



**FAITH TEMPLE COMMUNITY
CHURCH**

21 DAY CONSECRATION

FASTING & PRAYER

Corporately fasting in January is much the same precept as praying in the morning to establish the will of God for the entire day. I believe that, if we will pray and seek God and give Him our best at the first of the year, He will bless our ENTIRE year! “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Fasting is a principle that God intended for everyone to be able to enjoy. It’s not a punishment; it’s a privilege! By making fasting a way of life, you can get closer to God and grow in your spiritual walk like never before. Fasting is one of the most powerful weapons God has given us for our daily lives. When you fast and pray, you will see amazing results from God. It’s all about putting Him first, and letting our Shepherd lead the way all year long. Without a doubt, fasting sets you on a great course every year. Psalms 37:23 says, “The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He de- lights in his way.” We must be intentional about guarding what we see, hear, and digest.

Faith Temple Community Church Theme:

Believing God for Miracles, Signs, and Wonders. (Hebrews 2:4)

INSTRUCTIONS

-21 days Fasting & Prayer (January 4th, 2021 - January 24th, 2021).

-Begin everyday with Prayer. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

-Read and meditate on daily devotional, scripture, and prayer (3x a day).

*Some devotionals have questions.

-Fasting from food between the hours of 12am-3pm.

-Refrain from Tv & Social media between the hours of 12am-3pm.

Day 1

Reading: (John 5: 1-17)

Devotion:

Have you ever met anyone who continually complains about their lot: "*This is no good, life isn't fair,*" over and over? But when you reach out and try to help them, they almost bite your hand off! *What?! Help?! Change?! What's the matter with you?!*

They're comfortable in their situation. Comfortable to complain, but not to do anything about it.

In this plan, we're going to look at some of the miracles that Jesus performed as recorded in John's Gospel. And right now, we're going to meet a man stuck in his misery, doing the same thing over and over again. The only problem is, his life isn't getting any better.

And then Jesus walks in and turns his whole life upside down.

In John chapter 5, Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem near the pool of Bethesda, where He meets a man who has been paralyzed for 38 years.

So, what's the deal here at this pool? Well, the word 'Bethesda' means 'House of Mercy' or 'House of Grace'. And both Jews and Gentiles went down there because they believed that an angel would occasionally come and stir up the water—and that the first person into the pool would be restored.

The problem was that many people had been going there for years but had never been healed.

How many of us are living like that? A difficult marriage, a wayward child, a deep nagging sense of inadequacy or low self-esteem, an addiction of some sort... and we just sit there, day after day, with that wishing-well mentality.

We imagine that somehow, someday, things will get better. But on the other hand, we never really expect anything to change, and don't want it to, really!

And then, in walks Jesus.

He asks, "Do you want to be healed?" – John 5:6 (ESV)

Does the man immediately say, "Yes"? No, he doesn't! Even after 38 years of suffering, he gives Jesus excuses as to why he hasn't been healed. He's seeing things through the lens of his circumstances; he's looking from the bottom up, not from the top down.

But what does Jesus do? He commands healing.

Do you know what I believe? I believe that today, through the power of His Word, Jesus has just walked into your life... into your 'same old, same old' situation... into your particular, personal need for healing.

And He's asking you: "Do you want to be healed?"

Questions for reflection:

If you were that man, would you have hung around that pool for all that time? Had you been sitting at that pool on that day, what would you have been thinking and feeling?

What do you learn from this man about how you could think and behave when the situation seems hopeless?

Now imagine you're another one of the people in need of healing near that pool. What would you have done if you had seen Jesus heal this man?

What do you need to do now to put yourself in a place where Jesus may walk into your life and perform a serious miracle?

Day 2

Reading: (James 5: 16-17)

Devotion:

Because you've become the righteousness of Christ, your prayers have unspeakable power.

In describing the incredible power of every believer's prayers, James makes an astounding comparison: "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...*" (James 5:17). The implication is shocking. God didn't work miracles through Elijah because the prophet was better or less human than you are; Elijah was just like you. And God stopped the rain on account of Elijah's intercession.

In describing the healing ministry that God has entrusted to the local church, James is building the believer's faith for miracles. The one qualification that James highlights for a powerful prayer life is that the intercessor be "righteous." The "prayer of a righteous person has great power."

Some might stumble here saying, "Ah, there's the difference. Elijah was righteous and I am less so." To understand James' point, we must be clear about two truths: 1) no "superhero"

in the Old Testament (or New Testament) was perfectly righteous; 2) every Christian has been reckoned as perfectly righteous by God through the meritorious work of Jesus.

Not one of the spiritual giants was without sin. Abraham lied about his wife. Moses disobeyed, struck a rock and was banned from the Promised Land. David was a murderer and adulterer. Jeremiah complained to God. Jonah ran away from God. Peter denied Jesus three times. If God can only use the prayers of perfect people, He can use no one's prayers.

More importantly, every Christian has been declared "righteous" through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life so that, when He took your sin on the cross, God could impute Jesus' righteousness to you. *"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19, ESV). When you accept Christ, you are not only forgiven of all your sin; you are also credited with the meritorious life that Jesus lived. God looks upon you as if you had never sinned and, more, as if you had lived Jesus' righteous life.

Therefore, you are the righteous one James speaks of when he declares that the prayer of the righteous person is powerful. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) How are you prone to disqualify yourself or discount the power of your prayer life? Take a moment to list your "disqualifications":
- 2) For each of the "disqualifications" you listed, write what God's Word says that redeems the "disqualification" (for example, you might write FORGIVEN or NOW USED FOR GOD'S GLORY or GIVES ME COMPASSION FOR OTHERS):
- 3) How does seeing yourself as the "righteousness" of Jesus change your prayer life? How would you pray differently today if you truly, deeply believed that you're no different than Elijah (and, in fact, reckoned to be as righteous as Jesus)?

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, I confess my tendency to disqualify myself for lack of righteousness, but your Word declares that I have become the righteousness of Jesus by His shed blood so I lay claim to the fullness of my new standing with you. I agree with your Word that I am not only forgiven but also credited with Jesus' meritorious life. Therefore, teach me Father God, to draw near to your throne of grace with boldness and grant that my prayer life soars with faith and power in whole new ways. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 3

Reading: (1 Kings 18: 41-42)

Devotion:

You can hear the rain before it arrives; you can pray in faith before you see the miracle come to pass.

Three and half years of searing drought had struck the land upon Elijah's command. In the great Chinese famine of 1958-1961 between 15 and 43 million people died. An Indian famine at the turn of the nineteenth century killed 19 million. In more recent memory, the Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985 cost about a million lives.

In the days of Elijah, the drought dried up riverbeds. Livestock became emaciated as they foraged for scraps of wilted vegetation. Wildfires rampaged through the brittle land. Every day, for over three years, it was the topic of all conversation – when will it rain? The predominant local deity, Baal, could do nothing though he was the god of rain and storms. Everything withered without hope until Elijah spoke.

