

No, he goes with us, he spreads his grace over us like a protective cloud. He puts a ring of fire around us to protect us. He does not let us starve or die of thirst.

Blessed is he who does not resign his trust in this God, who remains faithful to him even when he does not understand his timetable. When John the Baptist had to think in prison, "He must have overlooked me", Jesus said, "**Blessed are those who do not give up their faith because of me.**" (Mt 11:6 NIRV)

To resign, to give up is different from being disappointed or despairing. To resign because of someone means to lose one's trust in that person completely. We may feel disappointed by God, but do we have to give up our trust in Him because of it? That does not have to be! There is a "nevertheless" of faith: "**Nevertheless I abide in thee: for thou hast held me by the right hand.**" (Psalm 73:23) One can despair of, or because of Jesus, because we do not understand his actions or his silence, as was the case with John the Baptist in prison. But he did not resign, he turned to Jesus in his despair and remained faithful to him even unto death.

The fourth and last person in this sermon also has to do with despair.

God does not overlook you when you are in despair

Mary of Magdala weeps in the garden before the empty tomb of Jesus. I am sure she had not stopped weeping since Friday afternoon. Now she has come to the tomb before sunrise. The tomb is empty! The first thing she did was to inform the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb. Then they both returned home, leaving Mary alone. Weeping. She was in despair, for she had lost forever the person who had set her free and given her a place in his team.

What the two angels told her in the burial chamber did not comfort her. In her despair she asked the gardener if he had carried Jesus away. When he said to her "Mary!", her heart almost stopped: This man was not the gardener, it was Jesus! Only one word was enough to bring her out of her despair. Only one word was enough because that word was her name. Only one word was enough because the one who spoke that word, her name, was the person she loved and admired: Her Rabbuni, her Lord and Saviour! The risen Jesus Christ!

Lord, "**speak but one word and my servant will be healed**" – said the Roman centurion to Jesus (Mt 8:8). Jesus spoke and it happened.

You can be disappointed, by friends, by family, by the church, but don't give up your trust. You may feel disappointed, even by God, because you do not understand his ways, his guidance, his silence. But do not go astray with him, do not give up your trust in him. For he is much greater than our view of things. He is much greater than our understanding of his word. He is much greater than what we can realize about him in creation. He is much greater than what Christians/Adventists teach about him. He is much greater than the distorted image that his adversary is trying to spread.

Let him tell you this one word. He also knows your name. When he calls your name, it will bring you out of the pit of your despair – like Mary.

"**Now says the LORD who created you ... and made you ...: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine!**" (Isaiah 43:1) Amen!

Oratorium „The God Who Sees“, with German subtitles: <https://ogy.de/Gott-sieht-dich> (Please do not share the link separately from the sermon, as this has been agreed with the rights holder.)



God does not overlook you!

Hagar, Ruth, David, Mary of Magdala – and us!

A sermon by Eli Diez-Prida (www.diez-prida.de)

Do you remember team games where two leaders took turns choosing a teammate? At first the most sporty ones were chosen. At the end, it was the loser's turn. When I played football, I was one of those who were overlooked until there was no one left to choose from. Being overlooked is not a nice feeling: whether playing as a child or later in professional life, when it comes to an honour or a promotion round.

The escalation of being ignored is bullying. The first person from the Old Testament I want to mention, experienced what we call bullying today: the young Egyptian woman Hagar.

God does not overlook you when you are bullied

Hagar was the maid of Abram's wife Sarai. Because she was barren, Sarai - according to the custom of the time - gave the maid to her husband so that he could have the son he longed for. But when Hagar became pregnant, her mistress humiliated her again and again.

Hagar felt lost and abandoned because no one protected her. Finally, she was so desperate that she fled into the desert. She wanted to die, and she did so again later. When Sarai finally gave birth to a son of her own, Isaac, she expelled Hagar from the house with her child Ishmael. That was even worse than the first time: now she felt abused, worthless, useless.

Do you know such a situation? Have you ever felt needed but not appreciated? Have you ever experienced what it's like to be overlooked or ignored? Or even bullied because you are different, think differently, step out of line, stand by your convictions?

If so, then you have an idea of how Hagar might have felt in the desert. She must have asked herself: Is there no one there who pays attention to me? Who cares for me?

It is true: she had behaved condescendingly toward Sarai. But even then, when we bring trouble on ourselves, God does not overlook us.

Is there no one there who pays attention to me? Who cares about me? Yes, someone was there: both times, when she first fled alone into the desert, and also later when she was about to die in the desert with her young son. It says "the angel of the Lord" appeared to her, according to **Genesis 21**. We read that (≈NIRV): **[15] When they had drunk up the water in the bottle, she left the boy in the shade of a bush. [16] She herself went a little further and sat down on the ground about 100 metres away. She thought, "I can't watch my son die!" she sighed and burst into tears.**

How desperate must a mother be to be willing to let her son die in the desert!

[17] But God heard the boy's cry and the angel of God called out to Hagar from heaven, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard your son's crying ..."

“Is there no one to hear my groaning?”, Hagar may have asked herself. She had not said a prayer in the strict sense and yet the angel told her, “God has heard your son's crying!”

