

# Sermons on 1 Kings by Robert Morgain

**Introduction** - Robert J Morgan is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles.

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## Conflict Management: How To Iron Out Your Differences W/o Being Burned

1 Kings

Romans 12:16 says, "Live in harmony with one another." The word harmony is very interesting. Our English word arm comes from the same Greek root. You can easily see that the letters a-r-m are right in the middle of h-a-r-m-o-n-y. The stem word is the Greek *harmos*, which means joint. Your arm is attached to your body at its joint, joined to you at the shoulder. In the same way, when you have a soprano, a tenor, a bass, and an alto, all singing the proper notes, their voices join together to create one sound, one song. So the harmony occurs when various, different parts join together to make a whole. If everyone sang alto, it wouldn't sound very good. If everyone sang tenor, we'd miss the melody. If everyone sang exactly the same notes, we'd have boring unison without any fuller, more harmonious sound.

In a marriage, you have a bass and an alto. That is, you have two people with different perspectives, different backgrounds, and different ways of looking at things. One of the partners is in a man's body, the other is in a woman's body. One has the mind of a man, the other the mind of a woman. There will never be boring unison, but neither should there be continually discord. Perhaps the greatest challenge of marriage is learning how to manage conflicts and overcome differences so as to have harmony rather than discord in your home.

It can be done. In fact, it isn't an option, it is a commandment. Romans 12:16 says: Live in harmony with one another. But the commandment also contains the seed of a promise, for the Lord has never given us a commandment without also providing the grace for us to fulfill it. In a sense, every command is a promise in disguise. When God gives us the command to live in harmony with each other, the implied promise is, "I will give you the grace necessary as you look to me to have a harmonious home, a melodious marriage."

But how do we maintain harmony when conflicts arise? Put differently, how can we iron out our differences without being burned?

### Claming Up

There are three ways of responding to marital conflict, and I'd like to illustrate them using characters from a little-visited book in the Old Testament - 1 Kings. The first response to conflict is - claming up. This seems to have been the preferred method of immature and immoral King Ahab. Look in 1 Kings 21:

Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezzeelite. The vineyard was in Jezeel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth." But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezzeelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

The argument here isn't between Ahab and Jezebel; in fact, they went on to become partners in crime. But the thing to notice is how Ahab reacted to conflict. Notice the words here: sullen, angry, sulking, refusing to eat. Ahab just clamed up and moped around, lower lip jutting out like a school child who didn't get his way.

Earlier in my marriage, this was my primary method of responding to potential conflict. Katrina and I have only had three fights in our twenty years of marriage. One was over hot chocolate, another was over canning tomatoes, and the third was an argument that broke out while we were vacationing once in Maine (that one was altogether and completely my fault). But the fact that we've had only three fights isn't necessarily commendable. It indicates that sometimes I've just clamed up, refused to fight, refused to talk, and the problems have lingered on.

Katrina has often commented about how frustrated she was during our early years because I wouldn't be drawn into discussions over disagreements. I avoided them. Sometimes I just shrugged and ignored the disagreements. Other times, I engaged the kind of games that young couples often play with each other. I'd send a barrage of non-verbal signals and hope she would get the message. I'd sulk or mope around or not talk with her. And I would secretly hope that she would come and ask me about it, draw me out, and eventually give in.

It was a thinly veiled attempt to manipulate her by non-verbal means. I realize now how immature that is, and thankfully we're past that point in our marriage (for the most part). I can hardly think of any good that comes from the claming up. But the second way of responding to conflict is even worse - blowing up.

## Blowing Up

And that was the preferred method Ahab's wife, Jezebel. Look at 1 Kings 19:

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a message to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

He wasn't the first or last man who ran for his life from an angry woman. Jezebel was on a murderous rampage, and it proved very destructive. Blowing up - loud, angry arguments - are almost always destructive. They can torpedo a marriage faster than anything else. We lose our tempers and say more than we should, and in the process we inflict wounds on the other person and wounds on the marriage.

I want to tell you a story from the days of sixteenth century France that shows how we can often sink our own arguments by saying too much. The Protestant movement initially found fertile ground in France. Several preachers, sympathetic to reform, mounted pulpits in Paris, and the king himself showed interest. But on October 10, 1533, Nicolas Cop was elected Rector of the University of Paris and his inaugural address, prepared by a 24-year old firebrand named John Calvin, was a declaration of war on the Catholic Church. The speech demanded reformation on the basis of the New Testament and attacked the theologians of the church who "teach nothing of faith, nothing of the love of God, nothing of remission of sins, nothing of grace, nothing of justification."

The speech so inflamed Paris that Cop fled to Basel, and Calvin reportedly escaped his room from a window by means of sheets, fleeing disguised as a vine-dresser with a hoe on his shoulder. The ensuing months saw so many posters and tracts on Parisian streets that 1534 became known as "the year of the placards." The tension exploded into violence over a scathing placard by an over-zealous Protestant named Feret. He attacked "the horrible, great, intolerable abuses of the popish mass."

On the night of October 18, 1534, Feret's placard was found nailed to the king's bedroom door, and that did it. Protestants soon filled Parisian jails. And on January 29, 1535, to purge the city from the defilement caused by Feret's placards, an immense torch-lit procession traveled in silence from the Louvre to Notre Dame. The image of St. Genevieve, patroness of Paris, was accompanied by the royal family, princes, cardinals and church officials, ambassadors, and officers from State and University. Solemn mass was performed in the cathedral. The king declared he would behead even his own children if they embraced the "new heresies."

The day ended with six Protestants being suspended by ropes to a great machine that lowered and raised them into burning flames, slowly roasting them to death. In the coming months, many more Protestants were fined, imprisoned, tortured, and burned. The French Reformation miscarried. All because the Reformers were young, immature, and they said a few words too many.

The Bible says, "Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ" (Ephesians 4:31-32, CEV).