“There is the sound of the rushing of rain.”

Though there was not a cloud in sight or a sprinkle in the atmosphere, Elijah heard something. He heard it not with natural ears. Elijah heard the rain in the spirit. In other words, in faith he received a revelation that, in turn, instructed his prayer life.

Faith is not wishful thinking. Prayer is not pie in the sky fanciful longings. Powerful intercession does not come by psychologically convincing yourself that something will happen. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of the Lord (Romans 10:17).

Once Elijah “heard” the sound of the rushing of rain (though there was no rain in sight), he began earnestly praying in a unique physical posture. “He bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.” Scholars have noted that this was often the posture Hebrew women of antiquity assumed in childbirth.

So, Elijah was “laboring” in prayer the way a woman travails in childbirth. As a woman's labor proves that the unseen baby is about to manifest, Elijah's travail in prayer wasn't agonizing work accompanied by wishful thinking; his prayer was passionate expression of certainty that the rain was coming soon.

God gives you His Word and then calls you to pray that Word. Listen, there is the sound of the rushing of rain. Pray it. It will be here soon. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Is there a part of your life that feels like it is in “drought” right now? What’s made the season feel so dry? What would it feel like for the “drought” to end?
- 2) As Elijah “heard” the sound of the rushing of rain before the precipitation manifested, so God often gives us a Word of hope before the provision is manifested. Can you remember a time when God gave you a word of hope that later manifested? Journal about the experience. Write down the details. How did it build your hope?
- 3) Looking back on your reflections in Question 1 about any type of “drought” in your life, in what ways do you need to tune your spiritual ears for the sound of the rushing of rain? Take a few moments to ask God for spiritual ears to hear what He’s saying to you in this season. Ask Him how you are to pray. Write down what you discern from your time with the Lord:

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, give me spiritual ears to hear the sound of the rushing of rain. Tune my heart to yours. Let not the dryness of present circumstances cause me despair for you are the living water and I have abundant life in you. Sustain me by your grace and make me an instrument of your joy and peace to others in their dry and troubled times. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.

Day 4

Reading: (1 Kings 18: 43-44)

Devotion:

Your small beginning is a sign of great refreshment; a great rain may start as a small cloud.

After three and a half years of withering drought, the Lord gave Elijah a word about the advent of rain. Though no precipitation had manifested, Elijah heard the “sound of the rushing of rain” (1 Kings 18:41). Though there was no natural sound of the deluge rising in the distance, Elijah discerned it and told his servant to go toward the sea to spy it.

The servant went toward the sea and gazed upon the same barren land he’d seen for over three years. Nothing but the same dust. The same dry riverbeds. The same scorched fields.

“Go again,” the prophet declared.

So the servant went. Again and again and again. Still nothing but drought as far as the eye could see.

Sometimes when God gives you a revelation of hope for the future, your natural eye may not see it for a season. God stands outside of time. In God's eyes, the provision is already there. From God's perspective, the rain is pouring.

Not until the seventh journey toward the sea did the servant see any evidence of rain. In scripture, seven is the number of completion – the week isn't over until the seventh day. Your story isn't over until God completes it! And what the servant saw must have seemed puny: "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand...."

In that tiny cloud was the beginning of the end of a three and a half year drought. God uses small things to do big things. Look, there is a cloud rising. It is a cloud of hope amidst the despair of the world. It may seem small and distant, but the grace of God is rising and, when His provision has been fully manifest, it will be a downpour of His love. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Imagine you're the servant of Elijah. How would you have felt the fifth or sixth time the prophet sent you to look for rain in the barren land?
- 2) What is God calling you to perceive in the distance today? What sort of "rain" needs to come your way? Spend some unhurried moments "looking toward the sea" (looking toward God as your source). Can you see any small clouds on the horizon? Write down any little "cloud" (sign of hope) that you see.
- 3) What "big" thing in your life now started out as a "small cloud"? How did you feel in the "days of small beginnings"? When you reflect on the growth that has occurred, how does it make you feel about other "small clouds" in your life today?

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, let me not despair in the day of drought. Keep me on a quest to see every small cloud that rises from the sea of your grace. Grant me spiritual eyes to see the miracles on the horizon and sustain me by your promises until the provision is fully manifest. Build my faith not only so I can endure the heat of adversity but also so I can help others in their times of drought. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 5

Reading: (1 Kings 17: 8-9)

Devotion:

God miraculously provides for His children in times of “drought.”

When facing times of lack, we’re tempted to think God has left us alone, but, in reality, God is most present in the times of drought.

The seventeenth chapter of 1 Kings chronicles different, but parallel, proofs of God’s commitment to provide for His children. He provides ravens to bring food to Elijah. Then, God provides a poor widow of Sidon to feed the prophet. In the midst of the gift to Elijah, the Lord also provides food for the widow and then, most remarkably, He gives the gift of restored life to the widow’s son.

Elijah was in the middle of a long drought that God would end with the sound of the rushing of rain three years later. God can (and will) end every drought, but, as the drought tarries, God provides.

When the Apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove his “thorn” (a chronic, harassing demonic spirit), God denied the request but issued a prevailing promise: “My grace is sufficient for you....” (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV). Of course, God *could* have stamped out the spiritual persecution that plagued Paul. And, of course, Christ will one day return and end the spiritual battles you face. But now, in this “in between” time before Christ’s return, God provides miraculous grace for you to face the searing heat and drought of any wilderness.

When you face a drought – when the ease and comfort of life dries up – it isn’t a sign that God has abandoned you. Quite the opposite, God uses droughts to prove His presence. When we want the thorn removed, sometimes God leaves it and, instead, gives us His power. When we want the drought ended, sometimes God leaves it, and instead, feeds us by the ravens. God doesn’t provide for you by removing all your challenges; He provides for you by giving you ample grace to face the challenges. If you were never hungry, how would you find an appetite for food? If you were never in a drought, how would you ever savor the sweetness of cool water? If you’re facing a drought, it’s not a sign of God’s absence; it’s a promise of God’s presence. And that’s the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

1) Think of some seasons of “drought” (times of material or relational lack) in your life. What were some of your temptations during the “drought?”

2) Again, as you remember the seasons of “drought” in your life, how did God provide for you? List some of the specific ways God provided:

3) As you look over the course of your life, what are the most surprising ways that God has provided for you? Journal your heart of gratitude to God for His surprising provision when you’ve needed it most.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, though I long for every drought to end, I choose to trust you no matter how dry life gets. You, O Jehovah Jireh, provide my every need. You see all, you know all, and you never leave me. Help my heart to be still and know that you are God. Grant me confidence in your Word that sustains me during times of uncertainty. And give me eyes to see your provision today no matter what I face. In Jesus’s name, AMEN.

Day 6

Reading: (1 Kings 17: 8-9)

Devotion:

God’s Word is His provision because His Word never fails.

