today's christian woman

LOVE GOD. LIVE FEARLESSLY.

Angry at God

Holding on to Faith When Life Hurts

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Introduction

Shaking Our Fists

By Kelli B. Trujillo

I trusted you!

You've broken my heart!

You're not who I thought you were!

How could you do this to me?!

These could be lines ripped from a soap opera.

They could be the words flying in the kitchen as a strife-filled marriage erupts into conflict.

Or they could be your prayers. Not the, "Dear Jesus" bed-time kind—but the honest thoughts, whispered seethingly in your mind as you grapple with feelings of confusion, disappointment, and anger at God.

When tragedy strikes unexpectedly, anger is a natural reaction. Our pain, our sense of helplessness, our deep despair can easily transform into rage and resentment toward God.

Events and circumstances far short of tragedy can also throw us into an angry tailspin as little disappointments and average frustrations build up into a big pile of bitterness in our hearts.

Is anger at God simply human and natural? Or is it a sin? And when we feel angry, what are we to do with these feelings? Are we to just hide them under a nice smile as our faith becomes stagnant and weak?

In this download, our aim is to deal frankly and directly with the reality of an experience many of us have shared; we may not be proud of it, but there are times when we're simply furious at God. We feel let down. We question his goodness. We want to shake our fists at heaven rather than lift our hands in praise. In the following pages, you'll read the stories of five women who've been there—women who've battled through the emotional scars of sexual abuse, rape, unanswered prayers, unemployment, the loss of a child, divorce, and life's big buffet of unfairness and injustice. Their stories are real and they may touch a nerve as you read; these women are living through tough stuff! But their testimonies of how they've wrestled with God through their pain and frustration will speak powerfully to you as you aim to deal with anger and hurt in your own spiritual life.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo
Managing Editor, Today's Christian Woman downloads,
Christianity Today International

Leader's Guide

How to use "Angry at God" for a group study

"Angry at God" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**

Abused and Angry

How Papa-God showed me he's different than my dad

By Karen Rabbitt

My father took things from me. After filling a supper plate for myself, sometimes my father would take it. Just as I was salivating at the smell of fried chicken or bean soup, he'd require me to give it up. And he stole my innocence when I was four, when he took me out to the half-picked cornfield in the big Nash and molested me.

I grew up on an Illinois farm where I learned to can corn, pluck chickens, and cut out weeds in the soybeans. However I also learned to trust no one, stuff my feelings, and tuck the family secret of my father's molestation into a dark corner of my mind.

At 20, just before I got married, Jesus took my hand. I felt safe with him, but I was afraid of his Father. He seemed a little too much like my father—distant, angry, powerful. I rejoiced in Jesus' sacrifice for me, but I didn't let him into my secrets. Until I had a baby, three years later, the childhood abuse stayed hidden.

In those early years of marriage, nothing interested me. I didn't like myself much, and sometimes I couldn't get out of bed in the morning. I cooked meals and washed clothing, but dishes piled up in the sink and dust accumulated in the living room.

Twice in the two years after childbirth, I experienced not just depression, but much more serious mental illness, even losing touch briefly with ordinary reality. With much prayer and support from God's people, I recovered. But that experience and the stress of those years opened an opportunity for Father-God to give me a much deeper healing. God brought my father's betrayal into the light, and whispered to my soul, "Karen, you have deeply rooted weeds in your heart. Let me pull them."

He began to pull the easier weeds first. But one day he exposed a deep, deep root: the distrust I felt toward him as my "Father."

You're not like my dad—but it feels like it!

I was 35 and had been suffering with terrible back pain for a while. Finally, I asked for prayer, and our church prayer team prayed for my back problems which included sciatic

nerve pain down my right leg. We all praised God when the pain disappeared. I was able to return to work and my other activities.

But three weeks later, the pain returned. And I was angry. I drove 40 miles to a quiet forest preserve to wrestle with God.

I trudged to the edge of a creek and uncomfortably sat.

"God, what is going on? Why did you heal my back for only three weeks?"

Crying, I wiped my nose on my sleeve. The cold wind stung my cheeks. In the journal I'd brought, I wrote: "You have all the power here. Why did you take the healing away? Why do it at all if you meant to take it away?"

I closed the notebook and spoke aloud: "God, you are not like my father." I stared at the gray trees across the creek. "But it sure feels like you are. Show me! I want to give up this anger. It looks like you use power whimsically! You create pain, and you heal pain. I don't understand."

I opened the book again and wrote: "Capricious. That's how it feels. But that's my father, not you. Transference. I still expect you to act like my father." My hands felt numb. I climbed in the car to get out of the wind. After rubbing my hands to warm them, I continued to write: "Intense hostility toward Dad for years and years is part of my character." I put down the notebook and leaned against the seat back.

Yes. I've been angry with him forever. In fact, I hate him, I thought. I leaned my forehead against the steering wheel. I'd never acknowledged hatred before. I'd dreamed it. But I'd never said it. *And God has the same kind of power my father had. And like my father—he'll hurt me. It's only a matter of time. Yes, that's what it feels like. But that cannot be right.*

Distrust as a way of life

God wasn't the only one I distrusted. I'd been aware of my pervasive distrust of people since March 1981. Two days after starting a university clerical job, gallbladder pain seized me and didn't let go. I needed immediate surgery. *Could I use the health insurance so soon? Would I lose the job because I needed four weeks off?* The benefits official said, "Yes, insurance will cover it." My boss said, "You just take care of yourself. The job is yours." But I struggled to trust their answers.

