

Would It Be Okay For Me To Be Angry With God? - Tim Challies

It felt like a test—a test of my faith, a test of my convictions, a test of my love for God. Soon, very soon, after I learned that my son had died, I received a message from an old acquaintance. Her intentions were good—she wanted to offer consolation. But her instructions were suspect—she wanted me to rage against God. Paraphrasing one of her favorite authors she said “It’s okay to be angry with God about this. It’s okay to tell him exactly how you feel about him right now. Let him have it. He doesn’t mind.”

My instincts rebelled against her counsel but for just a moment I wondered. I didn’t feel anger in my loss, but should I? I didn’t resent God’s sovereignty in taking my son, but might that be appropriate? Already I was leaning hard on God for comfort, but should I now also press against him for blame? In that very moment a verse of scripture, a mere fragment, flashed into my mind. “Curse God and die.” In this case it was not a human demanding it of another as Job’s wife did of her husband. Rather, it was the Holy Spirit’s reminder of what it would mean for me to raise my fist to the sky.

That moment was a test of my faith. Haven’t we all wondered whether our faith would be able to withstand a staggering blow like the sudden, unexplained death of a child? I certainly had. In that moment I had to choose whether my faith would push me toward God or away from him. I had to make a choice between submission and rebellion.

That moment was a test of my convictions. I have often proclaimed the glories of God’s goodness and sovereignty, yet this has been easy because they’ve so constantly been aligned with my own desires. In that moment I had to choose whether I would continue to proclaim in the dark what I had celebrated in the light, or whether, instead, I would allow my circumstances to overturn my beliefs. I had to choose whether these doctrines would draw me to God in comfort or alienate me in anger.

That moment was a test of my love. I have so often proclaimed my love for God, but now he had taken my child, my firstborn, my son, my protégé, the man in all the world who was most precious to me. In that moment I had to choose whether I would love God through this or rage against him, whether it would turn my affections ever-more toward him, or whether it would steer them away.

That moment was a test, I’m sure of it. For though there is a thread of teaching in the Christian world that says it is a sign of maturity and authenticity to be angry with God, I am unconvinced. In fact, I’m sure the opposite is true—that there would never be an appropriate time for me to be angry with God or at God.

Why? Because, ultimately, to be angry at what God does is to be angry at

who God is. To be angry with his actions is to be angry with his person. It’s to doubt that his actions were just, that they were wise, that they were right, that they were good. It’s to cast aspersions on his very character.

That’s not to say we can never be angry. It’s not to say we must be completely impassive in the face of grief, sorrow, and suffering. On this note John Piper helpfully distinguishes between anger at a thing and anger at a person: “Anger at a thing does not contain indignation at a choice or an act. We simply don’t like the effect of the thing: the broken clutch, or the grain of sand that just blew in our eye, or rain on our picnic. But when we get angry at a person, we are displeased with a choice they made and an act they performed. Anger at a person always implies strong disapproval. If you are angry at me, you think I have done something I should not have done.”

And who am I to be angry at what God has done? Who am I to disapprove of what he has permitted? Who am I to conclude God has done something he should not have, or to even suggest the notion? I might be angry at what I do, or what you do, or what John Piper does, but all of us are sinful, all of us are foolish, all of us are wrongheaded, all of us make mistakes, all of us sometimes bring harm even when we attempt to do good. We might very well have done something we ought not to have done.

But not God. He only ever does what is right and what is good. He only ever permits what is best. He is so *for* us that no action he takes would ever ultimately be against us.

Little wonder, then, that, after Job’s wife encouraged her husband to curse God and die, he gently corrected her. He warned her that in her grief (for she, too, had suffered terrible loss) she was speaking words that were suitable only for the mouth of a fool. Then he asked rhetorically, faithfully, wonderfully, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Then follows this affirmation of his tremendous faith: “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

Job knew that consolation does not come by raging against God, but by submitting to him. Comfort comes not from anger at the divine will, but acquiescence to it. J.R. Miller says it sweetly: “[God] has a right to take from us what he will, for all our joys and treasures belong to Him and are only lent to us for a time. It was in love that He gave them to us; it is in love that He takes them away. When we cease our struggle, and in faith and confidence submit our will to His, peace flows into our heart and we are comforted.”

Comfort comes when we align our will with the will of God. Peace flows when we bless him in our grief as we did in our joys. For his love is as constant, his character is as perfect, his actions are as irrefragable in the taking as they were in the giving.

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