When Disappointment Deceives

by Jeff Olson

You don’t have to be a baseball fan of the Chicago Cubs to experience disappointment, but it helps. The Cubs, known as America’s “lovable losers,” have the longest championship drought in American professional sports. They haven’t made it to the World Series since 1945, and they haven’t won it since 1908. Over the last century, they have repeatedly broken their fans’ hearts.

Disappointment, of course, goes far beyond the world of sports. It is a part of life that can show up unannounced at any time and any place, parking itself in our hearts with a crushing weight. Whether it’s a major disappointment or the slow accumulation of what seem to be minor letdowns, its heaviness can smother our hearts and suffocate our joy.

No one is immune to disappointment, though some have been led to believe that following the God of the Bible spares us from being let down. But even He is not spared from experiencing disappointment. The book of Genesis...
tells us that after seeing “how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become,” the Creator’s heart was “grieved” and “filled with pain” (Gen. 6:5-6). And when God took on human likeness and became a man, He continued to experience disappointment. Listen to the heartache Jesus expressed over Jerusalem’s unwillingness to embrace Him as the Messiah:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Mt. 23:37).

If God isn’t exempt from disappointment, then we shouldn’t expect a free pass either. The fact of the matter is that disappointment is an inescapable part of life. If we desire long enough or deep enough, we will experience feeling let down. For most of us, disappointment appears early in our lives:

• A little girl isn’t invited to a birthday party.
• A young boy doesn’t get picked to play baseball during recess.
• A teenage girl isn’t asked to the high school prom.
• A high school boy doesn’t make the football team.

Before we know it, our lives seem marked by one letdown after another. And more seem to be lurking behind every corner of life. Friendships don’t work out as we want. The bottom falls out of a career. Marriage has its share of disappointments. A wife is unable to get pregnant. Investments go bad. Vacation plans get canceled. Children rebel. And on and on it goes.
Over time, we start to notice that people are disappointed in us and we begin to feel disappointed in ourselves as well. We don’t seem to live up to many of the expectations of others in our lives. And we just can’t shake that secret habit or keep our anger from getting the best of us. We often feel stupid or inferior when we make a mistake or when we give in to an old familiar sin.

Sooner or later, our disappointment turns toward heaven. In his book *Disappointment With God*, Philip Yancey found that “for many people there is a large gap between what they expect from their Christian faith and what they actually experience. . . . They learn to expect dramatic evidence of God working in their lives. If they do not see such evidence, they feel disappointment, betrayal, and often guilt” (p.9).

Disappointment will pay an unwelcome, painful visit to any part of our lives. As heartbreaking as some major disappointing events are, could it be that our understanding of how and why disappointment wounds us so deeply is more than slightly incomplete? Are we like the two heartbroken and bewildered men the risen Jesus met on the road to Emmaus who didn’t recognize Him or understand what was taking place? (Lk. 24:13-24). Could it be that we are missing something too—not seeing all that is truly going on?

Things are not what they seem. In some ways, they are worse than we thought. There is more happening to us in our disappointment than many of us realize. If we can agree on this point, perhaps we can embark on a journey to see in the following pages more of what is really going on.
What Is Really Going On?

In the 1999 motion picture *The Matrix*, Thomas Anderson, a.k.a. Neo, is a young computer programmer by day and an illegal hacker by night. In his search for information about something called the Matrix, he is unexpectedly summoned to a suspenseful meeting with Morpheus, a mysterious and intriguing stranger who is about to offer him the chance to see what is really going on:

*Morpheus*: “I imagine that right now you’re feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole.”

*Neo*: “You could say that.”

*Morpheus*: “Let me tell you why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain. But you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life—that there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is but it’s there—like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I’m talking about?

*Neo*: “The Matrix?”

*Morpheus*: “Do you want to know what it is?”

*Neo*: (He slowly nods his head yes.)

*Morpheus*: “The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.”

*Neo*: “What truth?”

*Morpheus*: “That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, into a prison that
you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind. Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.”

(Morpheus then stretches out both of his hands, palms up. In each hand is a large capsule, one red, one blue.)

Morpheus: “This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

Many of us can relate to Neo. Deep down we sense that something is off. Things don’t quite add up, but we’re not sure how or why. We need to know more about what is going on in our world. We need a clearer perspective, or else we will misunderstand much of what is happening to us and what can be done about it. Let’s take the “red pill” and begin to see the deception that often takes place during times of disappointment and why we are being deceived.

