

GOD'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

I Kings 19:1-15a

Some of the stories in the Bible would make a wonderful mystery, action, romance and “go get um” film and in fact many movies and books have romanced the Bible Stories. The story of Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah is one such story. Ahab, considered one of the worst Kings of Israel, married Jezebel, a Sidon princess who worshiped pagan gods. During the reign of Ahab and under the influence of Jezebel, pagan worship was not only encouraged, it was mandated. Jezebel had many of the Israeli prophets killed and supported over 400 of her own pagan prophets. Even the Israelites got under the spell of Jezebel and began worshiping pagan gods. Now, the prophet, Elijah, tried to urge Ahab back to his Israeli roots. But Ahab considered Elijah the “troubler of Israel” because he was calling for Ahab to stop worshiping the pagan gods and worship the God of Israel. But Elijah, as a prophet, wants to share that Ahab is wrong and to turn his people back to the God of Israel.

So Elijah sets up a contest between the God of Israel and the gods of the pagans. Can't you just see this on film? I can picture almost an army of people on both sides of a line and them running toward each other – you know the typical “go get um” type of movie. Well, the Lord, through Elijah, won this battle and Elijah killed all of the pagan prophets.

As you can imagine, Jezebel was furious, and here is where our scripture lesson for today comes in. Jezebel swore that she would kill Elijah, and Elijah fled for his life, running south through the neighboring kingdom of

Judah, going even beyond Beer-sheba (the southern most limits of Judahite civilization) into the Negev wilderness.

Elijah falls asleep there under a broom tree. But before he falls asleep he asks God to take his life. You see, he was in survival mode. He was a fugitive on the run and just didn't know what to do. He was discouraged and afraid, feeling let down after his overwhelming victory over Jezebel and Ahab. He was probably exhausted and spiritually spent. He was also probably feeling a little sorry for himself. He had put out all this effort to save his people and get them back into worshipping God, when in fact because he now had to flee Jezebel, they probably were going to go back to their old ways of pagan worship.

Aren't there times in your lives when you feel discouraged like Elijah? Oh, it probably isn't movie making discouragement. But it is discouragement. You have done the best you could do with a certain project, raising the children, earning a living, doing what you are supposed to do, and then, bam. A crisis hits, an illness or accident happens, a job is lost, the car breaks down, a relationship goes sour, and you are suddenly facing a situation in which you feel lost, discouraged and out of control.

But Elijah was feeling this way, too. Elijah ran into the desert and wanted to give up – just sit under the broom tree and die. We might look at him sitting there and recognize some of the classic signs of depression and burnout. God won't let him quit, however. An angel feeds him there in the wilderness and he gets some time to rest and even a cave to hide in. And God meets him there and challenges him to push through his fear and continue on with the business of being God's prophet. There is a wonderful scene in the film "Facing the Giants" that illustrates what God can do when we are tempted to quit. A football player wants to give up, but the coach pushes him,

letting the young boy know that the coach is with him all the way.(show film clip)

The lesson here is that even when we're ready to give up, God (our coach) is still with us. But it's only when we surrender to God's call that we can begin to move past our fear and despair and get at the business of living boldly into the future.

But how to do this. Elijah fled and tried to give up. Sometimes we tend to flee, but more often we frantically try to find ways to get out of our problems by ourselves. We try elaborated schemes to get out of our financial problems, we get second opinions and third and fourth opinions trying to find a cure for an illness. We seek outside help in relationship issues. We're like Elijah frantically running to get away from our problems and then stopping and giving up when we realize we can't escape the issue. So again, what do we do? Well, look at what God put Elijah through. He had Elijah go outside and wait for the Lord to help him. And Elijah experienced the frantic bouts of nature – the frenzy of nature. But God didn't appear in the frenziness of nature - the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but God did appear in the silence. You see, I think God was trying to tell Elijah and us that running around frantically trying to get our own selves out of trouble is like us trying to find God in wind, or fire, or earthquakes. Whereas God is in these natural disasters, they don't often bring us comfort. Elijah found God's presence in the silence.

Perhaps that is where God is trying to get us to go when we feel discouraged and defeated. Perhaps this is really God's survival guide for us - to go to God in the silence. For it is most often the ability to calm down, really listen to God, and work the problems step by step that means the difference

between discouragement and hope. And friends, we can only feel this when we stop and let God's amazing being surround us.

I read *The Upper Room* for part of my daily devotions. The one for Wednesday, June 16th, really illustrated what Elijah learned about the comfort of God and it hit me right in the gut. The story has a pilot telling of a time he flew into a sea of fog and couldn't tell whether he was flying up or down. He said that the protocol for these emergencies was to trust the instrument panels. To really trust the instruments to keep him from becoming disoriented. He likened that to trusting God when life seemed to turn us upside down. He says "in difficult moments, when we tend to ask "God why me", we need to trust God to guide us". We need to remember that, like Elijah, we can't do this on our own and take the time to spend some quiet moments with God to still our souls and find God's comfort.

So here is the lesson we can learn from Elijah's frantic run from Jezebel into the wilderness. Although we sometimes find ourselves weary, discouraged and afraid, like Elijah, we can learn from his experience. We can separate ourselves from the busyness of doing – whether it be our frantic ways of trying to get ourselves out of disasters, or just the mundane acts of living – by consciously putting ourselves in the stillness of God's presence. We can find ways to listen to God's still, small voice, be aware of God's continued ability to provide us with nourishment and refreshment, and be reminded that it is only when we listen to that still, small voice, that we have the strength and ability to be who God needs us to be.

I hope all of us can find ways to experience God's still, small voice this summer. It is so much better on us to find God this way than to try to frantically push our way into God's presence. Let's be still and know God's voice and participate in this part of God's Survival Guide.

