

Recognizing and Overcoming Spiritual Frustration

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5 Day Study



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about

f r u s t r a t i o n

Every human being will face frustration in this life. There will be many things we can't control, nor should we. As believers, we will experience a pull between our old ways and the new in Christ. This world will not make sense to us, because we were not made for it. Being out of place as a foreigner can lead to emotions of longing, loneliness, and loss. Knowing that a better place awaits can also leave us weary and worn from persevering through.

In this 5 day study, we will look at biblical examples of spiritual frustration and how God wants us to deal with these feelings. Jesus expressed emotions of frustration and grief over the way things had to be. What can we learn from His response?

From losing loved ones and patiently waiting to see them again, to a child who fails to listen, to a dream deferred or a road blocked by God, we all must face frustration head on with the grace and mercy of the gospel on our lives. There is rest and peace for God's people...let's see what Scripture teaches about how to overcome in His strength.

-Terri Prahl

table of contents

Intro:

What can we learn from Jesus about spiritual frustration?

01

Recognizing and acknowledging spiritual frustration.

02

Unrealistic Expectation: John the Baptist

03

Law over Grace: Colossian Church

04

Inadequacy: Moses

05

Comparison: Brother of the Prodigal

chapter 01

to make (plans, ...
defeat; nullify:
verb (used without object),
Obsolete. frustrated.
frustration noun [fruh-strey-
: act of frustrating; state of being
: something that frustrates, as
: a feeling of dissatisfaction, as
resulting from unfulfilled
efforts,

Day 1

The Bible is filled with real human beings, loved by God and used for His purposes, experiencing spiritual frustration:

Martha was resentful over busyness (Luke 10:38-42), Naomi was bitter over her loss (Ruth 1:20), Jonah was prejudiced, angry, and indifferent towards people God loved (Jonah 4:2), and the disciples were jealous and frustrated at others being used by God (Luke 9:37-56). They all had moments of disillusionment over what was and what would be -- laying down their wills for His.

Common examples of tension in our days:

- We aren't getting what we desire for life to "be" or "feel" good.
- We are resisting the ways of God. Fighting against God is not the same as wrestling through our humanity for understanding and blessing.
- Our needs are going unmet – at least our perception of what we need.
- We have unhealthy and unrealistic expectations of God and others.
- We lack good boundaries in our lives...overwhelm, relational issues, etc.
- We have unhealed wounds. We have never been honest with God and others and sought help to overcome in His strength.
- We feel vulnerable, so we self-protect, leading to isolation and new frustrations.
- We are easily offended and have trouble dealing with people in grace.

Verses for dealing with frustration:

Galatians 6:9

Psalm 62:5-8

Matthew 11:28-29

Proverbs 3:5-6

Philippians 4:13

Ephesians 6:10-17

Joshua 1:8

Application:

Look up each verse and write one that the Spirit speaks to you through on a notecard that you can place in your view during the study. What is the problem/source of frustration in each verse and what is the solution? For example, Galatians 6:9 is about growing weary. We get irritated when we are tired and hopeless. The solution is to remember that we are working for eternal rewards and that harvest time will come. If we give up, the harvest will not be as fruitful.



chapter 02



Day 2

A Look at John the Baptist's Question: "When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'" Luke 7:20

John asked this question after being in prison close to a year for calling Herod to repent of adultery.

John the Baptist had been faithful to go before Jesus, proclaiming the coming Messiah, as prophesied by his father at his birth. John had been set apart and lived for one purpose – he believed the message about Christ.

After baptizing Jesus and seeing the Spirit descend upon Him, John knew He was the Messiah. He kept going before Jesus, calling people to repentance and turning to God.

But when John sat alone in prison, he began to question if Jesus was actually the One he preached about. He wondered why Jesus wasn't taking over. Why wasn't He building a kingdom by overthrowing the Romans? Why wasn't Jesus rescuing him from this situation?

So, John sends some followers to ask Jesus personally. What did Jesus say? How did He respond?

Luke 7:21-22 ESV, "In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

John had a picture in his mind about what the Messiah would do. When his expectation didn't meet his reality, he questioned.

His question may have been misguided, but his solution was wise – ask Jesus directly.

Jesus kept on doing miracles as the followers waited for his response to John. Jesus didn't need to explain Himself. Instead, He reminded John to believe in not only His miraculous works but also in who He was.

Jesus gently rebukes John by saying, "Blessed are those who are not offended by me," Luke 7:23.

