

# 40. WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME



*Those struggling with mental health issues often feel that the world and life is oppressive, and meaningless.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

*Matthew 27:46: "It was about three o'clock when Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"*

"My God, why have You forsaken me?" I wonder whether you have asked God this question some or other time in your life – feeling very far from Him, feeling that He is not coming through for you? Perhaps your prayers are not being answered and it feels as if He has literally abandoned you. I think of the story of Jesus when He hung on the cross and He felt abandoned by His Father. Even though He was there, doing what He was called for, He asked: "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" As I read this verse, I wondered to myself whether we truly believe that God, the Father, had forsaken Jesus? I don't believe that He had, but I get this feeling that in Jesus' human emotions and mind, He could no longer feel the presence of God like He did before. He therefore cried out in a loud voice, "My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?"

Are you at a place in your life right now, or have you been at a place where you felt abandoned and forsaken by God? Perhaps you don't feel the presence of the Lord in your prayers anymore? You don't see Him anymore because the visible tokens that were there once, are no longer there. In a previous presentation we looked at our God view (This was covered in the presentation 'What is God doing?') We explored how God acts like a parent who wants the children to learn independence. He then sometimes steps back. God doesn't show

**ARE YOU AT A PLACE IN YOUR LIFE,  
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Himself visibly or audibly in our lives so that we can learn independence and learn to follow His ways, not because we are forced by His presence, but because He allows us that freedom of choice. He did not abandon us and He is still there for us.

There are over 100 verses in the Bible ensuring us that God will never leave or forsake us and that He goes with us everywhere we go. I am thinking of the verse in Proverbs 15:3 that says: *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching both the evil and the good."* Psalms 139 is a psalm of David and in verse 8 he says: *"If I ascend into the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there."*

You might say that despite all these assurances, sometimes God is **not** visible to you. Yes, it is true. He sometimes steps back in order for us to live our lives, but we are assured by all of these verses that He is there, He hasn't left us and He hasn't forsaken us. Why then do we feel so forsaken by God? Why don't we feel His presence in our lives? There is a perfectly good explanation for why we feel this absence of God in our lives. There are three reasons for this feeling:

1. The first reason is that **sin** separates us from God and it makes us blind for the presence of God.
2. The second reason is that we do not give **full expression to our beliefs** and this robs us of that full experience of God in our lives.
3. The third one is that depression, anxiety and **mental illness** can blind us for the presence of God.

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We are going to look at these three reasons individually and see how and why it is that we feel so God-forsaken in our lives. Why is it that we at times, just like Jesus on the cross, declare: 'My Lord, my Lord, why have You forsaken me? Why do I not feel or see your presence in my life?'

**Sin** separates us from God. Adam and Eve, the first couple upon this earth, were the very first people who experienced the separation that sin caused between man and God. Sin literally drives a wedge between us and our Saviour. We've seen this happening with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Right after they've sinned, they felt naked and they hid from God. I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but sometimes when we go through a sinful experience where maybe we have faulted again and we have fallen into our old ways, we struggle to go back to the Lord. We struggle to do our daily devotions and prayers and the things we usually do in spending time with God. We struggle to go back to those things because sin doesn't allow us to enter into the presence of God the way we would like to. The guilt of sin drives us away from our Lord. Not only does it drive us away from God, but we **feel** that He is displeased with us. Because of this feeling, whether He is displeased with us or not, our mind tells us that God is not pleased with us. We then do not only physically separate ourselves from our Lord, we also feel emotionally separated from Him.

Revelation 6:16 tells us that one day when Jesus comes on the clouds of heaven, those who have not confess their sins and have not departed from their sins, will cry out for the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them and to hide their faces from the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. Sin makes us feel dirty. It makes us feel that we cannot enter into the presence of the Most Holy God.

**BE CAREFUL THAT THE GUILT OF  
SIN DOES NOT DRIVE YOU AWAY  
FROM OUR LORD.**



It makes us feel as if God does not want us to go to Him anymore. This is not true, but we feel as if it is the case. David tells us in the book of Psalms that he also experienced this feeling. He had sinned and he felt the separation from God in his body. In Psalms 32:3-5 he says: *"When I refused to confess my sins (he felt that separation), my body wasted away and I groaned all day long."* His physical body was feeling the effects of his sin. *"Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy upon me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."* And then eventually: *"Finally, I confessed all my sins to You and I stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion before the Lord'".* Then comes the beautiful part where he says: *"And You forgave me! And my guilt was gone."*

