

## ELIJAH - Fasted for Spiritual Strength

**Key Text:** 1 Kings 19:8

**Big Idea:** God restores exhausted servants with holy sustenance.

*Sometimes our emotional exhaustion doesn't come from our defeats in life, but our victories; moments and seasons when we are on mission with God to accomplish incredible things! Victory can drain you just as much as battle. But God is faithful not to leave us in a state of depletion; rather, he desires to restore those who serve him with holy sustenance.*

Tonight, we are taking a field trip to Mount Carmel, the site of one of the greatest showdowns in the Bible: 450 prophets of Baal vs. 1 prophet of YAHWEH! We are going to read a lot of the Bible tonight, and I hope you're ok with that. Turn to 1 Kings 18:20-40. We begin by looking at Elijah's victory because Elijah's burnout makes the most sense when we remember the intensity of the victory that came before it. But why are we on Mount Carmel about to witness a showdown?

Israel is divided at this point in history. The northern kingdom is ruled by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who introduced worship of Baal—a false god of rain and fertility.

That matters because God has just shut the sky for 3½ years. No rain. No crops. Elijah is the prophet God uses to announce judgment on the nation and to call them back to the covenant.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenges the Baal prophets to a public test: Whichever God answers by fire—He is God.

**[Read: 1 Kings 18:20–40]**

*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."*

*But the people said nothing.*

*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."*

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.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." 32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again.

"Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

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!"

40 Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

When we are in moments or seasons of high spiritual output there is a serious risk of emotional depletion! Pastors experience this every single week, it's called the Monday blues! We can go from ministering to hundreds of people, praying for healing, contending for salvation, loving the downtrodden, welcoming the stranger, preaching with passion, from seeing God be victorious to the slowness, quietness, and often, loneliness of a Monday. But this doesn't just happen to pastors. After big spiritual output, ordinary Christians crash too...

## **BEWARE WHEN...**

- **After a major spiritual decision**
  - ...after you finally take a big step of obedience—
  - forgiving someone, confessing sin, committing to purity—
  - you often wake up the next day exhausted, wondering if it made any difference.
- **After serving others intensely**
  - ...after you pour yourself out caring for aging parents, supporting a struggling friend, or volunteering at an outreach event—
  - you can feel empty once the adrenaline wears off.
- **After a season of answered prayer**
  - ...after praying hard for a breakthrough—
  - for a job, a prodigal child, a crisis in the family—
  - ...the moment God answers can be followed by a strange emotional dip.
- **After big life moments**
  - ...after a baptism, a wedding, a new baby, buying a home, leading a small group, or seeing God do something powerful
  - the physical and emotional toll can leave you surprisingly weak.
- **After a spiritual high point**
  - ...after youth camp, a retreat, a missions trip, or an intense ministry weekend
  - the mountaintop moment can be followed by the valley of fatigue and even doubt
  - Emotional exhaustion isn't sinful. You can be faithful and still exhausted.

So what happens after moments and seasons of heavy spiritual output...let's see what happened to Elijah....

### **1. Burnout follows mountaintops.**

We may think that after experiencing mountaintop moments with God like we just explored, we might enter into a streak of more wins. But the reality is that we often experience physical exhaustion that leaves us weakened and vulnerable.

Let's continue reading.

**[Read: 1 Kings 18:41–46]**

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

43 "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

"There is nothing there," he said.

Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

44 The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."

So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

45 Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. 46 The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

**[Read: 1 Kings 19:1–4]** Elijah's collapse and fear in a cave.

1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 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."

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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."

Elijah has just run from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel (about 17 miles) after climbing a mountain, then fled over 100 more miles into Judah. Elijah didn't burnout because he lacked faith — he was physically spent from running the length of Southern California!

He is starving, thirsty, and sleep-deprived. He prays intensely and likely reaches the limit of his capacity and then he receives news from a messenger that Queen Jezebel is going to kill him. This is the emotional crash—where we meet Elijah exhausted and afraid.

He prays the 'I'm done' prayer. **"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."** Have you ever been in a place like Elijah? Elijah, the man of God, literally prayed, 'God, take my life!' after having a great mountain-top experience and being used mightily by God.

**This is when we need to be very careful. Commentators call this a “post-adrenaline collapse”.** Elijah’s courage evaporates not because he stopped believing in God, but because he has no emotional margin left.

I think the Bible permits us to pray such honest prayers to God, but we must recognize that they often proceed from a place of fear. Elijah went from being this baller prophet whose God defeated 450 false prophets, to being afraid of a queen and wanting to die! In his emotional depletion he confessed his fear of the future to the LORD, then he falls into a deep sleep!

***You may be asking, where is fasting in this story?*** Well, Elijah wasn’t intentionally fasting. Leading up to his collapse in the cave, Elijah was too depleted to eat, his exhaustion forced him into an involuntary fast while ministering. Elijah wasn’t being spiritually lazy, he was emotionally depleted. And this is what is so powerful about this story; God meets servants in our weakness, sometimes through fasting, sometimes through feeding.

This is where we see the kindness of the Lord toward his servants. Often times...

## **2. God nourishes before He commands.**

Let’s read the verses; Read: **1 Kings 19:5–8** — God’s ministry of rest.

*5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.*

*All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.*

*7 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.” 8 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.*

***Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to take a nap and eat*** (Spurgeon famously preached this). *Honestly, just take a nap and eat a meal in the name of Jesus.*

*Elijah is fed twice by God’s angels in between sleeps, these God-given meals become supernatural fuel that sustained him for forty days without food. This is an incredible truth!* Before God speaks and corrects Elijah for falling into depression, he nourishes him.

