

MISSING



real hope when
life doesn't make sense

JENNIFER ROTHSCILD

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About the Author

Missing Pieces: Real Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense is Jennifer's fourth video-based Bible study with LifeWay. It follows her popular Bible study, *Me, Myself, and Lies: A Thought-Closet Makeover*.

Jennifer has been cleaning out her thought closet and reconciling the missing pieces in her blanket of faith ever since her life drastically changed at the age of 15 when she lost her sight. Now, more than 30 years later, she boldly and compassionately teaches women how to walk by faith, not by sight.

Known for her substance, signature wit, and down-to-earth style, Jennifer weaves together colorful illustrations, Biblical principles, and music to help women live empowered. As a speaker, author, and accomplished singer-songwriter she travels internationally, offering fresh, sensible, biblical advice to audiences who, like her, are determined to pursue healthy and fulfilling lives in spite of their circumstances. She has shared her practical and inspiring messages to arena-sized audiences across the country and media outlets including *Dr. Phil*, *Good Morning America*, *Life Today*, The Learning Channel, and *The Billy Graham Television Special*.

Jennifer is an avid listener of audio books, is a C.S. Lewis junkie, and has a weakness for dark chocolate and robust coffee. She and her Dr. Phil live in Springfield, Missouri, and have two sons, Connor and Clayton, and a lovely daughter-in-law, Caroline. When she is not traveling, Jennifer enjoys nature walks and riding a bicycle built for two.

Jennifer is also the featured teacher and founder of Fresh Grounded Faith Conferences and publisher of the popular online magazine for women in ministry called womensministry.net.



Introduction

Some things just don't make sense, why do men's hair lines get higher while women's bust lines get lower? But far more significant—if God is good, why do we suffer? Why are children treated unjustly? Why doesn't God heal when He is capable? When the hard stuff becomes personal, our questions become piercing.

- A spouse leaves ... God, do You care?
- You see injustice in the world ... God, is this fair?
- You wonder if you will ever stop feeling lonely because you long for a baby, a spouse, a friend ... God, are You there?
- You get a pink slip instead of a paycheck ... God, are You aware?
- You ask God for years to help you lose weight, be more patient, overcome your temper ... God, do You hear my prayer?
- Nothing in your life seems to make sense and you just feel like you could have your own book of the Bible, kinda like Job ... God, do You err?

Because I became blind as a teenager, I've asked all these questions. They have the potential to create "missing pieces" in our faith. We aren't the only ones with missing pieces though. For thousands of years, both the faithful and faithless have had questions. In the seventh-century B.C., Habakkuk was a prophet. The people of Judah were doing evil things and Habakkuk asked God, "How long, LORD, must I call for help and You do not listen? ... Why do You force me to look at injustice?" (1:2-3). God responded that Judah was to be attacked by the Chaldeans (see v. 6). Habakkuk's people were about to suffer greatly, and he just didn't understand. His questions had to create missing pieces in his faith.

Habakkuk had a response that's hard for me to understand. In chapter 3 he said, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!" (vv. 17-18). Habakkuk knew the olive crops would fail and



figs wouldn't blossom. He knew the fields would be barren with no cattle. The only thing he could count on was heartache and loss—missing pieces. But, his response was rejoicing? Wow!

Do you know why he could be content enough to rejoice, even in such loss? It was because his satisfaction didn't come from answers. Habakkuk's satisfaction and hope came from the encounter with God his questions caused. Unanswered questions can be the missing pieces that help us really know God. That's what we really want, isn't it? To know God intimately, not just know about Him.

As you begin this study, I want you to think about your favorite blanket. You know, the one that keeps you warm a cold winter day. The one you wrap up in to watch a movie. Maybe it's the one you've had since you were a girl. My guess is it might be a little worn; maybe a bit tattered or frayed. Your blanket might even have some missing pieces.

Now think about how your faith is like that blanket. It provides you comfort and security, yet it can also be tattered and frayed by the questions that emerge from heartache and trials you have endured. Each sorrow we face can create a hole in our faith, a missing piece.

I want you to wrap yourself in that blanket as you begin each day in our time together. I'm going to call it your blanket of faith. Feel how it warms and protects you. That is what your faith, holes and all, does for you.

