
Dry Spells

By David Wilkerson

September 24, 2007 There is a unique experience common to every follower of Jesus. I'm talking about the tremendous spiritual letdown that follows a mountaintop experience of blessing or victory. We call these experiences "dry spells." They seem like a deep plunge into spiritual darkness, an immersion in great testings, after we have experienced a special touch of God.

My father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all preachers, and they testified of having this experience in their own lives. So did the missionaries and evangelists who visited our home. I remember all of them warning, "Watch out. After a great victory, the enemy is always there to try to bring you down. He wants to take away your blessing, to cripple your faith in the Lord."

We find dry spells plaguing the lives of godly men and women throughout the Bible. It is a common experience particularly for those who walk closely with the Lord.

• **Consider Elijah.**

This bold prophet led an amazing life of faith. In a single day, God manifested his power in Elijah in incredible ways. At Mount Carmel, the prophet called down fire from heaven that consumed his sacrifice along with twelve barrels of water. Elijah then wiped out 400 priests of Baal. As the people beheld this amazing scene, they fell down on their faces in worship.

We also see Elijah doing other incredible works. He prayed down rain to end a drought, and he outran King Ahab's chariot over many miles.

Talk about a glorious manifestation of God's power. These were incredible victories, marvelous answers to the prayers of a godly man. Elijah was experiencing supernatural strength, the very power of the Holy Spirit. He was bursting with zeal and faith, walking on an elevated spiritual plane.

So, what followed for Elijah? In the very hour of his blessing and revelation, this mighty prophet plunged deep into despair. Why? Ahab's wife, Queen Jezebel, had threatened to kill him. Suddenly, in a day's time, Elijah descended from glorious victory to utter despair. A dryness overcame him, and his spirit got so low he wanted to die.

Elijah ended up running from God in fear. He couldn't shake his despair, so he hid out in a cave, crying, "Lord, I have failed in my mission. What purpose is there to my life?" He experienced a dry spell.

• **Consider Israel at the Red Sea.**

Here is one of the greatest manifestations of God in all of world history. No event recorded by humankind has ever matched this one as a picture of God's glory. Try to imagine it: towering walls of water grew higher by the minute, dividing a sea in two. What an incredible miracle for any man, woman or child to witness.

The Israelites crossed over on dry land to the other side. Once they were safely there, they turned back to see their Egyptian oppressors crushed by the towering waves crashing down on them. God had miraculously delivered his people to victory, and now they danced with joy and shouted with praise. What a spiritual high it was for them.

So, what followed for Israel? Three days after their incredible victory, they were utterly discouraged.

They thirsted for water in the wilderness, and the pool at Marah where God had led them was bitter. As the people spat the water out of their mouths, their faith was shattered. In just three days' time, they had gone from the greatest mountaintop victory of all time to the lowest valley of despair — a dry spell.

What was going on? At the Red Sea, and at the pool at Marah, God was proving his people: "And there he proved them" (Exodus 15:25). Simply put, God was with his people in their spiritual high, yet he was also with them just as much in their low time.

• **Consider David.**

God told this man, "I am going to establish your kingdom as everlasting." "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee" (2 Samuel 7:16).

When the Lord spoke this word to his servant, he was referring to David's seed, or lineage. Of course, God was speaking also of the Messiah to come. No man could have been blessed more than David was by this promise.

After the incredible revelation, David went from one mountaintop experience to another. Scripture repeatedly says of his life, "And after this, David...", recording victory upon victory, blessing upon blessing. With awesome anointing, David subdued enemy after enemy and recovered Israel's borders, strengthening the kingdom. He was enjoying blessings on all sides, and as he worshiped in the temple he asked the Lord, "Who am I to be so blessed by you?"

So, what followed for this great servant of God? It was at the height of his most victorious, blessed time — when David was so close to the Lord, hearing him speak in such clarity, being fruitful, seeing wonderful promises fulfilled — that he fell into a pit of awful temptation.

