

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015
1

Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life... (1 Samuel 19:3, ESV)

For much of his life, the young man was on the run.
He had experienced incredible things...
 A calling vision in the night...
 A ministry blessed with growth...
 A gifting of speech and word...
 A life of service and activity...
 A family of love and compassion...
 A sense of the presence of God!
And yet, in his experience, he ran.

In the face of great moments,
A fear entered into the heart.
A fear which would dominate and control,
A fear which would eclipse and obscure
 All the good he had experienced and the good yet to come.

What made Elijah run into the desert to hide?
Jezebel had uttered threats and imprecations,
He became afraid for his very life...
So he ran to protect himself from the danger around.

The young man entered ministry.
He saw the workings of God in his heart and in his church...
He saw the blessings abound and fruit increasing...
He also heard the threat grow and the opinions rally,
He heard the anger, the resentment and the opposition,
 Of his own personal Jezebels.

And he ran...
Further and deeper in ministry...
Further and further way from God's presence.

“...he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” (1 Samuel 19:4, ESV)

He ran into the arms of depression;
He ran into the shadows of ministry;
He ran into the business of life;
He ran into the solitude of his mind;
He ran to isolate his soul.
He ran...and in his despair, he cried.

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God

November 9, 2015

2

He came, time and again, to moments of despair...
Moments of giving up and giving in
Up to the pressures imposed by others...
In to the fears of the future...
Up to the anger of influencers...
In to the demands of his heart.
He came, on more than one occasion,
To the end of himself, the end of his hope, the end of joy.

This chorus of “I am Done!” came many times:
When an influential leader doubted his integrity;
When a deacon said he should be gone.
When he presented the word and it was rebuffed;
When a letter was sent and he was judged.
When a meeting was held and accusations leveled.
When attacks were uttered without a defense.
When threats were uttered and intimidation attempted.
His mind echoed back the words...
Take me now; I am done in!

And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” (1 Samuel 19:7, ESV)

Young eyes and young minds refuse to hear...
The journey is too great for your strength...
The road too long for your endurance...
The work too difficult for your endeavor...
The requirements too heavy for you to bear...
Come away and draw strength.

And in his fear...and in his arrogance,
Like a six year old child who insists,
“I do it myself...”
He cried out to God, I can do it myself.
He attempted and tried,
He worked harder and stayed longer...
He preached with more passion...
He studied with more diligence...
He sought more approval...
He devoted himself to the church more completely.

And with every effort, and every attempt,
With all exertion and all hope,
The body grew tired and the spirit grew faint.
The body was willing but the soul was weary.

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God

November 9, 2015

3

With every step, deeper and deeper,
A voice was there speaking within:
The journey too hard...you need your strength.
The road too long...you need to recharge.

And even when the whispered cry was heard,
When the voice started to shout over the din,
The man ignored the words, the counsel and invitation...
And threw himself further, harder, more passionately into his work.
Resisting the nourishment and denying his need...
He pressed on even more to cover his fear and mask his oppression.

He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Samuel 19:10, ESV)

In thirty years of professional ministry,
The man toiled and worked and strove for success.
He sought blessing and affirmation
From the congregations he served,
From the people he longed for
Approval and commendation.

On many occasions he threw
For himself a party of pity.
Thinking himself faithful and others faithless,
Feeling abandoned by all, even the Lord himself,
He bemoaned his condition,
And voiced his complaint.

And in the latter years of ministry,
He thought he had arrived.
Ministry was thriving, growing and strong...
The voices he heard were praising and abundant.
He finally felt he had arrived...
That he finally had been pleasing
That he finally achieved success
The he had finally attained a peace in his performing.

And, then the world came crashing down.
Accusations were leveled, charges were made,
Meetings were held, disappointment was expressed.
Silence in response to the betrayal displayed,
The man felt the terror of all,

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015

4

And withdrew in his anger and anxiety,

He was angry with God to allow him to endure
The taunts and slander from those close by.
He was angry with himself for he thought,
Certainly if I was more, if I did better.
He was fearful of his future,
Worried about how he would survive.
He was fearful of the people,
Anxious they would finally reject him.

And yet he pressed on...attempting to perform.
He continued to serve...trying to prove his worth and devotion.
He strove to demonstrate a faithful spirit,
He longed to display a resilient ministry
He wanted others to see a devoted ministerial man...
He desired to be safe and find peace for his heart.

And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. (1 Samuel 19:11-12a, ESV)

He knew what he needed on those hot summer days...
As tempers flared and emotions rose,
As words were exchanged and threats were uttered,
What he needed most was a visitation from above.

He needed God to show up –
To voice his support and rise to his defense;
To remove his attackers and protect his heart;
To establish his ministry and strengthen his work;
To cover his life with the safety of his Hand.

So this man of ministry sought to experience God...
And what did he do, to find him these days?
He did the things he had always done,
When times were hard and approval was fleeting.

