

“Get ready to travel down a moving journey of faith. Through deeply honest and transparent stories, David Sanford takes the reader down life’s roads of spiritual and personal crisis filled with potholes, detours, and winding paths. The destination left me challenged, yet wholly encouraged and filled with hope.”

**MARK MILLER, author of *Experiential Storytelling***



“Anyone who writes knows that an author’s omnipresence is an illusion. But I’m convinced that David Sanford gets around more than the rest of us. I think God’s given him more experiences, more acquaintances, more conversations, and more serendipitous circumstances than most of us mortals. David is on good speaking terms with just about everyone and everything and that list includes suffering, doubt, trials, anxiety, and grief, making him a trusted and wise companion to walk through faith’s disillusionments.”

**RICK JAMES, author of *Jesus Without Religion***



“When I’m in the midst of the unwieldy circumstances of life, and then God disappears, I find myself stumbling around with one question on my lips: Am I all alone? David Sanford doesn’t simply answer my question; he engages me like a sage friend and mentor. By the end of the book I sense that God’s love for me is more generous and more sturdy than I suspected. Ultimately, *If God Disappears* is a meaningful conversation about hope.”

**TAMARA PARK, pastor of community, Warehouse 242**



“If you’re more human than religious, this book is for you. If you’ve ever been hit in the face with life, this book is for you. And if you think God can’t take your anger, this book is definitely for you. Real people, real problems, real God. Great book.”

**SALLY MORGENTHALER, author of *Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, [www.shapevine.com](http://www.shapevine.com)**



“*If God Disappears* shows us how God is always present in love and grace, even when heartache and suffering veils God from our awareness. From the pages of Scripture to the everyday lives of ordinary people, David Sanford uncovers a real faith, capable of sustaining and transforming us through hardship, even in times when we can’t see or feel God in our lives.”

**JIM PALMER, author of *Divine Nobodies* and *Wide Open Spaces***



“Most of us have wrestled with the difficult questions this book addresses. The author’s honest approach features engaging stories and thoughtful discussion that ultimately lead to hope. A tough topic that is handled with intellect and grace.”

**DAVE BURCHETT, Emmy Award-winning director for FOX Sports Net and author of *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People***



“For anyone who has ever felt abandoned, lonely, deserted . . . those times when it feels even your prayers go unheard . . . this book is for you. All of us need to be reminded that even in the darkest corners of life, God is there. In his book, *If God Disappears*, David Sanford rekindles our hope and strengthens our courage to hang on to what we know in our hearts is absolute and true about the mysterious ways of our loving heavenly Father, even when life goes terribly wrong.”

**WILLIAM CARMICHAEL, best-selling author and speaker**



“Doubts about God and ourselves sidetrack so many of us on our faith journey. *If God Disappears* raises honest questions, involves heartfelt stories, and offers practical, biblical wisdom to help us move from denial and despair to devotion to Jesus Christ. David Sanford rightly encourages us not to lose hope but to keep pressing on, remembering that God has a way of showing up—even when we think he’s disappeared.”

**PAUL LOUIS METZGER, PhD, professor of Christian theology and theology of culture, Multnomah Biblical Seminary**



“Jesus said, ‘In this world you will have trouble!’ We discover what we really believe by how we respond to an unexpected crisis. Many, like David Sanford, ‘lose their faith’ in times of testing, only to find an unshakeable foundation in a deeper awareness of God’s character, sufficiency, and strength. Take the journey to a deeper faith through reading this book.”

**MOIRA BROWN, cohost of *100 Huntley Street***



“*If God Disappears* is one of the most important books of the year. We all have gone through our own crises of faith and the resulting guilt that goes with it. After reading about the nine ‘faith wreckers’ and the nine ‘faith builders,’ your life will never be the same.”

**PAT WILLIAMS, senior vice president, Orlando Magic, and author of *The Pursuit***



“I am so glad I read *If God Disappears*. This is a book about stories—powerful and personal and challenging. These honest stories face head-on the hard and hurting things in life. David Sanford touches your heart and brings you closer to God, no matter what your journey has been.”

