

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO

ELIJAH



SANTA BARBARA COMMUNITY CHURCH
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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ELIJAH

SOURCES

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- Meyer** F. B. Meyer, *Elijah, and the Secret of His Power* (Fleming Revell Company, 1924)
- Olley** John W. Olley, *The Message of Kings* (IVP, 2011)
- Pink** A. W. Pink, *The Life of Elijah* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1956)
- Ryken** Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings* (P & R Publishing, 2011)
- Swindoll** Charles R. Swindoll, *Elijah: A Man of Heroism and Humility* (Thomas Nelson, 2000)

The Gospel According to Elijah study guide has been written by Reed Jolley, teaching pastor, Barbara Community Church. Prayer guides at the end of each study have been written by Vijay Jayaraman. Artwork was provided by Susi Lamoutte. Layout design was created by Carolee Peterson. Fall 2012.

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TEACHING CALENDAR

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INTRODUCTION

There are four figures in the Bible that bear a striking resemblance, if not in their appearance, in their lives and ministries. These are the men known to us as Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and, finally, Jesus. Many of Elijah's miracles seem to mirror those Moses performed. And many of the miracles of Jesus seem to mirror those performed by Elijah (see Luke 4:25-27). John the Baptist was going to come in the *spirit and power of Elijah* (Luke 1:17). And Jesus is sometimes mistaken for a new Elijah.

The Old Testament in our English Bibles ends with the prophecy of Malachi telling the reader that a new Elijah is going to come and *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers...*. The New Testament begins with the appearance of John the Baptist who some think is Elijah (John 1:21). Then Jesus is mistaken for the same prophet (Luke 9:19).

At the high point of Jesus' ministry and popularity, our Lord takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain and appears before them in his glory. As Jesus is seen in his radiance and splendor, Moses and Elijah appear as well (Matthew 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30).¹ *Et Cetera!*



In this study we are going to look at Elijah, his life, his ministry, and his message. We are going to look at the gospel, or the good news, according to Elijah.

Elijah comes to us in the pages of Scripture with his friend and protégé Elisha (see Study 10). Together these two prophets occupy a disproportionate amount of attention in 1-2 Kings. Their stories dominate 15 out of the 47 chapters that comprise these books (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 9).

In a sense, we know very little about the prophet Elijah. The Bible tells us nothing of his heritage. We do not know who his parents are. His birth is not recorded, and we have no clues about his early life. Elijah appears on the scene during the reign of evil King Ahab (see Study 1) and his prophetic ministry begins.

Elijah endured the great agricultural calamity of his times: he lived through a famine that lasted for three-and-a-half years. Elijah staged the great religious showdown of his times: he faced the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel and called down fire from heaven. Elijah executed the great judicial sentence of his times: he struck

¹ It is suggested by some interpreters of Revelation 11 that Moses and Elijah make yet another appearance in the last days before the return of Christ. There the two witnesses perform quite a bit like these two Old Testament prophets, provoking drought for 3.5 years, turning water into blood, striking the earth with plagues, etc.

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down 450 false prophets at the Kishon River. Elijah performed the great athletic feat of his times: he ran seventeen miles from Carmel down to Jezreel, ahead of horse and chariots. He gave food to the hungry; he brought the dead back to life; he spoke with God on the mountain; he did not die, but was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. (Ryken, pp. 433-434)

Elijah. His name means, *Yahweh is my God!* May Yahweh be our God as we study, ponder and reflect upon the life, ministry and example of one of his great prophets.

STUDY ONE



1 KINGS 16:29—17:7

A MAN JUST LIKE US

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three-and-a-half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James 5:17-18 (NIV, 1984)

James tells us in his brief letter that Elijah was *just like us*.¹ If all we read was the short book of James we might not be surprised. But when we enter into the turbulent world of Elijah the prophet, when we see the things he did, the miracles he performed, the discouragements he faced, and the faith with which he prevailed, we might be tempted to question James' assessment of both Elijah and of us! As soon as we learn anything about Elijah we find the comparison difficult to swallow.

Elijah was a real man who lived in a real place at a particular time in Israel's history. And what a time it was! Israel's story was never ideal but this prophet makes his entrance into the life of God's people at a particularly low point. Recall that after the period of the Judges, the nation was ruled by King Saul who was succeeded by King David, who was succeeded by King Solomon. After Solomon's death the nation experienced both a civil war and a parting of ways. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel form the northern kingdom, which is called *Israel*. The tribe of Judah becomes the southern kingdom. These two kingdoms never come together again.

By the time of Elijah, it has been 58 years since Solomon's death, and seven kings have reigned over the northern kingdom. In retrospect, it seems that these kings were in a contest to see which of them could do the most evil in the eyes of God. Consider the *character qualities* of these kings who set the stage for Elijah's prophetic ministry.

Jeroboam, the first northern monarch of the divided kingdom, made two golden calves and placed these idols in Dan and Bethel so that the people of Israel would not have to journey to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. He deliberately led the nation into idolatry.

Nadab *did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father* (1 Kings 15:26).

¹ The 1984 NIV is something of a paraphrase. The ESV renders the Greek text more literally. *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...*

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STUDY ONE

Baasha murdered King Nadab and *did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin* (1 Kings 15:34).

Elah was a drunkard and murderer (1 Kings 16:8-9).

Zimri was a conspirator (1 Kings 16:20). Because of his conspiracy Zimri's reign lasted all of seven days.

Omri *did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him* (1 Kings 16:25).

Ahab outdid even his father Omri's evil. King Ahab is the worst of the worst to this point in Israel's history (1 Kings 16:30).

Read 1 Kings 16:29-34. The writer of 1 Kings gives us a list of the most evil deeds committed by King Ahab:

He took Jezebel as his wife.

He *served Baal and worshiped him*.

He allowed (commissioned) Hiel of Bethel to rebuild the city of Jericho in spite of a stern warning. Read Joshua 6:26.

Respond to the teaching from last Sunday's sermon. What is the significance of each of these acts of evil? Discuss this with your homegroup.

Can you relate to the underlying motivations and ambitions you see in King Ahab? Has your heart ever gotten to a similar state? Describe.

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STUDY ONE

Read 1 Kings 17:1-7. Notice as you read, this is the first record of Elijah we have in the Old Testament. As we noted in the Introduction, he is one of those biblical characters who comes out of nowhere. We don't know anything about his tribe, his parents, his background, and even the place of his birth (Tishbe) is unknown. Elijah simply shows up in 1 Kings 17:1.

He is assigned no elaborate pedigree, whereby we could place him in the social register of ancient Israel, and no support group is mentioned for whom he could be considered the spokesman. He lived in Gilead, a peripheral area in ancient Israel, isolated across the Jordan. He had no fame or notoriety, no particular political clout, no credentials to command a hearing, no alphabet soup of academic degrees following his name. (Dillard, p. 16)

Yet, it is this man Elijah whom God uses so spectacularly over his career as a prophet.

What does Elijah's background teach us and teach you about those whom God uses for his purposes? Consider your own knowledge, experience and reputation. How are you similar to, or different from, Elijah?

Compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. How does this passage speak to you personally?

Considering these passages in 1 Kings and 1 Corinthians, who is the ultimate Elijah in this regard?

STUDY ONE

17:1 What is Elijah's specific prophecy? What would the fulfillment of this prophecy mean to people living in Elijah's time and place?

Notice what Elijah says about Yahweh specifically: *The Lord the God of Israel lives...* There is more here than meets the eye. The competing deity of the surrounding nations was Baal. Baal was not a living God in the sense that Yahweh is the living God. Baal was alive only during the rainy season. And then, during the long dry season of the Middle East, Baal died.

When Elijah stood before Ahab in a parched wilderness and spoke of the living God, he was rebuking Baal, the so-called rain God. Elijah's living God is Lord of both the dry season and the rainy season. (Ryken, p. 437)

When James tells us that Elijah was a man *just like us*, the implication is that we are people who should become a lot like Elijah. (Ryken, p. 438) And what was Elijah like?

Philip Ryken finds three areas of Elijah's life worthy of our emulation.

Praying

Simply put, Elijah was a man of prayer. James tells us Elijah prayed for three-and-a-half years. When we compare when the drought-induced famine ended (18:1) with the words of James (above) and Jesus (Luke 4:25), we learn the prophet prayed for at least six months before he went to see King Ahab.

No wonder God chose Elijah to be his messenger! When God needed a herald to go and speak divine judgment to Ahab, Elijah was his man. The prophet was an intimate friend of God. He had proved by his prayers that he was zealous and dependable, that he was concerned for the Lord's work and that he understood God's purposes for his people. (Ryken, p. 439)

1 Kings 17:1 is simple and succinct, but we learn from James 5:17 that this drought came from Elijah's devotion to prayer.

Why was it Elijah prayed "that it might not rain"? Not because he was impervious to human suffering, not because he took a fiendish delight in witnessing the misery of his neighbours, but because he put *the glory of God* before everything else, even

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STUDY ONE

before his own natural feelings...Not only was there no longer any public recognition of God, no, not throughout the length and breadth of the land, but on every side He was openly insulted and defied by Baal worshippers. Daily the tide of evil rose higher and higher, until it had now swept practically everything before it. And Elijah was “very jealous for the Lord God of hosts,” (1 Kings 19:10), and longed to see His great name vindicated and His backslidden people restored. Thus it was the glory of God and true love for Israel which actuated his petition. (Pink, p. 27)

How does, or should, the *daily tide of evil* inform the way we pray?

