WHEN FEAR MAKES YOU FALL



REDISCOVERING GOD IN YOUR WILDERNESS

ROB HULLETTE

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DEDICATION

For all the Prophets disguised as Prodigals may you find your way back to the mountain that is your true home.

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1 *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

"What if I fall?', Tim cried.
Maerlyn laughed. 'Sooner or later, we all do."
- Stephen King, The Wind Through the Keyhole

"Be careful when rising to the top. Be more careful when you get there. The higher you go, the riskier it gets. Be careful. Be very careful."
- Israelmore Ayivor,
Mine Your Gold: How to Dig Up and Optimize Your Hidden Greatness

So where do we begin? Any good tragedy must first have a wonderful

beginning. What interest is there in a fall that only happens from ground level? A fall from a tree, may gain my interest. Oh, but a fall from a mountain top, well now you have my full attention!!

I must admit I'm afraid of heights. The rides at the amusement park that go fast and make quick turns are fun, even exhilarating! However, the "Drop Zone" type of rides, the kind that take you to heights equaling that of 16-20 story office buildings and drop you at speeds exceeding 60 miles per hour, they are just flat out scary!!

It's not just roller coasters at our favorite amusement parks that drop us far and fast, sometimes it is life itself that takes us to such great heights just to seemingly plunge us at speeds that make our hearts sink to our stomachs. Before there can be a fall there must first be an ascension.

Everyone's ascension is different. Not only do the heights differ, the paths leading to each one's apex varies too. Undoubtedly, by now you are considering your personal journey with its highest highs, lowest lows, bends and turns. Let's think about the victories. What achievements are you the most proud? Do you believe you have reached your "crowning moment"?

The truth is those mountain top highs are made up of many smaller advances along the way. When I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Christian Ministries from Lee University in 2003 it wasn't the walk across the stage in itself that was so fulfilling. It was the overcoming of all the challenges I preserved through along the way that made it so sweet. My path to that day was not the one well-travelled. My high school years would be summarized in the phrase "just enough to get by". Academics were not important to me and received only the minimal attention necessary to keep me moving along. While I did enroll in Community College after graduation that didn't last long as I had

no clear direction. Truthfully, I knew in my heart that I had been called to ministry since an early age but that calling or even my personal relationship with Christ was not something I pursued with passion or deep rooted commitment. So, stints through Business Administration and Law Enforcement majors would have me dropping in and out of school often; mostly out!!

When I finally in my mid-twenties, got serious about my relationship with Jesus Christ and being obedient to His call upon my life, something unique happened. All of the sudden I had a deep desire to read and learn all I could about living the Christian life and ministering to people. Before I knew it, I was enrolling in a Ministerial Internship Program sponsored by the denomination that I had been involved in all my life. In fact, I was the 3rd generation of my family to hold membership within this body.

When the nine month intensive Internship program was completed, I was invited to remain at the host church as their part-time youth pastor. In less than one year and after a change in Senior Pastors, my position had grown into a full-time office. There I was, in full-time vocational ministry!! Yes, without having attended seminary, Bible college or even completing a degree of any kind I was advancing.

I can recall distinctly one day at lunch, when discussing my desire to get my degree from Lee University, that my Pastor Dr. Russell Morris asked me a question that has stuck with me ever since. After listening to my long list of excuses (that I poorly disguised as reasons) for not going back to school, the most boisterous being “I’m too old”, Dr. Morris asked “So it may take you six years huh…and you would be 33 years old, correct ? Well, if you don’t go back, how old will you be in six years?”!! The moral of the story: You are going to age whether you chase your dreams or not, so why not chase them with everything

you have!!

Those years did pass by and they included they included many events: birthdays, anniversaries, the acceptance of a Senior Pastor position and subsequent move, the adoption of children and the completion of courses and requirements necessary for graduation! My walk across that outdoor stage on a beautiful Spring day in Cleveland, TN was less about the shaking of a school president's hand and more about the transition from a boy with no purpose to a man willing to put away excuses in order to be victorious!

There was another man who stood up in the presence of seemingly difficult, if not impossible, circumstances to teach us some valuable lessons about reaching greater heights of victory. His name was Elijah. Does that name sound familiar? We first read about him in the Old Testament book of I Kings. He was raised up by God to confront Israel's King Ahab.

David's kingdom that had been passed down to King Solomon had now been divided after Solomon's death. There were now the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Israel is being ruled by an evil man named Ahab. In fact the Bible says that Ahab did more evil in the sight of the Lord than any of the kings before him (I Kings 16:30). He married a woman named Jezebel and began to worship Baal. In fact, his promotion of Baal worship included the building of a temple and altars to the extent that the Bible says that he did more to arouse the anger of God than any other king before him!! That's when God raised up Elijah!

So in this culture of sin and depravity Elijah steps on the scene and immediately declares that the land will not receive rain nor dew until he, himself declared it. This was not just a random prophecy or declaration. As we look more closely at the characters we have met so far, even their names show that this declaration was intentional. You see "Baal" was the Canaanite god of storm and rain. God

was declaring through Elijah that He in essence was using the very thing (rain) that Baal was supposedly responsible for as a weapon against him!

Just think about that a moment. God takes the enemies arsenal and uses it against him!! The very thing that the enemy of our soul boasts that it can control, God takes it and neutralizes it!! Every tongue that rises up in judgment against you shall be condemned! (Isaiah 54:17) The enemy says "I'll cause a storm and rain you out", God says "It won't even rain until my servant says so!!".

Well after a few months, a few months into the THIRD YEAR of the drought that is, God told Elijah to go see King Ahab and let him know that the rain would begin soon. Did you see the emphasis I put on that time frame? Yes, the drought lasted over 3 years. God wanted to make sure He had given the people plenty of time to see that this "god" Baal was impotent. No power to make it rain, no power to make it storm!

God was ready for the people to decide once and for all whom they would believe in and serve. God has always demanded that time of decision making. Remember when He spoke through his servant Joshua who said "*And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Joshua 24:15 NKJV) After 3 years it was time of Elijah to ask the people whom they would serve. "*And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.*" (I Kings 18:21 NKJV)

It's difficult to understand how the people could still be undeceive. "*..people answered not a word*". Really? Elijah is still climbing towards the heights of a

victory though. God is about to show up in a great way and leave no doubt who is the Lord!! Elijah did not let the people's indecision distract him from continuing towards victory.

Remember, your victory requires your commitment when those around you aren't committed. There will always be doubters, uncommitted folk and simple observers who in no way help propel you to your heights. Don't let the "naysayers" distract you. Those whom have had over 3 years to get committed yet are indecisive may never catch your vision. Keep climbing!!

Climb is exactly what Elijah did; all the way to Mount Carmel. There with King Ahab, all the people and the prophets of Baal and with a silent response to his charge to choose whom they would serve, he proposed a challenge. A showdown! Elijah charged the prophets of Baal to prepare a bull for sacrifice, he would also do the same. Then they could call on Baal and he would call on the Lord and whichever entity that answered by consuming the sacrifice by fire would be the true God. All the people agreed. (I Kings 18:22-25 paraphrase).

As this chapter has been about victory, one obvious thing has not been mentioned. There cannot be a victory without a contest! Without competition there is only exhibition. By nature I do not like conflict. I almost avoid it to a fault. Yet, without an enemy you can't have a victory. It should go without saying, but we often forget that our enemy is never a flesh and blood person or persons; it is spiritual. It's mindsets, sin, wickedness, it's opposition from the enemy of our soul, the Devil. And may I add that more often than not my greatest enemy is myself! It was me as a young man, that had no direction in life. It was me who doubted or feared to trust God for the impossible. It's often me who lets the circumstances of life that I can see hold more authority over me than the unseen faith in an unseen all powerful God.