Scott Stanley is part of a research team at the University of Denver that has identified factors that accurately predict whether a marriage will survive or fail. Two of them are especially dangerous. The first is Escalation. Escalation occurs when a person says something negative and his or her spouse responds in kind, with an even harsher statement. This leads to an argument that spirals to greater levels of anger and frustration. In some ways, this is very natural for us. Whenever we're criticized, our first impulse is to defend ourselves by turning the tables on the one attacking us. We lash back, and our words can be harsh. It's especially dangerous when one of the partners says something like, "If that's the way you feel, maybe I should just move out." The other might respond with: "Don't let me stand in your way!"

Stanley refers to one couple he counseled who began discussing household chores, but in no time they were threatening divorce. He said, "They made the mistake of threatening their very commitment to the relationship - a very common and very destructive battle strategy. Now matter how angry you become or how much pain you're feeling, it's never appropriate to punish your mate by threatening divorce. Rather than helping your spouse see things your way, it only causes him or her to question your commitment to the relationship."

The second deadly factor in a marriage, according to Dr. Scott Stanley, is Invalidation. In simplest terms, this means putting each other down, calling one another names, or making personal comments or insults about the other. It includes ridiculing one another and being sarcastic. You invalidate the other person. You belittle them and attack their self-worth. This is no way to deal with conflict; it only hurts the marriage and the mate. Instead of claming up and blowing up, I'd like to recommend a third response to problems in your marriage. I suggest that you wise up.

## Wise Up

We have an example of this response also in 1 Kings, in chapter 3. Here the Lord appeared to the young king Solomon and told him to ask for anything he wished. Solomon asked for wisdom. The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request, and said in verse 12: I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be again.

Out of this wisdom, Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, and I'd like to show you two verses there. These are verses to clamp onto the refrigerator of your home, to write on your doorposts, and to memorize as personal rules of your heart:

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing - Proverbs 12:18

Losing your temper causes a lot of trouble, but staying calm settles arguments - Proverbs 15:18 (CEV).

How can we stay calm and turn a troubled marriage into a harmonious home? Here are eight ideas:

**First**, make a conscious decision to keep your anger under control. It is possible, with God's help, to control your temper. You do not have to lose it. Proverbs 30:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

**Second**, learn to call a cease-fire. When you're in a heated discussion and you sense that you are losing your temper and the argument is escalating into a lose-lose situation, call a cease-fire. An escalating argument very quickly reaches a point of diminishing returns, and you're better off just to say, "I've got to cool down before I say something damaging. Let's go out to dinner Saturday night and try to talk through this issue with civility, and I'm going to pray that the Lord will give us the sense and the patience to work through it."

**Third**, apologize. Whenever you do go too far and say too much, apologize as quickly as possible.

**Fourth**, don't let problems simmer. Learn to be mature enough to sit down and talk through things openly, with a minimum of excess emotion. Ephesians 4 tells us to speak truthfully to each other. It's harder on the front end to deal with problems forthrightly, but it's much easier in the long run.

**Fifth**, remember that you don't have to say everything you think. Proverbs 29:11 in the King James Version reads, "A fool uttereth all his mind." I read an article recently by a woman named Mary Robins Clark. She said she once had a constant need to tell everyone what to do and how to do everything. She said, "I thought my husband needed my advice in every area of his life, including and especially in his driving." But one day on a radio broadcast she heard Christian author Elizabeth Elliot advise, "Never pass up an opportunity to keep your mouth shut."

Mary Clark took those words to heart. That doesn't mean that she clamed up; she just realized that she didn't always have to be giving directions. For example, she and her husband Al had been married 2 years. She was a neatnik and Al was... well, he was more laid back. She had lectured him since their wedding day about leaving clothes and magazines lying around. "If you leave these magazines on the floor, pretty soon there'll be nowhere to walk," she would say. "Why can't you just pick these clothes off the bathroom floor and put them in the hamper?" she complained morning after morning. Al ignored her. Occasionally if she acted really angry, he would pick things up, but it required increasing amounts of pressure from her.

So, having heard Elizabeth Elliot say "Never pass up an opportunity to keep your mouth shut," she decided to work on it. The next morning without saying a word, she picked up Al's dirty clothes and put them in the hamper. She was surprised that it didn't hurt worse than it did. In fact, she said that a biblical feeling came over her as she thought of herself as a servant. After a few days, she noticed a change in Al, too. He began wanting to do things for her. He did yard work that he had been neglecting, and helped her sand some old chairs. She seemed to sense that his whole attitude toward her had changed, and would you believe that soon he even began to pick up his clothes!

Proverbs 17:27-28 says, "It makes a lot of sense to be a person of few words and to stay calm. Even fools seem smart when they are quiet" (CEV).

Proverbs 12:16 says, "A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult."

Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up trouble, but love overlooks the wrongs that others do" (CEV).

**Six**, be willing to agree to disagree. Katrina and I have very different opinions about some things. We often disagree about some of our theological beliefs. But I've always been proud to have a wife who knew her own mind. I often say that if two people agree on everything, they double their chances of being wrong.

**Seven**, pick up a good book about marriage. Any Christian book store has a wide assortment of books on marriage, and it's

surprising how they can help. Or attend a marriage retreat, or sign up for some simple marriage counseling from a Christian counselor.

Eight, keep tight accounts with the Lord. Most of the conflicts we have with other people are not fundamentally horizontal but vertical. In other words, if my heart isn't right with the Lord, it probably isn't going to be very positive toward my mate. The reason Ahab was bitter toward Naboth and Jezebel was furious with Elijah was that their own hearts were out of fellowship with God. Most of the time, if I become angry or irritable or out-of-sorts with Katrina it's because my heart is out of tune with the Lord in some way. I suppose that eighty or ninety percent of our conflicts would be minimized if we really got on our knees and in His word and let the Lord have fuller access to our hearts.

We're either going to harm or harmonize. If we're going to enjoy healthy relationships, we can't clam up or blow up. We've got to wise up. If we do that we can iron out our differences without being burned. We can live in harmony with one another. And if we live in harmony with each other, we can make beautiful music together all our lives.

## How to Avoid a Nervous Breakdown

1 Kings

Today I would like to begin a series of five sermons on the subject Reducing Your Stress By Renewing Your Strength. This is actually a sequel to a series of messages by the same title last year, but the urgency is even greater today, for stress is one of our greatest enemies, and one of our most debilitating problems.

