

Betrayed by God?



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*Making
Sense
of Your
Expectations*

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This book is dedicated to four strong women in my family who know how to ride the rollercoaster of life and still hang on: my mom, Hazel Schutte, who is one of my greatest confidants; my amazing grandmother, Freda Nicholson, who always inspires me to keep looking ahead; my sister, Melonie Schutte, who has learned to go after her dreams no matter the cost; and my lovely sister-in-law, Jeana Schutte, who knows what it's like to experience loss and still have the courage to love. I am so blessed to have all of you in my life. Thank you for loving me!

This book is dedicated also to my mentor, Cheryl Mitchell, who taught me how to press into Christ when I felt abandoned and betrayed by God.





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1 When Dreams Die

*Life is not predictable, except in its
unpredictability.*

Dan B. Allender, *The Healing Path*

God: The most popular scapegoat for our sins.

—Mark Twain

Little girls know how to dream. Ask any elementary-school cutie patootie what she wants to be when she grows up, and she'll probably give you a list as long as her list for Santa.

I picked up my friend's five-year-old daughter, Alyssa, from school one afternoon. As acting mother, I did what moms often do—I engaged her in conversation.

“How was your day?” “How was lunch?” “How did you like gym?” Then I asked a another common question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

A dreamer, this sweet little thing with legs dangling over the back seat of my car unloaded dreams, hopes, and desires for her future at machinegun speed without taking a breath. “I want to be a ballerina, and I'm gonna play the clarinet, and I'm gonna do house stuff and play the piano and be an artist, and I'm gonna be a scientist and do math, and I'm gonna be a teacher, and I'm gonna be a writer and play the flute.”

House stuff, I discovered, meant actually building houses and giving them to the poor—a daring goal for such a tiny girl. Yes, little girls definitely know how to dream.

So do big girls.

Think about it. When you meet your girlfriends for a night out, how long is it before you're all going on and on about what you long for? If you're like me and my friends, it's about five minutes.

Every dream, hope, or desire we have resides on what I call an internal checklist of the heart. Just like Alyssa, we started keeping this personal list when we were little, adding to it through junior high, high school, and into adulthood. Sometimes we add things to the list, sometimes we take things off, but there's always a list. Sometimes we don't even know what's on it until God doesn't grant us something we want or we're surprised by something we haven't put on the list.

No one gets everything on the list; life rarely turns out exactly the way we want it. Our days on earth are a series of little disappointments over our lifetimes. We want a new couch, but we're stuck with the one our grandmother recovered with her old drapes. We want a promotion, but we receive a demotion. We want our children to get better grades, but they don't.

And then there are bigger things on our lists that, if left unchecked, deeply wound our longing hearts: We want intimacy, but we're misunderstood. We want health, but we become ill. We want fidelity, but some of us are traded in for newer models. We want children, but we're childless. We want stability, but we're faced with unemployment. We want acceptance, but we're snubbed by a family member. We want to be faithful, but we succumb to unfaithfulness. We want to overcome an addiction, but we struggle with it in spite of our prayers.

And then we experience disappointments that happen to us corporately. We want our nation to prosper, but its prosperity is threatened by a growing load of debt. A hurricane destroys our homes and the homes of our neighbors. Hardships surround us.

Life is never easy. Thus, the items on our internal checklists are never entirely checked off.

Yvette Maher knows what it's like to have something big remain unchecked on her list. On January 7, 2008, Yvette's twenty-year-old single daughter came home and told her mom that she was pregnant. Yvette was shocked, of course. As director of a sanctity-of-human-life organization, she and her husband had done everything possible to educate their children about God's plan for sex. For three days Yvette stayed home and supported her daughter, working out the details of how to handle this family crisis.

On January 10, while preparing to stop by Starbucks on her way to work, Yvette received a phone call from her sister. “I need you to pull over,” she said. Yvette braced herself for unhappy news.

“Dad has been accused of shooting his girlfriend,” she said. “He’s fled the scene, and there are dogs and helicopters looking for him. The whole county is in a lockdown. You need to get here. But you need to know that when the police find him, they’ll probably shoot him. So be prepared.”

As Yvette hung up the phone, she began preparing herself for the worst. She raced home, threw a suit in a bag, called her family together to explain the situation, then drove sixty miles to the Denver airport.

