

FRANCIS A. NANABA

WHEN GOD
GOES ON VACATION

Dealing With the Unexpected

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WHEN GOD
GOES ON VACATION

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“My name is Chantel and I read the gift copy of your book from my friend in Atlanta. Your book is so amazingly right—this minute in my life. The questions, the observations, my gosh, they take my breath away. You dove deep into aspects of pain, confusion, fear, and joy. I am deeply moved by the way you probe the most difficult questions in life.”

—PAULA, ATLANTA

“Hello from Australia. How are you? I received the email excerpt of your book when I first visited the states a month ago. I was glued on my computer all night reading your book. Thanks so much for the extensive research this book seems to have involved. It is the answer to today’s problems.”

—CYNTHIA, KANSAS CITY

“Dear Francis,

I have lived my life in reverse. At age twenty-eight, I was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Doctors gave me three years to live. At a time when most young men were out there shaping their careers, I was fighting for my life. Your book is feeding my soul. Whether I make it or not wouldn’t matter. My life has changed. Thank you.”

Take care,

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“I started to read it thinking I was going to read a pleasant little easy-to-read book on the subject of when God seems absent but this book is the clearest of all the books I have read on the subject.”

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“I have never felt the urge to write an author and thank him for his books. In a generation of microwave books that give easy solution to complex issues, I thought your book was one of them until I started reading it. I was spellbound; I couldn’t put the book down. God bless you.”

—EDWARD, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

FRANCIS A. NANABA is the founder and CEO of World Action Against Poverty, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that provides food, education, medicine, and emergency relief worldwide to families who are victims of poverty and famine. Francis lives in New York City and is currently working on his next book, *Dancing With Demons*.

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DEDICATION

Many people invested in the development of this book. Thanks to them, I was able to meet life's stringent demands and still provide the quality information that was essential to this kind of project. From the moment I began writing, *When God Goes on Vacation*, I have benefited from my family, special friends, and associates. Without them, I would have never had the courage to complete it.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Lord and personal Savior Jesus Christ who has made my life a never-ending journey of success. He is God and knows who I really am. His love has finally convinced me that in spite of my weaknesses, he comforts me and blesses me—man, does He ever! He takes what the world has rejected in me and makes it His best. My gratitude is too overwhelming to articulate is such a small span of life, especially with my limited linguistic ability. In fact, attempting to adequately express my feelings for Him is intimidating. Lord Jesus, thank you!

To my family and to those who gave me so much so often, only to receive so little so often in return.

To anyone who has gathered the courage to ask the questions even strong men cannot ask.

To my mother, who struggled to peddle food in the pouring rain just to make sure I went to school. Many times when I was sleeping, she laid hands on me and prayed for me.

To my dad, the hardest-working man ever, who inspired me to succeed.

To my twin sister, Francisca, whose pain I could feel when I was at the lowest point in my life. I love her so much.

To my elder brother Martin—he is the man! He goes out of his way to make me happy. I can put my head on a slaughter pen, and he still wouldn't kill me. His “hustler spirit” gave me my sense of entrepreneurship.

To my sister, Elizabeth, who is so dear to my heart. I love her integrity and her patience.

To David, for his understanding and love.

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INTRODUCTION

I started writing this book when I hit that point in my life where I was asking God, “Where are you?” I was like a big fish in a small pond, crying myself to sleep most nights. After realizing that my life had been full of struggles, I began to look deeply into my life and my walk with Jesus Christ.

I would pray to God for hours, without ever receiving any answers. It was as if God had given me up to the great fish. So I thought to myself, “Well, if the fish swallowed me, God would cause him to vomit me out.” But somehow that wasn’t happening, at least not anytime soon. I got to the point I would just laugh when I heard God’s name. I wasn’t sure if what I had believed in for years actually existed, or whether there was any grace or help in walking with God. I was what psychologists call “clinically depressed” for more than a year.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, it became very apparent that America was asking the same question I was: “Is God on vacation?” Why would God allow a group of Muslim extremists to take innocent lives, leaving many children either motherless, fatherless, or both? The after effects of people dying from the smoke and the conditions of the attack were equally disturbing. Many people began asking, “Where was God on that fateful day?” The pain in thousands of people’s hearts cannot be over exaggerated. Since then, I’ve met people who swore they’d never fly again.

