**The Crisis of Disappointment** *by David Diestelkamp*

I heard a relationship counselor say that most married couples hit a point in their relationship that they called a “crisis of disappointment.” It is when a spouse sees the flaws of his/her partner that had been hidden by the fog of emotional love. If nothing is done, patience wears thin and fights ensue. “I didn’t think it would be this hard” and “I didn’t sign up for this” become passing thoughts. Intimacy struggles, eyes wander, suspicion arises, separation and divorce hover on the horizon.

It occurred to me that this is a frequent scenario in the lives of Christians in their relationship with Christ. At first everything is beautiful. Forgiveness, blessings, fellowship, faith, hope, love, peace, future, and optimism are all there. But then a “crisis of disappointment” happens. Unbelievers mock, persecute, and ostracize. Physical life unravels: job loss, financial struggles, health problems, suffering and death of a loved one. The flaws of life that were temporarily hidden by the initial emotional love for Christ are still there. If nothing is done, patience with God wears thin and fights about His will ensue. “I didn’t think it would be this hard” and “I didn’t sign up for this” become passing thoughts. Closeness to God struggles, eyes wander to other life options, suspicion over whether God’s will is in our best interest, separation from God and His people hovers on the horizon. These similarities shouldn’t surprise us because marriage is used as a metaphor for God’s relationship with His people throughout the Bible.

Burying the crisis avoids uncomfortable and hard relationship work, but a lack of resolution dampens communication and robs relationships of growth and oneness. Talking to God about the unexpected negative things that are happening in our lives may feel awkward or even wrong, but it needs to happen. It happens in the book of Job without him sinning or charging God with doing something wrong (Job 1:22). The Psalms contain cringe-worthy complaints, desperate requests, and questions about the future, yet many of them were written by “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; Act 13:22). I remind myself of something I heard a preacher say, “You can tell God what’s on your heart. He knows it anyway.”

Openly facing the crisis of disappointment gives us the opportunity to get answers and grow in faith. Ignoring the crisis leaves flaws in our understanding and faith, giving “place to the devil” (Ep 4:27; “foothold” [NIV] or “opportunity” [NASB, ESV] to the devil).

Often the biggest problem is our expectations. As in marriage, we may not enter Christ objectively. People may paint things as being only sunshine and rainbows in order to attract us, even to seduce us, to Christ. Of course, “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” is in Christ (Eph 1:3). But is this what we are looking for – spiritual blessing? Will we be content with this? When Paul asked that his “thorn in the flesh” be removed, God told him, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9). Is grace really enough? Grace was enough for Paul, but will grace be enough for us?

This is not just about having positive mental attitudes and trying to see the good in every situation. This isn’t just about putting on a happy face and using smiling emojis in our texts when we are actually suffering and dying on the inside. We are told to confess our doubts, struggles, suffering, temptations, and sin (1 Jn 1:9; Ja 5:16). We are to engage in the wrestling match between flesh and spirit (Ep 6:12; Ga 5:17). God and His people can and will help us.

The crisis of disappointment is a critical point in our spiritual walk. Many disciples experienced a crisis of disappointment when Jesus refused to meet their expectation of being fed in John chapter six, so they quit following Him (Jn 6:66). But a few continued to follow Jesus and learn from the One who has the words of eternal life and is the “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn 6:68-69). One way leads to death and destruction (Mt 7:13-14); the other leads to righteousness, salvation, and eternal life (2 Cor 7:10). How will we handle the crisis of disappointment? It’s our choice.