He threw himself into the work and ministry, as never before.
He studied longer and longer,
He preached with more passion and zest;
He visited more constantly,
He created more ministries,
He held more meetings,

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015

5

He planned many activities,
And in all of these things, he really needed to see
He needed to feel and to know
The presence and approval of his God.

And in the noise and the bustle of ministry,
In the cacophony of activity and people,
He thought that he would find the peace he sought,
The approval he longed for,
The strength he needed.
The encounter with God he required.

God was not in the wind.
The winds were blowing and events were taking place,
Life shattering, never-ending crisis occurred
One after the other, life was threatened,
Anxiety was produced, life was tossed with the winds of trial.
But God was not seen in the crisis at hand.

God was not in the earthquake.
His world was shaking, from all that had occurred.
His confidence was weakened,
His faith was tested and his belief challenged,
His faithfulness was tried and questioned,
His life was shaken by all that had happened.
And God was not in the shaking.

God was not in the fire.
No matter how hard he tried, the passion was waning...
Regardless of the effort exerted, his joy was lessening.
He sought to reignite his passion, but the fire was dying.
He longed for renewal, revival and excitement...
But even in searching for the enthusiasm of days gone by,
God was not present in the passion of the moment.

And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. (1 Samuel 19:12, ESV)

Finally, the man and his wife,
Came to the end of themselves and their work...
They could do no more, they could attempt no longer...
Approval was elusive, success was fleeting,
Anger was growing, attacks were flying,
Nothing he could do, could recover the past.
Nothing he knew, could preserve his future...
He needed to see God, and was blinded by the noise.

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015
6

So in the middle of November of the year 2014,
The pastor and family said their goodbyes.
They left the ministry to which they were devoted...
Uncertain of the future they only knew,
They could not continue life as it was.

They silenced the noise of the ministry...
They quieted the criticism of their critics.
They quelled the busyness of their lives...
They rested in the uncertainty of tomorrow.
They stopped their working...
They stifled the complaints of the soul...
They sought the quiet of life...to heal, recover and restore.

And in the silence of their lives,
In the stillness of no longer being in the press of ministry,
Something was found that had been long neglected...
The voice of God was heard
In a whisper so low, so quiet, so still.

In leaving the church, in leaving the ministry,
Something was found that had been missing...
The presence of God and the restoration of heart and soul.

And in the leaving what has occurred?
A life has been redeemed from despair and fear;
A marriage is being restored to hope and connection;
A family is healing from life-long abuse at the hands of others.
A man is strengthened in heart and soul,
A woman is strengthened in body and spirit.
A couple is empowered to love and recover,
A Voice is heard and lives are restored!

The walk of this year has been a challenge,
Day to day, uncertainty abounded,
But in the uncertainty there was peace.
A peace from the voice of God,
A peace from the activity of the Spirit.
A peace from the presence of Christ,
A peace from the reconciliation of the past
A peace from the healing of hearts and hurts.

In the year since leaving the ministry,
There have been things that have been missed,

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015

7

But nothing has compared to the joy
Of again hearing God's voice,
And sensing his presence!

And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint..." (1 Samuel 19:15, ESV)

As with Elijah, this servant of God, this minister of the church
Has heard something he needed to hear, longed to hear.
God has spoken in a voice loud and clear –
I am not done with you yet.

Though your field may have changed...and your direction has shifted,
I have great things in store for your life and your ministry.
You will touch and bless others as you have touched others in the past.
You will teach and strengthened others as you have taught in days gone by.
You will heal and minister as you have in your ministry before.
Your field will change, your focus will sharpen, your skills applied,
You will be blessed and encouraged, empowered and useful.

Leaving the pastorate, some had thought,
Life would be over and passion would be spent.
And yet God has affirmed that his call is without repentance,
His passion is still strong, his presence still felt.
God is active in him and his wife,
God is prospering and blessing and using this life.

***I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."* (1 Samuel 19:18, ESV)**

And the final lesson learned in this year,
Having left the pastoral ministry into the future unknown:
No matter the situation, no matter the condition,
No matter the struggle, no matter the plight,
No matter the task that lies before,
No matter the pain of what is behind.
No matter what we face,
We face it no longer alone.

No longer hiding in the noise of our ministry,
No longer hidden in the façade of our faith.
No longer covering with the mask of pretention,
No longer living with the fear of approval.
No longer living with the anxiety of opinions
No longer living with the worry about position and influence.

Don Brackbill, Jr.
Leaving Church and Finding God
November 9, 2015
8

We now are experiencing a presence we longed for;
We now know a love we had proclaimed.
We now sense a power we've needed...
We now celebrate a God who is speaking!

Thank You God for speaking in the silence,
Thank You God for the courage to chart a new course.
Thank You God for the possibilities of tomorrow!
Thank You God for the work of the yesterdays!
Thank You God for your presence today!
Thank You God for the journey!
Thank you God!
Thank You!
