

Leadership Community—September 21, 2009

Written summary:

God Got You Here, God Will Keep You Here

Why Are You Here?

Tonight we are going to consider the story of man named Elijah. Elijah was one of our heroes this summer. We focused on one of his great God victories. But his life came crashing down *right after* that victory. We are going to consider his crash and how God renewed him.

Our hope is that leadership community can renew you guys, through leadership level teaching and connection with each other and with your teams.

And so we begin with the question that God kept asking Elijah when he had checked out. Why are you here?

Why are you here tonight?

- You're here because you were asked.
- You're here because you kind of have to be, I mean you got the emails.
- You're here because you like Mexican food.

Dig down a layer.

You're here because you serve here at this church, you're a leader and/or a team member. That's how we figure out whom to hound to come this thing.

Dig down another layer.

Why do you serve, why do you lead? I'm going to tell you.

It's because at some point God touched your life in a real way, maybe even here @ CTV, maybe for the first time or it felt like the first time. God touched your life and because of God's work in your life, you want to be a part of touching other lives.

Why are you here, on this list, at the leadership community, because at some point, God touched you and you felt this stirring to be part of this in the hope of touching others.

And that's why I'm here. God has touched my life, over and over, to the point where I feel like there's nothing that quite compares with working to

share his life and relationship with him with others. I've been committed to that for almost 20 years—to discover the things of God and share them with others vision. That's why I'm here, still here.

All those years ago, when I just started out after this vision of touching others, I naively believed that having this passion and this vision was enough. I meant well. I was sincere. I spent time with God and went to seminary, worked hard. I read the books, heard the church success stories. This will be a great exciting adventure.

Well it has been at times. But at other times it's been draining. At still other times it seemed pointless. There have been days when I've prayed for something else to do. I've even polished off the resume a few times, though not recently.

No recently, what I'm seeing is that I got burned out—so strung out and tired that my passion levels for ministry tanked. So depleted that my compassion levels for people tanked as well. Tapped out.

I wouldn't say I'm burned out right now. I'd say I'm in recovery. You never get cured from burn out; you just recover and learn how to avoid sinking in. So that's where I'm at. That's where some of you are too. And if you're not, you either have been or will be.

And here's our big idea for tonight: God got you in this game, this serve him-love him, make a difference for him game. And God is going to keep you there, even through burn out. That's what he's done for me, and he'll do it for you if you let him.

So were going look to Scripture and the story of Elijah, we're going to listen for God's voice to us regarding some keys to staying energized and focused and steady on the vision for change he gave us in the first place.

Elijah Hits the Wall

In our Heroes series this summer, Elijah was Kid Confidence. He took on King Ahab, his evil wife Jezebel, and all their best priests and prophets—850 in all. He threw down the gauntlet and said, lets have a god-contest—we'll both build alters and put sacrifices on them, but not ignite them. The god who lights the sacrifice is the real one.

He let them go first, and nothing happened as he teased them for hours. Then Elijah did his thing. He even poured water all over everything 3 times. And then he prayed, and that leads us to his high, his high point.

The High:

Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch!³⁹ And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, "The LORD is God! The LORD is God!" (2 Kings 18:38-39 NLT)

Wow, big time victory for Elijah. He must have walked home from that one fired up. "Boy god, we kicked some butts today, didn't we.

This high-like feeling you had when you were touched by God and decided you wanted to be part of touching others. This high is something we feel from time to time, you guys who go to Orange—you get the buzz. Sometimes we see some life change or we hear a great story about how God is working, or even the baptism, and it gives us that high.

Highs are good, but they don't last, they don't go deep enough to keep us going. After Elijah's high, comes the wall.

The Wall:

¹When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. ²So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed." (2 Kings 19:1-2 NLT)

Guys, all of us who lead, complain about the people we lead, about the burden of leadership. Moses did it. Paul did it. You do it. I do it. It's like we want people to get "it" without us having to work at persuading them and challenging them. We want it to be easy or automatic. Inevitably the people we lead will eventually resist us, even oppose us. But if you think you've got tough opposition to deal with, take heart. Elijah had it worse.

Jezebel was determined to kill him. I doubt the people in your small group or on the host team or in the parents of Arbor or amped kids want to kill you. They may vent their anxieties on you. They make act like hyperactive ADD children who constantly need steered back on course, but Jezebel took an oath, you're dead Elijah, or I'm dead.

So what's Elijah do, this man of confidence, this man who mocked Jezebel's gods and killed her priests? He runs.