**We Are Being Lied To.** Sometimes a collision with disappointment can help us see more clearly what is true. It can grab our attention and give us a chance to reevaluate our motives or the world in which we live.

For example, not getting what we want may help us see that we want something legitimate like a job or a relationship or a position of status, but for all the wrong reasons. I know a man who could not get accepted into medical school after several attempts. He eventually realized that his desire to become a doctor was too important to him and was
part of his plan to impress others and feel important.

At times, disappointing events can help bring back into focus the fact that this world is not our home and that all creation groans under the curse of sin. It can increase our longing for the better place that Jesus is now preparing for us (Jn. 14:1-30) and draw us to put our hope in the One who in the end will not disappoint (Isa. 49:23).

Unfortunately, many of us are misled during times of disappointment. A false message fastens itself to our disappointing circumstances and deceives us.

The deepest damage is not caused so much by our painful, disappointing circumstances but by the lies that sneak in through our disappointment. Life in a fallen world will have more than its share of letdowns, but it is the lies that often come with them that pose the greatest threat—for we suffer our deepest wounds from those lies.

A lie is any thought or conclusion that persuades us to tear ourselves down, stop caring for others, or love God less. Let’s take a closer look at some of the lies about life, ourselves, and God that come to us in our disappointment.

**Lies About Life.** Many of us feel more than just a little let down by life. A friend recently said to me, “Life is not what it’s cracked up to be. What I thought would make me happy doesn’t. And it seems that I will never get the things I really want. It’s one big cruel joke.”

My friend’s remarks sum up many of the lies about life that sneak through our disappointment and settle into our minds and hearts. For example:

- “Relationships are one
• “I’m nothing but an awful sinner. God’s never going to be able to use someone as rotten as I am.” It wasn’t
until he quit believing such condemning lies that he began to find freedom from his enslaving habit.

**Lies About God.** As disappointment continues to race through our lives, untrue thoughts about God begin to surface. Thoughts like: *He isn’t good. He can’t be trusted. He doesn’t care about me.* A person going through a devastating divorce recently said to me, “God doesn’t care about me. If He did, He would keep my husband from leaving me!”

The damaging lies about ourselves, life, and God are not true, but they feel true. And being told to stop living by our feelings not only loads us down with unnecessary guilt, it overlooks what else is really going on. We are not just being lied to. The lies are a part of a well-designed and cleverly concealed attack.

**We Are Under Attack.** It doesn’t always seem like it, but all of us have three enemies we must contend with. The Bible refers to them as the world, the flesh, and the devil. All three are very real. And all three have their own unique ways of misleading us in our disappointment.

**The World** is our visible enemy. It is an organized system headed by Satan that leaves God out. It is a system of artificial joy and fulfillment that is constantly seducing us. Whether it’s a job with more prestige, an affair, a new dress, more money, or having a perfect body, the call is the same: “Come, indulge yourself.” As one recent advertisement put it, “You can have it all.”

We can encounter this enemy when we listen to the radio, watch television or movies, read newspapers or magazines, or surf the
Internet. But without God, the best the world can offer is a counterfeit. It’s always a fake that will leave us feeling even more empty and vulnerable to the lie that just a little bit more indulgence will chase away our disappointment.

**The Flesh** is the enemy within that is bent on managing life apart from God. It is that selfish nature that remains inside each of us that demands to get relief or revenge—right now.

In moments of disappointment, the flesh tries to take over and get us to do the opposite of what our redeemed hearts want to do (Gal. 5:17). This is the universal war with the flesh that Paul candidly described taking place inside of him when he wrote, “Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Rom. 7:20).

When we give in to the sinful flesh’s pull to take control in the midst of our disappointment, it impairs our ability to see what is true. It not only becomes difficult to see that our efforts to manage life are only making things worse, but our understanding continues to darken—so much so that it becomes increasingly difficult to see when and where we are tripped up by a lie. As Proverbs says, “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Prov. 4:19).

**The Devil** is our invisible enemy who is out to get us. The apostle Peter described him like this: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus said that the devil is plotting to “steal and kill and destroy” the life that our Lord wants for each of
us (Jn. 10:10). He is out to keep us from having the relationship with God that he walked away from.