During this study, you may experience lots of different feelings. Feelings like discouragement, disappointment, or anger seem to always show up with our missing pieces. I want you to come visit me at JenniferRothschild.com/MP weekly (or as often as you'd like). I want to answer your questions, respond to your comments and provide you some additional helpful resources. In fact, each week I have a different "freebie" for you to enjoy as well as downloads, bonus videos from me, and some practical resources I've collected.

We are on this journey together so let's trust in the Lord with all our hearts, not lean on what we understand, but in all our ways let's acknowledge Him and see how He directs our paths. I pray that God will fill your missing pieces with Himself.



Get a free download or CD of Jennifer's song "Take Me to the Cross," featured in *Missing Pieces*, by visiting JenniferRothschild.com/MP



Group Session 1

Video Notes

God does _____, _____, and _____ our questions.

When we're _____ we wonder where God is.

God wants to fill the missing pieces with _____.

We don't want to just know _____ God. We want to _____ God.

Conversation Guide

1. Consider a "low point" that made you want to give up. What, if anything, prevented you from taking your hard questions to the Lord in that situation?
2. How might humbly presenting your questions to God illustrate your faith in Him?
3. Identify holes in your own blanket of faith. What about the analogy most resonates with you?

DOWNLOADS

Video and audio sessions are available at lifeway.com/jenniferrothschild

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week one

God, Do You Care?



In the wilderness of sorrow we all sometimes wonder if God cares. *If God is a God of compassion, why doesn't He just deliver me?* Caught in this missing piece, we can feel miserable.

The Israelites could relate. They were a miserable group, surrounded by God's care and compassion that fell every morning in the form of manna. Though they knew God cared, they remained unhappy; that's why I call them the Miserable-ites! "Who will feed us meat? We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now our appetite is gone; there's nothing to look at but this manna!" (Num. 11:4-6). They whined as if to say, "God, all we get is what You provided."

Rescued from Egypt, daily provided for, why were they so miserable? Surrounded by God's provision, they were miserable because they didn't receive it. They may have eaten, but they didn't take it in, acknowledge it for what it was—God's kindness, grace. They were consumed with misery, bitterness, and hopelessness. They thought if God cared, He would provide onions and melons. They missed the grace that fell each day with the dew because they took it for granted and didn't recognize it as God's compassion and grace.

We too can think God doesn't care because we miss His provision. We become consumed with our own lack. We don't notice His compassion and faithfulness. To experience God's care, we must receive His compassion in whatever portion and form He chooses to express it.

He wants to give you His manna as a reminder of His grace and compassion. To receive it, we need to have an open hand and heart. Only open hands receive. You cannot receive with a clenched fist. God cares. Let go of whatever is in your hands, open them to God and receive.



Day 1 If God Cares, Why Won't He Act?

I discovered a laundry defect gene. I decided it must exist when I stumbled upon a lump of dirty clothes strewn before my 12-year-old son's laundry basket. I've marveled for years how my PhD husband Phil can't seem to put his laundry in the hamper—he drops it in front of the basket. He's capable of placing it inside, he just doesn't. It's a mystery. Reconciled to my husband's quirky behavior, I've moved on. That is, until the day I literally stumbled on my son Connor's mound of manhood. "What is this?" I yelled from his bathroom. Connor ran expecting to find an insect or leak in the ceiling. My tone did sound a little shocked and urgent. "What Mom? Are you OK?"

"Laundry in front of the basket? Are you serious? Why isn't it in the basket?"

"I don't know Mom."

I peppered him with questions like, "Are you able to put it in?" After he said yes, I asked, "Why don't you put it in then?" He was as perplexed as I was, so I just determined it must be genetic. I'm doomed to empty baskets and mounds of laundry in front of them for all my days I guess!

Because Connor is able to do something but chooses not to, it's more frustrating than if he were unable to do something and therefore did not do it. The same applies to God. If He is able to do something in our lives—like heal or deliver—but doesn't act, it can be frustrating and cause more questions than answers.

Do you ever feel frustrated when you consider your own circumstances? I mean, if God can do something, like heal or rescue, why doesn't He? Underline any of the thoughts you've had.

- I must have weak faith or this wouldn't be happening.
- Maybe I am not praying hard enough or correctly.
- Perhaps God is too busy to notice.
- My problems don't matter. God only cares about the big things like earthquakes and wars.
- God must be mad at me because of sin in my life.