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Thousands of questions plagued my mind every day. What about the innocent people dying in Iraq? Why does God usually wait until a person is in the ground before He sends comfort? Preaching the gospel, or better still, telling people about Christ, no longer appealed to me.

I started searching deep inside the Bible, and into the lives of many prominent and ordinary men, past and present. I wanted to know about the lives of the people who have asked themselves the ultimate question: “Is God on vacation?” The answers I received from this study provided a search light for my own life.

Then, I decided to interview several people from the different continents of the world, all of whom I found right here in the United States. I was fascinated by people who had succeeded “against all odds” or people who were at least still moving on, despite the problems in their lives. I also wanted to know about the people who believed in the “no guts, no glory” principle. I thought the stories of these people would be a search light for my own struggles. I corresponded with clergymen, laymen, the rich, and the poor. When all was said and done, I’d interviewed close to 200 people. I spent many years researching the famous, the non-famous, and all the great men in the Bible who cried to God. You know what I discovered? Even Jesus Christ Himself asked the same ultimate question that others had.

Many cried with me and even wanted a hug. I found that a free hug meant so much to so many. I didn’t attempt to answer anyone’s questions, however, because I wasn’t sure if I had the answers myself. The majority had questions I couldn’t answer anyhow, despite the fact that I’d studied a great deal of medical psychology in school. So, I offered them my shoulders to cry on; I listened to them and tried to understand their worries.

I spoke to many on the phone and met about 100 in person, and I’ve included just a handful of my interviews in this book.

Some had succeeded, some hadn't, and some had just given up on God and going to church. Some even accommodated me for days in their homes, fed me, and thanked me for asking a question they couldn't ask in public. Many actually thought that not finding the answer to the question wasn't as important as talking about the possibilities. Their honesty fascinated me.

The answers I received during these interviews sent a quest of excitement and urgency through my bones to get this message out to you—a message that contains questions that no one in this lifetime can escape. Ultimately I discovered that it was during the most trying moments of people's lives that they found their niche and true calling—when people asked the ultimate question, “Is God on vacation?” Surprisingly, all the people interviewed were willing to let me use their real names, even though I chose not to. Nonetheless, I chose stories that I hope will touch and change your life. While several had to fight hard with the question “Is God on vacation?” many found strength in the quest to find the ultimate answer to the ultimate question. The most amazing part of my journey, however, was how the struggles of my own life turned into a book like this. Hearing, reading, and studying many people's lives gave me the hope that all wasn't lost. This book is about people who have confronted the real question that many run away from.

So, as I sit here at Starbucks, sipping on a small cup of coffee, writing this introduction, my heart and spirit are racing at the speed of light to get this message to anyone who is just sick and tired of life.

I will not attempt to measure the success of this book by whether or not it becomes a bestseller, but by how many lives it touches. If it causes someone who has just lost the courage to “keep on keeping on,” to stand up and keep their heads up, and to forge ahead, it will have served its purpose. My earnest prayer

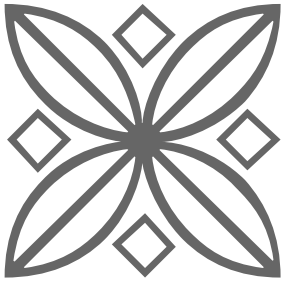
INTRODUCTION

is that God will help you understand the questions that have plagued mankind for a lifetime. Drawing from events and personalities of the Old and New Testaments, I have probed the deeper meanings of various scriptures to provide you with a message that will nourish you in your walk with God.

PART ONE



DOES GOD GO ON VACATION?



1

The Questions Nobody Asks Aloud

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible of poverty.”

—MOTHER THERESA

Have you ever wondered whether God is usually on vacation when bad things happen? Have you asked where God was when a group of Muslim extremists hijacked the planes on September 11, 2001, and took so many innocent lives while many are still suffering and dying from the after effects? Have you ever wondered why a little child has to die from illness, or has to be abducted, raped, or killed? Have you wondered why Nelson Mandela had to be in prison for two decades before He was released?

Have you ever wondered why God didn't answer you when you really needed Him? Do you wonder why you were born into an abusive family? After all, no one gets to come to this planet and tell God that he or she wants to be born into a particular family. Have you cried to God for answers only to seemingly receive more problems the more you pray?

