

Experiencing God: The Divine Discontent

Job 19:23-27
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

July 15, 2018
Faith Community

Of all the times I've been to Guatemala on mission trips, an event that took place on my very first trip will stay with me forever.

It was 2004, and the mission at that time was located in a village called Vasquez, a 2-3 hour drive from San Lucas, where we work now.

It happened on the very first full day, as we journeyed up to Delfina's house. Delfina, who was 10-12 years old at the time, was critically injured in an accident a couple years earlier. We rallied to her support with prayer and financial help, and today she's fine, thanks be to God.

It's a 45 minute walk to Delfina's place from the mission, most of it uphill, steeply uphill, most of it on dirt paths, narrow winding dirt paths, and more than once you knew that looking down was not a good idea. As we neared the house a young man appeared, heading downhill, and Teri, our missionary there, told us that was Delfina's uncle. He's the one who carried her down to Teri's clinic after the accident, with most of her scalp missing and much of her skull exposed.

She had stopped breathing on that awful day, but the bumpy trip down helped start her up again. She stopped breathing again at the clinic, but they were able to get her going again as well.

She was in Teri's little clinic for sixteen days. Doctors said she should be taken home and allowed to die, but you don't say that to someone of Teri's character and commitment to Christ, and so the battle was joined. Constant care and countless phone calls, visits, letters, and episodes of in your face nagging later, Delfina and friends were at the Guatemala City airport, a 5-6 hour trip from the village. Shiners' Hospital in Houston had accepted her, and one of the airlines even offered free transportation. But it wasn't until one hour before the flight was to leave that she was granted a visa.

We followed her progress here in the states, even saw an occasional photograph, and joined people around the world in thanking God for her healing. One of our members

made a trip to the Guatemalan consulate in Chicago on her behalf.

Now she was home. Her family wanted to say thanks, and did so by hosting us for Sunday dinner. It was a monumental undertaking for this family. It was prepared on a single cinder block stove fueled by wood or paper or anything else that would burn. So there we were, sixteen adults and five kids gathered in their makeshift dining room, sharing in a feast the likes of which most of us had never tasted, and giving thanks to God. Afterwards Delfina's dad spoke passionately of the family's profound gratefulness, giving glory to God every step of the way.

After dinner as we left their place and went further uphill, my son David said to me, "Dad, they're so grateful, but they don't have anything." I said, "Yeah, you're right. All they've got is Jesus. And who do you think is more poverty stricken?"

Sometimes the heartache we wish would go away is the very thing that leads us into the arms of God. Did you ever notice that? Mountain top experiences of life are tremendous, but the real fruit is grown in the valleys. Delfina's father could talk passionately about God's love because he'd experienced it. He knew what it was to have nothing to bring to God but his brokenness, and in turn find his empty cup filled to overflowing.

The apostle Paul learned that, and like the rest of us he learned it the hard way. He had some kind of physical condition that he longed to be rid of. He called it his 'thorn in the flesh.' This is the only place in the New Testament where the phrase is used, and it literally means something pointed or sharp, obviously something painful. Here's how he put it:

To keep me from getting a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. (2 Co. 12:7-8, TMSG)

Imagine that. Imagine praying and getting no answer. Then imagine the answer finally coming, but the answer is no. Then imagine that such an answer leads to greater growth and maturity in you and in people around you.

If God could say no to someone like Paul, what makes you think he wouldn't do the same with you? If God would send his own son to the cross, why should you remain unscathed? Friends, do not make the mistake of missing your brokenness. I think it's good that we don't know what Paul's ailment was. That way we can't write it off and think it doesn't apply to us.

And Paul heard God say to him,

'My strength comes into its own in your weakness.' Once I heard that, I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now, the weaker I get, the stronger I become. (2 Co. 12:9,10)

Here's Job in the Old Testament at the bottom of the pile, everything's lost, his family, his health, his fortune, or so it seems. People are telling him to cut his losses and make the best of it, but he has a better idea, and gives voice to it. He makes one of the most profound statements of faith you'll ever hear:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. (v.25)

Would you allow God to work in you like that? Can you take the worst life has to throw at you and give it to God as an offering?

Friends, don't make the mistake of missing your brokenness. Sometimes we need to pay attention when something's wrong and allow it to lead us even more deeply into the arms of God. Learn from Job and Paul. Learn from Delfina and her family. Watch every person who fights the good fight and finishes the course along godly lines. See how God is praised and glorified.

While we were in Guatemala I led a daily Bible study. I learned an expression in Spanish the very first day that I think I'll carry with me forever. We were talking about Abraham and how God keeps his promises. The expression is this: "Dios es fiel." It means "God is faithful." We ended every class with that wonderful phrase.

Now it's our turn. Let's say it together:

"Dios es fiel."

"Dios es fiel."

"Dios es fiel."