The devil isn’t mythological or imaginary. He is a 21st-century reality. And our main conflict is with him and his agents of evil. He is the god of this world, and our sinful nature was born out of his lies in the Garden of Eden.

The primary way the devil (Satan) attacks us is with lies. This is how he “leads the whole world astray” (Rev. 12:9). He used lies the first time he attacked the human race. He lied to Eve about God’s prohibition to eat from the forbidden tree (Gen. 3:1-5).

Jesus said that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44).

Did you ever consider how Satan was able to get so many angels to turn against God? He had to be a very persuasive and clever liar to pull that off. And he hasn’t given up his lying ways.

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Satan lies to us in many ways, but one common way is through our disappointment. He is the ultimate source of most of the lies that come to us in our disappointing events.

Satan and his demons take the occasion of our disappointing experiences to slip in carefully placed false messages designed to deceive us where we are the weakest. When someone lets
us down, he’s the one who is ultimately behind thoughts like: *No one cares about me* or *People can’t ever be trusted.* When we sin, he’s the main instigator of self-condemning and defeating thoughts such as: *How could I do such a thing!* or *I’m beyond God’s forgiveness.* The apostle Paul drew a clear connection between the “excessive sorrow” that can overwhelm a Christian caught in a sin and the schemes of Satan (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

Ironically, evil often mocks us with the truth of a bad choice only after we’ve fallen into sin: *You’re such a fool. What were you thinking!* *You should know by now that it never works.* And Satan is most definitely the originator of many of our doubts and questions about God that hit us hard in the midst of disappointment.

As we experience disappointment, we don’t just come up with all of these negative thoughts or impressions about life, ourselves, and God on our own. We get help—a lot more help than many of us realize. We are fed these half-truths and derogatory thoughts—not necessarily by Satan himself, but certainly by the forces of evil who follow and serve the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Satan can even lie to us through our family and friends. When Peter refused to accept what Jesus was telling His disciples about the suffering and death He would soon experience, Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me” (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn’t know it, but Satan was using him as a mouthpiece to trip up the Lord.

I find it alarming that the role the devil plays rarely appears on our radar screens. Many Christians
don’t seem to recognize or even believe that the evil one is assaulting them with lies. They may believe that he attacks missionaries serving in remote places of the world, but they also believe that living in a technologically advanced and enlightened society puts them out of range of such attacks. If we think we’re too smart for such things, we couldn’t be more wrong. With the evil one’s deceptive help, many of us seem to have forgotten that he is the deadly adversary the Bible tells us he is. In the book *The Sacred Romance*, Brent Curtis suggests that the first message the evil one tries to sell us about himself is, “I am not here.”

A forgotten enemy is the worst kind of enemy. Satan becomes even more dangerous when we fail to recognize his existence and his evil intentions to neutralize us. A line from the beginning of the movie *The Fellowship Of The Ring* says it well. In telling the story of how the dark ring of evil came to be overlooked by the world of men, the narrator makes this chilling statement: “And some things that should not have been forgotten, were lost.”

Satan is real. And we can’t afford to forget or overlook him. If we remain unaware of his schemes, he will “outwit us” (2 Cor. 2:11). We don’t want to put too much emphasis on Satan and his tricks. If we become obsessed with him, we will lose all sense of proportion and attribute every negative thought to him. At the same time, however, we don’t want to make too little of his ambushes, for his lies are as real as they were in the Garden of Eden, and they can create and enslave us in distorted beliefs.
The Power Of Lies

While time puts distance between us and disappointing events, we often grow attached to the damaging lies we were taught. As time passes, the lies tend to go unchallenged and often get reinforced. They deeply embed themselves in us until we are convinced they are true.

Even though a thought or idea isn’t true, if we are lulled into believing it, its influence over us is potent. As we believe these false messages that have come to us in our disappointment, they begin to shape our beliefs about life, ourselves, and God. And we begin to make decisions and react to life’s experiences based on distorted thinking. The lies that lead to distorted beliefs influence how we relate to others and they strongly affect the person we become (or don’t become).

The real danger is that we can become slaves to these lies when they are able to run loose in our hearts. Without even knowing it, we can be controlled by them. If we think we can’t do anything, we won’t try—or we’ll spend our lives controlled by efforts to prove we can. If we believe people are out to use us, we may become bitter and pull away, unable to let anyone get close to us. And if we are convinced that God doesn’t care, we will feel compelled to put up walls, only to miss the joy of knowing Him as our Father, friend, and lover of our souls.

