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Faithful Abandonment

"My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Jesus demanded from the cross.

Had God really forsaken Jesus?

Jesus was experiencing complete darkness in his soul as he took our sins upon himself. He was experiencing separation from God in a way he had never experienced it. Separation from God. The very definition of true death. Oh, the horror of it! The ultimate loneliness. The ultimate darkness. Jesus felt forsaken.

It is an awful feeling. Forsakenness. Being turned away from. Being left by the one you love the most. Betrayed. Abandoned.

A few months ago, I went through a season of darkness where I felt forsaken by so many. Betrayed. Abandoned by not only people, but by God Himself. The darkness was unbearable to my soul. I questioned the very existence of God. Surely the God I had based my life upon would never let me be hurt this way. I wanted to die. Death would be better than the pain of being abandoned by God Himself.

So many times I have treasured the scripture that says, "He will never leave me, nor forsake me." I have cherished the holy words that said, "When my father and mother forsake me, God will take me up." A deep place within my heart had been forsaken from my very beginning as my father and mother did literally forsake me. So believing God would never forsake me was a bedrock of my faith.

Yet I found myself surrounded by darkness. It invaded my heart. It consumed my soul. I felt unloved and vulnerable. I cried, "Why, God?" until I could cry no longer. Until my heart almost concluded "There must be no God."

My faith was tested in the fire. I remembered preaching a message about fear a few months earlier. I remembered talking about walking through the valley of the shadow of death and encouraging people that they and I could walk *through*. My own words echoed within me. But this valley of the shadow of death was much darker than I had ever imagined a valley could be. The shadow of death was taking away my breath. I was beyond fear. I was the little girl who was crying, "What is wrong with me that my parents would not want me?" A core question of my heart began to scream at me. My fear of being abandoned overtook me. And I wanted to abandon it all. I wanted to die.

People I loved had abandoned me. Painful words were spoken. The birage was never ending. One pain was succeeded by another. One wound followed another.

I was unable to connect with my lover – my God. I couldn't feel Him. I certainly couldn't see Him. I couldn't hear Him. The Word was too painful to look at. Hearing worship music hurt as it reminded me of His presence that now completely evaded me. Talking to God in prayer was too painful. He had left me. Forsaken me. Abandoned my heart.

Doesn't it make God more palatable to us – more sensible – to say He won't allow us to suffer yet the Word says...

1 Peter 1:6-9

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls. NKJV

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing

happened to you

In much of the church world today, we have been taught – whether purposely or subconsciously – that pain and suffering should not be a part of our lives. That true faith can bind away all pain, all suffering. We try to reconcile some of the great truths of the scripture, yet their mystery seems to be irreconcilable. But our humanness hates that! Surely we can explain God! And we try to put it all together. I find that God can't be explained fully. Suffering and blessing are both part of His message and I can't fully wrap my brain around the marriage of the two. This quote resonates with me now:

Jesus did not come to explain away suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with his presence. –Paul Claudel

Can we unapologetically say we can't explain all the mysteries of God? He loves us, yet He allows us to suffer at times. Don't get your theological feathers ruffled at me! This is not my forum to explain doctrine. Yes, doctrine is very important but people don't really care too much about doctrine when they are suffering. They long for God to come and fill them with his presence! The presence of God doesn't answer all our questions but it fulfills all our longings.

In my darkness, I needed the presence of God. But He was distant. Quiet. Silent. My heart screamed, "Don't you care? Do you care that my faith is failing? Don't you care that I am questioning you? Don't you care? Don't you care about me?" Silence. Complete silence. And I think of how Jesus felt on the cross. God was silent. He withheld His very presence. He withheld His words of comfort. He withheld rescue.

My valley, or course, was nothing like Jesus' valley. But yet I can learn from Him. God doesn't quit working in my life when I call out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He left me on my cross as my faith was taken to the point of death. And He didn't feel it necessary to answer my questions at that time.

2 Corinthians 4:8-18

8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 **For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, **but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

NKJV

And as I am on the other side of the deepest part of the valley, not completely out yet, I find that the mysteries of God are beautiful. That in His silence, He was bringing to surface in my heart the questions that perhaps all of us must eventually wrestle with. My heart looks at wonder now. *How God, through the death of my dreams, could you birth purpose and life and fulfillment? How God, through darkness and despair, could you shine light on my heart's unanswered questions and give me grace to face them? How God, in your stony silence, could you in reality be answering me?*

A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory....

The faithfulness of God in allowing me to suffer. Mysterious. Unexplainable. Offensive. Beautiful. Birthing in me

a deeper intimacy with God, my husband, and giving me friends who cared so deeply. Friends who stood at the foot of my cross and cried. Unable to rescue me. But their presence spoke to my deep longings.

Truly, only God can birth through death. I see deeper dimensions in His word now. I know intimacy more now. I am more real now. Less facade. More vulnerability. More ability to care. More compassion. More ability to see through His eyes and hear with His ears and more ability to carry His presence to others. Less of me, more of Him.

*For all things are for your sakes, that **grace**, having spread through the many, **may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God***

So, in a way almost as mysterious as God Himself, I can say, "Thanks, Father. Thank you for your mysterious ways. Thank you for bringing life in my death. Thank you for the preciousness of your resurrection."

May glory abound to my God who has been working in me something far more exceeding and eternally glorious. Filling me with His presence. Allowing gifts to be opened within me. Showering upon me the waters of life that cause me to live again. Allowing my suffering and bringing my comfort and healing. For being unexplainable.

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