Moses had Pharaoh. David had Goliath. Sampson had the Philistines. Esther had Haman. Deborah and Barak had Sisera. There will always be opposition on your way to your victory and destination. It may be financial. It may be a mental roadblock like doubt or depression. It may be that you feel inadequate or unequipped. Whatever, stands between you and your height of victory must be confronted! What you fail to deal with will eventually deal with you!!

Don't shrink back from whatever it is that seems to be coming against you. "*For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory*." (Deuteronomy 20:4 NIV) God has promised to give you the victory! You can't win if you never get in the game. As long as you sit on the sidelines, never attempting to do anything for God and His Kingdom, you will never experience the sweet taste of victory! Truthfully, there are no sidelines. To "sit" is to be defeated and not even realize it.

As Elijah's challenge gets underway, he allows for the prophets of Baal to go first. It's not long before it becomes evident that their sacrifice is not going to be miraculously consumed with fire by Baal. But that doesn't stop them from continuing to moan, groan and exhort Baal to hear their prayers. All to no avail. Elijah has no mercy on them. He begins to mock and provoke them saying "Cry louder, maybe your god is meditating or busy. Maybe he's on a journey or taking a nap" (I Kings 18:27,paraphrased)

For over 6 hours these 450 prophets of Baal yell, plead and even resort to cutting themselves until their blood gushed out! With no response. No fire!

Elijah then rebuilds the Lord's altar, prepares the bull for sacrifice, has the people to drench the altar and animal in water 3 separate times and after a simple prayer to God, fire immediately falls!!! All the people begin to fall on their faces and proclaim that "The Lord, He is God!".

Then as fire is consuming the sacrifice, the people are proclaiming the praises of God, and Baal along with his prophets have been proven a fraud!! The victory is made complete when Elijah gives the command that those fraudulent be put to death and the command is carried out! The mountain is ablaze with the fire of God and the air is scented with the sweet smell of victory.

The prophet Elijah would go on to tell Ahab that God was about to bring the rain the land and nation so desperately needed; and God did!

Titles, Diplomas, Degrees, Positions, Children, Droughts, Fire and Rain from Heaven, life's small and big moments of victory. What are some of yours? A dream wedding? The birth of a child or that miracle grandchild? When you planted that church and saw it grow? The day you became debt free and no longer slave to the lender? Perhaps when you read "victory" your mind goes back to the athletic achievements and awards you accumulated. Winning at life seems to mean different things to different people. Remember this, some victories may seem small but no victory is insignificant!

2 WHEN BAD NEWS COMES!!

"No one loves the messenger who brings bad news."
- Sophocles, Antigone

"*Bad news has good legs*."
-Richard Llewellyn, How Green Was My Valley

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." - I Kings 19:2

"*You have cancer.*" "*I don't want to be married to you anymore.*" "*We are*

making budget adjustments, your job is being phased out. I'm sorry but you are no longer needed." Phrases like these that feel like kicks to the stomach. We've all received a phone call, a text or that certified letter in the mail that conveyed news that we didn't expect and surely did not want or need. Several years ago, on a dark, dreary night I found myself in the waiting area of a local hospital emergency room. My friend had been taken there as he was sick and I was there for support. It was there that my brother in law, who was a State Trooper at that time, found me and asked for my assistance. He went on to explain to me that a lady had been killed in an automobile accident and that he had to give the bad news to her family who were on the way to the hospital not knowing the current condition of their loved one. "She has teenage daughters and since you are a youth pastor, it would be helpful for you to be there when I notify them of her passing." Before very long I could see through the large glass windows, a family moving intentionally towards the ER entrance. I knew immediately this was the family of the deceased woman. There was something very eerie in knowing that we strangers knew information that would change their lives forever and that we knew it before they did. As expected they took it very hard. A few weeks later I saw one of the teenage daughters at a Middle School where I was volunteering for the day, she remembered me and thanked me for praying with her that dreadful night. Since that time our paths have never crossed again, at least that I am aware, yet what seemingly happened by chance has stayed with me forever.

More often than not someone knows your "bad news" before you learn of it. Many times that person is a stranger or merely an acquaintance at best. The lab technician who reads the results of your medical test. An auditor who is helping the corporation determine where to make "cuts" in the budget. The mailman who knows that the IRS doesn't send certified letters just to say "Happy Birthday". Does it really matter the messenger, once the message has been conveyed? I'm not sure that news of an incurable disease being in your blood

stream is easier to hear from a lifelong family doctor who is like a dear friend or from a specialist that you just met. Regardless, the news is no lighter a burden to carry and no less true.

Imagine the life of Elijah. He says “No Rain” and the drought last 3 ½ years. He prays and God sends fire from heaven as a sign to all the nation. At his command the false prophets of Baal are executed. Then he announces that God is about to send rain and sure enough the drought ends with the abundance of rain! Our friend was on a roll to say the least. Then as he is enjoying the favor of the blessed life, one message changes everything!

King Ahab went home and shared with his wife Jezebel all that had occurred with the fire, the executions and the rain. Jezebel was not happy. Her beloved Baal prophets were dead and the reputation of her religion was ruined. She would rather have lived in drought with her false religion than to enjoy the nourishing rains with the Lord God. Everyone isn’t impressed with your victories!

Franklin D. Roosevelt said “I ask you to judge me by the enemies I have made.”. It was said in the last chapter that our enemies aren’t flesh and blood but spiritual. Yet, the kinds of people and forces that stand in opposition to us say a lot about who we are and what we represent. Jezebel was a very evil woman and stood in steep contrast to the message that Elijah preached.

The miraculous signs that God had conveyed through Elijah did not melt the Queen’s hardened heart. If you will remember, after the events, the people shouted “The Lord, He is God!” however Jezebel did not come to that same place of proclamation. It is both scary and terribly sad that people who hear the same Gospel and see the same miracles that convince others do not let it do its proper work in their life.

Jezebel's anger was so great towards Elijah (and ultimately towards God) that she declared she wanted him DEAD. It was her intention that not only he die but that he die soon! Reasonable deduction would suggest that since Jezebel nor her husband Ahab could kill God, the next best thing would be to kill His prophet Elijah. So she summoned a messenger and gave him the directive to deliver the news to Elijah.

We do not know anything about the messenger. Was he someone who delivered messages in behalf of the royal couple on a regular basis? Was it a random person who just happened to be walking by the royal chambers at the moment the Queen became enraged? The Bible tells us nothing about the messenger so it's of no real importance. However, there are two things that we do know: 1) We know the message that was to be delivered and 2) We know that he fulfilled his assignment and successfully delivered the message with which he was sent.

I can't help but to imagine what the messenger's mindset was while seeking out Elijah. He had to know that the Prophet had called down fire from heaven. It couldn't have escaped his attention that Elijah took no pity on the false prophets of Baal when he had them executed. Yet, something pushed the messenger to go on and carry out the task before him.

We all know people who seem to love to be the bearer of bad news. They like to be the one with the "inside scoop". I've noticed that the top sports entertainment television networks have their very own "insiders" for each sport they cover. It's funny to see these folks doing a segment on T.V. while also checking their mobile devices for any texts, emails or other communication that may have any updates to the information they have been brought on air to discuss. The political arena is a hot bed for this demand to be the first to "break" a story. It's been said that today's journalists are more interested in being FIRST than they

are in being ACCURATE!

