

from GREAT
DISAPPOINTMENT

to GREAT
EXPECTATIONS



Study Guide

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This study guide was created to help individuals and groups explore in more depth and detail the concepts presented in *From Great Disappointment to Great Expectations*. This book, available from Elathia Press, chronicles how God prepared author Joyce Wilson and her husband Ken for their experience with ALS and gave them insights on suffering that changed their outlook on life and death.

The principles outlined in *From Great Disappointment to Great Expectations*, which are examined at length in this study guide, do not only apply to death, but to every unexpected circumstance we encounter, be it job loss, divorce, or natural disasters. Through the book and this study guide, you will discover the secrets of finding true freedom from fear and grief.

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The truth will set you free!



1. Describe a life-changing moment you have experienced. Did you sense God's presence with you at that time?

2. Crisis comes in all shapes and sizes. **What are some small crises you've encountered?**

Some large crises?

3. God wants you to feel calm and secure when you face a crisis. **Do we have any evidence in Scripture that he is able to handle a crisis?**

a. Consider this story from Numbers 11:18-23, 31-32

"And say to the people, 'Purify yourselves, for tomorrow you will have meat to eat. You were whining, and the Lord heard you when you cried, "Oh, for some meat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the Lord will give you meat, and you will have to eat it. And it won't be for just a day or two, or for five or ten or even twenty. You will eat it for a whole month until you gag and are sick of it. For you have rejected the Lord, who is here among you, and you have whined to him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"'"

But Moses responded to the Lord, "There are 600,000 foot soldiers here with me, and yet you say, 'I will give them meat for a whole month!' Even if we butchered all our flocks and herds, would that satisfy them? Even if we caught all the fish in the sea, would that be enough?"

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Has my arm lost its power? Now you will see whether or not my word comes true!"

Now the Lord sent a wind that brought quail from the sea and let them fall all around the camp. For miles in every direction there were quail flying about three feet above the ground. So the people went out and caught quail all that day and throughout the night and all the next day, too. No one gathered less than fifty bushels! They spread the quail all around the camp to dry.

What crisis was Moses facing?

What was God's response?

Was God able to resolve the situation?

b. Consider this story from Exodus 14:5-14, 21-22

Then the Lord gave these instructions to Moses: "Order the Israelites to turn back and camp by Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, across from Baal-zephon. Then Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are confused. They are trapped in the wilderness!' And once again I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after you. I have planned this in order to display my glory through Pharaoh and his whole army. After this the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord!" So the Israelites camped there as they were told.

When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. "What have we done, letting all those Israelite slaves get away?" they asked. So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot and called up his troops. He took with him 600 of Egypt's best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with its commander. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, so he chased after the people of Israel, who had left with fists raised in defiance. The Egyptians chased after them with all the forces in Pharaoh's army—all his horses and chariots, his charioteers, and his troops. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.

As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the Lord, and they said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? Didn't we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, 'Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It's better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!'"

But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."

Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the Lord opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!

What crisis were the Israelites facing?

What was God's response?

How did God resolve the situation?

c. Consider this story from Habakkuk 1:1-6.

How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! “Violence is everywhere!” I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.

The Lord replied, “Look around at the nations; look and be amazed! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it. I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands.”

What crisis was Habakkuk facing?

What was God’s response to him?

4. Can you think of any crisis in the Bible that God resolved in a “natural” way?

Do you think God is likely to work through your circumstances in a way you expect?



1. Reflect on this quote from page 9: “We don’t expect suffering, do we? On the contrary, we expect good things to happen to us.” **Where do you suppose we got this expectation?**

Read the following statements from Jesus about living in this world:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Mt 5:4

Blessed are those who are persecuted because they do what is right, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. Mt 5:10

Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Mt 6:20

Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. Jn 15:20

How should these statements impact our expectations for this life?

2. Persian poet Sa’di (1184-1291) famously wrote: “I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” **What do you think he meant by this?**

What does this say about our personal context for suffering?

How much control do we have over how we perceive and respond to the things that happen to us?

3. Let’s think a little more about context. **Has your perception of what constitutes suffering changed as you have gotten older?**

Think back and jot down a few things that really distressed when you were:

A child:

A teenager:

A single adult:

A married adult:

A parent:

What factors influenced the change of your context?

Do you think there are any factors that could influence a change in your current context?

