



## The Cave

### Main Truth

The Bravehearted Way is...encountering God in the midst of our brokenness, our depression, our discouragement, our human limits, and experiencing what He desires to be to us and hearing what He may want to whisper to us in the "sound of silence."

### Passages to Study

*1 Kings 19:1-21*

*Luke 5:16*

### Background

We all love it when "the good guy wins," and by all accounts Elijah decidedly won over the prophets of Baal at the confrontation on Mt. Carmel. Fresh off this stupendous and supernatural victory of God; fresh off the fulfillment of a prophecy that Elijah had predicted and delivered to the infamous and cruel King Ahab three years earlier, that, "... surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1) and it is now raining, our hero, Elijah is found fleeing in terror and begging God to take his life. We may think, "That's not how it's supposed to end!"

Let's put Elijah's life in the context of the prophet's last three years. After delivering the message of impending judgment—a drought—to godless Ahab, Elijah spent months or possibly years living by the brook Cherith ("the place of cutting"), drinking the water from that source and being fed by ravens. Due to the advancement of the drought, his water supply dried up, so he was instructed by God to travel from the brook Cherith, in the southern portion of the Promised Land near Jericho to the northern city of Zarepath ("the place of the refinement and containment of the crucible") in Phoenicia, about 120 miles away, to live with a woman, a widow, and most likely a Gentile—not a circumstance in which a chosen prophet of God would likely be found.

From here, Elijah challenges Ahab and the prophets of Baal and Asherah (850 total) (1 Kings 18:17–19). A confrontation is arranged at Mt Carmel to have a “showdown” between the prophets and Yahweh, which results in an intense day of prayer, faith, waiting, and eventual slaughter, where God defeats the prophets of pagan–demonic worship in stunning defeat.

After the defeat of the prophets of Baal, God ends the drought with a rainstorm and Elijah warns Ahab to get out of town, lest he gets stuck in the mud of coming downpour. Elijah himself “... girded up his loins...” (which in Hebrew means, “he secured his junk and hit the ground running”) and runs a marathon-plus (approximately 30 miles) down from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel, outrunning the horses and chariots of Ahab.

After Ahab recounts the defeat of the prophets Baal and Asherah at Mt. Carmel, to Jezebel, his Asherah-worshipping wife, Elijah receives a death threat from her; an enraged Jezebel is no minor matter. Hearing the message of his impending death at the hand of an even more cruel and cunning person than her husband, Elijah flees in terror and on foot from Jezreel in the northern kingdom of Israel (ten tribes) to Beersheba in the southern kingdom Judah (two tribes), which is approximately 100 miles. From there, he leaves his servant and travels into the desert where he asks God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4) as he sits under a tree and sleeps.

In his discouragement, fear, and depression, Elijah is met by an angel who awakens him to eat and drink the fresh baked bread and water the angel has prepared. Elijah eats and he lies to down sleep again. The angel of the Lord returns and feeds him again and this time Elijah is strengthened sufficiently to travel into the Sinai Peninsula and spend 40 days and nights at Horeb, another name for Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God, which is in the southern wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, approximately 200 miles from Beersheba.

In a cave near Mt Horeb (Mt. Sinai), the weary and worn, fearful and discouraged prophet receives a word from the Lord asking Elijah, “What are you doing here Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9). God listens tenderly and patiently to Elijah as he pours out his heart, his fears, his discouragements. God then instructs Elijah to go up on the mountain where God Himself meets Elijah, not in a “great and strong wind,” nor in “an earthquake,” nor in a “fire,” but in the “sound of a gentle blowing”—in the “sound of the silence.” On the mountain of Horeb, God again asks Elijah, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9–14). And again, Elijah pours forth his fears, his heart, his confusion, and his discouragement.

In the interchange on the mountain, God listens. He then directs Elijah to head to Damascus (north again to Syria, about 400 miles!)\* to anoint two new kings, reveals His future plans for judging evil, as well as instructing Elijah to anoint a young prophet, Elisha, whom Elijah himself will mentor, love, and train. Elisha will become Elijah’s future replacement. God also reminded Elijah that he wasn’t alone—there are 7,000 other prophets in Israel who have not “...bowed to Baal....” (1 Kings 19:19).

Elijah, having been physically and later spiritually restored in his encounter with God, left and meets Elisha in a field (1 Kings 19:19–21).

\*(I’m wondering if, like our “Frequent Flyer Programs,” Elijah had any “Fabulous Footwear” discounts ...)

## Reflection

This passage in 1 Kings 19 of Elijah’s physical/emotional/spiritual breakdown is a *rich*, reassuring, and instructive narrative with numerous lessons. But for this week, we will limit

our discussion to one: the reality of the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual limits of human beings—even and perhaps, especially, people who passionately love God, actively serve others, and who long to reveal God to this world.

***It is interesting to note several points about Elijah at this time in his life:***

- † Elijah had been in a season of long-term stress—not simply an overwhelming event on Mt. Carmel, or a few days of difficulties, or even months of weariness. Elijah had experienced years of stress and hardship and uncertainty, requiring extra effort, focused diligence, extreme faith, and great courage.
- † Elijah had experienced the wonder of God doing incredible and supernatural things in and through his life.
- † Elijah had obeyed God.
- † Elijah had given his all to and for God.