We must be careful and pray for discernment when dealing with the messages we receive and the messengers from whom deliver them. Have you ever received a text and you read it multiple times trying to figure out, not what it said, but “how” it was said? When we read the words we hear tones and inflections in our mind do we not? This has been the source of many misunderstandings. If we are not careful we put attitudes and meanings to messages that were never intended. It’s not until we actual talk to the other person that we discover that miscommunication had occurred.

A recent study surmised that the we receive approximately 33 text messages per day. The average office worker receives over 121 emails per day. The United States Postal Services processes 509 million pieces of mail each day. When you add in advertisements that we see on signs during our commutes, in commercials while watching T.V. along with the phone calls we get from family, friends, coworkers or even telemarketers, the number of messages we receive daily can be overwhelming. What messages are true? What information has been misrepresented by a unreliable or ineffective messenger?
All too often we jump to conclusions when we really don’t have all the information. Sometimes our past experiences cause us to misconstrued what is really trying to be communicated to us.

Be careful when bad news, or really when any news comes, that you don’t make a permeant decision based on a temporary circumstance. Make sure that you have as much information as possible and that the information you do have is credible. Lastly, remember the old saying “Don’t shoot the messenger!” I know what some may be thinking, “Rob, what if the messenger and the one responsible for the message are one in the same?”. When it’s your child who says they don’t want to have a relationship with you anymore and they are

severing ties. When it's a spouse and they tell you they have found someone else and they are leaving. When it's a longtime friend who says the friendship is over and begins to ignore you. Yes, even in these situations when the bearer of bad news seems to be responsible for the news, you can't "shoot" them. Neither literally or figuratively. You can't "choke" them with a smothering presence pleading for them to reconsider. It's not healthy to manipulate them into recanting. I'm not saying you give up hope and walk away. Remember, God specializes in doing what seems impossible to man.

Because a doctor gives you a bad diagnosis you don't blame him or her and say it's the medical tests fault. Neither do you give up and resign yourself hopelessly to their predicted outcome.

You may not have ever had that dreaded call or sat through a conversation that would immediately turn your life upside down and wonder how this is applicable to your life. Remember, our Lord said that "…In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33b) The New Living Translation says it this way "…Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows". So, trouble will come; More than once, in fact! We can't wait until the bad news comes to learn how to handle it. It's imperative that we stay in faith, praying and communicating with God that in the heated moments of life what He has taught us in the peace time will automatically kick in.

One would think that as an Ordained Bishop pastoring a growing vibrant church, with a beautiful family, that I would have known just what to do when my messenger showed up that dreaded day. However, in that moment, it didn't matter that I had served on a statewide Youth & Christian Education Board. The fact that I was living in a nice private neighborhood didn't insulate me from the "trials and sorrows" of this world. The fact that I was the first and only member of my family to graduate college didn't give me the wisdom I needed for the

moment. The dignitaries that I had driven around for my denomination or for Promise Keepers couldn't help me in that instant. When the voice on the other end of the cell phone connection said "I'm moving out. I'm leaving you. I don't want to be a pastor's wife any longer, I don't want to be your wife any longer." all the resume builders, the vocational and social connections and the accumulated possessions couldn't help me. It was if I had been taken to the top of the world just to be pushed over the edge! This wasn't the 'Drop Zone' and I wasn't at an amusement park. This was real life. This was a John 16:33 moment. This was "this world" and I was having real "trouble"!

Jesus, in the midst of a storm spoke and the winds and sea obeyed. Moses, when having the Egyptian army behind him and the sea in front of him, stretched his walking stick out toward the Red Sea and the waters parted! Wonderful accounts of faith in the midst of trouble. Would I react like a character straight out of the Bible? Yes, indeed I did. Like our friend in the Old Testament who had called fire down from heaven and slayed false prophets, when bad news came: ***I RAN*!!!**

3 *RUNNING SCARED*

"And I ran
I ran so far away
I just ran
I ran all night and day
I couldn't get away"
-Flock of Seagulls, I Ran

"Once I ran to you, now I run from you"
-Gloria Jones

"I'm going to do to you what you did to my prophets, so help me Baal!" This

in essence is what Jezebel said to Elijah. In other words, “I’m going to kill you!” Those are definitely words that would strike fear into any heart. Especially when the threat comes from a source that we think is well able to carry it out and more than motivated to do so. Apparently, Elijah agreed with the seriousness of the threat and the ability for it to be carried out.

This seems to set up yet another showdown. If it was a video game Elijah would have “leveled up”. He had defeated the “prophets” now he was being confronted by the Queen. She held the 2nd highest role in the land but many would argue that she was the puppeteer that pulled the strings attached to the King. Would the prophet who specialized in fire and water be up for the challenge of Jezebel? Unfortunately, we wouldn’t find out because Elijah took off running.

Wouldn’t anyone in their right mind run from such a threat? His life was in the palm of the Queen’s hand; Or was it? Let’s look closer at what made Elijah run for his life. He took the threat serious because he knew she hated him and was against him. Some of us fear because we get our eyes on the one making the threat instead of our God, who is our protection. Psalm 28:7 says “*The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving*.” Elijah put more trust in the hatred his enemy had for him than he did in the Lord being his shield. If not, he would have burst into song at the hearing of the death threat instead of immediately running. How often do you put your protection in the hands of your “running” ability instead of the strong hands of God? In Psalm 89:13 the Psalmist describes the arm of God as “strong”, His hand as “mighty” and His right hand as “exalted”! How silly we must look when we run from our problems instead of standing still and seeing the Salvation of the Lord! As I look back on my running from difficulties, threats and hurts, I do so with

embarrassment. God had never left me at any other time and would not have let me face life alone then either but instead of putting my trust in His power I put my confidence in my hiding abilities.

Of course Jezebel was serious about her threat but her level of seriousness in no way could lessen God's power of provision. Your enemy can be as serious as they want to be concerning their intentions to do you harm but your God has the final word! Recall the account in the Old Testament of Job. Satan had limits to what he could put towards Job and those limits were established by God. If you will remember God allowed Satan power to take Job's property but not touch his body (Job 1:12). When Satan did that Job still remained faithful to God. God then allowed Satan to touch Job's body but forbid him from killing Job (Job 2:6). Just because Jezebel would have wanted to kill Elijah does not mean she had the power to do so! It is God who gives life and takes life.(I Samuel 2:6-7). Your enemy does not determine if you live or if you die, YOUR GOD DOES!

Something else I find interesting about Jezebel's threat is the fact that she even made a threat. When in a battle or a fight it is not in your best interest to announce your strategy. My Dad used to tell me that if a man was stupid enough to voluntarily invite you to take a "first punch" then lay him out and end the fight before he ever starts. It's only a bully that boast and brags about the damage they want to do to you. Why send a messenger to notify of your intentions? Why not just do it?

This is exactly how the enemy of our soul works. He tries to plant thoughts in our head. Thoughts of intimidation and threats. Unfortunately, he has great success with this weapon of warfare. Like Elijah, we take the bait and actually neutralize our own selves, saving our enemy the trouble. I have found it to be true that the people who threaten the loudest and the most often are the ones who never have the courage to follow through! "I'm calling your supervisor!", "I'm

leaving the church!", "I'll see you in court!", these are threats made with the intent to manipulate you into backing down. Usually, they are made by folks that are, as the old timers used to say, "full of hot air".