**DR. STEVE STEPHENS, psychologist and best-selling author of *Risking Faith***



**IF GOD DISAPPEARS**

9 FAITH AND WHAT

AND WHAT  
TO DO A

# RECKERS

## IF GOD DISAPPEARS

9 FAITH WRECKERS  
& WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

DAVID SANFORD

# ABOUT THEM



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*If God Disappears: Nine Faith Wreckers and What to Do about Them*

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To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with the author, some details and names have been changed. Still, every story in this book is true. At the request of several individuals who have told me about their experiences of abuse, one story is a composite.

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*To those who have walked away from faith,  
to those who know the day God left them . . .  
to those who allowed me to tell their stories,  
to those who still welcome me as a friend.*

*“Most of faith is patience.”*

JOHN VAN DIEST

*“We read to know we are not alone.”*

C. S. LEWIS

*“It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning.”*

CLAUDE BERNARD

*“The heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe.”*

JOANNA MACY

*“The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it.”*

GEORGE C. SCOTT

*“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”*

HELEN KELLER

*“At every crisis in one’s life, it is absolute salvation to have some sympathetic friend to whom you can think aloud without restraint or misgiving.”*

WOODROW WILSON

*“One who faces his own failures is steadily advancing on the pilgrim’s way.”*

WILLIAM TEMPLE



*“Deepest communion with God is beyond words, on the other side of silence.”*

MADELEINE L'ENGLE

*“Prayer and love are learned in the hour when prayer becomes impossible and your heart has turned to stone.”*

THOMAS MERTON

*“Faith is hanging on very stubbornly to the belief that things are not really as they seem.”*

OSWALD CHAMBERS

*“God is not a deceiver, that he should offer to support us, and then, when we lean upon him, should slip away from us.”*

AUGUSTINE

*“To our questions God has provided answers; not all the answers, certainly, but enough to satisfy our intellects and ravish our hearts.”*

A. W. TOZER

*“I am still amazed at how big, how enormous a love and mystery God is . . .”*

BONO, U2 SUPERSTAR

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## INTRODUCTION

*Sometimes it takes the experience of losing someone to shake us out of complacency.*

*I lost someone when I was eleven. My dad and mom and brother and two sisters and I were near Snoqualmie Pass, about fifty miles east of Seattle.*

*Waiting in line near the top of the mountain slope was a girl about my age with a new, red snow saucer. Compared to my black, smelly inner tube, it was high tech.*

*I'd never seen anyone fly so fast down the mountain before. I continued to watch the girl as I made my own way down at less than breakneck speed. Most kids stopped shortly after the slope flattened out. But this girl just kept going and going. And then she disappeared.*

*I swung around quickly to my left, to my right. Everyone around me was getting up and trudging back up the hill. But I didn't see the girl. She had been right in front of me. And then she was gone.*

*No one believed me.*

*I insisted I had seen her disappear. "We can't just walk away. Come back. Help me look for her."*

*Still no one believed. Except me.*

*The snow was wet and heavy that day. Off the beaten track, I soon found my boots sinking deeper and deeper into*

*the snowpack. It took a full minute to cover ten yards. But I would not stop. Looking carefully, I could see the slight depression where the girl's red saucer had flown across the surface of the snow.*

*Scattered alpine trees stuck out of the snow just ahead of me. I looked back and realized I was well off the beaten track. But I knew I had seen the girl go this far.*

*My heart stopped when I found the dark hole. There, in front of me, the saucer's track stopped.*

*I lay on the snow with my head sticking out over the hole. The second I heard her crying, I started yelling. "Are you all right? Don't worry. I'll get help. I promise—I'll be back right away."*

*I didn't have time to go all the way back up the slope to my parents, so I accosted the first adult I found and breathlessly told him my story. He started yelling, and other adults came running. Someone called up the slope, and within minutes someone else was running toward us with a rope.*

*I led everyone along the path I had taken earlier. It took a while, but eventually a very wet and cold girl was fished out of the creek fourteen feet below the snowpack. She was reunited with her father, and all was well again.*

*For a long time afterward I pondered what would have happened if I had been the one riding the red saucer.*

*I also wondered why it was so hard to get anyone to believe me.*

*The fact is, sometimes the bottom does fall out from under us, God seems to disappear, and it's almost impossible to get anyone to believe us.*

*I believe you.*



ONE  
UNSOLVED  
MYSTERIES

EVERYONE HAS A STORY.