When the Lord spoke to Elijah in a drought and told the prophet that a poor widow would feed him, the Word of the Lord was as good as the provision itself.

My father-in-law worked in the bond business at Wachovia Bank (now Wells Fargo) in Winston-Salem for his entire professional career before retiring nearly 30 years ago. In his leadership role with the bond department, he and his sales team regularly bought and sold millions of dollars of bonds over the phone. Here’s how every deal was sealed: it was spoken. Plain. Simple. If the bond salesperson made an agreement on the phone, it was done. If the salesperson didn’t follow through, no client would trust him/her. If the client didn’t keep his/her word, they’d no longer be a client.

In today’s world of emails, instant legal contracts and online agreements, it’s hard for us to imagine a world where someone’s word made all the difference. But such was the culture of the biblical world. People everywhere understood the power of an authoritative word.

When Jesus was tempted after fasting forty days in the wilderness, the devil tried to allure the Messiah into taking a short cut to glory. The devil wanted Jesus to forgo His humanity and only embrace His divinity. So Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. Instead of being authentically human and experiencing the hunger pangs of a real human belly, the devil tried to trick Jesus into quick satisfaction of fleshly desires. But Jesus, as He always

did, resisted the devil by the word of God. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy to the devil: *“Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

In other words, the Word of God is so reliable that it is the provision. God’s promise of food is real food. God’s promises and God’s provisions are, in that sense, the same. If God says you’ll have it, you’ll have it. And that’s the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Who, more than anyone else you’ve known, is true to his/her word? How does the person’s integrity shape how you feel about him/her?
- 2) Write down at least one way that you’ve seen God be true to His Word in your life?
- 3) Are there some areas of need in your life for which you need God’s provision? Write down each area of need and, beside it, write down what God’s Word has to say about His promise of provision.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, you created the world with words. No word that you speak returns to you empty. Teach my heart to love and trust your Word. Show me the deep joy of trusting in your promises. Today, I trust in your promise of provision in this area of my life _____ . Though I long for the provision now, I trust your Word. Your Word is my provision. Make my heart sure of the truth: I do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from your mouth. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.

Day 7

Reading: (1 Kings 18: 37-39)

Devotion:

You don’t have to take a leap of faith to believe a miracle; you just have to see a miracle.

Elijah’s showdown at Mt. Carmel was a contest to determine the true god. The 450 prophets of Baal contended that Baal (who, among other things, was considered the weather god by the Canaanites) was the true god. Elijah contended that the Lord

("Yahweh") was the true, supreme God. So they staged a contest. The Baal worshipers and Elijah would set up altars and call upon the name of their gods. Whichever god consumed the altar by fire would be established as the true god.

Elijah was happy with the arrangement. He was glad for the pagan prophets to behold an actual miracle. Elijah didn't have to use words to persuade the Baal worshipers. God was going to make Himself known.

English wit and philosopher G.K. Chesterton argued that belief in miracles isn't irrational: "But my belief that miracles have happened in human history is not a mystical belief at all; I believe in them upon human evidences as I do in the discovery of America. ... Somehow or other an extraordinary idea has arisen that the disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way. The believers in miracles accept them (rightly or wrongly) because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them (rightly or wrongly) because they have a doctrine against them." (Metaxas, Eric. *Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life*. Kindle Locations 57-63, Penguin Group US. Kindle Edition).

In other words, most people who don't believe in miracles do so because they've already decided that miracles can't happen. And, actually, people who believe in miracles do so because of the miracles themselves.

Elijah was eager for a showdown at Mt. Carmel because the evidence of the miracle itself would prove the Lord to be the only true God. The whole of the Bible (like the whole of the Christian faith) centers upon a miracle: God became a man who died on a cross in order to pay for human sin and, on the third day, was raised again. Being a Christian means being a person who believes in miracles. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Other than the resurrection of Jesus, what's your favorite miracle story in the Bible? What fascinates you or inspires you about the miracle?
- 2) What's the greatest miracle you've witnessed (or been close to)? Write down your thoughts and feelings about the miracle.
- 3) Spend some time journaling about the statement: "I believe in God because" Let your faith be nourished through your reflections.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, you are a miracle working God. You created all that exists from nothing. You still create and restore by the power of your voice. Give me eyes to see the miracles all around me. Build my faith that I might believe mightier things from you. In particular Lord, I'm standing in need of this miracle: _____ All things are possible to you God. You have told me to ask so I would receive. So here I am; asking in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 8

Reading: (1 Kings 18: 37-39)

Devotion:

You don't have to make sacrifices to move God on your behalf; God Himself has already moved on your behalf by making the ultimate sacrifice.

It was an epic showdown. On one side, 450 prophets of the Canaanite storm god Baal. On the other side, the lone prophet of Yahweh. They assembled on Mt. Carmel with an agreement: each side would erect an altar and call upon their god to consume it by fire; whichever god brought the fire would be proven to be the true god.

The Baal prophets were pitiful to the point of being comical. They called upon Baal from 6 a.m. until noon. Elijah mocked them. *Shout louder*, Israel's prophet said with a chuckle. *Perhaps Baal is musing or maybe he's just using the bathroom. Maybe your god is on a vacation or perhaps he is asleep.*

What's more comical than Elijah's taunts is the fact that the pagan prophets took Elijah's advice. They called louder and louder. They cut themselves. They raved.

Nothing happened.

When it came Elijah's turn, the prophet prayed a simple prayer of faith and the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the offering and the altar. Seeing the fire put the Baal prophets on their faces and proved Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the one, true God.

It's not just a story about the power of God; it's a story about the power of the Gospel.

The Baal prophets' ridiculous, painful antics provide an apt picture of dead religion. Every empty religious system is a human attempt to move God by ritual, vows and sacrifices. But the Good News of Jesus Christ is an announcement of how God has moved on your behalf

by making the ultimate sacrifice Himself. The Good News is good because it isn't about your ability to do something for God; it's about God's ability to do something for you. You don't need to rant and rave and lacerate your self-worth in order to move God on your behalf; God has already moved on your behalf. He's given you Christ --which means He's given His all. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) When are you most tempted to think "it's all up to me" – that you need to do more in order to please God or move Him on your behalf? What makes you feel that way?
- 2) Have you ever felt like you experienced a "Mt. Carmel" moment – a time in which God proved Himself the true God? Write down your memories/reflections about it. In what area of life today do you need God to show Himself mighty as He did for Elijah?
- 3) If the great illusion of all empty religion is that more sacrifice will bring more blessing, what are the deep assurances of the Gospel that prove the opposite? Journal about the assurances of God's love to you as seen in the sacrifice of Jesus. How has God already shown Himself mighty and gracious?