What can we learn from the prayer-life of Elijah? How can we, as the church, pray “Elijah” prayers?

As you think through this passage, what do you feel inclined to pray for? How might you grow in your prayer life? Select one thing to pray for, and pray diligently between this homegroup meeting and the next. Reflect on this at the end of the week and go forward from there.

Obeying

Notice verse 5. ... *he went and did according to the word of the Lord.*

To live for God in an evil day is to obey as well as to pray...It sounds simple, but sometimes the simple things are the hard things in the Christian life. All the Lord wanted from Elijah was simple obedience to his revealed will, which is what he wants from any of us. (Ryken, p. 441)

STUDY ONE

What are some *simple* areas of obedience that you find challenging at this point in your Christian journey?

Consider those areas. Elijah was obedient, but we have seen he was a man of faithful prayer. How do you integrate prayer into your life of obedience? How can you do so more?

Staying

Elijah went to the brook of Cherith, east of the Jordan River. He is hiding from both Ahab and Jezebel, the king's evil wife. Elijah is a prophet and a preacher, and now he is in the wilderness keeping quiet. What a challenge to a man of words! Furthermore, Elijah stays in a place where he has to rely on God's miraculous provision for his daily sustenance. The ravens bring him his food. On top of this, the very brook by which he pitches his tent dries up. Elijah is subject to his own prophecy. But he stays.

Is God calling you to stay in an uncomfortable place right now? To stay in a difficult job? A difficult marriage? Is he calling you to stay faithful as you pitch your tent next to a dried up brook? Share with your homegroup how they might pray for you in these areas. Elijah was a man *just like us...*

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STUDY ONE

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 16:29—17:7

- Acknowledge the God who is always there, even in the midst of evil rulers and unjust governments. Name some of those governments and rulers around the world, and thank God that He will ultimately prevail in those places. Consider repeating Proverbs 12:7 as a litany in response to these situations:

Wicked men are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm.

- Confess our apathy toward wickedness in the land. Name some things—perhaps parallel to the sins of Ahab—to which we the church has grown accustomed.
- Pray for each other to become more like Elijah!
- Petition God for miracles in the Spirit and power of Elijah. Pray for revival. Expand your prayers to nature and the nations. Let your prayers be informed and inspired by the character of God as revealed in Psalm 65:7.

...(He) stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

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STUDY ONE



STUDY TWO

1 KINGS 17:8-16

FROM CHERITH TO ZAREPHATH

Last week's passage, 1 Kings 17:1-7, showed both the power of Elijah's prayer for drought, and the prophet's own suffering which came as a result of answered prayer. On the one hand, Elijah was incensed over Baal worship and prayed that Yahweh would show his supremacy by bringing a drought. On the other hand, Elijah and the people of Israel suffered greatly because of the very drought the man of God prayed for! Reviewing the passage and commentary we looked at last week, *he prayed earnestly that it would not rain*, A. W. Pink writes,

What a terrible petition to present before the Majesty on high! What incalculable privation and suffering the granting of such a request would entail. The fair land of Palestine would be turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, and its inhabitants would be wasted by a protracted famine with all its attendant horrors.

Why was it Elijah prayed 'that it might not rain?' Not because he was impervious to human suffering, not because he took a fiendish delight in witnessing the misery of his neighbours, but because he put the glory of God before everything else, even before his own natural feelings.... He was deeply stirred by the horrible indignities against his Master and longed to see Him given His rightful place again in Israel. (Pink, pp. 26-27)



Read 1 Kings 17:8-16. Jot down any initial thoughts or questions prompted by the reading of these verses, or Sunday's sermon in relation to this passage. Share these with your homegroup.

STUDY TWO

Think about the movement of Elijah in this chapter. God moves the prophet from Tishbe in Gilead to a brook in Cherith. 1 Kings 17:7 records the drying of the brook from which Elijah drank. It is only then that God gives further instructions. Only when the brook dries up does God tell Elijah to move on to Zarephath.

A. W. Pink states,

God does not grant fresh revelations until there has been a compliance with those already received.... It is not the Lord's way to reveal to us the whole course which is to be traversed: rather does He restrict His light to one step at a time, that we may be kept in continual dependence upon Him. (Pink, pp. 29-30)

Zarephath

Zarephath means a *smelting-furnace*. The city was outside of Israel near Mt. Hermon in the north of the country. For a host of reasons, Elijah would have recoiled when Yahweh told him to go to this place. Zarephath *belongs to Sidon*. Case closed. Sidon was the land of Jezebel, the evil wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:31). Elijah is being called into a land of flagrant idolatry filled with temples dedicated to Baal worship, temple prostitution, even child-sacrifice. Not only does God tell Elijah to *go there*, he tells him to *dwell there*.

What has been your experience of the leading of God in your life? Can you look back upon a Cherith or a Zarephath? What was that place like?

Has God revealed his will for you all at once or *one step at a time*? What has this looked like in your pilgrimage?

Notice the beginning of verse 10. *So he arose and went to Zarephath*. The city is probably one of the last places Elijah wanted to go, but he got up and went. What is there for us to learn about discipleship in this simple sentence?

STUDY TWO

Respond to the following. Can you think of or find other examples from the Bible?

Search the Bible from board to board, and see if strict, implicit, and instant obedience has not been the secret of the noblest lives that ever lit up the dull monotony of the world. (Meyer, p. 39)

Can you think of an example of *instant obedience* in your life that *lit up the dull monotony of the your world*.

Has God every called you to a place (geographically or spiritually) you didn't want to go? Has he compelled you to *stay there*? What was the experience like?

One of the great lessons of this section of Scripture is that God cares for all people! Sidon is outside of Israel. It is in Gentile territory and God sends his prophet there. Elijah will be a blessing to the people of Sidon because God's love extends even to Baal worshippers. In fact, as Jesus was just beginning his ministry, he references this chapter of the Bible seeing it as a model for his own ministry.

Read Luke 4:16-26 and note this story in the last three verses. What do we learn about the heart of God from the lips of Jesus?

How should Luke 4 and 1 Kings 17 inform our goals as a church community?

STUDY TWO

The Widow

I have commanded a widow there to feed you. (v. 9)

On the one hand we should be surprised that Yahweh sends Elijah to Zarephath. On the other hand, we should be even more shocked when we learn Elijah is sent to minister to a widow. Think about it. The prophet is called to Sidon (a morally miserable place), to Gentile territory (people thought to be outside the blessing of God), and to a widow (the lowliest of the social strata). Not only that, the widow is to care for Elijah before he cares for her. He must receive before he gives.

Observe that once more God sent Elijah not to a river but a 'brook'—not to some wealthy person with great resources, but to a poor widow with scanty means. Ah, the Lord would have His servants remain a pensioner upon Himself and as much dependent on *His* power and goodness as before. (Pink, p. 55)

Read verses 8-16 again. What details does the author provide to show the depth of the widow's poverty?

To our 21st century ears (eyes?), this passage seems strange. A poor widow, on death's door, feeds Elijah before she herself is fed. This is a radical example of Middle Eastern hospitality. Guests were to be fed even if you or your family members did without.

The widow complies with Elijah's request. She offers him her best. Consider and respond to Ryken.

This woman gave her first and her best for the Lord's work. She took steps of faith that the Lord required, first feeding the Lord's prophet and then making something for herself and her son. The widow could do this only if she trusted God to provide. When she staked her life on God's promise, God did not disappoint her. Her faith was secure in his salvation: it always comes to those who trust in God. (Ryken, p. 453)

STUDY TWO

Notice Elijah as God's spokesman. Compare verse 14 with verse 16. What is the specific promise Elijah makes to the widow? What is the widow's response? What should we learn from her response?

What are some of God's specific promises to us? Share with your homegroup some ways you have leaned on and trusted those promises.

How have you been encouraged by this portion of Elijah's story? In what areas do you hope to grow in following God's leading, or relying on his promises?

As a homegroup share your hopes for growth in these areas, and discuss how you might encourage and help one another along the way.

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 17:8-16

- Praise God that He uses little to accomplish much! He uses, among other things, the simple obedience of Elijah (1 Kings 17:10), the meager offerings of widows (1 Kings 17:12; Luke 21:2-4), the preaching of uneducated common men (Acts 4:13), and the mustard seed faith of ordinary believers (Luke 17:6) to advance His kingdom. Remember some specific ways He has done this through history.
- Ponder the widow's willingness to feed Elijah first and meet her own needs second. Consider our own giving habits—do we *take care of ourselves* first, or seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Confess our own tight-fistedness and lack of faith. Ask God to make us generous givers, and to supply all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

STUDY TWO

- Pray for *instant obedience* in the lives of your homegroup members. Pray that each of you would go where God calls you to go.
- Pray that just as Elijah went into non-Jewish territory to bring hope to a widow, the church would be faithful to bring the gospel to the nations. Pray that our missionaries would have the beautiful feet of those who bring good news (Romans 10:15)!