What's yours? Have you ever reached a point in your life where God seemed to disappear? Have you ever felt as if things couldn't get any worse? As if someone has turned out the lights and God just slipped away?

Martin Luther called this *Anfechtung*. Saint John of the Cross called it the "dark night of the soul." Only it doesn't usually last a night. It can last for days. Weeks. Months. Even longer.

And when God steps back into the picture, it often feels too late.

Throughout literature, music, and movies, we see the themes of God's (or gods') abandonment, the hero(ine)'s resultant agnosticism, and the immense struggles that ensue. In real life, there's not always a happy ending.

### LONG GONE

Remember *Superman Returns*? By the time our messiah-like superhero shows up, five years after disappearing unexpectedly, Lois Lane has won a Pulitzer for her op-ed piece, "Why the World Doesn't Need Superman."

Just when Lois thinks she's completely processed her pain and suffering, she faces a second crisis: Can she make room in her life for Superman again?

Like the shaken believer who feels that God walked away without even waving good-bye, Lois has to decide: Does she even want him back?

We all need to answer that question at some point. Do I want God back?

This is the central question to those who feel God has walked out on them. Everyone has faced—or will face—such crises of faith. For some reason beyond our human understanding, such crises are part of everyone's spiritual journey.

Of course, Superman did return to Lois. But for Christians, sometimes it seems impossible to wait when we have no idea whether or not God is ever coming back. In the darkest times—the death of a close friend or loved one, a horrible accident, acts of terrorism and war, natural disasters, and other tragedies—he seems infinitely far away.

When I was nineteen, a close family friend, Darrell, fell victim to intense headaches. A CAT scan technician first spotted the problem: a massive tumor. Brain surgery followed. Darrell was practically my adopted brother, so I visited him every day. The first day he looked pretty roughed up, but the nurses said he was doing fine. As is customary after such surgeries, they were checking on him every thirty minutes, which was reassuring.

The second day Darrell looked about the same.

The third day his bed was empty. His mother stood in the corner of the room, weeping. Two hours earlier, the nurse on duty had been in to check on Darrell, only to discover he had stopped breathing. The hospital staff rushed to revive him, and now was desperately fighting for his life.

Darrell's mother looked up as I entered the room. Seven years

earlier, her first husband and oldest son had died in a tragic boating accident. She then married Darrell's stepfather, but two years later, he had a fatal heart attack. Now this.

She looked down to her right. I'm not even sure she was talking to me. If she was, she certainly wasn't expecting me to say anything in reply.

In her anger she demanded, "Doesn't God know I've suffered enough?"

She was absolutely exhausted. The attending physician came into the room and said there was nothing more they could do. Still in shock, Darrell's mother left.

"Darrell's situation is serious," the doctor told me. "It appears he stopped breathing for fifteen, maybe twenty, minutes. We can't pick up any brain waves. But I don't want to unplug him until we've tried everything we can. Would you sit with Darrell and talk with him? If you get him to respond in any way—a word, a motion, a blink—we'll keep him alive."

The doctor took me to Darrell's room in ICU. For three days, I stayed with Darrell. I talked with him. I stroked his hand. I pleaded with him to let me know he was still there. I desperately looked for any sign of life.

Nothing.

After three days, they turned off life support.

I never realized how powerless I was until that experience. Not only was I unable to save my friend, but I also had nothing to say to his mother in her moment of deepest grief.

Where was God?