Recently I read an article in the Nashville Tennessean that described a program at Duke University Medical Center which was detailed in the AMA's Archives of Internal Medicine. Dr. James Blumenthal studied over 100 heart patients and designed a stress-management program for them. According to his researchers, this stress-management program helped these patients reduce their risk of heart attacks or the need for surgery by a remarkable 74%. Dr. Blumenthal wrote, "In addition to diet, quitting smoking and controlling blood pressure, you need to think about managing stress (to avert potentially fatal heart problems)."

Many of us are headed toward stress-related heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, or other similar ills if we don't find a better way of handling stress. And in the final analysis, there are only two ways of handling it.

The **first** is by reducing it, by downsizing our lifestyles and learning to say "No" to unnecessary demands.

The **second** way to handle stress is by bearing up to it, by renewing our strength in the Lord, by restoring our souls—and that's what this series of messages is all about.

Over the next several weeks I'd like to share with you five passages of Scripture designed to strengthen us as we face the pressures of life.

Our opening study this morning involves one of the most unique characters in the Bible, a very strong and vivid individual who performed remarkable exploits for the Lord but who also, at the very apex of his career, suffered something akin to a nervous breakdown. He is Elijah, and he first shows up in the Bible in 1 Kings 17:1—Now Elijah the Tishbite from Thishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word... "

What can we say about the prophet Elijah? We can say he was most dramatic. He always made the most startling entrances and exits. The Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte wrote about him, "There is a solitary grandeur about Elijah that is all his own. There is a volcanic suddenness, and a volcanic violence, indeed, about all Elijah's descents upon us and all his disappearances from us."

We can say that Elijah was wholly committed to God. His very name meant "Jehovah is my God." Here in 1Ki 17:1-24 he introduced himself saying, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve... " And in 1Ki 19:1-21 he gives a testimony, saying, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty."

We can also say he was a man of prayer. As I studied again the life of Elijah again, I noticed the persistent nature of his prayer life. In chapter 17, he prayed three times and the Lord raised up a dead boy. In chapter 18, he prayed seven times for rain and a deluge swept over Israel. He prayed for drought, and drought came. He prayed down fire from heaven, and the fire fell.

We can say Elijah was fearless and passionate. He thought nothing of sticking his finger in the face of wicked King Ahab or in the nose of the nefarious Jezebel, a pagan queen who had imported the false god Baal into Israel. She had singlehandedly done more to corrupt the heart of her subjects than anyone before or since. It was against Jezebel, the patron of the priests of Baal, that Elijah primarily directed his fiery and fearless ministry. To quote Whyte again, "He was a Mount-Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm."

But Elijah's most dramatic moment came in 1Kings 18 when he assembled all Israel on Mt. Carmel for a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal. In front of the assembled multitude, Elijah commanded the false prophets to call fire down from heaven and consume their altar. All morning long, the prophets of Baal danced and prayed and entreated their god. But there was not so much as a spark from the sky.

1Ki 18:27 says: At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah called all the people to himself. He stepped forward and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." At that moment, the fire of the Lord fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil. And when the people saw this, they fell on their faces, crying, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

It was one of the greatest victories in the Bible, and it was the pinnacle of the mighty and marvelous career of Elijah. He then literally prayed down a thunderstorm before running on foot all the way to the captial city of Jezreel.

But then we turn the page, to the next chapter, 1 Kings 19:1-21, and to the very next day. And we are astounded to read what suddenly happened to Elijah. To put it in simplest terms, he had no sooner arrived in Jezreel following his remarkable victory on Mount Carmel than he suffered a nervous breakdown. The stress got to him and he crashed.

The term "nervous breakdown" has been discarded by most doctors and psychologists who find it a general term without meaning; but the Wall Street Journal recently dealt with the subject in a front-page article that began: "The nervous breakdown, the mysterious affliction that has been a staple of American life and literature for more than a century, has been wiped out by the combined forces of psychiatry, pharmacology, and managed care. But people keep breaking down anyway."

Well, Elijah broke down. How? According to 1 Kings 19, after he had ministered under the blazing sun atop Mt. Carmel all day, he presided over the slaying of the prophets of Baal. Then, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran a marathon to the Samaritan capital of Jezreel.

But in Jezreel, Jezebel—one of the most wicked women in the Bible—sent him a message: "By this time tomorrow," she announced, "I will have hunted down and killed Elijah." For some reason, those words were the straw that broke the prophet's back. His faith collapsed, and in a fit of fear he ran for his life until he wound up in the far south of Judah, in the desert of Beersheba. There under a scraggly tree he collapsed in despair and prayed to die before falling to sleep under a broom tree.

By and by Elijah was awakened by an angel who cooked him a meal. He ate, then fell into another deep sleep. When he next awoke, there was another cake of bread baked over hot coals and another jar of water. In the strength of that food, he traveled 40 days and nights until he came to Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God, the mountain of Moses. There the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty," replied Elijah. "The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

The Lord told him to stand just outside the cave and watch, for the presence of the Lord was about to pass by. As Elijah stood there, a cyclone or some kind of violent windstorm tore through the mountain with such force it seemed it would pull the mountain apart boulder by boulder. Elijah ran for cover into the cave. But the Lord was not in the wind. Then a violent earthquake sent Elijah running from the cave. I supposed he was flung to the ground clung to the rocks and roots for dear life. It seemed the entire mountain would collapse in a heap of rubble. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then a firestorm swept by like an inferno, sending Elijah running back into the cave for protection. But the Lord was not in the firestorm. And then, in the quietness and stillness that followed these terrifying phenomenon, there came a still small voice, a gentle whisper.

Elijah ventured to the edge of the cave, pulled his cloak around him, and listened. A voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty," replied Elijah, perhaps more meekly than before. "The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord told him, "Go back. I have work for you to do. I have a king for you to anoint in Syria, and another in Israel. And I'm raising

up another prophet for you to mentor. And by the way, you are not alone. I have reserved 7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him. Now don't you think it's time to be getting back to work?"

This is one of the most powerful stories in the Bible, for it tells us how the Lord deals with us when we become overwrought and broken-down. What did he do for Elijah? From this scriptural case study, we can find seven solutions to the problem of an over-stressed, broken-down spirit.