STUDY THREE

1 KINGS 17:17-24

DEATH, PRAYER AND RESURRECTION HOPE

Philosophers and theologians of high rank, middle-class business women and men, laborers, prisoners, surfers, husbands, wives, the unmarried, both young and old, all grapple with the problem of death. Death has been called the Grim Reaper, who respects no person, and who always has the last word. As playwright August Strindberg famously said, *Death doesn't bargain*.



At the heart of the Christian story is the hope for this Grim Reaper to be once and finally defeated, the hope that death will not have the last word, that each of us will be raised to life even after we die. This Old Testament record from the life of Elijah gives us a foretaste of what is to come in the promised Messiah.

Read 1 Kings 17:8-24, giving special attention to verses 17-24. What stands out in the dialogue between Elijah and the widow? What questions do you have of this passage? What confuses you? What speaks to you?

Because we are separated from Elijah by almost three thousand years, by culture, custom, and language, we are sure to miss much of what is going on in this brief story. The writer of 1 Kings is showing us, again, that Yahweh is God, and Baal is a worthless idol. As Raymond Dillard points out, Baal was not only the god of rain, Baal was thought to be the giver and sustainer of life itself.

The Canaanites, in their mythology, often portrayed warfare among the gods. At the end of the growing season each year, the God Mot (“death”) defeated Baal, and Baal descended into the netherworld, where he stayed throughout the dry season. But in the fall, Baal, with the help of his consort, Anat, was victorious and returned from the realm of the dead to bring the life-giving showers for the growing season. Baal was the source of life, and he was annually triumphant over the grave. (Dillard, pp. 29-30)

STUDY THREE

Here, in the midst of a severe three-and-a-half year drought we find a picture of the living God doing something Baal could never do! He raises the dead to life. God gives hope in the midst of death.

The focus of most who look at this passage is on what is going on in this poor widow's soul. Think, though, about the prophet himself. What do you think happened to the faith of Elijah when this boy died? How and why might Elijah's faith have been tested in this death? Have you had a similar test in your life? Explain.

17:18 Clearly the widow's resolve, and any faith that might have been developing in her soul as she came to know Elijah, and hear of his God, is severely shaken. This mother's loss cannot be overestimated. As Ryken puts it, *She lost her closest companion, her only family member, and almost all security for old age.* (Ryken, p. 458) Or, as Pink comments, *In him all her affections were centered, and with his death all her hopes were destroyed.* (Pink, p. 79) Certainly this story points us forward to the one who will come and destroy death completely and finally.

We will come back to this below, but look carefully. What does the widow say to Elijah when her son dies?

Dillard draws a parallel between the weather before a hurricane (often pleasant) and the life of faith. The widow enjoys the *never-empty jars of oil and flour*, but that was the calm before the storm. Such was the pattern in the lives of Abraham (Isaac is born before Abraham's faith is tested), Job (he is wealthy and enjoys a large family before his faith is tested) and Elijah himself (as we will see in the coming weeks). (Dillard, p. 29)

Can you describe a time, or times, you have experienced this *calm before the storm* in your Christian journey? What kept you on the journey of faith during the storm?

STUDY THREE

Read verse 18 again. What do you make of the widow's charge to Elijah? She has a particular world view. How does she interpret the death of her son? What is *right* and what is *not right* about her understanding of her son's death?

Respond to the following quotation. How have you seen both the smile and the frown of God's providence play out in your life?

Even when we have the clearest manifestations of God's good will—as this woman had in the presence of Elijah under her roof and the daily miracle of sustenance—we must be prepared for the frowns of Providence. We ought not to be staggered if we meet with sharp afflictions while we are treading the path of duty. Did not Joseph do so again and again? Did not Daniel? Above all, did not the Redeemer Himself?—so too with His apostles. 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you,' I Peter 4.12. (Pink, p. 79)¹

Ultimately this short passage in 1Kings is about the power of God over death. It is a passage that points us to resurrection hope and to the God who gives us that hope. But we would be remiss if we didn't learn from Elijah's persistent prayer life. In the midst of this widow's tragedy, Elijah prays, and he prays a bold prayer. He must have been prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit. Are our prayers, as believers in the 21st century bold enough? Do we pray big enough prayers when we come to God? Consider the following:

Ours is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God: to Him therefore let us have recourse whatever our distress. Hopeless as our case may be to all human help, yet nothing is too hard for the Lord. He is able to do far more exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. (Pink, p. 90)

¹ Let those more familiar with the Bible in your homegroup explain this quotation a bit to those newer to the world of the Bible. Define *providence*, review the lives of Joseph and Daniel, etc.

STUDY THREE

Consider several New Testament references that teach us how to pray. Discuss these in your homegroup. How should these verses inform how we pray?

James 1:5-8

1 Peter 3:12

1 John 5:14

A. W. Pink draws seven lessons from Elijah's prayer¹. Read, think through, and respond to these lessons:

First, Elijah's retiring to his own private chamber, that he might be alone with God.

Second, his fervency: he 'cried unto the Lord' —no mere lip-service was this.

Third, his reliance upon his own personal interest in the Lord, avowing his covenant relationship: 'O Lord, my God.'

Fourth, his encouraging himself in God's attributes: here, the Divine sovereignty and supremacy —'hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow.'

Fifth, his earnestness and importunity: evidenced by his 'stretching himself upon the child' no less than three times.

Sixth, his appeal to God's tender mercy: 'the widow with whom I sojourn.'

Finally, the definiteness of his petition: 'Let this child's soul come into him again.'
(Pink, pp. 89-90)

Read through these seven lessons again. Which of these lessons have you have experienced or practiced? Which would you like to experience or learn?

¹ Pink is using the *King James Version* as he interacts with this event.

STUDY THREE

Take time to pray for one another in these areas.

1 Kings 17:17-24 is only seven verses long, yet this small section of Scripture looks forward in anticipation to God's plan of salvation. Notice how Jesus mimics Elijah in his own ministry. Read Luke 7:11-17 carefully. Notice the parallels in the two stories: both have broken-hearted widows at their center, both have lost their only son, both are desperate, both witnessed the raising of their son from the dead, and both produced faith in the messenger.

Jesus mimics not only the role of Elijah as the miracle worker, he also plays the role of the son who dies. Hebrews 2:9 says, that Jesus *tasted death for everyone*. But in dying Jesus breaks the power of death itself.

Yahweh created humankind to live forever but by choosing sin and disobedience Adam subjected all creation to the pall of death (Romans 5:12). The story of the Bible is the story of God's love that conquers death. But God overcomes death by paying its penalty himself.

The God of Israel had introduced both life and death into the world (Genesis 3:3), and neither was beyond his control. So the prophet Elijah took the dead child to an upper room to cry out to God on his behalf. Is it not ironic that it was in another upper room, while Jesus was preparing the disciples for his own imminent death, that he taught them, "I am the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6)? Jesus called his friend Lazarus from the grave, and he taught those who saw it, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25). (Dillard, p. 31)

Spend time as a homegroup thanking and worshipping Jesus for this fathomless gift of life!

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 17:17-24

- Praise the God who is Lord of life and death. Praise Jesus who is the *Resurrection and the Life*. Praise God that He grieves death and suffering (as Jesus did at the death of Lazarus in John 11:35), and that He will ultimately prevail over it (1 Corinthians 15:55).
- Confess any ways you feel disappointment with God. Perhaps you can relate to the bitterness of the widow, who saw God as against her. Confess your perplexity, bitterness, or grief. If you don't feel this way, lay before God the disappointment of others locally and/or globally.

STUDY THREE

- Pray earnestly for God to raise the dead and heal the sick. Pray for both spiritual and physical healing. Ask God to demonstrate His power in this age, as a foretaste of His ultimate triumph in the age to come. Consider repeating 1 Corinthians 15:55 as a litany:

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

STUDY FOUR

1 KINGS 18:1-40

THE GOD WHO ANSWERS BY FIRE



1 Kings 18 is one of the most exciting and often told stories in the Bible. It begins with the words *after many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah...*

Evidently the physical drought was paralleled with a drought in the Yahweh's communication with the prophet. It seems God had been silent even as Elijah had been faithful.

With 18:1 we come full circle from 17:3. There God told Elijah to depart from evil King Ahab and now God tells Elijah to go show himself to King Ahab and, by implication, his wicked wife Jezebel.

We could outline the chapter as follows:

- 18:1-15 Elijah and Obadiah Prepare to meet Ahab
- 18:16-40 Yahweh vs. Baal
- 18:41-46 Yahweh Sends Rain

With the above in mind, read 1 Kings 18. Make note of anything which stands out, or is confusing, offensive, or comforting. What questions do you have as you read this passage?

STUDY FOUR

18:1-15 introduce us to Obadiah. (This is probably not the same person after whom a book of the Bible is named.) What kind of reviews would we give Obadiah? On the one hand, he *feared the Lord* (v. 3), but on the other hand, Obadiah seems to sail a little too close to the wind. He serves as the manager of Ahab's household. When Elijah asks Obadiah to inform the King of his arrival (v. 8), Obadiah appears to cower in fear.