The lies we believe in our disappointment can cost us our freedom to be who we are in Christ and the joy of loving God and others. For some of us, the cost has been extremely high. But there is something else
going on that is difficult to see, and it is as much a part of the problem as the lies we’ve been sold. We must see the role we play in losing our freedom by the way we respond to the lies.

How Do We Respond To Lies?

No one asks for disappointment. And we certainly don’t want to be lied to. But at some point we make matters worse by the way we respond. Unaware that we’re being ambushed, one of our first mistakes is to accept the lies as true.

We Accept The Lies. Unknowingly, many of us have agreed with the lies we’ve been told about life, ourselves, and God. We hang on to them as if they are true. Once we accept a lie, that’s when it starts to control us. And with a little collaboration from our enemy within, the flesh, we start to devise and implement some of the following plans to handle what we believe is true.

Hiding What We Think Is Wrong With Us. Many of us try to hide what we believe is ugly or weak about ourselves. A common way to hide our flaws is to try to be invisible around others. We don’t speak unless we’re spoken to. We don’t look people in the eye. We just go about our business and try not to draw any unnecessary attention where people might see what we think is wrong with us.

Hiding is the approach Saul took the first time Samuel tried to present him to the people of Israel. He had “hidden himself among the baggage” because he believed he was an inferior man from an inferior tribe (1 Sam. 9:21; 10:20-22).
Some of us try to cover up the questions and doubts we have about ourselves by overcompensating. We may use big words that make us sound smart, concoct stories that make us appear to be loved or important, or wear clothes that make us look more successful. The whole point is to keep others from seeing our flaws or deficiencies.

**Limiting Our Desires.**

In *The Devil’s Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce, a year is defined as a “period of three hundred and sixty-five disappointments.” Those of us who accept that definition will eventually start to hold back our desires. We won’t want or enjoy anything deeply. We will put strict limits on how much we open ourselves up to receive or give love.

For those of us who are deceived into believing that life is just one long series of letdowns, it seems that the only way to keep from being disappointed again is to limit our desires and take pleasure in very little. One man recently said to me, “I know what I want to be, but it’s impossible. So why want it?”

The Old Testament records the story of a barren wife who held a similar attitude toward one of her heart’s deepest desires. When the prophet Elisha announced to her that she was going to give birth to a son within the year, she objected. She pleaded with Elisha, “No, my lord. Don’t mislead your servant” (2 Ki. 4:16). In other words, “Don’t mess with my desires. I don’t want to open up my heart again only to have it crushed with disappointment.” She didn’t want Elisha to awaken the desire within her to have a child. As she stated later when her son died, “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes’?” (v.28).
are never told her name, but it may be that her objection was the result of accepting the lie that it was foolish to let herself want a child.

**Turning To False Comforters.** Once we accept the evil spin that lies put on life in the midst of our disappointment, many of us turn to false comforters. Many of these false comforters are the things that our visible enemy, the world, offers to us. Some of them are also good things like food or sex or a hobby. It’s just that we are turning to them for the wrong reasons.

We turn to our false comforters for consolation. They not only promise to temporarily soothe our disappointed hearts, they often represent something important to us that we wanted deeply but didn’t get. We cling tightly to these false comforters. Trying to take them away from us is like trying to take away a big steak from a hungry dog.

**Getting Bitter.** After a while, the disappointments of life lead to bitterness. Like the Israelites who had been miraculously set free from the bondage of Egypt and led into the wilderness, we can become moaners and complainers who are negative about most everything. We might say that we are just expressing our frustrations. But we are actually voicing our bitter resentment.

Some of us become demanding in our bitterness, requiring from others the love and respect they’re withholding. Others of us grow to be harsh and vindictive. We make it our goal to get even with anyone who has let us down. Even worse, we start to take out our resentment on those who had nothing to do with our disappointment. “Somebody’s gonna pay” becomes our
Finally, we turn our bitterness toward God. If we think He doesn’t care about us, we blame Him for our disappointing circumstances, and then we resent Him for doing nothing about them.