You may have underlined more than one of the thoughts and that's OK. We will deal with lots of questions over the coming weeks but ponder what you underlined and think about why you chose what you did. Let's just consider one of those options together: Does God care? If He lets trying circumstances continue when He could fix it, is it because He just doesn't care?

What does Job 10:12 say about God's care for us?

How does Psalm 103:13 describe God?

What adjectives does Jonah 4:2 use to describe God's character?

God has a caring character which preserves us, and His nature is that of a good Father. He's compassionate and, yet, sometimes His care feels as if He is MIA.

Have you ever felt a lack of compassion from God? If so, describe.

How do you feel He should have reacted to your situation?

Why do you think God doesn't always show His compassion in an obvious way?

What does the psalmist ask in Psalm 77:8-9?

The psalmist was dealing with some missing pieces, and he wondered if God's lovingkindness ceased and if His promise came to an end. David was so tangled in his own pain that he questioned if God simply got angry and stopped being compassionate or maybe He just forgot to be caring. If you've felt that way or feel that way right now, Sister, you're in good company. Pain makes us wonder if God has forgotten to care about us.

What does Isaiah 49:15 say about God's compassion toward you and God remembering you?

A mother cannot possibly forget her child whether that baby is 21 days old or 21 years old. If you're not a mom, you still understand intuitively that urge to love and nurture. It's how women are wired, and that's why Isaiah uses such imagery about God. Moms don't forget, and neither does God.

When our oldest son Clayton had emergency surgery as an 8-month-old baby it was such a difficult day for us. I was nursing at the time and had to stop immediately. And, if you've nursed a baby before, you know that's not the most ideal way to stop! It's extremely painful. Let me just say this Sister; even if I wanted to forget my baby and forget being compassionate, I could not. My personal pain kept my son's pain front and center. I chose not to forget and I could not forget.

If I as a feeble, human mom have that within me, how much more does your Heavenly Father remember you and desire to show you His compassion? If you didn't have a mom that showed you compassion, please know she did not reflect the heart of God. Her weakness misrepresented who God is.

**God doesn't forget to be compassionate, but sometimes
His compassion is obscure and hard to recognize.**

When you consider your difficult trials, it may be hard to understand how God can truly care if He lets it remain. Why doesn't He show His compassion in a way we'd recognize? Or maybe a better question is "Why does He show His compassion in such a mysterious way?" Think about that. Could God be showing His compassion by allowing your pain to remain rather than by removing it? How could your pain or unanswered questions represent God's care for you? Ask yourself the following questions.

Has my pain been a source of protection for me? If so, how?

Has my pain taught me something about God or myself? If so, what?

Has my pain put me in a position I may not have been without it?
If so, where?

After you ask yourself those questions, call one of your Bible study buddies and share with her your insights. Your honesty will encourage her and strengthen you.

We often assume God's apparent inactivity in our situation is evidence of His neglect, when it really may be His way of showing compassion to protect you, provide for you, or preserve you.

Pray and ask God to affirm His care for you and show you how afflictions and pain can be evidence of His compassion.



A piece of comfort from George MacDonald:
**"Afflictions are but the shadows
of God's wings."¹**



Day 2 Do You Not Care?

Well, I hope you don't get seasick because today we're heading out to the Sea of Galilee! The story in Mark 4 will help answer the question of God's care for us.

Who initiated the crossing of the Sea of Galilee in Mark 4:35—the disciples or Jesus?

Do you think Jesus knew a storm would erupt while they were on their voyage?

If Jesus knew there would be a storm, why do you think He would send them into such a scary, dangerous situation?

The NIV wording of verse 36 reports the condition of Christ when they entered the boat as, "Just as he was." Mark was probably referring to Jesus' status at the time; they took Him with them just as He was. In other words, He didn't change clothes or grab a sandwich before boarding the vessel. But, think of that phrase in a broader sense: God is compassionate. Do you take Him "just as He is"? Do you take God for who He is, even if He expresses His care in a confusing way?

Have you ever tried to change God into what you want Him to be like?

Circle the image that best depicts what or who you expect God to be in your life.

servant
best friend

boss
father

magic genie
other:

Often we feel real disappointment with God because we are unwilling to take Him just as He is. Until we do, we will be frustrated with our faith.

