

# The Disillusionment of Elijah

*Often God's most effective servants experience feelings of defeat after a great victory. Learn how to avoid this trap.*

Derek had been invited to speak at a Christian conference. He was preparing for the conference with prayer and fasting when he and the conference organizer had a conversation that put the organizer at odds with Derek.

Derek heard that the organizer was talking to the conference leaders, trying to spread suspicion about him. By the time the conference rolled around, Derek wondered if he should even go. But he did, and the Holy Spirit showed up in a powerful way. People were touched and changed by the truth that was taught and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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## Are You Running From Nineveh?

**Like Jonah, many of us struggle to embrace God's will for our lives. Don't let reluctance prevent you from fulfilling His purpose.**

Jonah the prophet was a man who heard the voice of the Lord. The Bible tells us that God spoke to him and gave him clear instructions: "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jon. 1:2, NKJV).

But Jonah had a problem: He didn't want to do what God was asking him to do. Instead of obeying, he "arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa,

and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (v. 3).

Basically, he said no to God and ran in the opposite direction.

Many of us are like Jonah. We receive a clear word from God, but we are either quietly rebellious or openly disobedient to His command. Often our reluctance to obey causes serious problems.

I know—because I had the same response Jonah had.

### **Called to Gather the City**

Soon after I received a special visitation from God in 1997, the Lord called me to gather together the congregations in my city of La Plata, Argentina. He gave me a vision of revival there. When I closed my eyes, I could see a sports arena packed with people seeking the holiness of God.

After seeing that vision, I followed the conventional route and began to talk to some of my pastor friends who were leaders in the city. They tried to discourage me from obeying God. The pastors will not pray or work together, they assured me.

Nevertheless, I printed some posters to announce the event. But when I found out that the city was holding a secular festival during that same time, I let the matter drop, assuming I hadn't heard God after all.

Three years later, the Lord grew silent in my life. I went for weeks without hearing anything from Him.

I traveled to England to minister in a conference there, but He did not speak to me. The glory came, miracles of transformation occurred, but when I returned to my hotel room, God was strangely quiet. I could not sense His presence.

Concerned, I asked Him about it.

One afternoon I went jogging and took my tape recorder with me. I was listening to the sermon of the speaker who had preached before me at the conference. I wanted to get an overall view of what God was doing at the conference.

As I jogged, I heard the speaker say: "God doesn't like to repeat Himself. He will speak to us once and then silently wait for our obedience." By the time he finished saying those words, I was no longer running; I was kneeling on the ground.

"Lord, that's me," I said. "Three years ago you asked me to call the churches together in my city, and I didn't obey. Forgive me.

"If You will give me a second chance, I promise You won't have to say it again. This time I will obey."

I was like Jonah after he had been thrown off the ship headed for Tarshish and swallowed by a large fish—a little more willing to submit to God's plan than I had been previously (see Jon. 1:15,17).

God gave me the second chance I asked for. However, by now we were not living or pastoring in the city of La Plata. We had resigned our local congregation to embrace a worldwide vision the Lord had given us.

It would not be as easy to carry out God's plan as it would have been before. Nevertheless, I planned a citywide meeting for all the churches. To get the word out, I started recording radio programs for the Christian radio station in La Plata. On the programs, I talked about the meeting and invited the churches to participate.

When I approached one of the pastors in La Plata to ask for his support, he replied: "This is the worst time to organize a rally! Pastors are divided. We just had a new split in the

city, and the spiritual atmosphere is not good.

“If it was bad before, it is worse now. Do not try to rent the sports arena; you are going to lose a lot of money.”

But this time I did not allow the voices of doubt to deter me. I knew I had received clear direction from the Lord, and I had given Him my word. So I decided to go ahead with my plans, with or without the pastors’ support, if they would just grant me permission.

Eventually I received an e-mail giving me “permission to fail,” but that was enough. I was convinced that I would rather fail doing God’s will than succeed doing my own.

“Lord,” I said, “some pastors have already let me know they are not supporting us. Some of them are forbidding their congregations to come to these meetings. There is no way we can pull this together.

“But Lord, in obedience to You, I am going to rent that sports arena. Even if only 50 people show up, I will do it, and I will fulfill my duties in that city!”