What followed was the most vicious dry spell David would ever experience. We have read his confession about the spiritual drought that came after his fall. David cried, "My soul is cast down, my bones ache, all joy has departed. I was so blessed, but now I am lonely and down. I can't understand it. Oh, God, where are you?"

• **Consider Daniel.**

This man set his heart to seek God by faithfully interceding, fasting and studying the Scriptures. The Spirit of God so possessed Daniel that he received incredible visions from heaven. And as these great revelations came, Daniel delivered powerful prophecies.

What followed for such a godly man? Daniel was persecuted, jailed and cast into the lions' den. He testified that he was so overwhelmed "there remained no strength in me" (Daniel 10:8). He too endured a dry spell.

• **Consider the apostle Paul.**

Paul was taken into what he calls "the third heaven," a realm where he witnessed unspeakable glories. He was given revelations never before seen or heard by any man or woman. Simply put, Paul had stepped onto another plane, where he glimpsed something of God's glory.

What followed for Paul? As he came out of that heavenly realm, he faced "a messenger of Satan," which buffeted him. Paul speaks of being hindered at that time by a thorn in his flesh. Indeed, Paul entered immediately into a time of spiritual warfare. His writings show him being imprisoned,

abandoned by close friends, experiencing one trial after another. Paul well knew about dry spells.

• **Consider Jesus.**

As Christ came up out of the waters of baptism at the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended on him as a dove. And a voice thundered from heaven, validating him as “my Son.”

What followed immediately for Jesus? He was led straight into the desert, where there was no food or water. Jesus was tempted there in all ways by Satan. Like others, Christ went directly from revelation to temptation, from an experience of closeness with his Father to a literal dry place.

Let me tell you about a personal experience. In 1974, I was at a convention in Dallas where I spoke on “the sufferings of Christ.” In the middle of my message, the Holy Spirit came upon me and I began to exalt the Lord. As I raised my hands to heaven, I was moved to speak only these three words: “Glory, honor, praise.”

In an instant, I was swept up in a river of praise to the Lord. I was caught up in the Spirit, as though I were being lifted out of the auditorium. Suddenly, my praises were joined with those of angels and heavenly hosts. I felt as if I were but one voice in heaven’s choir.

I collapsed on the podium while the audience sat still. There was light all around me, and it grew increasingly brighter. I seemed to be in some kind of heavenly atmosphere. In that moment, the presence of Jesus was all in all. I had no desire to meet Moses or Abraham, or even loved ones who had gone on before. I had no concern for streets of gold or mansions. The question “Will we know each other in heaven?” didn’t even apply. None of those things mattered. The glory of God’s presence was completely overpowering. I began to realize how little we know about the glory of Christ.

I knew that what I was experiencing was not a result of my holiness. On the contrary, I had failed the Lord often. The fact is, I was in a realm of high praises to him. I realize now this was God’s answer to my soul’s cry, my hunger for him, my prayers for a greater revelation of Christ. I was being given a vision of how our praises here on earth blend in with praises of heaven’s hosts.

Finally, I awoke from the experience and sat up. My wife, Gwen, who was on the podium with me, was relieved. It was a while before I could speak.

In the wake of that experience, I thought, “I have had a glimpse of his glory! This is the greatest single revelation in my life. My flesh is defeated. I’ll never again go down into a valley of despair. From now on, I will pray like Elijah. The flesh cannot hold me. Revelation after revelation is going to flow. I know I’m never going to lose this glow.”

Less than a week after that, I entered into the driest period of my life. Over the next six weeks, I seemed to go from the heavenlies to agonizing emptiness. I had thought tremendous growth would follow my experience, that my hunger for truth would grow and I would have ever-increasing joy and peace. Instead, the heavens seemed shut to me.

God was not hiding from me, because he promises never to leave us or forsake us. One pastor told me my dry spell was God’s way of showing me that emotional experiences have no value. I knew that wasn’t the case for me. Nobody could take away the deep experience of high praises the Lord had given to me.