Learning to move on in times of stress is one of the most difficult challenges an individual can face. You go to church and the preacher asks you to “keep on keeping on.” But all you can do is look at his face and ask yourself, “How can I keep on keeping on when I have never been this disgraced? When we reach those points of crisis in our lives, when we do not know what to do,

*Adversity is the diamond dust
that heaven polishes its jewels with.*

–LEIGHTON–

where to go, or where to turn; when all we can see are questions with no answers, when we are going through the rough side of the mountain, when we have fought the storms so much that we are just on the verge of giving up, that is when Jesus Christ comes walking on the water of our storms, proclaiming, “Do not be afraid; it is I.” We have all had to fight storms, one way or another. Sometimes those storms are people whose main agenda is to frustrate the purpose of God in our lives. Others storms come in the form of sickness, accidents and misfortunes. You may spend several days, weeks, months, or even years fighting a particular debilitating problem [storm], only to be hit with the next one.

Some of the biggest situations where you have thought that God wasn't there for you are usually not open for public view where people can sympathize with you. In all likelihood, these will be experienced in your secret chamber, between you and the Lord, who knows what you have to go through to become who you are destined to be. Some storms will not be physical; instead you will go to God in fervent prayer, asking Him to give you the heart to keep on keeping on. As long as we live on this earth, storms will keep coming, many of which when we are the least prepared for them. Praise God that He holds the key to death through His Son Jesus, so that even when the storms come, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

You may believe that life dealt you an unfair blow; the sun may not seem to shine anymore; the stars may have lost their glow. When heaven is silent, it seems that there is no one home. Great men of the Bible have had to battle with the same question, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” David wrestled with this in Psalm 22. It hurts to know that there is someone out

*The symptoms and the illness are not the same thing.
The illness exists long before the symptoms. Rather than
being the illness, the symptoms are the beginning of its cures.
The fact that they are unwanted makes them all the more
a phenomenon of grace— a gift of God, a message from the
unconscious, if you will, to initiate self examination and repair.*

—M. SCOTT PECK, *The Road Less Traveled*—

there who can help and yet when you most needed that person, He is nowhere to be found, especially when we know that God truly does exist. David proclaims in several songs, “The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want,” declares that “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear,” and yet he found himself in a situation where he felt abandoned by God.

David’s trust in God was phenomenal. In fact, he trusted God so much that God declared him the man after His own heart. He witnessed how God had delivered him from the hands of Saul and how He had been preserved. But when you have experienced all these great works and you expect God to be there but can’t find Him, it hurts. I believe this is why some divorces are really painful and disturbing. They leave people thinking, “Was this the woman or man I thought loved me?” and “Is this the man or woman I thought would be there for me no matter what?” Many times our circumstances leave more questions than answers.

I have asked the same question that David did several times. It’s an honest question, and I have not asked it simply because most people do. Rather I’ve asked it because I’ve been in situations where I thought God was not listening to me. When you go through the darkest moments of your life and there is more pain than you can bear, you do not ask scholarly questions; instead, you sincerely cry out from the heart.

The reason we cry out to God is that when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we enter into a spiritual

A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner.

—ANONYMOUS—

contract with God. It is because we enter into a bond with Him, a blood covenant, that we naturally hold God to it anytime we feel neglected. In effect, we feel that He has not upheld His part of the contract. We seem to take God on trial. There are many lawsuits in the United States today simply because someone feels that someone else is not fulfilling the terms of a contract. Spiritually, we all feel that way toward God at some point during our walks with Him.

If you're here looking for an answer to why God doesn't answer when you cry out, I cannot possibly answer that question. That can only be learned through experience. My late grandmother once told me the story of a boy who asked his father, who was an armed robber, to teach him how to be a successful robber without ever getting caught. His father not only agreed to teach him but he also offered to take his son out on a "job" one night. When they arrived at the house they were going to loot, the father sent his son through the window, took out what he wanted, and left the house, leaving his son behind. To make matters worse, he also activated the alarm system. The homeowners were awakened, a search was mounted, and the son was left to defend himself. When he finally returned home, he asked his father why he had left him in such a situation. His dad answered, "It's part of the lesson." In effect, the dad was telling his son that the only way he could learn was by experience. I guess he would be caught the next time and given the beatings of his life and probably spend time behind bars, all as part of the learning process.