Prayer for the Day

Lord, forgive my feeble attempts to add to the grandeur of the sacrifice you've made for me in Christ Jesus. I choose this day to trust in your finished work and your sovereign grace. Let all my good works be expressions of gratitude and authentic partnership with you rather than pitiful attempts to garner your favor. I thank you for the unmerited favor that you have shown me through the cross and resurrection of Christ. Take me to Mt. Carmel in my faith and show me your power so that, through me, a bold, bright light will shine. I pray in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 9

Reading: (1 Kings 19: 2-3)

Devotion:

If the game goes into overtime, God always wins.

In the spring of 2018, the Baylor Bears men's basketball team was scrapping for every game in hopes of making the big dance. In one important matchup, the Bears led the Texas Longhorns almost the whole game. At the end, the game seemed neatly in hand. I know what the Bears were thinking. *In just a few seconds, the buzzer will sound and we'll start celebrating.* While they were looking forward to the fun bus ride home, Texas inbounced the ball with

almost no time left. Suddenly, their guard heaved the unlikely shot and, as the buzzer sounded, the three-pointer swished to tie the game.

Overtime. The Bears thought they'd finished. They thought they'd won. And, suddenly, they had to gear up for five more minutes of the fight.

Ever had a time when life handed you "overtime?" Elijah did. The mighty prophet of Israel had defeated 450 prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel and proven Yahweh to be the one, supreme Lord of all. Then, out of nowhere, the pagan queen Jezebel (who had invested a lot in the prophets of Baal) threatened Elijah's life.

It's odd. Elijah had seen the fire of God fall. Elijah had experienced God's power and might. Elijah, as much as any man alive in Israel, knew that God was sovereign. But the Queen's threat landed with great force in Elijah's soul. Why? It was "overtime" for Elijah. He had given his all, thought he'd won, and the sudden thought of having to fight another day just seemed like too much. The mighty prophet became depressed and retreated into the wilderness. He gave up.

"Overtime" comes when you least expect it. Perhaps your marriage goes through a big crisis and you're reconciled but, all of a sudden, one argument seems to threaten it all. Or, maybe you're a business owner and you landed the big contract when, all of a sudden, a competitor surfaces with a competing bid. Or, maybe the chemo treatments are over, but there is a new scan that raises questions and new treatment is recommended. Overtime.

The Bears didn't beat the Longhorns in overtime last year. They beat them in double overtime! When Elijah went into "overtime" God sent an angel to feed him and tell him there was still a great journey ahead. If you're in "overtime" God will feed and lead you too. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) What has been your greatest "overtime" victory in life? How did God sustain you when you had to "get back in the game?"
- 2) Why do you think someone as faith-filled as Elijah was susceptible to discouragement and depression? Have you ever had a time in which you were discouraged to the point of despair? How did God feed you and lead you?
- 3) We assume that we're more vulnerable to the devil's taunts when we're already down – when we already feel defeated. But Elijah's temptation toward despair came on the heels of

a great victory. Have you ever had a time of discouragement that followed a high, victorious time in your life? Journal your memories of both the high and the low that followed. How did you experience God's grace?

Prayer for the Day

Lord, when the spirit of Jezebel attacks, I know you are near. There is no discouragement that can overtake me when I know you are with me. When the unexpected "overtime" moments of life catch me by surprise, give me the grace to continue in the full armor of God. Though discouragement may crouch at the door, show me the great journey that you have set before me. Lift up my head and give my eyes new vision for this new day. Thank you for the victory that has been secured in Jesus. It is in His name I pray, AMEN.

Day 10

Reading: (1 Kings 19: 7-8)

Devotion:

There is a great, God-given journey in front of you.

Elijah had defeated 450 prophets at Mt. Carmel, proven Yahweh the one, true God and established himself as Israel's mighty, miracle-working prophet. But when the pagan queen Jezebel threatened him, Elijah ran for his life and fell into despair. How human all the great heroes of God are!

To cure his despair, God sent an angel to minister to the prophet. The heavenly messenger touched him and gave him an odd word: "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." At first, it's hard to see the encouragement in the angel's words. What's so encouraging about reminding a tired prophet that he has a long way still to go?

I once heard of a seminarian who continually announced, "I will go far in the ministry." His classmates tired of hearing the refrain, "I will go far.... I will go far...." Finally, someone asked the confident student: "Why do you say that all the time? Are you arrogant or what?"

The seemingly boastful student responded: "I'm just repeating what all my professors told me. If I've heard it once, I've heard it a hundred times – they all tell me, 'Son, you have a long way to go.' "

If you have a long way to go it means you will go far!

The angel didn't encourage the depressed prophet with bumper sticker clichés. Instead, God's messenger strengthened Elijah with deep truth. The truth is, Elijah, you have a long way to go. Your ministry isn't over. There are more miracles to be wrought through you and your most important task lies ahead. You'll transfer your mantle to Elisha who will be used for twice as many miracles as you. It's a long road. It's a hard road. But God will be with you. Arise and eat. You have a long way to go.

When you face discouragement in life you need spiritual nourishment and deep assurance that there is more ahead. Though you may feel weary today and the journey in front of you seems daunting, the assurance that you're not finished yet is revitalizing. Arise and eat – you have a long way to go. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Do you ever think you've encountered an angel? Take a few moments to remember and reflect on God's provision and protection. If you've never had a sense of an angel's presence, think back on the mysterious ways that God has provided for you or protected you. Write down a few such God moments.
- 2) Think back to a time in which you felt like giving up, but you didn't. How did it feel when you were sorely discouraged? By what grace or process did you find the strength to continue? Let the memory of God's sustaining grace in the past strengthen you for today's battles. Journal your reflections.
- 3) Spend some time reflecting on the journey ahead. If God is saying to you, *there's still a long way to go*, what can you see of that journey at this time? Journal your current thoughts about God's future plans for your life. Like Elijah, you may have had some victorious Mt. Carmel moments, but God has more for you. Write down some of your dreams and longings.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, though I have travelled far, I know I have a long way to go. I need strength for the journey. Feed me with your Word and lead me by your strong hand. When I feel discouraged, send messengers to point me in the right direction. When I am vulnerable and on the brink of giving up, dispatch angels on my behalf. Lord, give me fresh discernment today about the extent and grandeur of the journey ahead. Though I may not know all the details of the path that lies in front of me, I am confident that you have an important mission for me ahead. Grant me the grace and faith to move forward today. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 11

Reading: (1 Kings 19: 9)

Devotion:

When God asks you a question, it isn't for His education, it is for yours!

After Elijah had defeated 450 prophets at Mt. Carmel, he became weary and worried to the point of giving up. But the Lord sent an angel to feed the depressed prophet and send him on his way forward. Elijah, nourished by the supernatural food of God, traveled forty days and nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

The Lord came to visit Elijah in the cave of Mt. Horeb with a powerful prophetic word. But, before the Lord gave Elijah the word, God had a question for the prophet: "What are you doing here?" God knew the answer but still asked the question!

Rabbinical educators have always valued the power of a good question.

A Hebrew student once asked his teacher, "Rabbi, why do you always answer a question with a question?" The teacher responded, "What's wrong with a question?" Ha!