How have you felt disappointed with God just as He is?

Back to the boat ...

In verse 37, Mark tells us a storm erupted when they were well into their journey.

Underline the statement below which best depicts what verse 38 says Christ was doing during the storm.

1. standing in front, bailing out water
2. grasping the rails, praying to God the Father
3. hugging scared disciples, comforting them with His words
4. lying in the stern, asleep on the cushion
5. calming the storm

Jesus was asleep! When a storm rages, we don't like to think of our God as sleeping through it.

If you were in the boat, which of the above positions would you have preferred Jesus to be in?

We sometimes want to picture Jesus bailing out water, praying to God, hugging His followers, or fixing the problem altogether—doing something would make us feel like He cared. But, He slept. Are we willing to take Him just as He is? The disciples weren't.

They woke Him saying what (v. 38)?

His frightened followers did not ask, "Do You care?" Instead, they asked, "Do You not care?" To ask Jesus, "Do You care?" is to inquire. But, to ask, "Don't You care?" is an accusation hidden in the form of a question. Hear the difference?

The words below describe the actions of inquirers and of accusers.

Place an **A** by words that describe the actions of an accuser and an **I** beside the words that befit the actions of an inquirer.

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| ___ seek | ___ wonder | ___ request |
| ___ judge | ___ condemn | ___ assume |
| ___ ask | ___ criticize | |

Can you identify? If someone accuses you in the form of a question, how does it feel?


Do you tend to inquire of God or to accuse Him? Which of the word(s) in the last activity best describes the way you approach God when you are mired in pain or caught in a storm? Circle the word from the list.

Do you believe those words are the best way to approach God? Do they show you are taking God as He is? Why or why not?

If you need to, stop right now and pray about this. You may want to call a friend to process this. Remember, God loves you. He offers no condemnation when we are struggling. He does, however, expect His children to talk to Him about it.

The disciples asked Jesus their question, but the unspoken accusation was “He obviously doesn’t care about frightened followers!” They then followed their accusatory question with an assumption.

What did they assume? (See v. 38b.) “... that we’re _____”

 **Note:** Accusers usually have an agenda. They usually are operating on assumptions. Inquirers are open to answers—even answers they don’t like.

Which one are you most often?

“Don’t You care that we’re going to die?” They asked the question with the assumption that they were going to die, and the assumption was faulty because it was speculative. Do you do that? The disciples didn’t know they would die in the storm. They thought or felt they’d die in the storm.

When you ask God questions, do you base it on assumption or speculation? “Don’t You care my marriage is rocky, we’ll divorce, and I’ll end up alone and miserable?” “Don’t You care my teenager is hanging out with the wrong kids and will become a drug addict and ruin his life?” “Don’t You care that my illness might leave my kids without a mother?”

Write your own exaggerated statement below which relates to your situation and let it end with speculation.

“Don’t You care that ...

Now, think about that speculative possible outcome. When you're losing hope or when the storm is tossing you, remember what you wrote is speculation and, thus, a faulty assumption. Don't let your fear take you there. Instead, take God as He is and trust that He cares because He is in the boat with you.

**What we know, what we think, and what we feel are
not always the best representation of reality.**

You may know your marriage is rocky or your teen is hanging out with the wrong crowd, but that doesn't mean the worst possible outcome is inevitable. Storms do not equal death. Don't fall into the pit of despair by jumping on the slippery slide of assuming the worst.

You cannot control storms, but you can control your assumptions. When the wind was raging and the boat was being tossed, to the disciples death was a possible outcome, but it was not the only possible outcome.

**Sometimes our speculation is based solely on our
feelings—like fear, insecurity, and hopelessness.**

If the disciples' assumption of certain death was not based on fact and truth, perhaps their assumption that Jesus didn't care was also an incorrect representation of Christ. Is that possible?

We can't assess storms based on our assumptions or speculations nor can we assess God based on our assumptions or speculations either.

As you face your own pain and questions, you may think you will die; you may feel you won't make it. "I feel" and "I think" thoughts are often based on speculation and assumption. God is not "I feel," He is "I Am" (see Ex. 3:14).

For you and me to become who we long to be we must take God as He is.

