
Adult Sunday School Lesson

“A Still Small Voice”

The Calling of Elijah
(1 Kings 19:1-20)

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Focal Passage:
1 Kings 19:11-13

Central Truth:
God initiates, approaches, and calls us out from the midst of the realities of our lives to be a part of His continued work in this world.

Bible Background:

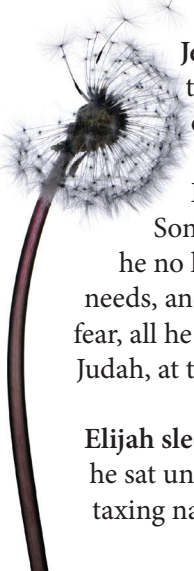
The Book of Kings tells the story of the Hebrew people from the beginning of King Solomon’s reign over the United Kingdom to the division of the kingdom (974 BC) into two nations—the Northern Kingdom, also known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (587 BC). At the time we pick up the story in 1 Kings 19, Ahab is the King of Israel and Jezebel is his Queen.

Everything Elijah had done (v1)—Elijah had just had an amazing experience. There had been remarkable demonstrations of God at work through Elijah. He had single-handedly confronted hundreds of Baal priests on Mt. Carmel. He defied the enemy. He performed mighty works. He brought food to the starving widow of Zarepath. He brought the rains to end the drought. He brought celestial fire to consume the sacrifice. He brought life and healing to a sick boy. The foretold famine came to pass. The widow’s barrel of flour and jar of oil never ran dry. After such an emotional high, life took a different turn. Things didn’t turn out as he had hoped. His joy and celebration turned to fear.

Jezebel’s revenge (v2)—When Jezebel heard from her King about everything Elijah had done, she vowed to put a stop to Elijah’s doings. She vowed by her gods to annihilate Elijah’s influence on Israel. Elijah was celebrating the triumphs of God, but now Jezebel, the Queen of Israel, vowed to take her revenge.

Elijah runs (v3)—What does Elijah do? He cowers, he flees. Fearing for his life, he saw his own peril. Somehow Elijah forgot from where his real strength came. Elijah was so preoccupied with his circumstance he no longer could see God’s hand at work. The focus of his attention shifted away from God to himself, to his needs, and to his circumstances. Jezebel’s threat intruded between Elijah and God. Engulfed and overcome with fear, all he could do was to run and to run fast! He ran all the way to Beersheba, the last settlement in the south of Judah, at the edge of the desert. He got as far away from Jezebel as he could and entered no man’s land.

Elijah sleeps (v4-5)—Leaving his servant behind in Beersheba, he traveled yet another day, and finally, exhausted, he sat under a broom tree. The excitement of the prior days of successes, the emotion of fear, and the physically taxing nature of being on the run exhausted Elijah. There was nothing left of Elijah. He was spent—physically,



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mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—thus he voiced his anguish to God in a prayer of desperation. He had enough. He was tired. He was ready to call it quits. Enough is enough! Quite literally he stated in his prayer to God, “Take my life.” Elijah fell asleep.

God cares (v5-8a)—God cares for Elijah, his servant. God understands the frailties of humanity—being physically spent, being emotionally fried, being mentally exhausted, or spiritually dry. Elijah was spent, and God was prepared to refresh and to renew. God provided nourishment. Elijah slept and ate, and slept and ate. God touched, restored, and revitalized Elijah.

Elijah travels further (v8b)—The heavenly food strengthened Elijah for the trek to Horeb. Elijah traveled hundreds of miles through desolate desert wasteland, and across fierce mountains and burning sands. Elijah returned to the original place where God revealed himself to the tribes. He went back to the beginnings of his people. Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, was the same mount upon which God spoke to Moses in smoke and flames. Elijah cowered inside the same cave or cleft where God had hidden Moses when he passed by to show his own great glory. During the 40 days and 40 nights, he heard only the dry desert winds, the cries of the ravens, the yapping of the jackals, and the howls of the hyenas. He was alone—very much alone.