The night before surgery, praying in the hospital bed, I reflected on the struggle. *Why couldn't I believe them?* Just then, an image of the cornfield abuse came to me: the front seat of the Nash—my father's violation. That objectification, like I was a toy to play with. I had trusted him without reservation before that day. But he abused that trust. At age four, without conscious thought, I took a vow. I will never trust anyone again. Not my father. Not other people. Not God.

Not until that night, when I stopped to think and pray, did I realize the vow I'd taken. When the abuse memory flitted through my mind, I made the connection. If I couldn't trust my father, I couldn't trust anyone. *Did the benefits official know for sure? Would my boss fire me, after all?*

Of course, they both kept their word and I continued to learn trust.

My head told me I could trust God, but still I wasn't sure. When I wrestled with God about my back pain, I knew what the Bible said about God's trustworthiness. After 15 years of walking with God, I'd heard hours of teaching on God's character. I knew Jesus' self-revelation in Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." I knew Colossians 1:19: "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ" (NLT). In my head, if not my heart, I knew that God loved me as part of the world he loved and sent his Son to. I'd even prayed for a revelation of God the Father's love—a powerful experience at the time he revealed himself—but I still fought with him about what kind of God he was. The roots of my unbelief went deep.

As I sat by the creek that day, God illuminated one of the darkest lies in my heart. I expected God to display the worst parts of my father's character—his capriciousness—his volatile use of power for his own pleasure. I thought God had just toyed with me—he'd healed my back and then arbitrarily taken it away.

To get to that lie, I opened my angry heart to God. I became honest with him, and finally allowed him to show me the truth of who he is. Paying attention to my thoughts and feelings helped me understand how I expected my Father-God to hurt me like my father. Recognizing the source of my unbelief set me free to see the real, biblical *Abba*, Papa.

Papa-God has revealed his fullness in Jesus. Like Jesus was gentle with the children, Papa is gentle with us. Like Jesus warned the Pharisees that they were whitewashed tombs, Papa exposes the lies and unbelief in our hearts. Papa's purpose is to create a family for himself. At the cross, Jesus suffered greatly to accomplish that purpose. No one knows what it cost Papa to restrain himself while his dear son died such a cruel death.

When I confessed my unbelief, the pain left again. Sciatic pain has not bothered me since. I have continued to let Papa-God pull my weeds and grow his seeds. I now live among his lilies and believe that God cares about what is going on with me.

Karen Rabbitt based this article on her memoir, **Trading Fathers: Forgiving Dad, Embracing God** *(Winepress). She blogs at* **www.karenrabbitt.typepad.com**. *This article, originally titled "Redefining God as Father" was published on* **TodaysChristianWoman.com** *in 2010.*

Reflect

- *Abuse and serious tragedy can stir up feelings of anger and distrust toward God—so can "smaller" things like marital conflict, unfair circumstances, and unanswered prayers. Privately journal your answer to this question: What events in your life have caused you to feel angry at God?*

- *Emotional and spiritual pain can show up in our lives in many forms. Karen's hurt manifested itself in depression, hatred, and distrust. How have you been affected by hurt or anger? What impact has it had on your relationships with others, your demeanor, or your sense of self?*

- *Like Karen experienced, often our feelings of anger toward another person can infiltrate and corrupt the way we view God and relate to him. Can you relate to Karen's feelings of distrust and distance toward God? Explain.*

- *Karen explains a key step in her healing process: "I opened my angry heart to God. I became honest with him." Scripture is full of examples of honest expression of negative emotions to God. Select and read aloud at least three of the following psalms:* **Psalm 6, 10, 13, 59, 69, 70, 88, 102, 109, 142,** *and* **143.** *What feelings did you see expressed? Which phrases or emotions can you most relate to?*

- *Are you as brutally honest with God about your feelings as these psalmists? Why or why not?*

Mary Beth Chapman vs. God

Mary Beth Chapman is brutally honest about her lifelong feud with the Creator, especially after losing their daughter to an accident in 2008.

Interviewed by Mark Moring

In her book **Choosing to SEE: A Journey of Struggle and Hope** (Revell), Mary Beth Chapman relives in heart-shattering detail the death of her 5-year-old daughter, Maria. Chapman, the wife of Christian music star **Steven Curtis Chapman**, describes that day in May as she sat at the dining room table, working on wedding plans for their oldest child, Emily. She goes on to recount the horrible events of that afternoon: son Will pulling into the driveway, accidentally running over his little sister, the chaos, the panic, the blood, the 911 call, the emergency personnel, the hospital, the brutal news that Maria had passed away, the screams of "No! No! No!" giving way to Mary Beth telling her husband, "We have to let her go, sweetie. It's time to let her go."

Mary Beth, married to Steven for 26 years, writes not only about Maria's death and the family's subsequent grieving, but is also candid about her own continuing feud with the Creator—a difficult childhood and teen years, adulthood battles with depression, and more. Mark Moring, an editor for Christianity Today, caught up with Mary Beth to talk about the book, the grieving process, and what she calls "a lifelong wrestling match with God."

Is this a book that you felt you had to write as part of the grieving process?

Probably yes. After we lost our daughter, I began blogging, and it became one of those places where I could write like a stream of consciousness, the grief flowing out of me. People started to respond to that, and publishers asked us to consider a book.

