
READ: 1 Kings 19:1-15

Elijah Flees from Jezebel

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then 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.' ³Then 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.

⁴ 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.' ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' ⁶He 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. ⁷The 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.' ⁸He 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. ⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁰He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the

Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

Elijah Meets God at Horeb

¹¹ He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁴He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' ¹⁵Then the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.'

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Introduction

Many will resolve to get moving in the New Year. The gyms will fill up with eager people running, rowing, and yoga-posing toward a healthier life. But all these physical efforts at transformation will be at best incomplete

without a deeper “movement of the soul.”
Over the next four weeks we’ll explore four spiritual movements rooted in relationship.

January 7th, From Loneliness to Solitude:
Relationship to our self:

January 14th, From Hostility to Hospitality:
Relationship to others

January 21st, From Illusion to Prayer:
Relationship to God

January 28th, From Competition to Compassion: Relationship to the world

Context

The sermon series will lean on the book *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* by Henri Nouwen. He writes that the spiritual life is about navigating a series of related “poles”—two ends of a spectrum. Each relationship we explore takes up a polarity we experience as part of our human condition. The first pole is about our inescapable experience of being alone. What we make of our human aloneness is crucial to the adventure of faith.

Quotes

“Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.” - *Alfred North Whitehead*

“Our language has wisely sensed two sides of being alone. It has created the word ‘loneliness’ to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word ‘solitude’ to express the glory of being alone.”
- *Paul Tillich*

Big Idea

God meets us in our loneliness, inviting us to discover the glorious peace of solitude.

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Are you ever aware of feeling lonely, even in a crowd? Reflect on your own story or experience of loneliness.
3. We like to believe that others can “cure” our loneliness. Why might this be a disappointing or even damaging illusion?
4. What is solitude? Do you have an experience or story of solitude?
5. How might solitude lead to real community and deeper relationships?

Engage

Henri Nouwen suggests a few practical ways to cultivate solitude:

1. **Practice “little solitudes”** - moments before waking, sleeping, your morning coffee, the drive to work, and staying 10 minutes late at the office to stare out the window in silence.
2. **Make a place** - set up an intentional space for silence: like a chair by a window, a garden, a trail, a park, a retreat center, a library, a coffee shop, a church.
 - a. When you get there, do nothing.
 - b. Wait to see what happens next. It may take a while.
 - c. Visit consistently... a routine.

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3. **Practice yearly big silences** - Go on spiritual retreat(s).

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