



Summer Sermon Reflections

Strength for the Journey

Faithfulness always brings opposition, often in ways we can't see until it's upon us. The prophet Elijah speaks words of truth given him by God, but ends up running for his life. Along the way he finds he's not running alone, but that God has come up along side him. After a time in God's presence, he discovers strength to turn around, go back and confront the evil he fled.

1 Kings 19:2-8 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

For Personal Study

A few years ago, the national trend of corporate downsizing caught up with our family. With no job, we survived by taking in unemployment payments and buying nothing that wasn't truly essential.

We wondered (worried) about what we would do. Was the perfect job out there? When would we find it? Could we survive until then? But we were not on that journey alone. God was with us.

Time and time again God would remind us that he was taking care of us. One week a Bible Study I was in was going to work through *The Prayer of Jabez*. It was a small book, but I knew I couldn't buy my own copy. Meanwhile, a family friend in Ohio wanted to send us some encouragement. He sent the very book I needed for the study!

Another day, I was particularly worried about finances and wasn't really thinking about how God was with us. That very day we received three unexpected checks in the mail. We couldn't ignore

God's presence in it. He knew our concerns day-to-day. He was holding us up, giving us strength for the journey. We still had to take that journey; we still had to work to find that right job, but God wanted us to give him our worry. And when we did, he replaced it with deeper faith and love for him and more energy and determination for our search.

Elijah, in the Bible story above, had his own crisis. He was so worried that he went away, laid down, and asked God to let him die. But instead of letting him waste away, God sent an angel to feed Elijah. And it wasn't one meal, but two. And Elijah was sustained by that food for 40 days!

What is your crisis? Your worry? Have you given it to God? How is he supporting you on your journey today? As Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace..."

Readings & Questions for Individuals and Groups

Monday, August 14

Read Psalm 68:19. What is your crisis? What are you worried about? Share those concerns with God in prayer and let him take the burden of worry from you.

Tuesday, August 15

Read Psalm 28:6-7. How would your current crisis change if you really let God be your strength and shield?

Wednesday, August 16

Read Philippians 4:4-7. Paul tells us not to worry, but to pray. What's the difference? How will you remind yourself to pray—especially when you feel worried?

Thursday, August 17

Read 2 Timothy 1:7. Sometimes it is easier to hide behind our worries and fears. When have you let fear keep you from moving forward? What do you need to do now to move ahead on your journey?

Friday, August 18

Read 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Jabez was honest with himself and God. He had hopes and fears and took both of them to God in prayer. Share yours with God today and watch for his answers.