God's question to Elijah wasn't for God's information; it was for Elijah's destiny.

During elementary school years, if my child asked, "Dad, what should I choose as the topic for my research paper?", my best response was, "Well, what captures your interest? What do you think is important?"

God's question to Elijah was designed to put the prophet in touch with the aimlessness of his life so he could hear God's good news of a future and hope. He had accomplished great feats in God's name and travelled a great distance, but he hadn't become still enough to discern the word from the Lord about his destiny.

When God asked Elijah, "What are you doing?", Elijah, in introspection had to admit, "I'm not really doing anything – I'm aimless." And, by asking the prophet what he was doing "here," God was helping Elijah see how far he was from the place of his real mission. Elijah wasn't supposed to be in Horeb at all. He had run hard and far, but he had travelled far from his appointed destination.

Elijah didn't discern the Lord's meaning at first. So, after a great wind and shaking, God spoke again in a quiet whisper: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then, Elijah was ready to hear God. The Lord gave him instructions for the new phase of his ministry. And Elijah

went. When God asks you a question, He has a blessing in mind for you. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Have you ever felt like God asked you a question? What did He ask? What did you learn?
- 2) The tired prophet has been encouraged enough by an angel to travel forty days to a cave in Horeb. What do you think the cave represents? Have you ever been in a "cave"? How did God get you out of that dark, lonely place?
- 3) If God were to appear to you and ask you: "What are you doing here?", what would be your response? Journal your answer to the question and, as you do, listen for God's still, small voice.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, you know how I thirst for answers, but, today, I open my heart to your questions. Give me ears to hear what you are asking. Grant me discernment to not only hear your promptings but to answer from my deepest heart. Let me not wander a single day aimlessly but guide me by your steady hand. When I retreat to the comfort of the cave, draw me out and into the light. Show me the way God. I want to follow you. I pray in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 12

Reading: (1 Kings 19: 12-13)

Devotion:

Shh, listen. God is whispering because He loves you and has a great plan for you.

When God wanted to speak deeply to the aimless, cave-dwelling prophet, He reached Elijah with a whisper.

A whisper is powerful.

The whisper is the voice of comfort. When a mother wants to calm her crying baby, she does so with a gentle, soft voice. A shout agitates and frightens; a whisper calms and comforts.

The whisper is the voice of closeness. If I'm trying to get my wife's attention in a busy crowd, I may need to shout. If we are in a bustling restaurant, I may need to raise my voice above the hum of the other patrons. If I'm at home, just the two of us at dinner recapping

our day, I speak quietly. But, at night, on our pillows, I whisper. The closer you are to someone, the softer you speak. When God whispers, it means He's near.

The whisper is the voice of intimacy. We whisper secrets. God has trumpeted the Good News everywhere, but He also whispers to you.

A toddler is not impressed that his father is the Super Bowl quarterback or the president of the bank. What matters to the child is the presence of his father – the feel of his scruffy face and the strength of his arms. A little child isn't interested in what his father does in the distance; it's what's up close that matters. Giggling. Wrestling. Sitting in his lap to read a bedtime book.

God wants to be close to you and wants you to be close to Him. So, sometimes, He whispers.

A tornado tore through the mountainside, but God wasn't in the wind. Then, an earthquake shook the hills of Horeb, but God wasn't in the tremors. Next, a wildfire ravaged the brush and trees of the cliffs, but God wasn't in the flames. But, when God whispered, Elijah stepped out of the cave and into the presence of God. When God whispers, it is glorious. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Have you ever felt like you've heard God's whisper? Write about a time in which God led you by some quiet, unassuming means.
- 2) Do you find it hard to grow quiet enough to hear God's whisper? What are some of the distractions that tend to keep you from noticing God's still, small voice?
- 3) What would greater closeness with God look like for you in this season of life? Journal prayerfully about the ways you desire to be closer to God.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, tune my spiritual ears to hear your soft voice. You know how prone we are to be fascinated by the big, the urgent and the loud. But, today, Lord, I ask for discernment to see you in the small, quiet things. I want to hear your gentle whisper. I want my heart to know your closeness. I want to draw near to your throne of grace and see your smile up close. Let me not be distracted by the endless noise of the world around me but draw me close to you and teach my heart your ways. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

Day 13

Reading: (2 Kings 4: 2-4)

Devotion:

Though the commodities of the world grow scarce, the oil of the Holy Spirit never runs out.

There is more to God's grace than you know.

The living God – the Holy Spirit Himself – lives in and with you. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth who has all understanding and knowledge. You will never, not here or even in eternity, know the fullness of His infinite worth. His love is from everlasting to everlasting and His grace knows no bounds.

When a widow pleaded for the prophet Elisha's help, the man of God gave her an unusual command. He instructed her to take her only possession, a little jar of oil, and pour it into borrowed jars. So she did as the prophet had instructed. The widow borrowed vessels from her neighbors, took her one jar of oil and began pouring it into one of the borrowed vessels. A breathtaking miracle transpired. The oil didn't run out. So, she filled another jar, and another, and another. The oil didn't stop flowing until there was no empty vessel ready to receive it.

Throughout scripture, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. His life and joy and power never run out. Though we live in a world of scarcity, God is eternally spilling over with goodness.

Some of the most precious things in life only increase when you pour them out. Joy doesn't diminish when you share it – it increases. No one says, "I better not laugh now – I better save it." Likewise, love doesn't run out. In fact, the more you give love away, the more you love. No mother says, "I better not hug and kiss my sweet baby today lest I run out of love." In fact, the more the mother expresses love to the baby, the more she bonds with her child and, thus, the more she loves her little one.

God's grace, like the widow's oil, doesn't run out when you draw upon it; when you draw upon God's grace, it increases. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

1) Make a list of things that are precious to you. Which thing in your list can run out and which can't ever expire or go away? Spend a few moments journaling about what is most valuable to you in this world.

2) Elijah surprised the widow by asking her to pour out her one valuable commodity, a jar of oil. Has there ever been a time when you had to pour out your treasure in order to see it increase? What did it feel like? What gave you courage to pour it out?

3) Like the widow's oil, the love, grace and grandeur of God is deeper than you can ever fathom. What virtues and facets of God's life and character do you long to see and appreciate more? What aspects of God's grace do you want to draw upon more deeply? Journal prayerfully about some of the ways you hope to grow in knowledge and love of God.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, your love never runs out. Your grace goes on and on. And, yet, you know how quick I am to worry and fret about the scarcities of life. Teach my heart to trust in your infinite grace. Pour out your Holy Spirit afresh in my life. Let the oil of gladness anoint my life with the aroma of Christ. Pour out your love into my heart until it spills over with ever widening mercy toward all in my world. Multiply the gifts that you've given me and grant me grace to share the benefits of your oil with others. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 14

Reading: (2 Kings 4: 5-6)

Devotion:

When you feel inwardly empty you don't become less useful to God but more.

