

Have you ever felt the temptation to abandon your faith when life doesn't align with your expectations? This struggle is not uncommon. Many of us grapple with the disappointment that comes when our prayers aren't answered as we hoped or when we question the value of our beliefs. It is in these moments that we are truly tested.

So, what do we do when our faith becomes a source of that disappointment? When the prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling, and the God we have followed, loved, and served appears silent, what then?

This is not just a question of theological debate; it is a deeply personal, heart-wrenching dilemma that many of us face at some point in our spiritual journey. It is the kind of question that can make or break our faith. And yet, it is within this very struggle, this uncertainty, that a profound truth lies waiting to be discovered—a truth that has the power to transform our understanding of faith, disappointment, and the journey we are on. It is a truth that can strengthen our faith, deepen our relationship with God, and lead us to a place of greater spiritual maturity.

Today, we are looking into a story from the Bible that mirrors this very struggle. It is a story about two disciples on the road to Emmaus, their hearts heavy with disappointment and confusion after the crucifixion of Jesus, whom they had believed to be the Messiah. It is a story that may mirror our own moments of doubt and disillusionment, reminding us that we are not alone in our struggles.

This is the story per Luke 24: 13-21,

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and Word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

These were difficult times for the disciples—in losing Jesus, their hopes were dashed. Luke tells us that some of them were hiding, gripped with fear of the Jews, while two confused and disheartened disciples left Jerusalem and started traveling back home to Emmaus.

But then, the unexpected happened. As they were heading home, a man they did not recognize approached them and said, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" Jesus's execution was about the only thing people talked about in Jerusalem. So, Cleopas replied to him, saying,

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” The man replied back, “What things?” “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Then the stranger said the last thing they expected,

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

After this, this strange man walked Cleopas and his friend through the entire Scriptures for the next two hours and explained all the references to the Christ. And as he did, the fire of their faith that had died came back to life. This experience changed them because they no longer believed with their feelings or opinions but with the hope the Scriptures gave them.

Think about this: What was this, if not a Bible study on the go? Literally, they had a Bible study as they walked together to Emmaus. Jesus walked with Cleopas and his companion, step by step, through the words of the prophets, revealing how each prophecy pointed to the Messiah’s journey of suffering and glory. Why would Jesus do this? Why not tell them who he was and save the time and energy? Because he was rekindling their hope, igniting a revival of faith through the living Word of God. The reason Jesus did not choose to reveal himself through a grand gesture but through the quiet unfolding of Scripture was because Jesus wanted them to believe and understand the Word first in their hearts rather than being overwhelmed by supernatural signs.

So, what does this mean for us? It means that in our moments of doubt, when the road ahead seems uncertain, or when we are disappointed and ready to walk away, hide, or give up on our faith, we are invited to open the Scriptures, not as a last resort but as our first response and as our guiding light. Psalms of lament, for example, can resonate deeply when we are grappling with grief, offering words to the pain we are unable to express and comforting us. Stories of biblical figures like Job or Paul can remind us of perseverance during times of trial and suffering.

For example, consider these verses:

For Strength in Trials: Isaiah 41:10 reassures us, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” This verse reminds us of God’s unwavering support and strength, especially when facing seemingly insurmountable challenges.

For Encouragement in Perseverance: Hebrews 12:1-2 motivates us with, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” This passage encourages us to persist in our faith journey, inspired by the examples of faith heroes before us and focused on Jesus as our ultimate guide and Savior.

For Reassurance of God's Love: Romans 8:38-39 declares, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." In moments when we feel unworthy or distant from God, this powerful reminder assures us of the unbreakable bond of love between us and our Creator.

As we can see in these examples, the Scriptures provide the roadmap for our spiritual journey and a mirror reflecting our deepest needs and strength for our weakest moments. The Word of God is a light that guides us to life and God, just as it did to the men on their way to Emmaus. It gives us understanding when we are confused, confidence when we are doubtful, and strength when we feel weak—just as these men experienced all of this that day.

Now, consider how, as they approached Emmaus, they pleaded with Jesus to stay for the night and have dinner with them. They did not want to stop learning; they were hungry for more. They wanted this stranger to keep teaching them. So, once they arrived and were having dinner, Jesus took some bread, pulled it apart, and gave them each a piece. As soon as the bread touched their hands, they recognized who he was: Jesus. Both gasped, and Jesus vanished.

All this time, the man walking next to them, speaking words of encouragement and hope, giving them back their faith by explaining the Scriptures about Christ, and eating with them by breaking bread with them, was Jesus. After the Word was given and received, the miraculous happened. We can say that studying the Scriptures softens the heart, opens the mind, and readies the spirit to experience a supernatural revelation of who God is and his purposes for us.

I believe this story has to say a lot about us and our faith. Let me explain.

These disciples had a particular expectation of who and what the Messiah ought to be and do for them. They expected their Messiah to fulfill their dreams and expectations of being a king and conqueror, freeing them from their enemies and Roman oppression. But, since that didn't happen and they did not understand what God was accomplishing, they were disappointed and felt let down.

Has this ever happened to you? We confuse the things we want with what God has promised us. Instead of coming from a place of faith and openness to the unexpected, we come from settled expectations and limited understanding. But just as it happened to these men, we may not understand what God is doing and why some things happen the way they do or why they take too long, but if we keep the faith and truly engage in studying the Bible, we will see everything through.

My friends, I can't overestimate the importance and power of the Bible for us. One of the best analogies I can think of is a defibrillator. Imagine you are dying, and someone brings you back to life with a defibrillator. That powerful shock resuscitates your heart and makes you breathe once again. That is how I imagine the Word of God works in our lives, too. It shocks us; it helps open our eyes, breathe, and have a heart. It fills us with love, hope, peace, and all the blessings of Jesus' character.

All this to say, in the journey of the disciples to Emmaus, we find our story reflected. In the moments when our world seems to crumble around us, when disappointment clouds our vision and doubt whispers deceitfully in our ears, the Word of God stands unshaken as a beacon of hope and light, reminding us of the unwavering love of our Savior for all of us.

We know this because just as Jesus walked with those disciples on the road to Emmaus, he walks us too on whatever road we may find ourselves in, however straight, treacherous, bright, or dark it may be. He walks with us in our confusion, our questioning, and our seeking. He is ready to break open the Scriptures to illuminate our minds and to set our hearts ablaze with renewed faith and understanding.

So, with this good news, here is the invitation now: Let the story of the road to Emmaus be our guide. Let us not walk away in disappointment or hide in fear. Instead, let's invite Jesus to stay with us, to speak to us through his Word, and to reveal himself anew in the midst of our trials and our journeys. Insist on inviting Jesus into your homes and hearts, not as a guest, but as the Teacher, Savior, and King of our lives who opens the Scriptures to us, reminding us we are never alone, never without hope, and never without a way forward. Amen.