Where was *anyone* when Darrell's mom and I felt overwhelmed with such intense feelings of loss and grief?

Who could blame her or me for feeling abandoned?

In the face of unspeakable suffering and pain, why would *anyone* still believe in God? When asked what they would like

to ask God if given the opportunity, 44 percent of Americans said they want to know why there is evil or suffering in this world.<sup>1</sup>

**FAITH  
WRECKER**

**Experiencing evil and suffering**

**GIVING UP**

Sarah's hard-driving husband, Rob, wasn't a kind man. Twenty-six long years had proved that beyond a doubt. Day after day, night after night, Sarah prayed for Rob to find God and turn his life around.

But the years had taken their toll, and most of the time Sarah found it to be almost a relief when Rob left the house to go to work. She couldn't remember the last time he had told her good-bye, let alone offered a kiss. That morning was no different, it seemed. Until a knock at the door shortly before lunch. Rob had been headed north on I-5 just outside Sacramento when a semi jackknifed in front of him. A second semi and Rob's hotel shuttle van hit simultaneously, rocketing him out of the vehicle. Seventy-five yards away, he writhed in unimaginable pain. By the time the paramedics arrived, he was almost dead. He officially expired at 10:33, less than two miles from a local hospital.

That day, Sarah experientially lost her faith. She had prayed and prayed for her husband's salvation. Where was God when her husband needed him most? And where was God in the midst of her piercing sorrow?

A year later, Sarah answered the phone and a woman asked if her husband had been in a terrible accident. Sarah demanded to know who was calling.

The woman said her name was Tammy. She had been driving



south when she witnessed the accident. Instinctively, she pulled off the freeway as quickly as she could. In the median someone was dying. She couldn't bear to look. Gripping her steering wheel, she argued with God.

*Go to him,* God told her.

*I can't,* Tammy argued. *My two children are in the backseat, bundled in their car seats.*

*Go.*

*No! Please, God, no.*

Weeping, Tammy pulled the key out of the ignition, looked back at her sleeping children, stepped out of the car, made sure all the doors were locked, saw that traffic was at a complete stop, and started running between cars toward the median. She knelt in the grass amid the broken glass, took the man's bloody hand, and started talking to him. Immediately, he stopped writhing.

"Look at me," Tammy pleaded. "You're hurt very badly. Do you know God?"

He couldn't speak aloud, but he slowly shook his head no.

"Do you want to know God as your Savior right now?"

He nodded.

"Pray with me," Tammy told him.

When she finished the prayer, Rob squeezed Tammy's hand. "Did you pray with me?" He squeezed again.

Only at that point did Tammy realize a group of people were standing in a circle around her and Rob. Tammy stood up and an off-duty paramedic immediately went to work. The next day Tammy learned that Rob had died before reaching the hospital. After Tammy finished her story, Sarah scoffed. "Why didn't you call me before now? No matter. I don't even believe in God anymore."

Tammy protested, but Sarah rebuffed her. "Don't go quoting Scripture at me. It's not true. God doesn't work all things together for good. My life's ruined."

Sarah told me the same thing. After all the depression and anxiety and stress she'd experienced, her life felt shattered. To this day, she believes God might as well stay put in heaven. She's not looking for him anymore. At least not yet. But God hasn't given up on her. Neither have I.

It's startling to realize the implications of God's unconditional love, grace, and mercy. Like the Prodigal Son's father, God isn't disillusioned with us. He never had any illusions to begin with.

Of course, even if someone knew God wasn't angry at her, if she knew beyond a doubt that God had no intention of heaping guilt or shame on her, there's no guarantee she would turn back to God.

I walked away, didn't I? I made my choice. My fate is sealed, isn't it?

## **TOO LATE?**

The course of your life could change today based on a single decision you'll make—either to open the door of your heart and invite God to come back in or to consciously lock him out of your life forever.

Maybe you have been taught that it's impossible to come back to God. You may have felt God wouldn't take you back anyway. But it's not too late.

