

Exodus 32:1-6

The God Who Disappoints

TSC Apex, Standalone

MPT: Much like the Fall in Gen 3, Exodus 32 shows us how Israel is unable to keep the very covenant and commands that, ironically, God is giving to Moses on the mountain.

MPS: Our response when God disappoints us is a good indicator of where our faith is truly placed.

My name is Curtis...Happy Memorial Day...Apex staff.

Josh mark Mike Megan Reagan Madison Michelle

Exodus 32 this morning...

Exodus 32:1-6

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ²So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." ⁶And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1700s a 21 year old named David Brainerd was attending Yale University when he heard the gospel and gave his life to Christ. I'd love to tell you "his life was awful but then he met Jesus and from that point forward—much like the *Lego Movie* my kids are so obsessed with right now—everything is awesome!" But that's not the case. In fact, Brainerd **suffered endlessly** throughout his life...*especially* after becoming a Christian:

- He struggled with almost **constant sickness**, often dropping out of college for weeks at a time because he'd be **coughing up blood** from gut wrenching pain in his chest.
- He struggled with **recurring depression** he often called "**a kind of death.**"
- And all of his physical and mental pain was exacerbated by a **deep loneliness** that marked his life til the end.

Even with all of this, Brainerd felt called to establish a gospel presence and church among Native Americans in the northeast. But struggles continued in his life and about two years into his missionary work Brainerd wrote in his journal, "*My heart sunk. It seemed to me that I'd never have any success among the Indians. My soul was weary of my life. I longed for death.*"

- From the outside looking in, David Brainerd's life might be summed up in one word: **disappointment.**

Fast forward to 1960 and we find spiritual giant C. S. Lewis who has just lost his wife to a painful bout with bone cancer, and he writes, "I can't understand why God is always there when things are going well, telling you what he expects of you, "*But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door*

*slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once... Why is God so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?*¹

(This never makes it on everyone's "favorite CS Lewis quotes" page, does it?) Keep in mind this was 30 years after he became a Christian and Lewis, much like Brainerd, finds himself disappointed.

Now, both of these guys made it through this, and their faith was ultimately strengthened in their trials, but I think **they both articulate what many of us feel and it's the same word which sums up our text today—it's the word disappointment. Specifically disappointment with God.**

CONTEXT

In Exodus 32 we find Israel—God's people—who have just been **delivered from captivity in Egypt**. They've seen God's mighty hand of faithfulness: God sent plagues to **free them from Egypt, walked through** the Red Sea, **God destroyed their pursuers**, and they find themselves in the wilderness at the bottom of Mt. Sinai while **God is feeding 'em** by dropping **chips and dip from the sky** and making **water fountains out of rocks**.

Moses, Israel's leader, has gone up on top of Mt. Sinai to talk to God and look at verse 1, ***When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain...*** You know how else that could read?: *"When the people were disappointed that nothing had happened yet."*

- After about 5 weeks of waiting the people are like, "Moses...? God...? Where y'all? We kinda expected more from you guys. We're out here in the middle of nowhere and you were SUPPOSED to **lead us and take care of us and guide us** but instead you've **left us here to die.**"
- Moses's "**delay**" had led to Israel's **disappointment**.

Now what exactly is disappointment? Disappointment happens when my expectations are not aligned with my real time experiences.

- Disappointment happens when what you **hope or expect or believe** *should* happen is out of alignment with what is **actually** happening.
- Your **expectations** and your **experience** aren't lining up.

Maybe you're here this morning because someone told you God would fix all of the problems in your life. Can he? Absolutely. Will he? Don't get your hopes up. (*Alright, that's all I've got. Let's pray...*)

If I'm being honest there are times I show up to church and we sing things like, "**You've never failed me yet!**" or "**You're never gonna let me down!**" and I'm thinking, "**ASTERISK: I've definitely felt let down and there have definitely been times where I've felt like you failed me.**"

- Can we be honest with one another: **raise your hand if you've ever been disappointed with God because of something he did or didn't do?**

Author and teacher **Lysa Terkeurst** said it like this: ***"When God's timing seems questionable, his lack of intervention seems hurtful, and his promises seem doubtful, I get afraid. I get confused. And left alone with those feelings, I can't help but feel disappointed that God isn't doing what I assume a good God should do."***

¹ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1961), 17.

This is exactly where some of you are right now—**disappointed with God:**

- You keep **praying**, but he keeps **ignoring**.
- All your friends are **getting married** right now, but you aren't.
- You asked him to **heal**, but instead your loved one **got worse**.
- You busted your butt in the off season, but someone else got the **starting position**.
- You're killing yourself trying to **make rent and feed kids**, but prayer isn't paying the bills.
- You've done everything right in parenting, yet your **kids aren't turning out** like you hoped. . . or maybe **God isn't giving you the kids** you long for in the first place.
 - And you're like, **"God, I don't understand! How can this be your perfect plan? How can this be good? God, I had dreams but all you've left me with are disappointments."**

What do we do when what Jesus is or isn't doing doesn't match what he *should* do? What do we do when God disappoints us?