**Giving Up.** Disappointment can eventually wear us down to the point where instead of staying bitter, we give up. As one disillusioned husband put it, “I used to be angry. Now I’m only tired.” At times, we can become so exhausted by disappointment that we just want to quit a marriage, a friendship, or a career. Like the prophet Elijah, who said at a low point in his life, “I have had enough, Lord” (1 Ki. 19:4), we become disillusioned and slowly give up. Even though we may never fall into a state of severe depression, many of us quietly resign ourselves to the fact that this is the way it’s always going to be.

I was once talking to a man about the lies he had learned and accepted during a long series of letdowns. At one point in the conversation, he said in a hollow yet convincing tone, “You just don’t get it. My life stinks. There is no point in talking about it any longer because it is never going to change.” Sadly, he had come to the point where he wanted to quit.

**We Prove The Lies Wrong.** Generally speaking, we either accept the lies that come to us in our disappointment as true or we set out to prove the lies as false, especially lies about ourselves. And if we refuse to embrace the lies, we don’t often do it in a way that frees us to live for God and others. They still have power over us when we believe we must prove them false.
Some of us have made proving our critics wrong such a high priority that it begins to take over our lives. I know a woman who learned early in life the lie that her opinion didn’t matter. Today she has an extremely difficult time changing her mind once she’s made a decision. Even when she becomes aware of new information that calls for her to adjust her decision, she refuses to budge because she is on a mission to prove to everyone that her opinion counts. She thought she was over the influence of the lie, but she, in fact, was still under its control.

Sometimes a lie that we try to prove wrong is directly related to a disappointing relationship. One man told me the sad story of how he spent much of his adult life trying to prove that his father was wrong about him. When he was growing up, his father told him repeatedly that he was never going to amount to anything. His father’s disappointment in him stung deeply, but he was going to prove his father wrong. And he did. He worked hard and built a successful business, but his plan consumed him. His life became out of balance and out of control, and he eventually lost his family in the process.

It’s possible to trust in Jesus as our sin-bearer and receive forgiveness of sins, yet live much of our lives imprisoned by old lies of disappointment. Many of us have been deceived for so long that we just can’t talk ourselves into believing the truth. On our own, we can’t free ourselves from the slavery of deception. We need divine help to reinterpret the lies we’ve been taught in the midst of disappointment.

An often overlooked part
of the good news of Jesus Christ is that He wants to bring healing and freedom to those parts of our hearts that are wounded and deceived (Isa. 61:1-3; Lk. 4:17-22). More than any of us can imagine, Jesus longs to speak truth into those hurt and deceived places inside of us. Let’s take a look at how we can invite Him into our wounded hearts to confront the lies and help us to see the truth.

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A Way Toward Healing And Freedom

We’ve all been wounded deeply by the lies that come to us in our disappointment. Ultimate healing won’t occur until we get to heaven (Rev. 21:4). Then “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” But for now, healing occurs when we realize how we’ve been deceived in our disappointment and allow God to show us what is true. Finding the truth heals by freeing us from the prison of deception and releasing us to be the people God intended us to be.

God wants to heal and set us free from the power of the evil one’s lies, both past and present. He doesn’t save us from our sins, give us a new nature in Christ, and then just leave us at the mercy of Satan’s deception.
The apostle John wrote, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 Jn. 3:8).

Remember, one of the devil’s primary works is to mislead us with deception. That is how he causes the greatest harm. The good news is that Jesus came to put a stop to it—in a deeply personal way. He wants to meet with us in our hurting and deceived hearts and speak truth that brings healing and freedom.

He says to all of us who have accepted Him as our Savior, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20). We first invited Him in when we trusted Him to save us from the penalty of our sins. Now the Lord wants further access into those places inside of us that are disappointed and misled. But He won’t come in unless we invite Him as we did the first time He met us in our hearts.

Inviting God into the disappointed and deceived regions of our hearts is a deeply personal and unique process. Sometimes it occurs alone in our private moments of prayer and reflection. At other times it happens in the presence of a caring friend or spiritual advisor. Some of us experience healing suddenly, while most of us come to know it gradually. God will ask many of us to revisit a wound more than once to bring a deeper sense of healing. While it’s never quite the same for everyone, let’s look at what is often involved as we move toward healing and freedom.

We Need To Wake Up. It all starts with seeing what’s really been going on in our disappointing experiences. The apostle Paul put it like this: “Wake up, O sleeper, . . . . because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:14,16). He stressed a
similar idea when he wrote, “The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber” (Rom. 13:11). Wake up. That has been the point of the first part of this booklet. We must recognize what is actually happening to us in our disappointment and admit that we’ve played a supporting role in making things worse (even though we do not fully understand it). We are then in a better position to see our need to surrender to God and invite Him into the places of our hearts where we’ve been disappointed and deceived.

