

Disappointed with God

Have you ever faced a situation in your life that was so disorienting, so powerful, and so spiritually dismantling that you wondered if you were going to survive? And during those moments, did you ever wonder where God was? Many of us have, including many a theologian.

Though the famed author and Oxford scholar, C. S. Lewis, is remembered for many works, one of his lesser known books is our favorite precisely because it describes with sincerity, candor, and clarity, the anguish of facing pain and hardship while feeling that God is absent from the effort.

Lewis' book, "A Grief Observed," chronicles his struggle in the aftermath of the death of his beloved wife, Joy. Joy died only two years after they were married, breaking his heart, and throwing into doubt every certainty of faith he had previously claimed. Lewis writes about how disappointed he was in God during those dark times in his life. He says, "I turned to God in my greatest time of need, but I found God was not there. If this was all God had to offer, then I wanted nothing of it."

Lewis had expected that the God he had so neatly and efficiently described in all his prior theological writings would provide a suitably neat and efficient avenue for his recovery. But now that Lewis found himself in such great need, he experienced no comforting presence, no assurance and buoying hope, no stirrings of sustaining faith. He felt none of that. He just felt miserable and alone.

Have you ever had that happen to you? Having lost something of great significance to you, whether a loved one, a marriage, financial security, your health, or a dream for your future, have you ever found yourself wondering where God was?

Then perhaps you will recognize the realization that ultimately dawned upon Lewis. He had been so busy, in the aftermath of his great loss, looking for signs of the God he thought he knew that he missed the presence and action of the God who had been available to him all along, but simply unrecognized.

All the while Lewis was bitterly resenting that the particular responses he expected from God were absent, he was missing the fact

that God was indeed right there with him, but in ways Lewis had never anticipated. God was present with an ingenuity and tenderness and grace he never ever imagined possible. God's repertoire of caring was far larger than Lewis had known.

God's hand had been at work, Lewis eventually saw, in the people who traveled miles to sit with him in his loss, in the young students who offered their stumbling and heartfelt condolences, in the cards and notes he received from people he didn't even know, and in the familiar comforting voices coming over the phone to express sympathy.

God was present. God was working. It wasn't flashy. It wasn't neat and precise. The grief wasn't all swept away in one, clean, surgical amputation, but God was working to love and sustain and carry Lewis, even though he perceived nothing of it.

So if we find ourselves disappointed by God today, perhaps we ought to reconsider our expectations. Maybe we've developed some notions about how God ought to act on our behalf that are prohibiting us from seeing how God is actually acting. God's repertoire of imaginative, loving, caring acts is enormous. So look for God at work in your life. Be prepared to be surprised at the unique and inventive ways God offers you hope and help.