At first the working title was *Mary Beth vs. God*, about my wresting match with God, and really with all of life—the theme of what do you do when things go wrong. This isn't just the story of losing Maria. It's also the story of the redemptive struggle that we all walk through when God doesn't seem to be who we thought he was, or when things don't work out the way we thought they would.

You write openly about your struggles—with depression, in your marriage, and so on.

Steven and I have always been on what we call a preventive maintenance program. When we got married, we found out pretty quickly we were quite different. Sometimes it's holy headlock, not holy wedlock. And I write about my depression.

When I finished the book, it was like a release. I felt God saying, *That's all I needed you to do. You wrote it; it's in black and white now. I took you on a journey that wasn't easy, but I revealed things about my character to you. Now you can just let it go.* So it was a really good process for me—really hard, but really good.

You don't hold anything back in this book.

I've never tried to hide these things or keep them private. When I talk, it's like, *there she goes!* I'm from the Midwest, and Midwesterners tend to just put it out there. Not for any kind of shock factor, but I've really wrestled with God. And when we lost our daughter, I had some anger to deal with. I was shaking my fist at God: *Okay, you created me. You created the anger. I'm tenacious. I'm competitive. And I'm really mad, and you're going to have to answer some tough questions and bring me back to this place of knowing that you are a good God when bad things happen.* But, man, it was a really difficult journey. And still is.

I never thought in a million years that I'd write a book, let alone speak and go **on tour** with my husband. I kind of feel like **Esther**: "for such a time as this." It's a limited engagement. But I realize that some of the interviews I've done have connected with women when I talked honestly—like when I talked about my depression with Today's Christian Woman. I've always wanted to be open, vulnerable, and as honest as I can be. In the Christian music culture, it's easy for the book cover and album cover to look great and for people to think, *Man, they have it all together.* Steven and I long to be authentic, because we *don't* have it all together. But we know who does have it all together, and that's the

ultimate goal: redemptively struggling out the battles that come our way—whether that's our marriage or losing our child or whatever we are going through.

Given your wrestling with God, is Jacob your favorite biblical character?

I think so. I always feel like, *I can fix this*. Or, *I can build it stronger, better, faster*. Much of my life, I've thought that God needed help from me—like I needed to be the fourth member of the Trinity to tell him what was best for me. I think it took a lot of breaking to cause me to rely more on him. So I probably relate a little more with David and Paul. Like David, the Psalms have become so alive to us. One day David is praising God, the next he says, "How long do I have to cry on my pillow, God? This is miserable. Please come quickly." That's how we felt after losing Maria. It's like, "How long, O Lord? I don't think we can take another day."

And then Paul had his thorn in the flesh. I often talk to women about my depression and my ongoing battle of, *Why can't God just take this away?* But Paul's thorn kept him close to Christ. I feel that way with the depression. It continues to drive me back to Christ.

I identify with a lot of the characters of the Bible these days. Job, that's another! God has taken us on a really hard journey with losing our daughter, but even before that, we were never a family that had it all together. The Chapman bunch, we love hard and we fight hard, and we cling as tightly as we can to Jesus, and we want to finish the race well. And we know the Enemy has come to steal, kill, and destroy, but what he intended for evil, God intends for good.

Tell the story of the book cover, which has the word* SEE *in handwritten letters, and a flower that dots the* i *in Choosing.
After the accident, we avoided the house for several days. We were begging God to show us himself in this, because this was clearly the darkest place he had taken us, and we were drowning. We were like, *God, please, let us see. Let us see Maria. Let us have a dream. Let us see something so we know that you're here.*

The day after the accident, some dear friends came with us to the house to hold us up, to walk through, to go into Maria's room and get some things for the memorial service. Steven walked into our dining room, where our two little ones—Stevie Joy and Maria—have art tables. Maria loved to draw flowers. Her signature flower always had an orange center and six petals, and all the petals were usually different colors. On Maria's table, Steven saw a piece of paper with an unfinished flower she had drawn—only one petal was colored in, and it was blue, her favorite color. On the other side, she had drawn a picture of a little orange butterfly and written the word *see* in capital letters. We had never seen her write that word before. When Steven saw that, he was like, *Really? Are you kidding me? This is unbelievable.* We felt like it was God and Maria at the same time going, *See, Dad? It's everything you told me it would be. I'm okay. I'm here. I left this for you. It's the very word that you were asking for.*

A week or so later, I told Steven, "She always drew six-petal flowers. It's interesting that we have six children but there's only one petal colored in. It's almost like Maria was saying, *My life is complete. I'm home now. I'm with Jesus. And some*

day you're coming, too, Mom and Dad. Just hang on. I'm going to see you again." And so that flower, the word *see*, the little butterfly—all of it became significant to us.

Psalm 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." That's hard to say, even two years later. I would rather be holding Maria on my lap and not doing this interview. But we have seen where the Lord has been good, even though things seem really bad. We have seen God's goodness, even at the expense of me not being able to cuddle my little girl this side of heaven.

Your work with* Show Hope *and especially opening* Maria's Big House of Hope *(a facility for Chinese orphans with special needs) last year—how has that helped? I would think diving into work like that would be wonderful in some ways, but also a constant reminder.