Elijah alone with God; a glimpse of relationship (v9-14)—

1. **The Conversation:** God asked Elijah what he was doing there, in the southernmost parts of Judah in a cave—you can't get much further from Israel, from Ahab and Jezebel, and from his original venue of ministry. What in the world are you doing, Elijah?! As if he's expected him to be somewhere else. Elijah wasn't rebuked; he was personally addressed by God. In response, Elijah told his tale of woe, made his complaint—he was a pursued man, his life was in danger, Israel was not faithful, the people have turned against God, and he was in danger. Elijah was totally and utterly sincere. He put it all out there. The relationship between Elijah and God was transparent and vulnerable. Elijah needed a new touch from God. God repeated the question and Elijah continued his lament.
2. **The Commission:** God told Elijah to exit the cave and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord. Elijah stepped out of the cave of self-pity and emerged in the full light of God. Elijah was slow to respond, but God went into action. There was a violent wind. It was sudden and swept across the ridges. It roared through the canyons. It loosened stones and boulders that came crashing down. It was a fearsome display of nature. Then an eerie earthquake occurred where great cracks may have developed, rocks were shaken, and the peak could have crumbled. Lastly, there was a furious fire—an electrical display of dry lightning that flashed and flared with a brilliance that lit the sky. All were well-known symbols of God's power. They figured prominently in Moses' wilderness wandering experience (Num. 16:31-35), Then there came the silence. Elijah's ears strained to hear the quiet. A sound of gentle stillness—so still that it could be heard. In the utter stillness and in the intensity of awesome silence came a still small voice—the voice of God. There were no conflicting voices to confuse Elijah. There were no accolades of success to distract him. He was clear of all threats. There was no one to sway his feelings or thoughts. Elijah was alone with God. Elijah was in the place of God's appointment. Elijah received a word from God. The intense inner conviction of God's spirit spoke to the inner life of Elijah's spirit—he knew assuredly God is in this place! In the transparent communion with God, in the attentiveness of posture, and in the silence came “a voice, a barely audible whisper.” Elijah heard God's call. He was given a new order to succeed the old one.

Elijah's new work (v15-20)—There was work to do with God. God revealed himself in the quiet reflection of a silent whisper. It wasn't the spectacular, it was the special. God gave Elijah direction for personal action. Prayerful fellowship brought new zeal and a new commission. Elijah's continued work was to anoint Hazael as King of Syria, to anoint the new King of Israel, Jehu, and to anoint Elisha as his successor.

Key Themes:

1. **The stuff of life:** In the story of Elijah's experience with God's still small voice, we find an individual faced with a variety of circumstances and a range of emotions. There were successes and celebrations, failures and fears, hopes

and doubts, disillusionment and despair, and faithfulness and frustrations. Elijah, just like us, experienced the hurts, the highs, the healings, and the hopes of life and of following God.

2. **Quiet the distractions:** In order to experience God's call on Elijah's life he needed to be in fellowship with God where distractions were minimized. In Elijah's case, he was alone in a cave, on a mountain top, in the desert, in a place of spiritual significance to his people. His focus shifted from self to God. He was alone with God having a conversation and communing with God. As we discern God's call on our lives, we need to be focused on God, not ourselves.
3. **God's gentle whisper:** God's call on Elijah's life did not reside in the spectacular. It wasn't heard in the wind, the earthquake, or in the fire. There was no burning bush this time! It was in the quiet, in the stillness, in the silence that God's whisper was heard. Elijah made himself available to God as he stepped out from the cave where he was engrossed in self, into the presence of God. He made himself available to God.

Introduction (5 min.):

God called Elijah into continued service. God was at work then and God is at work in the world today. God calls all believers to be a part of his work in the world. Can you name some folks that you believe are called to their vocations or places of service whether they are paid or non-paid. List them on the board or flip chart as they are named. Today's focal point is that God approaches us and calls us to be a part of his work in the world.

Read the Text (5 min.):

Divide the reading of 1 Kings 19 among several individuals that agreed in advance to read. Ask the class to listen for at least one point of connection with Elijah's story. Where are you in Elijah's story? How are your emotions or actions like or unlike his?