Raymond Dillard explains that the purpose of this section is to show the contrast between the wickedness of Ahab and the righteousness of Obadiah and Elijah.

Before the writer of Kings reports the confrontation of Elijah with Ahab and the prophets of Baal and Asherah, he includes one other story in order to show how bad the famine had become and to further characterize the protagonists. (Dillard, p. 37)

In the ancient Near East, kingship was often described in terms of a shepherd caring for his sheep. The setting of this passage is the third year of a drought. The people are starving.

What, or whom, does Obadiah care for? What, or whom, does King Ahab care for? Obadiah *feared the Lord greatly...*(v. 3). How does this shape his concerns? What can we learn in this section of 1 Kings?

The God Who Answers by Fire (18:16-40)

Now for the *good part*. Verses 16-40 contain one of the classic confrontations in all the Bible. Yahweh vs. Baal. Elijah vs. 850 false prophets! Though vastly outnumbered, the contest is not even close. Yahweh, as we will see, answers the challenge with fire from heaven.

The Troubler of Israel (18:17-19)

The land has suffered a severe drought and King Ahab blames Elijah. The word used by the king means *to trouble, to bring calamity*. Turn the verb into a noun and it means *snake, viper, adder*. In what way might Ahab be correct? How did Elijah *trouble* Israel?

STUDY FOUR

What is Elijah's response to Ahab's charge?

18:19 This verse contains much that we might miss. Mount Carmel is one of the hills above the plain of Jezreel and rises about 1,800 feet overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. In Elijah's time, Mount Carmel is on the southern part of Phoenicia. Baal worship took place on the highest mountain available, which is a center for Baal worship. In other words, Baal has every advantage in this contest with Yahweh.

Dillard adds yet another historical detail of interest:

In the art of ancient Syria, Baal was depicted holding a lightning bolt in his right hand; since he was the god of the storm, he should have easily been able to send a flash of lightening to ignite a sacrifice presented by his devotees. (Dillard, p. 44)

18:26-29 How do the people attempt to entice Baal to send fire from heaven?

Notice the taunts of Elijah in verse 27. Examine various translations. Some are quite polite. Compare the ESV with the NIV.

1 Kings 18:29 reads, *No one answered; no one paid attention.* This is Elijah's real indictment of Baalism and idol worship. The gods are silent. Yahweh hears and responds.

Read Psalm 115:1-8. How does this Psalm speak to you regarding the false-gods you may be tempted to worship?

STUDY FOUR

Limping Between Opinions (18:21)

Evidently the people want to have it both ways. They want to worship Yahweh and Baal. They want the God of the Bible and the gods of the area. Compare Elijah's question in various translations. They render the verb differently: *How long will you hesitate...? How long will you waver...?*

What is the people's response to Elijah's question?

Respond to the following quotations:

The easiest thing to do at the hour of decision is to remain uncommitted. Just linger in the neutral zone. And that's what they did. They were silent. (Swindoll, pp. 77-78)

There is no room for double-mindedness here, no room to waver or doubt—not for Elijah, not for Israel, and not for you and me. They had been praying for rain and fire, but, as James would later warn, “a double-minded man” “should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:7-8) No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). (Dillard, pp. 45-46)

Was there a time you could have been described as uncommitted or double-minded with regard to your relation to God? How did you move through this double-mindedness?

The Prophet Who Prays (18:30-37)

Read this section again. What details stand out in this ritual relative to the way the prophets of Baal and Asherah sought fire from their god?

STUDY FOUR

How should, Elijah's prayer inform the way we pray? Notice especially verse 37. How can, and should we pray similar prayers as a church? Give some examples.

Consider and respond to the quotation below:

Elijah's prayer was a simple one, but it was a prayer of *faith*. There was no pleading or screaming. No shouting. No frenzied cultic dance. No empty repetition of the same words uttered for hours. Just a plainly spoken request that God would prove to all that He, alone, is Lord. (Swindoll, p. 83)

The God Who Answers by Fire (18:38-39)

The fire of Yahweh precedes his healing rain (vv. 41-46). What happens to the people who had been *limping between opinions* when they see the fire and feel its heat? What was their reaction?

What kind of fire did you see that melted your heart and compelled you to worship the living God? Share a word of your testimony with your homegroup.

1 Kings 18:40 is troubling to many. It seems harsh to our modern sensibilities to find Elijah slaughtering, depending on how one reads the passage, either 450 or 850 false prophets. We might want to *witness* to these false prophets or invite them to church. Dillard is helpful...

STUDY FOUR

Keep in mind... that Elijah's battle points us toward the final conflict with evil. In the new Israel there is no place for idolatry (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5; Revelations 21:8; 22:14-15). The utter defeat of evil—of all that sets itself up against God—is part of the goal of history. Elijah had but a foretaste. There remains “a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27). We live with the hope of someday seeing every knee bowed and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). (Dillard, p. 47)

If the above is true, and it is, think of the *little idols* in your life that you need to purge from your heart. Talk about these false gods, confess your attraction to them, renounce them and worship the living God!

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 18:1-40

- Acknowledge the God of Elijah, and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the one true God. Praise Him for the ways that He has demonstrated His power in this passage and through the ages.
- Confess our tendency to idolatry. Confess also our tendency to privatize the truth—to see Jesus as right for me but not the next guy—or to gravitate toward pluralism in which many roads lead to God. Contrast this with Elijah's bold proclamation that the Lord and Baal cannot both be the one true God (1 Kings 18:21)! Confess for the church at large and ask God to purify us.
- Pray for one another by name, that you may have the boldness of Elijah, even when outnumbered by those who do not believe (1 Kings 18:22).
- Pray for God to send down fire from heaven and demonstrate His glory in our day! Pray for revival locally and abroad. Pray for those who do not believe to see His glory and embrace Him. Consider saying aloud together the prayer in Habakkuk 3:2:

Lord, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.

STUDY FIVE

1 KINGS 18:36-46¹

PRAYER AND RAIN



Did you know that the drought endured by Elijah, Ahab, the people of Israel, and the Canaanites was predicted by Moses some 750 years earlier? Shortly before his death, Moses prophesies that the nation of Israel would one day forsake Yahweh and drought would be the consequence. Moses is just about to send the people of Israel into the land of promise after 40 years when he says,

Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

Furthermore, did you know that prayer played a huge part in ending the drought? In Study 1, we saw how James connects the prayer life of Elijah to both the drought and the rain (James 5:17-18). At the outset, review these verses in the letter of James. Then read 1 Kings 18:36-46 and, before looking further in this study, see what lessons you learn about prayer from these 11 verses. Make note of any questions which arise as you read.

Questions

Lessons on Prayer

¹ Yes, you read it right... In this week's study we are going to loop back and re-examine part of the passage we looked at last week. Much of this study is indebted to Philip Ryken (pp. 504-515).

STUDY FIVE

Ryken gives us an illustration of the value of Elijah as a man of prayer. He opens a chapter on this section of Scripture with the sentence, *Elijah was like the firekeeper in the longhouse* (Ryken, p. 504). He then explains that for many Native American tribes, the center of life was lived in what was called a *longhouse*. There the people would eat, sleep, play and conduct business. Every tribe had a *firekeeper* whose job it was to keep the fire going at all costs. It was imperative for tribal life and survival that the fire never went out.

...Elijah was like the firekeeper in the longhouse. When the tribes of Israel wandered in the spiritual wilderness, Elijah stayed at home and blew on the embers of biblical faith. When the prophets of Baal tried to stamp out worship of the one true God, Elijah did not allow faith in the Lord God to be extinguished. He was the keeper of the flame for the people of Israel. (Ryken, p. 504)

And just how did Elijah keep the flame alive? Primarily through prayer. Elijah was a man of prayer, a man from whom we have much to learn. How did this prophet of God pray? Let's ponder five lessons on prayer we can glean from Elijah's prayer life.

Elijah prayed in the name of Jesus

Of course Elijah didn't know the name of Jesus, but, in a sense, this prophet prayed in the name of the one who was to come.

What does the prophet say in 18:24? *The God who answers by fire, he is God*. Of course, after a three-year drought, fire is not what the people had in mind. But atonement needed to be made for the people's sins before the rain would fall. Elijah takes a bull up on Mount Carmel and when God immolates the bull (v. 38), a sacrifice of sorts is made for the people's sin. Again, Ryken,

Elijah knew something about the holiness of God. He knew that God's people cannot come into his holy presence (and live) without a sacrifice for sin. He knew that there was no sense asking for rain before they received the fire to consume their sacrifice. Only then could he pray on the basis of a sacrifice for sin. (Ryken, p. 507)

When we pray and end our prayers, *In the name of Jesus, amen!*, we are really claiming the one and final sacrifice offered to God for the forgiveness of sin. We are saying, *Lord, because Jesus died for our sins we can come to you assured that you will not consume us, assured that you will hear our prayers*. We can pray because Jesus has made it possible for us to enter in to the presence of God. With Elijah, we can pray to the God who has atoned for our sins.

STUDY FIVE

Compare Hebrews 10:19-25. How could this passage give shape to your prayers?

Elijah Prayed To The Right God

Re-read verse 36. How does Elijah begin his prayer? How does beginning in this way shape the rest of the prophet's prayer?

