

# *When It Feels Like It's All Up to You*

September 13, 2015

**PRELUDE – 10,000 Reasons (Instrumental)**

**Feature – “Not For a Moment”**

## **Introduction**

“Introduction Slides”

Good morning everyone.

And to those who are watching on the TV in the vestibule so as not to distract during this part of the service, thank you for being patient for the next four or five minutes.

I love that song the band just did because it's such a wonderful declaration of faith.

- *Our God is constant.* He isn't subject to the whim of emotion or opinion.
- *Our God is only good.* There is no shadow of darkness or evil in Him whatsoever.
- *Our God is sovereign:* Everything that happens, God

ordains it or intends to use it for the good of those who love Him.

A good and loving and faithful God is in charge. We know it is true and, yet, so often in our lives, *it feels like ...* it's all up to us.

If you were here last Sunday, you know that we had a special guest speaker – sort of. Ladell was supposed to speak but he got very sick on Saturday so we showed video of a message by Jeff Henderson, one of the pastors at Northpoint Church in Atlanta. And as part of that message, we heard the story of a very challenging time in the life of the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

After a great spiritual victory over the false prophets of Baal (in which God literally sent down fire from Heaven), 1 Kings 19 tells us that, for some reason ...

*Elijah was afraid and fled for his life.*

*He went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. 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 who have already died.”* 1 Kings 19:3-4 (NLT)

Of course, God doesn't do that. Instead, he send angels to take care of Elijah so that Elijah could simply rest and recover.

And, in his message, Jeff made the point that rest is so important to you and to me that God actually commands (in the Ten Commandments) that we build that discipline into our lives.

But if we read just a little further in 1 Kings 19, we discover *why* Elijah was so afraid and *why* Elijah was so discouraged that he was ready to die. Verse 9 tells us that, after fleeing even further, one night Elijah hides in a cave on the side of a mountain. And the Lord speaks to him.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” He asks. In other words, “Why are you running? Why are you hiding? Why are you done?”

**And Elijah replies,**

*“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 am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”* 1 Kings 19:10 (NLT)

What's Elijah saying? He's saying. “It's all up to me. And it's just too much. And I've had enough. And I'm done.”

We'll come back to this story a bit later in the service but what I want you to see right now is that *whenever we feel like it's all up to us, we're in pretty good company.* One of the greatest servants of God *to ever live* felt the exact same way.

But, as we'll see later, *he was wrong.* It wasn't all up to him.

And if we belong to Jesus – if we have come to the point where we agree with God that we are sinners who fall short of His glorious intentions for our lives and we believe that Jesus gave his life and rose from the grave to atone for our sins – if we belong to Jesus and we think it's all up to us, *we're wrong, too.* No matter what happens in our lives, regardless of what it looks like, if Jesus is our savior, it is

*never* all up to us.

And this morning we wanted to do a service that reaffirms that truth in a very personal and practical way ... because a lot of us this morning walked into this building wondering “if God is constant and good and sovereign over everything, why do I feel this way? Why do I feel ... like it’s all up to me?”

So, if you’re a Christian – if you belong to Jesus – what I’m going to invite you to do this morning – several times, actually – is to simply declare *in faith* what we know to be true of our God even though it might not *feel* that way or *look* that way right now.

**As the Apostle Paul once put it:**

*We live by faith, not by sight.      2*  
*Corinthians 5:7 (NIV)*

Now, as we go along in this service, I’m going to talk to you about why we sometimes feel like it’s all up to us and what we can do about it. But for now, we’ve already heard one declaration of faith from the band. On this next song – this next declaration – we have the opportunity to join them.

So, let’s all stand together and let’s sing in faith. And let’s make room for the folks who are coming in from the vestibule.

Here we go ...

**Worship Song – “10,000 Reasons”**

**Video Announcements – Shannon**

**Feature – “Faithful God”**

**Main Message**

“Message Slides”

Earlier, I said we wanted to do a service today that reaffirms in a very personal and practical way that, because we have a faithful Savior ...

- Who promises to never leave us or forsake us
- Whose Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path
- Whose strong hand upholds us
- And whose love will never let us go ...

It really *isn't* all up to us ... even though it sometimes feels like it.

