

HOW TO STAY SANE

WHEN LIFE DOESN'T MAKE SENSE

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How to Stay Sane When Life Doesn't Make Sense

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Dedication

TO OUR DEAR FRIENDS at Heritage Baptist Church in Lakeland, Florida, who allowed us the privilege of ministering to them for eighteen years. The joyful times and the painful times enriched our lives and equipped us to be better servants. These experiences taught us the lessons we are teaching in this book. Our desire is to enrich other lives so they may know the values of encouragement, rebuke, empathy, and forgiveness.

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Preface

WHY, GOD? This question, more than any other, plagues Christians and makes sleepless nights seem like an eternity. When we are not delivered from our adversities, we wonder why. Didn't God deliver David? "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6). When we pray for a miracle but don't get one, we wonder why. Didn't God say, "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:23)? What happened? Did we fail to have enough faith, or did God fail us?

Why? Why? Why? We know God's Word is true. And we know that God never fails, but sometimes life just doesn't make much sense to us. We want everything to make sense; we want logical answers to our questions. Would we bear our trials any better or would the suffering seem less intense if we knew why? Probably not! If we knew why, could we keep something bad from happening? Probably not!

"Why?" is not really a good question, because it doesn't solve anything. Instead of asking why, we would be wiser to ask how. *How* can I trust God more so I can ask why less? When I can't understand the "why's" of life, I can still know the "Who" of life. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "When you can't trace God's hand, trust His heart."

Trusting is often harder than obeying. With obeying, we have had the boundaries of obedience explained to us, but trusting God has no explained boundaries—we are always dealing with the unknown. We don't know what trials we will have to endure, how long a trial will continue, or how frequently we must endure

our trials. To trust God, we must come to the place where we can see our adverse circumstances through eyes of faith, not of sense.

Our purpose in writing these lessons is to encourage you to trust God when life doesn't make sense. We have learned by experience that trusting God works!

Part 1

*God Always Does What Is Right—
Even When It Doesn't
Seem Right!*

LESSON ONE

Lord, Why Is This Happening?

WHEN adversities charge into our lives, we often ask why. “Why me and not the alcoholic who can’t keep a job?” “Why me and not the guy down the street who beats his wife and kids?” “Why me and not the woman who steps out on her husband?” It is natural to ask why when our lives seem to be topsy-turvy. Even our Savior asked why when He agonized on the cross as He died for our sins: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; emphasis added). We all ask why. The problem is that our questioning spirit becomes demanding. We demand because we were born with a sinful, selfish nature.

We demand our children to respond correctly—after all, look what we have done for them! We demand that our mate meet our needs—isn’t that what God commands? We demand people move as soon as the light turns green—we don’t have all day to wait on slow people. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves demanding God, Who created us, to respond to our orders as well.

1. What orders do people shout to God?

2. How foolish it is to shout orders to a sovereign God. What

does the statement “God is sovereign” mean to you? Read Psalm 135:6.

From MY Perspective—J. O.

Isn't it amazing? God is not subject to the plans that we make. Never once does He ask us, “Would you like to have cancer? lose your child in death? be terminated from your job?” No, He just allows these things for His own purpose as part of His plan for our lives. The things God allows will make us more demanding, critical, and bitter or make us better, sweeter, and less insistent on answers from God. We must never forget that God is in control! He gives the orders—not us. He orders our steps and our stops. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psalm 37:23).

3. Have you ever felt God uniquely designed a difficult circumstance for your life just to frustrate you? What was it?

4. Look at Exodus 13:21 and Numbers 9:15–23. Our sovereign God guided the Children of Israel through the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. How could this experience have been frustrating for two million or more people traveling together?

From MY Perspective—Juanita

Try to imagine what it might have been like traveling—on foot—with your family and two million or more companions in the wilderness. You're tired, your husband is complaining, the kids are crying and whining. You keep thinking, “When is that pillar of fire going to stop moving?” But as time goes on, you

seem to be revived; you can make it for a few more hours. Just when you are set to keep going, the pillar of fire stops; and you think, "Why now?" All the people stop, unload, and set up their tents. Just as everyone dozes off for a much-needed night's rest, the pillar of fire starts moving. Everyone must pack and move again. And you ask, "Why, God?"

Do you ever feel as if God is trying to frustrate you? He could stop things from happening, but He doesn't. Does God do things just to frustrate us? NO! However, we need to deal with our frustration with God. Frustration can plant in our hearts seeds that may develop into a habitual attitude of questioning God's fairness. Is He unfair in the way He is treating us? No!

We all question God now and then, but we must be careful that we don't develop a questioning spirit that wants answers to the "why's."

5. Read Job 10:1 and 2. What Bible character developed a questioning spirit with God?

We remember Job as a patient man, and he was: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5:11). However, even his patience ran out, and he started wanting some answers from God. Let's look at Job's struggles with his trial. He moved from acceptance to a questioning spirit and back to acceptance.

6. What did Job lose? See Job 1:13–19.

7. Describe Job's attitude. Read Job 1:21.

8. Job lost his cattle, his servants, and his children. What other trial did God allow into his life? See Job 2:7.

From MY Perspective—J. O.

I once read of two young men who experienced great tragedies in their lives. One went on to live a happy, successful life; but the other ended in bitterness. What made the difference? One word—acceptance!