Engage the Text (15-20 min.):

While we may not find ourselves exactly in the same circumstances as Elijah in our own journeys, we all are in the midst of living outrageously hectic lives. There are so many things, people, or events that can crowd God out of our lives. As God is squeezed more and more out of our daily lives, we struggle to see him at work and believe oftentimes that he no longer "speaks," no matter the form. God is always present in the midst of our "stuff," but to hear his gentle whisper we need to quiet our lives enough to hear. He invites us and desires for us to be a part of rescuing a hurting world in his name. Here are a few questions to help us reflect on where our lives intersect the text.

1. In the range of experiences of life, where do you find yourself today?
2. What intrudes between us and God? What in our culture, world, or daily lives distracts our attention away from God and on to ourselves?
3. What quiets the distractions of life for you?
4. Where are you the closest to God? What would it take for you to go to that place whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually?
5. How have you made yourself available (or not) to God?

Apply the Text (15-20 min.):

God's gentle whisper in our lives potentially manifests itself in a variety of ways. How would you describe that still small voice to someone? What does it look like? God's call on our lives can be difficult to articulate, especially if it has been the still small voice that we encountered and not the spectacular burning bush or bolt of lightning. Below are some terms that may describe how God's promptings or gentle whisper could be experienced. Share with a partner which one most resonates with you. This may be the beginning of discerning God's gentle whisper in your life.

- **An Unrealized Dream:** Something we have always wanted to do but never got around to it.
- **A Sense of Burden:** Is there a need in the world or a particular venue that weighs you down—that burdens your heart?
- **A Sense of Joy:** Where do you serve that you feel a sense of contentment or you think, "I was made for this!"?

- **Tearing Up:** What causes you to tear?
- **Anger:** What causes you to get angry? This is a God-rightness sense of anger. This is not a self-righteous anger that is sin. It is understanding God's rightness for a situation so well that the lack thereof causes you to get angry.
- **In the Zone:** Where do you serve that you sense you are in the zone?
- **Sweet Spot:** What is your sweet spot?
- **People Group:** Are you drawn to a particular people group?
- **Causes:** Are you drawn to a particular cause?
- **Function or Role:** Do you find yourself enjoying a particular task or function? Examples are an organizer, reconciler, or instructor.
- **Last Thing on Your Plate:** If you had to give up everything that you do, what would be the very last thing that you would let go of?

Case Studies (10-15 min.):

Divide into groups and discuss how you could respond to the following comments and questions posed by individuals:

Adult 1—

A young, single woman in a small group states, "I know what I have been called to do, but I don't think it's religious enough." "Oh my," I replied, "Tell us more." She says, "I am 28 years old and am a breast cancer survivor. I have been trained by the American Cancer Institute to counsel with other young women who are facing the same diagnosis as me."

Adult 2—

A career missionary states, "I have served in the mission field for 30 years. God has been so good. However, due to health issues, I have been permanently furloughed back to the States. I feel that I have lost God's call on my life. What is God doing? What am I going to do?"

Adult 3—

A young woman has just graduated from college. She stated that she knew what God called her to do and prepared for it. Now, however, doors do not seem to be opening and opportunities are not available. She asks you, "Did I get it wrong? Did I miss God's call?"

Senior Adult—

In a Sunday school class a senior adult says, "I have a question and I just want a 'yes' or 'no' answer." "I never have a 'yes' or 'no' reply. Go ahead ask your question," I replied. He went on to say, "I am 65 years old. I am retired, and I have had the opportunity to do a lot of things in my life. There are also some things I have always wanted to do, or dreamt of doing, but have not done. Is it too late for me? Is too late for God to use me?"

Closing Prayer

Close with prayer asking for each student to be open to hearing God's voice in their lives and to having the courage to follow God's calling, wherever it may lead.

Resources:

The following resources, which the author consulted in preparing this lesson, may provide a starting point for further in-depth study of the passage:

- *Commentaries: The International Critical Commentary*
- *Word Biblical Commentary*
- *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*
- *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*

Books:

Bugbee, Bruce *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ Grand Rapids*: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Getz, Gene A. *Elijah: Remaining Steadfast through Uncertainty* Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1985.

Keller, W. Phillip *Elijah* Waco: Word Books, 1980.

Moore, Michael S. *Faith Under Pressure: A Study of Biblical Leaders in Conflict* Siloam Springs: Leafwood Publishers, 2003.