The reason why we feel so far and so separated from God, yes, is our sin, but it actually is because we do not have the courage to go to the Lord and confess our sins openly. The moment we have sinned, we feel that we cannot go to the Lord immediately and say to the Lord: "I've done this, please forgive me. I am a simple human being." As a matter of fact, that is what we should do the very minute we have done something that separates us from the Lord. When you feel far away from Him, you should go on your knees immediately and confess and ask the Lord to heal you and to help you, to bring you back to Him. But we wait because it feels wrong to go to God immediately. It feels as if it is not sincere to say: "Lord, I know that I need You. I know that the guilt of sin is going to separate me further from You. I want to come to You immediately because I don't want to feel that separation. I don't want to go through life without You."

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In Psalms 65:3 David wrote: *“Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, You forgave them all.”* This is what sin does, it overwhelms us, it consumes us and there are feelings of guilt. However, if we focus on these feelings of guilt, it is going to stop us from going to God. It is going to stop us from experiencing Him every single day, because we sin every single day. Maybe not big sins, not those terrible things we struggle with in our lives, but we sin every single day. God says we should go to Him, moment by moment, confessing to Him and taking our burdens to Him, because He is the One who is going to help us to overcome those sins. He is the One who is going to lift that burden of guilt and the burden of feeling so distant from the Lord. Because of our sins, we are hiding from Him and we feel that God is angry with us, kind of how Adam and Eve felt in the Garden of Eden.

Satan wants you to think that you cannot go to God because your sins are too big or too small or too insignificant for Him. But God, on the other hand, says: “Don’t listen to him. Don’t allow your thoughts of guilt and shame to separate you from God.” It is **your guilt** that separates you from the Lord, but in moments of guilt and shame, God tells you: “Come to Me all you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Psychologist Angela Charles (2012) writes: *“For those who struggle with depression, a healthy level of conviction can sometimes reach an unhealthy level of guilt ... Spiritual growth can either be enhanced or hindered depending on how each person deals with these feelings.”* She says if people with a healthy level of conviction of the wrong and the need to go to the Lord, have depression, the healthy level might escalate to an unhealthy level of guilt.

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She further says with this unhealthy level of guilt, spiritual growth is either going to be enhanced or hindered, depending on how each person deals with these feelings of guilt.

The feelings and thoughts nest in our heads therefore we need to realise that it is often our own minds that separate us from the Lord. It is not God who separates Himself from us. It is us who separate ourselves from Him because our minds, our feelings and our thoughts are captivating us into not going to the Lord. This is the first reason why we feel so distant from the Lord, why we might feel that God has abandoned us – our thoughts and our emotions often press us into this idea that we are abandoned by God.

This brings us to the **second reason** why we experience feelings of abandonment. **We often struggle to give full expression to our beliefs** and this robs us of the full experience of God's presence in our lives. Let me explain to you what I mean with this. To do this, I need to explain two terms. The first is spirituality and the second term is religiosity. In order for us to understand how we are spiritual and how we are religious, we need to clearly understand the meaning of the two words.

**Spirituality** is the heart of our being. It is the 'undercover you', as in a spy story where a person goes undercover. He puts on black clothes and a balaclava and he goes into a building at night, infiltrating a group. (You will perhaps remember the James Bond movies and the tune, t-dum, t-dum .....) The word 'undercover' just means what is hidden, what is not seen, like under the cover of the night. Your spirituality is undercover. It is something that is not seen by people unless you tell them about it.

OUR THOUGHTS AND OUR  
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Your spirituality can be summed up as your values or your belief system – something that you hold dear inside of yourself. The things that you are hoping for. The things that you attach meaning to. It's everything you believe and that you can feel inside of yourself. It is the part of you that people cannot see, unless you tell them about it. For example, if I were to look at you right now, by just looking at you from the outside, I wouldn't be able to tell whether you are a spiritual person or not because your spirituality is something that is contained inside you.

**Religiosity** or religion, on the other side, is the outside of you. It is the part that can be seen – how you **conduct** yourself spiritually. It is the way that you give expression to your doctrinal beliefs. It is the way that you morally conduct yourself, how you live and practise your spirituality. Let me give an example. Your spirituality or what you believe could be that you should care for the poor or that it is wrong to be unkind or that it is a sin to swear. Your religiosity is how you express those beliefs. If you believe that it is important giving to the poor, you will serve your community, doing community outreach programmes. If you believe that you need to worship the Lord your God, you are probably going to do this in your religion by going to church, by praying and by singing songs.