One of the things that's universally true about life is that **experiencing disappointment is unavoidable**. However, **how we handle disappointment is a good indicator of where our faith is truly placed**.

Disappointment with God will lead us down **one of two roads**...look again at v1: **"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron** (In the Hebrew this is much stronger language...it's more **"they gathered against" Aaron**. They became a mob...) **and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man**

who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

God's not working on their timeline and they become **weary in waiting**. So assuming Moses isn't returning, they go to Aaron, their temporary leader, and they ask for a **substitute God** who will go before them.

- My entire life I've thought they asked for a **completely new God**, as if they want to discard the God of Israel and just make a new one. However, the Hebrew word rendered "gods" is actually **the name of God in its plural form**. They weren't asking for gods that would *replace* the God of Israel, but since they couldn't control *that* God they wanted to remake him into an image they *could control* and **see and touch**.²

Let me be clear: this doesn't make it any better. In fact, by doing this they were breaking the first two commandments (**worshiping a false God...in a wrong way**). But I do think when we understand this it makes their response significantly more **relatable**, cuz what we see here is that **disappointment not properly dealt with subtly opens the door to disobedience**. And that's exactly what happened with Israel: **their disappointments lead them to disobedience**.

1. Don't Let Disappointment Lead to Disobedience

Now Israel being disappointed does mean one good thing: **it means they actually care**. It means they **hoped in God** for something. It means they **put the weight of their expectations** on him.

² Hannah, J. D. (1985). Exodus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 155). Victor Books.

The problem is that **the second he doesn't come through, they immediately reach for an idol**. In v1 it happens so quickly: God disappoints; reach for an idol. God disappoints; reach for an idol.

- And, again, **their idol was subtle**. They didn't wanna replace God, they just wanted a physical representation of him.
- See, an idol is usually just a **good thing** that we make an **ultimate thing**. Yours could be your kids, or career, or your image.
- Idolatry is subtle because idolatry isn't just worshiping false gods; it's also **attempting to worship the true God in false ways**.

Remember they have just come out of captivity in Egypt where they had become so accustomed to seeing **visible representations of deity**. We learn from Joshua 24:14-16 that they had themselves habitually worshiped these idols.

- **Rom 8:24-25** says it, "~~For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.~~"
- If your faith is **contingent upon only that which you can see** then that's not faith.

But when God disappoints them by delaying, what do they do? They go back to the idol that's comfortable. As Albert Tate says, as soon as God doesn't work on their timeline they immediately **reach for what's familiar instead of he who has been faithful**.

Here's the lesson: One of the quickest ways to see our idols is in seasons of disappointment, because **idols tend to be things we reach for to bring us comfort, even when we are not thinking about it**.

Let me ask you this: When God doesn't meet your expectations—when God disappoints you—what do you start reaching for? What familiar thing do you go back to?

- I'm longing for **intimacy and connection**, but I reach for pornography.
- I'm longing for **security**, but I reach for money.
- I'm longing for **comfort**, but I reach for alcohol.
- I'm longing for **peace**, but I reach for sleeping pills.
- We **overeat** and over **drink** and over **indulge** and over **compensate** and over **control**—all in an attempt to reach for something (someone) that seems so distant.
 - When God disappoints us we can be so quick to reach for another god we can **control**...another god who is gonna **make us feel better**...another god we can **see, touch, and feel**.
- We would never verbalize it this way, but **we reach for idols because God isn't performing up to our expectations**.

The late **Tim Keller** says, "If you say: *I believe in God, I trusted God, and he didn't come through*; then you only trusted God to meet your agenda."

When God disappoints you what idol do you reach for? Whatever that is, just like Israel, it's gonna be impossible to move forward until you first stop and deal with that idol.

Family constantly sick; trying organic. Don't @ me. Don't email me. It's working so far.

- In general we already eat healthy 80% of the time. But if you've ever truly taken inventory, it's sobering.

- When my wife does something she goes all in. So we spend all this time and money getting all the **undesirable stuff out**, and all the **new good stuff in**.
- **In essence, we couldn't move forward with our new stuff without first dealing with our old stuff.**
 - And that never would've happened without all the **disappointing sickness** in our house.
 - This is where disappointment can be a gift: because it surfaces our stuff/idols, and allows God to say, *"We can't move forward into the best of what I have for you, unless we stop and deal with the golden calves."*

Disobedience not dealt with can lead to idolatry. It can also lead to desperation. Look at vv2-4...