As I'm writing this it was as if the Spirit of the Lord is speaking saying "Snipers don't announce their intentions, they just pull the trigger!" If the enemy of your mind and soul is shouting threats at you then be of good cheer, because the reason they are *talking about it* is because they are impotent and can't ***be*** *about it*!!

All too often we are like Elijah and running from enemies simply because they make loud threats and sometimes even serious threats but regardless because of our God they are **powerless threats**! Remember, "Greater is He that is in You than he that is in the world"!! (I John 4:4)

For us humans we tend to fall in the thought stream of "perception is reality". If we perceive a threat to be legitimate then in our mind it is and we act accordingly.

The Bible says that Elijah "ran for his life". He did not just run aimlessly, the account says that he ran to Beersheba. Furthermore, he did not go alone, we are told that he took his servant with him. I find these two small pieces of information very intriguing. Let's look at them a little closer.

Beersheba. This was the southernmost city in the kingdom of Judah. The lowest place within Ahab and Jezebel's kingdom. It's more than a pun to say that Elijah went as low as he could go.

That's what running scared will do to you. First we run from a situation, then we are running from all the people involved, before long we are attempting to run

from God and ultimately we want to run from even ourselves! The latter two can never be escaped. The Psalmist reminds us of the fact that if we go to the highest heaven – God is still there! If we go to the lowest hell – God is still there! We cannot escape God's conviction, His love or His presence. We may try and even desire to flee Him but is everywhere, all the time! It's one of the characteristics that makes Him God. He is truly Omnipresent! God dwells not only in the church house, He also fills the crack house! His Spirit reaches into the strip club, into the jail house, and even into throne rooms of Kings and the offices of Presidents! It is truly amazing that we can feel so far from God but He is there never leaving us, never forsaking us.

Have you been to Beersheba? No, not the city of "seven wells" in the Middle East. The figurative place; the place that is as low as you can go. This southern most spot as it were. Where I am from we have a saying that describes events taking a sudden turn for the worse: "that went south in a hurry". For Elijah things indeed went "south in a hurry"! We don't know how long it took for him to go from the Mt. Carmel showdown to hiding in Beersheba, but we do know that it's approximately 116 miles. Life had taken him from the top of a mountain to the southernmost part of the kingdom. Again, I ask, "Have you been to Beersheba?". The low places that you never thought you would go. I remember looking at myself in the mirror and thinking "How did I get here?".

When I received the bad news that my marriage was over, things indeed went "south in a hurry". Let me say, I don't blame my former wife, a denomination or anyone else for my running. I ran on my own. No one made me run, I decided to run! Sure, we like to play the role of martyr or victim but the truth is we alone are responsible for our own actions. In the immediate aftermath of my separation, the local church was gracious enough to place me on a paid sabbatical. My only instruction was to work on me, my family and our situation. I was not told that I was welcome back regardless of how my marriage was to work out. However, situations beyond my or that local church body's control,

caused me to have to make a decision sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, I was in no place mentally or spiritually to return, so I voluntarily turned in those credentials and walked away. Actually, I ran away! I allowed bitterness and hurt to overtake me. I headed towards "Beersheba" and went as fast as I could go. What or who was I running from? Everything! Everyone!

I was no longer an Ordained Bishop or a Pastor so I ran as far south from that as I could go. No longer a husband so I ran to separate myself from that role. The only thing that remained in my mind was my identity as a dad and a son. My girls and I relocated to be near my family and while I was geographically close I was still running as fast as I could in my mind and in my spirit. I ran away from dear friendships. I ran away from accountability. I ran as far as I could go from my Mt. Carmel experiences and went headlong towards Beersheba. The very things I was indeed running from were the things that I couldn't get any distance between: God and Myself!!

Not only did Elijah run to Beersheba, the second small fact we wanted to look at is that he took his servant with him. We don't know the name of this servant or anything else about him. Undoubtedly, he was faithful. I'm sure he had been with Elijah during the drought. I imagine he assisted the Prophet at Mt. Carmel when he had the showdown with the prophets of Baal. We have to believe he was by Elijah's side when Jezebel's messenger delivered the threat because he was there to run along the side of the man of God when he took off on his journey.

Rarely when we run from life does it affect us in isolation. Elijah's running greatly affected his faithful servant. My running affected a congregation that loved me, it affected my daughters, it affected my family, it affected my friends and truthfully it affected the people I hurt while in my own "Beersheba". I wonder how the people of Judah that were just beginning to believe in this God

that Elijah had been preaching were affected when they heard he was on the run from Jezebel. Who would lead them? Who would teach them? I suppose Elijah didn't consider them or maybe didn't care. We all find ourselves in self-preservation mode when it comes down to it.

Who is your running scared affecting? Is your spouse suffering because your hiding out in fear? Are innocent folk being dragged along for the run because you have put your hurt or fear above your trust in God.

We may begin running out of fear but eventually it is our selfishness that keeps us running. I began running out of fear. Fear of being alone. Fear of being seen as a failure. Fear of change. Eventually, I had to confess that it wasn't fear, it was pride and selfishness! Like Saul to Samuel I was worried more about what the people thought than being honest and transparent. I would rather wear the victim of circumstance label than repent of my own sins and shortcomings. It felt better for people to blame a former spouse or denomination than it did to admit that I was responsible for my own behavior.

Oh to God that Elijah would have rather been killed for his faith than to run! Oh that I would rather say "it's not my brother or my sister but it's ME in the need of prayer"!

We are hurting innocent people around us because we won't stop running and start kneeling. There are folks who love you and will run with you not because they are afraid of the "Jezebels" but because they don't want to let you run alone! When we read I Kings 19:3 through those lenses it contains one of the most heartbreaking phrases in all the Bible: "…*and he left his servant there*.".

Elijah's decisions were his own yet the consequences of those decisions were not uniquely his. Now this servant is far from home, in a low place that he never

asked to be. Perhaps Elijah thought leaving him in Beersheba was in his interest, that he was protecting him. Would he be safer without the target Elijah by his side? Or is there not safety in numbers and should they have not stayed together?

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12 "*Two are better than one,*
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Fear was affecting Elijah the same way it does us today. It made him forget the principle of this scripture, that we are made to live in community and when we fall or when we are cold or when we need defending, that it always goes better when we have others around us and not left to our own self. You see fear will not only make you run from your enemies, it will ultimately lead you to forsake your closest allies. You may excuse the fact that you are leaving them for their own protection but in reality it is simple abandonment. Maybe he felt that if the forces against him found his servant in Beersheba that they would waste time there looking for Elijah. I mean even the heathen would not expect the prophet to go far from his close confidant. Surely, he wouldn't be as ruthless to consider that if Jezebel's henchmen found the servant that somehow that would suffice her thirst for blood, that she kill him and give up looking for Elijah. We are attempting to know the thoughts of a man operating out of fear and the point is that fear makes us irrational and our thought system flawed. It's as if we are trying to read the actions of a crazed man and make sense of them.

Your decision making has been flawed not because you are the recipient of bad news or the victim of unfair threats; it's flawed because of how you have reacted

to them! You have allowed fear a foothold into your mind and spirit. Now, it has grown to the point of overtaking your decision making. The fear led to self-preservation, which reached unhealthy levels, and transformed into selfishness. We tend now to put what's best for us, not our dependents or anyone else, in the center of our universe. We have taken people and left them in the Beersheba areas that they never asked to visit and abandoned them there! And what do we then do?