### **Get some sleep and start eating correctly**

First, God provided rest and nutrition. Elijah was physically exhausted, for he had combated paganism for three unrelenting years, he had waged a very vigorous war on Mt. Carmel against the prophets of Baal, then he had prayed with exceeding earnestness. Atop all that, he had run a marathon back to Jezreel. He had taken time for neither rest nor food, and he was physically, emotionally and spiritual exhausted. Do you remember when Jesus was surrounded by the crowds of Galilee, and a woman touched the hem of his garment and received healing? Jesus turned and said, "I felt virtue drain out of me." When we work with people, when we try to help them spiritually, when we deal with problems in their lives—virtue drains from us.

When we grow physically and spiritually exhausted, we have less control over our emotions. Depression descends more easily. Worry grips us more doggedly. Temptations catch us unawares.

God made us to require eight hours of sleep, more or less, and a solid intake of wholesome food. And if we persistently work ourselves into a state of exhaustion, we'll suffer the consequences. So the Lord provided a broom tree under which the exhausted prophet slept, and he provided hot baked bread and very cold water to nourish his drooping body.

### **Realize the very angels of heaven are concerned about you**

Second, the Lord sent an angel to strength him. It was actually the angel who built the fire and baked the bread on the hot coals. Do you remember when Jesus was suffering from exhaustion and dread in the Garden of Gethsemene? The Lord sent an angel to strengthen him. Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. Many times, according to the intimations in the Bible, the angels minister to us though we may be unaware of it.

### **Verbalize your frustrations to a godly friend or to the Lord in your journal**

Third, the Lord helped Elijah verbalize his feelings. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" The prophet replied: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me."

Half the battle in controlling our emotions is in being able to identify and verbalize them. In my own experience, I have found two ways of doing that. Sometimes if I can talk to a friend, it helps a lot. Other times I use my journal and write out my feelings as a prayer to the Lord. When nameless fear and emotional distress swirl inside you like a toxic cloud of nebulous gasses, it is hard to deal with. But when you can express your feelings to a godly, counseling friend or to the Lord in a journal, it gets them down into tangible, black-and-white words that helps you identify and deal with them.

### **Listen to God's still, small voice as he reassures you from Scripture**

Fourth, after having provided food and rest, after having sent an angel to watch over him, and having listened patiently as Elijah verbalized his problems, the Lord then redirected Elijah's attention to himself. The ultimate answer to depression and distress in life is refocusing ourselves on God and on his infallible Word.

Hebrews 12 says we should throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles, and we should run with patience the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Colossians 3 says that we should set our minds on things above, not on earthly things, for we died and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God.

So the Lord sent Elijah down to Mt. Sinai to have him re-enact a scene from the life of Moses. Do you remember what happened in Exodus 33? A very discouraged Moses trudged up Mt. Sinai, 40 days and 40 nights, and there he entered a cave, and there he saw the glory of the Lord pass by. Likewise, the Lord sent a discouraged Elijah to Mt. Sinai, 40 days and 40 nights. The Lord directed him in the cleft, a cave, in the rocks, perhaps the very cave of Moses. And there the Lord appeared afresh to Elijah, as he had to Moses.

But there is something interesting here. Elijah knew that God was a God of thunder and earthquake and fire. He knew the majesty and fear and terror of the Lord. He knew all about God's greatness and transcendence. Elijah was, after all, the prophet of thunder, the man who could call fire from heaven, a prophet of judgment. Sometimes God is in the fire. Sometimes he does speak with the voice of thunder, calling us to repentance, calling us to commitment, warning us of judgment.

But this time, Elijah didn't need fire or earthquake or thunder. He badly needed a contrasting word, a gentle word from God, a word of reassurance, a word of love. He needed the still, small voice, the gentle whisper.

God speaks to us according to our need. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoking flax he will not quench. He whispers assurance to our hearts according to our need. He whispers His word into our hearts by his Holy Spirit:

- Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also.
- The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.
- Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will help thee; I will strengthen thee; I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

The Psalmist said, "When my anxious thoughts multiply, thy word is my consolation." There is no comfort or strength in the world like that of going to God's Word in times of fear or worry or depression or distress and finding there the very verse that speaks to your need.

### **Remember: where God is concerned, things are never as bad as they seem**

Fifth, Elijah needed encouragement. He had been feeling so sorry for himself, so full of self-pity, so lonely. "The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

But the Lord said, "Oh, my dear weary Elijah. You are not the only one left. I have reserved 7000 people in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Things are never as bleak as they may appear to us, not when God is in control.

### **Determine to complete God's will for your life on this earth**

Sixth, Elijah needed a renewal of his purpose. The Lord wasn't finished with him, there were still kings to anoint and prophets to commission. His best days of ministry and his most spectacular moments were still ahead of him. Elijah needed to determine afresh to complete God's will for his life on this earth.

### **Find a friend with whom to share your burdens and blessings**

Seventh, the Lord provided Elijah with a friend, a colleague to help him share the load. Go anoint Elisha, mentor her to succeed you as prophet. And from that day until he was caught up into heaven, Elijah had a friend and companion with whom to share his burdens and blessings.

Are you overwhelmed, stressed beyond endurance, discouraged, depressed? God knows and he cares. He wants to rehabilitate you, to renew your strength, to restore your soul. What is necessary? Some very practical steps:

1. Get some sleep and start eating correctly.
2. Realize the very angels of heaven are concerned about you.
3. Verbalize your frustrations to a godly friend or to the Lord in your journal.
4. Listen to God's still, small voice as he reassures you from Scripture.
5. Remember: where God is concerned, things are never as bad as they seem.
6. Determine to complete God's will for your life on this earth.
7. Find a friend with whom to share your burdens and blessings.

This was God's personalized treatment program for his exhausted, defeated prophet. It pulled him back to his feet.

Now if it worked with Elijah, it seems to me there's a good chance it will work with you an

## **WHEN YOU THINK YOU CAN'T GO ON**

1 Kings 19:1-21

Today we're going to begin a new series of summertime messages from the Old Testament, from the life of the prophet Elisha, and our first message is entitled "When You Think You Can't Go On." There are times in life when we all feel that way, because life can be so terribly difficult. Perhaps you're at a place of wondering if you can keep going.