Right before the start of World War I, a young French boy named Jean-Paul Sartre and his widowed mother were living with her parents. The grandfather was a Protestant, the grandmother a lifelong French Catholic. At the dinner table, the family patriarch and matriarch often poked fun at the other's religious beliefs.

"I concluded from these exchanges that the two faiths were equally valueless," Jean-Paul later said. "Even though my family saw it as their duty to bring me up as a Catholic, religion never had any weight with me."

By the time the war ended, Jean-Paul had grown completely disenchanted with the church. By the time he turned twelve, he thoroughly hated to attend Mass and resolved that he would go no more.

To seal his decision, Jean-Paul stood before a mirror, stared at his reflection, and then cursed God. He felt a sense of relief. He was through with God and the church. He decided to become an atheist so he could live the rest of his days as he pleased.

Over the years, Sartre looked back at that event as a defining moment in his life. In *Being and Nothingness*, writing against certain Christian beliefs, he commented almost as an aside: “We should know for always whether a particular youthful experience had been fruitful or ill-starred, whether a particular crisis of puberty was a caprice or a real pre-formation of my later engagements; the curve of our life would be fixed forever.”

In other words: If I really meant it when I cursed God, I thereby set the course of my entire life and have sealed my fate.

Sartre went on to make a name for himself, of course. His political exploits are legendary, his writings definitive of mid-twentieth-century atheistic existentialism. Yet, reviewing his life, Sartre seemed to swing between the extremes of heady pride and sexual liberation on the one hand, and philosophical anguish and personal despair on the other.

On numerous occasions, Sartre stated that there is “no exit” from the human dilemma of trying to live as if God did not exist. “Man is alone,” Sartre claimed, abandoned to his own destiny. “Hell is other people.” Life is hard, and then you die. Period. My friend Tim Barnhart says, “He was trying to experience life on his own terms. His ‘truth,’ though depressing and controversial, was nonetheless an exercise in believing.” I agree.

Shortly before his death, Sartre relented. The *Nouvel Observateur* records these words: “I do not feel that I am the product of chance,

a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.”<sup>2</sup>

How tragic that Sartre allowed a decision in his youth to overshadow any consideration of God’s relevance for nearly six decades.

Although he’s considered one of the greatest twentieth-century philosophers, I believe Sartre committed two of this past century’s most prevalent errors of thinking.

First, Sartre confused his *feelings* with *reality*. You see this all the time. A man wakes up one morning, rolls over, sees his wife, and realizes he doesn’t have any loving feelings for her. This lack of feelings of love shocks him so much he decides it must be the truth. So he acts accordingly, forgetting that love is more than a momentary feeling. In reality, to love is a decision we make over and over again.

Second, Sartre confused an *event* with *fate*. When he cursed God, he felt he had sealed his destiny. There was no looking back, no recognition that he could choose otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

I don’t know your particular life story. Yet after talking individually with hundreds of people over the past decade, I find that many people wish, in their heart of hearts, that they could believe God hasn’t abandoned them after all.

Maybe you’ve consciously cursed God. Maybe you’ve rejected only the church. Maybe you’ve simply lacked the confidence to say, “God, if you’re real, please make yourself real *to me*.”

## NIGHTMARE

God wants us to know that even when it’s humanly impossible to see or feel him, he is always there with us. Sometimes that’s hard to believe. But no matter how deeply we bury grief in our souls, it doesn’t go away.

Four years ago, Lisa and her family took a brief but much-needed vacation at a beautiful resort outside Phoenix.

During their fifth night there, Lisa was awakened by a horrific nightmare. She dreamed she was a little girl again, just four years old. Her father was tying a gag in her mouth and then binding her hands. While her mother watched, he carried her through the apartment and down the stairway to a waiting car. He put her in the trunk of the car and slammed the lid shut.

