



Study Guide

ELIJAH:

just like us...



Christ Central
Church

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This series looks at how God speaks to a nation – to a people – that has rejected God. Reading about Israel, from thousands of years ago, it is easy to separate ourselves from the story. However, for us in a nation that has turned away from God, this is just as applicable to us today.

Elijah is probably the most famous Old Testament prophet. The prophets were people who delivered God's message – normally for the people of Israel – direct from God. God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets (Hebrews 1:1). This isn't the 'prophecy in part' that we see today, but is His direct, authoritative word. Their message, and language used was often shocking and offensive, violent and explicit. The response was normally aggressive: Jeremiah thrown in a well; Daniel thrown to lions; Elijah was a marked man. It was not a fun job to be a prophet, and they would plead with God to give the task to someone else. Often, when we see people called to be God's prophet, there was a great reluctance. It was a tough job to have – yet it was important for the nation of Israel to hear.

Q. Why is fear of man such a challenge for us? How can we overcome this fear?

Hearts turned from God

Israel is God's treasured possession, chosen, called and loved. As we read about God's relationship with Israel there is great fondness and affection. As with every strong relationship, there is a need for reciprocal love. God asks of His people that they love Him. God asks the Israelites to join this relationship, to join this affection and fondness. He calls a people to worship Him and worship Him alone. If God had created all of creation, there is nothing else that deserves worship more than Him. To give worship to anything else, would be worshipping the creation, not the creator. If God exists, He is worthy of worship. Throughout the Old Testament, God has revealed Himself to the Israelites - and the response He deserves is their total worship.

As we read the history of the nation of Israel, we meet King David – the worshipping king. David – a man after God's own heart - knew God and loved Him. David was not perfect – an adulterous murderer – yet he knew how precious the word of God is – 'sweeter than honey' and 'more precious than gold'. David led the nation of Israel to love and praise their God. David is followed by his son, Solomon – a king who sought wisdom, and the understanding of God. Solomon was blessed by God, and even the Queen of Sheba sees the favour upon Israel, and glorifies God.

Q. The Queen of Sheba was amazed by the favour of God upon Israel - how can we as a church display the favour of God upon us to the surrounding world?

All is good until: 'Solomon took many wives, from many nations in defiance of God's word which said *'you shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their god.'* (1 Kings 11:2). The 'heart' of Solomon turned from God and consequently the heart of Israel too. Once Solomon rejected God's word and took many wives from many nations, there started a downward spiral. Solomon's son saw his father ignore scripture, and so gave it less authority. The next king: even less. Seven kings pass between Solomon and Ahab – in a period of 58 years - and the kings

become more and more evil. By the time of Ahab, the God of Israel has been fully rejected, in favour of Baal – worshipped through temple prostitutes and child sacrifice.

Q. What does a life lived in obedience to God's Word look like? What ways can a person who finds reading very difficult still be shaped by the Word of God?

Q. What subtle changes has society made to God's commands, steering people away from His will?

Standing Before God or Against God?

Read 1 Kings 17:1

This is the first time we encounter Elijah. He just appears on the scene, confronting a king who is happy to execute anyone worshipping God rather than Baal – and he starts with the name of Yahweh – at odds with the status quo. Elijah is not pandering to the ego of the king, and is not on a popularity mission. This isn't about Elijah at all – it is about Yahweh, the God who lives – not a god made of wood or stone. The God who sees, hears, moves, feels – and speaks! Elijah knows God and stands with Him. He knows that in His presence there is fullness of joy – pleasures forever more. Elijah knew we stand before God as our judge and, if we stand with Him, we need not fear any man or king.

Q. What response do you receive when talking about God? What discourages you from talking about Jesus?

Q. How can we hold onto Yahweh – the God who lives - when confronted with objections and trials?

God is the source of both Saving Grace and Common Grace

Read James 5:17

This is devastating. No rain, means no food and no drink. Drought and famine does not sound compassionate and merciful. God is the source of common grace: food, water, breath - all the things we take for granted. If we reject His saving grace, worshipping the created things – the blessings of common grace – the kindest thing God can do is remove those idols. God will withdraw His common grace to bring you back to something infinitely better.

Elijah found himself in the time of drought, where common grace was being withdrawn – yet Elijah was obedient to the word of God and remains in the provision of God's common grace. God remains faithful to Elijah. Alone on a mountain God provides – even if it's the beaks of ravens.

Q. How can the comfort of 'common grace' become an idol? How is this seen in the lives around us?

Q. How can we express our gratitude and thanks for all the blessings God provides?

The LORD's Provision 1 Kings 17: 8-24

Elijah is a man of faith. He obeyed God's word, even when it was difficult and challenging. Elijah had been sent to Zarephath – a land outside of Israel, in the territory of Ahab's father-in-law. Not only was Elijah in enemy territory, he was to trust in a widow – certainly not someone who would have resources to support him. Elijah finds the widow, and all would appear to be going well. However, when the widow is asked for a loaf of bread, her response cements the theory that she cannot support Elijah. In fact, her response is that she can't even support herself and her son.

Elijah responds in faith. He knows that God has promised to provide through the widow. He has no evidence, but he has faith in God to provide. Elijah believes that if the widow does as God has instructed, then God will provide – and so Elijah instructs the widow to do so. This is the behaviour of a man, just like us. Elijah had the same vulnerabilities that we have, and so we can learn from him.

Q. How can we be tempted to give up on God's plans, when circumstances appear too tough?

Elijah is a great example for us, yet this story shows an example that may be a little closer to how we feel. The Zarephath widow shows us a journey which many of us can relate to.

