

Unexpected Detours

(I Didn't Sign Up For This)

■ by Matthew Potter, MEd, LCPC

At different times in my life, I have related to characters in the Bible. It is encouraging that God includes stories of people he has used for his purposes, even when they tried to run from unwanted or unexpected 'turns' in their lives. Aaron Sharp has written a book, *I Didn't Sign Up For This: Navigating Life's Detours*, which addresses a subject so many of my clients struggle with. Circumstances in their life they "didn't sign up for". A 'detour' they didn't expect.

Elijah's Detour

The main subject of the book is the prophet Elijah in I Kings 18 and 19. Aaron writes about Elijah's return to the Jewish people under the rule of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. With the prophet Elijah as the 'poster child' for how God works in our lives, the author introduces a simple term, 'detour', to describe how Elijah's life went awry. In his words a detour is 'your life making an unexpected and almost always unwanted turn'. A classic definition of the word is 'taking a long or roundabout route to avoid something'.

Elijah fleeing the city upon learning Queen Jezebel plans to have him captured and murdered is the beginning of his 'detour'. Even though God is ever present with Elijah, Elijah navigates his detour by abandoning God's people, his role with God, and contemplated life itself. From Elijah's perspective God is *unseen and seemingly uninvolved* (I Kings 18:1-4), yet God interacts and directs Elijah through the angel of the Lord (verses 5-9a), dialogues directly with Elijah (verses 9b-14), and then personally commands Elijah (verses 15-18).

Examine Your Expectations During Life's Detours

The book is chock-full of very practical advice, but I want to share the 'guidepost' in chapter 1, "Detours and Unmet Expectations".

Three problems with the formation of our expectations during a 'detour':

1. Our expectations are uninformed because they involve the future.
2. Our expectations are inherently selfish or egocentric in nature and in hoped outcomes.
3. Our expectations become unmet because we have a false perception of who God truly is. Aaron continues on this point with some popular views of God in relation to meeting our needs.
 - God is a slot machine who gives me what I ask for, need.
 - God is (only) love so only allows loving things to occur.
 - God wants me to be happy.
 - God will not give me more than I can bear (alone).
 - God wants Christians to be happy and joyful (always).



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Aaron reasserts that when we find our journey through life taking a detour we need to check our expectations. When we reframe what the detour truly is, we can begin to accept the new route with all its uncertainty – where it will lead and why God allowed it. With the grounding of faith in God, we will have reassurance that God remains by our side. Elijah's fall from glory to fear when viewed from a perspective of unmet expectations can help explain how fragile we all are in the face of unexpected 'detours'. Some practical advice while on a detour and you continue to have unmet expectations:



1. **Look for God's purpose.** Take time to look for God's purpose in the situation instead of your own best interests. The book cites the blind man in John 9 when Jesus explained the blindness was allowed '...so that the works of God might be displayed in him'. When we minimize the need for an answer to the 'Why' of the detour, we can shift our focus to wondering how God will use our "story" to impact others.
2. **Keep your expectations flexible.** The more firm or rigid your expectations, the harder it becomes to adapt to the actual reality of the situation, especially when we try to predict our own future.

Aaron ends each chapter with various questions for discussion and below is Chapter 1's.

1. Which of your expectations for your life have been unmet?
2. What is the most difficult part of dealing with your unmet expectations?
3. What has dealing with unmet expectations taught you about yourself?
4. What have your unmet expectations taught you about how you view God?

One of my clients has read the book, and commented, "The main thing I took from this book was God's plan vs my plan. Especially today where a lot of people live for themselves and put God on the back burner. The book showed me we are here to put God first and problems occur when we do the opposite. Am I scared, anxious, frustrated and even mad sometimes? Yes. But the book helped me see that through prayer, reading the Bible, attending church, and seeking counseling that I am becoming stronger, more patient, more forgiving and more loving than ever." ■

If you are getting frustrated and need a fresh perspective, Matthew suggests reading *I Didn't Sign Up For This: Navigating Life's Detours* by Aaron Sharp.



Matthew Potter is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Lombard and Orland Park, IL locations.

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