It *is* a constant reminder of Maria because she was a special-needs orphan. [Maria was born with a heart defect that eventually healed on its own.] At first we were building a Shaohannah's Hope healing home [in China], but after losing Maria, out of the outcry of people praying for us and wanting to help, we established Maria's Miracle Fund. Out of that fund, we were able to complete the building, and last summer—a year after her accident—we traveled to China and dedicated this special-care facility in her name. We renamed it Maria's Big House of Hope, where we care for about 150 orphans. Since then, we have been able to open two other units.

Yes, it's a constant reminder of who is not with us. But it is also a constant reminder of who *is* with us. When we went to dedicate the building, I was not in a great place [emotionally].

I was sitting in one of the rooms by myself. I was sad. I was angry. I just wanted Maria. I begged God, "Please show me something. Can I just see her for a minute? Can you just show me that she's happy? I know she is. But can I just see it?" And as I sat there sobbing, I began hearing the babies of Maria's Big House, and some of the older kids chatting in Chinese, and the Chinese nannies and all the commotion with the laundry and the cooking and all that was going on. I felt like God whispered, "You know you're not going to see her physically until you're with her again in heaven. But this is how you're going to see her. And you're going to see her in the work that's being done here in her name."

I didn't like that answer. I was like, "Really? Oh man. Can't you show me a picture? I just want to see her on a swing or something." But you know what? God met me there. I went, "Okay, this is going to be hard, and I don't like hard, but we're going to take this story and we're going to try to steward this as well as we can. We're going to tell as many people about Maria and her story as we can, and about Jesus taking care of us when things are really, really bad."

Mark Moring is Editor of CT Movies. Mary Beth Chapman is president of Show Hope, a nonprofit organization that cares for orphans worldwide by providing financial assistance to families wishing to adopt. This article was published online at **ChristianityToday.com** *in September 2010.*

Reflect

- *What stands out to you most from Mary Beth Chapman's painful and compelling story? Why?*

- *For Mary Beth, writing became an important avenue of working through her feelings of anger and confusion. What activities or forms of expression are most helpful for you when you struggle through difficult emotions?*

- *Mary Beth calls her period of working through her family's tragedy a "redemptive struggle," emphasizing that we all go through times "when God doesn't seem to be who we thought he was, or when things don't work out the way we thought they would." How can good come out of this type of struggle? If you can, share from your own experience.*

- *Read* **Psalm 34:8**. *What do you think it means to affirm this truth when life seems* anything *but good? Is it possible to be honest about our experience and simultaneously affirm this truth? Why or why not?*

- *Read Paul's description of suffering in* **2 Corinthians 1:1–10**. *How can a person get to the point at which they respond to hurt in* this *way rather than in feelings of anger and bitterness?*

I Was Raped

Could God heal my deep emotional scars?

By Diane Hudson-Burns

In my mind's eye it's as clear as if it happened yesterday . . . only in slow motion.

On the morning of that sunny California day, life seemed wonderful and bright. I was one month away from turning 21, a junior in college with a great summer job at Disneyland, and I was preparing to go away the next day with friends on a four-day waterskiing trip. But in 10 minutes of pure terror, all my hope and enthusiasm for life shattered.

I was home alone that afternoon. My parents were at work and I was doing laundry before leaving for my waitressing shift at 4:00pm. I spent most of the afternoon going back and forth between the laundry room in our garage and the family room where I was folding clothes. I'd just sat down to watch a TV show when the door from the garage burst open. It happened so fast, all I saw was the man's white pants and large black shoes. He had a cloth over his head, which he immediately flung over mine. I never saw his face. I was sitting a mere five feet from the door he entered, so I didn't have time to respond. He gripped my neck with his thick, firm hands, nearly choking the breath from me. I must have screamed loudly, because he kept yelling, "Shut up!" I remember his voice to this day. The neighbors heard me scream but didn't respond. With great force, he knocked me onto the floor and threatened to kill me with his knife.

I pleaded for my life, offering him money, my brand new Minolta camera, the stereo. I didn't care what he wanted, I just wanted him to leave me alone. I kept begging, "Please don't hurt me." He poked my back and shoulders with the knife and hit my upper body. But his plan wasn't to steal; his plan was to rape.

Even in this moment of sheer terror, I silently prayed, *Lord, let me live. Dear God, I want to live*. When he was finished with me, he walked me around the house, his hands still gripping my throat, the blindfold over my face, the knife to my side. Evidently he was looking for a place to stash me. (The police later said I was fortunate—usually when a perpetrator moves a victim from one room to another, his plan is murder.) He finally stuffed me in a kitchen cabinet.

As quietly as possible, I took the cloth off my head and listened. When I felt fairly certain he was gone, I carefully opened the cupboard. I feared his return, or even worse, that he might still be in the house. Crying helplessly, I groped at the telephone and dialed my dad's office number, almost on instinct. His secretary answered the phone, and I had to compose myself enough to ask to speak to my father. When I heard his voice, I came unglued, and he had to ask who was calling. I took a deep breath and said, "Somebody broke into the house and raped me." He told me to call the police and said he'd be right home.

I dialed 911 and told the woman who answered the phone that someone had broken into my house and raped me. She kept telling me to calm down. "Everything will be okay," she said. After she told me the police had been dispatched, she asked if I needed an ambulance. I looked at my body to see if I was bleeding. I couldn't see the places where the rapist's knife had nicked my back, and had no idea my arms, neck, and shoulders would be black and blue by the next day. I appeared unhurt, so I replied that I didn't need an ambulance.