The Journey to Faith

When Elijah encounters the widow, she seems to know of him. She is in a pagan nation, worshipping Baal, and yet God has told her to feed Elijah. She is not shocked by meeting Elijah – she is aware who he is. Yet her response makes clear that - although she respects Elijah and God – this is not her faith, and not her god. Elijah's word of faith is strong enough to convince her to take part - to ride along on Elijah's faith. By Elijah's encouragement, we see the widow take great steps of faith, and starts to trust in the provision.

Q. How does your faith and obedience impact and affect your friends/family/colleagues?

Q. How can we be inspired by the faith of those around us? How can we learn from other's experiences?

Later she experiences a crisis. She has been living on the blessing God has provided, enjoying the food that God has given – and then, all of a sudden, her son dies. Her blossoming faith is rocked by this crisis, and she shows anger at Elijah and 'his God' – feeling like the whole thing has been a joke, a plan to highlight and punish her for her sin. Elijah continues in faith. His response is not a brazen or proud response – he cries out pleading with God, and the son is revived – a miracle as the boy is brought back to life. The widow sees something completely different. No longer is she talking of Elijah's God, leaning on his faith. Now she knows God herself, and believes His words to be truth. What started as respect and appreciation of the God of Israel, has developed into full faith in Him and His words.

Q. How do your friends/family/colleagues respond in times of crisis? How can a crisis affect our faith in God?

The Grace of God

Elijah's encounter with the Zarephath widow is a sign post – an early indicator – of God's heart for the hurting, the poor and the needy across the world. Jesus referred to this woman in Luke 4 to show an example of what He was coming to do. Jesus was talking to the teachers of the law - the religious people – who expected Jesus to benefit them. Jesus uses this widow as an example, highlighting His purpose for the world, those who need His good news and healing.

Grace is God's favour, unearned. The widow is a clear example of someone who deserved nothing. She did not follow the laws of Israel, nor did she have the blood heritage that the teachers of the law expected. Jesus explained that she is the type of person that He came to save. It is not by works or human endeavour, but solely by the grace of God. This idea offended those around him (to the point they tried to throw him off a cliff) – but is seen clearly throughout examples in the Old Testament, and the teachings of Jesus.

Q. 'Grace is something for nothing – for those that don't deserve anything' – how can this seem offensive?

Q. How does the widow's example remind us of grace, and take our eyes off ourselves and our works?

The LORD's Provision

This widow experiences something in this encounter. She may not be the big character that Elijah is, but she is key to this story, and we can see that she catches something from Elijah. At the start of this story we read that this widow had enough food for herself and her son only. By giving to Elijah, the widow needs to sacrifice either her son's meal - or her own. She is prepared to trust in the word of Elijah, and giving to him first – before she can see the miraculous provision.

The widow gets out of poverty and need by giving out of the little bit that she has. God is looking for the widow to honour Him as the provider. Elijah challenges the widow, and inspires her – but she needed to trust in God to provide, when the circumstances and evidence around her suggested otherwise.

Read Proverbs 3:9-10

This is an example of biblical economics – trusting in God to meet our needs. Putting God first - not fear of the assumed outcome, but in faith of God's promise. God uses the little we give - the widow with only a little bread; a little boy with only five loaves and two fish – and pours out blessing to meet our need. The widow started with enough for one final meal - but by faithfully remaining obedient, the widow had enough for each day, every day.

Q. How can we be tempted to limit our sacrifice by our circumstances and personal situations?

Q. How do your friends/family/colleagues react to your stories of sacrificial obedience, and God's provision?

The Troubler of Israel 1 Kings 18:1-18

This account is written three years into a drought. There has been no rain, people would be angry. The nation would be in huge unrest, and there was one man to blame. Elijah had prayed earnestly for this drought – and the nation of Israel were not happy. This is a story of God bringing drought on the Israelites - but this is not a story of an unloving God, but the story of a stubborn people. Israel belongs to the true God, but Jezebel had turned the nation to the worship of Baal, the fertility god, and god of rain and storm – one who could not stop this drought.

God Wants Your Heart Ready to Obey Him

After three years, there is no evidence of change. Ahab has been chasing Elijah, searching for him. The nation has been under hardship, blaming Elijah. At this point, God calls Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land'. For Elijah, this could feel like a complete failure. There has been no change, and God is calling this plan to a stop – putting Elijah straight into danger. This may feel like the right time to abandon the plan, to give up. But Elijah did not give up on God; 'Elijah went to present himself to Ahab'. There is immense moral courage in Elijah's response – incredible faith and total trust. Elijah sets a great example as he obeys God.

Many people aren't ready to hear and obey God. For some they feel let down by God, hurt, upset, bruised or hardened by past experiences. For others there is a barrenness, having been in the same place for years you see no sign of escape. Some have heard God, asking them to step out, yet they hold out – waiting for a clearer sign, and more favourable circumstances, second guessing themselves. All Elijah saw before him death at the hands of Ahab, yet he was obedient. Elijah knew God's promises, knew God's goodness, knew His faithfulness, and so trusted in His plans. This was not an uncertain hope, but a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.

Q. How do you react when plans change suddenly? How do respond to God when things appear to have failed?

God Has Placed You with Purpose, as a Person of Influence

As we read this passage, we encounter Obadiah, Ahab's palace administrator. It would be easy to assume God had left His people aimless and alone – yet here we see God had placed a man in a position of influence – someone who followed God, who used his authority to look after the people of God. Such was his love for God that he risked everything to save God's prophets. Yet we don't read a moment of a special call for Obadiah. We don't read that God specifically spoke to Obadiah, instructing him to look after the prophets. Instead, Obadiah knows God, knows His love for the people, and that Obadiah's love for God works itself out in action.