In other words, spirituality is what is inside of you, your beliefs or values and religiosity is how you practise those beliefs, e.g. you go to church, you pray, you give to the poor and you speak kindly to those around you. I've heard many people saying: "I am a spiritual person, but I am not a religious person."

**YOUR SPIRITUALITY CAN BE  
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Basically what this means, is that they believe in God, they still have meaning inside of them, they still have hopes and values and those things, but they would probably say that they have stopped going to church, they have stopped praying and stopped exercising what they believe inside of them. The reason why this happens is mostly because many people have been hurt by religious organisations. The pastor, or a member in the church, has judged them or discarded them or told them that something they did, wasn't good enough. It made them feel like an outcast. They got hurt within a religious organisation and because of this, they gave up their religiosity. They gave up practising what they believe inside of them. But they didn't give up on their belief in God.

Are you in such a place today? Does this make sense? Does it make sense to give up your religiosity when you've been hurt by a religious organisation, but still hold on to your spirituality? Now, it is good if you are still holding on to your spirituality, but who is getting hurt in the process of not practising your religiosity anymore? It really is you. Let me use golf as a type of a synonym for religion and spirituality.

If I were to go to you today and say to you that I believe golf is the best sport that exists within the world, I am telling you about my beliefs. In other words, I am sharing my inner being with you that I believe golf is the best sport in the world. I can also tell you why I say that golf is the best sport in the world. Firstly, golf is not one of those sports that makes you get dirty or where you run and you break legs or you get blood all over yourself. It is a gentleman's sport – you do it very sophisticatedly.

**RELIGIOSITY OR RELIGION, ON THE OTHER SIDE, IS THE OUTSIDE OF YOU. IT IS THE PART THAT CAN BE SEEN – HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY.**

You get to wear fancy clothes when you go out to play, where with the other sports you have to wear short trousers and the clothes are probably going to be ripped and thrown away after the sporting event in any case. The other sporting events are so noisy and loud and there are vuvuzela's, but with golf it is quiet and calm. Golf is played in some of the most beautiful places of the world, the most splendid greens where there are beautiful lakes with ducks and beautiful trees and all kinds of cute nature elements.

The other sports are played in a stadium and all you see is a concrete jungle. The skills you need to play golf are just so amazing, like the way you hold the club. It is not just about holding the club and just swinging, there is a beautiful technique to it. The way you position your hand, the stance of your body and the way you move. Then, when you hit the golf ball on that sweet spot, it is just satisfaction you feel. When it is quiet you can even hear the ball travelling through the air.

I don't know, but maybe by now you are convinced that Nandi believes golf is the best sport in the world. Maybe you've even started changing your own beliefs regarding the different kinds of sports. But this is not the reason why I am sharing my belief with you. If I believe that golf is the best sport in the world, what am I going to do about it? Well, I am going to play it or I am going to learn how to play it. I will go for some lessons and I will go to the driving range. I will probably even collect some golf memorabilia. I will probably have a place where I am putting up pictures of those who play golf. I'm probably going to watch golf and I'm going to do things showing that I believe golf is the best sport in the world.

**HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ON  
PRACTICING YOUR SPIRITUAL  
BELIEFS BECAUSE OF THE PAIN A  
RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION HAS  
CAUSED YOU?**



Now, if I start playing golf and I go to a driving range and I struggle a little bit, keep hitting the grass out, damaging the golf course, eventually the owner of the golf course will come to me and say to me: "Nandi, you are here for two months now and you are still not able to hit the ball. I think you should probably go to a place where you can play putt-putt. You are damaging the golf course for those who are professionals and those who can actually do it properly." How am I going to feel? Well, I'm going to feel hurt and I will probably be very angry. I will probably leave the golf course to never again go back.

This could be the experience we have in our walk with the Lord. We go to organisations where the people become impatient with us because we don't reach the level that they expect us to reach quick enough. We don't measure up to the standards that are set by the religious organisation or even by our own spirituality, because we are still young in our Christianity. And we get hurt, so we leave our religiosity. We leave the golf course. Then we stop playing golf altogether.

If you had such an experience, I'd like to encourage you not to give up. When a religious organisation or even a church organisation has hurt you, remember it is not the only place where you can practise your religiosity. You can practise your religiosity in various ways. Make sure to find a place to practise, since you're the one who is going to suffer – you are the one who deep down want to play golf. You want to do those things which you believe you should be doing. Just because people have stopped you and separated you from practising it, doesn't mean you need to stop practising it.