A few weeks before the meetings started, the pastors began to believe that the meetings were God’s will. Young people gathered from separate congregations for a youth rally. They printed flyers and distributed them to the city. Something new had started to happen.

By the time my wife and I walked into the sports arena, the place was packed. On the second day, I still had doubts—and as if to support my doubt, a downpour fell all that day.

But that night the arena was packed again. On the third day, it was overflowing. The local newspaper reported that more than 6,000 people were crammed into a space that supposedly seated only 3,000.

The results of those meetings continue to be seen today in La

Plata. The pastors began calling the churches together and holding united meetings once a month. Subsequent large gatherings have occurred. Momentum for a citywide revival continues to build.

### **Fulfill the Plan of God**

Citywide revival occurred in Nineveh, too, when Jonah finally obeyed God and proclaimed, “‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!’” (Jon. 3:4). The people believed the word of the Lord, and the king instructed all citizens—rich and poor—to fast and give up their evil ways. The entire city turned back to God.

Wouldn't you be thrilled to see your city turn to God? Imagine what could happen if our civic and religious leaders would issue a proclamation similar to the one the king of Nineveh sent out! God could transform your city in a single day.

When God saw what the Ninevites did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened through Jonah. His mercy triumphed over judgment.

Interestingly, Jonah was not pleased with the Ninevites' response. He was upset that they had repented and their city had been spared!

That's because he had no compassion for the people. He obeyed God's command to speak to them, but he ministered without hope of their redemption. He wanted them to get what he thought they deserved.

God is calling the church today to a higher level. He is telling us that transformation is possible. Zechariah 3:9 proclaims, “I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.”

The Lord can revive a city in one day—just as He revived

Nineveh. The time we spend in prayer, fasting and proclaiming will not be in vain—God will send the harvest.

But problems occur when our stubborn will refuses to fulfill the plan of God. When we decide we want God to do things our way and only our way, we set ourselves up to miss the blessing He intends.

Jonah's resistance to doing God's will caused several problems. One of them was delay. If you postpone obedience, you delay the will of God for your life and your city.

In essence we, His people, are dragging our feet as we serve Him. That is why the church is advancing so slowly. If we would let Him take us with Him, the Holy Spirit could move much faster.

The real problem with delayed obedience is that it becomes disobedience. We can believe ourselves to be very spiritual—but if we have forgotten what the voice of the Lord has whispered to us in the past, then we are deceived. God does not forget, and He does not change His mind.

As my wife and I entered that sports arena in La Plata for the united meeting we had finally planned in obedience to God's earlier word to me, a wonderful thing happened. People in the crowd began to stop me.

One man shook my hand and said: "Pastor, do you remember me? I was the taxi driver you witnessed to." Another lady came down from the bleachers and said: "Pastor Sergio, do you remember me? I was your neighbor, Coca. You stopped at my house and told me about Jesus. Now I am a committed Christian."

My heart rejoiced! I remembered the day I went to Coca's house in obedience to the Holy Spirit. She had gathered her teenage girls around her and made them turn off the television to listen to me.

When I had finished talking, I led her to the Lord. How happy I am that I did not postpone talking with her—I found out later that she died three months after I saw her at the united meeting.

Another problem caused by our disobedience is the negative influence it has on those around us. If we are not totally committed to the Lord and filled with joy about what God wants us to do, it will negatively affect our families or our marriages. Our churches will pick up on our attitudes, too.

It is unavoidable. If you are not in the will of God and are refusing to do what the Lord tells you, there will be an influence on others that is not good.

In Jonah's case, the negative influence was very evident. The boat he was in began to sink! A big storm came, and the people asked, "'For whose cause is this trouble upon us?'" (Jon. 1:8). They cast lots, and the results pointed to Jonah (see v. 7).

When we are not in God's will, we become the main problem, not the unbelievers around us. It was not the idol worshipers in the boat who were the problem at that moment. It was the servant of the Lord who was hiding from the will of God. We become the problem and create new and unnecessary crises with our disobedience.

The men on the boat asked, "'What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?'" (Jon. 1:11). But instead of saying, "Let's hold hands and repent before God and pray," Jonah said, "'Pick me up and throw me into the sea'" (v. 12).

