

Key Texts: I Kings 19:7-12

## **I. Introduction: The Important Business of Prayer**

Run here, run there. I’ve got this responsibility, this one and this one. It all adds up! Here’s my to-do list and it seems at times it just keeps getting longer. What’s a person to do with such a busy schedule and such an important life? It seems that a big part of our prayer series has focused on us being “busy” people who often have little time to settle into the important business of prayer. Friends, it is prayer that cultivates a relationship with God.

I think there are times in life linked back to our scripture today when we push, fight for something or champion a cause, do a big mission or ministry project and we are doing everything we can do for God, the church and for others. We give our best energy, resources, time, efforts, and we know what we are doing is for God or for good; and we get to the end of that and might feel good about what we accomplished, and/or we might end up like the prophet Elijah and feel threatened, targeted, worn out, depressed, and maybe hard to hear it – suicidal. We want to just give up on life.

## **II. Having a Plan for Prayer**

That to me is where having a meaningful, purposeful, thought-out prayer life comes in.

Interestingly, we can come up with all kinds of important plans on life’s journey.

We plan for a wedding, we plan for children, we plan for vacation, we plan for weekend activities, we have college fund plans, or retirement plans. We have health plans, fitness plans, missional plans. In fact, it sounds like a whole lot of life revolves around planning.

And we even find hope and satisfaction knowing God has plans for each one of us. Jeremiah 29:11 is one of our favorite verses. For some of you, it’s your life verse. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope.”

And do we know in that process that “it is God’s will for you that you should be sanctified and that you should avoid sexual immorality.” (Thess 4:5)

## **III. Elijah and His Future**

What do you think Elijah was feeling about his future? He had just done battle with God by his side with Jezebel and her 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Obadiah went to Ahab who went to Elijah who opposed Jezebel and these false prophets in all they said and did and asks him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” At that point those are fighting words to Elijah and led to a showdown between Jezebel’s gods and prophets and Elijah and God.

Long story short, Jezebel’s prophets taunt Elijah and God, sitting up an altar. And Elijah actually does the same. You get a bull, I’ll get a bull and we’ll offer it up, but set no fire to the altar. Call on your gods and I will call on my God to come and start the fire and burn the sacrifice. Only Elijah adds fuel to the fire, not by adding gasoline, but water and not once or twice, but 3 times!

The prophets called on Baal, but no answer or fire came. Elijah says, “Why don’t you shout louder so your god will hear you.” The prophets shouted louder and danced more. “Maybe your god is busy, or traveling, or sleeping.” And they slashed themselves and still no answer.

Then Elijah called on God after having water poured on his altar and God came immediately with fire and burned up not only the altar Elijah tended, but the altar and bull that Baal could not burn up.

All the people watching the contest bowed down and cried, “The Lord – His is God!” (vs 39)

And then Elijah had all the prophets of Baal seized and killed in the Kishon Valley. And now Jezebel’s anger raged even more against Elijah and after that great victory he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran for his life.

#### **IV. What are You Doing Here, Elijah?**

And that’s how we end up at today’s text and God asking, “Elijah, what are you doing here?”

And this is where Elijah’s dejection comes out. You’d think coming off a great victory he’d be elated, right? Yet he seems so discouraged and deflated. He says to God, “I have been zealous for You Lord, but the Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, put your prophets to death and now they are coming after me too.” (vs 10)

Elijah, the victor at Mt. Carmel over 450 prophets had run for his life, and then the next day he prayed that he might die.

But the Lord did not forget Elijah, or walk away from him, or leave him alone in his state of dejection or depression. God came to him, but not like one might expect this time. God did not come to him in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire – all these big ways where we might look for God. God came to him with a gentle whisper, a still small voice that if we are too busy, frantic, schedule driven, or not paying close enough attention, we might just miss.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”, God asks again. Aren’t you glad God is persistent and never gives up on us, even when we are ready to give up? Elijah tells God his frustrations and then God gives him clear direction on his next steps. God gives him a purpose and a plan and after this sort period of dejection, Elijah arises. God tells him, you may feel all alone right now, but you are not. “There are 7000 in Israel whose knees have not bowed down and kissed Baal.” (vs 18)

Elijah, having such an important talk with God is renewed, reenergized and moves forward in the work God has called him to. God came to him in a gentle whisper that if we do not slow down and focus, we may not hear and therefore miss out on the daily, weekly and even yearly plans God has for us because we’ve been too busy making and carrying out our own plans.