In Mark 4:39, Jesus spoke peace. Read that verse aloud.

How beautiful that Jesus didn't first rebuke His disciples; He rebuked the storm and He spoke peace.

My friend, the God who cares is in your boat. The peace He grants is not reserved for storms; it is intended for your heart.

Don't let the fact that God allows a storm in your life, and you can't understand why, cause you to isolate yourself from the God you need most.

If you really think God is sleeping through your storm, then grab your blanket of faith and go snuggle up right there with Him. As you rest in Him you will find the peace you long for and realize how deeply Father God cares for you.



A piece of my mind:

God is not "I feel" or "I think." God is "I Am."



Day 3 Compassionate Inactivity

By now you've had time to grapple with what it means to take God at His Word and trust that He cares. Even if you're willing to believe He does care, you may still be left with the problem of His inactivity when you consider the suffering that doesn't seem to make sense. Questions still remain. Does He avoid stepping in and cleaning things up because He can't? Did He set the world in motion but then abdicate His power to someone else so He is bound to inaction? Maybe He does care, but He doesn't have the ability to intervene. Hmm ...

What does Jeremiah 18:1-6 suggest about God's power?

God can do what He chooses with His people. He has the power and ability to create and recreate, shape and destroy. God shows His power "as it pleased the potter" (v. 4, NASB). In other words, God shows His power in the way He chooses. And, it isn't always as we choose, is it?

God's power is beyond our ability to perceive or grasp. He is omnipotent. That literally means all-powerful. Since God is powerful beyond bounds, why doesn't He act when we ask? Consider the following story in formulating your answer.

When my husband Phil and I were newlyweds, we lived in a rickety shabby little apartment in West Palm Beach, Florida. We were smack-dab in the middle of the worst part of town and had our bikes and grill stolen to prove it! Blaring sirens serenaded us each night as we fell asleep. I wasn't fond of this less-than-secure environment, but Phil found it a stage upon which he could perform his heroics. On several occasions he chased away "bad guys" from our backyard, once when he was wearing a shabby pair of torn gym shorts. It was bad enough that the criminal and police saw him dressed that way, but unfortunately, the vice president of the university where Phil taught came upon the crime scene just in time to behold my shirtless husband in all his saggy gym shorts splendor.

The story Phil most loves from his super hero days in Crimeville was the time he saw a guy dart behind our apartment carrying a TV. Faster than a speeding bullet (well, you know) Phil ran outside and began to chase the bad guy. (This time fully

dressed I might add.) Bad guy saw Phil. Bad guy dropped TV. Phil trailed him for blocks until the hooligan got into a congested part of town. At that point, the bad guy began to walk casually along the sidewalk blending into the crowd. Phil was concerned the bad guy may have a gun so he hid behind trees and followed him covertly while the bad guy tried to hide among pedestrians. The police had been called and their sirens alerted my husband that help was on the way. As soon as the patrol car pulled up, Phil jumped from behind a bush and ran toward the villain; he threw himself at his ankles, hooked them in his arm, and yelled "Officer, I got him for you!" It was a proud and powerful Barney Fife moment!

My husband's antics showed off his power but highlighted the fact that he lacked authority. Power without authority isn't complete. He could have clung to the bad guy's ankles for hours if he was strong and powerful enough, but he never could have accomplished any justice because he lacked authority.

Authority trumps power every time. God possesses both ultimate power and ultimate authority. The choice to not exercise power does not mean one is powerless. It means sometimes one who has power chooses to withhold it for a greater purpose.

Healing, delivering, and calming a troubled sea all show God has power over people and creation. But a greater evidence of His power and care is His exercise of power over Himself.

What does Romans 9:22-23 suggest about God's apparent suspension of power? Why doesn't He show His power?

God endured our sinfulness with patience. He did this to make known the riches of His mercies and forbearance.

What does that mean to you?

Our sin deserves God's wrath. The fact that God chooses to forbear instead of destroy reveals a power and compassion you and I can't even comprehend. To understand the power He possesses, it's important to understand the nature of "the riches of his ... forbearance" (Rom. 2:4, ESV). Some versions render this word

as kindness, tolerance, or patience. The Greek word, *anochē*, or *forbearance*, is best understood as a picture.² Visualize the hand of God, lifted, ready to strike a just blow against the sinner. Just then, the other hand of God rises to stop the strike by grasping the arm and pulling it back. In His restraint He displays He has power over Himself. This compassion for us is far more magnificent than displaying power over created elements. He chooses not to act even though He could. He chooses to forbear.