That night around 9 P.M. she arrived in Lexington, Kentucky. Shortly after landing, she discovered that her father was in the hospital, but due to strict legal guidelines and because her father was already a convicted felon, she couldn’t get any information on his condition. The district attorney told her that she would need a court order to see her father—no exceptions.

Three days later she entered his hospital room. She was shocked by what she saw. Instead of the police having shot him, he had tried to kill himself. Half of his face was gone, including his right eye, ear, and cheekbone. He looked like a character in a horror film.

Yvette stood over her father. *I can’t believe this is happening*, she thought. *My daughter’s pregnancy and now this*. Her dad had already been in jail for ten years after being convicted for murder. But since his release two years earlier, he and Yvette had been rebuilding their relationship. Now what?

Ten months later, her father was sentenced to life plus ten years in a Kentucky prison.

At the end of the same year Yvette and her husband, Tommy, felt the strain of the crises on their relationship. “We hit a ma-

gor wall of exhaustion and spiritual depletion. It was like ‘I don’t know if I like you, love you, or can’t stand you,’” Yvette said. The Mahers considered separation but later worked out their differences with the help of a licensed counselor.

Within twelve months, Yvette’s daughter had become pregnant, her father had shot his girlfriend and was sent to prison for a second time, her marriage almost fell apart, and her beautiful grandson was born.

When I asked Yvette if she felt betrayed by God, her eyes widened, and she replied, “You know what’s crazy about all this? In all the troubles I’ve experienced, I feel as if God is the only one who *hasn’t* betrayed me!”

Do you feel like Yvette? Blessed in spite of tragedy? Loved by God in spite of some extremely difficult circumstances?

Or—as I have—have you felt that God has let you down, betrayed you?

I’ll never forget when I pounded my bed crying and screaming, *God, I hate you!* On that day in 1992 everything significant I had believed about myself, God, my relationship with Him, and His teachings seemed to die under the heavy weight of disappointment.

My heartbreak was excruciating, because it centered on a woman’s most intimate longing—romantic love. Like most women, I wanted to become a bride more than anything. Convinced that life would be unbearable if I couldn’t marry the man I loved, I pleaded with God to let me have him. In complete seriousness I asked, *Lord, if I never get married, would you please let me die?* The fact that I said that to God should have warned me that my desire was so all-encompassing that there could be an intense and dangerous reaction in me if He said no.

I prayed kneeling, crying, begging, standing, sitting, and screaming, but the man I longed for married someone else. A

subsequent four-year spiritual and emotional black hole sucked me into enemy territory where Satan had what my mother calls a “heyday.” I was in such emotional pain that I could no longer understand who God was or who I was to Him.

Because He didn’t give me what I wanted, I believed He had betrayed me, leaving me in a spiritually and emotionally messy place. If this is your story, you know that there are few things more painful.

Why did *I* feel God had betrayed me in *my* circumstances, yet Yvette didn’t feel that way? My troubles could be considered small compared to hers. What spiritual perceptions hindered my walk with God while Yvette’s walk with Him grew stronger in spite of what she endured? Why do some people see their houses burn to the ground and sail through trouble with flying colors of faith? Why do others experience something that seems as small as having a hangnail and end up hating God?

In *The Sacred Romance* John Eldredge writes,

Everyone has been betrayed by someone, some more profoundly than others. Betrayal is a violation that strikes at the core of our being; to make ourselves vulnerable and entrust our well-being to another, only to be harmed by those on whom our hopes were set is among the worst pain of the human experience. Sometimes the way God treats us feels like betrayal.

Ah, yes. It *feels* like betrayal. But is it?

Are our perceptions wrong if we believe God has betrayed us when life hurts? Do we have some faulty expectations about God, ourselves, our relationship with Him, and the Bible? Are we confused about His heart and intentions toward us?

Have we been deceived?

Perhaps reading my story reminds you of a personal wound that caused you to ask God questions you’ve been afraid to whisper

to Him in the dark, let alone speak out loud. Maybe you weren't jilted on your way to the altar, but your experience has been equally painful. Your heartbreak may have happened when you were an adult or when you were young. Maybe it caused you to scream at God, as I did, or maybe you expressed your pain more politely. Nonetheless, there has been a time when you've questioned His goodness and love and have felt that God has betrayed you.

