

Walk in the Spirit—Pray in the Spirit

Sermon #8: Prayer As Expressing Despair

Study Text: 1 Kings 19:1–18

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Bible Study Introduction:

Prayer is where we may go when we feel utterly defeated. God will not leave us destitute, but neither is God bound to respond as we would expect. Elijah climbs Horeb, perhaps seeking interaction like Moses, or at least another rain of fire as in 1 Kings 18. Instead, God provides answer in a whisper of intimacy.

Though Elijah has missed the victory in chapter 18 and only sees defeat (in fact wishing for his death as threatened by Jezebel), God has something else in mind. God answers first with the greatest gift of spiritual relationship with God, but then also with the gift of unfolding relationship with others.

Opening Questions:

- Who, if anyone, is the person you so trust that you will actually let them see you whine, complain, wilt, and even express deep sadness and despair? How did that person earn that place in your life?
- How appropriate is it (how comfortable are you) with being a first-class whiner and despairer before God? Is there a line that shouldn't be crossed in our prayer life?

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18

- Create two columns on a piece of paper: On one column list the various activities of Elijah. On the other, pair them with God's activities. As you read down each column, what themes rise to the surface for you?
- What expectations and themes are evoked by the parallels with Moses' story like what we read in verse 8?¹ What do you suppose is the message for us when those expectations are both met, but also altered?
- What is the nature of Elijah's various complaints? How are they accurate and/or misrepresentations of what is really happening?
- What are we to understand from Elijah's parallel response in verse 10 and verse 14? Does Elijah "get it" or not? What is he supposed to "get" from the experience in verse 11–13?
- How do you characterize the various acts of God and the angels in this passage? Are they provision or babysitting or judgment or something else?

Group or Personal Reflection

- How might a passage like this one shape your habit of prayer? What is the "take away" for you when you hold your prayer life up to this passage?
- This study concludes our eight weeks of study on the Holy Spirit and prayer. What ideas or elements from the studies (or the sermons) are memorable to you, or need remembering?

¹ See Exodus 19–20, Num 14:33–34, Exodus 33:12–23