

## **How to be a Failure like Isaiah**

Once upon a time, I heard Papa ask me to minister to an ailing congregation. I dove in, ready to experience the miracle of church revitalization. Then, after 7 years of sweat and tears, I preached that church's last sermon, and I wished the congregants well as they moved on to their various new church families. I closed and locked the door on my way out, and went home to cry angry tears alone in my basement.

I bring this up just to say that I know what it's like to "fail" in ministry. Apparently, Isaiah did too: "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (Isa 49.4). But in brother Isaiah's dynamic life in Christ with Papa and the Spirit, he knew something else. He knew he was created to be a "polished arrow" for Papa, even though as far as he could tell, he'd never even been taken out of the quiver (49.2). He knew he was created "that Israel might be gathered to" Papa's arms, but that he hadn't seen it happen (49.5). Papa responded to Isaiah's sadness by promising that not only will Isaiah be part of Israel's restoration, but also that his ministry will be woven into Christ's work of saving of the entire human race (49.6). Isaiah's labor of love will not be wasted, even though he will not live to see the results.

It is hard on our egos when we realize that Christ is building his own kingdom, and that he doesn't need us to build it for him. But like Isaiah, we can find meaning and joy in the fact that we get to make the bricks, even when we don't get to see how he will use them.

*~ John Stonecypher*