The next hour moved quickly. The police and my parents arrived within a few minutes of each other. The officers questioned me, talked to the neighbors, and inspected the locks on the house, garage, and gate. They concluded that the rapist parked around the corner, jumped the neighbor's fence and our fence, and entered through our garage's side door. The door between the garage and the family room was unlocked because I was doing laundry. Obviously the attacker had watched the house long enough to know there was only one female home that afternoon. During the next year, I

learned seven other women had been attacked before me within a 30-mile radius. I heard the ninth victim died. To my knowledge, our attacker never was caught.

The police officer asked if our family ever considered owning a dog, explaining that's the best deterrent to a home invasion. My heart sank because our beloved Shepherd mix had died just three weeks earlier. We had a new dog by the end of the weekend, a Doberman/Shepherd mix I named Angel.

The police officers then escorted my mom and me to the county rape crisis center. The rape clinic personnel knew I was coming and immediately led me to a private room where I was given a complete physical exam, including a pap smear to collect for evidence and a blood test for sexually transmitted diseases. They told me I was in shock, which explained my uncontrollable shakes and shivers. They asked me more questions and gave me literature on rape, emphasizing it wasn't my fault. I also received antibiotics to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and was asked to come back in 30 days for a pregnancy test and follow-up blood tests for diseases. Thankfully none of the tests came back positive.

When I finally returned home, I took a hot shower to wash off the filth I felt was consuming me. I had my mother stand in the door because I was so frightened to be alone, even while showering. I feared being in the house by myself for many months.

That first night was quite fretful. I was too scared to turn off my bedroom light. I slept with my door open and my parents kept their door open across the hall, where my mom had

stashed a large kitchen knife under the head of her bed. I couldn't sleep. I kept reminding myself I was grateful to be alive, but I wondered how God could allow such awful things to happen to people. I wondered how I would move forward with my life. A few times I dozed off and dreamed someone was in the house, and I jolted out of bed. I wondered if I would ever sleep soundly again.

I couldn't fathom sitting around the house for the next four days crying or feeling sorry for myself, so I went on my waterskiing trip. Being several hundred miles away from home offered a sense of security, but when I returned home I completely panicked as I approached the house. Arrangements were made for me to stay with family friends across town for a few weeks. I also saw a counselor, a regular procedure for victims treated at the rape crisis center.

While I was on my trip, my parents went door to door and told dozens of neighbors about what had happened. They also announced it in church. They were trying to alert the community that crime was happening in their upper-middle class neighborhood. So by the time I returned, everybody knew what had happened. I felt so embarrassed and ashamed.

I continued with my university studies and graduated a year and a half later, but I resigned my post on the editorial staff of the college newspaper. I was too fearful to make the mile walk to my car in the dark each evening. I didn't even want the security personnel to escort me, since I was afraid of most everyone I didn't know personally.

My pastor was great. He would meet me at my parents' house after school (I was staying across town), walk into the house

with me to get my new dog, and we'd take her to the park and talk. I attended church regularly, but I still was pursuing a solid relationship with God. My spiritual seeking continued until I accepted Jesus as my Savior 10 years later. I frequently questioned, "Why, God?" But I also remember thanking him frequently for letting me live. I truly thought I was going to die that day, so I was grateful simply to still be alive.

During the next two years, I suffered miserably. I experienced the typical symptoms of grief and depression, and I had severe nightmares and insomnia. I didn't feel like eating and got so skinny, people accused me of being anorexic. I trembled and shook, was constantly in tears, and was desperately fearful to be alone. Former boyfriends and guy friends would come to visit and "baby sit" me whenever my parents were out of the house. I still dated some, but I felt tainted and sure no one could ever love me.

In my years of grief, I was consoled by the story of Job in the Bible. His suffering and agony seemed similar to mine. Job struggled through the complete destruction of his home, his land, and the death of his children. Finally his body was so diseased and disfigured, he was unrecognizable by his friends. Yet in his suffering, Job didn't curse God. Job remained steadfast, patient, and faithful to his Redeemer. Job became to me a model of faith, courage, and strength during my time of suffering. Through his story, I learned a few basic principles for overcoming grief: talk about it; allow plenty of time for healing (it took me more than 14 years to speak openly about my trauma), be honest with God and friends about how you feel, and maintain faith in God. In my years of searching for answers and hope, my meager faith grew. Finally, 10 years

after the attack, I accepted Jesus as my Savior and embarked on a relationship with him that finally brought me the peace I so desperately needed.

From Job's story, I also learned I could be honest with God. Job talked about his affliction, describing how hopeless he felt and how confused he was that this affliction had befallen him. I questioned God, "What did I do to deserve this?" I have since recognized we all live in a world raging with sin, and I'm not immune to its affects. Finally, Job showed me that in deep hopelessness and doom, there is hope in God. I never thought I would survive the physical and emotional scars of that terrible day, but God had a plan for my life: He allowed me to live.

A couple years ago I began to share my story one-on-one with a few women. Eventually I worked up the nerve to share about my attack in a Bible study group of seven women. It was a big step to speak openly about it. To my amazement, two women called me to share their hidden stories of being sexually abused as children. I realized that if sharing my story could help others heal, then maybe revealing this part of my life could be a good thing. In the past several years, I've shared my story with hundreds of women at Bible studies, church meetings, and conferences. Women from all backgrounds who have never shared their story before have told me about the rape or sexual abuse they've suffered. I'm convinced that when a sufferer can speak about her pain and tell her story, the healing process can begin. God has granted me peace over what happened, and he's opened the door for me to share my story.