The late Menachem Begin was a freedom fighter for Israel -- some say a terrorist -- who late in life became Israel's Prime Minister. He's best known for signing the Camp David Peace Accord with Egypt, which was brokered by Jimmy Carter. But you may not know that Begin suffered all his life from bouts of depression, and the last months of his leadership in Israel were arduous. Israel became bogged down in a protracted, thankless war in Lebanon; and during the course of it, Begin's beloved wife died. He himself was not a well man. One day he abruptly walked into a Cabinet meeting, told his stunned colleagues, "I cannot go on," and left the room. He spent the rest of his life in seclusion. He was one of the strongest and most tenacious men I've ever read about, but he came to a point in which he said, "I just can't go on."

We all feel that way sometimes, and so did the great characters of the Bible. In the Old Testament, there was a great prophet named Elijah, who was one of the most durable and courageous men in Scripture. He was fearless and formidable. But in 1 Kings 19, he had a breakdown, and that breakdown paved the way for the emergence of another great prophet, a man named Elisha, which is actually the subject of our series of sermons for this summer. But since Elisha is introduced in this story about Elijah, it's a good place for us to start. That's the story I'd like for us to look at today from 1 Kings 19, and I'd like for us to go through this chapter verse by verse:

Verse 1: Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

When you read the Old Testament story of Israel, you have three great kings—King Saul, King David, and King Solomon—who ruled over the land for a combined total of about 120 years. But when King Solomon died, the empire broke apart; and the northern tribes became a separate nation known by various names, but we often just call them the northern nation of Israel. From the very beginning, the northern nation departed from the worship of Jehovah and worshipped a golden calf, similar to the one Aaron had fashioned years before at Mt. Sinai. The reason was because the Northern kings didn't want their people traveling down to the southern kingdom to worship in Jerusalem, so they established idolatrous worship centers in the north.

So from the beginning, this northern kingdom lapsed into idolatry. That was bad enough. But when King Ahab came to the throne, he married a woman named Jezebel who was one of the most wicked women who ever lived. She had grown up a pagan princess. Her father was the king of an area up in Lebanon, and she came from an immoral environment that centered around the worship of a false religion that was even worse than the worship of the golden calf. It was the worship of a god named Baal.

I don't have time to go into it, but it involved such heinous aspects as ritualized immorality and child sacrifice. It was extremely vicious, virulent, and very wicked. It was evil raised to a new level of intensity. And in response, God raised up two men—Elijah and Elisha—to combat this evil, and even gave them the power to perform miracles.

Elijah combated this evil tooth and nail, and in the previous chapter—1 Kings 18—we have the famous story of his contest with the prophets of Baal atop Mount Carmel, ending with the slaying of 450 of these false prophets. But the episode exhausted Elijah, and to his great disappointment, it did not lead to a sudden revival of Jehovah-worship in Israel. Instead, it had pitted him face-to-face with his archenemy, Queen Jezebel, who had now mobilized the entire army against him. Let's continue reading:

Verse 2ff: So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

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

This combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion—coupled with horrendous circumstances—caused Elijah to experience a Menachem Begin moment. He told the Lord, "I cannot go on." He was so defeated and depressed that he was almost suicidal, and he asked God to kill him and take him to heaven. Now we never know what people are going through as they sit in church. Someone said, "There's a heartache in every pew," and some of you may be feeling a little like Elijah today; and so it's instructive to see how the Lord dealt with all this.

The Lord is the wonderful counselor. He's the world's first and best psychologist. He understands the soul, for He Himself designed it. He knows how to impart strength and grant healing. In this chapter, I can identify for you six medicines or balms that the Lord Jesus applied to Elijah's heart.

**Jesus Gives You Rest and Nourishment (1Ki 19:5-8)**



First, when you think you can't go on, Jesus wants to give you rest and nourishment. Look at verse 5ff: Then (Elijah) lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

It is important to get the rest we need. Jesus told the disciples that very thing on two different occasions. Once He said, "Come apart by yourselves and rest awhile," and later He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

I don't know how to tell you to do this in your own situation, but I can tell you that God did not make your body and soul capable of withstanding prolonged, chronic fatigue. Some of you would find your burdens lessened by 70 or 80 percent if you just had a few good nights of sleep and some proper nourishment. Even in the middle of the climactic moments of frenetic and frenzied ball games, the teams know how to call a "time out" so players can rest a moment and get a sip of water; and sometimes we need a time out, too.

Last year, when I realized I was very tired, I made a handful of adjustments. I started being more diligent about taking a day off (Saturday) each week, I set my alarm clock for 6:30 instead of 6:00 each morning, I decreased my work load somewhat, and I began taking steps on Saturday nights to make sure I rested well before Sunday's ministry—and those little steps made a big difference. If you sat down and thought about it prayerfully, I'm sure you could find some ways of backing away from the precipice of exhaustion. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we're to care for it. Elijah's problems were exacerbated by exhaustion, and the first thing the Lord prescribed for him was rest and nourishment.

### **Jesus Reminds You of His Power (1Ki 19:9-11)**

Second, Jesus wants to remind you of His power. Continue reading with 1Ki 19:9ff: There (at Mt. Horeb) he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, broken down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

God was not in the wind, earthquake, and fire; but the Lord did cause them because Elijah needed a reminder of God's splendid power. He had gotten his eyes on Jezebel instead of Jehovah. He had become so distracted by the Queen of Israel that he'd forgotten about the King of Kings.

Anxiety is when we come to believe that our problems are greater than God's power. Elijah had gotten himself into such a state as that, and so the Lord gave him a wonderful pyrotechnic demonstration of His power.

The Lord did the very same thing for me recently. One night when I was worried about something, I stood on the back porch and looked up into the night sky. There was the moon, blazing in its whitened glory. The stars were flung out across the sky like lamps against velvet. And the Lord seemed to say to me, "If I can manage My universe, I can surely take care of your little concerns."

I felt like the Psalmist who said, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth."