But what I *should* have said is that I wanted to do a service that reaffirms that truth in a very personal and practical way because, quite frankly, a few weeks ago I was feeling pretty overwhelmed.

- Maybe it was the surge in heat and humidity (which, to me, is even more draining at the end of the summer).
- Maybe it was the fact that my wife, Jetta, had just gone through hip revision surgery and so many things didn't go the way they were supposed to, which was very stressful to me.
- Maybe it came from having to rearrange our house for her recovery and nothing felt "normal."
- Maybe it was the intensity of a pastoral planning retreat with so many challenges and opportunities to address here at North Heartland.

Whatever the reason, since we didn't have already have

plan for today's service, I thought "what kind of a service do I *personally* need right now? What would be helpful for *me* to hear and experience in an hour on Sunday?"

Of course, it's not all about me so, at first, I discarded the thought. But then I realized that a lot of folks feel overwhelmed – and much more frequently and intensely than I ever do. I mean, I know have a pretty easy life compared to a lot of people and I know I'm kind of a wimp but, I figured if something would help *me* it would probably be helpful to everyone else, too.

So that's why we're talking about this today because *all of us go* through times where we're like Elijah; where it feels like "I am in this deal all by myself. It's all up to me."

For example, we think ...

- If the job is going to get done and done right, I'm the one who has to do it.
- If the relational crisis is going to be resolved, I'm the one who has to fix it.
- If the diapers are going to get changed in the middle of the night, I'm the one who has sacrifice the sleep.
- If our family is going to stay within budget, I'm the

one who has to be the bad guy about not overspending.

- If the kids are going to turn out right, I'm the one who has to handle the discipline.
- If this organization is going to stay afloat and headed in the right direction, I'm the one who has to tie myself to the mast so the ship doesn't go down.

Sometimes we just feel overwhelmed by the pressure of it all.

And sometimes *it's a good thing* to feel pressure because, truth is, there are times when nothing will happen unless we take responsibility. For instance ...

- If we want to lose weight, the burden is on us to make better choices.
- If we want to have more money in the bank, it's up to us to buckle down and control our checkbook and credit cards.

Sometimes, feeling pressure is a good thing because we're responsible.

But when we cross the line from a healthy sense of

responsibility to what can best be labeled a "savior complex" where it feels like the weight of the whole world (or, at least, our small part of it) rests entirely on our shoulders, it's *not* a good thing because, as I said earlier, it's just not true. You and I are not the saviors of the whole world or even the savior of our own little part of it. That position has already been filled!

More importantly, for you and me to *live* that way – as if it is all up to us ... well, that's just not what God wants for us. That's not the path to the abundant life that Jesus promised to us.

## **Over the Line**

So, how do you know when you've crossed the line from being responsible to an "it's all up to me" savior complex?

I think it varies from person to person but, over the years, I've noticed that when *I* fall into this rut, there are several warning signs that begin to appear in my thoughts, attitudes and behaviors.

For one thing (and these are not in any order of importance) ...

## 1. I become overly self-critical.

For instance, when I can't do something that requires a certain amount of mechanical know-how and I mess it up (which is pretty much every time), instead of just saying, "Well, for some reason God hasn't given me that gift," I will think or even say "I am such a loser. Why can't I do this simple thing?!"

Or, I'll go home after church and I'll think back over the service and the message and I'll think, "Oh my gosh - why did I say *that*? What a *dumb* thing to say. No one is ever going to come back after that."

A warning sign that I'm starting to believe that it's all up to me is that anything less than perfect performance isn't good enough.

Another sign is that ...

## 2. I become overly sensitive to minor criticisms.

For example, somebody will make a negative comment about North Heartland and I'll take it personally. If I'm really over the line, I'll hear what people are *not* saying ...

and take *that* as criticism.

After all, North Heartland Community Church is my "baby" and if it's going to survive, it's all on my shoulders.

### **Sign #3. I'm overly protective of my areas of responsibility.**

I have to know every little detail of every decision and why it was made. And I get frustrated that someone else made it ... and *I told them to* ... because I wasn't available.

### **Sign #4. I am overly impatient with "people who don't get it."**

We all have people like that in our lives, right? We've told them a hundred times how to do something. Or we've explained a concept to them over and over and they still don't get it.

For example, it's a pretty good sign that I've crossed the line into the "savior complex" when my wife says ...

