

THE SAME STORM

Thirty Bible Stories for the Life You're Living Now

FATHER ELIA

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Part One

Faith on Ordinary Days

After the fire, there was a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:12

Chapter One

When You Have Nothing Left

Elijah under the juniper tree

1 Kings 19:1-18

Today

It is twenty minutes to midnight, and you are sitting in your car in your own driveway with the engine off. The kitchen light is on. Inside that house are people who need you, and tonight you cannot make yourself open the door.

This was supposed to be a good year. You showed up. You kept your word. You prayed before the hard meetings and you carried people who could not carry themselves. And then one message on your phone, from your boss or your sister or your son, took the floor out from under you.

You do not feel close to God right now. You do not feel much of anything, except one sentence you would never say out loud in church: *I can't do this anymore.*

You are not the first person to say it. One of the greatest prophets in the Bible said it, almost word for word, right after the greatest victory of his life.

The Story

Elijah has just stood alone on Mount Carmel and watched fire fall from heaven. Soon after, a single message arrives, from Queen Jezebel, who promises to have him dead by tomorrow. And the strongest man in Israel runs.

19 3 When he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. Then he

requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough. Now, O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

5 He lay down and slept under a juniper tree;
and behold, an angel touched him, and said
to him, "Arise and eat!" 6 He looked, and
behold, there was at his head a cake baked on
the coals, and a jar of water. He ate and
drank, and lay down again. 7 Yahweh's angel
came again the second time, and touched
him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the
journey is too great for you." 8 He arose, and
ate and drank, and went in the strength of
that food forty days and forty nights to
Horeb, God's Mountain.

. . .

11 He said, "Go out and stand on the
mountain before Yahweh." Behold, Yahweh
passed by, and a great and strong wind tore
the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks
before Yahweh; but Yahweh was not in the
wind. After the wind there was an
earthquake; but Yahweh was not in the
earthquake. 12 After the earthquake a fire
passed; but Yahweh was not in the fire. After
the fire, there was a still small voice. 13 When
Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his
mantle, went out, and stood in the entrance
of the cave. Behold, a voice came to him, and
said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:3–8, 11–13 · World English Bible

The Detail Nobody Notices

Read it again, slowly. A man has just asked God to let him die. If you or I had been there, we would have started talking. We would have reminded him of the fire on Carmel, corrected his theology, told him to have more faith.

God does none of that. The first thing heaven sends a man who wants to die is not a sermon. It is bread, still warm from the coals, and a jar of water. And then something even stranger: Elijah lies down again, and the angel lets him sleep.

Then the angel comes back a second time, with the same bread and the same words, and one more sentence that I have learned to love: *"because the journey is too great for you."* God does not argue with Elijah's exhaustion. He agrees with it. Yes, the road is too long for you. So eat.

Only after bread, water and sleep, twice, does the Lord ask him a question. And when God finally speaks, He is not in the wind that breaks the rocks, not in the earthquake, not in the fire. He is in a still small voice: a sound so quiet you can only hear it once you have stopped running.

There is one more thing. On the mountain Elijah tells God, twice, *"I, even I only, am left."* It is not true. A few verses later God tells him that seven thousand in Israel have stayed faithful, and sends him to find Elisha, the man who will walk beside him. Exhaustion lies. Above all, it lies about how alone you are.

What It Means for You

Many of the people who sit with me in the evening believe they are losing their faith. Some of them are. But many more are simply tired, and their tiredness has put on the mask of doubt. The heart that has not slept starts to argue with God at midnight, and at midnight every argument sounds like the truth.

So before you decide what you believe about God tonight, do what the angel did for Elijah. Eat something. Drink a glass of water. Go to bed. The question you are asking is real, and God is not afraid of it. But He asked Elijah only after the second meal, and He can wait for your morning too.

And look again at the people around you. The voice that says *no one understands, I am the only one left* is the voice of the juniper tree, not the voice of the Lord.

This Week

The Juniper Rule

For the next seven nights, when a heavy thought comes after ten o'clock, do not answer it.

1. Write it in one line on a card and lay the card on your Bible or your nightstand.
2. Drink a glass of water, eat something small if you have not eaten, and go to sleep.
3. In the morning, in daylight, read the card again. Only then bring it to God.
4. On the seventh day, show one of the cards to a person you trust. Elijah had Elisha. You have someone too.

> **If "I can't go on" means more.** Elijah asked to die. If you have thoughts of ending your life, do not carry them alone tonight. Call or text **988** in the United States, or your local emergency number, and tell someone near you. Asking for help is not a failure of faith. It is the bread the angel brings.

A Short Prayer

Lord, the journey is too great for me.
Feed me before You correct me.
Let me sleep before I decide.
And when the wind and the fire have passed,
let me hear Your still small voice.

Amen

For Your Journal

What am I calling doubt that might only be exhaustion?

