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## SESSION TWO

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# Elijah Flees for His Life

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how the prophet Elijah gave in to discouragement and despair. In response to Elijah's circumstances, God revealed Himself. The God who sent down fire from heaven in a bold and spectacular display of His power is the same God who whispered to Elijah in a quiet moment of sustaining grace. God strengthens us in our despair, challenges the lies we believe, and then ministers to us through His Word and through His people. As the recipients of God's grace, we rely on His power to deliver His message of comfort.

### SCRIPTURE

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1 Kings 19:1-18

# THE POINT

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**Even in our moments of fear and disbelief, God is with us.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

We all have moments in our spiritual lives that bring us to those joy-filled “mountain top” experiences. However, it’s important to remember that mountains are surrounded by valleys. In the same way, our spiritual lives will be filled with ups and downs, successes and failures. Instead of obeying God, we sometimes give into the fear that we may be headed straight for a valley. As a group, discuss common excuses we give for not following God. Then ask:

- **In what ways are you sometimes discouraged from doing God’s work? Have you ever faced something so discouraging you wanted to quit?**
- **When Christians face difficult situations and fear the outcome, what should we do?**

Elijah experienced victory on Mount Carmel, but Queen Jezebel was angry over the loss of the prophets of Baal and threatened to kill Elijah. So, Elijah ran. He was afraid, exhausted, and so discouraged he asked to die. Stories like Elijah’s are recorded throughout the Bible—God used him in a mighty way, but Elijah still faced difficulties and discouragement.

Sometimes, evil waits for us at the other side of victory. Even the strongest believers are subject to fear and doubt, but God never promised believers an easy life. However, He did promise to care for us and walk through those valleys with us. His quiet presence, like the whisper on the mountain, invites us to restored trust and faith.

### Option 2

As students arrive, place them into teams. Give the students a poster board and marker. Instruct them to label the poster *Most Discouraging Day Ever* and to make up a story describing what they think this bad day would look like. Give a few minutes to complete the activity, and then ask each group to tell or act out their story. After each group has presented, gather the students together and ask these questions:

- **How would you respond to some of the scenarios described by each group?**
- **Why do you think one bad day seems to erase our memory of previous good days?**
- **How could we look at these scenarios differently, noting God’s presence in the details?**

As believers, we sometimes allow negative circumstances to block our view of God. And it seems these discouragements often come after victory or encounters with God. Just like God took care of Elijah, He will take care of you, reminding you of His presence in your life and your purpose in His plan.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Even in our moments of fear and disbelief, God is with us.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God**- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Elijah**- prophet of God who faced 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel
- **Ahab and Jezebel** - king and queen of the northern kingdom; Ahab is known for being one of the most wicked kings ever to have served Israel

## PLOT

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As we pick up the story of Elijah, we find the prophet of God in a tough situation. In the previous session, we witnessed Elijah's spectacular contest with the prophets of Baal. The people had proclaimed Yahweh as Lord! Surely, Elijah expected spectacular results after such a miracle. However, neither Israel's king (Ahab) nor queen (Jezebel) had undergone a heart change after the fire came down from heaven. Instead, Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah's life. As a result, Elijah found himself in a situation of loneliness and despair.

## TIMELINE

### **ELIJAH'S PERSECUTION**

*Elijah flees in the midst of persecution.*

### **THE HEALING OF NAAMAN**

*Naaman is healed from his leprosy.*

### **ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD**

*Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.*

## ELIJAH RETREATS OUT OF FEAR FOR HIS LIFE

Elijah and the people witnessed a spectacular display of God's power in the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:18-39). In this contest, God proved to the Israelites that He is the Lord of all creation and that Baal was a powerless creation of mankind. The people repented and professed Yahweh as Lord—at least almost all. Let's take a look:

**Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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 as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. There he came to a cave and lodged in it. (1 Kings 19:1-9a)**

It is difficult to believe that after the events of Mount Carmel, Elijah would respond to the threat against him by running away in fear. But this is what we see. Like we often do, Elijah forgot the truth of God's power and responded to threatening circumstances by creating distance between himself and the threat.

By the time Elijah arrived, he was utterly depressed and hopeless, despairing of life itself. He counted himself as a failure, stating that he was "no better than my fathers," meaning, the prophets that had come before him. Elijah believed his work on Mount Carmel had no greater effect on turning the people back to the worship of God than did the work of any previous prophets of Israel. So, he desired to not only resign from his prophetic ministry, but also to die. He hit rock bottom. But in this moment of despair, the Lord sent food to Elijah and let him rest. By doing so, God provided Elijah with the necessary strength to keep going. God was still there, ministering to Elijah during his lack of faith and his despair.

- Share about a difficult time in your own life where God was faithful in ministering to you. (p. 16, PSG)
- In what ways are you tempted to forget about God's power and allow your circumstances to overwhelm you? (p. 16, PSG)

## GOD MINISTERS TO ELIJAH IN HIS DISTRESS

After ministering to Elijah's physical and emotional exhaustion through the gift of food and rest, the Lord questioned Elijah. He engaged Elijah's reasoning.

**And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks 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. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:9b-14)**

Elijah responded to the Lord's questioning by expressing his disappointment and hopelessness. His words indicate that he was considering only a narrow selection of Israel's past events. In his accusations against Israel, he failed to mention what God had just done in sending fire from heaven, or the repentant response of the people, or the execution of the prophets of Baal. Simply put, Elijah's vision was narrow and misinformed.