²So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

Side note: some think Aaron told them to do this believing it would deter them from participating because their jewelry was so precious to them. It's like when your **kid asks you for ice cream and you say something you think is so absurd they'll never actually do it** ("sure...if you go clean your room and put away all the laundry and mow the grass and facetime your grandma and be nice to your siblings and finish your homework." But then they actually do it and you're like, "Ahhh crap.") ³So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

Aaron—Moses's #2—the dude who had seen *firsthand* God do so many miraculous things lets **disappointment turn into fear** which

leads him to a **desperate act**. Just as disappointment opens the door to idolatry, it also opens the door to fear.

And did you see how quickly this happened? The mob approaches him in v1 and then what's his response in v2? ²So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

- He doesn't remind them **who God has been** to them or **what he's done** for them.
- He doesn't remind them of the **covenants and promises**.
- He doesn't **protest** or **argue** or use **priestly reasoning**.
- He doesn't **refute** or **rebuke**.
- No, he trades **promises** for **pragmatism**. He trades **covenants** for **compromise**.

He jumps straight to what he thought would **fix the problem** without even **engaging the process** (this isn't a marriage sermon but guys might wanna listen up...)

- **Math Class: SHOW YOUR WORK (HATED THIS IN HS)**
- **Spiritual math** can be equally as frustrating, because **God is not only concerned with the right answer, he's just as concerned with the process**.
- If you get the right answer this time but don't understand the process which got you there, you'll miss the point of the lesson: What if God is more concerned with **growing something in you** than he is with **giving something to you**?
 - What if God is more concerned with your **sanctification** (growing you to look more like Jesus) than he is meeting your **expectations**?

Maybe you've allowed disappointment to turn into fear, and that's causing you to trade some of the **promises of God** for supposed **pragmatic solutions**.

- **God, I've been working my hardest but the promotion still hasn't happened.** So you start cutting corners like other co-workers in order to make up for what is "rightfully yours"... and obviously you can't tithe right now cuz, well, I've got too many irons in the fire financially as it is.
- **God, I've asked you to take this desire away but you haven't.** So really it's not my fault if I'm acting out sexually...if God didn't want me to have these urges then he should take them away.

Church, I say this with as much love *and* truth as I can: God is more interested in growing our faith than fulfilling our expectations.

- Pastor Tony Evans says, "*One of the most **difficult** times to trust God is when he has disappointed you. Yet one of the most **important** times to trust God is when he has disappointed you.*"
- What if God wants to use your disappointment to grow your faith and dependence on *him*. **When we are weak, he is strong.**

When disappointed we can take the **road of disobedience**, or we can make another choice: we can take the **road of hope by reframing disappointments with God as divine appointments from God.**

2. Reframe Disappointment as Divine Appointments

As we've seen, disappointment means we've **lost hope** because an expectation wasn't fulfilled. But the way the follower of Jesus sees

disappointment should be fundamentally different from the world because **our God is a God of hope** (Rom 15:13).

For the Christian, disappointment and pain can have redemptive value. Look at how **Romans 5:2-5** puts it, "**Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame** (hope does not DISAPPOINT us), **because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**" (leave that slide up)

This is so counterintuitive to culture. Because the secular view of life is all about **comfort, survival, and pleasure**. So anything that's a threat to those things—pain or suffering—those things need to be **avoided at all costs**, cuz those things don't have any intrinsic value.

But what if we could reframe our suffering?:

- What if our sufferings produced in us **endurance**? And what if our endurance produced **character**? And what if that character building actually gave us **hope** because it tightens our grip on the sovereign God who controls it all?
- *What if we reframed disappointment to see it as an emotional signal in our body that our hope was set in the wrong object in the first place?*
- *What if we reframed disappointment to see it as a gentle invitation from the Spirit to re-center our hope on God and not just a desired outcome from him?*³

I think about my life and disappointments as it relates to my salvation:

³ JMC, Advent: Hope and Disappointment

- **My plan:** bball, take my time getting married, party, etc.
- **God's plan:** wreck my life and use the girl who would become my wife to lead me to Jesus and into ministry

Charles Spurgeon said he had lots of disappointments until he **changed the first letter of the word and chopped it in two**: Rather than **"DISAPPOINTMENT"** he changed it to **"HIS APPOINTMENTS"** **Disappointment** can become a way we deepen our faith and trust in God as we're reminded that nothing in our life happens apart from his sovereign hand.

We love this *idea*, right, (**Rom 8:28**, *God's always working for the good of those who love him and called according to his purpose!*) But we don't always love the *experience*. So how do we reconcile that?

- Well, either **what we longed for wasn't good**—at least in the exact way and at the exact time we longed for it. Or **God's not finished redeeming your disappointment for good!** Those are the only two options: either **my hope is displaced or he's not done**.