When God goes on vacation, we have to wait for Him to come and bring us back to life. Jesus waited, and in His dying moments asked the same question that we ask every now and then, the same question David asked: "Why have you forsaken me?" Even

How singular is the thing called pleasure and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it... yet he who pursues either is generally compelled to take the other; their bodies are two but they are joined by the same head

—SOCRATES—

the Son of God asked the ultimate question, “Why?” Even though there are times when God seems to go on vacation and you receive no answers to your prayers, Psalm 145:18 tells us that “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him.” Yet, sometimes we call upon Him and He doesn’t seem to be around. After all, where was God on September 11, 2001?

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?” He replied, “An enemy has done this.”---Matthew 13:24-28

What do we have to say to the countless number of people dying every day because of famine? What do we have to say to the people who are still being kidnapped and killed? These questions have caused great and ordinary men alike to lose their faith in God. People have simply given up and no longer believe. Charles

Templeton was once faced with such a dilemma. Templeton was once an evangelist and a close friend of Billy Graham. In the latter part of his life, however, he bid a “Farwell to God” after the question, which I believe he had been so afraid to ask, reared its ugly head. He was sick and in pain from his visit to Africa, where he saw the huge amounts of suffering people had to endure. And he probably asked “What kind of God would allow

The storm also beats on the house that is built on the rock.

—ANONYMOUS—

His people to suffer?” But the answer to this question is beyond our human perception, and a man who preached and led others to Christ, ended up bidding a “Farewell to God.” Trying to use our own human common sense to seek understanding into God’s way is vanity, pure and simple. The ways of God are indeed not ours. The Lamb of the Lord was slain even before the foundation of the earth.

Why did Jesus have to wait until Lazarus was buried before He got to Bethany? The disciples themselves may have misunderstood Christ. Why did He have to wait until the disciples fought the storms until daybreak before He came in to offer help? I cannot possibly answer this, but I do know that His ways are not our ways. He was teaching His disciples a lesson. It’s important for us to understand that Christianity is a journey with God, and often when we become new converts we are overwhelmed with promises from the Bible. Psalm 37:4 tells us to “delight ourselves in the ways of the Lord and He will give us the desires of our heart.” When we pray, God does listen. Yes, He does. But most often we pray and pray amiss. We ask for the wrong things at the right time. We might pray and ask something right on the target, but God might say, “I will give it to you; just wait,” and we don’t seem to get close to that moment with God.

If you look closely at Lamentations 3:8-17 you will realize that you and I are not the only people who have thought that God has forgotten about us:

“Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked. Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. He

*Challenges are what make life interesting;
overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.*

–JOSHUA J. MARINE–

pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall. He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.”

This message is truly coming from a mind that understands what it means to be in pain. And at last, he concludes, “I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.” When we hit that crisis point in our lives, we forget the goodness of God. We can ask a lot of questions and get answers, but the one question that God never promised to answer is “Why?” In fact, when we study Job, we realize that even though Job asked God so many questions, God actually answered him with several more questions like, “Job, do you know how the ravens get their food?” or “Do you know how the sun sets?” God was virtually telling Job not to question His authority. In fact, He was saying to Job, “Look you are too young to understand what is going on.” We can attempt to rationalize the crises in our lives until the end of time. I have often come up with several apparent solutions and ideas that excited me for a long time that in the end seemed so vain to me years later when I looked back. In fact, I would sit and rehearse how I would carry out a particular solution that I deemed so groundbreaking for weeks and months, only for it to sound so vain to me afterward.

WHEN GOD GOES ON VACATION

*Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you;
they're supposed to help you discover who you are.*

–BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON–

*May you have enough happiness to make you sweet,
enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you
human, and enough hope to bring you joy.*

–UNKNOWN–

*Look at a day when you are supremely satisfied at the end.
It's not a day when you lounge around doing nothing; it's when
you've had everything to do, and you've done it.*

–MARGARET THATCHER–

*Don't ever say that you don't have enough time.
You have exactly the same number of hours in a day that
were given to Helen Keller, Louis Pasteur, Michelangelo,
Mother Teresa, Leonardo Da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson,
and Albert Einstein.*

–H. JACKSON BROWN–