After this Jesus tells all listening that John was the greatest of men – so we know Christ wasn't mad about his human frailty.

Offended means to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey...since one who stumbles or whose foot gets entangled feels annoyance.

Good news! Jesus understands our frustrations. He knows how humans think. He meets us in our questions and uncertainty.

He calls us to trust Him even when our hearts grow weary and our eyes can't see. For His ways are not our own. Our expectations are not always aligned with truth.

John's Frustration: Having the Wrong Expectations for the future and what Jesus should be doing.

Jesus' Response: A gentle rebuke to not place human expectations on Him. "Blessed is he who does not take offense at me" Luke 7:23

Application:

Do you have an expectation of God that isn't rooted in the truths of Scripture? If you feel He has let you down, study to see what the Bible promises to you – not what you THINK He has promised. Seek a mature Christian to help you process your expectations with truth. Will you ask God to help you in your frustration today?



chapter 03



Day 3

A look at Colossians 2:16-23, “So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality,” Colossians 2:16-17 NLT.

Source of Spiritual Frustration: Living in the shadows of law and not in the grace of Christ.

We often worship the ways in which we practice drawing near over the worship of Christ Himself.

Our rulemaking can become a stumbling block to knowing the peace of Christ, leaving us frustrated and weary – elevating our rituals as the only way to God is prideful.

Rules and practices aren’t bad – they are disciplines we humans need to consistently keep our eyes on Christ to avoid falling asleep in our new lives as saints and heirs of His promise.

Paul says rules seem wise “Because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline” (v. 23). Paul then says that keeping these rules doesn’t provide help in conquering sin – only the Holy Spirit can do that (v.23). The purpose of rituals/practices is to point us to the newness we receive by faith through grace – given in Christ.

Knowing Christ personally and understanding the grace he gives is what truly guards our hearts and minds from temptation and sin. His holiness attracts us to worship and rest. Otherwise, rituals, religion, and rules become vain attempts to accomplish something only Christ could do.

We are saved by faith and grown by faith.

Recognizing our spiritual frustration helps us deal with it properly before God, so we can persevere in faith with joy.

Today's topic affected the church in Colosse and is still impacting believers today.

There were people in the church telling new believers that there were certain holidays, rituals, and rules they had to follow to please God. Paul sets them straight on what is required to please God...and that is faith in Christ alone.

Some thought certain days were holy. Others had wrong theology (about angels) that they were forcing as gospel on others to be holy. Our holiness comes from being made righteous through the blood of Christ. He makes us new by faith. And He gives freedom from religious laws.

I particularly see this in our culture today around the celebration of Lent, what day Sabbath is observed, and what type of preaching and music styles are pleasing to God.

Man is always looking to impose their rules and ways on others. When we get caught in this, we grow frustrated and weary – because we aren't doing them with the right motive. We are trying to please man, not God. And often the practice puffs us up for "sacrificing" when these things are meant to humbly draw us to behold and praise the Father for all He has done for us through Christ.

I know many Christ-loving people practicing things that I didn't learn about in my gospel centered church. They aren't biblical commands so I am not bound to participate or be in fear of judgement.

If you set intentions to keep you focused on Christ...beautiful!

If you give something up and fast (without publicly making a show of it) for the purpose of spending more time on worship and reflection...praise God!

Where we go wrong is making these things mandatory for acceptable worship, and even worse, a way to earn/work towards pleasing God.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God," Ephesians 2:8.

The Colossians' frustration: They were living by the rules of others, hiding in the shadows of morality instead of walking in the full light of Christ. The shadow didn't provide what they craved which is the freedom of gospel grace.

Paul's response: Get out of the shadows and step into the light of Christ who has fulfilled the law and nourishes and grows His children. Worship in spirit and truth.

Application:

Let's ask God to help us draw near through healthy spiritual practices without seeking to create rules for others on how to worship in acceptable ways. If you lean the other extreme and eschew all discipline, you will remain a babe who gets tossed and blown every which way, never experiencing His intended rest (Ephesians 4:14). Focus on beginning with one healthy habit to seek God. Write out your desire to grow in light of God's grace as a prayer to God. He will help you!

If our practices don't lead to joy in our relationship with God, our religion led us in the wrong direction.

chapter 04



Day 4

A Look at the life of Moses: “Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:10-11)

Source of Spiritual Frustration: Looking at the world for understanding about God’s call on our lives.