As Christians, our purpose can be seen clearly in the Great Commission and Great Commandment. We don't need a billboard, or divine voice to show us what to do. We have received instruction through the words of Jesus and we should be seeking to see these in action in our lives. We have a purpose for the places we have been put.

Q. How can we be tempted to put off God's purposes, waiting for a big sign or confirmation?

Q. Who are the people God has placed you alongside? How are you furthering God's Kingdom in these areas?

Obadiah was faithful to his purpose, the will of God in his position. The situation may have looked dismal. If Obadiah had been caught, Jezebel would have executed the prophets, and would surely have killed Obadiah too. The nation's response to the drought did not seem any better either, as people became angrier with God and his prophets. Yet, Obadiah was prepared to risk his life for the hope, a confident expectation, that God would come through in the end. Obadiah had a desire to see the nation turn back, and once more worship the true God.

Obadiah's hope is restored in Elijah. Immediately Obadiah recognises the prophet, and respects him. But when Elijah told him to speak to Ahab, Obadiah got scared. He knew Ahab, and knew he would be killed. Obadiah was fearful, but he did not say 'no'. Rather than letting fear shut him down, or pride hiding his concerns, he brought his fear to Elijah – the mighty prophet. Obadiah was honest with his humanness, weakness, doubts and fear. Elijah recognised a human, struggling with human emotion, and brought loving reassurance.

Q. What fears and concerns prevent us from sharing our struggles with those closest to us?

Q. How can we encourage a more open and loving relationship with the church and in our Life Groups?

You Will Cause Trouble, but Jesus has Overcome

Three years of drought, with no sign of their rain God Baal – and Ahab's response is to blame Elijah. Instead of recognising his own guilt in worshipping other gods, Ahab had spent those years hunting down Elijah. There was no sign of remorse or recognition of his own involvement – he has been consumed by his hatred of Elijah.

Jesus was himself treated as 'the troubler of Israel'. His gospel is an offensive gospel – and he was treated with contempt, hunted by mobs, beaten, mocked and put to death. His crime – a message of peace and reconciliation. Jesus threatened the established way of life, the rules of the Pharisees, religious orders and government reign.

As Christians, we stand as troublemakers in society. Our message, our gospel, is offensive and stands as a provocation. We believe in the truth, something which society would want to believe does not exist – and blames us for the trouble caused. Ahab was an evil king over a lost people. We have a victorious, conquering King in Jesus – alive and ministering to us through the Holy Spirit. We have a living Hope, and confident expectation through the Holy Spirit.

Q. How can our beliefs and actions cause tension and trouble when confronted by society's expectations?

Q. How can we remain faithful to the truth in the face of trials and confrontations?

Fire from Heaven 1 Kings 18:19-40

The story of Elijah is full of incredible moments. We have seen wonderful provision through ravens, multiplication through grain jars and oil canisters, and the resurrection of a dead boy to life. As we read through the Old Testament, this is a unique moment - the power of God is being displayed through the prophet of God like never before. Yet at the same time we know that the vast majority of God's people have rejected Him - worshipping other gods. There is a wicked Queen Jezebel - slaughtering the prophets of God. It is at this time God moves in power.

When Jesus walked the Earth, there was again great darkness, oppression and fear - and Jesus worked many great miracles, seeing the dead raised to life, wonderful provision with God's power evident - to the point where people called Jesus 'Elijah'. This is repeated throughout Church History - in times and places of great evil and darkness, our God will work miracles. Even today, in countries of darkest oppression, we are hearing wonderful stories of God moving. God loves people too much to leave them to Jezebel.

A Thirsting Crowd (verses 19-20)

This is an incredible scene. This is a mass gathering for a desperate, thirsty crowd. Ahab is desperate, and so does what Elijah has instructed. Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered, following three years of no rain - they were desperate for break though in their circumstances. Ahab's crowd does not impress God. Having thousands gathering at his command does not make him a good leader. There is a huge gathering, but they are not there for God. Their heart is not expecting to repent and to turn back to God. Instead they are gathering for rain, believing Elijah has the solution - a prosperity gospel seeking the blessing of rain, not the Living God.

What is our purpose as a church? A 'prosperity gospel' might gather a crowd, and speak into people's circumstances but it doesn't address the greater need of their soul. The primary purpose for the church is not to quench the thirst of the parched tongue, but instead to invite people to quench their parched souls with water from Jesus. There are souls that are desperately in need of a drink, and it is more than rain that is required (***Read John 4:10&14 and Isaiah 55:1***).

Q. Where are we most tempted to seek 'rain', and expect relief from the church rather than quenching souls?

The Agony of Ambivalence (verse 21)

Elijah addresses the vast crowd and calls them to a point of decision - which is it going to be, YHWH or Baal? The people of Israel are indecisive, half-hearted and non-committed - limping between two contradicting worldviews. With a foot in both camps, there is no way to stand for either. Elijah calls them out, to decide and live full out. Israel didn't really know what they believed in, and so accepted anything. Today people still don't really know, and so hold on to 'well wishes' - the hope of something better. I'll say a prayer when things are tough. I'll hold on to the hope of heaven and vague spirituality, to see my loved ones again. However, I'm not going to get too religious, go to church or 'follow Jesus'.

Elijah is brave, in a dangerous position, to call them out – but they remain silent. The crowd did not say a word. They are hoping for something better, but they are caught between God and the views of the world. The powerful prophet is sharing, convicting hearts – a challenge to the people to make a stand and declare what the stand for. Yet they remain silent, sitting on the fence.