Today, one of the biggest supporters of my speaking ministry is my husband, Bill. When he asked me to marry him, he told me he accepted and loved me just as I was, and he assured me we would overcome the obstacles of my past together. Hearing that was another step forward in my healing process.

We now have three children, and I own my own business, which requires me to interview male and female clients in my office. I even stay home alone (with my dog). To this day I'm cautious of strangers, especially those near my home, and I'm concerned about my children's safety. Though we still lock our doors and keep a watchful eye, I now know ultimately my family and I are in God's hands.

Diane Hudson-Burns, a business owner and speaker, lives in Maryland with her husband, two children, and watch dog, Cleopatra. This article was first published in the July/August 2002 issue of Today's Christian Woman.

Reflect

- *Along with Diane's physical and emotional wounds were spiritual ones: "I was grateful to be alive, but I wondered how God could allow such awful things to happen to people," she writes. When have you wondered the same thing? What personal experiences, events in friends' or family members' lives, or stories on the news have caused you to question God in this way?*

- *Diane found a strange comfort in the Job's story in Scripture.* **Read Job 1:1–2:13***; as you do, step inside Job's shoes and imagine what his experience would have been like. What questions or feelings does this passage stir up in you? Why?*

- *Many Christians sum up Job's story as saying "he suffered terribly but didn't get angry at God" or "he didn't blame God" or "he didn't sin" (based on Job 2:10). But that summary overlooks how honestly Job expressed his real, human emotions. After listening to Job's words, one of Job's friends even accused Job: "Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth?" (***Job 15:12–13***)! Read some of Job's expressions of emotion to God:* **Job 3:1–13; 6:1–9;** *and* **10:1, 18–22**. *How would you describe Job's feelings? Why?*

- *Job took his honest expression of anger and hurt too far when he began to demand an answer from God for why all this tragedy happened to him; God responded by stunningly putting Job in his place. (If you'd like, read* **Job 38:1–42:6**.*) When can healthy expression to God of negative feelings become sin? Where would you draw the line?*

- *Diane highlights four steps for dealing with anger and grief:*

    - *Talk with others*
    - *Allow time to heal*
    - *Express your feelings honestly (to God and friends)*
    - *Strive to maintain faith in God.*

In your own experiences of hurt, frustration, or anger, which of these steps has been the hardest for you? Why?

Years of Confusion

How to learn to trust God in the midst of uncertainty

By Gina Rago

The ground starts to shake; parts of the earth are shifting. An earthquake begins to separate the land around you. Bits of the earth are crumbling into the depths. To the left, to the right, behind you, and in front of you is sinking ground. Chaos and destruction are destroying everything around you . . . but the land directly below your feet remains unshaken.

There was a point in my life where I felt like I was the person on that small piece of land watching everything fall apart around me. Several year ago, my time was spent between hospitals as I watched two people very close to me battle life-threatening diseases.

I watched my aunt struggle with the fiercest and fastest form of lung cancer I've ever seen. Within six weeks, I saw a life so full of love and joy reduced to painful chemo treatments and breathing tubes. I sat helpless until the last day when she couldn't fight any more and lost her battle to cancer.

A few weeks later I found myself back in the hospital trying to muster up strength for a friend who was undergoing multiple brain surgeries. After six attempts, he was finally released from the hospital.

Around this same time, I struggled to find a job. Fresh out of college, I thought I had a safety net: a diploma from a private university. That turned out to be just a piece of paper with a lot student loans attached to it. Months turned into years as I had plenty of interviews but no job offers.

I did what every other degree-holding, job-seeking post graduate would do: I took a job at Starbucks. Over-caffeinated I was; happy I was not. I was an eager young person ready and willing to make my mark in the world and definitely ready for a life of independence.

Frustration, depression, and anger were slowly creeping into my soul. To say I was confused about my life would be an understatement. I began to doubt the very character of God and his promises.

But God, I prayed, *I'm doing everything in my life to glorify and serve you—Bible studies, prayer meetings, helping out with the children's ministry, singing on the worship team. How could I be doing everything right and still have no blessings, no provisions?*

Where are you, Lord? I wondered, frustrated. My wait continued, with silence from God.

During one of my darkest days, a friend gave me some encouragement that changed my whole outlook and understanding. She told me to remember that no matter what, we must continue to follow our great Shepherd. We must trust and believe that he hasn't turned his back on us. But sometimes all we can see is his back, because we're following him so closely.

And the land directly below your feet remains unshaken . . .

This is the imagery I think of when I read Hebrews 12:26–28, when God says he will shake up the heavens and earth so that what cannot be shaken will remain. Slowly, I came to realize that even when everything around me was swirling out of control, when I chose to trust him, I was on solid ground. Everything may have been shaken, but what would remain was a deeply rooted faith in Christ Jesus and his sovereignty.

While I still don't understand why I had to struggle through that period of waiting, I've realized ultimately it doesn't matter because God is in control.

I couldn't control those circumstances, but I could focus on the things I *could* control. I could control my faith. So instead of doubting, I began to offer God a sacrifice of praise, just as David commanded in Psalm 27:6: "At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I *will* sing and make music to the LORD" (emphasis added).