Lying in the dark in her hotel room, Lisa trembled in her bed, perspiring all over. Never had she felt such an overwhelming sense of shock, fear, and abandonment. She couldn't stop the unfolding nightmare. She turned on the light. She wept. She cried out to God for deliverance. Finally, in desperation, she woke her husband, Mark, beating his chest as the nightmare continued to play out in her mind: The four-year-old Lisa was drenched with sweat by the time the trunk lid opened again. She was slapped, then carried into what appeared to be a warehouse. Except for the light from a small wood fire, it was dark inside. Lisa's captors laid her next to the fire, only inches away. She tried to roll away, but they kept kicking her back. Finally, when her clothes were almost dry, they forced her to stand up and then stripped her. Then they started filming the unspeakable atrocities that happened next.

What Mark didn't realize that night was that his own nightmare had just begun. It would be months before Lisa was finally diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, and by that time, her four-year-old self was often Lisa's dominant personality. She no longer knew anything about God, her Christian faith, or even her husband, often emphatically declaring that she wasn't married to him.

Months later, having no idea what had happened, I sat in Lisa and Mark's living room, expressing my genuine concern for their welfare. Thirty-year-old Lisa looked at Mark, nodded her head,

and then looked down for a minute. I sat quietly. Finally, her story—their story—started coming out. I immediately quit asking questions. When someone tells their story, I’ve learned to listen—just listen. I’m convinced that intertwined within every story you’ll find God’s redemptive presence where you least expect it.

As Lisa told her story that night, she began to see God again for the first time in a long time. She wept tears of joy as she felt his presence. She realized he was in the midst of her story, after all.

The next morning Lisa called to tell me she had slept through the night for the first time in sixteen months. By week’s end, four-year-old Lisa had begun reintegrating with thirty-year-old Lisa. She still had a long road of healing ahead of her, but the process of recovery had begun. Today, her marriage and faith have been fully restored. I say that almost matter-of-factly, but for a long time that was anything but a sure thing.

Lisa said it best: “I discovered there’s always hope.”<sup>4</sup>

Like Lisa, we all have a story. But unless we’re broken enough to take the terrible risk of telling someone our story, no matter how dark it is, we may never reconnect with God again this side of eternity.

Remarkably, as Lisa learned, if we do tell our stories to someone who knows God—without demanding answers to that blackest of all questions (“Why?”)—guess who shows up, unannounced?

## FAITH BUILDER

### Telling my story to a friend who knows God

#### REAL LIFE

As a teenager, I must have read through the Psalms a dozen times each year after my father’s health fled and poverty pounced upon our once-proud family. I learned firsthand that God indeed

cares deeply about the helpless and oppressed, the wounded and despairing.

Perhaps more than any other portion of Scripture, the Psalms tell us about real life.

Over and over again throughout the Psalms we find the psalmist crying out to God in various dire circumstances.

*I have so many enemies!*

*Take away my distress.*

*Listen to my cry for help.*

*Go away, all you who do evil.*

*Save me from my persecutors—rescue me!*

In seven out of every ten psalms, the writer is crying out to God for physical salvation, thanking the Lord for sparing his life, reminding himself of the differing fates of the righteous and evil-doers, or renewing his allegiance to God and his Word in the face of rampant wickedness.

During my teens, as my dad lost his eyesight and the financial pressures on our family became increasingly severe, I was driven again and again to the Psalms. Over time, I memorized nearly fifty of them. They renewed my faith in the God of the afflicted and suffering.

Maybe you haven't thought much about the Scriptures for a long time. Yet if the middle of the Bible teaches us anything, it's how to turn to God in times of trouble and pain. I invite you to consider this brief synopsis with specific examples from various psalms.

■ **Call out to the Lord . . .**

O God, listen to my cry!

Hear my prayer! *Psalms 61:1*

**. . . and ask for help!**

Please, God, rescue me!

Come quickly, LORD, and help me. *Psalm 70:1*

■ **Tell God about your troubles . . .**

O God, pagan nations have conquered your land,  
your special possession.

They have defiled your holy Temple  
and made Jerusalem a heap of ruins. . . .