**We Need To Willingly Surrender Control.** Before we can give God greater access to our wounded hearts, we must surrender to Him by giving up our commitment to self-reliance and humbly present ourselves helpless and vulnerable to Him. Peter wrote, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

We won’t know God’s healing as long as we remain self-sufficient and resort to our old ways of handling life. Surrender is putting to death our enemy within, the sinful flesh that wants to be in control. Sometimes life can hurt so much that we are willing to take over and do anything to end our pain. Surrender, however, is giving up the right to escape our pain through false comforters.

When we surrender, we’re acknowledging that we’ve sinned against God by leaving Him out. We’re admitting that our ways of managing disappointment don’t work and that we need God more than ever. A deeper level of surrender will occur in us when we admit that He is God and we are not. While we may struggle with doubt and ask Him many tough
questions, a sincere prayer can emerge from our hearts that is similar to the one a disappointed and confused father once expressed to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:24).

We Need To Learn To Recognize Old Disappointments. Once we surrender to God, the old disappointments that misled us will start to make their way to the surface. We don’t necessarily have to go searching for them. God brings the truth of previous letdowns and wounds into our awareness—or at least creates enough of a stir within our hearts to get our attention. Let’s consider some of the kinds of situations where we can expect to see past disappointments emerge.

Present Disappointing Experiences often trigger an old disappointment to push to the surface. A disappointing event in the present often represents a letdown in the past where we were misled.

Many of us seem to be disappointed in the same way over and over again. Rather than allowing a recurring disappointment to reinforce an earlier lie, we can start to ask for God to help us connect a present disappointment to the first time we experienced it.

One woman recognized that her husband’s occasional failure to keep his promises triggered earlier feelings of disappointment that went back to being repeatedly let down by her father. As she noticed the connection between her past and present letdowns, she began to see that her greatest struggle was not with her husband. It was with what she was misled to believe about men from a father who rarely kept his word.
Moments Of Temptation can also cause earlier disappointments to show up. Not all temptations are connected to a past disappointment or lie, but many are. When we are being tempted to turn to our false comforters, we can do more than just resist. We can evaluate the temptation to see if it is a sign of a wounded and deceived place inside our heart where God wants to meet us.

One woman who began to look below the surface of her temptation to overeat started to see that she was using food to cover a lifelong disappointment in herself. Her husband had left her years earlier for another woman and she blamed herself entirely for the affair. Abusing food was how she buried her feelings of self-contempt, but the temptation also gave her a chance to be honest about her history of being left and how it was deceiving her.

One man realized a direct link between his urge to have anonymous sex and the pain of having an uncaring family. Rather than give in to the temptation and settle for another visit with a counterfeit comforter, he began to see his temptation as an opportunity to be honest about a disappointed and misled place inside him.

Feelings Of Anger toward ourselves or others are often a strong indication of past hurt. A careful look at our anger will often reveal that it is a coverup for a deep disappointment.

As we reflect on times when we’ve lost our temper or felt ourselves seething inside, we need to look closely at our anger and ask God to help us understand what it’s telling us about the wounds in our heart. For instance, one man who found himself getting angry
whenever his wife would answer for him began to recognize that underneath his anger was an old wound that left him feeling weak and inadequate.

**We Need To Spend Time In Our Disappointed Places.**

Old disappointments can show up in a number of ways. Jesus may take us to an earlier disappointment the way He took Peter back to the night he denied Jesus three times (Jn. 21:15-17). Jesus reminded him of his lowest moments to reaffirm His confidence in him.

We need to linger in our disappointed places, however they come up, so we can learn from them. We may have to set them aside temporarily so we can fulfill our daily responsibilities, but we must make it a point to come back to them.

It isn’t easy for any of us to spend time in the places where disappointment has paid us an unwelcome visit. We will be tempted to cover it over with anger or soothe it with a false comforter. Many of us would prefer to shove our disappointment back down and pretend that it no longer exists. But we can’t invite God into parts of our lives where we won’t stay ourselves. Healing can occur only if we remain in them.