When we struggle, we can praise God—even if there's nothing inside of us that wants to. Praise will be our biggest weapon. Keeping our eyes focused on what's holy, and seeking to praise him because he's good will ensure that we will collide with our destiny.

Gina Rago is a marketer for Christianity Today International. This article was first published on **Today's Christian Woman's blog** *in August, 2010.*

Reflect

- *Gina didn't go through a heart-wrenching tragedy like some of the other writers in this download; her pain came from more common, mundane frustrations. Yet it still had a profoundly negative affect on her relationship with God. What "everyday" frustrations or disappointments in your life* right now *threaten to stir up feelings of anger or distrust toward God?*

- *During her long period of waiting, Gina writes that "Frustration, depression, and anger were slowly creeping into my soul. . . . I began to doubt the very character of God and his promises." When you feel angry or discouraged, which of God's character traits do you most often doubt? What promises do you tend to disbelieve?*

- *Gina writes of her choice to, in essence,* make *herself worship God even when she didn't feel like it. Have you ever forced yourself to pray or worship or trust even though all your feelings pulled you in a different direction? Describe your experience.*

- *Reflect on* **Psalm 46:1–3**. *When have you experienced the truth expressed in this passage?*

Yife's Not Fair!

Transform difficult lessons into powerful, positive change.

By Sandra Ring

My son, Jordan, loves to yell, "It's not fair!" in response to every minor infraction. If his remote control car stalls, "It's not fair!" If I tell him he can't eat a bowl of marshmallows for breakfast, "It's not fair!" Even when his favorite 30-minute cartoon ends right on time, "It's not fair!"

Not long ago, I felt bombarded by unfair circumstances. I strained to recall a fair and peaceful time in my life. The family I'd dreamt of and strived for was swallowed by tragedy.

I lost a baby through miscarriage and only 11 months later my precious daughter, Angelica, was stillborn. I was traumatized by Angelica's birth-death. I lived in a constant state of torment, a concoction of grief and postpartum depression. I was haunted by her delicate and beautiful features.

My world continued to crumble when after seven years I lost the battle to hold together my fragile marriage. When I held the framed wedding photo that had hung on our living room wall for all those years, I stared into the face of a woman I didn't know, the face of youthful naiveté. I had been a 22-year-old bride, confident that I could handle all of life's challenges. I married at a time when I was rebellious and un-phased by the fact that my husband didn't share my faith. It was a turbulent union from the onset; my husband was unfaithful, abusive, and struggled with addiction. I reached out to God but kept him at a distance to avoid his truth penetrating my denial. I was desperate to remain a family, but in the rawness of my grief there was no more room for pretending—my home wasn't a safe place. My marriage collapsed and I watched the life I'd built with thoughtful precision topple like a thousand dominoes.

I would stare out my large living room window and imagine plunging myself through it. I was angry, frustrated with God, and consumed with pain and grief.

A child's tantrum

As tantrums stirred within my soul, Jordan was on an "It's not fair" rampage. Although I knew his outbursts were only the uninhibited rantings of a four-year-old, they struck a raw nerve. One afternoon during this fragile period, the unfair worlds of Jordan and Mommy collided.

At the mailbox I fumbled impatiently for my mail key, frustrated by the small nuisance. The only item in my mailbox was a telephone bill I couldn't afford to pay. I rounded the corner and noticed my garbage cans empty and overturned, one halfway to the middle of the street. For a fleeting moment I was annoyed that my husband hadn't retrieved them sooner. When reality struck, that I was the sole owner of the wayward garbage cans, I wanted to scream, "It's not fair!" The garbage cans were a little thing, but piled on top of everything else it was more than I could bear.

I felt suffocated by the family dwellings that surrounded me. I was one tiny spec of imperfection amongst rows of manicured yards, swing sets, minivans—suburban perfection.

I hurried inside my house before someone noticed my delicate state. Just as I closed the front door behind me I heard Jordan scream from his bedroom, "It's not fair!"

"Come here!" I yelled to him. He met me at the front door startled by my angry tone. "I don't ever want to hear you say that again, do you understand?" His hazel eyes grew big. "I don't want to hear you say it anymore because do you know what? Life *isn't* fair, Jordan. *Nothing* in life is fair!"

Jordan's eyes pierced me with their radiating innocence. "Yife's not fair?" he whispered.

"No, it isn't," I said harshly. "So remember that."

Immediately I felt embarrassed that I was teaching a lesson in hard knocks to a four-year-old. We walked away silent and in separate directions.

For the rest of the day any disappointment that would have previously been combated with, "It's not fair," was instead met with a defeated, "Yife's not fair."

The symptoms of an injured soul

I'd just made everything worse. The guilt of what I'd done settled over me. My bout with self-pity forced me to take a hard look at how my defeated attitude was self-destructive and influencing Jordan. For the first time since my losses, I considered that perhaps there was a purpose behind the pain. If *my* life was riddled with unfairness, then the lives of others must tell a thousand tales of injustices.

I wondered how I'd allowed myself to become so self-absorbed. Just one glance in the newspaper or one segment from the evening news would alert anyone that unfairness in tragic proportions can strike us all. I was tired of living angry and knew it was time to move forward.

I stared incessantly out my living room window, but this time I didn't want to plunge myself through it. Instead, I took a more insightful look at the homes that surrounded mine. Landscaped yards and custom-made swing sets don't paint the clearest portrait; there is no such thing as perfection. Ours is a hurting world. I wouldn't have to look far to find someone who could benefit from the truths I'd learned from my darkest hours.

