

Running on Empty

Dealing with Discouragement - I Kings 19:1-18

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Aug. 14th, 2022

Intro:

- There have been a number of times in my past when I have run out of gas in my car. One time I was in the middle of nowhere on a country road when I found out my gas gauge did not work . . . Another time I was with my family, and we ran out of gas on an exit ramp . . . It is more common than we think, even today with our modern cars. We used to live in a house where our backyard butted up against Bypass 20 right at the start of the exit for Alpine road. A couple of times a year, there would be a vehicle on the side of the road right behind our house that had run out of gas, and I would always try to have some fuel on hand to at least get them up the hill to the gas station. Every time we run out of fuel, it is inconvenient, frustrating, and can be downright dangerous. Our life slows down to a snail's pace, or we stop moving forward at all.
- Fuel exhaustion is a real thing. Life exhaustion is a real thing as well. Where we just "run out of fuel" to go on for a variety of reasons, from overwhelming news, to disabling diseases, to insurmountable pressures, to devastating discouragement, to sheer exhaustion. Some of you may be feeling this way and living with this right now.
- This morning we are turning to a time when Elijah the prophet had run out of fuel himself, so we can learn from his life and find fuel to continue moving forward in our lives.

There are times when we run out of fuel

- In order for us to better understand our passage for this morning, it is important to understand the back story. A man named Ahab became King over the nation of Israel who "did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (I Kings 16:33). Ahab was also married to a woman named Jezebel who was even worse than he was. During the reign of this King, Elijah was alive and doing the work that God assigned him to do. It was a very difficult time, and he was given a very difficult task.
- Elijah told the king that there was going to be no dew nor rain for three years, except by his word. Then he hid by a brook, and the ravens fed him until the brook dried up. Then he was led to a town and a widow with a son, and God miraculously fed them through a never-ending jar of flour and jug of oil. Then the widow's boy died, and Elijah raised him back to life.
- In the meantime, Ahab and Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, and they were hunting Elijah down. Elijah came out of hiding and had a standoff with the king and the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (who were supported and supplied by Jezebel). They had a competition to find out who the real God is. God sent fire, the people saw that the Lord is God, then they killed all the false prophets. Elijah then went up to a mountain top to pray for rain, and the Lord sent rain on the land. This is where we pick up the story from I Kings 19.

1 Kings 19:1-5a NIV

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

- This wasn't a good day for Elijah. He received a message that a powerful person wanted to kill him and that the deed would be done within 24 hours. Sometimes we hear news that scares us, and we start running. Our mind starts running, our pulse starts running, and we start running from one thing to another, trying to find something that will help and some form of safety. We try running away from it all.
- Now you would think, given the back story of who Elijah was and what He saw the Lord do, that he would not have run at all. But he did. I don't think that Elijah thought God would not defend His Glory for a second. I do think that Elijah was afraid that God would not defend him.
- If you are afraid, discouraged, or depressed, it does not mean you have done something wrong or that you are wrong. You may have done everything right, but you are just worn out and tired of the battle, the pain, and the fight. So tired that you would rather die than go on. And perhaps you have prayed that God takes you home. That you have had enough and can't take it anymore. The only way you see for your pain and problems to stop is for your life to stop. Elijah, who was a great man of God, felt this way.
- *The truth is when God gives you a special task, the devil makes you a special target.* "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12-13). Peter echoed Paul when he wrote, "dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12-13 NIV). And the apostle John writes, "do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13-14 NIV). Welcome to the fellowship of suffering. These things happen. Don't add to your suffering by beating yourself up because of them.
- Know that there are times in our lives when we run out of fuel and are afraid and frantic, running around looking for answers, and we are exhausted and want it all to end. In times like this, don't run from something, but run to something and someone who can help.

God will give you the strength to come to Him

- Often, we have to come to the end of ourselves in order for us to find Him. God meets us in our depression, despondency, and despair, and gives us the strength to run to Him.

