

Asking God The Hard Questions

My father's suicide catapulted me into a time of deep grief, a time when I questioned all I thought I knew about God, while clinging to Him daily for the strength to get through the pain.

In those first shock-filled days after I heard the news that my father had hung himself in the basement of our home, my heart would scream: "NO, NO, don't think about it! It hurts too much!"

After the funeral, when I left to return to university, I felt so alone and overwhelmed. Whenever I had time to think, I would think of Dad, and I would cry. Questions and doubts started to fill my mind:

If God loved me, why had He allowed this disaster?

If God was all-powerful, why hadn't He stopped my dad?

If God was all-knowing, why didn't He let me know how despairing my father was? Why hadn't He shown me how to reach him?

If God was there, why hadn't He done something?

Was God there?

I had become a Christian a few years ago. The thought that Jesus had died for me so I could be forgiven and know Him personally had filled me with surprise. *I could know God? He could be closer to me than a brother?* Of course I wanted to know him! Of course I wanted to be forgiven! And when, at 16, I invited him to come into my life and forgive me and change me He had done so, filling my heart with a sense of His presence.

But now, for the first time, God had really disappointed me. And I felt I had really disappointed Him too. You see, my father and I had spent time together just a few days before he died, and he had asked me questions about God I couldn't answer. Then he had asked me to transfer back to the university at home so I could be with him, and I had refused to do so. Now, I wondered if he would still be alive if I had done what he wanted, and I was tormented by a deep sense of guilt.

Thankfully, God put a very special person on my path who would help me work through my guilt and my questions by meeting with me weekly for the next few years. She pointed me to books and resources that really helped me grow in my faith during that time of doubt. The first time we met, she shared that the Christian life was impossible to live, and if we tried to live it by our own strength, we would end up frustrated. Only Christ could live the life He called us to, and He wanted to live through me, but to do so, He needed me to surrender my life fully to him, and trust Him daily for the strength to obey. I was certainly frustrated. I was certainly aware of my sin and my weakness, and so I did surrender my life to Him and ask Him to fill me with His Spirit.

And I believe that it is His Spirit who gave me the perseverance and the strength to keep coming daily to God with my pain and my questions, so that He could comfort me and speak to my heart.

For the next months, I would spend about an hour or two a day with God. Sometimes it was with tears streaming down my face. He had showed me through the Psalms that I

could say anything to Him, ask Him anything, be absolutely real with Him, and so I brought my doubts about His existence and His attributes to him. And He answered my questions in a very interesting way: He showed me Jesus.

I asked:

Are You really there, God? And He showed me that the universe in all its complexity and beauty declared His glory, and that Jesus was the invisible God made visible. His life, His death, His resurrection and the prophecies He fulfilled were all compelling evidence of God's existence. As I read books on apologetics and as I studied the prophecies, my doubt was replaced by a deeper faith, a more reasoned and fact-based belief.

Do You love me? Jesus showed me the depth of His love for me, over and over. He had left heaven to live as a human, experiencing everything we live through. He knew grief, He knew pain, He knew loneliness. One of his friends, Judas, had committed suicide. He knew. He understood. He had died for me. He was committed to spending eternity with me. I was his sister, His Father's child. Forever. But I was struggling with believing in His love because I was focusing on the pain of the moment, while He was focusing on eternity. Just before going to the cross Jesus told His disciples: "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." The Father's love was allowing pain and suffering in Jesus' life. How could Jesus be so sure He was loved, when He was facing such agony? In Hebrews, a book I read so often I nearly memorized it, it says: "... for the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame." He endured the pain, because of what He would gain. And if God allows pain in our life, it is so we can gain by it. He promises that in Romans 8: "All things work together for the good of those who love him." God wants me to be like Jesus, and if He allows pain in my life, it is because He will use that pain to make me more like Him.

Did You love my dad? God showed me Jesus crying over Jerusalem, pleading with His people to turn to Him and put their trust in Him. He showed me passages that spoke of His desire to see all people come to repentance, and I slowly discovered the broken heart of God. He used my pain to help me understand His pain. I understood in my heart now the passage in Isaiah 53 which declared Jesus to be a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. God loves us, and wants us to know Him, but has wisely given us true freedom to choose Him or reject Him.

Is my Dad in hell? This was the worse question of all. I had never really thought about hell before. But I had no idea were my dad stood with God, and the question of hell was now very real to me. And as God and I talked about it, I realized that I had to leave my dad in God's hands, knowing that God's love for him was infinitely greater than mine could ever be. I realized God hates hell as much as I do. That was the very reason why Jesus came: to die for each of us so we wouldn't have to go there. God doesn't send us to hell. We choose to go there by refusing to accept the love and forgiveness He offers us in Christ.

Could I have done something to stop this from happening? The famous "what ifs?" haunted my thoughts for months. *What if I had prayed more? What if I had known the answers to his questions? What if I had gone back home?* God showed me I had two problems. The first one was that I was taking responsibility for another person's life. I was playing God. My dad was responsible for his actions. I wasn't. The second problem was that although I had accepted God's forgiveness, I wouldn't forgive myself. One day,

as I read a verse in Romans 8 that says, "It is God who justifies, who is it that condemns?" I realized that by not forgiving myself, I was basically telling God I was more just than He was. Talk about pride! I fully accepted His forgiveness that day, and every time the guilt would return, I would just return to that passage and say, "I will not make myself out to be more righteous than God. He has forgiven me, and I forgive myself, too!"

As I look back on that time, I realize that my grief was a gaping wound at first. It overwhelmed me. It filled my thoughts and my heart. But as I continued to take it to God, over and over and over again, He took that wound and slowly healed it so that it became just a tender spot. I am still amazed by His ability to take the worst possible things and change them around so that good comes out of them. But it is what He does, when we let Him. He gives "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy from mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61.3).

Is this the life for me?

Take a look at your life. How would you describe it? Contented? Rushed? Exciting? Stressful? Moving forward? Holding back? For many of us it's all of the above at times. There are things we dream of doing one day, there are things we wish we could forget. In the Bible, it says that Jesus came to make all things new. What would your life look like if you could start over with a clean slate?

Credit – Anne Marie Montgomery