4. Consider this excerpt from missionary Matthew Haus on his experience living in Chad, Africa:

“God is here, God is big, God is strong.” These are words that almost always come from Chadians when they are explaining a problem to me, or when I’m explaining one of my problems to them. Many of them trust God for everything. When telling me that they don’t have any food to feed their five children, they often follow up by saying that God will provide work for them to pay for that, and for everything else. I was raised in a country where a “poor person” has a junky car and a small house. These people have nothing, but they are the happiest people I have ever met in my life. Kids are content to sit on the ground and talk to each other. They don’t have to have their cell phones or their gaming devices. Adults spend their free time talking to friends and building relationships. Not watching a meaningless TV show or spending hours on Facebook.

Their simple way of life is difficult and painful here, but in my mind, they are better off without the distractions. I could walk to any home in my village, at any time of the day, and someone would pull out a chair (of sorts) for me and sit down to find out all about me. In the States most of us just don’t have time for that. We’re too focused on our own goals and ambitions. Just some thoughts I have had. Are we too distracted by our own ambition? Maybe so, maybe not, but time is worth so much. I’m challenged every day to give some of my time to different people and try to represent the character of Jesus to them during that time.

What do you imagine constitute suffering and crises to people in Third World countries?

How do you think their perception of suffering is different than ours?

How do you think their perception of suffering is the same as ours?



1. Reflect on this quote from page 12: “Precisely because God is love, he has created intelligent beings with freedom, which includes the freedom to rebel.” **Does true love require freedom?**

Does true freedom require the option of hurting yourself and/or others?

If so, can you ever have true love without the possibility of suffering?

2. Reflect on this quote from page 19: “If [Satan] can’t cause us to hate God, he’ll settle for hurting us in the meantime. He knows that hurting us hurts God.” **If this is how freedom can be abused, is it really worth it?**

Why do you suppose it’s worth it to God?

What, if anything, is the alternative?

3. Reflect on the two lies of Satan in the Garden of Eden: (1) God lied to you. (2) God is withholding something good from you. **How are we still tempted to believe these lies when we are suffering or in a crisis?**

4. Reflect on this quote from page 17: “God can appear to act one way on one day and then act in a way that seems totally opposite on another day.” **Have you ever found Scripture confusing for this very reason?**

In the context of relationships, each of which is unique, and also changing circumstances which require a variety of actions, what is the unchanging motive that undergirds God’s every action in our world?

How do you know?

5. Reflect on this quote from page 20: “It’s time to stop looking at suffering as something strange or foreign... we ought to expect it.” **How would your life change if you expected suffering?**

How would your response to crisis change?

6. God has given us special words of encouragement for tough times. **Which one of these verses encourages you the most?**

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. Jn 16:33

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! Ps 46:1-3

Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. Isa 41:10

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs. Zeph 3:17

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. 2 Cor 4:16-18

For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him! Isa 64:4

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. Rev 21:4



1. Some people believe all suffering is random and meaningless. **Do you find that to be a comforting thought?**

If this were true, would it make suffering any easier to deal with?

What implications would this have for what we believe about God?

2. Reflect on this thought: When we suffer, God suffers, too. **If God suffers when we do, how much suffering has *he* endured from this sinful world?**

What does this say about his personal commitment to freedom?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 23: “To Eve, Satan appeared as one who was interested in helping her, in making her life better. However, the war has revealed that Satan really wants to hurt us.” **If evil can wear a helpful disguise, is it possible that something loving could appear cruel at first?**

Is it possible that blessing could be disguised as suffering?

4. The first two chapters of Job reveal that God placed limitations on Satan, controlling how much suffering he could inflict on Job. Similarly, Revelation 7 pictures God’s angels holding back the “four winds” of strife and destruction. We often question how a God of love could be connected with this world of suffering, but perhaps his connection has really been in limiting and restricting the damage Satan can cause. **How much suffering do you think we have to endure if God took a “hands-off” approach to Satan?**

Does it give you comfort to know that God is placing limitations on Satan’s ability to cause suffering?

5. As much as we don't like to experience pain, it alerts us to a problem in our body that needs to be addressed for the sake of our long-term health. **Do you think God uses the suffering that comes to us in this way — as a way to address issues that present potential problems to our long-term spiritual health?**

6. **Have you ever suffered as a result of personal choices you've made?**

How has God used the painful results of your choices to bring redemption to you?

7. Reflect on this quote from page 30: "God does not get rid of suffering by erasing it; He gets rid of suffering by transforming it. He takes what has been meant for evil and transforms it into something He can use for good." **Do you agree? Do you believe that God is able to transform every action meant for evil into something He can use for good?**



1. What are you trying to control in your life?

What goals are you working hard to achieve or what outcomes are you looking forward to?