What reason for God's apparent inactivity does Hosea 5:15 suggest?

God sometimes chooses not to act out of compassion. He does so to give us time to acknowledge our sin or seek Him.

How does that apply to your painful or confusing circumstances? Does your hard situation let you or someone else see your need for Him? Can you see God's purpose? Jot down your thoughts.

What does Isaiah 30:18 tell you is another reason for God's restraint?

God's restraint and forbearance show His compassion for the purpose of drawing you to Himself. Oh, my friend, I know you're trying to trust Him and understand His ways. I struggle with the same. I'm fully confident God cares about me and could heal my blindness, but even though He has the power to, He doesn't choose to show it in the way I sometimes hope—not yet anyway. Does that mean He doesn't care? I think it means He cares enough to allow me to struggle and find a deeper understanding of and connection to His heart.

If I plead for His power, then I must accept His authority that comes along with it. Stop for a second and think about that statement. I'll say it again—this time to you directly. If you plead for His power, then you must accept His authority that comes along with it. His power may be capable of healing my eyes and filling in your missing pieces, but His authority may not deem it best. I'm learning

to respectfully trust His authority as much as I trust His power. For it is the companionship of those two attributes that allows suffering and at the same time disallows punishment for our sin. Hard truths, I know. But, unless we take God just as He is in His wholeness, we will never find hope in our own brokenness.

So, should God heal you just because He can? Should God end that trial to ease your faith questions? Should He deliver you just because He is able to? Should God hold you accountable for your sin just because He has the right to? Consider this with me: To embrace the concept of forbearance as it applies to our sins, yet, reject it as it applies to our suffering, is to reject part of the character of God. And if we don't experience His wholeness, we will never experience our own.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

God grant me understanding and grace to plead for Your power and at the same time accept Your authority. Help me to forbear during my difficulties as You forbear patiently my sin. May I take You as You are.
Amen.





Day 4 Special Delivery with Care

News flash! Blindness makes me tired! My friend Karen once told me that I make blindness look easy. I laughed because it isn't easy at all. Yet, she said that because people only see the "polished" result of all the raw refining that comes with blindness. I share this with you because I want you to know I get it—I understand how trials and hard stuff can make us frustrated and feel defeated. Sometimes our fatigue is greater than our faith. It takes perseverance to keep wrestling with the missing pieces.

Sometimes, we want our powerful, caring Father God to deliver us from our pain. We can wonder, *since He is powerful and caring, why won't the Deliverer deliver?* Or maybe a better question is, *why does the Deliverer do His delivering in such a mysterious way?*

Pour yourself a cup of coffee or tea. Today let's just talk honestly as sisters. I want to share with you a hard story about God's care and deliverance.

It was 1983, and I was on a college choir tour with First Baptist Church West Palm Beach. Shari and I had been sharing a room on tour, and we were also sharing clothes and secrets. Lots of us girls at Palm Beach Atlantic College and FBC were close, and that's why our tour was abruptly interrupted and completely deflated when we got the news about our friend Regina. Regina didn't come with us that year on tour. She went home when spring semester ended. She was a vivacious redhead who truly always smiled. Of course, I couldn't see her smile but I could hear it and I could feel it. She was warm and kind and it was so clear that she really loved God. Our director waited until after our concert to tell us what happened to Regina. She had been riding her bike—as she always did—in a park near her home. She was attacked, raped, and strangled. She was left unclothed in some brush in the park. This was our dear, sweet friend. It wasn't a character on a TV crime show—it was Regina. We were all shaken and disheartened.

If this could happen to Regina, then does God really care about anyone? She loved Him. Why didn't He deliver her? On the bus after the concert, those were the questions intertwined with the tears.

Our tour ended too late for us to attend her funeral. When I got home, I sat in the living room with my dad. I couldn't hold back tears as I retold what Regina endured. I kept asking him, "How could God let her go through that?"

Have you ever asked that question about your or someone else's painful circumstance? What circumstance prompted the question?

That's so hard, isn't it? After all, God promises to deliver us and clearly, He didn't. At least that's how I felt.

