

Elijah: The praying prophet

Pre-reading – 1 Kings 17/18/19 need to be read in advance of this Bible study.

Groups – The sheet at the end of this pack could be given to smaller groups of 3-4 people.

Introduction

In this session we are going to talk about Elijah, a man of prayer. We are going to consider how to become men and women of prayer, through looking at Elijah's example. This is not easy and it requires Kingdom Courage to ask God into every area of our lives not holding back anything.

Starter questions (5 mins)

- (1) How regularly do you pray?
- (2) How important is prayer to you?

Elijah

James 5:16-18 – The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth yielded its crops.

James reminds us that Elijah was a human just like us. Get to know him, see his struggles and his strengths because James holds him as an example of prayer. He can be an inspiration to us as we study prayer.

Foundation of prayer: trusting in God

Background

We are going back to the ninth century BC. To the reign of King Ahab of Israel. Now it says Ahab 'did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him' (1Kings 16:33), and the kings before him were pretty bad! He had built altars to other gods and was causing the people to worship them, instead of the true God.

Then this guy Elijah turns up, almost out of nowhere – Tishbite means 'a stranger'. But this stranger was a prophet of God and Ahab would have to listen to him.

Read 1 Kings 17:1-6

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe 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."

2 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."

5 So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

The drought on the land showed the spiritual drought in the nation under Ahab. Israel had not put God in the rightful place in their lives.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) How was Elijah reminding the nation to put God back in the right place?
- (2) How does God provide for Elijah in the drought? (v4)
- (3) Jesus teaches us to pray 'Give us today our daily bread'. What does this mean practically for us?

Summary

Even in a nation so off-track Elijah comes and reminds the nation that their God is alive, and that they need Him. The drought comes and God provides for Elijah.

We learn that without God we live in a spiritual drought, and that is revealed in many ways. But if we put our trust in God He will provide for us.

After a while the spring dried up and forced Elijah to move on, and so often this is how God works, so that we know that we are reliant on God and not the 'spring'. God later provides in another way, through a widow.

It is through the realisation that God is alive in power, and that he wants to provide for our needs, that our prayer life becomes a meaningful activity.

Why we pray: the context to prayer

So after hiding for a while, Elijah called the King Ahab to come and meet him. This passage builds up to a big moment, a big prayer for the nation.

Read 1 Kings 18:17-20

17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. 19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

Background

We see here two sides lining up. On one side is a strange prophet of the Lord, fed by ravens. On the other side, we have 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. There was a battle for the people of the country over who they worshipped, and Elijah challenged the people to pick a side.

The backdrop to prayer is spiritual battle and this is what motivated Elijah to pray.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) Is there a spiritual battle going on in your own life?
- (2) How do you use your prayer life in this fight?
- (3) How is Elijah like Jesus in this passage?

How to pray

Read 1 Kings 18:22-24

22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

So, Elijah sets a contest, between Baal and the one true God. Who will win? The odds look stacked against Elijah. In numbers of prophets, he's outnumbered 450 to one. Besides, this is taking place in front of a people who have mostly turned away from God.

Read 1 Kings 18:25-29

25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." 26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

27 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." 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 29 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.

Elijah at the end of this passage starts mocking them. 'Is your God asleep?' Hilarious! It seems ridiculous, but so often we call on other gods/idols when we should call on God.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) How did the priests call on false gods?
- (2) What are the false gods in your life?
- (3) What does our worship of these false gods look like?

Read 1 Kings 18:36-39

36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the 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. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

The Lord's prayer ends with 'The Kingdom, the power and the glory'. Here we see God's Kingdom proclaimed in Israel, God's power shown, and a revelation of who God is in glory.

Group questions (10 mins)

- (1) What do we learn about Elijah's view of himself?
- (2) What do we learn about Elijah's view of God?
- (3) What did this prayer achieve apart from the fire?
- (4) When we pray do we want the same results?

Elijah the man of prayer

Elijah was a human like us. When he prayed God answered him, sometimes in miraculous ways, but also in practical ways. Each of us should feel empowered to pray as Elijah did. Physical fire may not always fall from the sky, but spiritual fire will come in the form of the Holy Spirit. This was made possible by Jesus standing alone, in the face of overwhelming opposition, and winning the ultimate battle over sin, evil and death. Then through the Spirit we see the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory in our lives, as Elijah did.

Response (15 minutes)

Pray for each member of the group.

You may consider praying into:

- Revelation of God's glory in their lives
- Spiritual battles in their lives
- False gods which draw them away from worship of the true God

Use elements of the Lord's Prayer to guide you as you pray.

Elijah the praying prophet – Group Handout

Questions

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Introduction (5 minutes)

- (1) How regularly do you pray?
- (2) How important is prayer to you?

Foundation of prayer: trusting in God

1 Kings 17:1-6 (5 minutes)

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- (3) Jesus teaches us to pray 'Give us today our daily bread'. What does this mean practically for us?

Why we pray: the context to prayer

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- (4) When we pray do we want to see 'The Kingdom, the power and the glory'?

Response (15 minutes)

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Bible passages

1 Kings 17:1-6

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