The Run:

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. (2 Kings 19:3 NLT)

Elijah runs away scared. He is afraid. This was not exercise run. This was not a vacation. This was defeat. He was done. We see it in the text.

He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." (2 Kings 19:4 NLT)

High, then the wall—great victory, then great opposition, then the run. He runs to the broom tree. The run that says "I'm running away, I'm done. I'm a loser and I quit."

In his book *The Dip*, Seth Goden talks about quitting. I read it, twice. He says that every endeavor has a dip, a wall, a time when it seems pointless to go on. And that dip is where most people get off the train. Quitting is why most people live terribly average boring lives. Most of us, most of the time quit way too soon.

In a sense God got Elijah there, and God was going to keep him in the saddle of his ministry. God would get him through this dip or this wall, get him through this place where he wanted pack it all in, where he wanted to die. And God keeping him going is where we turn next, to Elijah's recovery and some handles for ourselves.

The Recovery:

Rest: *Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!"⁶ He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again. (1 Kings 19:5-6)*

Food and sleep are the first things we need when we start to fry. Never make decisions when you exhausted or hungry. Rest is the fastest cure for depression. Get some sleep, some extra sleep when you're down. Use sleep aids as necessary.

Time with God: *So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.⁹ There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. (2 Kings 19:8 NLT)*

Elijah was carving out time with God. He was headed to a place where he believed he would meet God. Mt. Sinai was where Moses got the 10 commandments.

But when he arrives, God says why are you here?

So Elijah get's his rest. And the Elijah goes to God. And the God starts to direct him, starts to lead him in processing his situation. Processing with God is the next step.

Processing with God: *Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." (1 Kings 19:10 NLT)*

What's good about this is that he is processing his pain with God. I fear that some of you think you can't do that. You have picked up the wrong belief that any pain is a sign of spiritual failure. Instead, what we see over and over again in scripture is a God who can handle our pain.

What's interesting about this, is that Elijah's rant completes our portrait of burnout

Burn out =

I'm tired. He was exhausted, even before the long trip. He was exhausted even though he was coming off a high. Highs are exhausting not just lows. So he's tired.

I'm alone. I'm the only one...I know you guys feel this way. I do too sometimes. No one else will do this, if I don't. No one else even sees that this needs to be fixed. No one else cares about this. I'm alone. (this was not true in Elijah's case, but because he was isolated and not in community, it was easy for him to believe it)

I'm opposed. These people, they're not interested, they've killed everyone else, and now they want my head as well. These 7th grade boys, have driven off every other leader they've had and now its my turn. We assign tasks and people don't do them—I believe that is passive opposition. I'm opposed.

I want out (add a now to that). I want out now. I have to get out. I quit. I guess prophets didn't quit or transfer or polish the resume. They just died.

For me I have also scene that I don't want to learn when I get burned out. Normally, I want to grab every tidbit of wisdom I can about how to lead and do church. But when I'm fried, it's gone.

How intense are these for you now? In the last 6 months, in the last few years. The more intense they are the more you're burned.

So Elijah is burned out and now it's God's turn.

¹¹“Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”
¹⁴He replied again, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.” (1 Kings 11-14 NLT)

Here is God. He is gentle. He will be gentle with us, but he will still ask the hard question. Why are you here? Why are you in this place of hopelessness and discouragement?

I think God is implying to Elijah and to me, “you don't need to be here. I'm being gentle and all because you know, you're beat up. But you don't need to be here.”

You don't need be here in this place where any chance of bringing change is gone.

You don't need be here, tubing out night after night because you've lost all motivation to forge ahead.

You don't need to be here, where you expect people in your ministry to function automatically with out your direction.

And so through the gentle whisper, God gives Elijah two things. The first has to do with action and the second has to do with vision.

Renewed Action Plan: *Then the LORD told him, “Go back the way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. (1 Kings 19:15-16 NLT)*

I think it's interesting that God's way to keep Elijah in the game, to help him recover or be renewed is to give him work to do. Part of the work of prophets was anointing—it was a God appointment, they tapped kings and

Elijah is even designating his successor—it would be years before Elisha would take over. Elijah did not get a quick exit. His final transition stayed out on the horizon. Instead God gave him work to do, now, work that would impact the future.

Guys, don't be surprised if part of the remedy to burn out is getting on with some God-tasks. Instead of stopping, God is saying—its time to give your team a little more—more prayer, more vision, more personal interest in them and what their dealing with. Action is a part of renewal, but action alone won't heal the ache in side. So God also gives Elijah something else and it spoke to his hope deficit.

