

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Lost and Found Series, Sermon #6

Sermon Title: What To Do When You've Lost Your Courage: The Story of Elijah,
I Kings 19:1-14, II Kings 2:7-15

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This sermon is number 6 in my Lost and Found Sermon Series.

- My first sermon was “What to Do When You've Lost Your Cutting Edge: The Story of the Ax Head that Floated.”
- Sermon #2 was “What Not To Do When God Gives You a Second Chance: The Story of Jonah.”
- Third was “What To Do When God Seems Lost: The Story of The Lost Ark of The Covenant.”
- Fourth was “What to Do When You've Lost Your Delete Key: The Story of Peter.”
- Sermon #5 was “What to Do When Your Change Directions: Paul's Shipwreck on Malta.”

Today, I'll be speaking to you about what to do when you've lost your courage—the story of Elijah. Every now and then we find ourselves in a state of absolute despair. We ask ourselves what we can do to make the situation better, but then we find out there isn't anything else to do. We have completely lost our courage. Have you ever been there?

Elijah was a prophet of God. He is one of the most talked about prophets in the Bible. When he first came on the scene, the original kingdom of Israel had been divided for a long time into two kingdoms—Judah and Israel.

- In the first story of Elijah, we read about him being fed by ravens and drinking water from a brook.

- In the second story, we read about him being fed by a widow who had just enough flour and oil to cook food every day. We read how Elijah raised the woman's dead son.
- In the third story, we read about Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel.

And today's message will be the fourth scene—that of Elijah's discouragement.

The three points to my message today are:

1. Elijah experienced a low after a high.
2. During his discouragement, Elijah retreated.
3. Loss of courage led to a helper—Elisha.

After Elijah called fire from heaven and destroyed the prophets, King Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, who became enraged. You see, she was a supporter of all the false prophets of Baal. She was a Baal worshipper, and she issued a death threat to Elijah. She had a pretty good system worked out, and Elijah destroyed it all.

First, ELIJAH EXPERIENCED A LOW AFTER A HIGH.

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 19:1-5 *¹Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."*

³Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

EXPLANATION: There seems to be a fundamental disconnect with Elijah's calling fire from heaven and his fear of Jezebel. What in the world was that all about? Elijah had first-hand knowledge of God's protection. God took care of his

physical needs. God protected him from the wicked prophets of Baal. So, why was he afraid of Jezebel?

After calling down fire from heaven, he was on a high. In fact, he was so full of energy that he ran ahead of King Ahab's horses all the way back to the palace. I believe the answer as to why Elijah was afraid of Jezebel is simple: He was tired. Following such spiritual and physical energy, he really needed a break. He'd been hyper-vigilant for such a long time.

APPLICATION: The physical and the spiritual are connected in ways I don't understand. With my spiritual-self locked into my physical-self until I die, my spiritual-self can be negatively affected by my physical-self. I learned a long time ago, it is not best to make important decisions when I am tired. Preaching and teaching when I am tired is not a good thing either. It's better if I am rested. It seems even my prayers are better when I am rested as well. Even Jesus took time away to rest and to pray.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 6:9 ⁹ *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

APPLICATION: Churches have a way of wearing out dedicated church volunteers, don't we? Everyone needs a respite from time to time. This weekend I am asking our church to support the Arabic language revival. We have two other churches helping us. Our deacons are organizing greeting and parking lot matters. Shannon Moore is organizing the nursery. Two other churches are helping us. I will tell you in advance it will be a tiring weekend, but rewarding, and then next week everyone needs to take it easy.

ILLUSTRATION: A supervisor once told me his company had little money for rewards, and it didn't matter anyway because he'd learned a long time ago, people appreciated time off more than anything else.

APPLICATION: No matter how much energy you think you have, no matter how much drive you have to serve the Lord, you'd better take a break and rest because our bodies are not designed to go non-stop. Rest is good. You'll be more effective if you have a balance between work and rest than if you don't.

APPLICATION: Like Elijah, after we've experienced some type of high, we can expect a low to follow it. What Elijah experienced was normal, but instead of realizing he was tired, he became full of self-pity. *"Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*

APPLICATION: Elijah lost his courage and needed rest. When you've lost your courage, it's time to take a rest.

Second, DURING HIS DISCOURAGEMENT, HE RETREATED.