If you or someone you know relates to the experience of feeling betrayed by God in some way, there are a few things you need to know before we begin to examine that reaction.

Feelings of betrayal require honesty with God.

Being honest with God about the ugly things in our hearts doesn't always come easily. Many believe that it's *not* okay to say we're angry with God or that we feel He's lied to us, let us down, or betrayed us. Right? We've been led to believe that messy emotions are not okay and that being honest about our doubts is spiritual taboo—that "Hallelujah!" and "God is good!" should be constantly on our lips.

There's a better way.

When we're brokenhearted due to loss or disappointment, God wants us to be honest with Him. Why? Because being truthful creates an open door for Him to walk through to heal us. That's the way grief works. When we let it out, He comes in to apply His healing truth to the places that hurt.

One day it hit me afresh that the Psalmist did this very thing. Then I unexpectedly got the idea to do something I used to do when I was in the second grade—color in my Bible. I picked two of my favorite hues: pink and green. Every phrase in which the Psalmist expressed feelings, I highlighted pink. In the places he proclaimed God's truth, I colored the words green. The result

was an interesting pattern: Pink, green. Pink, green. Pink, green. Feelings, truth. Feelings, truth. Feelings, truth.

This reminded me that God shows that His plan for my life involves the blending of my emotions with His truth. One without the other never brings emotional healing or keeps me from believing the lie that God has betrayed me.

What if a woman lives only according to her feelings? There will be no healing for her broken heart, because emotions alone are often untrustworthy and can be based on lies. But what if she acknowledges God's truth only and stifles her emotions because "It's the Christian thing to do"? Healing remains elusive, because she's living a life of denial about what's really going on in her heart.

God wants to merge what we *know* in our heads about His Word with what we *feel* in our hearts, even if it means admitting some ugly things such as that we're angry with God, believe that He's lied to us and let us down—or that He's betrayed us. It's only when we're honest that He can change our song of betrayal to a song of joy.

Faith requires that we live not just from our heads but also from our hearts. Only then can faith be transforming. This means that I allow God to touch the messy places of my internal life; I engage my emotions and cooperate with God to blend them with His truth.

I recently had the privilege of speaking with Ruth Graham, author, speaker, and the third child of Billy Graham about being honest with God. When Ruth married at the age of eighteen, she believed marriage was for life. "I made a pact," she said, but when she learned that her husband of twenty-one years had been having multiple affairs, she was disillusioned with God.

This wasn't supposed to happen to me. I used to think that if I did this or did that or the other, God would bless me. But

then, when something bad would happen, I struggled with disappointment, and I was angry with God. I stood on God's promises that He would do a new thing in my marriage, thinking that He would improve things, but then I realized that He was doing a new thing in *me* instead.

Part of the "new thing" God did in Ruth in the aftermath of divorce was to teach her how to cultivate greater intimacy with Him through honesty.

Now I see God as gracious and welcoming. I imagine myself talking frankly with Him, crawling up into his lap, and saying, 'All right, this is how I'm feeling.' God wants us to be honest. He wants to include us, not exclude us in any way. He handles honesty very well. We can be open with Him and talk to Him like a friend.

God wants your honest feelings when you are hurting from not getting something you longed for. If you continually suppress the monster of disappointment, it will continue to raise its ugly head again and again. God can't heal what you won't give to Him, and denial will keep you bound by feelings of betrayal.

God wants you to surrender to what you don't understand.

I used to think that I couldn't get past believing God had betrayed me or come to trust Him again unless He explained why my heart was broken and why I didn't get what I wanted. I've since learned that surrendering to Him is necessary to overcome any distrust I feel. And it does not require that He reveal anything to me about my past disappointments. He's not obligated to tell me why my heart was broken or why someone else has experienced the joys in life that I've longed for. Rather, in surrendering I'm giving up what I don't know to a God who loves me.

Because of this, I can choose to believe moment by moment that He's sovereign over every detail of my life—and all things in my past, present, and future.