How would beginning your prayers in this way give shape to your prayers?

What difference does it make how we address God in prayer?

When you pray, do you address the various members of the Trinity? Examine the Apostle Paul's classic prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19. Here we have a fantastic model of prayer. Notice how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in this prayer.

Elijah Had A Place And A Posture For Prayer

Notice verses 41-42. Where does the prophet pray? What is his posture in prayer?

STUDY FIVE

Where do you pray? What posture(s) do you use in prayer? How is your prayer experience affected by the posture you assume?

Respond to the following:

Never underestimate the place of prayer....I'm convinced that one of the reasons we are so lax in prayer is that we have never prepared a place to meet with God. When you want to draw near to the heart of God, you have to get away from the din, away from the confusion, away from the noise and distractions. (Swindoll, p. 102)

Often times we hear people say, *I pray when I jog*, or, *I pray while I drive to work*. What is your experience of what might be called *multi-tasking prayer*. Can these be legitimate times and places for prayer? Explain.

Share with your homegroup your own habits of prayer and how they came to be. If you feel like you are not growing towards a more mature place in your prayer life, tell your homegroup some habits you would like to cultivate. Be specific.

Elijah Prayed For God's Glory

Notice verses 36-37. Elijah, we will see, will soon pray specifically for rain, but first he prays for glory. He prays that Yahweh may be known. He prays a huge prayer for glory before he prays a smaller prayer for rain.

STUDY FIVE

Look at verses 36-37. Specifically what does Elijah ask for?

In SBCC, we have called these kind of prayers *extraordinary prayers*¹. Extraordinary prayers are prayers that go beyond our *ordinary* and very necessary prayers. *Ordinary* prayers are those prayers we offer to God for health, wholeness, and happiness. *Extraordinary prayers* are those prayers we offer to God asking for renewal and revival. These are prayers that center in on God, his glory and his kingdom. Our Tuesday morning prayer gathering has, for over a decade, focused on *extraordinary prayer*. Periodically throughout the year we have whole days of *extraordinary prayer*. Hopefully our homegroups spend time, each week, praying such prayers.

John Piper rightly sees prayer as central to the mission of the church.

Prayer proves the supremacy of God.... This is why God has ordained prayer to have such a crucial place in the mission of the church. The purpose of prayer is to make clear to all the participants in this war that the victory belongs to the Lord. Prayer is God's appointed means of bringing grace to us and glory to himself.²

Think about your own prayer life. What might help you pray more *extraordinary prayers*? Pray with and for one another about praying. Pray that you will learn to pray.

Elijah Prayed Expectantly

Re-read verses 41-46. Notice what Olley calls praying with *the ears of faith*. (Olley, p. 177)

Elijah goes up *to the top of Carmel*, higher than the location of the altars. His *bent* position suggests intense prayer as he looks eagerly for a sign of rain. Seven times he sends his servant before the smallest glimmer of a sign of rain, a cloud coming from the sea (cf. Luke 12:54), but that is enough for Elijah. Soon comes a torrential downpour. (Olley, p. 177)

1 The term *extraordinary prayer* comes from the 18th century pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. In 1735, he wrote a book with the title, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union Among God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion, and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time*.

2 From *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 1993, p. 55.

STUDY FIVE

What helps you pray with the *ears of faith*, and *the eyes of faith*? Elijah lived and prayed expectantly. We should, and can, do no less.

The words of James, again, form a fitting bridge between this study about prayer, and praying itself. Spend time practicing praying together as Elijah prayed.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (James 5:13-18)

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 18:36-46

- Consider beginning your prayer on your knees and repeating 1 Kings 18:39b: *The Lord, he is God; the Lord He is God.* Flesh out this statement by proclaiming who God is in various ways. Consider repeating 1 Kings 18:39b as a litany, as you proclaim God's identity and character.
- Ponder the hard teaching of verse 40, a startling demonstration that those who cling to worthless idols forfeit that grace that could be theirs (Jonah 2:8). Confess your own idols. Pray for friends and family to meet the one true God, and experience His grace instead of judgment.
- Pray for spiritual and physical rain, locally and abroad, just as Elijah's prayer brought rain (18:41-46). Pray revival for the physically and spiritually impoverished places where our missionaries serve. Consider the words of Acts 4:19:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

STUDY SIX

1 KINGS 18:46—19:8

SITTING UNDER THE BROOM TREE

In our first study we learned that Elijah *is a man just like us*, and perhaps by now we don't believe it. Think about this prophet of God. Think of all he has done, how he endured trials and deprivations, and think of how God used him so mightily. To this point in 1 Kings we have seen Elijah's:

Boldness: The man of God challenged King Ahab's idolatry and told him of a coming drought which was punishment for the King's idolatry (17:1).

Obedience: The prophet obeyed God's voice and went to Cherith and sat by a drying brook (17:2-6).

Faith: He goes to Zarephath and is used by God in the miracle of feeding a widow and her son and in raising the son from death to life (17:8-24).

Courage: Elijah confronts Ahab as the problem king of Israel (17:17-18).

Worship: *He offered the proper sacrifice, on a proper altar, at the proper time of day, to the proper God (18:30-36).* (Ryken, p. 517)



As our section opens (18:46), we even find that humility could be added to this list above. After Yahweh sends rain, Elijah runs 18 miles from Mount Carmel to Jezreel ahead of the chariot that carries King Ahab. We might think of this as an example of athletic prowess, but it was a sign of humility. By running ahead of the king's horses and chariots, Elijah was taking the posture of a servant or a slave.

After all of the above, we might think Elijah is most *unlike us*! Chapter 19 shows us the other side of this prophet. We find this towering figure in both the Old Testament and the New Testament has, after all, feet of clay, *just like us*.

STUDY SIX

Read 1 Kings 18:46—19:21. (We will cover this section over the next two studies.) What stands out as you read? Who are the main characters in this chapter? What is confusing? What is comforting?

19:1-3 What happens when Ahab arrives in Jezreel? What is Jezebel's message to Elijah?

19:3 When Elijah runs from Jezreel to Beersheba, he is running from north to south in Israel and he covers a distance of about 120 miles. This is about a six day journey!

19:4 Beersheba is on the edge of the desert, a virtually uninhabitable wilderness. Elijah goes one day farther into the wilderness from Beersheba and finds himself under a *broom tree*, or a *juniper tree*. Here we find an extreme mood swing in Elijah. Remember this is the prophet who had just called down fire from heaven and who had slain the prophets of Baal. Now we find him sinking into a deep depression. In fact, it is not too much to say that Elijah has suicidal thoughts. He asks Yahweh that he might die.

Elijah is depressed and the causes must be many. Various commentators, (Swindoll, Dillard, Ryken, Olley, etc.), ponder what must have contributed to Elijah's spiritual depression. What follows is a composite list and paraphrase of what these and other commentators suggest. Consider these and reflect on your own life. What kind of spiritual mood swings do you experience? How does the following list help you understand your own bouts of depression?

Fatigue: Elijah has been in the business of *prophet* for over three years without a break. Recently he has turned into an ultra-marathon runner. His warm-up was an 18-mile run to Jezreel. Then another 120-mile run to Beersheba.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the greatest English speaking preachers of the twentieth century, wrote a book called *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*. The former medical doctor wrote about the physical and spiritual components of depression. As a pastor, Lloyd-Jones noticed that some people who came to him for counsel were simply tired.

STUDY SIX

[There are some] ... in whose case it seems quite clear to me that the cause of the trouble is mainly physical. Into this group, speaking generally, you can put tiredness, overstrain, illness, any form of illness. You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit. The greatest and best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time...¹

A Greek proverb states, *You will break the bow if you keep it always bent*. Elijah has been *bent* for too long, he is tired, and tired is the companion of depression.

What has been your experience of fatigue and spiritual depression, or simply being *down*, *blue*, *low* or *bumped out*—basically exhaustion that has taken a physical and spiritual toll?

Separation: Notice Elijah is alone by the time he gets to the broom tree. Swindoll writes,

Discouraged people are lonely people. A juniper tree deep in the wilderness has room for only one underneath it. Beneath the barren branches of discouragement and loneliness there is little shade. (Swindoll, p. 114)

How have you seen *separation*, or *loneliness* contribute to your mood swings? How has this affected how you are spiritually?

A Swing From Greatness: Elijah just witnessed one of the most dramatic acts in history. God sent fire from heaven and then sent a flood after a three-year drought! His was the ultimate post-revival slump. Again, Lloyd-Jones:

Another frequent cause of spiritual depression is what we may describe as a reaction—a reaction after great blessing, a reaction after some unusual and exceptional experience. [Such was the case with Elijah under the juniper tree.]... there is no doubt in my mind that his main trouble was that he was suffering from a reaction...to what happened. (Lloyd-Jones, p. 19)

¹ *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 1965, p. 19.

STUDY SIX

Have you ever experienced a *spiritual depression* after a particularly great moment of worship? Or after a deep time of devotion and renewed commitment to the Lord? Or possibly after being part of leading or helping with a ministry, or service, that was exciting, and appeared to go well? What was this like?

