

## Frustrated?

Isaiah 49:4

*"I have laboured in vain;  
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.  
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,  
and my reward is with my God."*

No doubt there are times in everyone's life when we question why things are the way they are. We seriously ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this? Why are there so many difficulties? Why are there so many difficult people?"

Maybe it's with your family or work. You can't believe that in spite all your efforts to do the right thing, everything has gone wrong and people are upset with you or have no appreciation of what you have been trying to do.

One bad thing after another and you say "I can't believe that this is happening to me again".

A statement like that is an expression of frustration and perhaps even anger because we feel we have lost control of what is happening in our lives. It's as if no matter what we do everything still turns out all wrong. We feel helpless and disappointed because family life, work, friendships, church life go all pear shaped and become messy and we feel helpless to do anything about it.

Perhaps you've been to the funeral of a child and asked yourself why an accident or sudden illness should strike someone who had barely started out in life and didn't deserve this. You may say to yourself, "There are so many people in the world who cause nothing but evil and seem to get away with it, yet this innocent child's life is cut short". Things like that don't make sense.

As we reflect on the past it's not too hard to recognise those events that appeared on our journey through life and unexpectedly took us down a path that we had never anticipated.

Our thoughts turn to God.

Where has he been while all this has been going on?

Is he aware of my frustration and helplessness?

If he really knew what I was feeling then why hasn't he given me some clear direction how to change things or why hasn't he prevented things turning out the way they did?

If God truly loves me surely he wouldn't put me through all of this?

The prophet in the Old Testament reading this morning laments, *"I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all."* (Isaiah 49:4). He is frustrated and feeling helpless. God had called him to serve his people and deliver an important message. The prophet has worked as hard as he could yet there seems to be no results.

Why do we in the church so often feel as the prophet did.

If you have tried to be a faithful disciple and live a truly Christian life - tried to teach a Sunday School class - reached out to help someone - taken on responsibilities in the church - tried to witness to the truth and standards of Christ no matter what the opinions of others at your workplace

- then you will know the frustration and exhaustion the prophet expressed when he said, *"I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all."*

Like the prophet we don't like feeling that what we have done has been a waste of time. We like to see results from all of our efforts. We want to be in control of our destiny, to have a say about our future. And it can be so bewildering and hurtful when things in our daily lives or in the church don't go the way we think they ought.

Too often we try to fit God's ways into our way of thinking and our ways of working things out. When we do this we discover that God's ways are so mysterious and even confusing. His ways don't seem logical to us at all.

We need only to look at the death of Jesus. Why did the eternal all powerful God have to go down the road of dying such a horrible death on a cross in order to give us forgiveness? Surely, if God can do anything, there must have been another way to achieve the same results. Even many of Jesus' closest friends couldn't make any sense of his death. The facts were so contrary to what they thought the Messiah would do.

But there is one thing that is not a riddle. Even though you can't understand everything about God, you can know him.

God who is the Creator of all in the universe has promised to keep watch over us all the time. He is our refuge and strength. God knows that life has both its moments of stability and its moments of uncertainty. It is in those moments of uncertainty that God's presence becomes so important to us and enables us to function in today's world.

God's presence in our lives  
guides us,  
comforts us,  
and gives us strength.

We are confident that at all times we have a God who goes through our troubles with us, caring for us in a personal and intimate way, lifting us up and supporting us.

Remember, God is a God who keeps his promises.

Have you noticed how God can use even the unwelcome things in life to achieve his purposes?

It is true we find it hard to explain so many things that happen in our lives. Paul explains that even though we like to think that the plans we make and the future we plan are firm and fixed, but in reality we can only see a part of the picture of what God has planned for our lives (1 Cor 13:12). One day it will be revealed to us how all of these events fall into place and why they have taken place. Even though Isaiah felt as if he had wasted his time

and energy with nothing to show for it, he could still confidently say, *"Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."*

We need only to look at Christ and we see that God's love is the most valued possession we have. As we think back and all that has happened in our lives, the mistakes and the tragedies, the one thing that enables us to keep our senses is knowing that the love of God forgives us for all our past mistakes as we come to him in repentance, the love of God has supported us through every tragedy and difficult time.

The Holy Spirit keeps on whispering to each of us when we are frustrated and angry with the way things are turning out, not to give up but to remember that we are his chosen people, that God will keep his promises, that he will use the bad things that happen to bring about his purpose, that his love for us will be as strong as ever and that he has called us to faithfully carry out his work in this community and in this country.

He tells us, as he has told leaders, prophets and preachers in the past, doing God's will and carrying out God's plan for his church are not easy. It will involve struggle and frustration.

It will also challenge us to look to God for ongoing direction and encouragement.

May the words of Isaiah also be ours when we are confused about what God has planned for us or are discouraged because nothing is turning out the way we had planned it would. *"He who formed me in the womb to be his servant... my God has been my strength". (Isaiah 49:5).*

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