We are mocked by our neighbors,  
an object of scorn and derision to those  
around us. *Psalm 79:1, 4*

**. . . and admit if you feel abandoned or forsaken.**

O LORD, how long will this go on?

Will you hide yourself forever?

How long will your anger burn like fire? *Psalm 89:46*

■ **Describe what you want God to do . . .**

Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!

Replace the evil years with good.

Let us, your servants, see you work again;

let our children see your glory.

And may the Lord our God show us his approval  
and make our efforts successful.

Yes, make our efforts successful! *Psalm 90:15-17*

**. . . and explain why God should act on your behalf.**

Let this be recorded for future generations,  
so that a people not yet born will praise the

LORD. . . .

And so the LORD's fame will be celebrated in Zion,  
his praises in Jerusalem,



when multitudes gather together  
and kingdoms come to worship the LORD.

*Psalm 102:18, 21-22*

■ **Give a candid appraisal of your enemy . . .**

They surround me with hateful words  
and fight against me for no reason.  
I love them, but they try to destroy me with accusations  
even as I am praying for them!  
They repay evil for good,  
and hatred for my love. *Psalm 109:3-5*

**. . . and ask God to put that foe in his place.**

Arise, O LORD, in anger!  
Stand up against the fury of my enemies!  
Wake up, my God, and bring justice! *Psalm 7:6*

■ **Honestly evaluate your guilt or innocence . . .**

I have chosen to be faithful;  
I have determined to live by your regulations.  
I cling to your laws.  
LORD, don't let me be put to shame! *Psalm 119:30-31*

**. . . and confess any known sins.**

I have wandered away like a lost sheep;  
come and find me,  
for I have not forgotten your commands. *Psalm 119:176*

■ **Affirm your implicit trust in God . . .**

I look up to the mountains—  
does my help come from there?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth! *Psalm 121:1-2*

**. . . and then praise God for his deliverance.**

Praise the LORD,  
who did not let their teeth tear us apart!  
We escaped like a bird from a hunter's trap.  
The trap is broken, and we are free!  
Our help is from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth. *Psalm 124:6-8*

If we learn anything from the Psalms, it's that God isn't afraid of our emotions, our struggles, and our questions. The one mistake we dare not make, Philip Yancey reminds us, is to confuse *God* (who is good) with *life* (which is hard).<sup>5</sup> God feels the same way we do—and is taking the most radical steps possible (Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and more to come) to redeem the present situation.

I haven't always believed that. In fact, my father is an atheist. I was raised to *not* believe in God. When I became a Christian, my dad saw it as an act of rebellion. Later, I studied under a German existentialist philosopher. I dared her to prove there isn't a God. "If you're right," I said, in essence, "I'll stop being a Christian." Instead, after studying the writings of the most renowned atheists of the past four centuries, my Christian faith was stronger than ever.

Why is it, I wondered, that these men and women can write brilliantly about any area of philosophy, but they get so angry and irrational when writing about God, the church, and the Christian faith?

After studying their biographies, I discovered the most common reason: Very bad things happened to them or their loved ones, often when they were very young. Many even went on to study in seminary, but they didn't find the answers they were looking for. So they turned against God with a vengeance. It can happen to any of us.

A decade ago I was hit with a rapid-fire series of crises. Emergency surgery for my oldest daughter, who had just been diagnosed with endometriosis, a painful, cancer-like condition. Unexpected house repairs. Two vehicle breakdowns. Huge unpaid bills. I felt that the hand of God was crushing me—emotionally, physically, financially, and in every other way.

How could God do this to my family?

This isn't fair!

My love for God, my joy for life, and my peace were shattered. Instead I felt angry, deceived, and desperate for a way out of my family's nightmare.

In my despair, I doubted God's character. Finally the day came when I couldn't read the Bible anymore. Not a single verse. I couldn't pray, even over a meal. For days and weeks on end.

Experientially, I had lost my faith. Why? Because I had let the circumstances of life temporarily overshadow what I *knew* to be true. As a result, I couldn't fall asleep at night. I couldn't get rid of the stabbing pain in my chest.