Jordan remained distant from me throughout the day. I realized that although what I'd told him was true, it was premature and not the tone in which I wanted to impart such wisdom. I hoped I hadn't caused him any lifelong scars. I remembered that he too shared my losses.

My outburst made me realize how deeply wounded I was. I was like a little girl screaming out to God, "You're not fair!" When my tormented soul finally erupted, it was my own son who heard my cry.

But God heard too. Just as I was attempting, as a frustrated parent, to teach Jordan a lesson about unfairness, God my Father was reminding me that he never promised a fair life, though he offers strength, love, and acceptance to help us through.

I didn't sleep well that night. In the early morning my covers rustled as Jordan crawled toward me.

"Can I have a popsicle for breakfast?" he whispered into my ear.

"No," I answered.

"It's not fair!" he protested. His words soothed my irritated psyche.

"What about, 'Life's not fair'?" I asked with reservation.

"That was yesterday," he answered, as matter of fact as any four-year-old can be.

The word *yesterday* resonated in my mind, and I reveled in his innocence. I lifted my head and captured the orange sunrise through my bedroom window—it was a new day. It had been a long and painful journey and it wasn't over yet, but from that morning on I decided not to personalize every injustice

that greeted my life. I wanted to trust God again, to accept that I hadn't been "chosen" for a life of disaster. I wanted to retire the "poor me" cloak I'd been wearing. I was finally convinced that indeed my life has a purpose and good would come from all the pain I'd internalized.

I vowed to transform the difficult lessons that impacted my life into powerful positive change. The insignificant nuisances of life that suffocated my peace, I chose—as Jordan had—to leave them behind with yesterday.

Sandra Ring lives and writes in Ontario, Canada. This article was published on **TodaysChristianWoman.com** *in 2009.*

Reflect

- *"Life's not fair" can seem like a discouraging mantra, yet Sandra found comfort in accepting this idea. In your opinion, is "Life's not fair" a biblical idea? Why or why not?*
- *Sandra certainly had good reason to feel angry, yet she realized her pain was causing her to become "self-absorbed." Why does pain and anger cause us to turn inward? What's the difference between normal grieving and self-absorption?*
- *Ultimately Sandra decided to respond to her hurt in a different way. One key for her was opening her eyes to the hurt and injustice others were also going through. "Ours is a hurting world," she realized. How could truly seeing the brokenness and pain in others' lives help you process feelings of anger?*

- *Sandra writes, "I decided not to personalize every injustice that greeted my life." What could a similar change of mind-set look like in your own life? How does someone go about making this change in perspective?*

- *In light of all you've read and discussed, how do you feel God's leading you to respond?*

Additional Resources

Books, Bible studies, and articles to help you further

Online Articles

"The Death of a Dream"—One couple grapples with infertility
By Rhonda Rundberg Birchard, available on **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

"Grappling with God"—Prayer sometimes feels like a hug and a stranglehold at the same time.
By Philip Yancey, an excerpt from *Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference*, published on **ChristianityToday.com**

"Redeeming Bitterness"—Miroslav Volf tells how to stop the "shield of memory" from turning into a sword.
Interview by Collin Hansen, published on **ChristianityToday.com**

Books

Angry Conversations with God by Susan Isaacs (FaithWords, 2009; 256 pages). What do you do when you're 40 years old and at spiritual rock bottom? You take God to couple's counseling to find out what's wrong with your relationship! Casting herself as the neglected spouse, comedian and NPR essayist Isaacs faces her "inner nag" and offers a running commentary on the ridiculous expectations she puts on God.

Choosing to SEE by Mary Beth Chapman (Revell, 2010; 256 pages). Grief is a journey many of us take at one time or another. For the Chapman family their journey began with the accidental death of their 5-year-old daughter, Maria Sue, whom they adopted from China. In *Choosing to SEE*, Mary Beth Chapman shares her struggles with the tragic loss of Maria Sue, her journey to heal, and the unexpected path God has placed her on. Even as difficult as life can be, Mary Beth and the Chapmans *choose to see* with faith and hope.

Overcoming Emotions That Destroy by Chip Ingram and Becaa Johnson (Baker, 2009; 256 pages). Do tensions and day-to-day frustrations result in stressed interactions with your loved ones? Anger is an emotion we all can relate to. But anger does not have to be an uncontrolled, negative emotion. This book will show you how to harness that anger so you can grow personally, relationally, and spiritually.
The Wounded Woman by Steve Stephens and Pam Vredevelt

(Multnomah, 2006; 256 pages). This book is every woman's tool for releasing the hurts that hinder and moving forward to your glorious, liberated future! Using real-life testimonies and practical counsel, Dr. Steve Stephens and Pam Vredevelt will guide you toward complete recovery and inspire you to press forward in newfound strength—not in spite of your wounds, *but because* of them.

Bible Studies

"Anger with God"—a four-session Bible study series exploring how we can express our feelings to God rather than allowing anger to stunt our spiritual growth, available from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

"Believe God Loves You"—a single-session study about resolving our anger by affirming God's love for us, available from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

"Dealing with Difficult Memories"—a single-session study about moving through painful memories toward reconciliation and healing, available from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

"Doubt Can Strengthen Your Faith"—a single-session study about working through doubt to discover hope, available from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

"Honest Anger"—a single-session study about expressing our feelings honestly to God, available from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

today's christian woman

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