Over time, I became convinced that I was sharing an experience so many other believers have known: *spiritual dryness and testing after fresh revelation*.

I think of T. Austin-Sparks, a pious English preacher and one of my favorite writers, who is now with the Lord. People who read of Austin-Sparks's revelations sold their homes and moved to London just to sit under his preaching. He was considered such a godly man that even Watchman Nee trained under him.

An American woman who also studied with Austin-Sparks wrote of his confessions to his students about his dry spells. He said that every revelation in his life was followed by a satanic attack on his physical body. He suffered terrible gastritis, stomach pains, sleepless nights, and endured extreme loneliness. In short, this man paid a price for every fresh touch and revelation he received of the glory of Christ.

In his book *His Great Love* Austin-Sparks writes on this very subject. He says (in my close paraphrase): "After wonderful truths are shown to us, it is a painful thing to learn we have not reached the summit...."

"In order to go on to further stages of truth, to further revelation, something has to happen to us. We go through new experiences of death, desolation, emptiness, hopelessness, in order to come into something further on and deeper in divine revelation. We thought we had come into the fullness of God's thoughts. We thought we were really growing, seeing. Then everything is as though it is nothing...."

"My experience is that it is through such a history with God — a history of repeated desolation and emptiness, after wonderful unveilings and revelations — you are brought up out of that dry place again into something further on, greater revelations. And your vision is enlarged...."

There were times during my ministry when I was privileged to partner with great men of God, such as Leonard Ravenhill, who wrote *Why Revival Tarries*. At times these men would share with me their deep experiences in their dry spells. Inside, I recoiled; in my youthful zeal I thought, "This should not be. This man is a giant in the faith. Lord, where is he falling short, that he has come to such a wilderness?"

I did not understand the deep, awesome work of the Spirit that God does on dry ground.

Consider the example of the apostle Peter. Jesus had just been crucified and buried when Peter and the disciples decided to meet. They convened behind a locked door, fearing for their lives, when they heard these exciting words: "He is alive!"

Suddenly, Jesus walked through the locked door in his resurrected body. He told them, "Fear not. It is I, your Lord."

Now, tell me: if you had been in the room that day, wouldn't you say this was the most incredible sight you could ever witness? Think of it: you see with your very own eyes the risen Christ, shortly before he ascends to his heavenly throne. You are allowed to touch him, embrace him, sit down to eat with him.

Before he leaves, Jesus commands you to go into all the world, preaching and baptizing, casting out

devils and healing the sick. And he promises his presence will never leave you: “I will go with you to the ends of the world.”

I tell you, any believer in that room would consider this the greatest revelation, the most glorious moment, anyone could ever experience on earth. Anyone would leave that room thinking, “I’m going to have a miracle ministry. Jesus said so. He’s going to use me as I never could have imagined.”

Tell me, wouldn’t that experience build up in you a reservoir of faith? Wouldn’t you be convinced that you could never doubt again?

Yet, what followed this greatest of all spiritual highs? “Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing” (John 21:3). Six of the disciples followed Peter to the lake, in effect returning to their former lives as fishermen. Why? What had happened to the great ministry that Jesus called them to?

These men had fallen into deep sorrow. It was something Jesus had forewarned them about: “In a little while, and ye shall not see me...and ye shall be sorrowful” (16:19–20). Christ knew these devoted followers would experience a very low period. They were going to be overwhelmed by his physical absence in their lives. There would be no more face-to-face communion with him. Though he had promised he would be with them, it seemed he was leaving them to make it on their own.

Austin-Sparks writes, “There are times the Lord lets us feel that we are left alone, when he seems to close the heavens and there is no to-and-fro communication. Everything we had looked for and expected seems to have come to an end, to have broken down. All seems to be in ruins” (my close paraphrase).

Have you experienced dry spells like these? I have offered examples of the highs and lows of major figures from the Bible. I have described one of my own dry experiences and those of T. Austin-Sparks. I ask you, what experience have you had with extreme lows after spiritual highs?

