

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.

It should have been a time of victory and rejoicing for what God had just done through his life and ministry. Instead, Derek could not stop wondering what the leaders thought of him as a result of the gossip. He was plagued by self-doubt, depression and an overwhelming sense of disillusionment.

THE POST-REVIVAL SYNDROME Derek experienced what I call "post-revival syndrome." It happens to many of us—an incredible time with God immediately followed by a disillusionment that seeps in and causes us to see life through a grim, negative, dark glass. It diminishes in our eyes everything God has just done, and we end up feeling sad, defeated and depressed.

However, we can overcome disillusionment by learning a valuable lesson from the life of Elijah. In 1 Kings 18 Elijah had just experienced a high point in his ministry—a true, one-of-a-kind revival encounter. In front of an entire nation of pagans Elijah, in a matter of minutes, called down fire from heaven, humiliating some 450 prophets of Baal who had tried unsuccessfully for half a day to do the same thing.

The multitudes of people watching fell prostrate before God and cried out, "The Lord—He is God! The Lord—He is God!" (1 Kin. 18:39, NIV). An entire nation changed religions in just half an hour. Israel repented of its idol worship of Baal and returned to worshiping the one, true God.

Instead of basking in God's glorious victory, though, Elijah fled for his life. Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab, had threatened to kill him for defeating her idol-worshiping prophets. She swore that by the next day Elijah would be dead.

"I HAVE HAD ENOUGH, LORD" Because of the threat of one powerful woman, Elijah lost sight of all that God had been accomplishing through his powerful ministry. Elijah became deeply depressed and, according to 1 Kings 19:4, wanted to die: "'I have had enough Lord,' he said. 'Take my life.'"

This mighty Old Testament prophet ended up hiding in a cave. Eventually Elijah responded to God's gentle, healing power and was told that he was the one to anoint Hazael and Jehu as kings over nations and to anoint Elisha as his successor (see 1 -16). This was probably Elijah's greatest, most lasting work for God and His kingdom.

Elijah might have thought he was done, but God was getting ready to complete the work He had begun in his life. Elijah might have lost his anointing if he had continued to resist God. But because he responded to God, he was allowed to anoint an assistant to help him with his work.

This assistant eventually inherited Elijah's ministry and received a double portion of his anointing. Elijah got to see the fulfillment of God's work in his life.

God desires the same for us today—He wants to complete the work He began in our lives. His work in us involves more than a religious change in our hearts—more than a Sunday blessing. His work will affect every aspect of our lives. The power of God, the joy of the Lord and the holiness of the Lord have to

affect us Sunday through Saturday.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISILLUSIONMENT Perhaps, like Elijah, you are saying: "I have had enough; I can't take any more. My strength is gone. I am not ready to face the future." You feel you have come to the end of your enthusiasm, faith and courage.

Allow God's gentle healing power to envelop your soul. Understand that disillusionment has warning signs and characteristics. Here are some traits that can be found in people who are crossing the threshold into disillusionment.

A disillusioned person is afraid. A few years ago I became very ill because of sheer exhaustion. My doctor prescribed just what I suspected he would: a seven-day hiatus from my ministry. My wife, children and I went to a farm to rest. During those days a dear pastor friend of mine called me on the phone and asked, "Sergio, are you scared?"

He could not have known it, but by that time I was besieged with many fears, so I said yes. "I want you to know," he continued, "that Satan is attacking you in the very area where God destined for you to be the strongest."

He went on to explain that I would have tremendous strength and stamina in the future but that Satan was trying to intimidate me in that very area. My friend's words ushered in a healing unlike any other remedy.

For all of us, many of our fears are totally unfounded and basically part of Satan's ploy to try and avert the gifts of God in us. That is why God calls us to daily purify our hearts and minds so we can be set free from fear.

A disillusioned person decides when she has had enough. It wasn't God who said to Elijah: "You have had enough. I am going to give you rest. I am going to take you to heaven now."

Elijah himself made that decision and told God he had reached his limit! That is how disillusionment operates; it sets false limitations.

Disillusionment causes us to tell God when we are going to stop our ministry and service to Him. It keeps us from asking God if we should go on, and it hinders us from seeking Him for His power to continue.

God has a glorious schedule for each of us to follow, but we create a problem when we decide to quit following His schedule. That is never the will of God. You are not the owner of your life; therefore, you cannot tell God when you are finished!