1 Kings 19:5b-9a NIV

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. **9** There he went into a cave and spent the night.**

- God doesn't just ask you to do something; He also gives you the strength to do it. Sometimes we need physical rest and food, and God grants us these things. And sometimes, we need more, and we need energy and nourishment from another source. I can't help but think of Jesus in this passage when He was tempted and tried and said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4 NIV). And when Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35 ESV).
- Notice that it was not just one-time eating and resting. It was a process for Elijah to become strong. We need help from the Word of God to continue on our journey in this life because "the journey is too much" for us. *We cannot live the Christian life without the life of Christ in us.* God, in His wisdom and love, gets us to the end of ourselves so that we will fully rely on Him, so that we can know Him more and experience His strength and His goodness and His glory. This is what happened in Paul's life, and he wrote: "**We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead**" (2 Cor 1:8-9 NIV). These things happened in the life of Paul and happen in our lives so that we will rely on God, who raises the dead, who can do what no human can do.
- God will give you the strength to come to Him, and we must continually pursue Him through our time of trial. Notice the length of time Elijah ran to meet with God—forty days and nights. Does this sound familiar? (This is the time of trial and testing in the Bible: Noah, Israel in the desert, Goliath, Jesus). Elijah ran to the mountain of God, the place where He knew God dwelt. God could have met him where he was, but He set it up deliberately so Elijah would pursue Him. In so doing, Elijah became strong because of God's strength. We, too, have to pursue God and meet with Him where He can be found. God gives us what we need to do this.
- After Elijah was sustained and supported and strengthened by God, he met with God. God demonstrated His mighty power before him, showing that He is who He has always been.

God is still God

1 Kings 19:9b-10 NIV

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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."

- God did not ask Elijah this question for His information. He asked so Elijah would think about it. When God asks us a question, it is not for His information but for ours. Elijah answered by painting himself in a positive light and painting everything else darkly. He did not mention any of the positives in his situation and did not give any negatives about himself. This is usually the way we think when we are in a difficult place. We usually have a hard time seeing our situation with clarity.
- Notice that the Lord did not call Elijah out on this nor put him down because of this response and perspective. God reminded Elijah with a visual demonstration of who He was and what He could do.

1 Kings 19:11-13a NIV

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. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

- God is still God and is still able to do what we have read about in the past and have experienced in the past. He has never lost any of His abilities. He is still God in every way, and He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. But God's purposes for displaying His power in the past may not be the purpose of your present pressures and persecutions. Notice that God did not take out Ahab and Jezebel with His power, because He could have. He used his wind to part the Red Sea and took out Pharaoh and his army. He used an earthquake to swallow up Korah and the leaders of his rebellion. He used fire and burned up those who followed Korah and his rebellion.
- God showed that He has the power to do what He wants to do. He was still who He always has been, but He was not in this now. God has a different purpose and plan for the present. Know that God is still God, and He can take out the issue in an instant if that serves His purpose. And sometimes God does that. And then, at other times, God, because of His plan and purpose to continue to make us like Christ and serve His purpose, provides what we need to continue to persevere. This is what He did with Elijah at this point in his process.

God will provide what you need to persevere

- After God showed Elijah His power, He asked Him the same question in a gentle whisper. So often, we want the dramatic event with God when He wants us to wait for the quiet whisper (which means we have to be quiet and listen).

1 Kings 19:13b-14 NIV

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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."

- Elijah responded the exact same way he had before. God did not work to change his thinking. He just told Elijah what he needed to do and provided some information that would help him persevere in his purpose.

1 Kings 19:15-18 NIV

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. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel,

and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 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. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

- Instead of taking Elijah out of his situation and circumstances, God sent Elijah back into it. *Don't expect God to always deliver you from your circumstances but to develop you through your circumstances.* "Go back the way you came, and what you get there," do what I have for you to do.
- God will give us what we need to persevere in His purposes. In this case, it was direction, succession, and information. Do what I tell you to do, and I will tell you what I will do through it. He was to anoint Hazael king over Aram (which is Syria). At the hand of Hazael, Ahab died. And Jezebel died at the hand of Jehu. God used a chain of events to take them down and deal with the problem. Elijah did his part, and God worked it all out.
- Also, in naming Elisha as his successor, Elijah gained a companion and a successor so that His work would continue, and also that there would be a time when Elisha's work would be done. God gave Elijah what he needed to persevere for God's greater purposes, and God will do the same for you.

Conclusion

- Do you remember who God the Father sent to Jesus before His crucifixion? Elijah and Moses met Him on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:30). Why Elijah? Because Elijah knew what it was to be sustained through trials, not to be delivered out of them. Elijah was uniquely positioned to encourage Jesus through his life and experiences helping Jesus with what He was to face. And Jesus, by persevering in His trials, is able to give us the greatest gift and help us through our time of need.
- Remember that at times we all run out of fuel. It is okay to be this way. Our journey, at times, is more than we can handle. Know that God will provide the strength to come to Him. He still is who He has always been. Trust Him to deliver you in His way for His purposes. He will give you what you need to see you through. He will never leave you or forsake you, even in and through our toughest times.
- Prayer people and pray.