In Dad's attempt to console me, he quietly spoke in his gentle southern drawl. "She didn't go through it." His statement startled me. "She went from it." He explained how God sometimes protects us from awful things so we never have to endure them. That's a form of His deliverance. Sometimes, God delivers us by rescuing or healing us. Sometimes, God brings us successfully through hard things—that's also a form of His deliverance. But, sometimes out of His great care for His children, He delivers us out of the horror and into His glory.

Unlike us, who, if we lived through such agony, would have a marred and awful memory, God compassionately took Regina out of that situation and into His presence. She was brought from it, out of it, and into glory where no tears, no crying, and no pain exist. The only scars are the ones on the hands of Jesus. I now think of Regina as she should be remembered. She is not a victim; she is a victor. The question remains: Did God really deliver her as He promises?

Fill in the rest of the stories below to see how God delivers us.

2 Kings 6:15-20—God delivered Elisha and the Israelites ...

Isaiah 38:1-5—God delivered Hezekiah ...

Daniel 3:16-28—God delivered the three young Hebrew men ...

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60—God delivered Stephen ...

Based on what the Bible describes as God's deliverance, I believe God delivered Regina. It wasn't in the way I would have chosen, yet I believe it was His compassionate choice.

My friend, you may have endured something so awful that you are weeping right now just recalling it and wondering why God let you go through it. The fact that you are doing this study tells me you are gutsy and willing to push yourself even through your fear, frustration, or fatigue. What has been such a huge missing piece in your life can become a place others will deposit their tears and find hope even when their lives don't make sense. God does care. I care. Your Bible study buddies care. Keep holding on.

Matthew 4:1 describes another type of deliverance that is really, really tough. To where was Jesus delivered? Who led Him and why?

The _____ led Jesus into the _____ to be _____.

Sometimes God wills to lead us into hardship just as Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Perhaps the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrew people give us a hint why God sometimes delivers us into our own places of wilderness.

What does Deuteronomy 8:2-3 suggest as the purposes of being led into the wilderness?

God allowed His children to roam the wilderness for 40 years to humble them, test them, expose what was in their hearts, and determine whether or not they would keep and depend on God's Word.

Think about the mystery of faith you deal with in your situation. As you consider it, circle one of the Israelite's deliverance lessons from bottom of page 24 that describes what you may be learning from your trial. Has the Master Potter used it to humble you, test you, or draw you to His Word?

After you circle one (or more) write a "Thank You, Lord" note for what you are learning.

Dear God,

Amen

Check the kind of deliverance you think of when you think about your own situation.

- ☐ God is delivering me through hardship like He did the three Hebrew young men in the fiery furnace.
- ☐ God is/has/will deliver me from hardship through healing or rescue like He did for Hezekiah.
- ☐ God has delivered me by preventing hardship like He did for the Israelites and Elisha.
- ☐ God has delivered me into hardship like His Spirit led Jesus to be tempted.

Each of the stories about God's deliverance features a positive faith statement.

Write each one beside the appropriate person, but personalize it as an "I" statement and make it your own. I'll start with the first one.

Hezekiah; Isaiah 38:17

I am rescued from destruction because of God's love for me.

Hebrew young men; Daniel 3:17-18

Elisha; 2 Kings 6:16

Jesus; Matthew 4:4

Choose the statement of faith you most need to claim in your hard moments. Rephrase it and write it in all caps here as if you're screaming it out with all your heart.

When you get sucked into the deep hole of despair, let your statement of faith be a way God delivers you from it. Speak it to yourself and pray it to your Father. Write it on a card or in lipstick on your bathroom mirror.

However God chooses to deliver us really is a reflection of His compassion. Delivering us into hard stuff, through hard stuff, and from hard stuff all show God's compassion and care. "You placed burdens on our backs. ... But You brought us out to abundance" (Ps. 66:11-12).



A piece of truth from one who knows:

"You gave me life and faithful love, and Your care has guarded my life." Job 10:12



Day 5 The God of Empathy

Maybe this will be the year she smiles, I thought while waiting for my annual physical. The doctor I had seen for the last many years was a good doctor, but she sorely lacked in bedside manners—and manners in general. She entered my room and by the dull, monotone sound of her voice, I realized this wasn't the year for her smile. She droned through her usual questions about new meds and commenting on weight, blood pressure, and such. *She still hasn't looked up at me,* I thought. I knew she hadn't because her voice was droning into her clipboard. Then, the exam began. She's a fine doctor, but I've had better interactions with empty cardboard boxes. (And they're much cheaper.)