I remind you, the dry spell — the low period in your spirit — is known mostly to those whom God intends to use. Indeed, it is common to everyone he trains to go deeper and further in his ways.

As you look back on your own dry experience, ask yourself: did such a period follow a renewal of the Spirit in your life? Maybe you experienced a fresh awakening. You went back to earnest prayer, asking the Lord:

“Touch me, Jesus. I feel lukewarm. I know my service to you isn’t moving forward as it should. I’m hungry to have more of you than I have ever known. And I want zeal to do your works: to pray for the sick, save the lost, bring hope to the hopeless. Renew me, Lord. I want to be used for your kingdom in greater measure.”

Because you got serious with God, your prayers began to get answers. You started to hear God’s voice clearly. Intimacy with him was wonderful, your zeal was increasing, and you sensed his movement in your life so clearly.

Then one day, you woke up and the heavens seemed as brass. You were cast down and didn’t know why. Prayer seemed like agony, and you didn’t hear God’s voice as you once did. Your feelings seemed dead, your spirit dry and empty. Ever since then, you have had to live only by faith.

Beloved, do not panic! And don't beat yourself up. I know this kind of plunge personally, from the mountaintop to the lowest pit. Peter speaks of it specifically, advising us not to think some strange thing is happening to us: "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

I pray the Holy Spirit will help us understand why God allows these low, dry times. The Lord allows our dry spells because he is after something in our lives.

When I woke to dryness one day, after that great mountaintop experience in Dallas, I became introspective. I tried to retrace my steps to see where I might have possibly derailed. As I examined my heart, I ended up blaming myself for having a hard head, thinking I was unable to "get" the deep things of God.

Recently, I found some notes from a record I kept of that dry spell. The following entries are from a period in 1979:

"Is my dry spell a result of depending too much on my feelings? Is it a result of not being yielded enough? Is the Lord angry with me?... I know this is more than just 'having the blues.' I never doubt his love for me. But why do I have this sense of not hearing his voice?... Somehow, Lord, I know you will bring me out of this dryness. I know you will fulfill the promises you made to me. You'll turn my dryness into a river of love."

The truth is, if you are on dry ground, you are on your way to greater miracles. God insists there must be "dry ground" on our way through the Red Sea. He told Israel, "(You) shall *go on dry ground* through the midst of the sea" (Exodus 14:16, my italics). Amazingly, God uses this phrase four times, telling his people, "You will *go over on dry ground.*"

We see this phrase again when Israel was poised to enter Canaan. They crossed over Jordan *on dry ground*, on their way into the Promised Land.

Simply put, dry ground is a path. And if you're on it, then you are going somewhere. You're not losing ground or going backward; your dry ground is the Lord's plan, his work in your life, his miracles to perform. You are moving toward a revelation, a new victory in Christ, toward something greater.

Scripture proves this. Note where Pharaoh and his army lost their battle: *on God-given dry ground*. Dry ground is the exact place where the devil will come after you. He wants to attack you when you're at your weakest. Yet, it is on this same dry ground that the Lord removes the "chariot wheels" from Satan's principalities and powers:

"The waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them" (Exodus 14:28). Simply put, our enemy is defeated *on dry ground*.

God is telling us, in essence: "I want you to learn to move on in faith — not according to a vision or a voice, but when you're in the midst of a dry spell. I want you to be confident that when you can't hear my voice or see ahead — when you are *on dry ground* — I am leading you somewhere."

Moreover, the Lord promises that out of our dry places, new life will spring up. He will turn our dry

ground into springs of fresh water:

“When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, *and the dry land springs of water.*

“I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel created it” (Isaiah 41:17–20, *my italics*).

Dear saint, are you dry? God is telling you, “Soon you will see a harvest. Where there once was dry ground, life will spring up at your feet. And I have created it! Stand still, and see what I will do for you *on dry ground.*”