He was ready to die rather than comply with the will of the Lord. So they threw him into the ocean, and a big fish came and swallowed him without killing him.

When Jonah was entombed alive in the belly of that big fish, he began to pray and repent. Then he said, "'I will pay what I

have vowed'" (Jon. 2:9).

Finally, after being inside the fish, Jonah was willing to go where God had directed.

In other words, Jonah finally agreed to give God what he had promised. He had a change in behavior but not in attitude.

A lot of people comply externally with the vision of their church or with what God is doing in the city, but inwardly their hearts are not there. When our hearts are not in sync with our actions, there is no enjoyment.

But God is restoring the vision to see revival in our cities, and He is awakening us to the reality that He has called every one of us to be a part of the harvest. It is time to crucify our flesh and obey Him.

In a meeting recently, one young man came to me and said: "I was called by God to the ministry when I was a child. Then I went into a time of confusion, and to this day I have been confused. But today I come to the altar to tell the Lord that I am going to fulfill my vows and obey the calling of the Lord on my life."

Jonah never became an official backslider. He never quit believing in God, never stopped being a part of God's family. But his heart was far from God's will.

Perhaps you are an active church member and do not consider yourself a backslider. Yet, like Jonah, you have persistently resisted the voice of God. You may even be confused about what the will of the Lord is.

Disobedience will always bring confusion, but obedience will bring clarity. The way to pierce through the fog created by disobedience is to begin to take steps of obedience one at a time.

Have you put some of God's directives on the shelf?

Rise up, O man or woman of God! Align your heart once again with the complete will of God for your life. Reach out to your city for God.

Proclaim the day of salvation to those who need to hear it. Don't let negativity, offenses or excuses prevent you from embracing His will. Be a part of what God is doing in this day in your city.

If you are struggling with being willing to give everything to the Lord, it is because you do not trust the Father who loves you. Remember that God's will is perfect, good and pleasant (see Rom. 12:2).

Grasp this wonderful reminder of the goodness God has for your life: "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Ps. 16:5-6, NIV).

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## **6 Keys to Preparing for Revival**

We love to read in 1 Kings 18 about how the prophet Elijah confronted the priests of Baal and called down fire from heaven. But if the story tells us anything, it is that the fire does not fall in just any old place in the middle of the

**desert. We must prepare the altar of our lives if we want to be ready for the fire of God to fall upon us.**

Before the fire fell for Elijah, he endured an arduous process of preparation. And what was God preparing him for? To change the religion of an entire nation in one day! Elijah's task was to pull the Jews away from the pagan worship of Baal and bring them back to their belief in one God, Jehovah the Lord.

We read in 1 Kings 17:1: "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab [who was the king], 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word (NIV).'" Immediately a drought began in all of Israel.

"Then the Word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there' (vv. 2-4).

God was saying, "I am preparing something. I am preparing the nation, and with this drought, I am going to break them."

Baal was the god of rain, crops, prosperity and fruitfulness. God was hitting Baal hard when He sent a drought. In essence, He was saying to the people, "What kind of god do you worship if there is no rain? What kind of god of abundance and prosperity is this, if all your fields have dried up?"

Be sure not to curse your drought because sometimes dry seasons are from God. Many times He permits difficulties in our families, churches, cities and nations in order to prepare us and make us hungry for revival. When things do not work, when there is discomfort, people often become more receptive to the Lord.

## **STEPS IN THE PREPARATION PROCESS**

How did God prepare Elijah to become the leader of a great revival in Israel? He told him to hide himself. He told him to

drink from the brook of Kerith and to eat the food brought to him by ravens in the morning and evening. He has steps for us to follow, too.

**Step 1: We must learn to depend on God.** God did not build Elijah a dining room. He did not give Elijah a telephone so that he could order out for pizza. The Lord said: "You are going to depend on Me, and I am going to use methods that are unfamiliar to you. I am going to use one of those birds that are called 'unclean.'"

The people of Israel normally kept their distance from ravens. Yet this was the very bird God sent to take bread and meat to Elijah. He had direct food service sent by the Lord. If we're going to be used by Him, we must depend on Him as Elijah did.