Moses expressed 4 concerns:

1. Who am I? Isn’t there someone better?
2. How will the people know who sent me? How do I explain who you are?
3. What if the people don’t believe me?
4. I don’t have the ability to carry this out.

God gave Moses 4 responses:

1. I will be with you. (3:12)
2. I AM WHO I AM. (3:14)
3. I will equip you. (4:5)
4. I am your Creator God. (4:11)

Looking for man’s approval over God’s leads to mistrust in our hearts and minds.

God allowed Moses to bring Aaron along as a helper, but God was more than capable of using Moses just as he was. Moses missed out on seeing God work through his weakness. His frustration came from doubting God’s abilities to be his source of help, allowing fear of man to rule him.

Moses saw God in the burning bush that wasn’t consumed by fire. Moses heard God audibly. Moses saw signs of God’s power through the rod becoming a snake and the cloak/hand sign (4:1-7). *And still his inadequacies frustrated him...*

What feelings of fear and inadequacy are holding your back from stepping out in confidence to serve the Lord? God has given us everything we need to live in the good plans He has for us. It is the only way to move from frustration to peace in our spiritual lives. “Jesus said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blesses are those who have not seen and yet believe,” to Thomas in John 20:29.

Today's profile is on Moses, the man God chose to lead the Israelite people out of Egyptian slavery. Moses didn't like the assignment God had given to him -- he doubted God's ability to help him accomplish this seemingly impossible task. His frustration led to God becoming frustrated with Moses' lack of enthusiasm to be used.

Because of Moses' many insecurities and fears, God allowed his brother, Aaron, to help deliver the message to the people. This was a grace of God to Moses, yet it didn't always go as it should. For instance, Aaron didn't have the leadership skills and allowed the Israelites to make and worship a golden calf while he was on the mountain with God. Aaron brought punishment to the camp for murmuring against Moses with his sister, Miriam. It definitely wasn't a perfect fit, because they were humans.

God had made it clear that He alone could provide everything Moses needed to walk in His calling with confidence. Yet, Moses couldn't trust Him, leading to inner frustration instead of unsurpassable peace.

Moses' frustration: His personal insecurities and fear of man clouded his understanding of who God was. He was frustrated with the assignment because he didn't believe it was possible. He thought God had chosen unwisely. Instead of walking confidently in God's plan, he reluctantly obeyed.

God's response: I am all you need. Trust me and be amazed. Now, Go!

Application:

Has God asked you to serve Him in some way that you feel inadequate to accomplish? Are you fighting to surrender and rest in who God is? Frustration will be our story until we walk in obedience. But there's a better way...

Sometimes the scariest ways lead to the greatest peace...because that is where the safety of God is. That is where we get a seat to God showing up in our weaknesses.

Talk to God about your desire to live in the peace that comes from being obedient to walk in the ways of Christ.

His plans are good, friends.



chapter 05



Day 5

Read Luke 15:11-32. Notice how the older brother was bitter about how the father loved his prodigal son.

Source of Spiritual Frustration: Expecting all our ‘walks’ with God to look the same – the comparison trap.

The prodigal son and the older son both had the Father’s love and inheritance. However, they had different lessons to learn and God knew how to reach/expose both of their heart issues.

We must be careful not to look at someone else’s walk with God to define our own. God is not required to answer our prayers in the same way. He gives and takes for His will to be accomplished. He knows our individual weaknesses and what we need to grow in His likeness.

Each of God’s kids is special to Him.

His love and grace go further than we can imagine. He decides who He wants to use in certain ways, but every member of the body is vital to its health. Whatever God asks of YOU, do it fully unto the Lord...not to impress men.

Our unhealthy expectations:

1. Expecting to receive the same blessing God gives to others.
2. Wanting other to “get what they deserve” while we prosper.
3. Elevating certain gifts among believers causing jealousy in the body.
4. Putting God in a box as to how He works individually in each believer’s life.

God says:

1. I love YOU with an everlasting love.
2. Everything I have is YOUR inheritance.
3. I give YOU special gifts of grace.
4. Comparing YOURSELF to others is unwise.

Each of us is uniquely created, gifted, and known by God.

Each of us is uniquely created, gifted, and known by God.

Older Brother's frustration: he had been faithful to the father. He was envious of the blessings given to his wayward brother, thinking him underserving.