When a widow reached out to the great prophet Elisha for help, she was desperate. She had a debt she couldn't possibly pay. She faced the prospect of selling her two children as slaves to cover her debt. She had no kinsmen redeemer. Her future, like her soul, was empty.

And God worked a miracle to prove His power and delight in filling empty vessels.

Elisha instructed the poor widow to borrow jars from her neighbors and to pour out her one, precious jar of oil into the borrowed vessels. When she poured out her only possession, it miraculously multiplied. In fact, the oil didn't stop flowing until there were no more empty vessels to receive it.

It is a picture of the grace of God and the oil of the Holy Spirit. Only the hungry eat. Only the thirsty drink. And only the empty are filled.

It means that your emptiness is your greatest qualification for the outpouring of God's oil.

Charles Spurgeon put it poignantly:

“My Lord Jesus does not want your help. Abstain, resolve, repent, advance—do what you will. But do not join these poor things to His great salvation. Give up once and for all depending upon what *you* have done, even when you have done all—as an unprofitable servant quit all claims of wage and appeal to *mercy* only. Dismiss the proud notion of containing anything in yourself which comes of your fallen nature and yet can be acceptable with God. ...Empty buckets are most fit for the well of grace—these shall be filled while the full ones stand idle at the well’s mouth” (from Charles Spurgeon, Sermon 2063, “The Filling of Empty Vessels”, 1889).

If you’re empty, you’re qualified for God’s best. God fills empty things with Himself. And that’s the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Think back on a time when you felt empty. How did it feel? How did God’s grace sustain you?
- 2) What are some of the ways that you try to “help” God – to, as Spurgeon said “join these poor things to His great salvation”? List them and acknowledge prayerfully the futility of your own strength.
- 3) What are some ways that you feel empty during this season? Journal prayerfully before the Lord about your spiritual hunger. Write down your longings. Listen for the Lord’s reassurances from His Word and His whisper of grace. What are the ways you’re trusting God to fill you with His Holy Spirit?

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, here I am – an empty vessel – fill me I pray. Fill me with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Fill me with the oil of gladness. Fill me with love overflowing. Fill me with hope that does not disappoint. Lord, I bring to you my deepest longing _____.

Grant me the grace to open my heart to your Spirit’s presence. Give me an ever-increasing readiness to receive every good gift from you. Let the oil you pour out in my life spill over as grace to others. In Jesus’ name I pray, AMEN.

Day 15

Reading: (2 Kings 1: 9-10)

Devotion:

When you've heard God's quiet whisper, you become emboldened in the day of battle.

Ahaziah, wicked King Ahab's son, fell through the lattice in his upper chamber. Instead of trusting in the living God to provide for him and heal him, Ahaziah wanted his fortune told. He sent messengers to Baal-zebub to ask the "lord of the flies" whether the fall would lead to the king's death or not.

Ahaziah's affection for Baal-zebub and rejection of God did not go unnoticed by the Lord. God sent Elijah to intercept the messengers of Ahaziah. The prophet queried the messengers: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub?" (2 Kings 1:3, ESV). Elijah sent them back to their idol-thirsty king with a word from the Lord: Ahaziah indeed would not recover from his fall.

So, the king sent fifty soldiers to confront Elijah. The soldiers saw Elijah on a hilltop and mocked the man of God. Not long before, Elijah had run in fear of one woman's persecution. Jezebel's taunts had dragged the prophet down into despair and isolation. But this time around Elijah knew no fear. Instead, the man of God stood his ground and called down fire upon the king's mocking men.

What had changed?

Elijah had heard the still, small voice of God. He was not the same prophet who had fled from Jezebel and later hid in a cave. Elijah met with God at Horeb. He heard the gentle whisper of the Lord. Intimacy with God changes you.

Deeper intimacy with God doesn't just warm your heart; it emboldens your spirit. Growing quiet and hearing from God doesn't just calm your soul; it awakens your courage.

The new Elijah could no longer be intimidated.

Perhaps the enemy is bringing threats and accusations against you during this season; you can take confidence in Christ. You aren't who you once were. Like Elijah who sat firm on his mountaintop, the Gospel will silence the voices of fear and keep your spirit lifted. The whisper of God will make you strong. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Think of a time when you experienced the closeness of God – a time when, like Elijah, you heard God’s still, small voice. How did that closeness to God strengthen you?
- 2) Elijah was just as human as you are (see James 5). He knew what it was to be afraid. He experienced despair. But he grew. How have you grown in recent years? Write down several ways that you’ve grown spiritually.
- 3) Elijah was seated on a hilltop when the wicked king’s soldier taunted him and implored him to come down. But Elijah stayed on his hilltop. What “lower voices” mock you and urge you to “come down”? How does the Gospel empower you to pay no attention to the dark, mocking voices below? Journal your thoughts.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, by your grace, I’m growing. Help me grow more today. Teach me how to lean into your still, small voice so that, from ever-deepening intimacy with you I can stand resolute in the day of trial. When the mocking voices rise from the cellar of my thought life or from the dark valley of temptation, remind me of who I am in Christ. Strengthen me for the day of battle. Yours is in the victory and I am in you. Grant me grace this day to listen to you and reject every competing voice. I pray in Jesus’ name, AMEN

Day 16

Reading: (2 Kings 1:10)

Devotion:

Jesus hasn’t just died for you; Jesus has taken the wrath of God’s judgment against sin for you.

Some wit once joked about a small plane that was transporting a doctor, a lawyer, a minister and a little boy. When the single engine aircraft developed engine problems, the pilot grabbed a parachute and told the four passengers to do likewise. Unfortunately, the passengers soon realized that there were only three remaining parachutes. The doctor proclaimed that he was needed to save lives, so he grabbed a parachute and jumped. The lawyer said he was needed because he was one of the smartest men alive, so the attorney grabbed a parachute and jumped. The gracious pastor looked at the boy and said, “Son, I’ve lived a long full life—I’m not afraid to die. Here, you take the last parachute because you have your whole life in front of you.” But the boy reached behind his seat, grabbed another

parachute, handed it to the pastor and declared: “No worries Pastor. We’re both okay because the smartest man in the world just jumped out with my backpack.”

Jesus isn’t like the nice, sacrificial pastor who offered his parachute to a little boy. No, Jesus did far more than replace you in the position of one who was certain to die (though that He did). Jesus came to receive the judgment of God against sinful humanity; Christ experienced the wrath of God.