Finally, like Peter the apostle at the end of John 6, I realized, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life." I dared take the risk of embracing faith again.

Thankfully, God renewed my faith when I started taking several simple (but nonetheless terribly hard) steps of obedience. I forced myself to open my Bible, read a verse—I don't even remember which one—and honestly answer the question, "Do I believe it?" To my surprise, I said yes. It wasn't a big yes. But it was enough to prompt me to read another verse, and then another.

At long last, I felt God speaking to me again. I started praying to him as well. To my surprise, he wasn't angry at me over my crisis of faith. Just the opposite. In time, my faith was renewed in a remarkable way.

Since then, I've talked with many people about my experience.

Not because it's dramatic, but because it's true to life. Every Christian is seriously tempted, at one time or another, to lose his or her faith.

The good news is that God never abandons us. Even in the worst of circumstances, he's still there, urging us not to lose hope that we will see him again.

What's your story? Can you see God at work in your life? If not, let's talk. You can write to me at [IfGodDisappears@gmail.com](mailto:IfGodDisappears@gmail.com).

## CORRESPONDENCE

THANK YOU so much for reading *If God Disappears*.

You may have found that this wasn't an easy book to read, but through various stories you have had an opportunity to get to know me a bit. Now I'd love the privilege of meeting you via e-mail (and perhaps in person someday when I'm speaking at an event in your area).

I'm open to hearing your take on what I've said in this book, whether you strongly agree or strongly disagree with it. I welcome the opportunity to hear your story, listen to your comments, field your questions, and discuss your concerns.

You can join the discussion at [www.IfGodDisappears.org](http://www.IfGodDisappears.org) (or [.com](http://www.IfGodDisappears.org)) or at [www.IfGodDisappears.blogspot.com](http://www.IfGodDisappears.blogspot.com), where you can post your comments about this book and more.

I hope you'll take a few minutes to write me at [IfGodDisappears@gmail.com](mailto:IfGodDisappears@gmail.com) as soon as you close this book.

And, finally, please don't put this book on a shelf. Instead, loan or give it to a friend.

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## NOTES

### CHAPTER 1: UNSOLVED MYSTERIES

1. See <http://www.americanbuddhist.net/general/thought-0?page=6> (viewed October 25, 2007).
2. This statement originally appeared in French in *Nouvel Observateur*. It first appeared in English in *National Review*, June 11, 1982, 677.
3. Luis Palau and David Sanford, *God Is Relevant* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), xi-xiii, tells Jean-Paul Sartre's story in more detail.
4. If, like Lisa, you long for healing from the wounds of child sexual abuse, I highly recommend *In the Wildflowers* produced by Restoring the Heart Ministries, [www.rthm.cc/Wildflowers](http://www.rthm.cc/Wildflowers).
5. See [http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/yancey\\_3302.htm](http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/yancey_3302.htm) (viewed June 1, 2008).

### CHAPTER 2: BEFORE A FALL

1. Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 91-94, tells Vincent van Gogh's story in more detail.

### CHAPTER 3: ANYTHING GOES

1. Harold Kushner, *Who Needs God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 82-83.
2. Bertrand Russell, *The Collected Works of Bertrand Russell, Vol 10* (London: Routledge), 192.
3. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (New York: Harper, 1937), 267.
4. Mark Twain, *Follow the Equator* (1897; repr., Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 146.
5. Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 136.
6. J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist?* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 36.
7. Kai Nielsen, *God and the Grounding of Morality* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), 13.
8. Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage*, 32.
9. Kushner, *Who Needs God?*, 22.
10. Palau and Sanford, *God Is Relevant*, 179-186, explores this subject in much more depth.

### CHAPTER 6: LOST IN THOUGHT

1. Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2000).
2. Palau and Sanford, *God Is Relevant*, 187.
3. Ibid.
4. Scott Larsen, editor, *Indelible Ink* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2003), 185.
5. Ibid., 222.



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