What would be difficult for you to give up control over?

2. Journalist Allen Saunders once wrote, “Life is what happens to us while we’re making other plans.” **When something happens (big or small) that’s not in your plans, do you just try to get it out of the way as quickly as possible so you can “return to your life”?**

3. Reflect on this quote from page 34: “Everyone born into this sinful world is going to die, sooner or later, and that includes you and me. There is no avoiding it. It really doesn’t matter if you have a ‘diagnosis’ today or not.” **What might you do today if you believed it would be your last? Is there anyone you’d want to have a conversation with or anything you wouldn’t want to leave undone?**

4. Did you hear about the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge that happened in August of 2014? Maybe you dumped a bucket of ice water over your head during the campaign.

In case you missed it, the challenge was started by two friends: Corey Griffin, the “healthy” 27-year-old, and Pete Frates, the “terminal” guy with ALS. Guess which one of them died first? Griffin drowned in a diving accident on August 16, 2014, just days after the two began the ALS Challenge! You can bet Griffin never imagined he’d be in a coffin before his friend! But the stark reality is that if he spent one moment agonizing over the thought of losing Frates, it was a wasted moment, a scenario he would never live to experience.

Do you really believe today could be your last day?

Have you wasted any time today worrying about a future scenario that may never come to pass?



1. In Romans 8:38-39, Paul wrote: “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Do you believe that nothing can separate you from God?**

Do you believe that no matter how much suffering you are enduring now, even if it leads to your death, it cannot touch your eternal life?

2. In 1 John 5:11, John wrote: “And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” **Do you think it’s significant that John wrote God has given us eternal life?**

Why didn’t he write God will give us eternal life?

Does this mean we have eternal life now?

How would your perception of today change if you thought of this day as one in an eternal string of days to come?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 37: “You see, we have life in Christ whether we are awake and alive or dead and asleep. That’s because the Source of the life doesn’t change. Ken didn’t ‘lose’ his life...because he never had any of his own life to begin with. If God is the only Source of life in the universe, then John is right—when we have God, we have life, no matter what.” **Do you believe God is the only Source of life in the universe?**

How does that make you think differently about each day you live?

What does it mean to “have God”?

4. Reflect on this quote from page 38: “We don’t have life when we don’t have God—even if we are breathing!” **How should this impact how we think of the living and the dead?**

You are awake today, and you are breathing, but are you alive? Or are you dead?

5. Reflect on the idea that God doesn’t even inflict life on us without our consent. He gives us the choice to enter into the second birth (which leads to true life) or enter into the second death (which is final). In light of this, do the following Bible verses take on a different meaning to you?

The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. I have come to give life, and life more abundant. Jn 10:10

Put all your rebellion behind you, and find yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O people of Israel? Ez 18:31

What sort of life and death do you think God was talking about in these verses?

6. Genesis 3:22-24 says, “Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”

Who barred human beings from continuing to eat from the Tree of Life?

What reason is given for this decision?

What was the result of this decision?

Consider these thoughts from Revelation 2:7 and 22:1-2, 14.

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God... Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations... Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life.”

Where and when will human beings access the Tree of Life again?

Who will be allowed to eat from it?

Will anyone who eats from the Tree of Life die?



1. Reflect on this quote from page 42: “This new label hasn’t changed reality. All you have is one day at a time, whether you have a label or not. No one ever has more.” **Have you lost a loved one that you are longing to see?**

How would it change your outlook if you believed that today could be your last?

Does it help to know that you are never more than one day away from seeing the loved ones you miss?

2. Reflect on this quote from page 43: “Each new day is full of possibilities because God is with us each day, working in and through the circumstances of our lives. This means that God not only has plans for our life, He has plans for this day! Therefore, with God, there are no ordinary days!”

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

What does this verse say about God’s plans?

Who are they for? What will they result in?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 44: “Realizing that today is all we have makes each day a glorious opportunity to live well for God and to have new experiences with Him. That’s really the only value in any life experience—that we share it with God and those we love... Every situation we encounter—whether good or bad—is something we experience with God. That’s why, no matter what today holds, we can rest in God, knowing He is right here with us.” **Was there a time in your life (good or bad) when you especially felt God’s presence with you?**

4. In Romans 8:15-17, Paul says, “This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What’s next, Papa?’ God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what’s coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with him!” **How would it impact the crises we encounter if we thought of them as experiences to be had with God instead of looking at them as something we want to get out of or get rid of?**

Isaiah 43:1-2 says, “But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, ‘Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.’” **Where is God when we go through difficult times?**

If God doesn’t keep us from walking through the fire or going through the waters, what do you think he wants to do with us in the midst of these hardships?



