

James C. Dobson. *WHEN GOD DOESN'T MAKE SENSE*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale Publishers, Inc., 1993) 250 pp. Reviewed by Stephen and Joyce Kramar.

Christians who lose their faith in God in times of spiritual confusion are like branches cut off from the vine. Dr. Dobson states that this book was written for those who struggle with circumstances in life that just don't measure up to what they have been taught about Christian life. Written in an easy-to-read format, the book strives to help Christians hold on to their faith, even "when God doesn't make sense."

The book is divided into two sections by two chapters of questions and answers. In the first section, Dobson discusses normal reactions and responses to adversity. The second section deals with principles for Christian living. The final chapter presents Dobson's modern-day "heroes hall of fame" and summarizes the information and encouragement he has presented in this book.

In the first chapter, Dobson gives some examples of circumstances that "don't make sense." He then delves into reasons why we have trouble accepting or discerning the reasons for these circumstances. First, we do not have the understanding to comprehend God's mind. Also, the "name it-claim it" philosophy that has been popular over the past few years has helped generate the false expectation that everything will always be all right with Christians—bad things happen to other people. Dobson gives some biblical examples of the fallacy of this belief. He assures his readers that God may conceal things for His purpose and Satan may use that concealment to generate distrust in God, but we must remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

When God doesn't make sense to us, we are likely to feel betrayed by Him. This feeling of betrayal will build a barrier between us and God. Once this barrier is built, it can be extremely difficult to regain trust in God. In the second chapter, "The Betrayal Barrier," Dobson gives good counsel for overcoming this barrier—or preventing it in the first place. First, God does not single people out for sorrow; believers face the same hardships that nonbelievers experience. Second, we shouldn't lean on our own understanding or the advice of amateur theologians. Dobson gives scriptural examples noting that all the writers and giants of

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faith suffered similar hardships. They didn't always know why they were suffering. Scripture tells us to expect hardships and suffering but encourages us to remain faithful, joyful, and thankful.

Dobson then makes the assertion "God makes sense even when He doesn't make sense." This apparently conflicting assertion is based on his understanding of God in four specific areas: (1) God is present and involved in our lives, even when He seems to be deaf or on an extended leave of absence, (2) God's timing is perfect, even when He appears to be catastrophically late, (3) For reasons that are impossible to explain, we human beings are incredibly precious to God, and (4) Our arms are too short to box with God. Dobson gives some examples and convincing arguments for these beliefs in the remainder of this chapter. He also gives good advice on how we can and should allow God to be sovereign.

In the fourth chapter, Dobson tells his readers they have only two basic choices: Continue to be angry with God, or let God be God and admit you don't understand and may never understand. The example of Abraham is given. Though confused about how God intended to fulfill His promise, Abraham nevertheless believed God's promise. It is up to us, says Dobson, to decide whether we will be faithful through the confusing times or give way to despair.

What is God's role in situations that are confusing and disappointing? Dobson addresses this question along with prayer, faith healing, and glib answers by unthinking (but well meaning) people in the next chapter. He concludes by assuring us that God is always there and won't let us down, but that he isn't going to let us off easy, either.

The second section of the book addresses the same issues as the first section, but at a deeper level. Dobson begins by allowing that God permits adversity in order to help us become strong. Christian life was never meant or promised to be easy. We are in a spiritual war every day and need to be in the best shape possible to cope with the darts and arrows sent our way by Satan. The close interrelationship between mind, body, and spirit causes the Lord to ask us to strengthen our resolve and meet our difficulties head-on. Flabby, overindulged, pampered Christians don't have the stamina to fight the battle. Dobson's contention is that Christians used to focus more on the fact that they were in a battle, while today's Christians focus more on using God to have a successful life. It is bad theology to imply that Christians will always have a good life: we must build our faith on something besides always having a trouble-free life. We should permit the Lord to use our weaknesses for

His purposes. Christians need to be tough, and their faith must be tough. In addition, Dobson also cautions that before we blame God for our problems, we need to take a look at ourselves. Sinful behavior sometimes is the cause of troubles. For example, sexual promiscuity leads to sexually transmitted diseases, smoking to lung cancer, and so on. Thus, some of our trials and tribulations may be of our own making, and we should examine ourselves before blaming God.

Dobson concludes the book with his own "hall of fame," a discussion of his heroes in the faith. He again addresses the issue of the barrier we can allow to come between us and God, and describes different situations where this is likely to occur. He encourages us to expect hardships, to know that God will use them for His purposes, and to remember that He promises they won't be more than we can bear.

This book is replete with touching stories, examples, and perceptive insights that can be helpful in dealing with difficult circumstances. Although it provides no answers to specific problems of suffering, it does offer good advice, comfort, and a realistic hope for dealing with the problems of tomorrow.

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Bruce Shelley and Marshall Shelley. *The Consumer Church: Can Evangelicals Win the World Without Losing Their Souls?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993). Reviewed by Robin D. Perrin.

The basic premise of this book should be reasonably clear from the title and from the illustration on the front cover: a saxophone and surfer inside the curl of a large wave. Californians may be immediately reminded of evangelical movements like the Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Calvary Chapel, which have created a "culture current" version of evangelicalism that has proved especially attractive to Baby Boomers. In *The Consumer Church*, the father and son pair of Bruce and Marshall Shelley examine the dilemmas facing market-oriented churches like these.