I Kings 19:4 "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness,…" Elijah left his servant in Beersheba and he went another day's journey deeper into the wilderness!!

When I read that I'm reminded of a saying that I first heard as a teenager in Christian School, it goes something like this: Sin will take you further than you wanted to go. Keep you longer than you wanted to stay. And cost you more than you wanted to pay!

The sin of fear has now propelled Elijah "off the map". He's gone lower than low! The various writers of the Bible, inspired by God to do so, make beautiful use of movements, time and space. The New Testament is filled with accounts of Jesus traveling *down*, *over*, *across*, *thru, up to*, etc. These words expressing more than a direction or way off movement, they capture emotion and a sense of mood. No one goes "up" to the "dumps" of depression. We use the direction "down" in the "dumps". The term 'wilderness' conjures thoughts of isolation and abandonment. It's a scary place. Wilderness is the kind of area where the children of Israel wondered for 40 years. Wilderness is the environment where Jesus fasted 40 days and night and was then tempted by Satan. The wilderness is not where we go for picnics and celebrations; it's a place where we go to suffer, or even die!

From a mountain where God is gloriously answering your prayers for the whole world to see to now hiding in the dark crevices of a wilderness where you hope you aren't seen. You were at the apex looking down and the world looked so

peaceful as it was all beneath you to a place now where you are brought low and the least little noise makes you frightened. Into this place of hopelessness and depression is where fear and anxiety leads us. There is no lower place. We would have to look “up” to see even the friends we abandoned along the way, however looking up is nearly impossible. Your fear of death has now made you too scared to live!

You have outran both enemies and allies. The journey has taken you to a place that has no name. It can only be described as a day’s journey beyond. This place of no name is fitting because it to each of us it has a different name. We can’t pin point it on a map. We can’t identify it by a landmark but it is that place of total desperation. Where hope is lost and darkness engulfs our total being. There we are lonely and crave affection but have not the strength or willpower to love even ourselves. The Jezebel’s of our lives may not have killed us but we are paralyzed to the extent that we aren’t truly living. This is not the life God intended for any of us. Christ came to this wilderness that we would have life more abundantly, not this state of being that we have resigned ourselves to accept.

No doubt some of you are reading these pages from a wilderness place. Someone recommended this book or maybe even purchased it for you because you have gone to a dark place where being reached seems an impossibility. In the mold of Elijah you ran seeking safety but the place you thought would bring protection as instead brought imprisonment. This was not the way God intended it to happen but the good news is that your cell of solitary confinement is about to become your meeting place with Jehovah. When Moses was in a wilderness, by himself, God showed up in the form of a burning bush and transformed the area to Holy Ground! Yes, He created us to live in community with others, but He also requires us to commune with Him in a One-on-One relationship. Your loneliness, whether you claim your responsibility for it or if you are still blaming

others, is the avenue God is going to use to communicate with you in a personal, intimate way. He has been calling each of us but because of all the noise filling up our space we couldn't hear Him. Now, however, in the unnamed spots of our life, we are about to encounter Him in a way that we never could before.

The blame game is over. It's time to quit putting our circumstances on former spouses, employers, fake friends or political systems. No one made us run. No one forced us into addiction, adultery, crime, unforgiveness, hatred, bitterness, or to the wilderness that is unique to us. Yes, you may be a victim of another's selfishness, sin and poor judgement, yet the power they still hold over you is the power that you give them to hold over you! God is ready to meet with you to bring you the healing, forgiveness, restoration and deliverance that you have either been running from or refusing to believe possible.

The 4th verse of I Kings 19 not only tells us that Elijah went deeper into the wilderness, it also say that he fell under a tree and prayed to God that he would die. In his place of isolation he has come to the conclusion that death would be a welcome thing. How ironic, that he began running in order to preserve his life but that when the run was over he asked God to kill him. This makes no sense or does it?

We use drugs to escape reality until our new reality has become that off addiction, abuse and lack of self-control. Now this new reality has become worse than the former. Too often, we become the very embodiment of what it is that we claim to despise. The abused child becomes the abusing adult. The struggling employee becomes the controlling boss. That one hurt in a relationship becomes the one who inflicts hurt on others.

I find myself screaming at the pages of the Bible, exhorting Elijah that if he wants to die then quit praying, get up, go find Jezebel and dare her to make good on her threat!

The life lived in fear and wilderness out of the desire for self-preservation is not a life worth living. That very hurt, embarrassment, pain and threat you have been running from goes with you into your wilderness. The issue is not the hand we are dealt or the circumstances we find ourselves in daily, the true issue is us and our faith. The manifestations of life will only reveal what is already inside of us. It was not the circumstances of my divorce or the stepping down from my church that made me go to a lonely wilderness, it was the misplacing of my trust in others or self instead of God. It's our own sins, insecurities and lack of true faith in a true God that cause us to fall. Why does one run from a death threat only to pray to God that he would die? Could it be that at the root of the issue was not the fear of death but seeds of intimidation, pride, and insecurity. He trusted God to bring down fire and rain to show a whole nation his power, but when it came down to needing God's protection in a *personal* way he lacked faith. He had no problems flaunting his faith in front of Ahab and the false prophets but apparently something about Jezebel intimidated him. I don't know if she had some demonic influence or if it was because she was simply a woman and he couldn't handle threats from a strong-willed female. Yet, there is one lesson to be learned here for sure. We all have our weak areas. What may not be a temptation to me, may cause you great trouble. Circumstance that may cause me fear may not fret you in the least. Remember, the giant that kept the armies of Israel frozen in fear didn't intimidate young David at all. Goliath scared David's brothers but not him. There will be things in your life that affect you differently in the future than they do now, as some things that once held a hold on you no longer do. Each of us are unique in our strengths and our weaknesses.

Because we are unique comparing ourselves to one another is truly an exercise in futility. Elijah made this mistake as we see in his request for God to just take his life. For in that prayer it's recorded that he said "*For I am no better than my fathers*". (I Kings 19:4) He compared himself to those who had come before

him, his biological father, in addition to those fathers of the nation and faith. Comparing oneself to others is normal as we seek to measure our own progress. Psychologist recognize 2 main types of comparison - Upward and Downward. Upward comparison is when we compare ourselves to those whom we perceive to be better off than ourselves. Downward comparison is when we compare ourselves to those whom we perceive to be worse off than ourselves. While this may be ok within reason when it comes to how we are advancing socially, academically, or physically, it is not healthy to compare ourselves to one another spiritually.

No one around you is the standard by which you should judge yourself. Neither are they the standard God will use to judge you. We must judge ourselves according to God's Word, the Bible. In Christianity we tend to base success and failure on the same systems our culture does. Numeric statistics, Finances, Social buzz and Appearance are far too often how we deem if we are being a success in our God given assignments. However, the Bible teaches that God is simply looking for FAITHFULNESS.

As Elijah removes himself from faithfulness to his God given assignment he enters this arena of comparison. Since I'm no better than my fathers just kill me God. Perhaps that is why he fled Jezebel. Could it be that his ego was hurt because she did not see his victory at Mt. Carmel and run to him in repentance? Did he feel like a failure because he couldn't win her?
Our ego can be so fickle. Did our previous marriage ending truly break our heart or did it more so hurt our ego? Is our pride the culprit when a child rebels and we look "less than" as Christian parents? It may be that Elijah didn't want to live if he couldn't be seen as successful to the rest of the nation. Did he abandon his servant in Beersheba because ultimately his ego and pride made him feel like he wasn't a strong leader?