She finished and asked, "Do you have any questions?" with that tone that suggests "you better not" and then shot out of the room before I could answer.

As I dressed, I thought I'm 47; a big girl! If I don't want to use this doc anymore, I don't have to. This is my last time! I felt empowered as I passed the receptionist without an appointment for the following year. The next year arrived, and it was time for a new doctor. I found a general physician, and when she entered my examination room, she was effusive and warm. *I like her,* I thought. *She's more interesting than a cardboard box.* She asked questions. Her voice never fell flatly on the ground and was not once swallowed by a clipboard. She was actually making eye contact. She listened and took her time, and even the room didn't feel so frigid. Then, she told me we were the same age and many of the changes I was experiencing, she was too.

When I told her I felt fuzzy headed and moodier more than I used too, she laughed and said she could identify. "There's something that can help with your memory and moods," she said. "It's called ... uh, um ... it's called ... uh, um ... It's a memory-enhancing supplement, you've heard of it ... What is it called?! I forgot what it's called" she cried. "I'll be right back. Let me go look it up in the book in my office. I know what it's called. I can't believe I can't remember!"

As she ran out to her desk to confirm the name of a supplement, I laughed and thought, *I really like having a doctor who knows what it feels like to be me, but who is capable of healing me.*

We have a great Physician who knows what it feels like to be “us” yet is capable of healing us.

How does the writer of Hebrews describe Jesus? (See Heb. 4:15-16.)

Jesus is our High Priest who identifies with our weaknesses. He has felt our pain and endured our temptation. He offers far more than sympathy and expertise. We have a powerful, great Physician who gives the sweetest gift—*empathy*.

Write what you think empathy is and what it means to empathize.

To have empathy is to understand or identify with someone; to care about, deeply relate to, and enter into their situation or feelings.

Do you think Jesus can empathize with your difficult situations? Why?

Can you think of a situation Jesus faced during His earthly life that gives evidence He knows what you’re feeling? If so, jot it down here. (Psst! If you don’t know the stories of Jesus that well, no problem. Just call your Bible study buddy and ask her if she knows one that applies to your situation.)

Though there are myriad stories of Jesus facing pain, hunger, temptation, rejection, fatigue, and all the other trappings of humanity, we know He can empathize with your pain simply because our Messiah was to be a suffering servant.

How does Isaiah 53:3 describe Messiah Jesus?

Have you ever felt despised or rejected?

Jesus knows how that feels. He can empathize.

Remember from school verbs are action words. Read Isaiah 53:4 and note the verbs. What did Jesus “do”?

What grief do you bear? Jesus bears that grief with you.

What sorrow do you carry? Jesus carries that sorrow with you.

My friend, He was oppressed and afflicted. He was acquainted with grief—He knew what it felt like. He still does. Jesus is not the cold, distant Physician who won’t make eye contact with your questions and suffering. He’s not the detached expert who hurries out of your pain.

In His humanity, Jesus chose to patiently walk our roads, feel our pain, and cry our tears. But, in His Deity, He has the power to deliver us when His authority and compassion deem it best. My friend, He cares. He knows what it feels like to weep, to feel pain and sorrow. Jesus also knows how to reach us in our pain with His compassion.

Let Him reach you. Ask Him to enter your circumstance and show you He cares because He does. And, Sister, so do I.

Sometimes life doesn’t make sense; sometimes even faith doesn’t seem to make sense. But God can fill those missing pieces with something far better than answers. He fills that void with Himself. Ask Him to do that for you today.

Well done. You finished the first week. I pray you have seen and been reminded that God cares deeply for you, Sister. Things are beginning to take shape. I’m proud of you.

1. “Wings quotes,” *Brainy Quotes* [online, cited 13 April 2012]. Available from the Internet: www.brainyquote.com
2. Thayer and Smith, “Greek Lexicon entry for Anochē,” *The New Testament Greek Lexicon* [online, cited 13 April 2012]. Available from the Internet: www.biblestudytools.com