The Father's response: Dear son, everything I have is yours. We must celebrate the dead coming to life. This is the good news of Christ!

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (2 Corinthians 10:12)

God works in mysterious ways, beyond our understanding. Don't let comparison frustrate the joy you should have in Christ. Seek Him out of love and trust Him.

Application:

It's a real challenge to not look around at what everyone else is doing in the world. Through the power of the Spirit in us, we can let God's opinion of ourselves be the end of all tension and envy.

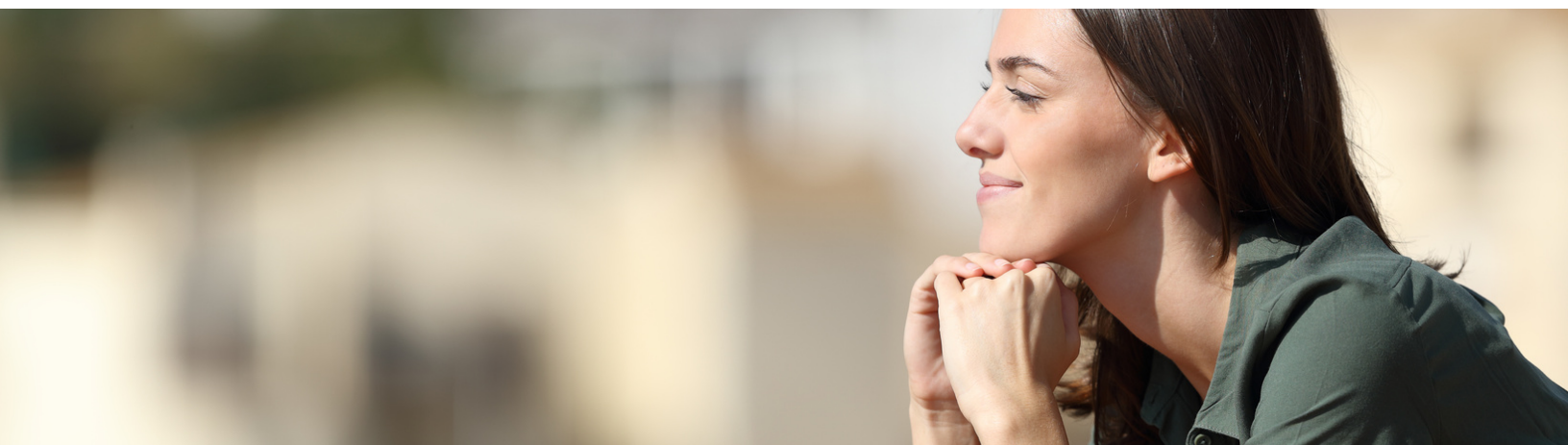
Do you struggle to believe God loves you? Think about how that makes Him feel, considering all He has done for us? If you are a parent, think about how the rejection of a child would wound you. God, our Father, delights in us. Scripture makes that clear. We have to practice walking in that truth as if we believe it.

It is unwise to compare ourselves. It takes intention to capture those thoughts and put them under the blood of Christ mentally. Otherwise, our hearts are restless and dissatisfied, because we were never designed to compete for love. God has more than enough for each one of us.

Write down the ways God has gifted you. Yes, you have strengths and gifts. Yes, you are valuable and needed in the Body. What has God asked you to contribute? Start with the gift of presence if you need a starting point.

Send a note to someone else (maybe someone that you are jealous of?) acknowledging their giftings and how you see them using them to serve others. That's not easy, but can you imagine how our churches would change minus the competition? What if we came together to love and serve one another out of deep love for our Father?

Glory.



Want to learn more?

Conclusion:

Theology is the study of the nature of God...or how/what we think about God.

Thinking wrong leads our hearts to despair and frustration. We must study the Bible to know God's nature. Our understanding shapes our theology of suffering, healing, relationships, sex and gender, etc. It's so important to our spiritual health to know Truth as given by God.

There's a lot of information to process in this study, so take your time. Be looking for blog posts and future resources to expound on these thoughts.

You can join this ongoing conversation and study over on my Instagram account, @terri_prahl. Look for the green squares for all the topics of this series.

What would you add to things that frustrate you in you walk with God - that are a hindrance to growth? What do YOU struggle with personally? This would help me so much in how to serve others through my writing.

If you need prayer, further resource suggestions, or would like to encourage me with how this project has encouraged you to live in sincere faith, please email me at terriprahl@gmail.com.

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