Whatever, the real issue may have been, the situation is this: There is a lonely, suicidal prophet, curled up under a tree out in the middle of a nowhere wilderness! Sound familiar?

4 *WHEN GOD ISN'T IN THE FIRE*

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;"
-William Cowper, 1773

"Nothing that has happened to you is a surprise to God. God will still get you to where you're supposed to be."
-Unknown

Get up and eat! These were the words of the angel from God as he touched Elijah who was sleeping. There at the prophet's head, lay a cake of bread upon hot stones and a vessel of water. All that running had made the man of God not only tired but very hungry. Unfazed by the angelic being's presence, he jumped and ate. Immediately then he went back to sleep!!
As I read that account I couldn't help but to imagine a teenager sleeping until almost noon, rising long enough to eat lunch, then heading right back to sleep. Apparently, Elijah was beyond just tired or sleepy, he was wore out. Running from God will do that to you.

Ever notice how much more we seem to use when we are fighting against God's will instead of flowing with His plan? Don't misunderstand, even when we are being about the Father's business, our physical frames will experience fatigue. The Bible says in Galatians 6:9 to not become "weary in well doing" (KJV). Just because you are tired does not mean that you aren't in God's will.

However, there is a supernatural strength that comes in walking in obedience to God. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah tells us that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. That they will mount up with wings as eagles. That they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31 paraphrased). The Bible also tells us that "the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10b).

Yes serving God strengthens us spiritually, mentally and physically. In contrast, when we live according to our fleshly desires and mindsets, life becomes burdensome, tiresome and more draining on us in every part of our being.

A second time the angel visited him to touch him and instruct him to eat and drink. Yet again the food and water were provided for him.
Don't let the fact that God divinely provided for Elijah's physical needs be missed here. Though the prophet had ran in fear, abandoned his servant and travelled even further into the wilderness God never lost sight of him, neither did he fail to supply the man's needs. Hallelujah, God provides for his children even when we are in a "running away" condition.

All too often we aren't sure that God will provide for us even when we are living "right". Jesus had to tell his followers that they need not worry about clothing because if the Father would clothe the flowers of the field that he would also provide for His children. (Matthew 6:28) Two verses earlier in this context he exhorts that if God feeds the birds that He can be trusted to provide for His people.
I want to encourage you right now that no matter your condition that God not only loves you, He is the one who is providing for your needs. Too many think that there employment or on the other hand assistance they may receive from the government is their source of provision, but the truth is every good gift comes from God. He can be trusted to care for His people whether we seem to meet the

requirements to earn that provision or if we appear to be disqualified. The God who sends you fire on Mt. Carmel is the same God who sends you angelic messengers, hot cakes and cold water in the middle of the wilderness!

When you have out ran your family, friends and are far away from God's best for your life, you are still within the scope of His sight. He sees you today, knows exactly where you are and what you are truly in need of this very moment. The Psalmist said if he were to ascend to the highest heaven that God would be there; that if he descended to the depths of the earth God would be there too. (Psalm 139:8)

God promises to never leave us and to never forsake us. We may outrun those whom despise us and those whom love us, we will never outrun the presence and promises of our Heavenly Father!

The angel tells Elijah that the meals are needed to give him strength for a journey that he was about to begin. How ironic that we read nothing about Elijah's need for food and water when he is in escape mode from Jezebel, yet for the journey God was about to assign him it was indeed necessary.

That journey would take him to Horeb. Known also as the mount of God, this is where God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush some 600 years earlier. This is also the location where Moses would experience the presence of Yahweh and receive the Ten Commandments.

There are times that God calls us back to places of remembrance. Locations where holy moments transform the place into holy ground. Abraham was returned to an altar he had previously built unto the Lord, to renew his commitment to the earlier promise he had received from God. Though Elijah had been weary, depressed, even suicidal he had enough common sense and

obedience to harken to the voice of God. The words “He went” in I Kings 19:8&9 are indeed powerful.

Like Abraham earlier who had left his home land in route to a promise land that he had never seen or even had knowledge of its whereabouts, Elijah steps out on a journey that we are told took 40 days. Some scholars say that the “40 days” could simply be a figure of speech, similar to how we may say “I haven’t seen you in a million years” to emphasize through exaggeration the passing of time. Honestly, I don’t know if he spent 40 days making a journey that could have been made in less time or not. We do know that the Israelites spent 40 years on a journey that should have only taken days or months. Regardless, often times our return to wholeness is a process and not an overnight event.

Personally, my wilderness experience consisted of years spend in self-pity, rebellion, sin, sulking and running aimlessly before like Elijah I collapsed under “a tree”. There are those of us that can’t seem to hear (or refuse to listen) to God’s prompting in the loud noise of rebellion, therefore it’s not till we get still in sleep (literally and/or figuratively) that we can receive His instructions. Then we have to determine if our next passage will include “He/She Went”. Will we take the first step of obedience in journey to restoration? What if that journey takes longer than we would like? Elijah had heard indirectly from God through the angel who gave him instruction but he had yet to directly experience God’s presence. Will you trust Him, even in your brokenness, when you have yet to experience Him directly? Will you take the first step knowing that it may be followed by enough strides to fill 40 days?

Elijah went! He began the process to get to the mount of God, with no guarantees of what would happen when he arrived.

Could he have been praying “Father, I’m heading to Horeb, Mount Sinai, the

place where you revealed yourself to Moses and my forefathers, the children of Israel. It's there God that I need you to reveal yourself to me! As powerful as the experience of Mount Carmel was, I desperately need a Mount Sinai experience!!"?

Is that your prayer? God I thank you for what you did for me before. I remember your touch, your grace, your power but Lord yesterday is gone! This day, here in this wilderness, far from all I've known, I need an encounter with You!

The text in I Kings 19 says that upon his arrival to Mt. Horeb that he entered a cave, spent the night and that the word of the Lord came to him saying "What are you doing here?".

In the events leading up to the Mt. Carmel showdown Elijah had been obedient to go and to do as he was prompted by God. Even his obedience to the angel to eat, drink and prepare for the journey that would bring him to this very cave. The only time we seeing him operating outside God's instruction was when he ran from Jezebel. Thus, I believe, the inquiry from God as to why he was in the place he found him. Even at this moment you may be hearing God ask you the same question. "Why are you in this relationship instead of at home with your spouse?". "Why are holding on to your tithe instead of trusting me in your finances?". "Why are you getting yourself entangled in these addictive behaviors instead of walking in the freedom?"

There were moments that I looked myself in the mirror and wondered how could I have fallen to such depths of depression and depravity. I knew in my heart there was a call of God on my life to serve Him in ministry, yet I fought so hard to push it down because of past hurts, disappointments and shame. The vast library of sermons I had written and preached, the books I had gleaned knowledge from and almost every resource from my time in ministry, I either

threw in the trash or gave away! How foolish to think that such childish behaviors could make God stop loving me and leave me alone. The truth is I didn't want Him to cease loving me, I just wasn't loving myself!

Why are you here? Wherever you are right now: physically, mentally, spiritually, why are you here? What brought you here? What are you really hiding from? What is keeping you here? There is a very good possibility that the very thing you are running from in a futile attempt to forget, is the very thing that is consuming your thought life and being! Why not stop today? The prodigal son went home, so can you! It may be a fact that no one truly understands your condition, your situation or your "why" but God's faithfulness to heal and restore is not predicated on anyone else's agreement, permission or consent! Whether you feel like the victim or the preparator (honestly, we've all been both at times) there is enough grace to cover your multitude of hurts and/or sins!