I find the first encounter with the “angel of the Lord” in the desert very moving, when she had fled there alone. We read about it in [Genesis 16](#), where she received the promise: [\[10\] “I will greatly increase the number of your children after you. You will have more of them than anyone can count.”](#) From these words alone it is clear that here someone spoke to her who was more than “just” an angel; for an angel cannot promise “I will give you more descendants than you can count.” That God met her personally is clear from the words in verse 13: [There she gave a name to the Lord who spoke to her. She called him El-Roi: “You are the God who sees me.” That's because she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”](#)

How comforting it was for Hagar to hear from God: I have not overlooked you! Abraham did not protect you, abandoned you. But you are not alone, I care for you. The others think about you: “You are a slave, you have done your duty, now you can go”, but in my eyes you are infinitely precious.

God is still El-Roi today: the God who also sees you! He hears your weeping; he hears your groaning. You don't have to “put yourself in the spotlight” for him to see you or hear your prayer. Whether you are bold or timid, God is a God who sees you. He not only pays attention to those who pray and perform loudly, impressively and with style, but he also hears your awkward-sounding prayer. - Scene change.

God does not overlook you when everything goes wrong

The Book of Ruth tells of the fate of a Jewish family that had to emigrate from Bethlehem to the neighbouring land of Moab because of a famine. (Moab is in what is now Jordan.) First the husband of Naomi, a Jewess, died, then her sons, who were married in the meantime, also died. Thus, Naomi was left alone as a widowed woman with her now also widowed daughters-in-law ([Ruth 1:5](#)). Without men by their side, women were neither legally nor financially secure nor protected. As if enough misfortune had not already happened, famine now broke out in Moab. How Naomi might have pondered: Was it wrong to move here from Bethlehem to Moab? Why did not only my husband have to die, but then our two sons also? What did I, what did we do wrong?

Do you also know this brooding when things go wrong? When it seems like you're being punished for some reason?

So, Naomi decided to return home, to Bethlehem. Alone, she thought. But Ruth, one of the two daughters-in-law, decided to accompany Naomi. How brave! Ruth dared a new beginning, albeit an uncertain one: she opted not only for her mother-in-law, but also for her mother's homeland, which was foreign to her, and for her God, whom she had begun to know. This was truly a step of faith. Ruth decided, with all the consequences, to live as a migrant. All those who know migration stories or have experienced them themselves know how difficult and painful it is. I experienced how hard it was for my mother in the first few years when she came to Germany as a guest worker after my father had died: a foreign language, a completely different culture, unfamiliar work in a factory, leaving the children (we were teenagers at the time) alone in the home country ...

Some of you have come here to Germany for a few years to study or to work. Others decided years ago to make a new start here [in the land of their ancestors]. I hope you have

experienced that God has not abandoned you. Others have moved here for professional reasons. ... Wherever you have come from: your God did not stay in the old home. No, he was by your side all the way and helps you to build up a new existence here, to become native here - for a time or forever (that is until Jesus takes us home).

Ruth experienced this too. The story is so exciting, you can read it in the book of Ruth, it's a short book. When she asked herself: Is there anyone who sees me? God not only gave her an answer, but also a promise: She was to have a son, Obed. And not only that: King David was then to come from this multi-generational patchwork family, and subsequently even Jesus was to be born! So, Ruth became one of the progenitors of Jesus!

God has not overlooked you when everything or many things go wrong in your life. He opens doors for you where you only see high walls. He helps you to get up again and again and to start anew. In the end, we are all foreigners - whether former foreigners or old residents, whether newcomers, immigrants, foreign students, Russian Germans or refugees – we are all foreigners on earth. Our home is there where Jesus prepares a home for us. But on the way there we can know: He does not overlook us. He looks benevolently on us. He gives us a spiritual family and keeps our hope in God's new world alive!

Sure, it takes longer than we thought. Waiting for the fulfilment of his promise can wear us down. Which brings us to the third person in this sermon: David!

God does not overlook you if you wait a long time

Have you ever thought about how long David had to wait from the day Samuel anointed him king until he actually became king of Israel? How young the shepherd David was, we do not know. Since he is described as a boy, he will probably have been a teenager. But we do know that he did not become king of Israel until he was 37. So, he had to wait at least 20 years!

That's a long time, isn't it? How might David have felt while waiting? Especially because he could not live in the palace like a prince to prepare himself for the task. On the contrary, he spent most of the time as a gang leader on the run from Saul, who only harassed him! If I had been David, I would have complained to God: Why do you let me be anointed king so young, when you knew that I would have to wait for years to become what you called me to be? Why is Saul doing so well and me so badly? What good is it for me to waste time here in the desert? Have you forgotten me?

“Have you forgotten me?” Do you know this question? When your prayers only seem to reach the ceiling. When God has helped you to do well in your studies or training, but you are now waiting for months for a meaningful job. These are just two examples.

I'm sure we all feel the same way about one thing, especially those who have been Advent believers for 30, 40, 50 years: Lord, didn't you promise that you would come back soon to take us home? How long are you waiting? Have you forgotten us? Have you overlooked us? Do you not see us and the millions/billions of people who are suffering and crying out for justice?

I don't know why Jesus is so long in coming, because by human standards the statistical gap between population growth and the growth of Christians is widening, despite the spread of the Gospel worldwide. But one thing I do know: He is still El-Roi, the God who sees, who sees us, who does not overlook us. The God who makes us march through the desert - like his people after the Exodus or like David while waiting - but does not leave us alone in the desert.