Jesus told us to study the chirping birds and colorful flowers, for they are reminders of God's power and provision. The Lord surrounds us with displays of His power to let us know that, when all is said and done, He is still the controlling agent of the cosmos and the Lord of our lives.

### **Jesus Speaks to You in a Gentle Whisper (1Ki 19:12-13)**

Third, Jesus wants to speak to us in a still, small voice. Continue reading this story in 1Ki 19:12-13: After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The older translations say that God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice; and I'm convinced that He primarily does this in our lives today by the use of His Holy Word. The most precious thing in my life is the way in which the Lord gives me specific verses to bear me through specific times in my life. It's His still small voice, and it seems to me that has always been the great secret of composed Christians.

Recently in studying the life of Ann Judson, the wife of missionary Adoniram Judson, I read of how she encountered a dreadful set of

problems that would have overwhelmed anyone. She was in Burma, her husband was bound in a loathsome prison, she was having incredible difficulty getting enough food to keep her infant daughter alive, and she herself was suffering from spotted fever. In that moment of extremity and distress, the Lord gave her Psalm 50:15: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me." Ann wrote, "God made me at this time feel so powerfully this promise, that I became quite composed, feeling assured that my prayers would be answered."

That's the still, small voice of God. The thing is—we have to train ourselves to hear Him over the noise of the world. A couple of years ago when I was in South Carolina, I made a call at the home of Dr. Robertson McQuilkin. We sat in his living room and visited for awhile, then he asked if I would like to see his Japanese garden. For a number of years, Dr. McQuilkin served as a missionary in Japan, and he had developed an appreciation for the calming beauty of Japanese gardens. During his wife's long illness in Columbia, he had designed and built a small Japanese garden in his backyard. It was lovely, and we sat out there for awhile, talking. To one side was a small trickle of water, running from a shoot of bamboo and spattering gently into a pool.

Dr. McQuilkin's house is alongside a busy street, and the cars were coming and going incessantly. But as we sat there, Dr. McQuilkin looked at me and said, "You hear the traffic, don't you? I don't hear the traffic; I hear the trickling of the water."

He had trained his mind to block out the sounds of the cars and trucks, and he had tuned his ears to hear the trickling and gurgling of the water.

I've thought of that conversation many times; and it has reminded me to pray, "Lord, tune my ears to block out all the noise of the world and to hear Your still, small voice." And I believe that happens as we read, memorize, and meditate on His Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us with just the verses we need for the several frustrations of life.

### **Jesus Still Wants to Use You (1Ki 19:14-17)**

Fourth, Jesus still wants to use you. You may think your exhaustion or failure or breakdown or sin has disqualified you for service in God's eternal work, but look at what happened to Elijah. God immediately renewed his commission and gave him a new set of assignments. Continue reading with 1Ki 19:14ff:

(Elijah) replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu."

Elijah may have felt defeated by the virulent epidemic of Baalism in Israel, but the Lord was determined to wipe out the disease, and he had three secret weapons—the king of Syria, a general in Israel named Jehu, and a budding prophet named Elisha. And Elijah was the one who would light the fuses of all three.

The Lord wasn't finished with Elijah, and He isn't finished with you. As long as we are on this earth, God has work for us to do in the extending of His kingdom. You and I have a purpose. You and I have a calling.

### **Jesus Reminds You that Things Are Not as Bad As They Appear (1Ki 19:18)**

Fifth, Jesus wants to remind you that things are never as bad as they appear to be. When God is in the picture, things are never as bad as they seem. I think this is one of the premier lessons of 1 Kings 19. Look at 1Ki 19:18: Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.

Twice in this passage, Elijah had complained to the Lord that he was the only Jehovah-worshipper in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. "They have killed all your prophets with the sword," he said, "and I alone am left and they are seeking my life also." Feeling down in the dumps, sorry for himself, and miserable, Elijah thought that he was the only preacher left—and that he himself was as good as dead because of Jezebel's threat. But after all the other therapy and rehabilitation, the Lord ended His session with Elijah by saying, "Oh, by the way, I actually have 7000 people in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Things are not as bad as you imagine them to be."

What a message for us! What a message for you in your own set of circumstances! Things are never as bad as they appear to be whenever God is in the picture.

### **Jesus Gives You Friends (1Ki 19:19-21)**

And finally, Jesus wants to give you a friend (or friends) to encourage and help you; and this is where we come to the subject of this series of sermons, the young man named Elisha. Look at 1Ki 19:19: So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He

was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you."

"Go back," Elijah replied, "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

In her book, *To Live Again*, Catherine Marshall wrote about the devastation she felt when her husband, Peter, died suddenly of a heart attack at an early age. One morning, he complained of chest pains and went to the hospital. He didn't seem to be in mortal danger, and so she stayed at home just long enough to get their nine-year-old son off to school. But the terrible news came on the phone before she could get to the hospital. Peter was dead. In one instant, Catherine's world caved in, and in the weeks that followed she felt like Elijah, like Menachem Begin—she thought she couldn't go on, and she longed to just die.

But the Lord gave her a friend, Dr. Rebecca Beard. One day Catherine sought her out. Catherine later wrote:

On the afternoon of my appointment, she received me in the small upstairs room in the home where she was a guest. Dr. Beard was a big, gray-haired woman whose outstanding characteristic was motherliness.

Soon I was pouring out my heart to her—all the hurt of it, the ineptness and the fear I felt about facing the future alone.... The tears flowed copiously.

My friend just let me talk. She said little. She attempted no pat explanation of Peter's death; offered no advice for the future. Sometimes there were tears in her own eyes as she watched me.

Then finally, when the well of my emotion was drying, she said quietly, "As a doctor, I have only one remedy to offer for what ails you. Let's talk to Christ about it."

Her prayer was a simple heartfelt claiming of Christ's promise to bind up the brokenhearted. Then when she had finished, without another word she gathered me into her ample arms. That afternoon it was as if a gentle Hand were laid on my heart.

From that moment the healing began somewhere in the depths of my being....[1]

Until now, Elijah had been one of the most solitary figures in Scripture. He was an eagle that soared alone. But now, he needed a companion, an ally, a friend—and God gave him this young man, Elisha. Tonight, we'll study the unusual account of the calling of Elisha; but for now I just want you to see the elements that Jesus used to restore Elijah's soul.