When the Samaritans rejected Jesus’ messengers, the disciples remembered the story of Elijah calling down fire on the soldiers of the wicked King Ahaziah. The disciples wondered if they should also call down fire. But Jesus rebuked them. Why? Was it because Jesus brought no fire? No, not according to Jesus’ words in Luke 12. Jesus indeed come to cast fire like Elijah. But the fire of God’s wrath was not cast upon the Samaritans, or you and me. The fire of God fell on Jesus. The Messiah took the fire for you so that you would only know the warmth of God’s affection. Your sin has been judged, punished and burned up at the cross. And that’s the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What is the worst thing you ever did? How did you feel? Were you punished? Take a few moments to remember the sting of guilt and pain of punishment.
- 2) If Jesus took the punishment for you, then justice has been accomplished. How does it make you feel when you think of Christ experiencing judgment and wrath on your behalf? If Jesus paid it all on the cross, you are debt-free. You owe nothing! What are the implications of such sweet freedom?
- 3) As you think about Jesus taking the judgment due you, is there someone who has wronged you that you can forgive today? Take a few moments to journal about the pain you’ve experienced because of another’s sin and then, in faith write out your forgiveness (not a rationalization or an acceptance of the sin) to the one who has wronged you.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, thank you for taking the fire of judgment against sin on my behalf. Receive my gratitude, honor and praise for the inexpressible gift of the cross wherein I have been set free from a weight of guilt I could not bear. Thank you for the infinite wisdom and mercy of your redemptive plan whereby you have become favorable toward me and I have been reckoned as the righteousness of Christ. Help me today to fully receive the infinite benefit of

Christ's cross and grant me the grace to let go of judgment against those who have sinned against me. I pray in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 17

Reading: (2Kings 1:10)

Devotion:

Jesus took the wrath of God against your sin so that you can be assured God is utterly, forever favorable to you.

When the disciples learned how the Samaritans had rejected the messengers of Jesus, they wanted to call down fire the way Elijah had famously cast down fire on the mocking soldiers of the wicked King Ahaziah. But, instead of endorsing the disciples' Samaritan-rebuking plan, Jesus did the opposite – He rebuked the disciples. It wasn't that Jesus wanted to overlook the Samaritans' (or anyone's) sin. In fact, Jesus elsewhere declared that He, indeed, came to cast down fire.

But the fire of God's wrath that Jesus cast didn't fall upon the sinners who deserved it. The fire fell on Jesus as He hung on the cross. Jesus took the wrath of God on behalf of all who would receive His grace. Your sin was imputed to Jesus and punished on the cross. Jesus' righteousness was imputed to you through your faith and, thus, God favors you. The implications of this great exchange are glorious.

First, it means that you can live free from condemnation and fear. There is no sin left for which you can be punished. It would be unjust for God to punish two people for the same crime. So you can be sure that the God of all justice will not treat you unjustly by punishing you also.

Secondly, it means that justice is now on the side of every believer. Before you accepted Christ, justice was against you. You were guilty and on the wrong side of the law. But, when you were born from above, justice turned. You are no longer a sinner, you're the righteousness of Christ. It means justice is on your side.

Thirdly, when you experience such lavish grace, it changes everything in your life. Grace changes everything. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection:

1) What past sin (or current sin pattern) is the hardest for you to believe that God has forgiven? Why do you struggle to believe God has forgiven that particular sin or flaw?

2) Think about the radical Gospel truth that assures that justice is on your side. What are the implications of such good news? How does the assurance that justice took place on the cross empower you in your stand against the wiles and accusations of hell?

3) Journal about some of the ways grace has changed you. As you continue to grow in the knowledge of God's perfect love, how are your fears lifting? How are your priorities changing? How is your life mission emerging?

Prayer for the Day

Lord, help me accept the glory of the Gospel more richly today. You died the death I deserved and took the punishment due me. Let this glorious truth invade all my thinking. Lift from my soul all fear and condemnation and grant me fresh confidence that shields me from all the accusations of hell. Your grace has changed me; change me all the more. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

Day 18

Reading: (2 Kings 4: 16-17)

Devotion:

The Good News is so good that it seems too good to be true but it's good news because it is true good news.

The Gospel announcement is astonishing. Unless there's a part of you that cries out "that's too good to be true," you probably haven't heard the Gospel. In Luke's account of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance, the disciples "disbelieved for joy" (Luke 24:40, ESV). The thought of such good news was so hopeful, so joyful that they couldn't let themselves believe it for fear that it was too good to be true. That's what a childless, wealthy woman felt when Elisha gave her news that seemed too good to be true.

There was a wealthy woman in Shunem who showed regular hospitality to Israel's prophet Elisha. At first, she simply fed the man of God as he passed through town, but eventually she and her husband made a small bedroom just for the prophet to use whenever he had need.

Elisha was grateful and wanted to bless the woman. But she was a woman who, by appearances, had it all. She had a lovely home, a fine husband, and nice things. It seemed like she had no need. But, like all of us, she did have a deep yearning – a secret grief.

Though the Shunammite woman reassured the prophet that she didn't need anything, Elisha's servant confided to the prophet: "She has no son, and her husband is old" (2 Kings 4:14, ESV). A word of the Lord came to Elisha. He called in the Shunnamite and declared: "About this time next year, you shall embrace a son" (2 Kings 4:16, ESV).

Elisha's word aroused the deepest grief of her life. In a culture that established its economy according to the customs of primogeniture, a woman with an old husband but no son, was vulnerable. She'd put the dream of a son to rest many years earlier.

"No ... O man of God; do not lie..." (2 Kings 4:16, ESV).

As Pastor Kenny Thacker has pointed out, that is the rightful response of any one who hears the Gospel: "Don't lie to me man of God!" The Good News is so good that it seems too good to be true but it's good news because it is true good news. The Shunnamite had a son. Jesus is alive. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Other than the Gospel, what's the best news you ever received? How did you feel? How did the news change you?
- 2) What part of the Gospel announcement most often makes you "disbelieve for joy"? Total forgiveness? Being made holy? Becoming an heir with Christ?
- 3) Spend some time journaling your reflections on the Good News of the Gospel. List all the reasons you can think of that the Gospel is the best news ever.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, thank you for good news that is so good that it seems too good to be true. Let me continue to grow in wonder and astonishment at your mercies. Let the Good News thrill me and fill me and shape me. May the Gospel keep me in wide-eyed wonder. May my every thought of your goodness send me into worship. Keep my eyes today fixed upon Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. It is in His name that I pray, AMEN.

Day 19

Reading: (2Kings 4: 16-17)

Devotion:

The Gospel is better than what anyone could have dared to request.

The wealthy Shunammite woman, who regularly showed hospitality to Elisha, had a deep, secret dream. Though she seemed to be a woman who had it all – a fine husband, a fine bank account and a fine home- she lacked what she most wanted: a son. When the prophet announced that God would give her a baby boy within a year, the woman's response was understandable.

Don't lie to me man of God.

It was as if she said, How dare you touch upon my deepest dream? How could you be so cruel as to arouse the grief I tucked away so long ago? My husband and I are old; the dream of a son has long past. What you say is too good to be true. Don't lie to me.