We must spend time with the painful memories and emotions. Sometimes the memories are about a specific incident that is stamped with a date and time. At other times it is just a gut feeling that isn’t attached to any one particular event. Whatever is stirred up, we need to give it a name and feel our disappointment. We shouldn’t hurry through this. We need to slow down and let ourselves think about, describe, and feel the hurt.
One effective way to keep from rushing through our painful places is to write down what we are feeling. It forces us to pay attention to thoughts and emotions that we rarely make time for. It can help us begin to recognize the lies we’ve been told and how we hold on to them. Journaling makes whatever is being stirred up inside of us real and encourages us to engage it with our heart and not simply with our head.

As we make it a priority to spend time in our disappointment, we may also need to enlist the help of a caring friend or a Christian counselor to keep us on track. God doesn’t want us to bear our burdens alone (Gal. 6:2). Others can help by listening, sharing honest feedback, praying, and telling us when we veer too far from the place we need to be.

We Need To Invite God Into Our Unhealed Places.
Waking up, surrendering control, learning to recognize old disappointments, and spending time in our disappointment is a good start, but we must go further. We also need to ask God to come into those unhealed places inside of us and surround us with His presence and truth. We need to ask Him to help us see more clearly the lies we are holding on to that we’ve learned in the midst of our disappointment. Any thought that makes us feel condemned or believe that we’ve lost our ultimate security and significance is another lie.

It’s important to ask God to speak to us in our place of need. He desires to answer His children when they humbly cry out to Him for help.
This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. . . .” Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. . . . How gracious He will be when you cry for help! As soon as He hears, He will answer you (Isa. 30:15,18-19).

God speaks to us more than we realize. He speaks to us primarily through His written Word. But He can also speak to us through other people, music, books, movies, a card or letter from a friend, and many other sources. As we invite God into our wounded and deceived places, we must be open to any way He wants to use to show us what is true.

We Need To Listen To What God Is Saying.

Listening to God is an intimate experience. It is a vital part of our personal relationship with Him. Jesus said, “He who belongs to God hears what God says” (Jn. 8:47). Later He said, “My sheep listen to My voice” (10:27).

Listening to God doesn’t mean that we are going to hear an audible voice. We will hear Him speaking to us in our hearts. We will sense a “gentle whisper,” a “still, small voice” of the Spirit. The apostle Paul said, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16). God whispers to us from His Spirit to our spirit—heart to heart.

How can we know if it is God speaking to us? God is certainly not going to tell us anything that is contrary to, or add to, what He’s already said in the Bible. We must
evaluate any idea or impression that comes to us by comparing it with the truth of the Bible. And we need to reject anything that contradicts or draws us away from the wisdom of His written Word and the love of Christ.

Another way we can measure whether or not God is speaking to us is by what or where it leads us to. If what we hear leads us to feel discouraged or feeds a bitter attitude, it is not from God. If we sense something that justifies turning to a false comforter or away from depending on God, it is another lie from our enemy. But any thought that leads us to walk away from our false comforters or tear down the walls that keep us from God and others is of God.

Hearing God speak is something that many of us aren’t accustomed to. But our ability to listen and distinguish Him from what is merely a random thought or another lie can grow over time. The more we become familiar with His written Word and remain open to however He chooses to speak, the better we are able to recognize Him when He is speaking to us.

While there is no way to capture all that God might say to us, we can know for certain that His message is true—not like the false messages the evil one and his demonic forces have whispered to us in our disappointment. As the psalmist expressed, “Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Ps. 51:6).

Many of us may know in our heads the sort of things God wants to say to us, but it’s like understanding them for the first time when He speaks to our heart. However He chooses
to impress our heart with the truth, having it come from Him makes all the difference. As we learn to pay attention to what He has to say, we can reject the lies that have held us captive and remind ourselves of the truth. Jesus said that as we believe what He is saying to us, we “will know the truth, and the truth will set [us] free” (Jn. 8:31-32).

As we open our heart to hear God speak, the truth can begin to sink in. It will wash over us in a way that is undeniable and freeing. We can begin to experience what the book of Proverbs speaks of:

The Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding . . . . When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil (Prov. 2:6,10-12 NKJV).

