

Samuel Rodriguez Warns: Don't Let the Devil Steal Your Worship

A few years ago I became aware of the amazing story of John Smith—a teenager who died as a result of being submerged in the icy water of Lake St. Louis for fifteen minutes—and who was miraculously brought back to life when his mother, Joyce, prayed. I felt as if the Holy Spirit told me to share Joyce's story about John's miracle with the world—in a movie.

If the Spirit had told me to use my connections to help Joyce write and publish a book, I would not have been surprised. I have a little experience in that arena and would have been happy to share what I know. But the Holy Spirit made it clear to me her story should be more—not just a book but also a movie. You know it as the movie *Breakthrough*.

I shouldn't have been surprised, really, that I ended up doing something so unexpected, because God's vision is always bigger than our own. When you're living a holy, healed, healthy, happy, humble, hungry, honoring life, you will be called to thrive outside your comfort zone. I'm talking *when*, not *if*, because God always has a bigger plan for our lives than we imagine for ourselves. Based on what we see in the Bible, most of the people God chose to advance His kingdom didn't aspire to greatness but simply remained willing and able to serve in whatever capacity the Lord called them to serve.

Many of them protested or made excuses—just ask Abraham or Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Naomi or Rahab. Others faced obstacles that appeared impossible to overcome based on human perception and earthly resources, including Noah, Joseph, Joshua, Jeremiah and Ruth. One of my favorite examples, however, never questioned, wavered or doubted God's ability to use him

according to His infinite wisdom, limitless power and divine will.

David was always willing to trust God for the next step, which is essential for thriving in the power of God's Spirit. As the shepherd king discovered in his battle against the giant Goliath, trusting God often requires ignoring the advice, opinions and counsel of other people. But thrivers, those people whose spirits have been awakened by their anointing, aren't afraid to disrupt existing systems or traditional paradigms. Sometimes drastically altering or destroying a system or structure already in place is exactly what God wants us to do. If I had refused to persevere in producing a movie when I hit the first obstacle, I wouldn't have been obedient to what God asked me to do.

Returning to David's showdown with Goliath, we see that thrivers do not permit anyone or anything, no matter how large or threatening or powerful, to occupy their praise. You may recall from the biblical account the Philistines gathered their army and occupied Sokoh in Judah (1 Sam. 17:1), and Judah means "praise." It cannot be repeated often enough that the enemy always wants to occupy your praise—through distraction, intimidation, diversion, conflict, crisis or whatever it takes. So many people have struggled to praise God during the turmoil of recent events, but they're forgetting this is exactly what the enemy wants us to do!

The devil will use anything and everything to derail your faith. He begins to defeat you the moment he takes hold of your worship. If he can take away your willingness to praise God, then the spiritual warfare will tilt in his favor. The enemies of truth, love, grace and hope always come after your worship first. It's the same as a terrorist's first strike at the source of your power, fuel and motivation. So cherishing, guarding and practicing your praise must be a priority in order for you to thrive.

-Do not permit failure to occupy your praise.

-Do not permit fear to occupy your praise.

-Do not permit anxiety to occupy your praise.

If I were a betting man, I would wager the enemy attempted to occupy your Judah during the pandemic, the economic fluctuation and all the civil unrest in the recent past. So if you have not already, I dare you to say, "Get out of my Judah! You cannot occupy my praise!" Claim the truth expressed by the psalmist: "The Lord is enthroned in the praises of His people" (See Ps. 22:3.).

The Bible does not require you to be happy in order to praise God. The Bible does not require you to be smiling and joyful in order to praise Him. As a matter of fact, sometimes you must choose to praise while you're crying; Sometimes you praise while you're wounded; Sometimes you praise while you're hurting; Sometimes you're aching and you still have your praise.

In his poetic songs, David often chose to praise God despite how he felt and everything going on around him. He basically said, "I'm broken, I'm wounded, I'm at the bottom of the pit, but I will not refrain from praising You." If we want to thrive, we must choose to praise with the same fierce determination. Don't let the devil steal your worship! Don't allow any obstacle to occupy your praise! {eoa}

*This article is excerpted from Chapter 9 of **Samuel Rodriguez's** book, From Survive to Thrive (Charisma House 2020).*