



Ministers' Expectation of their Ministry & Ministers' Backgrounds & Personalities **The second in a series of articles by Montagu Barker on Stress in the Ministry**

Expectation of Ministry

What expectation did you have of your ministry when you set out to train? What are your expectations now of how the Lord will work through you? What do you consider to be your fortÉ? Do you have a secret day-dream? Have you a personal ambition, even fantasy, that niggles away somewhere in the back of your mind-probably nobody knows about it, least of all the person who knows you best-your wife? You may have only told yourself and you hardly admit to God that you have such a dream.

These expectations need to come into the open, certainly before God and also before some other friend we can trust. These fantasies often give a clue to that part of our motivations where failure to achieve makes us most vulnerable. Often we are not honest with ourselves. We deny these expectations, but we still day-dream about them from time to time.

Frustrated ambitions

Some hope to be specialists with young people but then find they lose their rapport as they grow older. Others hope to be great preachers but never have a church that gives them the needed scope. Yet others see themselves as competent counsellors, modern reformed pastors like Richard Baxter, spending fruitful time with people to help them. But they find that their parishioners bare their souls not to their minister, but to their GP, or their social worker.

Did you once dream of a famous pulpit? Of many conversions? Of a parish in renewal? Or were you going to be a great church planter? Yet God may have called you, not to greatness in human eyes, but to obscurity instead. You may have even become someone who closes down churches or amalgamates them rather than plants them! Remember that the Apostle John was arguably the greatest pastor in the New Testament. His writings convey an enormously sensitive pastoral heart. But God chose to send him away from his beloved people to the little island of Patmos.

The example of Elijah

We can learn from Elijah. There was no doubt about God's call to this man or his enabling of him. Yet after the triumph on Mount Carmel, he became profoundly depressed. 'I have had enough Lord...take away my life...I am no better than my ancestors...I have been very zealous for the Lord...I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too.'

God's first approach was to supply him with food, drink, rest and sleep, the very same physical treatments for depression we would use today. But then God took Elijah off to Mount Sinai for some psychotherapy and Elijah started talking and the underlying issues spilled out. He had come to rely on the spectacular and after a truly amazing demonstration on Carmel of rugged faith in God, he now slides into the snare of trusting in himself, not God.

Earlier on he had had many miracles to give spectacular confirmation that God was really with him. But now the miracles were no longer coming and Jezebel was threatening his life. Feeling let down and forsaken by God, he fled. Is there also in his complaint that he is no better than the prophets before him a hint of a secret desire to excel and outdo others in his service for God? Perhaps there was a competitive streak in Elijah, a secret passion to serve God more effectively than others had done.

Previously, full of his own importance, Elijah had given little credence to the weak-kneed Obadiah who may have appeared to have compromised to keep his nose clean at Ahab's court (Elijah would appear to have no idea of what Obadiah had achieved as a servant of God in a high, civic position). He, Elijah, was the *only* man after God's heart. He confronted Ahab. He tackled the prophets of Baal single-handedly at Carmel while all the rest dithered

or remained in hiding.

Then the miracles stopped and his expectation of the spectacular was shattered. It was then the power of Jezebel came home to him, and like Peter suddenly noticing the wind and waves, he took his eyes off God and forgot all that God had done for and through him.

In his zeal and subsequent 'low' he had distorted the facts. He had a plan in his mind of how things should happen based on his past experience and his day-dreams of personal importance. When it did not work out that way, he amended the facts so that he could wallow in his self-pity more effectively before God. He felt that God had let him down. His expectations had not been fulfilled in quite the way he had wanted.

God had to use Elisha and two pagan kings to continue the work as we read in 1 Kings 19:15-17. Elijah's public ministry appears to have finished. Poor Elijah. Poor God-when Elijah failed!

How often I have seen this pattern