Unfilled Expectations: Elijah went to Jezreel, perhaps thinking, *Finally! Now Ahab, his wife Jezebel and the whole nation will repent. After what God did on Mount Carmel, and after my show of humility by running ahead of the king's chariot... this must be the time for revival in Israel.* Instead the prophet finds himself running the distance race of his life, for his life!

Again, share from your own life your experience of how *unfulfilled expectations* have affected you spiritually.

Fear: Elijah doesn't know how this will turn out. He is still running for his life when he sits under the broom tree.

How do your fears play into your Christian life?

Pride: Notice the second half of 1 Kings 19:4, *...for I am no better than my fathers.* Elijah was, indeed, a very special man and remains so in the history of redemption. But, as James writes, he was a man with a *nature like ours.* Elijah seems to be infected with the pride that haunts us all—the notion that we are somehow special and have risen above the crowd.

What thoughts do you have on your own pride with regard to your Christian growth?

STUDY SIX

Think through this list above as a whole. Which of these six potential causes are you most prone toward? Which of these is most likely to sink you into something of a spiritual depression? Share with one another in your homegroup and pray for one another.

19:5-8 What does God do for Elijah as he languishes under the broom tree? What gifts does God give his prophet to revive his spirit? How have you experienced these gifts in your own life?

Before concluding this study we need to ponder one more quotation from Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

I say that we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing 'ourselves' to talk to us! Do you realize what this means? I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self.... Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?...

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why are you cast down'—what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God'—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. (Lloyd-Jones, pp. 20-21)

Have you ever tried this? How can you *preach the gospel to yourself*? How has this been helpful? Or, how might it be helpful if you began this practice?

STUDY SIX

Write yourself two or three sentences of encouragement that you can share with yourself. You may want to put them on a separate piece of paper, or on your screen saver where you see them daily, and read them to yourself! Share these with your homegroup and pray them for one another.

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 19:1-8

- Thank God that He is present in the midst of our weakness. Praise Him for the Scriptures that show us that even His most Spirit-filled servants experience fear, discouragement, and weariness. Consider reading aloud Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:9, or David's words in Psalm 13:1-4.
- Tell God and each other where you are weary or discouraged! Consider holding before Him the discouragement of others.
- Pray for each other that God would revive you like He revived Elijah. Ask Him to give you real food to eat, so that you, like Elijah, would *run and not grow weary* (Isaiah 40:31).
- Pray for God to send ministering angels to discouraged and suffering believers around the world. Pray for them to be *strengthened with power through God's Spirit in their inner beings* (Ephesians 3:16).



STUDY SEVEN

1 KINGS 19:9-21

LIVING IN A CAVE

Some of us might be tempted to think that depression, or spiritual depression, is something that can be cured with a good night's sleep after a nutritious meal and a little exercise.... Or we might be tempted to think that those who are spiritually mature could and would conquer depression in short order. The example and experience of Elijah tells us this is not the case.

Is it surprising to find that this great man of God was still depressed? It shouldn't be. Spiritual depression is hard to shake. It is not a twenty-four hour virus. Getting over it takes more than a pastor saying, "Take two Bible verses and call me in the morning." Even the godliest of the godly can become so discouraged that it takes months or even years to return to useful service for the Lord. (Ryken, p. 530)



Read again 1 Kings 19. Recall the geographical distances we saw in our last study. What stands out as you read this passage for the second or third time?

19:9 *What are you doing here Elijah? Where is here?* Elijah is, literally, in the back of a cave. He is sitting in the dark, apparently still deep in his spiritual depression.

What do you think the intonation of God's voice conveyed in this question? Is it a sincere question? A gentle question? A harsh question?¹ Is it a question meant to teach Elijah? Have you ever sensed God asking you a similar question? What was his intonation with you?

¹ Commentators disagree on the meaning of this question. Charles Swindoll, for example, sees it as a simple question meant to encourage Elijah (Swindoll, p. 118). Philip Ryken, on the other hand sees it as a harsh question meant to rebuke Elijah (Ryken, p. 532).

STUDY SEVEN

Again, Elijah was living in a cave when God asked him this question. Where were you when God asked *Where are you?*

19:10 contains what is likely a well-rehearsed speech Elijah has been yearning to make to God. It has been forty days since *the angel of the Lord* appeared to this prophet (19:7-8) and Elijah has had something of a pity-party and now he is going to give God a piece of his mind. Notice, he repeats the speech, word-for-word, a second time in verse 14.

What is at the heart of Elijah's speech to Yahweh? What is the center of Elijah's complaint?

What part of Elijah's speech is simply untrue? See verse 18 along with 18:3-4,39.

Ryken sees that Elijah's speech is a consequence of his self-righteousness. Respond to the following.

By mentioning his zeal to the Lord, Elijah was asking for special treatment. Apparently Elijah thought that God owed him something for his service. He thought he deserved better. Sometimes we are tempted to have the same attitude, insisting that we ought to be exempt from the flu, or car trouble, or corporate downsizing, or whatever troubles we may have. Self-righteousness feeds spiritual depression by making claims on God that will only add to our bitterness when he fails to meet our outrageous demands. (Ryken, p. 533)

Think of a time when you had your own version of Elijah's complaint. How did God respond? What was his answer? If appropriate, share this with your homegroup.

STUDY SEVEN

19:11-13 Now notice what Yahweh says to the prophet. *Go out and stand before the Lord.* God invites Elijah out of his dark place and then all sorts of things happen. Make a list of all that happens in verses 11-13.

What does Elijah do when told to get up and leave his cave?

19:11-12 Much has been made of these verses. Apparently Elijah is moved not by two dramatic demonstrations of God's power, but by the *low whisper* of God. The rendering of verse 12 in the King James Version is virtually immortal. God speaks with a *still small voice*. God is revealed not only in the fire and earthquakes but in his word. Yahweh is the God who speaks.

What has your experience of God's *still small voice* been since coming to faith in Jesus? In what ways does God *whisper* to you?

How can spiritual depression inhibit our abilities to hear God's voice? What can we do if we find ourselves, even right now, in a place where it is hard to hear? How can we help friends who are struggling to hear?

STUDY SEVEN

How does the life and ministry of Jesus exemplify the *still small voice* of God? Compare the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30.

19:15-18 shows Yahweh's sovereignty over the future. Elijah, the doubting prophet, will soon journey back in the direction from which he came. He will anoint both the next Syrian king and the next king of Israel. He will also anoint Elisha, his prophetic successor. We see the fulfillment of these things in 2 Kings 8:7-15, 2 Kings 9-10, especially 2 Kings 10:32-33.

How should these instructions to Elijah have been an encouragement to the prophet?

19:19-21 As Elijah comes out of his cave, God gives him a friend. Elijah comes out and finds a friendship with a like-minded and similarly-gifted person.

God has not designed us to live like hermits in a cave. He has designed us to live in friendship and fellowship and community with others. That's why the church, the body of Christ, is so very important, for it is there that we are drawn together in love and mutual encouragement. We are meant to be a part of one another's lives. (Swindoll, p. 121)

When Elijah came out of his cave, God provided the fellowship of his successor Elisha, the man who would carry on Elijah's prophetic ministry (v. 16).

Again, in verse 19, the 1611 translation of the King James Bible has remained in our vocabulary. There, we read,

Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

Elijah is *passing the mantle*, he is raising up his own successor who will, in the future, take his place.

STUDY SEVEN

19:20-21 is an interesting paragraph from the perspective of something we read in Luke's Gospel. Elijah *passes the mantle* to Elisha, but the latter wants to return to bid farewell to his parents. Elijah says, *Go back for what I have done for you*. The statement is far from clear, and may mean something like, *Go back. What have I done to prevent you?*¹ Elisha is free to set his affairs in order before he follows Elijah.

In Luke 9:61, a man who wants to follow Jesus asks a very similar question. *I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home*. Then we read,

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:61)

By mentioning the plow, Jesus clearly reminds us of Elisha....

Possibly Jesus wanted to show that his kingdom comes with the demand of absolute discipleship. By alluding to Elisha, and by demanding immediate obedience, he was letting everyone know that he was greater than all the Old Testament prophets. (Ryken, p. 545)

In other words, we worship the greater Elijah who demands that we don't look back as we follow where he leads.

Hundreds of years after the events of 1 Kings 19, the apostle Paul reflects on verse 18. The seven thousand faithful people in Israel were proof to Paul that God does not abandon his promise to keep and preserve a people for himself. Read the following and rejoice. If we love Jesus we are a part of this promise!

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:1-6)

¹ This is the New English Bible's rendering. The NIV (1984) is as ambiguous as the ESV and reads, "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"

STUDY SEVEN

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 19:9-21

- Consider the gentleness of God, who speaks to us in a whisper (1 Kings 19:12-13). Spend some time being still, and knowing that *the Lord is God* (Psalm 46:10a). Break the silence, and acknowledge that God will be exalted among the nations, that He will be exalted in the earth (Psalm 46:10b).
- Acknowledge your places of weariness or depression. Lift up the names of others in the body of Christ who need refreshment from the Lord. As you do so, read aloud Matthew 11:28-30:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

- Pray for each other by name, that you may be faithful to the Lord's instructions for you (1 Kings 19:15-16). Pray that just as Elijah was to appoint a successor, you would disciple others and pass on your faith and ministry!