Q. How can we see this ambivalence and indecisiveness towards Christian beliefs in the world today?

Q. How can we be tempted to remain silent when God works to convict our hearts?

Idols are Idle (verses 22-29)

Elijah lays down a challenge to the prophets of Baal and Asherah. This is a comical yet devastating scene – as the people call upon Baal, throwing everything they can to summon him. After a drought, mal-nourished and thirsty, they call upon a god who did not answer. Even when Elijah points this out, taunting their god, they react by yelling louder and even slashing themselves in a desperate act to convince their idol to act. However, their god remains idle and impotent.

We may not see the same gods today, yet society still has idols which are clamouring for our worship; the next promotion, the bigger house, the ideal relationship, the healthy body and perfect beauty. Pursuing and living for other things, and the praise of the world. We all have our idols, where we can be tempted to find our self-worth and identity – but these idols have no voice and cannot quench the thirst in our soul.

Q. What are our biggest temptations to idols? How can they appear to provide self-worth and identity?

Q. How does worship of these idols lead us to working and striving with desperation, while they remain silent?

Fire from Heaven (verses 30-39)

God's plan doesn't go straight to the rain to end the drought, but instead to fire. Here we have the vindication of Elijah. Israel have forgotten their God, and are reminded in power – power that turns rocks to dust. They have been a fickle people, now fall down and worship God. Elijah couldn't turn a nation back to God – it required fire from heaven.

John the Baptist spoke of one who would baptise with fire and the Holy Spirit. Pentecost saw the Spirit come with tongues of fire. God has determined to move in an all-consuming fire into the hearts of men, women, children and communities. God is doing a work in us that people can't miss. Elijah waited three years, and the change came in an instant. We need the Holy Spirit, the fire of God to change hearts – to impact our lives, and the lives around us.

Q. How can we be tempted to 'convince' and bring people to God? How do we make room for God to move?

Q. Where are you tempted to give up, seeing little hope? How can you seek God and His will in these times?

Let It Rain 1 Kings 18:41-46

In a time of great wickedness and evil, God has called a prophet – Elijah – to speak to His people. Israel had turned its back on God, worshipping idols. Three years of drought is drawing to an end, as God has promised rain (see 1 Kings 18:1). Israel has witnessed a contest between YHWH – the God of Elijah, and Baal and Asherah - the gods of Ahab and Jezebel. While the idols were silent, unable to bring an answer, God brought a powerful fire, showing His power to all Israel.

Sound of the Rushing Rain (verses 41)

We read that there is not even a cloud in the sky. This is blistering Mediterranean sun – yet Elijah hears rain. Elijah's response is as confusing as Noah's – prepared for what is to come, because he knows that God is utterly truthful, and faithful to His word. Elijah has heard God's promise - and despite there being no cloud in the sky, he was confident and excited about what was going to happen. Here we see a great example of faith – of believing in God's Word.

When all around you is parched land, are we like Elijah, hearing the sound of rushing rain? This faith, hearing the rushing rain, cannot be manufactured. We live in a world that is dark, surrounded by evil. The news is filled with stories of pain and suffering. God has made promise after promise to renew this world, to save. We are in a time of drought, but we have hope in the promises of God. If we have lost heart, despairing – what hope is there? If we are not calling upon one who is able to come in a moment, what is our purpose? We are called to bring hope to a world that is suffering from a great drought, and our hope comes from His promise and His word.

We can look at society and feel disheartened. There is no love of God here. Churches and Christians who love God are fast diminishing – so how can we have this hope? The redemption story does not start with us. It is not the love for Jesus that is the determining factor. Instead it is the love of Jesus for men and women. If this nation comes to love Jesus, it will be because Jesus has loved this nation first.

Q. How is our land suffering from 'drought'? What signs can we see of a nation that has lost hope in God?

Q. What promises from God do you hold onto? How can God's Word (the Bible) bring hope in times of darkness?

Elijah Bowed Himself Down (verse 42)

Elijah knows the rain is coming. He is certain the drought will end. His response is not to sit and wait – to put his feet up and expect God to move. Elijah has done his part – he has told the Israelites, but he doesn't stop there. Elijah has just been involved in a great sign of God's power, fire from Heaven showing God's might. This God is obviously able to make it rain and end the drought – but Elijah does not leave it there. Elijah's response is to pray.

Read James 5:16-18

God longs for us to come close to Him – to take time to be in His presence and call upon Him to do all He has said that He will do. Does he need us to do this? Of course not, but

through prayer he is bidding us to come closer to Him – to know His heart and His will. Elijah has heard God’s promise, and his response is to ask for it. Like a child holding onto a promise of a gift from their parent, Elijah is persistent in asking.

‘Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God’ (R. Kent Hughes – *Disciplines of a Godly Man*). We can get fed up with praying because we use it as a method to get God to do what we want. Jesus taught us to pray ‘thy will be done’, and His will is perfect. Each time we pray as Jesus prayed, our will is brought in line with His perfect will. Elijah knew God’s promise, and so He prayed. He left the crowds, to be with His Heavenly Father. Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Our souls are restless until they find their rest in God. God wants to bless each of us. He wants us to know He is faithful.

Q. How important do we consider prayer to be? What challenges do we face in spending time in prayer?

Q. How do you ‘withdraw to lonely places’ to pray? What practical tips can we share to help each other make time and remove distractions from our time with God?

A Cloud on the Horizon (verse 43-44)

Elijah persevered in prayer, and he is eventually answered and vindicated. Seven times Elijah prayed. This is not a ten-second prayer, but a fervent prayer. God loves Elijah, and wants to know him. Our prayers can be set too low – asking God for things, but God wants us to know Him, and enjoy Him. Prayer brings us to God, and aligns us with Him. Elijah’s perseverance is a reminder of the relationship God longs for us – to be with Him. God wants to bless us. God wants to give us good things, but much more He wants us to enjoy our maker.