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So, the reason why you feel distant from God, could be because you haven't practised for a while, because you haven't been out there on the golf course with Him, because you haven't been singing and praising and reading your Bible. Maybe you are experiencing this distance from God and you are feeling God-forsaken because people have caused you to feel that separation and not experiencing God's presence around you. I'd like to encourage you to find a way to practise. Find a way to live up to your spirituality – those things you believe deep down inside of you.

The **third reason** why we are struggling with feelings of abandonment by God, is because we might have some **mental struggles**. Depression, anxiety, grief and stress, cause a lot of negative emotions inside of us. These negative emotions often leave us feeling that God is not there.

Let me explain it this way. Depression is like a pair of dark sunglasses that covers your eyes. I don't know if ever you've experienced it, but when you go through depression, anxiety, worry and stress, or any mental health problems, the world seems to feel very oppressive. It seems very dark and meaningless. It is really like a pair of goggles that goes over your eyes and you see everything through the glasses of anxiety and depression and stress. It is as if the world and everything around you are dark. This inner darkness of despair that a person is experiencing because of depression and anxiety, often leaves that person feeling God-forsaken. In other words, it is like putting on those dark glasses and you don't feel or see the presence of God.

I'D LIKE TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO  
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You might then say things like: “God is absent. God has abandoned me. He is displeased with me. He is disapproving of things that I am doing. He is punishing me.” When you experience sadness and emotional distress, it penetrates right into your spirituality and religiosity. Sometimes in such a way that you know you can't reach out to God anymore, or you don't feel Him reaching out to you anymore. It's like seeing everything in this dark cloud. And sometimes you become distant and you feel that God has become distant. It's interesting that King David, a man after God's own heart, the Bible says, also experienced this.

What are the two things we experience when we have these feelings of anxiety and depression? We tend to experience negative **thoughts** and negative **emotions**. Depression, anxiety and stress often attack our thoughts and our emotions and we experience everything through those negative thoughts and negative emotions.

I want to quote a verse for you from one of the psalms and I want you to identify the thoughts and the emotions of David when he wrote this psalm. I want you to pretend being a psychologist for a while and identify whether David was feeling very happy or very sad. Then, on the other end, I want you to identify what he was saying about his relationship with God. Was he saying that his relationship with God was in a good place, or in a bad place? Psalms 13:1-2 reads as follows: *“How long, o Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemies triumph over me?”*

**DEPRESSION, ANXIETY & STRESS  
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EMOTIONS.**

Now, if you read very carefully, you will notice that David mentioned he was wrestling with his thoughts and he had sorrow in his heart. I believe that David was feeling a little bit depressed, he was feeling a little bit anxious and he was feeling a little bit worried.

His emotions and his mental and emotional health were not doing so well. How was his spiritual life because of this? It is saying that his spiritual life was not doing so well either. He is basically saying: "God, why have You forsaken me? You have forgotten me. You are hiding your face from me, I can't feel you."

I really do believe that emotional and cognitive distress cause us to feel God in a way that we didn't feel him before. We feel as if He has left us in the dark cloud which shrouds us from seeing and feeling His presence in our lives.

Another example of a person who was going through emotional and cognitive distress is the lady called Mother Teresa. She was a Roman Catholic nun whom many people within Christianity considered a very godly woman. Some even called her a saint because she did a lot of social work amongst the orphans and widows in Calcutta. She really was a woman of God who loved the ways of God and dedicated her life to God 100%.

One would assume that this mighty woman of God would be in a good place with God, but there was a time when she was suffering pain and agony. She questioned her relationship with the Lord and she also questioned Him. This information is from one of her diaries and you can access this in a book written by Burgess (2011).

**EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE  
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In an excerpt from her diary she asks: *"Where is my faith?"* Now, please read what is happening to her spiritually – in other words what is happening to her emotionally and cognitively. She says: *"Where is my faith? Even deep down there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ..."* She sounds a little bit depressed when she explained the dark cloud that enveloped her. It could be because of the suffering she saw. She further says: *"If there be a God – please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul."*

She experienced that the prayers she was raising to Heaven, were just hitting the ceiling, they were coming straight back to her and it felt like knives hurting her. Her heart was aching, she was feeling a pain inside of her soul. She says: *"How painful is this unknown pain – I have no faith. Repulsed, empty, no faith, no love and no zeal ... What do I labour for? If there be no God, there can be no soul. If there be no soul then, Jesus, You are also not real."*

What was this lady going through? She was experiencing emotional and cognitive distress. She felt empty and as if she was in darkness. She said she did try to reach out to God, but it just felt as if He's not there. Her prayers came straight back to her. She was even questioning the existence of Jesus. She was questioning the existence of God and therefore she even questioned her faith: "Do I even have a soul? Why am I working, why am I doing the things God has asked me to do?" Can you see how those dark glasses of emptiness, depression and sadness blind you for the presence of God?