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 19:5-9 ⁵*All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."* ⁶*He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.*

⁷*The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."* ⁸*So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.* ⁹*There he went into a cave and spent the night.*

EXPLANATION: Perhaps he thought if he could go back to where the Law of Moses started, just perhaps, God would meet him in a similar way. I don't know what was in the cake and water which allowed him to travel for forty days and nights!

Mt Horeb is where Moses encountered God and received the Ten Commandments.

It's interesting the first two commandments are what Elijah advocated for throughout his ministry: You should have no other gods before me and you should have no graven image. Fighting against Baalism, no doubt Elijah had quoted them many times.

SCRIPTURE: [While there he had a conversation with the Lord.] I Kings 19:9-13 ⁹*And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

EXPLANATION: Elijah had just experienced one of the most dramatic manifestations of God in the Bible when fire came from heaven and burned up the altar. He expected God to give him such a dramatic revelation when he sought out God, but God didn’t do it.

In the Book of Job, God communicated through a whirlwind. In Exodus 19, God communicated through an earthquake. In other parts of scripture, his voice sounded like thunder. I believe Elijah was looking for something dramatic.

But, God didn’t communicate like that, did he? No. He was not in the wind. He was not in the earthquake. He was not in the fire. He was in the gentle whisper. God demonstrated to Elijah he wasn’t limited to one way of communication.

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 19:13-14 ¹³ Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

I believe this was a test to Elijah. What Elijah should have said was, “I am here to do whatever you want.” But he didn’t. He merely repeated what he’d said earlier.

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 19:14 ¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

EXPLANATION: Elijah really wanted God to know he was the last man standing. He reminded the Lord how he'd been faithful to him through the years *AND* how awful the Israelites were *AND* that he was the only believer left.

In verses 15-18 Elijah gained instructions from the Lord...fairly simple instructions. He gave Elijah instructions on whom to ordain as kings, which was typical work for prophets. On the mountain God prepared him for less dramatic work than he'd be used to.

Then God told Elijah two important things...now Elijah was hearing the gentle voice of God. One, he was to anoint Elisha as his successor, and two, God told Elijah he wasn't the last God-fearing man standing but that there were 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal. The overall lesson learned on Mt Horeb was Elijah was a mortal. He would not live forever. But, in the meantime, God had work for him to do.

APPLICATION: It's a hard reality to realize we are not going to live forever and God's work will go on through someone else. It's also a hard reality to realize we are not the only one out there. When we grow weary in well-doing, it's usually because we think we are the only ones out there doing what God wants done.

Third, LOSS OF COURAGE LED TO THE HELPER, ELISHA.

Folks, in all honesty, the prophets were odd characters. They saw things from a different perspective than the average person. As I recall, most of them were very independent people, and Elijah was no different. God used his discouragement to help receive and to mentor Elisha. Had Elijah never had the experience where he feared Jezebel and ran for his life, he might not have been humble enough to accept his own mortality and the need for a successor.

Elisha was plowing one day when Elijah came to him and put his cloak around him. That was a "follow me" sign. Elisha said his goodbyes to his family and went with Elijah. For quite some time, he was mentored by Elijah.

While the scripture doesn't tell us this, it is implied with the nature of the teacher-student relationship. To train the junior prophet, the elder prophet had to tell of all the times God had been faithful.

APPLICATION: If you are ever discouraged, start mentoring someone about God's faithfulness.

Turn to II Kings 2, and let's look at how it ended for Elijah. About fifty prophets were together one day, and in a supernatural way, they knew it was the last day of Elijah's life on this earth.

SCRIPTURE: II Kings 2:7-15 ⁷ *Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.* ⁸ *Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.*

⁹ *When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"*

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

¹⁰ *"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."*

¹¹ *As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.* ¹² *Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.*

¹³ *Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.* ¹⁴ *He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked.*

When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

¹⁵ *The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.*

EXPLANATION: The lesson learned here is God’s work continued through another man.

APPLICATION: Here is yet another Biblical example the importance of mentoring someone to take over your ministry. We have an aging congregation, and if you are dedicated to a particular work, wouldn’t it be awful if the work ended when you were no longer capable of doing it?

CONCLUSION: Let’s review:

- In the way Elijah experienced a low following a high, you can expect the same thing. So, be prepared for it.
- When he lost his courage, Elijah retreated to find God. Let us do the same thing and remember what Elijah learned: God wasn’t finished with him.
- When he lost his courage, God provided Elijah with a student who needed mentoring. If you’re discouraged, start discipling someone, and you’ll be encouraged.

In this lost and found story, Elijah lost his courage, but God helped him find it in a new way.

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