This is a great moment of vindication for Elijah. There is a cloud, albeit a small cloud, and Elijah knows a deluge is coming. Elijah’s faith has been in God, not in the physical signs, and he continues in faith, despite seeing only a cloud as small as a man’s hand. Then, the sky grows black with rain clouds and a heavy rain pours on the nation of Israel. Elijah held onto the promise of God, and persisted with God.

Q. How can we be tempted to use prayer like a wish list rather than conversation and relationship with God?

Q. How can we be tempted to stop persevering for miraculous blessing at the sign of the ‘small cloud’?

Q. What promises from God have you been tempted to give up on? How can you bring them back in prayer?

The Prophet's Weakness – 1 Kings 19:1-8

Irrefutable proof that the living God – the God of Abraham – is God, has been performed in front of all the nation of Israel. At God's word, Elijah had commanded a three year drought. The gods of Baal and Asherah had been put to the test against Elijah's God, YHWH – and only YHWH was able to answer with power. God had promised to send rain, and following Elijah's prayer God sends a heavy rain to end the drought. Surely now, everyone will turn to God and believe.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-8

Rather than the expected response, we read of Queen Jezebel – the queen who was not an Israelite, and shouldn't have been queen. She does not turn to God, but instead responds in vicious anger against Elijah. She sends out her messenger to spread the warning to Elijah: "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow". Elijah, who up until now has shown incredible bravery and fearlessness, hears this message and flees. Elijah fears man – fears the actions of Queen Jezebel – and he gives up on the purposes of God.

The Sin of Elijah

Compare 1 Kings 17:2-5, 1 Kings 17:8-10, 1 Kings 18:1-2.

Looking back over Elijah's life, there is a pattern - God speaks, and Elijah obeys. However, at this point we do not hear God speaking. Instead, Elijah hears Jezebel's messenger, and he responds out of fear of man. Elijah hears the message from Jezebel and stops trusting in God's word. This is a challenge for all of us, a daily battle that we all face – with the temptation to respond in fear of man. Hiding our struggles and sin in fear of man's judgement. Making excuses and lying to please our bosses. Keeping quiet about our faith, out of fear of how our friends and family will react. Are we acting out of fear of what other people think, or are we acting on what God has called us to do?

Q. How can we be tempted to act in a way that pleases man, rather than God's commands?

Elijah gives up. He wants God to take his life away. Elijah has seen great miracles in the nation of Israel, and thought he would be the prophet to change the nation – but now is devastated. Looking back at his ancestors, and the prophets before him, he loses hope. They rose up and spoke God's truth to the nation of Israel, and they have been ignored. All the prophets before have died, and so Elijah feels he is due the same. The Bible encourages us in our times of struggle (**Read James 1:12 & 2 Thessalonians 3:13**). When we have reached our end, teetering on the edge of giving up, the Bible tells us to persist and persevere.

Q. How can we remind ourselves to persist and persevere when things are tough?

Elijah's sin comes after enormous spiritual success. He has seen great miracles, and has spoken powerful truth. Then he falls to temptation and sin – temptations that come only because of his success. Elijah was only confronted by fear of Jezebel, because he had proven God's authority so successfully – so much that she needed to rise in opposition. Elijah gave up, because even with his successes – the miraculous displays he had seen –

the nation had still not turned to God. When we have spiritual success, we can be opposed by man. When we have spiritual success, we can increase our expectation, and end up disappointed to the point of giving up. It is important to be prepared for the vulnerability that may follow, and to remain prayerfully close to God.

Q. How can we protect ourselves from disappointment, following the appearance of great spiritual success?

God's Kindness & Provision

As seen earlier, when Elijah obeys God's command, God provides and keeps him safe. Now, Elijah hasn't obeyed God's command, and has turned from God – so we can expect God to take away his provision and protection. God doesn't act as we expect, but instead acts out of grace and mercy – showing favour he did not deserve. Arguably, this example of God's provision is far superior to what Elijah has seen before.

The God of the Bible is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It's not a message of 'be better – or else'. It's a message that God is gracious, loving and kind – in spite of our sin. The glorious good news is that we can all be forgiven – no matter what we have done wrong. We need to heed the warnings: to avoid sin, fear of man and giving up. But even when we fall, God still loves, is still kind and still provides.

Q. How do you expect to be treated by God after sin? How does this affect your relationship with God?

Q. How do our friends and family believe God treats sin? How does God's grace and mercy differ to their beliefs?

The Prophet Greater Than Elijah

While reading this record of Elijah's life, we can see comparisons with Moses. Moses asks God to take his life, after Israel complains – ignoring the word of God. Moses received bread from Heaven. Moses spent 40 years in the desert. Moses spends time at Mount Horeb (and many believe Mount Horeb is the same as Mount Sinai) – it is a significant place. We can compare Moses, as the giver of the law – to Elijah who is attempting to restore the law.

As Christians we have another comparison. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness – but he did not give in to fear and temptation. Elijah needed food, but Jesus knows man does not live by bread alone. Elijah gave up, but Jesus was triumphant. Where Elijah grew disappointed after spiritual success, Jesus expected opposition and doubt, and pressed on through greater successes. Where Elijah failed, Jesus succeeded – always prevailed and always persevered.

Q. How does Jesus – the fulfilment of the law – bring hope where Moses and Elijah were unable to?

Q. How does Jesus' example encourage us when confronted by fear of man and temptations to give up?

Elijah's Restoration– 1 Kings 19:9-18

Elijah was a man just like us. As we read through 1 Kings, we have seen Elijah do amazing things. His prayer life, obedience and faithfulness show an incredible closeness to God - but we also see his mistakes and flaws, while God remains incredibly faithful. We see a man that is relatable to our lives, and our attempts to be faithful and obediently – and a God who still remains incredibly faithful.