**BE OF GOOD CHEER EVEN THE  
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THERESA A WOMAN OF FAITH  
EXPERIENCED DARK MOMENTS OF  
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FAITH.**

If you realise that it is something many great Christians have experienced in their lives, you might have hope. You might realise that the reason why you feel so abandoned is because of your depression. The reason why you feel so abandoned is because of your sin. The reason why you feel so bad is because you haven't practised and therefore haven't experienced God in your life the way you did before.

I do believe that there is hope in it all. Even David, who asked the Lord: "Lord, why are You turning your face from me? Why have You abandoned me? How long will You ignore me?" experienced this. In his experience of feeling abandoned and even with Mother Teresa's abandonment, they were talking to God about Him **not** being real. David was pouring out his heart to the Lord in prayer, asking God where He was and why He had abandoned him and why He was closing His ears to David's prayer. In the quote Mother Teresa said her faith was deep down, but when she tried to raise her thoughts to God, it returned to her like sharp knives. Although she did not experience God's closeness, she was still praying.

I believe that is the key. Even though God feels far away from you, even though the darkness of anxiety and depression results in you feeling far away from God, even though you haven't experienced that relief from sin yet and you have not really experienced living Christianity the way you would like to live it, don't give up. Despite all of these, keep going to the Lord because that is the message of the gospel. Don't quit. God will bring relief because He hasn't abandoned you.

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Look at the metamorphosis of King David. In Psalms 10:1 he asks God: *"Why do You stand afar off, o Lord? Why do You hide yourself from me in times of trouble?"* Also in Psalms 13:1-2: *"Why do You hide your face for me?"* His emotions were very troubled. He was at a place in his life where anxiety, when God left him to face Saul all alone, was overwhelming him and he felt as if God was abandoning him. But as he kept talking to the Lord, as he kept wrestling with the Lord, we see the **transformation**. We see a change in him when we read Psalms 32. He says he will no longer keep things inside himself. He will go to the Lord and confess and tell Him how he feels. And he did that. He then says that the Lord forgave him and the Lord showed His face to him. In Psalms 34:18 we read: *"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* What a beautiful transformation in the life of David! He himself went through this experience of the valley of the shadow of death where he had experienced the coldness that this world and the troubles of this world can bring. But he says: *"I will fear no evil for Thou art with me."*

He says he knows that the Lord is with him. He experienced the side where he felt that God was not with him, but he kept going to God. He kept going to his Shepherd, asking Him to lead him. He then could say for sure that the Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalms 145:18 says: *"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth."* If you have felt abandoned by the Lord, my prayer for you today is that you evaluate and ask why it is so. Is it because you have stopped practising that which brings you closer into communion with the Lord? Is it perhaps, because you haven't yet confessed your sins; you haven't laid them before the Lord because you feel the guilt weighing you down and you feel that sin is separating you from the Lord?

**THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THE  
BROKEN-HEARTED AND SAVES THOSE  
WHO ARE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT.**

Or is it perhaps because you are already in emotional and cognitive distress, struggling with some mental health issues? If this be the case, don't give up. Know that the Lord has not abandoned you. Tell yourself the reason you feel that God is not with you, is because of these things. And keep pushing and keep praying, because you know when you are broken-hearted, God is close to you. When you feel crushed in spirit, God is close to you. When you call upon Him, you know that He comes close to you. Even if you don't feel Him right now, you know that He is with you and that He hasn't abandoned you.

May God show His face to you today. May you feel His presence. And if you are not feeling it yet, don't give up because soon the sunrise of Christ's righteousness will burst through those clouds of darkness. I believe it with all my heart. The Bible says that He will make a way through the wilderness, where streams will once again flow in the desert. May God bless you as you seek out those streams, as you keep searching for that experience with the Lord and where you can say: "Not only do I know, but now I feel You and even if I don't feel You, I know that you are here with me."

**DON'T GIVE UP BECAUSE SOON  
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