Why are you here? Why are you reading this book? Does fear currently have its horrific grip around your mind? Have you fallen to such a depth that you don't believe you can ever rise again? Have you wondered in the wilderness long enough, now you are at the mount of God, waiting on Him?

Elijah answered God with a response that gives us insight into what is really going on in the prophets heart and mind. Basically he says: No one else in the land serves you, they have disobeyed you and I have stood for you, now they want to kill me. I paraphrased verse 10 of I Kings 19 but one part that is an exact quote is this, "they want to kill me" (NJKV) Did you catch that? The prophet has turned a single death threat from one wicked queen into a "they". They didn't want to kill him – Jezebel wanted to kill him! It's way too easy to lump the whole wide world into the category of your opposition. "Nobody likes me", "Nobody would help me" , "Everybody hates me", "Everybody is against

me". We've all muttered such phrases in moments of frustration and self-pity.

We need to realize that no matter how tough the situation may be, the whole world is not against us; neither is the entire universe our enemy! Stop letting your imagination run wild in the land of negativity. If you are going to thing "wild" thoughts think "wildly positive" thoughts. Remind yourself that no weapon formed against you will prosper. Meditate on the fact that if God is for you that no one can stop you!

God, as he does with us, simply allowed Elijah to talk. His listening to Elijah's complaining and the despair that he seemed to be the only one living right, was not an endorsement nor agreement, but proof that our Heavenly Father is patient enough to hear our cries, even when they are in error. I'm thankful that God knows we are but dust and is patient with us. True He rebukes us when we are off course but does so in true love.
As He did with Moses on this same mount, God is going to reveal himself to his servant Elijah. The text says that a strong wind, powerful enough to break the rock into pieces, began to blow but that God was not in the wind. This commotion and powerful exhibition would undoubtedly bring a sense of awe to anyone dwelling in a cave on the mount, yet the prophet knew that as powerful and awe inspiring as it may be that the manifestation was not God's presence.

After the powerful winds, the earth began to quake; God was not in the earthquake. The earthquake was followed by fire, God was not in the fire either. These dynamic events were the same ones God did indeed surround Himself in when He manifest Himself in times past. However, he did not chose to do so this time.

Elijah was able to discern the fact that God was not in the wind, earthquake or fire. He did not allow his knowledge of past manifestations to cloud the present

situation. While we may be like Abraham, Elijah and others who returned to locations where God had previously visited His people, we must realize that He may not do it the way He did before. Isaiah 43:19 says

"*Behold, I will do a new thing,*
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert."

If we make the mistake of only looking in the same old places for God to work in the same old ways, we will make the mistake of experiencing His fresh works and life giving presence.

Jesus worked many miracles in a variety of unique ways. Sometimes He simply spoke words of healing to the afflicted and they were made whole. He once spat on the dirt, making mud, applied the mud to the blind man's eyes and told him to wash it off, when the man obeyed he went home with his sight. The Bible tells us that people that Jesus never held a conversation with or touched were healed by simply touching the hem of his garment.

God is not limited by our knowledge, our expectations nor does he need our approval to do whatever He wills. Don't limit his presence or miracle working power in your present situation. God may have touched you and you danced like David in His presence; that doesn't mean that next time it will be the exact same way. You may instead find yourself on your face weeping for hours.

We all probably know people who limit their worship to a particular style. Some folks say they are quiet and reflective thus that's the way they choose to worship God. There are other groups that insist their praise be vocal and at high volumes. Individuals and churches get accustomed to their particular styles of

liturgy, missing out on glorious graces that may be available in others.

It is true that God chooses to move in winds, shakings and flames but that in no way limits Him to only those avenues. Remember just because He worked in a particular way in your life before doesn't mean that He has to do it that exact same way now or in the future.

After these spectacular exhibitions heard "a still small voice" (I Kings 19:12 NKJV) Immediately he knew this was God, wrapped his face in his mantle and went out to meet with God.

The whisper of God penetrates to the innermost parts of the soul. Where earthquakes, fire and wind cannot reach the still small voice of the Holy Spirit abides. For it is "*not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord*" (Zechariah 4:6)

The 'fire on the mountain' times like Elijah had experienced at Mt. Carmel are glorious, exhilarating and productive but the moments when God whispers to us are some of the deepest that we will ever experience. There will be times when we need a 'shaking wind' encounter with God and there will be times when in the stillness of the moment He ministers to us. He knows exactly what we need, when we need it!

In regards to my life, I know that God speaks, moves and works as He wills in a variety of unique ways. I returned to Jesus through the ministry of Pastor Mark Myers and First Lady Wendy Myers in an Assemblies of God. I had attended "AG" church for a brief time as a teenager but had no ties to that denomination or local church. I almost accidentally stumbled across Pastor Myers one day while working my job at the Postal Service. That brief conversation prompted me to take my family to visit his church, 1 year later. Yes, a year after our

coincidental meeting at a mailbox we attended services. There are no coincidences or accidental meetings in God's Kingdom. God had me on that specific route on the specific day that Pastor Mark was setting up for a Fall Festival at his new church building, so that when my girlfriend and I were under conviction to get in church a year later, we would visit there!! It was there and under his care that I rededicated my life to Christ and that she received Salvation. There we received healing, went through premarital counseling and were married! In a place and in ways that were new to us God manifest Himself in the way we needed for that time.

Elijah didn't need fire, he needed a whisper and he after all his running he needed a ***still*** *small voice*.

5 TO LEAD AGAIN

"Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another."
— John C. Maxwell

"God uses people who fail—'cause there aren't any other kind around."
— John C. Maxwell, Failing Forward: How to Make the Most of Your Mistakes

Being in the undeniable, unmistakable presence of almighty God makes all the difference in the world. He can do more in just a split second than we can in an eternity of effort.

I come from a church tradition that puts an emphasis on recognizing the need for the presence of the Lord in our corporate gatherings. We believe that the third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, abides in believers and is ever present with us. I grew up singing songs like Lenny Wolfe's 'Surely the Presence of the

Lord' which includes the following chorus:

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can hear the brush of angel's wings,
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Life is difficult. Ministry is difficult. Leadership is difficult. Doing life, ministry and leadership outside of the presence of God being present is frustrating, taxing and truly ineffective. There is no way to be the true mom, dad, spouse or sibling that your family needs without Jesus in your life and consistent times of refreshing and renewal that come in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

Being present is the key ingredient to making any relationship work. No marriage can survive if the partners are present to make it work. This includes not only your physical presence but your mental and emotional engaging too.

Too many of us as Christians are absent in regards to our relationship with God. We are absent from church. We are absent from serving. We are absent from spending time daily communicating and listening to our Savior. Unfortunately, when we are present, we aren't engaged in the relationship. Ideas and terms like Devotions, Quiet Time, Prayer Closets and Tarrying in the Altar are strange at best and unpracticed at worst.

A pebble thrown into the middle of a pond will cause a wake to take place. Waves will ripple out from the locust point where the stone entered the water. The further out from that epicenter the weaker the energy associated with the waves. This effect is also applicable to events in our life. The moment a "pebble hits our pond" the more powerful it's effect; but as time and space separate us from that epicenter point the less impact we feel from the event. So

it is with our experiences in the presence of the Lord. Many are trying to ride the waves off experiences they had years ago. It's impossible to be continually revived off of times of refreshing that occurred a decade previously!