- "Honey I can't get my computer to <whatever>"
- "I can't get the TV to work"
- "No, I didn't check my text messages (or voicemail)."

... and I become very short and critical and I think “Come on! How many times have I told you this?”

When I’m really over the line, I’ll actually say that ... which usually does not go well.

But I feel that way because, after all, I already bearing the weight of the world. And I just don’t have anything left to deal with someone else’s lack of skill.

**#5. I experience little or no joy in God or His blessings.**

When I’m over the line and it’s all up to me, joy is not even a part of the equation.

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, in this frame of mind, having a relationship with God isn’t about loving Him and finding joy in being part of His family. It’s about service and duty and have-to and ought-to.

**Sign #6. I feel anxiety and dread over new problems.**

When something happens that my plan didn’t account for, I literally feel the adrenaline flow. I feel butterflies in my stomach.

“Oh no, what now?” I’ll think. “What *else* am I going to have to figure out how to fix?” (whether it’s a computer or a person or a situation or a church).

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Anyway, those are some of my warning signs. I’m curious – how many of my “signs” are *your* signs?

By the way, there are other warning signs, too. I’ll just give you one – a really big one – which, thankfully, I don’t struggle with so much anymore, but I see it in lots of other people.

**7. It’s believing that “I don’t have time to refill my soul.”**

“A 24-hour break every week where we do nothing but rest? A once-a-quarter time-out to get off the treadmill and disconnect? Shoot, I’m afraid to go into airplane mode for an hour on Sunday because I might miss a text from my boss or my customer.” (And I’m not talking about doctors and nurses and safety personnel – people whose job it is to respond to life-threatening emergencies).

## When God Shows Up

I think you get the idea. There's a point where you cross over from being responsible (which is a good thing) to adopting a savior complex – where you believe it's all up to you – like Elijah did (which is not a good thing). And if you're paying attention to yourself and/or listening to the people around you who know you, you'll know what that point is.

The question then is ... what do you do when you realize it's happened to you?

Let's go back and take another look at Elijah's story and see if we can discover the answer.

As we read earlier, after the big showdown with the prophets of Baal, Elijah flees into the wilderness. He tells God that he's had enough, then he collapses from exhaustion. And, at that point, God sends angels to feed him and take care of him.

Now, you might think that after this experience, Elijah would turn around and go back. But he doesn't. He continues to wander in the desert until, eventually, he

winds up spending the night in that cave where *God Himself* speaks to him.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” He asks. “Why are you running? Why are you hiding?”

### And Elijah replies (as we read before) ...

*“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 am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”* 1 Kings 19:10 (NLT)

Of course, if you read the whole story of Elijah, you will see that the fact that they were trying to kill him wasn't really a new development. Truth was, *they had been trying to kill him all along* but they could never find him because God would always protect him!

Now, what happens next is fascinating. God doesn't respond to Elijah's complaint. Instead he tells Elijah to go out on the mountain and stand in His presence.

### But before Elijah can even get out of the cave, the Bible



**says that ...**

*A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD ... but the LORD was not in the wind.*

**And ...**

*After the wind there was an earthquake ... but the LORD was not in the earthquake.*

**And ...**

*After the earthquake came a fire ... but the LORD was not in the fire.*

**And ...**

*After the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV)*

Then – after the whisper – God speaks to him again. “Elijah, what are you doing here?”

And Elijah gives the same exact response. “God, I did what you asked me to do as your prophet, but it didn’t work. And

now, I’m all alone and they’re going to kill me.”

And again, God does not respond to Elijah’s complaint. Instead, He says (and I’m paraphrasing here), “Elijah, I’m not finished with you yet, so go back and be my prophet. And the first thing I want you to do is to appoint a new king. And the second thing I want you to do is to find a young man by the name of Elisha and make him your apprentice. Train him up to take your place when you’re done ... which, again, is not yet.”

## **The Truth Revealed**

Now, that sounds a little harsh, don’t you think? I mean, here’s Elijah who fears for his life, who says, “I’m all alone” and *appears* to be all alone. And God says to him (in essence), “OK, son. I’ve fed you. I’ve let you rest. I’ve let you have a little sabbatical. Now, get back to work.”