The really remarkable thing about this is the fact that Elijah went to Mount Horeb. I don't know if you noticed that, but verse 8 says that he traveled forty days and forty nights to get to Horeb, the mountain of God. This is Mount Sinai, the place where the Israelites camped, where the Lord descended onto the mountain amidst great smoke and fire and lightening and thunder, the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments. This was the fountainhead of Jewish history and heritage, the place of God's presence, the mountain of God.

Elijah had totally exhausted his spiritual fluids. All his gauges were low. His oil was gone. His transmission fluid was gone. His radiator was dry. His antifreeze was all gone. His break fluid was used up. His fuel tank was empty. His tires were flat. Even the windshield washing fluid was spent. Nothing was showing on his dipsticks. His engine was burning up, and he was on the brink of total collapse.

But he realized it, and he knew that he had to do whatever was necessary and to go wherever was necessary to recover. He was ready to do anything and to go anywhere. And he knew that Mt. Sinai was the mountain of God—and so he left the Northern Kingdom of Israel, fled in fear through the Southern Kingdom of Judah, ran out into the Negev Desert, realized his pitiful condition and made up his mind that he would travel on, into the Sinai Peninsula, halfway to Egypt, on to Mount Sinai—for he knew that there was a great Filling Station where he could replenish the spiritual fluids that he had to have for divine life and service.

He hit bottom, and that's when he started to look up. If you really want to get better, you can get better. If you really want to heal, you can heal. If you really want spiritual and emotional restoration, you can find it. But you have to go to Mount Calvary. You have to look up to Jesus. You have to say, "Lord, here at the cross of My Savior, replenish my energy, restore my soul, revive my heart."

When you think you can't go on, you have to go on to Calvary. You have to go on to Christ.

Jesus, keep me near the cross,

There a precious fountain

Free to all, a healing stream  
Flows from Calvary's mountain.  
In the cross, in the cross,  
Be my glory ever;  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.

## LEVEL FIVE LIVING

### 1Kings 19:19-21

Throughout history, we have had great philosophers trying to tell us what life is all about, like Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher of the Enlightenment, Kierkegaard, who is considered to be the founder of existentialism, and Schopenhauer, who was famous for his pessimism.

And then we have the writers of bumper stickers.

These are philosophers, too, who boil down all of life's great questions and answers in little statements short enough to be plastered on the bumper of your car. Here are some examples:

- Ø If ALL ELSE Fails, stop using ALL ELSE.
- Ø Never Let Your Mother Brush Your Hair When She's Mad At Your Father
- Ø Never Believe Generalizations
- Ø Always Avoid Alliteration
- Ø No Pressure No Diamonds
- Ø The Best Things in Life Are Not Things
- Ø No One Can Drive You Crazy Unless You Hand Them The Keys
- Ø Just When I Think I'm Winning The Rat Race, Along Come Faster Rats
- Ø Sacred Cows Make The Best Burgers
- Ø Maybe You Should Go To E-Bay And Buy A Clue

Perhaps my favorite bumper sticker is one that expresses the way we all sometimes feel. It says: Attitudes are contagious; mine might kill you.

That's why someone with a bad attitude can be very detrimental to a home or to a church or to a family or to any group of people. And that's why leaders, especially, must be people who know how to keep their attitudes healthy. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah lost control of his attitude, but we saw this morning how God helped restore his soul. Tonight, I'd like for us to look at the last paragraph in that chapter, for this is the passage in which Elisha is introduced to us—and the thing we immediately notice is his attitude. Let's start reading with 1 Kings 19:19:

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat.

This is the only time Shaphat is mentioned in the Bible, but we know two things about him. First, he was very wealthy and influential in the northern kingdom. He evidently had lots of land, oxen, servants, and was an affluent man. Second, he was a worshipper of Jehovah. We know that because he named his son Elisha, which means "God is Salvation."

He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

This doesn't mean that Elisha was driving a plow that was hitched up to 24 oxen. It means that there were eleven servants plowing the fields that day, and Elisha was in charge of them and he himself was plowing with a yoke of oxen. He was the foreman on his father's farm and he wasn't afraid to work hard. He was a strong and muscular young man.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

There's more to that sentence than meets the eye. Elisha undoubtedly knew who this man was. Elijah was a legend in his own time, the most famous prophet in Israel, an outlaw from the government, a worker of miracles. His cloak was the symbol of his prophetic office. In my mind's eye, I can picture the scene as this famous old solitary prophet approaches Elisha, who halts his oxen and watches him with curious interest. Elijah removes his cloak—the symbol of his authority—and deliberately places it over the young man's shoulders. He perhaps spoke to him as well, telling him that God was calling him to succeed him as prophet. It was a moment of decision, but Elisha didn't ask for time to think about it nor did he hesitate.

Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

"Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"

This is a Hebrew idiom which meant, "Go ahead; I'm not stopping you."

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

One of the most popular leadership and management books of the last several years has been *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Collins and his team of researchers studied eleven good companies that had become great companies, looking for trends and common denominators. They found several common traits, and one chapter is devoted to company leadership. Jim Collins coined a phrase that has since become popular in leadership lore: Level Five Leadership. He described different kinds of leadership styles as Level One Leaders, Level Two Leaders, and so forth. The eleven "great" companies that he studied all had Level Five Leaders, and without exception Level Five Leaders were characterized by two traits. First, they were relatively humble and deferred compliments to others and didn't care who got the credit. Second, they were driven - determined to make their companies successful.

I was reading about that at the very time I was studying the life of Elisha; and it struck me like a bolt of lightening that Elisha is a prime example of what Jim Collins was talking about.

#### We Need Humility

First, notice Elisha's humility. God prefers humble people, and humility is a requirement for service in His kingdom. Notice the very last word of this paragraph: Then (Elisha) set out to follow Elijah and become his attendant. In other words, his servant. And that's the last we hear of Elisha in this book of the Bible. He isn't in chapter 20 or 21 (which is the story about Naboth's Vineyard), or chapter 23, nor do we see him in 2 Kings 1. He is there, present as the action unfolds, watching Elijah, but he isn't mentioned in the text. He's a servant.

