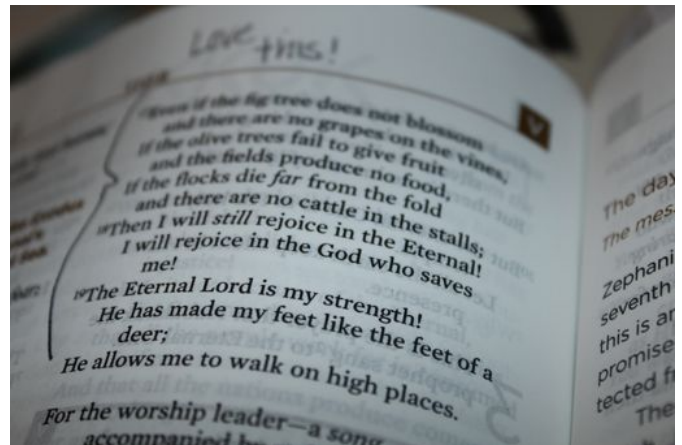
You're very much not alone if this is your experience. Next week we'll be starting a short series on Psalms in the podcasts, and many times we will read of the writers of those Psalms asking where God has gone...and this is in scripture!

Sadly, though, many people give up on being Christians when this period strikes. It's not supposed to be a time to give up, but a time of growth. Whilst I wouldn't want to compare myself or anyone else with Job, the accusation the Devil had against God at the beginning of that book was that He blessed Job so much that of course Job loved Him. But God knew Job well enough to be able to say that Job would go on loving Him even if those blessings were removed.

In the same way God is proving us. Not testing, not finding out things He does not already know, but proving we are the people He knows us to be. We need to be people who will walk with God even when it does not seem to be bringing any benefits - and even when it seems to be bringing difficulties we would not have if we just gave up on being Christians.

It's not just the Psalmists who experienced this sort of thing. The Prophet Habakkuk wrote:

*Though the fig-tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the sheepfold
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour. (Habakkuk
3:17-19)*



You see, it's about going on trusting even when there is no external evidence to back it up. Actually, I don't mean no external evidence, I mean no *new* external evidence. God doesn't leave us in this position without testimony in our lives to His goodness. There is always stuff we can look back on in our past where we know the Hand of God was at work. And there is also the testimony of others, to encourage us. Habakkuk started chapter 3 with the words

*Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.*

All scripture quotations taken from NIV unless otherwise indicated

It is as we trust God despite the current external evidence that we grow in faith and depth of insight. We become more

the people of the Kingdom, sharing the heartache of God and trusting in His goodness which we will one day see again. Job declared

*I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
(Job 19:25,26)*

Throughout all Job went through; tragedy, disaster, long illness, mocking and insult he did not waver from his trust and faith that God is God and Job's duty was to praise Him and trust Him.

So whatever is happening.... a sense you no longer feel God, vital prayers not being answered, not hearing Him speak to you and more.... keep believing, keep trusting. He is our hope and our future and He doesn't leave us in this situation for ever. Joseph was in gaol and could have remained there till he died or was executed, but God was there even if he could not sense Him. And God used the experience for His own purpose and glory.

At the far end of this tunnel there is more light than there was at the beginning, but that doesn't mean that meanwhile you just smile and pretend it's alright. Get friends to be praying for you, and make a habit of reflecting on the evidences you have for God and His goodness in your life. These will include, among other things:

- 1/ The Bible forming your worldview, and the fact that you know the Bible is true cos it makes sense
- 2/ Times when God has been very real and close to you in the past
- 3/ Prayers that have been answered in the past
- 4/ Friends' testimonies of God with them today

Give thanks to God for each of these things, and remind yourself you believe because of them and because of other things too.

I put number 1 first because, for me, when I have felt God is a long way off I always find it good to remind myself that the universe makes sense with God in it, creating it and sustaining it. Without God I can't believe in us even being here. And also because the Bible is how God speaks, and all the times I have heard Him it is in the context of a Bible story or teaching. Don't give up on God's Word just because God seems far off!

Our series on Ephesians comes to an end this week with ch 6:10-24. Next time we start a series on the Psalms, but you can still listen to the whole series on Ephesians, and many other bible books, on the podcast stream. Or try our Ephesians CDrom for groups, email to get a copy.

figministries.org.uk/podcasts