When we are listening carefully to God, the truth of how we’ve wrongly responded to disappointment often sinks in more deeply as well. The part we’ve played in hurting others and making things worse for ourselves becomes clearer to us. Although the truth of it all deeply saddens and disappoints us, we don’t feel condemned, because once we’ve confessed our sin the truth of God’s forgiveness and cleansing sinks in (1 Jn. 1:9). We more deeply understand what Paul understood in the midst of his own struggle with sin—that we are not condemned (Rom. 8:1) or defined by our sin (Rom. 7:20). While we are fully responsible for attitudes and choices we make from our sinful flesh, the core of our heart is redeemed and made new.
The War Rages On

The way of healing and freedom does not spare us from further disappointment. Nor does it protect us from being lied to again. We are still in a war—a spiritual war. It's the war of all the ages—the war between good and evil.

We don't choose this war. The war chooses us. Like it or not, we are born into it. Our lives are lived out on the stage of this ultimate battle between the forces of heaven and hell. And we, the ones who bear the glory and image of God, are what the forces are fighting over.

While it's true that the death and resurrection of Jesus delivered a fatal blow to Satan, the war isn't over—not by a long shot. And we can't afford to ignore that we are in it. We must remember who our deadliest enemy is and stay alert.

While it’s true that the death and resurrection of Jesus delivered a fatal blow to Satan, the war isn’t over—not by a long shot.

Remember Who Your Greatest Enemy Is. We need to avoid falling into another one of Satan's traps by obsessing about him. But we don't want to ignore him either, because most of the lies we've been taught in our disappointment ultimately come from him. We must recognize him for the fierce enemy he is, for without him we wouldn't be in a war. Remember, Jesus said
that Satan is the one who is determined “to steal and kill and destroy” (Jn. 10:10).

Our greatest enemy is not disappointment. Our real fight is not with people or a world that lets us down. It’s not with a corrupt political system or a culture that has lost its moral compass. And it is most certainly not with God, even though it can sometimes seem like it.

The apostle Paul made it clear that our real fight is with Satan and his forces of evil and darkness:

*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Eph. 6:12).

**Stay Alert.** After talking about the spiritual war we all find ourselves in, Paul said, “With this in mind, be alert” (Eph. 6:18). Peter echoed Paul’s warning to “be . . . alert” (1 Pet. 5:8).

In the book *Wild At Heart*, John Eldredge wrote: Behind the world and the flesh is an even more deadly enemy . . . one we rarely speak of . . . . Yet this is where we live now—on the front lines of a fierce spiritual war that is to blame for most of the casualties you see around you and most of the assault against you.

It’s time we prepare ourselves for it (p.155). Be prepared. We’ve been ambushed before in our disappointment, but now we understand what to expect. Watch for it. We will still
continue to experience disappointment and we should expect more attacks. The world will continue to seduce us away from God with half-truths. The flesh will keep pulling us to forget God and take over. And the ringleader, Satan, will keep trying to deceive us with more lies about ourselves, life, and God.

We need to be looking for the lies. Some will sound so familiar. Remember that many of our negative, bitter, or self-defeating thoughts are not just coming from within us. And with the power Jesus gave to us we can “resist the devil” and he will “flee from” us (Jas. 4:7).

Every time I see a movie about the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, I’m struck by how different that day might have turned out if the United States military had known it was coming. Imagine the outcome if the sinking of the Japanese submarine the morning of the attack would have tipped them off. What if they had not mistaken the massive waves of planes that appeared on the radar for their own B-17 bombers?

How might that fateful day have been different? We will never know. But when it comes to the great war we are in, we do know this: Our enemies have attacked us before in our disappointment and they will do it again. And if we remain unprepared, we will be caught off guard and be taken out again. That is why we need to stay alert.

Knowing that we have been lied to before, and will be lied to again, doesn’t take away the pain of disappointment. But it reminds us to combat the lies in the power of our risen Lord (1 Jn. 4:4) so the devil doesn’t gain a foothold in our lives (Eph. 4:28).
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Disappointment With God by Philip Yancey (Zondervan, 1988).

The Sacred Romance by Brent Curtis and John Eldredge (Nelson, 1997).

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis (Macmillan Publishing).

Shattered Dreams by Larry Crabb (Waterbrook Press, 2002).

Waking The Dead by John Eldredge (Nelson, 2003).

OTHER RELATED RBC BOOKLETS

Self-Esteem—what the Bible says about self-respect and self-acceptance (Q0503).

What In The World Is Satan Doing?—understanding Satan and his strategies (Q1001).

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