STUDY EIGHT

1 KINGS 21:1-29

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

There is a principle of the universe that is found, in some form, in virtually every religion—the principle of reaping and sowing. The Apostle Paul refers to this principle in his letter to the Galatian church.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8



1 Kings 21 contains a rather famous story from the Old Testament about reaping and sowing. Here we will find Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. God will not be mocked. The greed of this evil king leads to his final demise.

The story begins abruptly in verse 1. Here we meet a man named Naboth who lives in Jezreel and owns a vineyard. The key players in this story are Naboth himself, King Ahab, Ahab's wife Jezebel, *two worthless men*, and Elijah.

Read the 29 verses of this chapter, and enjoy the story as a story. Make a list of each character's actions.

Naboth

Ahab

Jezebel

Two worthless men

STUDY EIGHT

21:1-4 Why does Ahab want Naboth's vineyard? What do we learn about King Ahab in verse 4? What kind of king is he?

Think of a time when you had a similar reaction to a blocked goal. Ahab sulks on his bed. What was your reaction like?

21:3 We might miss something that is going on here. The land of Israel was God's gift to his people, but in the end it was owned by Yahweh himself.

Since the land came to Israel as the result of the redemptive act of God, the land itself belonged to God, and provision always had to be made for the redemption of the land so that it returned to the ownership of the original family (Leviticus 25:23-24). (Dillard, p. 69)

Thus, a family could lease its land for a period of time but could not sell it outright (see Leviticus 25:13-17, 25-28).

What do we learn about Naboth as he answers the King in verse 3? Should this principle of Yahweh's ownership of the land inform the way we view our property and our money? Explain.

How do you view your property, material possessions, and money?

21:5-7 Examine the interaction between the King and his wife.

F. B. Meyer sets the scene wonderfully for these verses:



STUDY EIGHT

In a room of the palace, Ahab, King of Israel, lies upon his couch, his face towards the wall, refusing to eat. What has taken place? Has disaster befallen the royal arms? Have the priests of Baal been again massacred? Is his royal consort dead? No; the soldiers are still flushed with their recent victories over Syria. The worship of Baal has quite recovered after the terrible disaster of Carmel; Jezebel—resolute, crafty, cruel, and beautiful—is now standing by his side, anxiously seeking the cause of this sadness. (Meyer, p. 135)

Does Ahab accurately reflect the dialogue he had with Naboth?

What does this passage, and the whole of 1 Kings 21, teach us about the discipleship role husbands and wives have in one another's lives? What went wrong here?

If you are married, think of some ways you could be an *un-Jezebel* to your husband or wife. Share this with your spouse, and with your homegroup if appropriate. Pray for the married couples in your group.

21:8-14 Make a list of the sins of Jezebel in this paragraph. How do you think Jezebel justified her actions in her own mind?

Think through verses 1-16. This story shows us the awful consequences of coveting what is not ours. Here the wealthy king of Israel wants another vegetable garden close to his home and his covetousness leads to murder. Read Exodus 10:17 carefully. Why might someone say that coveting is the most dangerous of all sins?

STUDY EIGHT

How can we help one another in the church to stay away from breaking the tenth commandment? Who could help you curtail covetousness as it occurs in your life, and how would they do that? What would be your part in this?

21:17-24 Raymond Dillard provides a succinct summary of what is going on here.

God is a revealer of secrets (Daniel 2:28-30). He sent Elijah to meet Ahab at the scene of the crime.... Ahab would not have time to enjoy his ill-gotten vineyard before hearing that he and Jezebel would become dog food¹ on Naboth's land (vv. 19, 23). Ahab had a foretaste of the day "when God will judge men's secrets" (Romans 2:16). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Look up the above verses along with a few more. How do these verses speak to you personally? How should they inform the way you live?

Romans 2:14-16

Hebrews 4:11-13

Psalms 94:3-7

Psalms 94:9-10

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

¹ The statement that dogs would devour a king became almost a formulaic announcement of the end of a dynasty 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:10, 36. (Dillard, p. 71)

STUDY EIGHT

21:20 Here Elijah charges the king with *selling himself* to do evil and not good. The Hebrew word used conveys the idea of *habitual, constant, activity-trafficking in wickedness*. (Swindoll, p. 136) But the same word is also used for marriage. Ahab married Jezebel, one of the most vile characters in the Old Testament, and the consequences were disastrous.

What are some examples of people in our time and place who have *sold themselves* to do evil?

21:25-29 This paragraph probably surprises us. Ahab, we learn (21:25-26), was the champion of kingly wickedness. When the author tells us Ahab sinned *as the Amorites had done*, he is telling us much. It was because of the sins of the Amorites that God gave the land to his people in the first place (see Genesis 16:12-16).

But Ahab humbles himself and repents and lives.

What do we learn of the character of God from this paragraph, and from this chapter? Compare Ezekiel 33:11, and Luke 15:7-10. How should we find ourselves in this story? Was God's judgment suspended or erased in the edict of verse 29?

By the end of this chapter we might be scratching our heads. Naboth is faithful and is murdered. Ahab is unfaithful, yet repents, and lives. What would you say to a friend who has been faithful and suffered for his or her faithfulness?

Depending on your experience of studying the Bible, think of passages that address what seems to be an unfair conclusion to this story—the faithful man is killed and the wicked king is allowed to live out the remainder of his life (consider the details carefully). Discuss this as a homegroup.

STUDY EIGHT

Regardless of your background, whether your past is more Naboth-like or Ahab-like, be thankful for God's mercy and relentless grace in your life!

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 21:1-29

- Praise the God of justice, who calls [the evil man] to account for His wickedness (Psalm 10:15).
- Confess the covetousness of Ahab in our own hearts. Consider its outcome in James 4:1-2:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

- Pray against the church divisions that result from covetousness. Pray for the unity of the Spirit in the churches of our area.
- Hold before God the injustice in our land and in the world. Ask Him to consider it and to take it in hand (Psalm 10:14). Repent of ways that the church has participated in these things. Consider things like abuse of children in churches, the abuse of power, and violation of property rights.
- Ask God to respond to evil in the world and evil in the church. Pray that He would expose sin and clean up His church. Pray that those who sin in these areas would repent even as Ahab did.

STUDY NINE

2 KINGS 1:1-18

**FALLING THROUGH THE LATTICE
(A BRIEF STUDY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION)**

At its foundation, there is always an element of irrationality in sin. Sin is not simply rebellion. It is foolish, stupid, and wrongheaded—the product of poor reasoning.

Human beings seek relief from the chaos and the vagaries of life; they strive endlessly to be masters of their own destiny to whatever degree possible. They will turn in almost any direction and pursue any religious cult or philosophical movement that promises to relieve the terror of the unknown. Sadly, like Ahaziah, they will seek almost anything but the Lord. (Dillard, p. 76)



Read 2 Kings 1:1-18. Consider the setting of this chapter. King Ahab has died and his son, Ahaziah, probably his oldest son, is now taking the king's throne. (See 1 Kings 22:29-40.)

What features of the story stand out to you as you read?

We don't know much at all about Ahaziah other than the fact that he had an unfortunate accident with a lattice. But we do know that his instinct in times of trouble was to turn to the Baal gods rather than to Yahweh. We shouldn't be surprised. His mother is Jezebel and his father King Ahab! His parents were steeped in pagan worship and this son's instinct is to follow in the footsteps of his parents.

What are your instincts in times of trouble? What messengers and voices have spoken into your life that shape your first response to trouble?

STUDY NINE

The first two groups of 50 prophets are immolated by Yahweh, completely burned by fire. What does this teach us about both sin and about God? Compare:

Deuteronomy 4:23-24

Hebrews 12:28-29

How do these verses that liken our God to a *consuming fire* speak to you personally? Deitrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred at the end of WW2, is famous for coining the phrase *cheap grace*.

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.¹

How are you tempted to subscribe to a 21st century version of cheap grace?

How do you respond personally to the teaching from last Sunday's sermon? How has sin compelled you to stupidity? What can you learn from Ahaziah's stupidity?

Respond to the following summary statement from Raymond Dillard.

The God of the Bible will not tolerate hubris. Human pride and pretentiousness draw an unremitting response of judgment and anger from God. (Dillard, p. 78)

¹ From the first chapter of *The Cost of Discipleship*, originally published in 1937.

STUDY NINE

Kneel before God in humility. Confess your sin, and any proclivity you find in yourself towards *cheap grace*. Invite God to transform your heart and mind to desire to love and obey him, and to cause your life to be changed accordingly.

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 1:1-18

- In silence, take time to ponder the fact that God is the one who gives life and takes it away. Ponder too, His power displayed in consuming the first two groups of 50 men. Let us be careful not to approach Him too casually. Revere God as holy, and acknowledge that we are a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5).
- Confess the ways that the church has given up on God in dealing with physical, psychological, and spiritual sickness, and relied instead on techniques or other worldly methods. Acknowledge Him as the only one who forgives our sins and heals our diseases (Psalm 103:3).
- Pray for the sick in the church, that they would set their hope fully on Christ. Pray for the sick who don't know Christ, that they would meet and love this Great Physician.