Renewed Vision: *Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha!* ¹⁸*Yet I will preserve seven thousand others in Israel who have never bowed to Baal or kissed him!"* (1 Kings 19:17-18 NLT)

I don't really like this bloody stuff. But God is saying, "justice will done, and evil will not prevail." If Hazael doesn't stop the bad guys, Jehu will. If Jehu doesn't handle it, Elisha will.

"Look ahead, God will work, he will affect lives, he will bring change."

And oh by the way, "mr. I'm alone, and no one loves me or cares..."
You are not alone. I've 7000 among this people. That's 6 thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine more than you. You are not alone.

Look around. You're not alone. I'm not alone.

God never has delivered these messages to me in such dramatic way. But he does. Sometimes through you guys, you remind you, your in this, I'm not alone. Sometimes from my friends who visit here. They sense a good spirit in this church. That's encouraging too.

Why do we need leadership community? Because we need to be reminded, we are not alone. It's hard sometimes but not hopeless. We all have dips. But God got us here, touched us so we wanted to touch others, and now we need him to keep us here, to get us through our dips, to do the work to renew our vision, and to say ok, what's the action plan.

After we break from this session, we will turn you loose to your teams, and we have some things for you to discuss. I want to talk through this a bit and then you'll have time to share as teams.

Questions for Leaders:

How do you relate to Elijah?

Some of us probably look back on a wall hitting time, some of us feel as if we're splattered all over it under the broom tree, and a few of us may not be able to connect with this yet.

Where do you get rest and time with God in your weekly rhythm?

This one is huge. I don't doubt that some of us have unsustainable lives—we're just not going to get this stuff until we crash. I am on the edge of that myself. One of my friends counseled me at on point, and said, going away is nice, but you need to figure how to do this on a regular basis. That was good.

Renew Your Vision:

What was the initial stirring that God gave you to serve in the way you do?

This a personal question.

What do you hope will change as a result of your leadership?

This is a personal question too. But you want to share answer to it as a team, why are you here?

What do difference do you see your ministry team making?

This is the vision for your team. And as leader you have to be into that, and remind them of that.

I see more and more people getting more and more of the life of God through our church. As we pursue our mission, I expect to hear stories of movement, the people are more into God through Christ than they were.

Vision is about making difference. Vision is about imagining in advance the God-stories that will result from your ministry. Annette did that earlier. Some time it will be your turn.

Vision answer the why do we do this question. Leaders have to know it and tell it.

How does the above difference contribute to the mission God has given CTV?

Every one of your team visions must contribute to the overall vision of CTV.

We see you guys with deeper connections, hope, and skills to lead through leadership community, because without connected, hope-filled, empowered leaders, we will not be living the fullness of Christ in here—the fullness we say we want to pursue. We will not have capacity or passion to serve outside the walls—And God won't be smiling. Vision connected with mission.

Renewed Action Plan: rate yourself on each of the five key relationships involved in reaching your God given potential/impact as a leader.

In addition to your vision, we want you to think of your actions in terms of 5 relationship.

1. Relationship to God~we assume that this is good too often.
2. Relationship to your self~this gets into the rest and sleep and taking care of yourself so you can take care of others, so there's more of the true you to serve others.
3. Relationship to your team. If you're burned out, your team is probably limping along. Share this with them. Bring them to these things. Keep an eye out for those on your team who are hurting or wandering spiritually.
4. Relationship to those your team serves. It doesn't stop with us. Elijah had work to do for God, with the people. You do to. People are counting on us, to provide ways for them to grow, to provide a place where they can bring their kids and their fiends to journey with God. People count on it—communion, the café, a warm greeting and program.
5. Relationship to the leadership of CTV. All of you have someone, who represents the leadership of CTV over you, around you. Keep the lines of communication. And don't be surprised when I follow-up with you this week or next and say, how's it going, what did you come with for a vision. When will you share it. When you think of the 5 relationships, which one needs the most attention and what are you going to do.

Vision—get in touch with that.

Action items—five relationships that put us on the Elijah road to renewal. At the top of the list of relationships are the God and self relationships which making all the other stuff real and connected and part of the vision he has for you.

So why are you here. Maybe the truth is, you belong here. God has brought here. He will keep you here. You're tired and little discouraged, but that's normal, and there's something in here to grab onto and keep going.