God wasn’t angry at Elijah! He didn’t abruptly wake him and rebuke him. He nourishes his servant knowing that Elijah needed something greater than food to make it through his next assignment, he needed the supernatural nourishment of God.

*1 Kings 19:6–8* — “The journey is too much for you.”

*Psalm 23:3* — He restores my soul.

**God meets His servants when they can no longer carry the load —whether they are fasting intentionally or simply running on empty.**

And here is why this truth is so relevant for us today: we may not be prophets like Elijah, but if God is the source of our spiritual nourishment, we too can receive supernatural strength to do incredible things.

Friends, the journey is indeed too much for you. On your own, you will be pressed on every side and be crushed. You will be perplexed and in despair. Persecuted and abandoned, struck down and destroyed. But if God is your nourishment, you can live another day to serve Him, and another, and another, into eternity.

Therefore, seasons of fasting are about looking to nourishment beyond bread alone, and it's in these seasons that God prepares us for the journey ahead.

**SNICKERS MOMENT** | Now before I ask my next question... let's talk about one of the greatest inventions in the candy aisle.

Soft, chewy nougat...  
thick, creamy caramel...  
packed with roasted peanuts...  
all wrapped in smooth milk chocolate.

It's salty and sweet.  
It sticks to your teeth in the best possible way.  
It gives you that little rush —  
that moment where your brain goes,  
*"Ahhh... I needed that."*

**Pause.**

Okay — NOW — how many of you are fasting from sweets?

Snickers promises satisfaction — but only for your mouth.  
It cannot feed your spirit, fuel your calling, or carry you through a wilderness.

This is what the world offers us every single day: quick fixes, fast sugar, short-term energy —zero nourishment for the soul.

The world knows exactly what your flesh wants.  
It wraps it in chocolate and caramel.  
It whispers, *"Just one bite... just one scroll... just one more click...you'll feel better."*

Spiritually, this Snickers represents:

- escaping into Netflix
- sugar, caffeine, comfort foods

- retail therapy
- scrolling TikTok
- numbing with porn out instead of intimacy with God
- even doing more ministry instead of meeting with God

All of them promise relief...

**none of them restore your soul.**

**But God** offers something deeper — something better —not a sugar rush, but a **soul restoration.**

Elijah didn't need a candy bar —  
**he needed the bread of heaven.**

### **3. Strength is sustained through dependence.**

Here is a truth we'd better learn sooner rather than later. *Human strength fails. Every. Single. Time. God does not tell Elijah, “muster up your strength you fool!” Nooooo....He touches him, tells him to get up, he feeds him, lets him rest again.* Not once does Elijah generate his own strength. Every calorie, every moment of rest is a gift from God. This is what dependence looks like my friends.

The Apostle Paul wrestled with the same reality. When he asked God to take away a physical limitation he suffered from, God replied,

**2 Corinthians 12:9** “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”  
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Paul, the amazing Apostle of Jesus Christ, had weaknesses, and he boasted rather than hid them.

Imagine if in the church we boasted more about our weaknesses than our strengths? Now, I'm not saying we need to stand up here and air every struggle we have or confess every weakness we carry. That's not wisdom — that's oversharing. But I do think we need to stop pretending we're made of steel when we're made of dust.

Let me be the first to say — I'm not preaching this from a place of strength. There are days I stand in this pulpit feeling empty. There are Mondays where I wonder if I have anything left to give. There are moments I question whether I'm the right person for the assignment God gave me.

But every single time — God comes through.

He feeds me. He restores me. He gives strength I did not have. As you confess your weakness, God's power rests on you. And if he did it for Elijah and for me, he can do it for you.

Paul didn't say, 'I brag about how strong I am.'

He said, 'I boast in my weakness... so Christ's power may rest on me.'

That means we don't hide tiredness, we don't mask discouragement, we don't pretend we're okay when we're not —we drag our weakness into the presence of God, so He can fill us. This is God's promise to us!

### **Isaiah 40:29–31 —**

29 He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

31 but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

*I'm wondering if there are some Elijah's in the house of the Lord tonight, sitting under a broom bush, strength withered up, no desire to live, fearful of what the future holds for them, depleted and in need of soul restoration. I want you to know that God sees you under that broom bush. And he wants to sustain you as you depend on him and not yourself.*

### **APPLICATION**

When you fast... exhaustion becomes renewed strength.

When you fast... weariness becomes emotional healing.

When you fast... fear becomes fresh courage.

But let me show you where Elijah's story takes us next.

Elijah arrives at Horeb (100 miles journey in 40 days) with just one thing left —  
**dependence.**

He is still tired. Still unsure. Still hurting.

But God has not finished with him.

In the very next moments — which we don't have time to read tonight — God doesn't throw Elijah away. He speaks, He corrects the lies, and He sends him forward...

Elijah thought Mount Carmel was his big assignment. God had more ahead — but only once Elijah learned **dependence**.

And church, the same is true for us.

If you are under the broom tree,

if you are running on empty,

if you are weary from ministry and life —

God has not finished writing your story either.

Strength isn't sustained by pushing harder — but by leaning on the God who restores exhausted servants.

**BLESSING | May you eat what God gives, rest where God leads, and rise in His strength — not yours.**