Tragically, leaders are so busy trying to lead that they neglect time in the presence of God. You may not be like Elijah running wild in a wilderness and you may not have done like me in forfeiting your call; you may be present at your post, however are you leading out of a fresh encounter with your God?

You may be reading this and thinking "But the chapter was entitled 'Leading Again'. What does this have to do with being reestablished in leadership?" Simply this, if you will put your personal relationship with God first and foremost, you will never have to be restored as a leader because you will not fail! Please note that I didn't exhort you to put your professional relationship with God first, it's your PERSONAL relationship with the Lord that will irrigate the other fields of your life.

It is with tremendous shame that I have to admit that the latter part of my previous ministry assignment was spent focusing on too much of the profession and not enough on the personal. There were so many beautiful opportunities that were being opened up for us as a local church. Our future was bright and there was excitement and expectations of greater things to come for our congregation. It's unfortunate that I spent too much time and energy trying to cultivate that and stay ahead of the curve and not enough attention to my family, my Savior and my own spirit man. Somehow, unintentionally and unknowingly I slipped into a partnership with God instead of a relationship with Him! I gave great detail to my professional relationship but not enough to my personal relationship. Hours upon hours were spent in sermon preparation, administrative planning, etc. and less in reading His Word and devotional material for my own spiritual need.

Remember His presence makes the difference!!

It made the difference for Elijah too. There at the entry way of that cave he had an encounter with God that changed him in a way that the fire on Mt. Carmel didn't. You see, it's one thing to be a part of the crowd experience where the whole nation sees God send fire down and a slaughtering of false prophets ensues. It's entirely different thing when it's you and God, 1 on 1! In the presence of God, Elijah found himself being asked again "Why are you here?". Why is a prophet, a leader, a voice now hiding far from his place. Our Father seems to be asking with a hint of rebuke but he is not bashing. There is no condemnation nor damnation in the inquiry. The Lord is not denouncing his servant or accusing him of being weak.

Yes, God already knew the answer. He knows our thoughts and the intents of our heart. The question seems to be more for Elijah's sake than God's. Elijah gives the same rehearsed answer as he had previously. I wonder if as he regurgitated it he may have thought to himself that it sounded more like an excuse instead of reason.

Firmly, but in love, God let Elijah know that he was not the only one who had been on the Lord's side. In fact, there were 7,000 others who had not bowed to Baal!

It is not just the manifested presence of the Lord that transforms us, it is what occurs between us and God in those moments that forever changes us.

God took time to inquire of Elijah. As we stated he already knew the answers yet he asked. Do not mistake God's questioning of you as accusing you. Childish individuals get offended when someone is inquisitive of their behavior or thought. God asks us questions for a variety of reasons but often it is simply a

gesture that expresses His genuine interest in our lives. He is not afraid or offended by your answers so don't be shy of his questions. It is part of the healing process.

Not only do we see God inquiring, we also see his responding. As Elijah pours out his heart of fear and frustration, God is attentive and takes time to respond. One of the most beautiful texts in the Bible is the 38th and 39th chapters of the book of Job. It is filled with God responding to his servant.

May I remind you that God is waiting to respond to you. He is not afraid of your questions or your responses to His own. He is loving and patient. He knows that we are but dust, that we are fragile in both our thinking and our frame. Don't allow the enemy of your soul to blind you to the beauty of Our Father's mercy.

God inquired, God responded and God commissioned. Though he had left his post and had ran from his work and calling, Elijah was not disqualified from being used to accomplish God's work. God did not deem him unfit, unstable or any other such label that we often put on folks today thinking they have limited their usefulness to God's Kingdom. Jesus' own disciple Peter denied Christ 3 times, even cursing to emphasize his story that he didn't know Him. Yet, Jesus forgave him, restored him and personally exhorted him to feed and shepherd God's sheep.

Joel Osteen tells the story of how his father's previous wife abandoned the marriage, leaving John Osteen as a divorced minister. He left the ministry and began selling insurance, thinking his opportunity to pastor had passed him by. Later, he remarried and God restored him to pulpit ministry. A few years later the Osteen's planted what would become known as Lakewood Church. Perhaps

situations like this give Joel Osteen to the confidence to write, "*When we make mistakes, God doesn't write us off, it doesn't cancel our destiny. God uses the dark times to refine us.*".

Some of the most powerful messengers of the Gospel today are men and women who made mistakes that took them to dark place but God used it to refine them and they didn't allow it to destroy them.

God commissioned Elijah to leave Mt. Sinai and go anoint Hazael to be king of Aram, to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel and to anoint Elisha to be his replacement as prophet. (I Kings 19:15-16)

His ministry would be restored, he would lead again! One of the things I love about this commissioning service is the instruction to anoint Elisha to be prophet. God was entrusting him to mentor his replacement! Not only was this an honor but it was also God restoring a part of Elijah that had been lost in his time of running. Remember what Elijah left in Beersheba before he continued traveling a day further into the wilderness?

His servant! God was saying what you lost, I will restore! Now not only would he have a travelling companion, this man would be more than a servant he would be a partner. One that Elijah could teach, pour into and help prepare to take the ministry to even greater heights.

Not only has God refused to call you disqualified, He is choosing to use you in ways that were even more impactful than you previously thought possible.
Be encouraged today for it is not over for you! You may feel that you are underserving, disqualified and unredeemable but God specializes in situations just like yours! As we chronicled the account of Elijah there was only one place where God seemed silent and unresponsive; did you catch it as we read?

It was when Elijah prayed to die. God may have been silent but in no way was He unresponsive. In your present season you may feel like God has gone silent on you, just know that while you may not be hearing Him, He is responding. He has a heaven full of angelic beings and He still cooks up a mean cake of bread that goes down great with cold water straight from Heaven. He is not going to let you die! He is as close as the mention of His name.

Indeed, God is not through with you. He put this book in your hands just to remind you of that very fact.

For those whom this book finds on this side of your wilderness. The ones who have experienced the love of the One who leaves the 99 in search of the 1, please remember the words of Haggai 2:9 (NIV):

"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Your best days are still ahead of you and if God has called you then nothing can stop you! Get Up and Lead Again!!

Afterword

Running is a great activity when it's a sport or a hobby done for health or fun. It is an exhausting lifestyle when it is descriptive of your flight from reality because of hurt, sin, disappointment or fear! Elijah found the strength to quit running when he found God in the midst of his weakness. Unfortunately, some souls will never surrender their journey to God and waste away in the wilderness.

My running from God lasted nearly 10 years. It's hard for me to even believe that as I type the words. Time ran faster than I did! Sadly, I call it my lost decade. Yes, God was merciful to me even in that time that I neither deserved it or appreciated it. He brought a woman into my life who loves me for me and encourages me to be my best. I could've and perhaps should've died in my wilderness…. BUT God!

If you are in a place that seems strange, lonely and deserted please hear the still small voice of the God who loves you. Get up and go home! You were born to be a Prophet not a Prodigal!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Hullette is a husband, father, grandfather, coffee addict and huge Florida State Seminoles sports fan. He is the founder of Rob Hullette Ministries located in the foothills of North Carolina. Known for his down to earth, relational style of ministry, his heart is to make authentic connections while sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His preaching style could be described as Biblical in foundation, relevant in content, clear in delivery and engaging both the intellect and the emotional.

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