



Remembering God's

Editor's Note: On September 28, 2002, Cathy Ann Meyer, wife of Companion editor Don Meyer, died following a lengthy battle with cancer. Earlier this year, Don shared the following reflection on Cathy's illness and death with the Communication Committee of the Covenant Executive Board.

If I were to ask how many in this room have had to face the loss of a spouse, a sibling, a parent, or a child, I imagine a good number of hands would be raised. I was asked if I would be willing to share a portion of my journey since Cathy's death last fall, especially how one confronts and responds to such a tragedy from a faith-based perspective.

I never knew any human emotion could be so painful or devastating as the loss and separation from one's life-long companion. It's a 24/7 experience—you never seem to escape it.

As I struggled to find meaning in Cathy's suffering, a good friend suggested reading the Psalms as a source of encouragement. I would like to read from Psalm 77, which has provided much-needed insight for me.

"I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

"I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

"I thought about the former days,

the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

Clearly the writer of this psalm was experiencing deep pain, deepened even more perhaps by a sense of God's distance rather than God's presence, something I too would experience.

I was buoyed by the knowledge that hundreds of people were praying for Cathy and me. I recalled the promise of Scripture that the prayer of a righteous person avails much. And there were lots of righteous people praying—many asking God to heal Cathy. I believe God has the power to heal. For me, it was not a question of could God heal her but rather would God heal her.

I also believe God has promised to answer our prayers, though maybe not in the manner we prefer. I prayed. I anxiously awaited an answer, but encountered instead a deafening silence. God's answer became painfully clear when Cathy died.

Perhaps the most difficult question of all is the familiar "Why?" Not "Why me?" however. I asked instead what great cosmic scheme would be disrupted if Cathy had been allowed to live another twenty or thirty years, to see her grandchildren grow and enjoy the leisure years for which she also had

worked so hard.

God's refusal to address my question frustrated me. Philip Yancey thoughtfully addresses this "Why?" question in his book, *Reaching for the Invisible God*.

"God restrains from continual interference with what takes place on earth," Yancey writes, "declining to humble every proud man and crush the wicked where they stand, for reasons that continue to perplex their victims.

"We, like Job, assume that God has somehow arranged all events, then draw conclusions that are patently false: God doesn't love me. God is not fair. Faith offers the option of continuing to trust God even while accepting the limits of our humanity, which means accepting that we cannot answer the 'Why?' questions."

Yancey goes on to say that the Bible gives "no definitive answers" to the question of "Why?" "But it does hold out hope for the future," he writes, "that even suffering can be transformed so that it produces good results.

"Sometimes, as with the blind man by the road, the work of God is manifest through a dramatic miracle. Sometimes . . . for so many others who pray for healing that never comes, it is not. In every case, suffering offers an opportunity for us to display the work of God, whether in weakness or strength."

What, then, is a person to do when confronting tragedy and struggling with questions to which there seemingly are no answers? One of my life principles



Faithfulness

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puts it this way: "I may not be able to control the events around me, but I always control how I choose to respond to them."

I see that same principle at work with the writer of Psalm 77. The writer is in deep pain, thinking about the former days, the songs in the night, much as I think of the thirty-five incredibly wonderful years I was married to Cathy. The good times. Times of great joy and laughter. And then comes the nightmare. "Will the Lord never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has God forgotten to be merciful?"

Listen to how the psalmist chose to respond. "Then I thought, 'To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.' I will remember the deeds of the Lord;

"I will remember your miracles of long ago"—like early on a Sunday morning when Cathy was rushed to the hospital after a blood vessel ruptured, and she prematurely delivered

our daughter, Christine, and how God spared them both when the doctors feared the worst.

"I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds"—like the Monday that God graciously gave to Cathy, her last day at home, to spend with her new and long-awaited grandson.

"Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles"—like the way God graciously spared our granddaughter, born tiny and frail at only twenty-six weeks.

This perspective—this life principle—of choosing to respond to tragedy by reflecting on God's goodness and mercies of the past is predicated on a full and complete trust in God, especially when he seems so distant and silent. Philip Yancey puts it this way:

"A faithful person sees life from the perspective of trust, not fear. Bedrock faith allows me to believe that, despite the chaos of the present moment, God

does reign; that regardless of how worthless I may feel, I truly matter to a God of love; that no pain lasts forever and no evil triumphs in the end.

"Faith sees even the darkest deed of all history, the death of God's son, as a necessary prelude to the brightest. For many people, it takes the jolt of tragedy, illness or death to create a crisis of faith. At such a moment, we want clarity; God wants our trust."

As Cathy was nearing death, I found myself questioning the very foundations of my faith. I learned how easy it is to recite our beliefs when things are going well. It is when the dark hours come that we confront the reality of our faith. It no longer is theory. It becomes so very real. "Do I really believe all of this stuff?" I found myself asking. The answer in time rang clear—I believe it now more than ever. □

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