And that's the way people viewed him. Look at the way he is described in 2 Kings 3. In this passage, three kings have assembled their armies for war, and one of them, Jehoshaphat, wants some spiritual guidance. We read in 2 Kings 3:11: But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord through him?" An officer of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah."

There aren't very many books or sermons on the subject of humility, and the reason is pretty obvious. Anyone—certainly me—who writes or speaks on this subject is automatically a hypocrite. Whenever we talk about humility, we do so hypocritically, because all of us are sinners by nature and choice; and the essence of sin is pride. Humility is an attitude we chose and a grace that God cultivates in us over a long period of time. But great people are humble people.

I haven't been around or known very many great people—almost none—but I have on several occasions been in close proximity with Billy Graham, and this is what has impressed me the very most about him. His voice, which is so authoritative and powerful in public, is soft and gentle in private, and it seems to me that his favorite word is "Certainly."

"Dr. Graham, can I have a moment with you?" --Certainly. "Dr. Graham, may we have our picture taken with you?" --Certainly. "Dr. Graham, would you do this or that?" --Certainly. He has a servant's heart.

One of the most successful politicians of our age was Tip O'Neill, the Democratic Congressman from Massachusetts, who served as the Speaker of the House of Representatives for many years. In his book, *All Politics is Local*, he said that someone once gave him some advice that made his career. The legendary James Michael Curley was the mayor of Boston when Tip was beginning his career in politics. Mayor Curley took him aside and told him, "Over the years, hundreds and hundreds of people will come to your office and ask for favors. Some of these favors may be great, and some of them may be small. Some may be important, and some may be trivial. Some will be easy, and some will be difficult."

He went on to say, "But always remember, for the person who comes to you, that favor is the most important thing in the world. If he could take care of it himself, he wouldn't be coming to see you. So treat them all alike and try to help everybody—no matter how big or small the problem is."

Tip O'Neill never forgot that. One day in early 1966, for example, Tip was sitting alone in his congressional office in Boston waiting to go to an official banquet. It was about seven o'clock in the evening. The door opened, and a fellow walked in with a problem. It seems his son had married a Turkish woman whose parents wanted to remain in the United States. Tip said that he would file a bill in Congress allowing them to stay. In those days, that's all it took. He did so, and the bill finally passed. The man was so grateful that he later told Tip it has restored his faith in the American government.

In the next election, the man insisted on giving Tip a party to help him with his campaign. And what a party it was! As it turned out, the man was very wealthy, and he set up a tent on his estate, hired an orchestra, and invited a thousand friends—all because of one act of kindness.[1]

It reminds me of Ronald Reagan, down on his hands and knees at the hospital following his assassination attempt, wiping up the water he spilled so that the nurse wouldn't have to do it.

Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Elisha, the greatest miracle man of the Bible apart from Christ Himself, was known as the man who poured water on the hands of Elijah. He was a servant-leader.

### We Need Drive

But the other aspect of Elisha is that he was driven. He was committed. He had passion and determination and drive. Verse 21 says that Elisha took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat. It was his way of burning his bridges behind him. He was determined to do the will of God for his life, no turning back.

When I was in Japan last year, I met a couple who were serving there as missionaries and who had become friends with Jonathan and Teresa Snow. The woman began telling me about her parents, who had been missionaries in Vietnam and had actually served there during the war. She told me that her father had written a book about his experiences; so when I returned to the States, I ordered the book and found it engrossing. The man's name was Sam James; and prior to becoming a missionary, he had served in the United States Navy, spending four years in the Pacific during the Korean War. One day, not long after giving his life to Jesus Christ, he stood on the catwalk below the flight deck of his aircraft carrier, looking out over the Asian shores and sensing that God was dealing with his heart. He bowed his head and told the Lord he was willing to go anywhere for the kingdom. Almost immediately, an impression formed in his mind that God wanted him to serve overseas among people who have had little opportunity to learn about Jesus.

After his discharge, he wrote to the Southern Baptist Foreign Missions Board expressing his interest in going to Vietnam as a missionary. The Secretary for the Orient wrote back, saying that the Southern Baptists had no missionaries in Vietnam and no immediate plans to send any there. Sam James was disappointed, but he enrolled in college and spent several years at WakeForest University and Southeastern Seminary getting his training; and just as he graduated the Foreign Mission Board announced they were making Vietnam one of their mission fields. Shortly thereafter, Sam and his family were appointed to Vietnam. War clouds were on the horizon, and as Sam and his wife Rachel were commissioned, in 1962. At that service on the platform, the executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Board told him something very poignant: "You are going to Vietnam. Things are not looking very good there for the future. Take whatever you want to take. Take your piano, your appliances, and anything else you want to take. But take them in your hands. If they ever get into your heart, you are through as a missionary."

The director could say that to them with integrity because as a missionary in China he and his family had three times lost everything as they fled from the invading Japanese and later from the Communists. His words proved to be prophetic, but they went willingly. Elisha left everything, killed his oxen, burned his yoke, and committed himself without reserve.[2]

I want to show you a verse I found just last week in my quiet time that speaks to this very thing. Look at Joshua 1, which is one of the most encouraging chapters in the entire Bible. If I ever preached a series of messages on "Great Chapters in the Bible," this would be one of them. It begins: After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give you...."

Verse 5 says: No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you....

The chapter goes on to give Joshua instructions, and through him the Lord gives instructions to the Israelites. They are to prepare themselves, fortify themselves, sanctify themselves, and prepare in three days time to cross the Jordan and began occupying

theHoly Land. And what was their response? Look at verse 16: Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

Notice those two words—which is the Christian's bumper sticker: Whatever... wherever...! If we had a bumper sticker pasted to our backs that expressed our philosophy of life, that's it: Whatever... Wherever....

That was Elisha's commitment. And that's the kind of leaders and the kind of Christians and the kind of people the Lord is still looking for: Humble, passion-driven people, willing to be servants, willing to say: Whatever, wherever.

I heard Him say, "Come follow."

That was all.

My gold grew dim;

My soul went after Him.

Who would not follow if they hard Him call?