It sounds harsh until you realize that Elijah’s “it’s all up to me” savior complex wasn’t simply a matter of being mistaken about the reality of his situation. The reason Elijah was in that state of mind ... well, let’s see what else God says to him.

## **I want you to go back, God says, because ...**

*“I still have 7,000 people in Israel whose knees have not knelt to worship Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”*

*1 Kings 19:17 (GW)*

7,000 people? Seriously?

Now, Elijah is some kind of super-prophet and he doesn't already know how many people are worshippers of his God?

Something's not right about that. Something doesn't make sense.

So, let's back up to that “let's see who can call down fire from heaven” contest which started this whole thing, and see what it is.

The Bible tells us that as everyone gathers to watch ...

## **Elijah announces with great fanfare ...**

*“I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.”*

*1 Kings 18:22 (NIV)*

“I am the lone prophet of YHWH standing against this multitude of deceivers!”

But if you go back a little further to just before this scene and Elijah's grand pronouncement, it becomes clear that he *wasn't* the only prophet of God left ... and *he knew it*. Just before all of this happens, the Bible says that a godly priest by the name of Obadiah lets Elijah in on a little secret.

## **He says,**

*“Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.”*

*1 Kings 18:13 (NIV)*

And now we have the whole picture.

- Elijah knows about the 100 prophets that Obadiah has hidden.
- And most likely he knows about the 7,000 who still worship his God (and, based on the fact that the ancients typically counted just the men, there would

have probably been at least 20,000 when you added in the women and children).

- And yet, in spite of that knowledge, he announces that he is the only remaining prophet of the Lord.
- And then, he flees to the desert and tells God he quits because he's the only one in all of Israel *who really, really cares*. It's all up to him and he just can't do it any longer.

Now, I don't want to minimize what Elijah went through. Ahab and Jezebel really were trying to kill him (as they were the other prophets). No doubt he was suffering from some level of post-traumatic stress from all of that. And he *was* the senior prophet in Israel at that time.

**However, I suspect that, at some point, Elijah may have developed an over-inflated opinion of himself and his importance in the grand scheme of things.**

He had been in the middle of so many big things, and so many amazing things that God had done that he may have started thinking "well, unless I'm in the middle of this, and unless it's really going well with me, there is no way God is going to get His work done. *If it is to be, it's up to me.*"

It's not that hard to imagine. Most of us will never ever

come close to filling the kind of role Elijah did and we have over-inflated opinions of ourselves and *our* importance in the grand scheme of things.

That's why we become overly self-critical, overly-sensitive to minor criticisms, overly-protective of our areas of responsibility, and overly impatient with "people who don't get it." That's why we're too busy to stop long enough to recharge our soul. We're *really, really important* and life as it was meant to be just can't go on without us.

## Getting Out of the Rut

And admitting that over-inflation of our self-importance is the first step to getting out of the rut. It's the first step to getting out of the trap and the draining dead-end of "it's all up to me" thinking and behavior.

In fact, since that's the purpose of this message – how to get out of the rut – let's mark that down as ...

**Step 1. Admit that we have over-inflated our sense of self-importance in the grand scheme.**

And I think that might have been the point of the whisper

Elijah heard while in the cave. Remember, all the dramatic stuff that happened before that? The storm, the earthquake, the fire. *But God wasn't in those things.*

Why not? What was God trying to teach Elijah?

I think maybe Elijah thought that if God was involved, it had to be something big and spectacular ... which meant that *he*, too, had to be something big and spectacular.

And God was saying, “No, Elijah, that’s not how it works all the time. Sometimes it does. But a lot of times, I do my best work in the background. Sometimes, my most impactful work happens not when I power up and win, but when I lay down my life and die” ... as Jesus of Nazareth would eventually do.

The God of the Universe doesn’t have an over-inflated sense of self-importance and, if we belong to him, neither should we.

So, step 1, when you’re in that rut, examine yourself – where are you overinflating your sense of self-importance? – and just admit that to God. To use the biblical terminology, confess it to Him.

**Step 2. Is to recognize and accept the grace that God offers in spite of our arrogance.**

And if you’re a Christian, if you believe in Jesus and what he did for you on the cross and in his resurrection, you should always do this whenever you become conscious of your failures.

A lot of times, Christians beat themselves up when they fail God. And we worry “maybe God won’t forgive me this time. Maybe I don’t deserve his grace this time.”

