

Beating Frustration

Psalms 73:12-16 HCSB Look at them--the wicked! They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth. (13) Did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing? (14) For I am afflicted all day long, and punished every morning. (15) If I had decided to say these things *aloud*, I would have betrayed Your people. (16) When I tried to understand all this, it seemed hopeless

Every week pastors quit the ministry. Every week disciples quit volunteering. Every week people by the thousands walk away from relationships. The principle cause of all this devastation? Simple frustration.

Frustration largely comes from unresolved problems or unfulfilled needs and is usually accompanied by anxiety or depression. Guess what though? Frustration is also a choice. The elders of this congregation believe that all emotions are morally neutral. We teach that they serve to motivate us to right behavior and that it is our conscious decisions on how to deal with our emotions that is the source of either blessing or cursing.

Allow me to illustrate.

Imagine you've just bought a brand-new sports car, and are taking it out for your first drive. As you approach a traffic light, it turns yellow, so you slow down carefully and stop. Suddenly someone bumps you from behind. As if this was not angering enough, the same driver backs up and bumps you again. Now, you're furious! Your beautiful, shiny sports car that cost a year's salary!



You jump out in a rage, ready to let the guy really have it ... when all of a sudden...¹

...Nicolay Valuev (the guy on the left) steps out of the car.

"Gee, sir," you begin in a much softer tone than originally intended. "It seems that you've hit my car. Are you okay? Do you have insurance?"

How did you shut off your anger so quickly? It's because deep in our hearts we know that anger that is not controlled and directed is counterproductive. We possess the power to control our emotions. No matter how infuriating a situation is, we can put the anger aside and act civilly; especially when standing up against a 7 foot tall heavy weight boxer called the "Beast from the East".

I want you to turn to Exodus 34:6.

- **Exodus 34:6 HCSB** Then the LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed: Yahweh--Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth,

Remember, when you are studying the Scriptures every word matters. That's the approach taken by any good rabbi, and it's the same approach that we must take if we want to truly mine the Scriptures. That's why it just isn't adequate to stick with an English translation. There is so much more to discover in the Hebrew or Greek text if we take the time to look. This verse is another example of something that lies beneath the surface, never seen in translation.

The Hebrew for "long-suffering" is an idiomatic expression that literally means "long of nose." The idea is simple. If God takes a long breath, His anger is delayed. The longer His

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-1219617/The-poetic-beast-Nikolay-Valuev-takes-turn-verse.html>

nose, the longer it takes for Him to come to judgment rather than mercy. And God has a very long nose!

But that's not all. The normal Hebrew expression would be *erech af* (singular). God has only *one* nose (anthropomorphically) so we would expect a singular noun *af*. But that's not what the Scripture says. It says *erech apayim* - literally "long noses." Is this a mistake? Absolutely not! The rabbis explain this apparent error by noting that God is equally long-suffering with the righteous *and* with the wicked. He is long-nosed toward both. His long-suffering has a dual character reflecting His personal forbearance toward both. I will venture to guess that not a single translation of this verse in any other language expresses what we find in Hebrew. It's a shame, because this is part of God's own declaration of His character. We need to know that God is gracious toward the righteous *and* the wicked. His attribute of mercy is not limited to those who have accepted His covenant. It extends to all.

That's all well and good for God, but unfortunately I have a very short nose. I struggle with frustration a lot! The following four approaches seem to help.

1. Step back and regroup.

- [Proverbs 14:16 HCSB](#) A wise man is cautious and turns from evil, but a fool is easily angered and is careless.

As our hypothetical person did when faced with "the Beast from the East", we need to take a considering look at our situation. Is there any point in allowing frustration to grow here? Is there anything we can actually DO about the situation? Frustration is fine if it pushes us toward viable solutions. Sometimes however, the frustration locks us up and keeps us from seeing solutions that are right in front of our short noses!

If you can, walk away briefly and come back to the problem with a fresh perspective.

2. Dwell on the good of the situation.

- [Philippians 4:7-9 HCSB](#) And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable--if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise--dwell on these things. (9) Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

No matter how challenging the situation, there is ALWAYS some good to be gained. In the midst of the horrors of Naziism, beautiful examples of heroism arose. Faced with the gross injustice of racial segregation, Rosa Parks took a stand.

What good can be derived from the situation that is frustrating you? Is there a way to develop a better system? Can you improve your social skills, or build a new interpersonal relationship? Is there a creative way around this that will save time, money, or resources in the future? Will this allow you to finally face a problem in your relationship that you've been sweeping under the rug for years?

I want you to take another look at verse nine. It says "Do what you have learned...and the God of peace will be with you." When you are frustrated, angry, and confused, it is critical that you obey what you know. You may not know everything. You may not have all the solutions to all of the world's problems. However, you DO know some things that are universally true. It is always appropriate to read the Scriptures; obey them; worship with others; pray; do good and kind works for others, etc. Focus on doing those things until God shows you what to do about this specific situation.

3. Consider a change of scenery.

- [Psalms 73:2-3 HCSB](#) But as for me, my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. (3) For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

- **Psalms 73:16-17 HCSB** When I tried to understand all this, it seemed hopeless (17) until I entered God's sanctuary. Then I understood their destiny.

David started falling for the old frustrating idea that a lot of us have struggled with in the past. “Why do the wicked get away with their evil? Why do they prosper while God’s people often face terrible circumstances?”

It was beginning to get to David. He said “my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray.” It was not until he entered God’s sanctuary that he got the proper perspective. This principle is especially true of God’s House, but it is not limited to it. We can often get a better idea of what to do when we see things from a different angle.

For instance, if I am struggling with a problem and cannot find a resolution, because God has granted me the privilege of learning a couple other languages, I’ll switch my thinking to another language. When you use another language, you actually think differently. You apply a different world-view and a whole new set of problem solving techniques. Often, I’ll start thinking in French and suddenly a solution comes to me.

If I’m struggling for too long and not making any progress, I’ll go take a walk outside while thinking about it. Or I’ll surround myself with black boards and kind of “step inside” the problem. Whatever. Just do what you can to get a fresh perspective or a different angle on the matter.

4. Get help.

- **Proverbs 11:14 HCSB** Without guidance, people fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance.

Sometimes the best way to get a fresh perspective is not in changing your location or thinking in a different language but in bouncing ideas off of someone else. I recently ran into trouble while studying the book of Ecclesiastes. I could not get my mind wrapped around what the Teacher was trying to say. I asked two people for their input. I asked Griz Hoffman and I asked my Dad. Both gave me insight into the passage but interestingly, each gave me DIFFERENT insight. I not only got the passage figured out, got past the “theologian’s block” but actually got two completely different and mutually supporting views of the matter.

Perhaps your frustration is not with an off-the-wall middle eastern passage in ancient Hebrew. Perhaps your frustration is with something less esoteric – like your kid or your co-worker or (God forbid!) your spouse. Trust me, someone, somewhere, has struggled with the same issue. Try to find someone who got through it successfully. Pick their brains. Failing that, go find someone who is still struggling with it. If you can’t pick their brains, pick their heart. It is always better to go through a problem with someone by your side who can empathize with you.

- **Ecclesiastes 4:10 HCSB** For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.

Nothing I’ve said to you tonight is particularly profound. It’s probably all stuff you already know. It’s actually quite simple. However, just because something is simple doesn’t mean it’s easy. Often the frustration makes us forget the easy things. It begins to confuse us and we make very stupid mistakes in very basic areas. My hope is to remind you of those simple things and help you get through your frustration.

When you’re frustrated:

- Step back and regroup.
- Dwell on the good of the situation.
- Consider a change of scenery.
- Get help.