And in the meantime, we take our **disappointments** and reframe them in light of his sovereignty and rest in **his divine appointments**.

- We rest in knowing we have **God himself with us**. That **he is good**. That **every good and perfect gift comes from him**.
- That he is our **shepherd**. That **goodness** and **mercy** will follow me all the days of my life.
- That nothing—not even the most devastating disappointment—can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

- **No, disappointments can never take us from him...but they can often point us to him.**⁴ And it's in him and him alone we find "a hope that does not disappoint us."
- God's care for his children is like the sun: it's constant. Even though the **clouds obscure it at times, it doesn't mean the sun isn't there**.
- Every **difficulty**, every **circumstance**, every **situation**, every **disappointment** that comes our way, if we receive it correctly, are opportunities to grow deeper in Christ and to anchor our lives in the God who controls it all.
- When our deepest desire is not something from God, or favor from God, but just God himself, then we've crossed a threshold of faith.

As the people of God we've gotta reframe our disappointment to see them as divine appointments from a sovereign and loving God.

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If we continue reading in chapter 32 we see what's happening on the mountain b/t God and Moses: **And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves** ("your people" is hilarious to me = like when one of my girls are acting crazy I look at my wife and say, "your daughter is acting a fool"). . . **And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."**

Let's keep in mind that **God isn't the only one who has disappointed in this relationship**. After everything God has done for them it doesn't

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-would-god-allow-my-disappointment>

take *40 days* for them to **completely abandon their faith** and their God and **begin worshiping idols**.

- It's kinda crazy, y'all: We expect God to be reasonable with us, but **we don't even meet our own expectations that we have of God *with* God**.

(VAMP)

So God is ready to go off on Israel—just do a massive reset—but then, if we were to keep on reading the rest of chapter 32, we'd see how Moses chooses to intercede on behalf of this disappointed (and *disappointing*) people.

And this is maybe the most *unreasonable* thing that happens in the whole story: Even though Israel has not responded well to disappointment...even though they've chosen **disobedience** and **idols** and **pragmatism** over faith, Moses steps in and offers to make what the text calls **atonement**.

- Moses says to God, "God, remember your covenant to them...forgive them...don't give up on them...don't blot their name out of the book. Father, forgive them for they know now what they do." Moses said, "I'll be their atonement. Take me instead of them." **Sound familiar?**
- But God doesn't acquiesce. In fact, he sends a plague on all of the people who have sinned against him, and **this story leaves us wondering if there ever *would* be an atonement who could actually deal with this problem**.
- Centuries later, with the problem of disobedience and idolatry still plaguing mankind, **God decides in love to send a truer and better Moses: his name is Jesus Christ, and the Bible says he doesn't just intercede for Israel, but for the entire world.**

- On the cross, the writer of Hebrews says, he made atonement for us once and for all—he **didn't just offer to die for us, like Moses; he actually died instead of us, in our place**. And our names are engraved on his hands, never to be removed.
- Friends, don't you see? In the gospel, God says, "I'll take *your* sin for *my* holiness...*your* transgressions for *my* righteousness. I'll take *your* bad behavior and when you fail me *I'll* cover you with grace." God says, "*I'll put my Spirit inside of you and I will never leave you or forsake you. You may not always feel me, but I'm always there.*"

We have to be willing to work through our disappointment by **releasing how we think God *should* work, and embrace how he *is* working**. When you're **disappointed**, remember his **demonstration**: **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

CONCLUSION

David Brainerd understood this. In fact, about 18 months after he wrote how **weary his heart was** and how he **longed for death**, he was able to see about 150 native Americans come to faith in Christ. Not much by today's EV standards, but a great start. Unfortunately, David Brainerd died a year later at the age of 29, and **his work seemed to stop completely**. Again, disappointment, right?

But that's not the end of the story. See, someone went on to publish Brainerd's journal he kept during those times of **disappointment** and **discouragement**. Those journals ended up in the hands of a guy named **William Carey**. William Carey is largely considered today as the **father of modern missions** because he ignited a missionary

movement that continues to this day where literally **millions and millions of people have come to faith in Christ.**

When someone asked William Carey what inspired him to devote his life to missions, he pointed to **the journals of David Brainerd.**

- Brainerd's life is a vivid, powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use weak, sick, discouraged, beat-down, lonely, disappointed, struggling saints who cry to him day and night to accomplish amazing things for his glory.⁵

Your **disappointment** is not your **destination**. Your story isn't over and the last word hasn't been spoken over your life. Faith always calls us forward. Keep trusting in the one who keeps you trusting.

Have you trusted in him? Are you in a season of disappointment? Stand...

PRAY

Rom 12:2, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

⁵ The Progress of World-Wide Missions