

A Prayer for Naming and Releasing Your Disappointments

By Jennifer Slattery



Most of us have faced numerous disappointments over the past years. Graduation parties canceled, postponed, or downsized. Family reunions and vacations that never occurred. Some have spent years, maybe decades working towards a promotion only to get laid off. Unmet expectations leave us with sadness and a sense of loss. In response, we can suppress our feelings, remain stuck in our unhappiness, or we can turn to Christ for His comfort, guidance, and perspective. As we sit in His presence, not only does He fill our souls with hope and peace, but our relationship with Him deepens as well.

My family and I was dreaming about my daughter's wedding, a celebration we'd long been planning and saving for. She and her fiancé selected a beautiful multilayered cake with gradient burgundy frosting and gold accents. Together, we toured venues and found and reserved the perfect one. We spent an entire afternoon selecting artificial flowers. We had such fun envisioning the decorations, the vows, and that first dance beneath glimmering tea lights.

When Covid caused drastic changes, I lamented the loss of so many anticipated moments. I shared my emotions through prayer, naming each disappointment specifically and why it stung.

He listened, and then He spoke, assuring me that He would still shower my daughter's special day with joy.

Our disappointments can lead to disillusionment, which often distances us from God. Or they can draw us to the One who knows us, loves us, and promises to work all things for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

When I'm battling negative emotions, my prayers tend to follow a typical pattern. I begin by honestly expressing my feelings one by one. Sometimes I'll use the Psalms as prayer prompts. These ancient writings reveal the depth of humanity and the peace and comfort that comes when, in moments of unmet expectations, we seek God.

Here is a prayer for naming and releasing your disappointments:

Vent Honestly

David, ancient Israel's second king, wrote Psalm 13 during a time of despair, stating, "O Lord, how long will You forget me? Forever? How long will You look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand" (Psalm 13:1-3, NLT).

Logically, we know the answers to David's first two questions, for Scripture tells us God will never leave us or forsake us, and hears our every cry for help. Based on what we read in many of David's Psalms, he knew this as well. But when he wrote Psalm 13, he felt abandoned. His words were an honest expression of the emotions swirling through his heart.

This was his common practice.

In Psalm 55, he wrote, "Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed in my troubles. ... My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking" (Psalm 55:2, 4-5, NLT).

When praying, I like to be as specific as possible. For example, regarding my daughter's drastically changed wedding, I said, "This hurts, God. I'm sad that she and I won't be able to spend an evening together, decorating the venue before the event. I'm grieving the beautiful images I'd formed in my mind over the years—the elegant table settings, the highly arched ceilings, the shiny dance floor, and that special table reserved for her and the bridal party. I'm angry that, despite all our planning, so much is now out of our control. And I'm deeply saddened that so many of our loved ones won't be able to join us for this event."

I named each emotion, one by one, and as I did, God listened, without chastising or correcting me. I'm certain He'll do the same with you, inviting you to draw closer to Him and to find comfort from His steady embrace.

Sometimes, the more intense our emotions, the more reluctant we are to share them with God. But those are the times we most need to invite Him in to our struggle. He already knows how we feel. He knows the deep, hidden emotions we're not even aware of. As we pray, lowering one defensive wall after another, He reveals the root of every frustration and hurt so that He can sooth each one with His grace and love. He reminds us that He sees us, remains with us, and that He cares. These truths, in turn, provide powerful weapons against the bitterness that could turn our discouragement to defeat.

Try it

- Name every emotion you feel, perhaps asking God to help you untangle your feelings so that you can become more aware of each one.
- Expand on why that disappointment triggered the emotions it did. What all do you feel you've lost through this situation?

Proclaim God's Attributes

Years ago, I went through a difficult time career-wise. For a while, it appeared as if I'd need to give up writing, something that brings me great joy. Initially, I was deeply saddened, but then one morning in the middle of prayer, God brought Psalm 147:5 to mind, which states, "How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!" (NLT).

I began repeating those words, in prayer. As I did, God challenged me to consider those truths in light of my current situation. If He truly is all powerful and all-knowing, as the verse states, and as loving as the cross of Christ proves, then I could trust that wherever He was leading me would be good. Because He is good. While I still grieved the temporary loss, I was able to do so with hope, knowing God still had fulfilling plans for me.

I prayed, "Lord, You are loving and faithful and true. You are a kind, generous, and merciful Father who has continually blessed and provided for me. You are my brilliant Creator, with a plan for every aspect of your creation, me included. Thank You for always standing beside me and going before me, even in this."

Try it

- Tell God, in prayer, how amazing, powerful, loving, and wise He is.
- Find verses that proclaim His character and power, then speak these to Him as you pray.

Ask for His Perspective

My perception is often faulty and fueled by short-sighted thinking, pride, areas of deception, and past hurts. I can only see what is right in front of me, but God's view extends beyond my most difficult moments to the beautiful life mosaic He is crafting. He sees and protects me from danger I might otherwise head straight toward. He also knows precisely how He plans to sprinkle moments of unexpected joy into my day. If I'm overly focused on my disappointments, I might miss those blessings He provides.

In Psalm 39:4-7, during a time of distress, King David prayed for an eternal, God-centered perspective. He said,

“Show me, Lord, my life's end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before You.
Everyone is but a breath,
even those who seem secure.
“Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom;
in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth
without knowing whose it will finally be.
“But now, Lord, what do I look for?
My hope is in you.”

Try it

- Ask God to remind you of what is temporary and what's eternal and to help you prioritize between them.
- Ask God to remind you of where your true joy is found—in Him.

Following David's example, ask God to lift your gaze off of things you're tempted to hold tight to today so that you can find joy in your true treasure, God. While that probably won't take away your disappointments, seeing God's grace might cushion them with hope.

Ask for Help in Releasing

Often, we cannot release what we haven't grieved. Therefore, it's important that we allow ourselves to prayerfully feel each emotion, but we don't want to remain stuck in our disappointments. We might need God's help to release those things we've lost or perhaps never enjoyed in order to embrace all God has for us today.

For example, I might pray, "Lord, please remove my hurts and frustrations and lessen the hold this thing has over me." I normally try to name whatever I need to let go. "Fill me with contentment, peace, and joy."

Our emotions aren't wrong or sinful. God doesn't want us to deny or suppress them, but neither does He want us to live dominated by them. Rather, He invites us to feel with Him, expressing our greatest struggles while seeking His perspective, truth, and grace. That is how we experience ever-deepening intimacy with Him, and many times, increased joy and hope as well.

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