Worral had been stricken with rheumatoid arthritis at age fifteen. By age forty-five he was totally paralyzed (except for one finger) and totally blind. He tied a string to his one mobile finger so that he could turn on a recorder. From his bed, he led a happy, productive life writing for national magazines and writing books. God had not answered his prayer for healing, so he graciously accepted his lot in life and said, “Well, Lord! If this is the size plot you’ve stacked out for me, let’s You and me together show the world what we can grow on it.”

Cliff, a powerfully built construction worker, fell from a dirt-moving machine and sheared his spinal cord at the age of eighteen. He was told he would never sit or walk again. Cliff insisted, “God never intended anyone to live like this.” He used all his energies and efforts expecting a miracle, but no healing ever came. Cliff became a critical, bitter man as he wasted his life demanding God to heal him.

What a difference acceptance brings into our lives. In acceptance there is peace. Oh, how long it takes some of us to learn that lesson!

9. What was Job’s attitude after Satan sent the boils (Job 2:7)?

Read verse 10.

10. Job had three friends who came to give him counsel on how to handle his problems. What were their thoughts about God? Read Job 8:5–7.

11. What did they encourage Job to do?

12. What was Job's response? Read Job 9:1–4, 14, and 15.

In Job 9:16 we see Job's confidence beginning to weaken. Job began to paint an incorrect picture of God. He stated that God afflicts for no reason (v. 17), overwhelms people with all kinds of misery (v. 18), laughs at the pain of the innocent (v. 23), and allows injustice (v. 24).

13. What two words addressed to God in Job 10:2 expose the beginning of a questioning spirit?

From MY Perspective—Juanita

We have all been where Job was, haven't we? When we pray and pray and nothing happens, it is easy for our confidence to weaken. Whether we realize it or not, it is easy for a questioning spirit to develop when nothing happens and we know God could change things if He would. The longer our misery continues, the more unfair everything seems. We might even begin to feel God hates us. When we feel this questioning spirit begin to develop, we need to see it as an alarm and start spending less time looking for answers from God and more time thinking about the attributes of God. God is just, loving, kind, patient, faithful, and compassionate.

Why not get out a piece of paper and list an attribute of God for each letter of the alphabet.

Here is a promise and a challenge: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3, 4). Keeping your mind stayed

on Christ will allow you to change your focus. Instead of dwelling on your problems, focus on your powerful God.

14. When we demand answers and relief but nothing changes, it is easy to develop a “poor me” spirit. What did Job call his three friends? Read Job 16:2.

15. How did he feel about God? Read Job 16:7–9.

16. Read Job 19:7. What words in this verse indicate Job had developed a “poor me” spirit?

17. In Job 23:1–7 we see Job’s questioning spirit at full bloom. What words in verse 5 indicate that he was demanding some answers?

18. When pain goes on and on, we often try to persuade God how reasonable it is to do things our way. Why do we tend to measure other people’s love for us by the way they agree with our plans?

19. Why is this behavior childish?

From MY Perspective—J. O.

Job 23:10–17 is a beautiful interlude in the midst of Job’s struggles. Verses 10 and 14 give us reason to believe that Job was remembering again how great God is. Job was coming to grips with the fact that God could still see him, even if he could not see God. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (v. 10); “for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me” (v. 14). Job seemed to be acknowledging

the fact that his trials were a testing that God had appointed for his life. Job realized God could not be controlled by his cries for answers and that God might not give him answers.

When we finally realize God may not do what we ask, we have made progress. God does not always make everything right—from our perspective. From His perspective, His actions are always right: “As for God, his way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30).

20. Job kept wanting an audience with God. Finally God spoke to Job, as recorded in Job 38. However, God did not answer any of Job’s questions. He told Job to brace himself because He was going to ask him some questions. What are some of the questions God asked Job?

Job 38:4, 5—

Job 38:12—

Job 40:2—

Job 40:8—

21. How would you summarize the lesson God wanted to teach Job with all His questions?

22. How did Job respond? See Job 42:1–6.

From MY Perspective—Juanita

Sixteen times Job had hurled his “why’s” to God. Never once did God answer the question why. Fifty-nine times we see the word “why” in reference to God. Job did not need to know

why. He needed to know who; Who was in control! When Job changed the *y* to an *o*, he finally found relief. His preoccupation with why changed to a submission and trust in Who when he had a personal encounter with God. “Now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5). Job moved from acceptance to demanding answers and then back to acceptance.

When we, like Job, finally see God in our circumstances, we will also see ourselves differently. We will see ourselves as vessels whom God is trying to shape for His honor and glory. We will also come to realize that He wants us to love and trust Him and not necessarily because of what He does or does not give us. He wants us to love Him because of Who He is—our almighty, awesome, all-loving God.

We don’t need to know why; He knows why. Knowing that I am not in total control of my life takes the pressure off me and puts it on God—He is in control. Personally knowing the One Who is in charge of every detail of my life brings great relief and confidence. We must pray much, desire much, plan much, and expect much—but demand nothing! God is God and owes us no answers.

From YOUR Perspective

Have you had a questioning spirit—even a demanding spirit? Have you been asking God to let you see how a situation is going to end or to let you see why it is happening? Will you let go of your questions? Will you quit trying to find answers? If so, will you pray this prayer with us?

Lord, forgive me for not trusting You; forgive me for demanding answers. Right now I turn loose my questioning spirit—it is enough for me to know that You are in control and nothing touches my life that does not first pass through Your loving hand. I accept Your appointment for my life and believe the truths in Psalm 18:30, even though I don’t understand the situation right now.

“As for God, his way is perfect” (2 Samuel 22:31).