The Gospel is like that. It's the good news that your soul has always craved. The Gospel is good news so good that no one could have (or would have dared) asked of God. Who could have asked for something like this?:

Lord, we know we justly deserve your displeasure and that, without the shedding of blood, there will be no forgiveness of our sins. And we know there is no adequate sacrifice on earth that we can offer.

So O God, the eternal, Creator of the universe, would you do this for us?

Would you come to earth and take on flesh just like us? Stoop to be human.

Would you endure being mocked, persecuted and flogged, like the very worst of all criminals, just for us?

Would you take the death penalty for our sins, and allow us to kill you on a cross in the manner of our most heinous criminals?

Would you become our sin and give us your righteousness?

Would you spend three days in the grave and then arise from the dead?

Would you send us your own dear Spirit after you return to Heaven so that we could live an abundant life on this Earth and then securely with you for all eternity?

And, would you make a new heaven and a new earth and give me a new, resurrected body and make me to reign with you forever and forever? O would you God?

No one could have dreamt up a prayer so bold. Only God could produce good news that good. It's no lie. It is the Good News of Jesus Christ. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Did you ever have a deep desire that was unmet for years but later fulfilled? How did it feel? How did it change you?
- 2) Unlike some eastern religions, Christianity doesn't denigrate desire. In fact, according to scripture, God delights in giving us the "desires of our hearts." What are some of the desires of your heart?
- 3) The Gospel is such good news because it answers the deepest questions and greatest longings of our souls. Spend a few moments journaling about all the ways the Gospel fulfills our deepest longings.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, you are the Desire of Nations. You are the Way, the Truth and the Life. I live and move and have my being in you. In all, and through all, you provide everything I need. With confidence that you are the God who delights in giving His children the desires of their hearts, I bring my deep desire to you today. Hear my heart's desire

_____. And always, Lord, keep my heart content in you. I pray in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 20

Reading: (James 5: 16-17)

Devotion:

You're no imposter. In Christ, you're fully qualified for your inheritance in the saints.

For several years during my childhood, I had the best seat in the house for the ACC basketball tournament. Back in the day, the tournament was a highlight not just because of the usual ferocity of competition and excellence of play but also because winning it was the only way to proceed to the NCAA tournament. Though the tournament rotates venue location now, when I was a child it was always played in my hometown at the Greensboro Coliseum. Tickets were rare and expensive. But my best buddy was a ball boy at the Coliseum. He got to sit under the basket, throw balls to the players during warm up and mop up sweat during the game.

One year, my friend's dad said, "Alan, why don't you come in the back entrance to the Coliseum and sit under the basket with the ball boys? All you have to do is put on some white pants and a blue shirt like the other ball boys. You'll fit right in."

So I did. I marched right in, threw basketballs to some of my all-time college basketball heroes (like Phil Ford) and even became bold enough to get on TV while mopping up sweat of the floor. It was unforgettable.

And frightening.

After all, I was an imposter. My enjoyment of being there was tainted by the knowledge that, because I didn't deserve to be there, at any moment I might be tapped on the shoulder by a Coliseum official and escorted off the property.

A lot of Christians live that way. Knowing the depths of our sin, it's hard to feel one hundred percent confident that we are truly qualified to walk with God. To make sure that every Christian understands his/her standing with God, James references one of the most famous, most glorious heroes in all of Biblical faith – Elijah. James' point is poignant: you are just like Elijah! He was just as human as you and look what God did through him. Paul tells the Colossians pointedly – you have been qualified! God wants you to know that the blood of Christ is sufficient; by faith, through grace alone, you're qualified. You're no imposter. And that's the Gospel!

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Can you remember a time/moment/season in your life when you felt like an imposter? What did it feel like?
- 2) When it comes to walking in the fullness of your spiritual inheritance, in what ways are you most likely to disqualify yourself? Take a few moments for honest reflection and confession – what makes you feel like an imposter as a Christian? What does God's Word have to say about it?
- 3) As you look back over your month of devotions with Elijah and Elisha, how have you grown? What has the Lord shown you? Journal about several of the most important revelations God has given you.

Prayer for the Day

Lord, though my sin-nature makes me feel like an imposter, you have qualified me in Christ for an endlessly rich inheritance among the saints and authorized me to reign with Christ in the kingdom of light. You've shown me that I'm no different than Elijah and, if you used Elijah in powerful ways, you can also use me. Let the meditation of *Everyday Miracles* not leave my heart. Draw me deeper into your counsel and cause me to thirst all the more for quiet time with you. Be glorified in and through me just as you were through your servant Elijah. I pray in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Day 21

Reading: (James 5: 16-17)

Devotion:

What do signs and miracles mean to you and me today, more than two thousand years later?

The answer to that question is really quite simple: no matter what situation you face, how big or how small your need happens to be, or how impossible your situation appears—the answer is JESUS.

Because we're spiritual beings living in a physical world, sometimes in our hearts and minds we allow our circumstances to trump our God. The problems that we're facing seem bigger than He is. Of course, deep down, we know that's not really true, but we think, believe, live, and act as though it is.

It's why we hold on to the little that we have in our hands, rather than offering it all up to God and expecting His mighty blessing.

And there's a reason for that. The closer something is, the bigger it seems.

Sometimes, we feel closer to our problems than we are to our God. But God is not a million miles away. In fact, the Bible says quite the opposite. It says that we are brought near to Him by the blood of Jesus:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” – Ephesians 2:13 (NIV)

My friend, look again at those two signs—miracles that point to the power of Jesus, the authenticity of Jesus, the willingness of Jesus to step into any and every situation and make a powerful difference.

He died for you on a cross so that you, who once were far away, could now be close to God every minute of every day. You and I don't have to shout across a galaxy to communicate with God. The impenetrable wall of our sin that used to separate us from Him is completely removed and destroyed the instant we believe in Jesus.

He is *much* bigger than any lifelong disability that you need to overcome, or any crowd that you need to feed.

No matter what the problem, situation, circumstance, obstacle, or limitation happens to be in your life, Jesus is there with you.

He is the answer. He always has been. He always will be.

Questions for reflection:

Think about that idea of close proximity. Do you feel as though your circumstances, stresses, and hardships are closer to you than God is?

What are the trials, relationships, pressures, or circumstances that are causing you the most pain and anxiety today? List them out and eyeball them.

One by one, bring them to God and ask Him to take each burden and fill you with His peace. Ask Him to reset your perspective and help you to trust in His closeness and power.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord, open my eyes to the miracles that will take place all around me this year. Build my faith that I can receive every good gift that you have for me and that I can be used to release your good gifts to others. Elijah was just as human as I am and you used Elijah's prayers for extraordinary, supernatural works. Oh God, inspire my prayer life with your own breath and use me like you used Elijah. Boldly in Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

You did it! Give God the glory for the Victory. Purpose in your heart to go forward and not backwards from this point.

Colossians 3:2 AMP

“Set your mind and keep focused habitually on the things above [*the heavenly things*], not on things that are on the earth [*which have only temporal value*].”