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

As the Holman Old Testament Commentary states, "But there was a profound difference between his feelings and reality. He had lost sight of the nature of his God. As a result his vision was distorted. At the bottom of his complaint was a complaint about God himself. The Lord had not treated him well by allowing him to experience such things. Despair had made Elijah self-centered."<sup>1</sup>

Hopelessness can make the light around us look dim. We can lose our way in the darkness of our clouded minds, unable to see the “light at the end of the tunnel,” unable to discern truth. In his despair, Elijah rolled out accusations against the Israelites that were focused on the negative events. He had a limited, a self-centered view of the situation: Surely, if the people did not return to God after fire fell from Heaven, they would never return.

God’s reply to Elijah was extraordinary. Rather than argue with Elijah, God drew Elijah into an encounter with Himself. The encounter was an important moment in Elijah’s life, because God showed Elijah a truth about His nature: God doesn’t always display His work in fantastic ways, He also works in small and subtle ways.

## GOD REAFFIRMS TO ELIJAH HIS MINISTRY AND PURPOSE

One way God ministered to Elijah was to re-commission him to prophetic ministry and show him a remnant of people who were still faithful. God would minister through Elijah to others and through others to Elijah.

**And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:15-18)**

Elijah’s new role was to prepare the way for others to do God’s work. Other men would complete the task Elijah began. Once again, the Lord taught Elijah that He had other ways of working—it was not only through Elijah that this battle with idolatry would be won. A new order was to come to God’s people; however, this time Elijah would not be the one to usher in the new order.

When our thinking becomes negatively self-centered, we can forget to acknowledge the goodness and light spread by God revealing Himself through us. We can also forget to acknowledge the goodness and light that has spread from the work of others. Yet God calls us to remember that we live in community with others who also desire to spread the truth of God’s love.

## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH’S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God’s faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Our work in the Kingdom matters beyond the big moments, and our purpose extends beyond our lives. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, God's messenger who faced opposition and persecution, we know that all our labor for the Lord matters. It will endure into eternity. God's Word will not return void, but will accomplish His purpose. Trusting in the God who whispers to us in our times of greatest need, we set our hearts forward and follow Jesus.

And as we look to Jesus, it is important that we remember that Jesus taught us to daily take up our cross—or die to ourselves—and follow Him as part of God's redemptive mission. He has given us a daily battle plan of surrendering our lives to His authority, so we can be used big and small ways, for His kingdom and glory.

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

#### God is Immanent

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*When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.*

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What does God's ministry to Elijah during this season of doubt and despair tell us about the character of God?** *At the very least, it tells us that God is gracious, merciful, and faithful to us even when we struggle in being faithful to Him. Like a loving Father who cares for His children during hard times, God draws near to us to provide the comfort and encouragement we need to get back up.*
- **Elijah's emotional disappointment and despair contributed to him not being able to see beyond his immediate circumstances. What are some ways we can help those around us to see the bigger picture when blinded by emotional pain?** *The best way to help people see beyond themselves is to point them to Jesus and God's Word. By pointing them to specific biblical stories, the person sees not only that God cares, but also that God is at work even when it may not "feel" like He is.*
- **Part of Elijah's disappointment came from the fact that the events at Mount Carmel didn't have quite the impact he imagined they would. Have you ever experienced something similar? In light of Elijah's story here, how should you respond to similar moments?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Surely Elijah was encouraged to hear others would be joining him in his cause for truth. What does this teach us about the importance of surrounding ourselves with other believers as we seek to live out the Christian life?** *There are many benefits of actively living in Christian community with others, one of them being that Christians are strengthened and emboldened in their own faith and live out that faith as a result of living out their lives in Christ with other believers.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Many churches tend to focus so much on doing the “big things” for God, like musical and drama productions or mission trips and big evangelism events. But what if we are overlooking the small ways God works in our daily lives? Here is an area of church life that is difficult for us: learning to find God in the small things and in the quiet of the world. We must learn to drown out the human noise, quieting our souls long enough for God’s Word to break through and change us. When we only expect “fire from heaven,” we miss the “still, small voice.”

- **What are some smaller ways we can see God working in our own lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can the student ministry you are a part of encourage one another by pointing to God's work in these smaller ways?** *One way might come through sharing our testimonies with one another, thus highlighting God's active presence in even the small areas of our lives.*



## HEART

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Everyone faces the disappointing sting of failure in one way or another. We do not need to beat ourselves up for our moments of despair, nor do we need to deny them. Yet we cannot stay in those moments forever. In this passage, God ministered to Elijah in his despair for over a month while Elijah made his way to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai). Yet, as the angel noted, there was more to come. Elijah still had a good purpose to fulfill in this world. The Lord wanted to use Elijah, which should encourage us and strengthen our faith that God would want to use us as well.

- **How do you typically respond to moments of disappointment and failure?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some biblical and healthy ways we can respond to these moments?** *One way to respond to moments of disappointment is by reminding ourselves of the truth of Scripture. Instead of allowing our emotions and circumstances to drive our thinking and behavior, the truths of Scripture can shape our responses.*



## HANDS

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Even in our dark and difficult times, God still works through us to affect our world for His purposes and Kingdom. This is why we need to resist the temptation to think that our lives do not truly matter. Like Elijah, we can be tempted in exhaustion and pain, to become narrow-minded and blind to God’s mission for mankind. We might say things like, “If these big things didn’t change the hearts of men, then I give up! Nothing will work.” Yet, God has shown us through the obedient suffering of Jesus Christ and His redeeming resurrection, there is hope no matter how grim our current situation.

- **What are some ways God has worked through you in difficult times to minister to others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways God has worked through others in difficult times to minister to you?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. *Holman Christian Standard Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010). Accessed via mywsb.com.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**