Elijah has challenged the Baal followers and their god on Mount Carmel, and has seen huge spiritual success. Despite the prophets of Baal giving everything they could, their god did not respond. Elijah prepares his offering, making it as difficult as he could, and yet his God, the God of Israel, responds with an all-consuming fire. Following this spiritual success, Elijah is confronted by Queen Jezebel, who promises to kill him. Elijah's response came from fear of man, and gave up – yet God stays faithful, providing for him in his time of need.

Read 1 Kings 19:9-18

How Quickly We Forget (vs 9-10)

'The word of the Lord came to him' (v9). This is not the first time we have heard this phrase in this series. Three times already in the past two chapters, we read the word of the Lord coming to Elijah, and has told him to go somewhere and do something. This time, it comes to Elijah, but it doesn't tell him to go. Instead, it asks him a question – "what are you doing here?". Elijah has sent up camp in a cave. Because of what has happened with the prophets of Baal, and Jezebel's response, Elijah is hiding away. God has called Elijah to speak to the nation of Israel – to rebuke kings and rulers – but he is hiding away. With the situation Elijah is in, he has forgotten all that God has previously done, and has walked away from the task God had given to him.

Elijah has seen provision by ravens, and jars that refilled. He has seen the dead raised to life. He has seen power that turns rock to dust. Yet all these things, because of where he is now, have fallen away. He has forgotten all that God has done, and is hiding in the cave. One person's opposition has turned massive victory in to overwhelming defeat in Elijah's mind. Elijah has forgotten about what God has done, and so, who God is. Consumed by the immediate, Elijah has forgotten the bigger picture. God is the One who stands firm, but Jezebel is the one that he sees.

When confronted by opposition, trials and temptations, we can hide away in our own caves. Our focus can be drawn to the immediate issues – the problems we face. In these times we need to cling to who God is, and what He has done. We can be consumed by our current battles, but we have a victory that is far greater. Elijah could remember the victory of Mount Carmel. We have the victory from Jesus on the cross – which is far greater than anything that can come against us. In our weakness, God remains the same God who won the victory at Calvary. In our trials, it is important to remember what God has done, and who He is.

Q. How can our struggles and opposition prevent us from seeing the bigger picture God has planned?

Q. How can we remind ourselves of the victory won by Jesus, and how God remains faithful through our trials?

God Speaks (vs 11-12)

Q. How do we expect the all-powerful God to speak to us and direct us?

In previous chapters we have heard God speak through the fire. He has proven Himself to be an immensely powerful being. Here Elijah experiences a powerful wind that tears mountains apart, then an earthquake, then a fire – but God is not speaking in these moments. His display of power isn't in a show of might – in the wind or earthquake or fire. Instead God speaks in the sound of a low whisper. God can reveal Himself in the loud fires and earthquakes – but we need to take time to listen for the whisper. Instead of the massive actions, God chooses to speak to Elijah in the still small voice.

We can expect God to move in the big powerful displays - we wait for God to make His purposes clear by shouting in the wind, through the earthquake or by the fire. Yet there are times when God speaks in the still, small voice. God is God when sent the all-consuming fire, and He is still God when He spoke in the small voice. Are we giving time for God to speak in the still voice, or are we too busy that He needs to shout in the big displays? We can miss the whisper, the reassurance, the calm voice of God if we don't take time to listen to Him.

Q. How can we be tempted to give more weight to big displays, and ignore the quiet reassurance from God?

Q. What challenges do we face in taking time to hear God? How can we make time for the small voice of God?

Mountain Moments Begin in the Cave

When Elijah was in the public eye, he appeared strong. He stood at Mount Carmel, with all Israel watching – and displayed the power of God. Where people could see, Elijah was a great example after God's heart. Yet in the cave, when he was all alone, Elijah shows his weakness – he is afraid and has forgotten all that he knew.

It's easy to be bold and to be confident in public - where everyone can see you. When people are looking on, it can be easy to seem like you have everything together. The real challenge comes when we are alone, in the cave. When no-one can see how we respond – that makes clear how we really react. Character is made, not in the big and public moments, but in the quiet moments – alone when no-one is watching. If we are to become more like Jesus, we need to take time with God – alone where no-one is watching. We need to know the still small voice when no-one is watching.

Q. How can we be tempted to give the appearance of being a 'good Christian' ...at church? ...with friends/family?

Q. Where do you find time to be alone and honest with God? How do you allow God to speak in these moments?

Elisha Called and Anointed – 1 Kings 19:18-21

Elijah is God's Prophet. He has been tasked to speak God's word to the nation of Israel. He spoke the word of God with tremendous accuracy and power. We may think it would be great to have a prophet like Elijah, speaking the clear word of God into our lives – but we have so much more than just Elijah, we have Moses, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and the Apostle Paul – even the words of Jesus. We have His Word – full and complete – in our hands, in the Bible.

Chosen (vs 15-16)

This pattern is very interesting; the anointing of God is not reserved just for the prophet in his prophesying, neither is it reserved exclusively for 'Israelites' – the good/godly people. There is anointing made available for so called 'foreigners' to be used by God where they are for what they are doing. This immediately challenges our belief on who can receive the Spirit of God. We can believe the Spirit is reserved for Prophets – the unique individuals. Or maybe the Spirit of God is only for the really special Godly people. But this passage makes clear that God's anointing is made available for anyone to complete the task He has planned. They have each been anointed to complete the task they are chosen to complete.

