When God Seems To Have Disappeared

How Do You Respond When God Is Nowhere To Be Found?

As I have grown older, I have gotten much more organized in how I live. Years ago, I could not find my keys. I searched everywhere in our apartment but came up empty. Mary Jo suggested I check the pockets of my pants, so I did but still no keys. I could not leave the apartment because the car keys and apartment keys were on the same key ring and I had no spares. I prayed and prayed but everywhere I looked I came up empty. Resigned to spending the rest of the day at home and unable to get my work done, I went to the refrigerator for something to drink. Wanting ice, I opened the freezer door and there were my keys, just chilling out. Perhaps you have lost something and the harder you tried to find it, the more frustrating the search grew. Sometimes, it is almost comical when you can't find something, other times it is much more serious as with Savannah Guthrie, co-host of the Today Show, whose mother has been missing for sixty days. She recently spoke by video to her home church about how devastating it has been to not know where her mom is and that even her faith in God has been damaged. Her theological take, which she expressed in the video was certainly bizarre but the psychological and spiritual impact of missing someone you love can be shattering. What happens to you when it seems like God is missing, that He has disappeared? How many parents have felt that way when one of their children has died? Does it seem like God has disappeared when your best friend won't speak to you anymore despite your praying? Has it seemed like God is gone when you lose part of your retirement due to a bad investment or can't make enough money to get out of debt? How does the child feel when she is molested or abused? Or what about the parent when the son or daughter turns away from Christian faith? This sense of the absence of God is real, and you may be experiencing it now. It is a bit shocking to discover that it is not unusual in the Bible to find its key personalities going through this same experience, God disappearing. But the Bible provides a way out of this and helps you know what to do when God disappears. Our Big Idea is this. If God has disappeared, then look for Him.

The book of John records a rather strange event. After Jesus fed the multitudes on the hillside, he withdrew from sight, knowing the miracle had stirred up in the crowd a desire to make Jesus king. So He went off by Himself to pray. Meanwhile, the disciples got in a boat and sailed to the other side of the lake. **The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.** (John 6: 22-24 NIV) This certainly was very different from what you and I experience when it seems like God has left us but it does illustrate what we are considering. Each person in the crowd may have felt the same sense of urgency a mother who can't pay her bills feels. Impoverished and not knowing how they will get their next meal, many felt like their prayers had been answered when Jesus miraculously fed them. Perhaps it could be like this all the time if Jesus would just take up the kingship. But now He was gone. God could not be found. God disappeared.

The book of Genesis has a poignant account of what it is like when it seems God has disappeared. The Lord had previously met with Abraham several times in the past and even had made a promise to him. **"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."** (Genesis 15: 1b NIV) Abraham did not think much of this assurance though as he did not have a child and it seemed worthless to him to have the blessings of God without a son or daughter to pass them along to in his old age. God acknowledged this deep longing of Abraham's and promised him a long line of descendants. But then nothing happened. No children, no sign of God. Abraham still kept his faith in God, but his wife Sarah stopped believing. She thought God had abandoned her, so she came up with her own plan for getting children. Sarah offered up her servant girl Hagar to Abraham to impregnate and in a way that was culturally accepted, bear a child for her. Then she would take the baby and raise him as her own. This was certainly not God's plan, far from it, but the absence of God seemed to give Sarah permission to do as she wished. That is the great danger we face when we come to believe the Lord has left us. We start going off on our own without any regard for what the Bbile says or how the Lord is leading. Discouragement and depression often result in bad decisions when we think God has left us or is no longer showing us the way. Sarah and Abraham made a terrible decision when they thought God disappeared. The son Hagar bore to Abraham not only made life miserable for Sarah, but the descendants of the sons Sarah and Hagar bore Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, have fought brutal wars against each other throughout history, even to this day. When it seems to you God disappeared, it can lead to dreadful consequences if your faith in God disappears.

Perhaps you did not know, but the Bible points out to us that it is normal to have it seem God has disappeared. Why else would we have statements like these. **My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.** (Psalm 27: 8 NIV) Seek Him? Why? Because God has disappeared for you. **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.** (Jeremiah 29: 13 NIV) **Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.** (Isaiah 55: 6 NIV) It is expected that God will disappear from you from time to time. You will not feel His presence. It may seem you are abandoned and may think God is not there. That is a normal part of the human experience at this time in human history. We live in the age of sin and life is not how it should be, or better how it will be or even how it was before sin came into the world. If you are to have the sort of faith needed to become mature, the planned disappearances of God must take place. It is required for your growth.

Let us return to the case study of Abraham and Sarah. God was preparing the way for Abraham and Sarah to be the founding parents of the holy nation Israel. Their descendants were to be a light to the world who pointed the way to God and salvation. As such, Abraham and Sarah needed to have the spiritual maturity to raise their child so that he would lead his own family in righteousness and faith and future generations would follow in his footsteps. But Abraham and Sarah failed to grow in faith. When God disappeared from sight, rather than trusting in His word to give them a son and waiting patiently for God to keep His promise, they descended into immorality to get what they wanted. It is faith that God is after when He disappears from sight. He is stretching and building your faith at those times. Later, to get both Abraham and Sarah to the point where they could be the perfect parents for Isaac so he would develop his life with God, the Lord put them to the test and told them to sacrifice Issac as an offering to Him. It was only after they willingly submitted to this demand of God and Abraham actually brought Isaac up on Mt. Moriah that Abraham and Sarah had the mature faith needed to start the nation that would bring salvation to the world.

Your place in the history of the world may not seem to be as crucial as that of Abraham and Sarah, but to God it is. You are just as important to Him as the most famous saint because He died for you to have your sins taken away and to have eternal life with Him. His investment in you is infinitely important to God and so God will do whatever it takes to make you a powerful person of faith. Keep in mind this is what God says of you. **For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** (Jeremiah 29: 11 NIV) But for that to happen, God must improve your faith and to do that, He will disappear from you at times, and even perhaps for long periods of time. But what He said to Jeremiah He says to you. **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.** (Jeremiah 29: 13 NIV) When you take all the faith you have, which may be big or small, and stay on the look-out for God, He will reveal Himself to you. That is a promise. It may come through a Bible passage, or a worship service or some time in prayer or as you visit with a Christian friend who is walking with God or something else. But God will show Himself to you after He disappears for a while. And, after your time of waiting, you will be a stronger and more prepared Christian and your faith in God will have grown. Each day take a few moments and ask God to show Himself to you. Assume He will and look for Him the rest of the day. It may not happen that day or the next or even in a week but He will show Himself to you and by that time your faith will have grown. What a great thing for your friends and family and co-workers or classmates to have someone with your maturing faith in their lives. Prayers you never thought would be answered will be granted and you will be a hub from which God does His great work. Our Big Idea is a big one. If God has disappeared, then look for Him.