**Step 2: We must be willing to change.** Elijah "did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land" (1 Kin. 17:5-7).

How difficult it can be when God sends us to a place where we can drink fresh water and suddenly the brook begins to dry up. We think, But God sent me to do this ministry. God spoke to me 10 years ago!

The Lord is trying to say to us, "I sent you to the brook, but now I am telling you to leave that place. I made it dry up so that you would no longer depend on a mere stream. Now I am going to send a national downpour!

"With the brook, I could give you enough to drink, but the people of the nation are dying. I want to move you out of this hiding place so you can defeat the Baals. Then I will send a downpour over the entire nation and bless it."

The Lord will do what it takes to move us out of our

ministries and comfortable lives into a new place. He may say, "Yes, I sent you there 10 years ago, but now it is time to move. I want to do something new with you."

We must be willing to move from where we are and obey God's instructions.

**Step 3: We must go where God directs.** We read in 1 Kings 17:9 that the Lord told Elijah to go to Zarephath of Sidon. Zarephath was to the north of Israel, in Phoenicia. The Lord said, "I am going to use you, but I am going to take you out of your comfort zone."

How comfortable it is to stay right where we are in our little corners, hidden next to our peaceful brooks. But God is calling us to something greater, and some will not pass the test because they are unwilling to go where God wants them to go.

**Step 4: We must be willing to depend on others.** What would have happened if Elijah had refused to leave Kerith? He could have said, "What do you mean a widow is going to feed me? God feeds me directly from the heavens. I am not going to depend on a woman, especially a Phoenician who is not from Israel."

How many Christians do the very same thing with the will of God for their lives? Then they wonder why the fire does not fall and why the rain does not commence.

We have to be docile and sensitive to the will of God and serious in our service to Him. My heart is gladdened when I see the amazing commitment of some of His servants.

**Step 5: We must be willing to humble ourselves and ask.** When Elijah got to Zarephath, he asked a widow for some bread and water (see 1 Kin. 17:10-11). This great servant of God, who was getting ready to set all of Israel free from idolatry, had to request a plate of food from a starving widow!

How many people have been broken, not because they did not have enough to eat, but because they did not understand the purpose of the Lord in their time of scarcity? They would have overcome and survived if they had continued following God. One way or another, He would have provided all they needed.

But the terror and shame that come through not understanding God's ways cause many to give up. They do not understand that sometimes we have to pass through tribulation, testings and struggles.

Walking with God is a faith enterprise. If we are going to continue and not lose our fire and our blessing, we have to walk by faith. Sometimes God wants us to depend directly on Him, and other times, on special circumstances He sets up.

God is doing a new work. He wants to use us, but we have to be sensitive to His presence and do what He says. We have to be willing to let Him provide in the way He chooses.

### **Do You Want Revival?**

How many of you want revival in your nation?

God wants to use you. He is preparing you and the others who stay in His army. Those who say, "Count on me, Lord," are the ones He is going to use in the end-time revival.

Are you willing? Do you want to be used? Do you have the kind of faith that can persevere?

I pray that the same strength the Lord gave Elijah would flood your life. The normal state in life is to be unfaithful. But when the fire of the Holy Spirit falls on the life of a servant, God gives him strength to take him forward. It is like an oil that never runs out.

Follow the leading of the Lord. If He tells you to change places, change. If He tells you to go, then go.

God is preparing you. He wants to put a resistance inside you

that you have never known before. Maybe some of you have started and then quit dozens of things in your life. Right now, God wants to make you faithful, strong and firm until the very last day of your life.

I pray that you would continue walking in this glorious way until the day the Lord Jesus comes again. If you desire to prepare the altar to receive the fire of God, pray this prayer out loud and in faith:

“Lord, remove from me the superficiality that destroys any lack of commitment to You. Father, affirm me in You like never before in my life. Lord, help me, so that when You ask me to go west of the Jordan, I will go west of the Jordan. When You ask me to change places, I will change places.

Help me to go where You want me to go, O Lord. Father, I pray that You make me docile and obedient to Your Word and Your will forever. Amen.”

Read a companion devotional.

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**Sergio Scataglini** is the founder of Scataglini Ministries. God has given Sergio a ministry to impart to others a passion for a life of holiness.