#### **V. Tuning into God’s Leadings**

The last five weeks we’ve been learning about, hearing about and hopefully participating in the spiritual discipline of prayer. I hope you are circling some of your requests in prayer and being very intentional about the focused time you are spending in prayer. Hearing God’s leadings is vitally important to a healthy, growing Christian life. It is impossible to be taking next steps in one’s spiritual growth and discipleship without growing in one’s prayer life. How does God nudge us? Through the Holy Spirit nudging us to accept God’s offer of salvation – do you feel that nudge? Assuring us we are members of God’s eternal family. Do you feel that nudge? Encouraging us to grow in faith, get into a small group, to take a next step in faith by mentoring someone or allowing ourselves to be mentored. Do you feel that nudge? Being guided along the path God has chosen for us? Do you feel that nudge? But too often God, who is trying to get through to us, gets a busy signal.

If we really want to hear from God, we are going to have to pay a price. We will have to discipline ourselves to be still before God. This is no easy task, but it is essential. God said to King David in Ps. 40:10, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Jesus developed the habit of stillness before God in spite of a busy life. Even Jesus knew He needed quiet, solitude and time in prayer with His heavenly Father. No one can become an authentic Christian on a steady diet of activity. Power comes from stillness, strength comes out of solitude. Decisions that change the entire course of your life come out of our stillness before God.

Even Jesus, as he listened, needed God's comfort, direction, affirmation and assurance, and that gave purpose to every step Jesus took and every relationship He encountered.

## **VI. Trying a New Prayer Approach**

And in prayer, what is important is not following some particular method because even methods get old and routine and then we just start repeating phases and words and it loses its meaning. There's a reason the Psalmist says several times, "sing a new song to the Lord." If your discipline of praying has grown stale, try something new. Try something that can still your racing mind, that will soften your heart, and open your ears that will help you hear God's still small voice. When you get centered and focused on God, invite God to speak to you.

"God, what direction should this dating relationship go?"

"God, how should I be teaching and modeling You with my kids and grandkids?"

"God, how should I further my education?"

"God, how should I be serving You and Your people?"

"God, how should I plan my giving?"

Listen for what God says and here's the hard part, when God speaks to you, are you going to keep sitting on it, or will you get up and go do what God says? A lot of people hear from God, but doing what God asks us to do, we are not always willing to do it, so we begin to shut God down, stay busy, and now God is simply getting a busy signal. Elijah could have stayed in the cave, but he did not.

## **VII. In God's Presence All Day Long**

As we learn to tune in and obey in those small ways, I do believe it is possible to be tuned in and aware of God throughout the whole day. You can enjoy the presence of God all day long. I think we have no idea how much richer and fuller, how much more exciting and more effective life can be once we make the decision to be still and to be aware and to obey God's leading that comes through intentional, focused times of being still and tuning into God's gentle whisper.

Linda Kinde shares in the Wednesday Upper Room devotional that happened for her as she tended to her ten impatiens plants, each plant representing a family member she prayed for. She also prayed for close friends and her country and our leaders. She kidded her daughter that her flower was the most beautiful.

This time became a time to talk to and listen to God. And that has led her to pray throughout the whole day. Prayer has become for Linda a way of life as she has sought special guidance or just wanted to give thanks. This has opened her life to God's presence all day long.

## **VIII. Praying in a New Way – Try It!**

Mark Batterson, in *Draw the Circle*, warns, "Our tendency to do things the way we've always done them is called a 'heuristic bias.'" We do things without thinking about it and not thinking about why. He says, "it is an amazing process, but the result is mindlessness. And if we are not careful, we'll pray without thinking." (p 162)

So Elijah might have been caught off guard when God first showed up in the wind and earthquake and fire of the battle, but then at the cave in a whisper. So this week, as you spend time in prayer, try a new posture,

or new time slot. If you typically pray silently, try verbalizing softly, if you verbalize, try writing them in a journal. If you sit, try kneeling. If you kneel, try walking. Get out of the regular routine and try a next step.

And friends, make God's Word part of your prayer time. Reading God's Word slows us down and invites God's presence into our lives. Batterson says, "If we get into God's word, God's Word will get into us." It will change how we think, how we live, how we serve, how we love, how we give and how we worship.

### **IX. Slowing Down to Be Lifted Up**

God desires us to learn about prayer and how to pray. Most important of all? God wants us to slow down enough to take time to actually focus on time in prayer and trust me, trust God, it will make all the difference. And especially in those times when you feel dejected, deflated, discouraged, depressed and feel hopeless, the spirit will come as we tune into God's gentle whisper, and we will be comforted, encouraged, and given hope and healing to move out of the cave and onto God's greater plan for our lives, our church, our families, you name it. In those moments ahead, as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table, let's be sure to tune in to God and allow God to forgive us and encourage us onward.

### **X. Closing Prayer**

Let Us Pray:

God who knows all there is to know about us, come and meet us where we are. Wherever we are in our prayer lives, help us take a next step in hearing from and obeying You. Whatever battle we have recently gone through, or maybe in the middle of, give us ears to hear Your gentle whisper – "I am with you."

In Jesus' name, Amen.