You have been chosen to be anointed to serve God where you are doing what you are doing. He has chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the earth (Ephesians 2:10). You are there for a reason, for a purpose, and are uniquely chosen for the time and place that you are in. Elijah was sent to Hazael, Jehu and Elisha – Elijah was chosen and tasked. Hazael, Jehu and Elisha have been appointed a task. Each of us have been chosen to do a good work for Christ. No matter how much responsibility you feel you have, we are all sent to do all things for God's glory.

Q. What requirements can we try to achieve, before allowing ourselves - or others - to be used by God?

Q. How can you do things for God's glory in the time and place you have been uniquely chosen for?

Anointed (v 19)

Elisha was in the field doing the same thing he did every day. There is great ordinariness in this moment. God had determined in His Sovereignty for Elisha to be anointed to be prophet before the foundation of the world and yet the moment of encounter is so ordinary. That is the moment Elisha's heart is filled with the Spirit of God. This is not a random moment, this is a moment that God determined before the beginning of time.

This is so often the case that God comes to people in the middle of the monotony of life. Moses was with his sheep. Gideon was threshing wheat. The Samaritan woman was drawing water from the well. God invades the monotony and lives are changed. Maybe it's over a curry in a Southsea Balti House, sat on a bleacher in a Portsea Community Centre, or at your desk tapping an email – the sudden and immediate sense of the presence of God can come.

Q. Do you have any examples of times where God has come to you unexpectedly?

Q. What hope does this passage supply for those we are currently praying for?

Transformed (vs 20-21a)

So Elijah throws his cloak over Elisha – the next thing we see is Elisha ‘ran after Elijah’. What happened in the pause? Did Elisha stop to reflect on what had happened, laid out by the power of the Spirit perhaps? Elijah didn’t hang around – he’d done his job. Elisha knew the significance of this act – he knew it demanded his all. The monotony of life had been invaded by the Spirit of God.

His response - to go and kiss his parents was not unwillingness or disobedience but an understanding of the cost. Elisha understood what had happened to him and dealt with his former way of life immediately.

Elijah responds, reminding us that the call does not come from him, but from God - and it is God we are accountable to. Elisha honoured his parents, knowing this call would require him to leave them. But this action is not putting his parents before God. Rather Elisha knows that God's call is more important – even than his fortune...

Elisha had wealth. Twelve yoke of oxen (24 oxen) – by worldly standards he has got it sorted and is prospering. God transformed Elisha’s heart and he viewed his worldly estate in a totally different light. God isn’t after our money, but our heart – generosity will follow. Through Elisha’s actions, God is glorified in worship and sacrifice, and thousands are fed. The oxen were an obstacle in following God’s call – but he took a radical step to follow God.

Q. How can we be tempted to use our ‘responsibilities’ to prevent following God’s call?

Q. What radical steps can we take to honour God? How can we use our ‘wealth’ to support others?

Trained (v 21b)

Read 2 Kings 3:11

Elisha gave everything to follow God’s call - left family, friends, and fortune. For 18 years, his job was to ‘assist Elijah’ - to ‘wash his hands’. Nearly 20 years pass between receiving the call to go and becoming the ‘prophet’ to Israel. Getting ready, serving faithfully, being a friend to Elijah. This isn’t glamorous, it’s tough. Many of us are more instinctively like James and John - they wanted to be the ‘greatest in the kingdom’ – that’s just not how it works in the Kingdom of God.

If you are called - and you are - it is the call to serve, always. To give of yourself to help others, like Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. Elisha went on to do some pretty awesome things, but first he washed Elijah’s hands. Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, and it appalled Peter. Jesus not only took Peter’s feet but also his greatest shame, guilt and sin - upon the cross. He has done the same for you. That’s our servant King and our example to serve.

Q. How long have you waited for God to complete his purpose? How can we be tempted to give up?

Q. How can we follow Jesus’ example and put ourselves last to serve those around us? Why is this such an attractive characteristic?

Naboth's Vineyard – 1 Kings 21:1-29

This passage is a miserable message of sin and judgement. This is a terrible moment in the history of Israel. King Ahab - along with his wife Jezebel and men, described solely as 'worthless' – commits an atrocious crime. Reading this passage, we want to see how God will deal with this terrible King for all the awful things he has done.

Ahab's Sin (v 2-6)

This whole terrible episode in Israel's history begins because Ahab wants something that isn't his. The sales proposal - which today may seem pretty reasonable - is illegal according to the Israelite laws that God had given to the nation (see Numbers 36:7). God's purpose in these laws was to protect the whole nation from men buying up all the land, just as Ahab was trying to do. Ahab's desire for this land - wrongfully desiring something that isn't his – is breaking the tenth commandment, coveting his neighbours possessions.

This is something we can all struggle with. Some of us marvel at the amazing houses we will never afford – jealous of those who live there. Some of us dream of the amazing career – envying those who work in the roles we desire. Some of us envy the family life, jealous of the relationships those around us have, but we have missed.

Q. Where can we be tempted to covet? How are these desires seen in our lives, and those around us?

Ahab doesn't get what he wants, so he enters his house vexed and sullen. On two occasions, in just five verses (**1 Kings 20:20**) we read the king of Israel is extremely annoyed and upset – both times he is responding to what God has said. Firstly, God rebuked Ahab – secondly, God's commands stop Ahab getting what he wants.

Considering Jesus life, there is room for us in a Christian lifestyle to be sad and angry. Jesus Himself was sad, and angry – but He didn't sulk, and in the Christian righteous life there is no example for sulking, particularly for anything so trivial as not getting a vegetable patch.