1. Corrie Ten Boom once said, “There is no panic in Heaven. God has no problems, only plans.” **If this is true, how could this make you think differently about the things that catch you off guard?**

Does it give you greater or less comfort to know that God is not surprised or panicked about your situation? Why?

2. Reflect on this quote from page 49: “If you’re suffering right now because Satan is persecuting you, God can work through things in such a way that not one bit of it will be wasted in bringing blessing to you. And if you’re suffering right now because you’ve made poor choices that have come back to bite you, God can work through things in such a way that not one bit of it will be wasted in bringing blessing to you!”

Joel 2:25-27 says, “The Lord says, “I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the Lord your God, who does these miracles for you.”

What do these verses say about God’s power to bless us through tragedy and suffering?

Is God limited in his power to restore anything and everything we have lost?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 52: “Without our eyes on God, we feel small and powerless compared to life’s giant problems. But keeping our focus on Him transforms our crisis from something we are trying to get out of into a grand experience, where our handicap becomes the basis for a new experience of strength in Him.”

Numbers 13:31-33 says, “But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. ‘We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!’ So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: ‘The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!’”

When the Israelites sent spies into the land of Canaan to scout it out, the only thing many of them could see were giants, literally! Imagine, however, if they kept their focus on God and trusted him to do what he said... what sorts of grand stories do you think would have been recorded in the Bible about how God helped tiny people miraculously defeat giants?! **In the same way, how can keeping your focus on God affect the size of a crisis you're facing?**

What is the grandest outcome you can imagine for your situation Are you willing to ask God what is the grandest outcome He can imagine?

4. Reflect on this paradox noted on page 53: "When we're confident that our God is bigger than anything we can face, we see suffering in a whole new way, and in the process, the *weaker* we get, the *stronger* we become."

In Matthew 16:25, Jesus said, "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." **What other paradox is mentioned here? What impact does this have on crises that come into our lives?**

Are you seeking to save your life, or are you willing to lose it?



1. Reflect on this quote from page 57: “I realized that God had total control! I realized that, at any moment, if God wanted to, He could heal Ken’s body.” **How does it make you feel to think that God has ultimate control over your crisis?**

Do you believe God is not limited in what he can do?

Do you trust God to do what is best?

2. Read again this verse from 1 Peter: “Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.” **How can we be tyrannized by what we want?**

Is your thinking “chained” to a certain outcome you’re hoping for in your present circumstances?

Have you ever asked God what he wants to do in your crisis?

To what degree do you think what you want matches up with what God wants?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 59: “Suddenly, instead of being laser-focused on finding the right treatment or getting a cure, we were focused on the experiences we were going to have and the people we were going to meet that we never would have encountered otherwise.” **Who have you met as a result of a crisis situation whom you never would have met otherwise?**

In what ways might you be a blessing to them?

What divine appointments might God have for you today as you encounter something unexpected?

4. Praising God means taking the time to admire him for his many worthy qualities. For instance, “God, You are sovereign. You are comforting. You are all-powerful. You are compassionate.”

Make a list of six qualities of God you would like to focus on praising him for when you are in a crisis situation.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Which qualities of God’s will bring peace and assurance to you in times of uncertainty?

5. Think about a crisis you have experienced. What are some ways you know or can imagine that God is using that circumstance to bless you?

What are some ways you know or can imagine that God is using that circumstance to bless others?



1. If you are suffering from financial problems, reflect for a moment on where your true security is found. Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says, “The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.”

How hard was God expecting His people to work for their security?

Do you believe He wants to give you as many good things as He wanted to give them?

2. 2 Kings 5 relates the story of Naaman, an Aramite who suffered from leprosy, but found healing when he visited the prophet Elisha. Consider the beginning of the story:

The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy. At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman’s wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, “I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.”

So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. “Go and visit the prophet,” the king of Aram told him. “I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel.”

Do you think the Israelite slave girl was trying to “get out of” the unexpected circumstance she’d been thrust into?

How do you think this story would have been different if the Israelite slave girl had been bitter about the injustice she had suffered?

What does it say about the quality of relationship she had with her master that he would listen to her in the first place?

Do you think her willingness to help the person who had enslaved her came back to bless her in any way?

3. C.S. Lewis once said, “He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.” If you truly determined your wealth based on the depth of your relationship with God, how would you rate your net worth?

Is your relationship with God more important to you than all the things you own?

Is there anything or anyone in your life more permanent than God?