

Restoring Derailed Lives



Gary Wilkerson April 6, 2015

We all have a calling from God on our life. Maybe the Lord gave you a dream related to your calling and you started out strong. You could actually see that vision being fulfilled, but then an obstacle came along - an impossible circumstance - and it derailed you. You lost momentum and soon you were off track altogether.

An experience during my freshman year in high school illustrates this. I had been a good basketball player in Long Island, where I grew up, so when my family moved to a small Texas town I tried out for the junior varsity team. The coach in Lindale saw me as a benchwarmer though, so I only got to play when our team was ahead by thirty points.

Then our starting forward got injured and another guy got kicked off the team. The coach sat us down and said, "We're in for a rough season, guys." Reluctantly he looked at me and said, "Wilkerson, I guess you're starting." It wasn't exactly a pep talk, but I was excited.

In my first game as a starter I took seven shots and made them all. One was a last-second heave from half-court that swished through. I ended up being the game's top scorer. As we left the court that day, I noticed my coach looking at me as if he'd just discovered gold.

But in the next game I made just one of ten shots and played badly. This time as I left the court the coach just glared. I ended up warming the bench again, spending the rest of the season watching my teammates play.

It's easy to have our dreams derailed. We can start out energized but things change as hard reality sets in. That's when God wants to teach us something important about our dreams.

Jesus is our example when our lives get derailed.

Early in his ministry, Jesus' reputation for healings and wonders attracted huge crowds. "Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples... Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him" (*John 6:3, 5, ESV*).

Bible scholars estimated this crowd as being between 10,000 and 15,000 people. The sight of the vast throng must have encouraged the disciples. It confirmed they were following the right man and that more great things were going to happen. It must have delighted Jesus to see their joy because they were learning to anticipate great things from him.

Yet as the crowd gathered, the disciples faced an impossible dilemma: "Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?'" (6:5). No sooner had a dream been realized than hard reality set in.

Is this scenario familiar to you? Think back to the first great job you had. You were excited because it seemed like the first step in fulfilling your calling. But after a few days you learned your boss wasn't who he appeared to be. You had to work with a colleague who seemed to resent you. The demands on your time were far greater than you were told, causing you to miss precious time with your family. You realized, "I had no idea it would be this difficult."

That's how I imagine Philip feeling at that moment. Bewildered, he answered Jesus, "Two hundred denarii worth

of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little” (6:7). That was a huge amount of money. In short, even if they had the means and ability to provide food, it still wouldn’t be enough to feed the crowd.

As I read Philip’s response, a phrase leaps out at me: “would not be enough.” How often does this thought arise in our minds when we face obstacles? How often do we wonder, “I’m not sure I have what it takes. I don’t have the resources, and I doubt I have the ability. Am I strong enough in Christ? Do I have enough of the Holy Spirit? Lord, am I about to derail?”

We can know this for sure: Jesus had called Philip to a great victory that day; Philip just couldn’t see it yet. The same is true for us: God has called us to expect great things in our walk with him. So, what happens when our situation requires faith? Do we believe him for the miracle needed? Or are we derailed by our limitations? Jesus’ challenge here had a purpose: “He said this to test (Philip), for he himself knew what he would do” (6:6).

God asks us to trust his version of reality beyond what we can see.

Over a hundred years ago, a Frenchman came up with a marvelous innovation called motion pictures. He learned that by organizing a sequence of photographs and moving them quickly in front of a bright light, it gave the impression of real life being lived before his eyes.

This inventor knew he was onto something special. So he scheduled a premiere for what would be one of the most famous public showings of a movie. Expectations were high as dignitaries and guests filled the auditorium. The film, “Arrival of a Train at a Station,” was only fifty seconds long, but it had a powerful impact - too powerful, in fact. It showed a train chugging directly toward the camera - and some historians state that when the people saw it, they panicked. With no context for their experience, they thought an actual train was about to run over them!

Yet it was all an illusion. The people were convinced their lives were in danger when in reality what they experienced was mere smoke and mirrors.

This is the trick Satan plays on us whenever our faith is challenged. At such times, our needs seem to outweigh our resources. It looks like our God-given dream will be destroyed by a runaway train. That’s when the devil tells us, “It’s over. This is too much for you.” But the “reality” that Satan presents is superficial. The truth is Jesus is greater than any hardship we face. He holds our reality in his hands, and that reality is *victory*.

When all seems lost in the face of an oncoming train, Jesus tells us not to flee but to “sit down.”

At the point of crisis, Jesus told the disciples, “Have the people sit down” (John 6:10). Jesus had what I call a **DEPENDENT CONFIDENCE**. It was based on what he knew of the Father.

In the previous chapter, Jesus speaks of having received authority from his Father...of seeing what the Father does and doing it himself...of hearing the Father’s voice and obeying all he says. How did Christ see and know these things? To be sure, there was a supernatural element to what Jesus knew. Yet he also knew about the Father through prayer. Over and over in the gospels we read that Christ secluded himself in prayer, that he spent entire nights communing with the Father, that he spent days in the mountains in fellowship with him.

Now, as he faced the hungry crowd, “He himself knew what he would do” (6:6). Christ’s *dependent confidence* was based on his sense of God’s reality behind every situation. And so he instructed the disciples, “Have the people sit down, because the Father is about to meet this need. It’s time to trust him to provide all that this situation requires.”

Friend, God is sufficient to every circumstance we may face. The problem is we don’t know what he’s going to do. That’s the dilemma the disciples faced. Jesus used the experience to teach them, “Here is how to have *dependent confidence* in the Father.”

Is your situation to the point where it is now all up to God?

You may worry, “I’ve hurt my spouse too deeply for us to recover. Even marriage counseling can’t help.” Or, “Even if my child goes to Teen Challenge, he’ll always turn back to his addiction.” Or, “I’ll never be able to get where God has called me. I’m not educated enough. I don’t have the resources. My life is a failure.”

Don't fixate on the need. Under pressure, most of us rehearse our need over and over: "If only I had this one thing... If I could just work on that one weakness..." But Jesus tells us not to fixate on our need but on our *supplier*. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (*Matthew 6:25-27, NIV*).

In the Old Testament, when things looked impossible for King Asa, he fixated on his supplier, not his problem. When the kingdom was surrounded by a massive enemy with no hope in sight, Asa prayed in essence, "Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are fixed on you."

Jesus shows us we're to *give* thanks in the midst of our situation. Facing the starving masses with just a handful of fishes and bread loaves, Jesus gave thanks to God: "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them" (*John 6:11*).

Talk about dependent confidence; Jesus thanked the Father before the need was even filled—and a miracle followed: "When they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'" (*6:12-14*).

Your situation doesn't depend on your resources. It depends on God's. "He will meet all of your needs according to his riches in glory" (*Philippians 4:19, NIV*).

You may have cried your heart out over your need. Now is no time to review your failures; instead, it's time to remind yourself of God's goodness. It's time to stop fretting over your vast need and instead give him thanks. It's time to draw on the strength of your faith-family when you don't have it for yourself. Rest assured, your God is about to show himself great in your life. Believe it - and find rest in him!

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