

Isn't it true that life does not always turn out the way we want it to? Maybe we don't get that promotion we think you deserve, or we are struggling with our health. Or maybe our marriage doesn't turn out the way we imagined or our parents or children have disappointed us. **We have worked hard for all of this and done everything we possibly can to get things right yet they go in a different direction.**

Whatever it is, often we have expectations of what life is suppose to be or provide us, but we get disappointed. Our challenge is that **we have a tendency to write out our own life plans and then expect God to make it all happen—or else.**

Has this ever happened to you? Is it happening to you right now? Have you had any of those moments of disappointment, confusion, and even anger when life does not turn out the way we wanted?

If you think you are alone, you are not. This is a common experience that we just need to learn how to handle.

**The Bible is full of examples of how the people of God often have unmet expectations and how difficult it is for us to deal with that.** In the book of 1 Kings 19:1-18, we learned about one of those persons: the prophet Elijah.

Who is this prophet, Elijah? Elijah is one of only two men that have never known physical death (Enoch being the other). He is one of two men that appear in both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. He lived in the time of king Ahab and appeared with Moses on the Transfiguration mount as they both spoke with Jesus. At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the people thought Elijah would come and rescue him. Elijah was chosen by the apostle James to illustrate for us the might of a person of prayer.

**By all accounts, Elijah is an outstanding man of God.** But in this chapter of 1 Kings 19, we find him at an awkward moment, where he is neither heroic nor courageous. **Instead, a broken human, like many of us would find ourselves being at times. He from a mountain-top kind of experience in the previous chapter to waiting to die in a cave here.**

So, what caused Elijah to go from a hero to someone that gave up and wished to die?

The books of 1 and 2 Kings are about the story of God's people in relation to God's covenant. About kings that kept the covenant or disregarded it. King Ahab was a bad king that did not care about God's covenant, and Elijah's ministry took place during his reign in Israel. He married a pagan priestess named Jezebel—who was as bad as they come. Because of her reputation, her name became synonymous with evil. Elijah had become Ahab and Jezebel target. For them, he was no more than a troublemaker.

We read,

“Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”

Why would Jezebel despise Elijah so badly? They have a history together. First, Jezebel was persecuting and killing the prophets and priests of God because they were in opposition to her kingdom—and Elijah was part of them. And second, Elijah humiliated Ahab and Jezebel by mocking, defeating, and killing their prophets: 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19).

This action made Elijah the primary target of this evil monarchy. This defeating of the pagan prophets was a powerful display of God's power and Elijah's faith; it was a demonstration that Jezebel's gods were mere powerless lifeless idols and the Elijah's God was real and mighty.

We can almost see Elijah feeling very confident after winning the epic battle against the prophets of Baal and Asherah that he thought Ahab and Jezebel would be stunned, shaken in their unbelief, and the hold evil had on the country would be finally broken. Instead, comes a message from Jezebel that basically said, "I swear to Baal, by tomorrow morning, you will be dead!" This takes Elijah totally by surprise, and as a result, he seems to fall apart at the seams.

So, we have this hero of faith, a valiant man of whom the Bible says that "the hand of the Lord was on Elijah," a man of not only faith but courage too. However, after Jezebel sends word to find and kill him, this happened: "Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life..." **After the miraculous and overpowering victory over the prophets of Baal, we find this same man afraid and running for his life.**

"No! This isn't what is supposed to happen!" we can almost see Elijah crying out. He thought that, after defeating the pagan prophets, everyone would see how real and powerful God was, and repent and turn back to God. But that didn't happen. Instead, Jezebel's heart got even harder, and made her mission to kill the prophet of God. Elijah is the one that is stunned.

What is going on here? **Elijah experienced for the first time a huge letdown, even more, while in the midst of being faithful. He was wondering what he did wrong and if he was the person that he thought he was; if he was the right person for the job. It must have been his fault he may have thought to himself or that he was not as good as he thought he was.**

Look at verse 9 and 10,

“Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

If I were to paraphrase this, it might go something like, “I have given everything to God, I did my best, all that I could and it wasn’t enough. I am a complete failure.” This is what’s going on inside Elijah’s head. He was so broken he even went so far to say, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” **He can’t seem to find a way out but escaping his challenges by giving up and running away, hiding in a cave –literally and figuratively.**

Can you see the drastic change? First, he defeated hundreds of evil men, and now he is wishing to be dead.

**Isn’t this what happens to us too? The way we feel and see ourselves perhaps even right now? When Elijah’s expectations were met when he defeated the prophets of Baal and Asherah, he experienced a degree of satisfaction and contentment, even elation. But when they were not met he experienced anger, sadness, and fear, and this happens to us to.** Anger because we are mad that our expectations were not met and start looking to blame someone for it: others, ourselves, and sometimes even God. Sadness because we grieve the loss of what did not happen. And fear, because we are afraid that our expectation will continue to go unmet.

Steven Furtick speaks of this when he talks about the “expectation gap” as the space between our expectations and our actual experiences. **This gap is what we suffered as frustration that is caused by unrealized outcomes. We have been there, overwhelmed with frustration and disappointment.**

How are we supposed to respond? Do we just lower our expectations and settle with whatever we get? Or is there another way?

In such moments, we look for the provision of God. In the middle of our frustrations and disappointments, we don’t stop but keep going as best as we can knowing that God’s plan for us may not meet our finite human expectations, but it will certainly and ultimately exceed all of them.

Here is a profound truth: when we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” what do we think we are asking from God? To far exceed our expectations! **But we rarely realize this because we have not considered the possibility that what happens in heaven is much more than the best we could get from earth.**

This is exactly what God was showing to Elijah. **The prophet couldn’t see it because of the frustration of expectation gap and the cloud of disappointment he was under.** So, God showed Elijah the big picture when he said,

Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (he was in a cave) He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you

arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

Can you see what is happening here? God was up to something, a lot more something than what Elijah had realized. When Elijah was done, God was telling him, “get up and go now to anoint Hazael and Jehu as kings.” God was not denying his prophet’s challenges and emotions, but was telling him “we are not done yet, I get how you feel, but see, what we are doing together is far much greater than just winning a battle; it is much greater than your personal victories. We will win everything together.”

My friends, **what God is doing in our lives is far much greater than an unmet expectation and goes much further than our ability to see in the moment.** When things seem impossible or confusing, with God, there is always the element of surprise, the possibility that something greater is going to happen and change everything—and it does happen.

Here it is what I believe: God can change our unmet expectations into surpassing expectations. Our unmet expectations are not dead ends. At the end of the day, regardless of the immediate outcome, we can overcome anything by not letting go of God and keeping our faith and hope. But here is the key to all this: **our focus shouldn’t be on getting what we want from life or this world, but on being faithful to our relationship with God and living to the fullest of our potential listening and following God’s wisdom. You see, there is a shift here from “getting what I want” to “becoming what I was meant.”**

I finish with this. When Elijah gave up and became suicidal, God didn’t berate him for not being joyful or having enough faith. Instead, God met him right in the middle of his struggle

with tender grace and offered him a new perspective of life. Sometimes we need an encouraging word and a reminder of what we are about as people of God. And this is what God did for Elijah and does for us every single day—including today.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.