***It is also interesting to note how God met Elijah in his breakdown and what God did NOT do or say:***

- † God did **NOT** begin with addressing “the spiritual.” Rather, God met Elijah physically first, with food, water, and sleep.
- † God did **NOT** mention anything about, “finding the sin in your life,” nor give hints of “not enough faith,” or suggestions of “spiritual oppression” or “casting out demons.”
- † God did **NOT** give Elijah a message of reproof of “you shouldn’t be afraid,” or “shame on you for being afraid—after all I have just done for you on Mt. Carmel, you can’t trust Me now?”
- † God did **NOT** label Elijah, call him names implying weakness, nor condemn him for breaking down or being fearful or discouraged.
- † God did **NOT** tell Elijah to “Get his act together.”
- † God did **NOT** compare Elijah to any other prophet who “was getting it done,” or push Elijah to get out back out there and “git ’er dun fer God.”

***Rather, God DID meet Elijah tenderly and patiently in his fear, depression, discouragement:***

- † God **DID** allow Elijah to get rest.
- † God **DID** give Elijah time to recover.
- † God **DID** allow him to step aside from serving.
- † God **DID** allow Elijah to pour out his pain and confusion of heart, mind, and soul.
- † At the right time and in the right context, God then met Elijah personally in the “sound of silence” and the desert of solitude, giving Elijah the encouragement, hope, truth, and healing that comes from God alone, and *then* a task for the future.

## Making It Personal

Elijah, although obviously in great physical shape (all the walking he did!), hit his physical as well as his emotional, psycho-spiritual wall. *We too all have limits; we too all have a personal wall.*

When I was going through a difficult and overwhelming season in my life, my pastor, Win Decker, who faithfully and lovingly led a small community church in the green farmland of Bridgman, Michigan, once told me, “You know, sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a nap.”

Sometimes, earnest and passionate believers are deceived by the lie that “it is better to ‘burn out’ than ‘rust-out’ for God,” and this deception can drive people to “do great things for God,” instead of allowing Him to direct our service and resting in His plan. This thinking can lead believers to experience false guilt when they try to take time off or time away from serving families, employers, and even God’s kingdom. Sometimes this false guilt can drive them to embrace schedules and duties and work and tasks that God Himself has not asked them to embrace (Ephesians 2:10).

Even though Elijah’s tasks were assigned by God, burnout and breakdown can still occur if we do not take time to recharge with God in silence and solitude.

At other times we focus solely on the spiritual and neglect the physical. This reveals a subtle dualist mindset, “spiritual is good, matter/physical is bad.” The church has battled this heresy for centuries. Our bodies are gifts from God. We are told to honor God in our bodies. We should appropriately love, honor, and care for our bodies as the gifts of God given uniquely and crafted specially for each of us. Our bodies are not our enemies, and we should not condemn or hate our bodies.

## Application

***The Gospel of Luke notes, “But Jesus Himself would often slip away to deserted places and spend time with God” (Luke 5:16).***

- † How often do you make time in your life to sit in silence and solitude in order to hear God’s voice?
- † Why is silence so unnerving to most of us?
- † What do we hear in our heads when we turn off the exterior noise in our lives?
- † Might we be afraid of what God might want to say to us?

***Rob Bell in his DVD, Noise, asks these penetrating questions:***

- † “Does my schedule, my time, my life look like that of a person who wants to hear God’s voice?”
- † “What are some things in your daily life you could change to eliminate some of the noise?”
- † “Is it possible that you’ve been searching for God in the winds, the earthquakes, and fires...and he’s waiting to speak to you in the silence?”

† Bell also states, “These were regular disciplines that Jesus had. Silence. Solitude.”

(pgs. 21–25, DVD, *Noise* booklet, Nooma 2003).

When was the last time you intentionally set aside some time in your week to turn off the iPod, the cell phone, the pager, the TV, the radio, the voice mail, the email, the CD player, the Internet, the txt messages, Twitter, and Facebook—all *technology and relationships*—in order to sit in silence and solitude to hear from God?

## Going Deeper

- † Are you or is someone you know experiencing a season of hitting “the wall, the limit” or breakdown?
- † How are you coming alongside of this person or even yourself?
- † Are grace and space and freedom being given in order to allow this person to regain strength and health from God?
- † Are they receiving the necessary *physical* attention (rest, physical exams, medication if needed, etc.) and not merely spiritual advice?
- † Are we trying to “fix or cure” instead of simply being “present”?

***Some good resources that may be a help to create space and time to be with alone with God are:***

- † *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook; Practices That Transform Us*, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- † *Transformed Into Fire: An Invitation to Life in the True Self*, Judith Hougen. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009
- † *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer; Scriptural Reflections According to the Spiritual Exercises*, Timothy M. Gallagher. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007.

**Have you explored the possibility of Spiritual Direction?** Spiritual Direction is help given by one believer to another believer in attending to his/her relationship with God. Foothills Community Church offers Spiritual Direction. Contact Debbie Swanson at [dswanson@foothillsonline.org](mailto:dswanson@foothillsonline.org).