Ahab is failing to believe in God's goodness. When he sulks at God's command, Ahab is declaring that he doesn't believe God is good – that God is wrong to deny him. By sulking, Ahab is saying that the vineyard is more important for him, that God is Himself.

Q. How do you respond when God says 'no'? Do you 'sulk' when you don't get your desires?

Q. How does our response reflect our view of God compared to our desires?

Jezebel's Direct Confrontation (v 7-10)

The LORD has forbidden that Naboth give Ahab the vineyard. When Jezebel hears this, her response immediately puts her in opposition with God. God forbids it, but that won't stop her. Not only is this response obviously proud – the wording imitates the words of God to Elijah. As we read this passage, Jezebel is mimicking God's instruction 'Arise' – a word that is found elsewhere in 1 and 2 Kings, but only by God, to His servants. Not only is Jezebel defying God, she is also putting herself into God's place.

Be careful who you marry. Jezebel did not follow God, and had no desire to – so when things were difficult, her counsel was wicked – rather than pointing to God, she took His place.

When vexed and sullen – go to God, not to other people. When Elijah was vexed (1 Kings 19), he went to God and was restored. When Ahab was vexed and sullen, he turned to Jezebel, who led them to further pain, destruction and sin.

Realise there are moments in life we also make ourselves God. When we start calling the shots, telling God how things need to happen, and not obeying God's commands. Living life without prayer - 'fine by ourselves', trying to take God out of our lives – is putting ourselves in the place of God.

Q. Who do you turn to when things are tough? Does their support direct you towards God, or replace Him?

Q. How do our actions and attitudes display our constant need for God in our lives?

Not only does Jezebel confront God in speech, her next actions are in direct opposition to God. Jezebel, and the 'worthless men' use deception and scheming to murder and take hold of what she desires. While we may not use deception to take someone's life – there are countless temptations to deceive people, to lie and hide the truth.

God's Judgement and Mercy (vs17-29)

Elijah enters the scene with a message of judgement – the penalty for Ahab's sin is truly severe. According to God's holy law, the penalty of sin is severe. The judgement of God is just and fair, which is grim news for Ahab - and for all of us as 'not one is righteous'. Elijah's message of judgement prompts Ahab to repent. As Christians, we can shy away from the message of judgement, but there is a challenge that people need to hear.

This wicked king (vs 25-26 point again to how corrupt this king was) responds to Elijah's prophesy – humbles himself before God and repents – sorrowful of the sin committed and turning to God for forgiveness.

So the passage ends with God's mercy – the punishment that has been prophesied will not fall on Ahab, but it will be delayed (to fall on Ahab's son, who would be as wicked as Ahab, but would not repent). We may all be guilty of greed, sulking, failing to believe God's goodness, defying God and deception – but there is forgiveness for all who truly repent through the message of the cross.

Q. How can our attempt to remove judgement from the gospel soften and weaken the message we share?

Q. How does God's mercy towards this wicked king remind us of our need to repent and seek forgiveness?

Where is the LORD? 2 Kings 2:1-14

Elijah has been calling the people away from their idols which were leading them into darkness and depression, and instead beckoning them to return to their God, their creator, only through worshipping Him/knowing Him will the longing for true happiness in life be satisfied.

We often make the observation at ChristCentral that all people worship, but only the worship of our Creator will every bring the fullness our souls long for. Even in this modern society, all people worship, oh it may be subtler than bowing down before a carved idol in homage, but we all do nevertheless worship. We worship the thing we desire most in life, what we believe will give us greatest happiness! And for those of us who worship Jesus there is a constant battle for our affections to be diverted onto other things.

Q. Why do you think God created us to be worshippers? How can we encourage one another in growing our affections towards Christ?

Read 2 Kings 2:1-14

A Devoted Friend

It's a dynamic passage, to say the least! With all the miraculous going on around Elisha, one thing stands out and that is his devotion to Elijah. It is clear Elisha loved his mentor, and would simply not leave him despite Elijah's petitions! It's worth noticing that Elisha does not insist that Elijah remain with him, but that he will not leave him, it's a proactive determination to stand by his friend.

Q. What qualities make a person a good friend?

Consider and discuss this quote from C.S Lewis:

I have no duty to be anyone's Friend and no man in the world has a duty to be mine. No claims, no shadow of necessity. Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create). It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." (C.S. Lewis)

A Desperation for God

Will God turn up for Elisha as he did for Elijah? Elisha had walked alongside his mentor and friend, was able to see the evidence of God all over him, he couldn't deny this 'God thing' had worked pretty well for Elijah – Elijah had summoned fire from heaven, had provided food miraculously for the widow, had raised her dead son, he got the mighty river Jordan to stand still – would Elisha know.

You can't just rely upon the faith of others, don't simply pine for the experiences of God that you observe others having – if only I had their faith, if only I knew the power of God like she does, if only I had his peace, if only I had her courage. There isn't a lack in the storehouses of heaven – there is sufficient power for you. We don't read in the Bible of a stingy God, but it says his riches are unsearchable. It's time you encountered the power of God for yourself.

Q. Why do you think Elisha responded as he did to Elijah's departure?

A Demonstration of Power

Elisha is decisive – he does exactly what Elijah did, the cry to God was followed by a decisive step. He didn't just wait around and stare at the river, he took hold of the cloak just as Elijah had done and he cast it upon the water, and alas God performs the same miracle and demonstrates his power before Elisha. Here now is the God of Elisha – not just Elijah's God, he is my God, he is the God of Elisha and he will be the God of all who cry out to him and take decisive action to trust him.

Q. In what ways have we known a demonstration of God's power?

Q. What decisive steps can we take to encounter God?