In *Just Enough Light for the Step I'm On* Stormie Omartian writes,

God wants us to surrender our dreams, because we can't be led by Him if we are chasing after dreams of our own making. And He wants us to surrender all of them. That way He can tell us which of them are from Him and in line with His will and which of them are ours and born out of our will. If they are only our dreams and visions and not His, we will experience a lifetime of unfulfillment and strife trying to make them happen.

Can you relate? If so, count yourself in good company. I've often wondered why we're so slow to let go. I believe one reason is that we doubt God can give us anything greater than what we desire.

Trusting and surrendering to God does not mean that it will always feel nice to give up to God what we don't understand. Neither does it mean always skipping and singing hallelujahs through our troubles. Instead, it may often mean that we say, "I trust you, Lord," through tears, through shouts of despair, and possibly even through clenched teeth—because trust and surrendering to God is a choice, an act of the will not born of emotion.

I'm still single at age forty-one. Remaining unmarried has been my deepest heartache, because—like most women—a loving husband and family have been important items on my checklist. Although I've felt capable of giving and receiving love for many years now, the wedding altar has eluded me.

God and I have had many talks about my still being single. In some of my most personal moments with Him, I've raised my hands to heaven with tears streaming because I don't have a man

to love or a child to hold, and I've surrendered to God: *Lord, my life is yours. You know what's best for me. If I can serve you best alone, then I do it willingly.*

I've chosen to surrender to Him many times when the longing of my heart is fierce. There's no doubt that remaining in God's hand is not always an easy thing, *but it's always the right thing.*

I think about eternity and the people I want to take with me to heaven. I think about the souls I want to touch for Christ. And for these reasons I trust Him because these "light and momentary struggles" (2 Corinthians 4:17) will be outweighed by the glory of eternity. I say yes to Jesus. I agree to go His way.

If you feel betrayed, you're in the majority.

Some time ago, I e-mailed 125 women and asked them if they had ever felt betrayed by God. Ninety-eight percent replied that they had.

If you identify with these women, I congratulate you on your honesty. You're already on the way to discovering a deeper love for God and healing for your heart. It's my prayer that He'll speak to you through this book.

If you've never felt betrayed by God, you have good reason to believe that many of your friends are in the 98-percent who feel they've been. Hopefully this book will fuel your compassion, love, and understanding as you walk with them through difficult circumstances.

God wants to run circles around your checklist.

One of my friends recently said, "The search for satisfaction always ends in the same place; it always ends in God." I wish I had known that before I believed God had betrayed me; I wish I had known that God was going to run circles around my checklist.

This truth is illustrated in Matthew 5:4—“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” The word “blessed” in this verse is *makarios* in the original Greek language, and it refers to the state of the believer in Christ. The definition from my New Testament word study Bible says, “He (the Christian) is indwelt by God because of Christ and is *fully satisfied*” (emphasis mine). The thing that strikes me most about this definition, however, is the remainder of the definition: “*Makarios* differs from ‘happy’ because ‘happy’ describes the person who has good fortune.”

Don’t you love that? This means that no matter what items on your list have or haven’t come through, you can experience satisfaction. And unlike me, you can avoid the mess that’s sure to develop once you begin believing that God is a betrayer.

If you can relate to my story because you believed that something or someone could satisfy you in a way that Christ couldn’t, and that led to feeling betrayed by God, I invite you to remember *makarios*.

Examining Your Heart

1. What’s your greatest dream, hope, or desire?

2. What if anything do you desire that would cause you to feel as if God didn’t love you or care for you if you never received or achieved it? Would you feel betrayed?

3. Is it difficult for you to share your ugliest emotions with God? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think it's difficult to surrender what you don't understand to God?
5. Do you agree with Stormie Omartian's belief that we have to give up all our dreams to God so that He can give back those that are of Him? Why or why not? Would this be difficult for you to do?
6. How does it make you feel to know that God could want something for you other than what you desire for yourself?
7. Have you ever experienced the satisfaction of *makarios* in spite of your circumstances?

Action Point

Draw a heart on a sheet of paper, and write in it the dreams, hopes, and desires you hold most dear at this time. Then draw another heart, and write inside it the dreams, hopes, and desires you valued ten years ago. Has your list changed? Can you see God's wisdom in withholding some of the things you wanted ten years ago?