STUDY TEN

2 KINGS 2:1-25

PASSING THE MANTLE



In these verses, we come to the end of our prophet's earthly life. We have gone with Elijah to Cherith and endured the drought. We have seen him being refined and deepened in Zarephath as he cared for a widow and her son. We felt the heat of the fire that fell on Mount Carmel. We have heard his confrontations with King Ahab. We have seen him cower in a cave and ask that his life be taken from him. *Elijah is a man just like us...* Well, somewhat. Now he is an old man with a young friend. It is time to pass the baton of prophetic leadership.

Before going on in this study, read 2 Kings 2.

Notice the drama of the scene and the persistence of Elijah's protégé Elisha. Jot down any thoughts and questions this passage brings to mind.

The chapter can be divided into several paragraphs:

Elijah's Ascension (2:1-11)

Elisha Picks Up the Mantle (2:12-14)

The Search for Elijah (2:15-18)

Two Prophetic Acts (2:19-25)

In this study, we will focus only on verses 1-11 of this transitional chapter.

STUDY TEN

Elijah's Ascension (2:1-11)

At one level, these verses chronicle the remarkable end of the Old Testament's most honored prophet. As Charles Swindoll writes,

Heroic almost beyond belief, yet humble of heart, Elijah seemed to have reached the pinnacle of life's experiences. But now he was going to top them all: He was going to dodge death. The grim reaper's scythe would miss him altogether. (Swindoll, p. 162)

Elijah's ascension into heaven prefigures the ascension of Jesus, the greater Elijah. But we also have a vague picture of our own glorious future.

In the translation of Elijah we have both a pledge and a type of the supernatural exit from this world which every child of God experiences.... Death as the wages of sin has been abolished for the redeemed. For them physical dissolution is but the body being put to sleep: as for the soul, it is conveyed by angels into God's immediate presence, Luke 16:22, which is certainly a supernatural experience. Nor shall all God's people even 'sleep,' 1 Corinthians 15:51. That generation of them alive on the earth at the return of the Savior shall have their bodies 'changed'... Thus a supernatural exit from this world is assured to all the ransomed hosts of God. (Pink, p. 313)

At another level, however, we find in these verses a great example of the call to leadership and ministry. Elisha was chosen by Yahweh to succeed Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21). Here we find Elisha embracing the difficult life of prophetic leadership to which he had been called.

Notice the thrice repeated conversation in these verses. Elijah seems to want to get away from his younger friend and Elisha will have nothing of it. He sticks to his mentor and spiritual father like glue. Elisha says, three times, *As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you...*(vv. 2, 4, 6).

Is Elijah, even on this day, reluctant to hand over to Elisha, or is he testing Elisha's resolve?... [The answer] is best seen in the presentation of Elisha's response. The decision to continue is always his (vv. 2, 4, 6); He is ready to face whatever is involved as Elijah is taken from him (vv. 3, 5). The repetition emphasizes that Elisha 'is determined to follow his master, refusing to compromise his vow, though repeatedly challenged.' (Olley, pp. 215-216, quoting A. H. Konkle)

STUDY TEN

Ultimately, for those who call themselves believers, Jesus is our true Elijah. It is Jesus whom we follow and Jesus whom we refuse to let go. But in a secondary sense, each of us needs an earthly Elijah. Each of us needs a man or a woman in our life who serves as our mentor. Do you have such a person? Describe how this *Elijah*, has been instrumental in your Christian development.

If you do not have a mentor, or mentors, what steps can you take to find such a person? What might be the value of doing so?

As we have seen, Elisha won't let Elijah go. Think of it. Elijah is the mentor, Elisha the protégé. As we just saw above, in Christian discipleship we speak of the need for each of us to *have a mentor*. Each of us needs a *Paul*, or an *Elijah* whom we can emulate and follow. But think of the other side. Perhaps each of us needs an Elisha. This is not only because of what we can do for him or her, but because of what he or she can do for us!

We need a few Elishas in our lives don't we? They bring us strength. And they are a rare breed indeed! They're our intimate friends. They are those who are there for us, available to us—to hear us, to help us, to soften the blows of our critics, to support us in prayer, to stay in our corners, bringing us both encouragement and objectivity. (I know what I'm talking about here, having had a few of my own Elishas. As I look back, it is hard to imagine my life without them. I could not have gone on!) (Swindoll, p. 169)

Think about who the *Elishas* in your life might be. What help do they give to your Christian journey?

STUDY TEN

Elisha's Obedience to His Calling (2:9)

Elisha is determined to fulfill his prophetic calling. He asks for a *double portion* of his mentor's spirit (v. 9). This is not to imply Elisha wants to be two times as impressive as Elijah¹. Rather he is asking for the inheritance of a first-born son, a double portion. Elisha is asking only that he be equipped for his mission and calling.

A broad, general parallel to Elisha's call to be a prophet is that of our own call to ministry. The New Testament teaches that every believer is called into ministry and service (Ephesians 4:11-12). In Romans 12, Paul speaks at length of the call for every believer to use his or her spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ.

Look over Romans 12:3-8. Do you have a sense of your calling as a believer? How has God called you to serve the body of Christ?

Have you asked God to equip you for your calling? What would it mean to ask this of God? How would you know if you received this equipping?

With the above questions in mind, consider the words of F. B. Meyer as he comments on Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Oh for this spiritual hunger, insatiable for the best gifts! Men of the world hunger for name, rank, and wealth; and they get what they seek because they will take no Nay. Blessed should we be if we were as eager after the Spirit of God; and if, instead of giving up opportunities of usefulness because we did not feel qualified to fill them, we rather sought and received a new baptism of power, a fresh endowment of the Holy Spirit. (Meyer, p. 198)

Think about your own *spiritual hunger* for the *best gifts*. Are you eager to serve God in fresh and demanding ways, even if it means spending valuable time and taking risks? If not, where do you think you might find help in whetting your spiritual appetite?

¹ Nevertheless, Pink notes that *Chronologists reckon that the ministry of Elisha lasted at least twice the length of his predecessor's and apparently he wrought double the number of miracles.* (Pink, p. 311)

STUDY TEN

Clearly your calling to ministry and service was not as dramatic as Elisha's. Explain how you felt (and feel) called to serve God? Pray for one another in these areas. Pray for those in your group who may not have a sense of how God is calling them.

Geographical Significance

Notice the geography of this passage. It begins in Gilgal (2:1), the first place the nation of Israel camped after she crossed the Jordan River and came into the land of promise (Joshua 4:19). Gilgal is the place of promise, the place of anticipation.

Bethel (v. 2) is the place where Abraham built an altar (Genesis 12:8) on his journey from Ur. Beth-el means *house of God*. Again, Bethel was a place of promise and anticipation.

Next, we find Elijah and Elisha in Jericho, the place where the conquest of the land began. It was in Jericho that the people of Israel saw that Yahweh could and would deliver the Canaanites into their hands.

Think of some places, geographical places, that have significance for your Christian life. Was there a place of promise? A place of intense prayer? Was there a Jericho or a Jordan in your Christian journey? Describe these for your group. Celebrate!

Read 2 Kings 2:6-8. What is the next geographical marker in these verses? It is the Jordan River. This re-crossing of the Jordan is loaded with significance.

Elijah rolls up his cloak and strikes the water. At this instant, the water parts and Elijah and Elisha walk across on dry ground. What other Old Testament story does this bring to mind?

STUDY TEN

The Israelites crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land. Now Elijah crosses the Jordan to enter heaven itself.

As we have seen so many times in this brief study of the *Gospel According to Elijah*, there is a deeper significance to certain events than meets the eye. Dillard explains this scene of crossing the Jordan.

In ancient Canaan, the river and the sea were the rivals of Baal. Prince Sea and Judge River were his enemies. They threatened to destroy him if he could not successfully overcome them. In the Old Testament, however, the sea and the river do not threaten Yahweh; rather, he rules over them, and they do his bidding... Just as Elisha exercised dominion over the Jordan in the name of the Lord, the God of Elijah (2 Kings 2:14), so too Jesus would rule over the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the source of the Jordan (Luke 8:22-25). The wind and the waves would obey him. (Dillard, p. 86)

Let us leave these stories of the life of Elijah with confidence that the true Elijah, Jesus, who died and rose from the dead, and who exercises rule and authority over all the storms of life, is present with us today. May we live as Elijah did, in boldness, obedience, faith, courage, all to the glory of God. Amen.

PRAYING THE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 2:1-25

- Ponder the sovereignty of God in raising up Elijah in the time and place He chose, and in raising up Elisha to succeed Him according to His plan. Praise the God who ordains all the days of our lives (Psalm 139:16), and determines the exact times and places in which we live (Acts 17:26).
- Note Elisha's grief at Elijah's imminent departure (2 Kings 2:3). Consider those in our body who face the departure of loved ones. Pray for them and for others who face similar major life transitions. Pray for grace in these transitions, and for eyes to see that God is in control.
- Pray for a double portion of God's Spirit in the next generation. Pray for children and youth. Pray for new elders and new preachers, as our own preachers will not be around forever. Pray for the next generation in the places our missionaries serve. Consider ministries like the Palestinian Bible Society, the tribal churches of Venezuela and Papua, and Sports Outreach in Uganda as just a few examples.