



Why Are They Walking Away?

by Rick Wood

Have you ever felt like giving up on your Christian faith and walking away from God or the Church? Apparently, this is happening all over the world. In the deepest darkest moments of your life when your cries for help go unanswered, God feels distant, and there seems to be no sure answers for the pain that you are suffering, have you ever doubted God, His goodness or His power? Many have, and some have concluded that it is just not worth the effort to maintain their belief in a God of love and power in the face of circumstances that are horrific and impossible to understand as being directed or controlled by a loving Heavenly Father.

Let's be honest with ourselves and with each other. Living in this world of sin and pain is not easy and maintaining our trust and faith in the midst of it all can be a challenge. If we are to establish a witnessing Church in every unreached people and have it be a Church that not only withstands the onslaughts of Satan, but goes on to beat down the gates of Hell, we must understand why we are losing so many once "faithful believers" to doubt, unbelief and oftentimes outright defiance and anger towards the God and faith they once held dear. There is not one single answer to this problem but we must understand the causes that destroy faith and find solutions. That is what this issue of *Mission Frontiers* is all about.

This is no academic exercise. This is where the very real struggles of life intersect with faith in the God of the Bible—with life and death consequences for this world and the world to come. Matthew Murray, raised in a Christian home and considering missionary service, became so alienated and disaffected from the God of the Bible that he shot four young people recently who became martyrs for their faith here in Colorado where I now live.

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There are obviously many facets that make up the tragedy of Murray's life, but certainly his walking away from his faith in the God of the Bible was part of his downward spiral. Was the picture of God that was presented to him inadequate and sufficiently unbiblical to meet the challenges of his life? Fortunately, few go to the extremes that Murray did, but he is not alone in his abandonment of the Christian faith. Thousands, if not millions, have joined him in their disillusionment with God and the Christian faith and we need to have answers for them that make sense. The Christian faith is a rationally sound belief system and the Bible is a solid foundation for our faith. We have strong evidence for the faith we hold. So why is it that so many are walking away. George Barna and other researchers believe we may be losing a whole generation of young people. We cannot write it off as simply being rebellious people with hard hearts.

The key to the success of the World Christian Movement and the spread of God's Kingdom and His glory among all peoples lies in the God and the Gospel we proclaim and how we proclaim it.

If our Gospel is flawed, our view of God is disconnected from the Bible and poor (or no) discipleship is taking place, then it is not hard to see why people fall away when pain, suffering and disappointment comes crashing in upon their lives. They have no foundation for understanding the struggles of their lives in the context of their belief in a loving God and Savior of real power. They don't realize that they have been born into a world at war

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Yes, Satan is real and the battle between God and Satan is real. Many people think God directs terrible things to happen for some mysterious good reason. No wonder so many people are not terribly excited by following a God like this. Gregory Boyd in his article on page 19 goes into greater detail on this.

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Without a biblical understanding of the ongoing battle between God and Satan, the circumstances of life, not the Bible, will end up determining our theology and our view of the God we worship. For many who leave the Church or refuse to darken its doors, they have come to the conclusion that the God of power who allows or directs

the pain and suffering of this world is not worthy of worship or their obedience. They have wrongly blamed God for the pain and suffering that is the inevitable result of spiritual warfare and the free will of men and women. Spiritual warfare will always have physical consequences in our world. How well have we prepared people for the reality of the battles of this world? Have we, in the West, developed a theology of suffering and warfare against evil in all forms? Have we given people (false) expectations that do not line up with the Scripture? If our view of God is that of a loving Heavenly Father who will rescue us from all pain and suffering in this life and shower us with good things, then we are setting people up for disillusionment and failure.

If we are proclaiming a Gospel and a Christian worldview that does not make sense, is not biblical and does not work in the worst times of our lives, then we will continue to bleed out the best and the brightest from our midst.

This is not an academic exercise in my life either. The theme of this

issue strikes very close to home for me. Preparing this issue has been part of my own journey of understanding the trials of my life in the context of a God who loves me yet allows awful things to happen to me and the ones I love. I did not have a problem reconciling pain and suffering and a loving God until I started having lots of pain and suffering. I am still working through my understanding of the warfare between God and Satan and why things happen the way they do but here are a few things of which I am convinced:

1. If we want to know what God is like, we need to look at Jesus not our circumstances or the pain of this world.
2. The Bible, properly interpreted, gives us an accurate view of a good, loving and powerful God.
3. God still loves me even when the circumstances of life are hard and I don't feel like it.
4. Much of the suffering in this world is the result of free human beings exercising their free will in war and corruption.
5. God's will is not always done on Earth, otherwise we would not need to pray, "Thy will be done on earth."

6. The more people know God and are obedient to Him, the less suffering there will be in this world and in our own personal lives.

7. We have an enemy in Satan who is constantly trying to get us to believe lies about God and His character both at home and abroad. God is asking us to join Him in the battle to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8).

8. One day all suffering will end and we will see Him face to face in all of His glory and the sufferings of this life will pale in comparison.

The issue of pain and suffering is one reason we are losing people to unbelief. There are many others. But we must confront all of them with sound, rational and biblical answers. It is the key to our progress among the unreached peoples as well as maintaining the progress we have already made. 🌐