A disillusioned person sees no progress. Those who live with disillusionment are quick to say that there is no revival in a church or that there is no presence of the Lord in such and such a meeting. They seem eager to shut things down.

A pastor once visited our church in La Plata, Argentina, after hearing that we were experiencing a supernatural visitation from the Lord with signs and wonders. During the service we prayed with him to receive the fire of God, but he was expecting an emotional outburst and instead felt nothing. As he was leaving, one of our ushers overheard him tell his associate, "Nothing is going on here. Why did we come here anyway?"

However, when he returned to his church and stepped into the pulpit, the presence of God fell and a new move of God began. He learned that the fire of holiness is not an emotion or a feeling—it is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

A disillusioned person withdraws and hides. Some depressed people hide in their addictions; others either overeat or do not eat enough. Some bury themselves in television or other forms of entertainment. Disillusionment causes them to do

something—anything—to keep their minds distracted from the things of God.

Perhaps, like Elijah, you have taken your gifts, time, resources, stamina—everything you have—and retreated to a cave. We must resist the pull of disillusionment that causes us to be a part of the “passive audience” found in many churches. Don’t allow your disillusionment to keep you from getting wholeheartedly involved in your church.

A disillusioned person confuses disillusionment with religious zeal. Many people—myself included—like to channel surf while watching television. We want to see everything there is at once. Some people “surf” churches the same way. With the “press of a button” (or the turn of a key in their car’s ignition) they switch churches. They keep switching but never plug in.

People who are under disillusionment are often a part of the group known as “church surfers.” They tend to be restless yet think they are protecting their religious zeal. Sometimes they even think that God sent them to a particular church to correct the pastor. But they fail to take root in any church because no church is spiritual enough for them.

A disillusioned person doesn’t envision the completion of God’s plan. Satan loves to get Christians out of the race, especially if it is during the last lap before their biggest victory. We need to be alert to the schemes of the enemy and pray that God will protect and keep us until His plan for our lives has been fulfilled.

If you believe that you have a right to isolate yourself or to distrust God (or your pastors or spiritual leaders), you may be suffering from what I call religious trauma. Go before the Lord and surrender your trauma at the cross of Jesus. Be willing to trade your disillusionment for hope, faith and power.

BREAKING THE OLD PATTERN If we continue to embrace our disillusionment we will continually feel like victims. We may even feel that we need God to pay more attention to us. From experience, I can tell you that God does not work like that.

Whenever I throw a spiritual tantrum or feel like a victim, I do not get results. I now know better and don't even try that tactic anymore.

God has never once accepted my invitation to attend my pity parties! I no longer try to impress the heart of God with my victim mentality. Instead, I try to reach God with my faith.

If you have been living with disillusionment, you can start now to change the way you see and respond to the reality around you. Here are some biblical principles to follow.

1. Surrender completely to God's will. We must learn to trust God even if we don't understand the whole process. Are you willing to give up your anger and bitterness toward God about issues that cause you hurt or frustration because you can't see the total picture as God sees it? Take a moment to give God everything you have. He will give you something new.

2. Do not surrender to sorrow. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus experienced anguish, sadness and other emotions, but He was not bitter or disillusioned. He did not hide in a cave. Instead, Luke 22:44 says He prayed earnestly and faced the cross of Calvary with obedience and willingness.

We should follow Jesus' example. Do not surrender to sorrow. Romans 12:2 says that we are "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]." Jesus will help us to think differently and act differently.

3. Pray so you will not fall into temptation. If you are disillusioned, chances are you will fall into other kinds of sin. Pray that you will not fall into temptation. Hebrews 12:15 warns us, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God

and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." Bitterness left unchecked can ruin your Christian life.

4. Tell your soul what to do. The psalmist knew that we can exercise authority over our wayward emotions: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Ps. 43:5).

The psalmist was talking to his own soul. He was not crazy—he just knew that he had authority to command his own soul.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

How about you? Do you want to reach God? Start by praying with me the following prayer: "Father, thank You for untangling my thoughts and taking away confusion through Your Word. Thank You for pointing out the road ahead and removing inferiority complexes and fear from my life. Set me free from disillusionment, replacing it with hope. I pray for a mighty visitation of Your Spirit to transform me.

"Send Your angels to help me. Thank You for protection against the enemy. Give me discernment and purify me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Read a companion devotional.

Sergio Scataglini is the author of *The Twelve Transgressions*, published by Charisma House, from which this article is adapted.