But that’s not how grace works. Grace is already there even before you ask for it and, more importantly, when you don’t deserve it. That’s what makes it grace!

When Elijah ran away to the desert, God didn’t say, “Elijah, you are so stuck on yourself. You *know* you are not the only prophet left. You *know* there are 20,000 others who worship me instead of Baal. Tell you what – just keep on going.”

Instead, God lets him whine without smacking him down. And He lets him rest and recover for about a month and a half. He even sends angels to feed him!

God's grace doesn't come to Elijah after the big victory over the prophets of Baal. It doesn't come to him when he's praying and worshiping. God's grace comes when Elijah is out in the wilderness – when he's depressed; when he is a deserter;<sup>i</sup> and when he's self-deceived into thinking “it's all up to me.”

I think there is great encouragement in that for you and me. No matter what desert we wander off to when we are overwhelmed and discouraged, God still seeks us right where we are. And if we belong to Christ, God's grace is already ours. God's forgiveness is already ours. So we don't need to beat ourselves up when we over-inflate our sense of self-importance.

So, step one, admit that we've done that (we have over-inflated our sense of self-importance) ... step two, recognize and accept the grace that God offers in spite of our arrogance.

Then, finally, instead of trying to solve everything all by ourselves ...

**Step 3. Bring our cares and burdens to God for *He cares more than we do.***

*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)*

God's plan for Israel had begun long before Elijah arrived on the scene. And it was going to continue long after he departed. I think that may have been why God told him to go make Elisha his apprentice.

He was saying, “Elijah, it wasn't up to you in the past. And it won't be in the future. And it isn't right now. And though it may not always look like it to you, I am sovereign and I am constant and I am *only* good. And I will never leave or forsake those whom I love (even when they run to the desert). I will never let them go. I will always, always do what is best for them. Even that which is intended for evil I will transform and use for their good.”

“Ultimately, Elijah ... ultimately, Rick ... ultimately you and you and you ... it's up to Me. So trust me – bring your cares and burdens to me because I care about you and about this world more than you ever will.”

And we know this is true not just because of how God was gracious to Elijah as an individual in the desert but because of how God was gracious to all of us in Christ. “While we

were still sinners,” the Bible says, “Christ died for us.”

## Response

Now, in the next few minutes I want to give everyone who wishes to do so an opportunity to respond. And don't often do this but I'm going to ask everyone to bow their head.

If you're feeling this morning like it's all up to you ... if you have any of the signs that you've crossed the line from being responsible into being the savior that I talked about before ... I want to give you a minute to do step one. Examine yourself – are you overinflating your sense of self-importance?

- God just can't do it without you.
- The school just can't do it without you.
- The church just can't do it without you.
- Your kids just can't do it without you.

– and just admit that to God. Confess it to Him.

I'll just wait for a minute. <pause>

Now, recognize and accept the grace that God has already given you in Christ. You're already forgiven for your arrogance. Just say a word of thanks to God. <pause>

Now, for this last part, you're going to need to raise your head. What burdens and anxieties are you carrying this morning?

<Prayer>

### Feature – “It Is Well”

Now, as I said at the very beginning of this service, my goal today was to invite everyone to simply declare in faith what we know to be true of our God ... even though it might not feel that way right now. But as we close this morning, I want to take it one step further and this time, I invite you – if you are a believer in Jesus; if you belong to Him – to declare what is true about you.

We just heard the band sing “it is well with my soul” (which is not the same as saying it is well with my circumstances and feelings). This is a declaration of what is true about us because of Christ *in spite of* circumstances and feelings. So, I want to invite you to join them and sing it with them.

And for some of us, we can sing it with gusto because we know in our heart of hearts that it's true. And for some of us, it's going to be harder because, even after everything we've talked about and experienced today, we still wonder. And that's OK.

In fact, if that's where you are today, I invite you to sing it as a prayer, as a way of saying "God is this is what you say is true of me. Please help me to live out of that reality and to experience the peace and calmness that comes from that knowledge."

Ok, let's stand and sing together one more time.

### **Congregational Worship – "It Is Well"**

#### **Dismissal – Nathan**

#### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> From <http://bible.org/seriespage/restoration-elijah-1-kings-195-18>