

## Week 5: *The Still, Small Voice* – 1 Kings 19:1–18

### Hook



**Main Point:** God doesn't only speak in the big mountaintop experiences but also in the quiet whispers of our day-to-day lives.

A 2024 survey sought to discover what method of communication people prefer most with family and friends:

- 40% – text messages
- 29% – mobile phone calls
- 8% – face-to-face communication
- 7% – video calls
- 4% – audio messages/voice notes
- 4% – email messages
- 3% – landline calls

The poll found that every age group except 55+ preferred text messages (those in the 55+ demographic preferred mobile phone calls equally to text messages).<sup>1</sup>

However, one size does not fit all. Survey your group to discover what form of communication they prefer for the following:

- Making plans
- Giving or receiving encouragement
- Giving or receiving bad news
- Giving or receiving correction
- Engaging in conflict resolution

**Transition:** *How* we communicate matters – different messages call for different methods. A quick text works for plans, but encouragement, correction or hard news often needs something more personal and intentional. God communicates with His

people in ways that fit the moment, sometimes through dramatic displays and sometimes more quietly. In 1 Kings 19, we move from God's powerful miracle on Mount Carmel to a surprising, much quieter encounter in the wilderness.

**RECAP:** In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God's messengers calling His people to repent and how they pointed ahead to Jesus. In week 2, we saw God's provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence for Israel's idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised the widow's son from the dead, which not only showed His sovereign power, but also His care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations, not just Israel. In lesson 4, we saw God's superiority over other "gods" as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

In this lesson, we see Elijah run for his life from the wrath of Jezebel and find refuge in the Lord. We see God speak to Him not in the thunder and lightning but in the still, small voice.

## **Week 5: *The Still, Small Voice* – 1 Kings 19:1–18**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** God doesn't only speak in the big mountaintop experiences but also in the quiet whispers of our day-to-day lives.

#### **1 Kings 19:1–4 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** The life of a prophet can be dangerous and spiritually burdensome.

**Q: Why did Elijah fear for his life? What does this tell us about him?**

**Q: Why do you think Elijah left his servant and went into the wilderness alone?**

**Q: Elijah said, "I am no better than my ancestors." What kind of comparison or belief might be weighing on him here?**

In the last chapter, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and won. The Lord proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is the one true God, and the chapter ended with Elijah's slaughtering of all the prophets of Baal, and God's finally bringing the rain. This was a moment of tremendous victory for Elijah. Then why, just a few verses later, would he run away from Jezebel in fear for his life? Didn't he trust that God was more powerful than she was? Didn't he trust that God would protect him?

It's easy to criticize Elijah. But we have to remember that when Elijah had announced the drought, God *told* Elijah to run away and hide from Ahab and Jezebel. God hid him for three and a half years. He had only just brought him back out of hiding to challenge the prophets of Baal. Running and hiding would have felt like a natural reaction to Elijah. In the past, hiding had been an act of obedience. But this time, God didn't tell him to run and hide. He ran out of fear, not obedience and wisdom. Elijah knew Jezebel was ruthless. She had killed all the prophets of the Lord and had been hunting Elijah for years. Jezebel's threat was immediate and specific. She sent a message directly to him, declaring he would be dead within 24 hours. So Elijah did what anyone would do; he ran. It wasn't exactly *disobedience*; God didn't tell him to stay and let himself be martyred. God didn't tell him to run or to stay. His running was just a natural reaction to an immediate threat.

Elijah may not have felt as confident as we think he should have. But that's easy for us to say as we read the story thousands of years later from our safe vantage point. Yes, Mount Carmel was a huge victory for God, and the people turned their hearts back to Him. But Ahab and Jezebel didn't repent, and God didn't remove them from power. Jezebel was still in control, and Elijah had killed her prophets; she was out for revenge. Elijah ran to Beersheba, at the very southern border of Judah; beyond it is the wilderness. Mount Carmel is at the northern end of Israel, which means Elijah ran all the way through Israel and Judah, as far away as possible. Beersheba was the last city

before the wilderness, so he left his servant there. Then he went alone into the wilderness and sat under a “broom tree,” a small bit of shade in the hot desert, and asked God if he could just die. This plea gives us more insight into how he was feeling and why he ran. It is ironic that he ran from Jezebel in fear for his life only to ask God if he could die.

Elijah was spent. He had endured three and half years of drought and famine, during which he was hunted by a wicked and powerful king and queen. Then he faced an intense spiritual confrontation against 450 prophets, a huge “high” but one that ended with a threat of immediate death. So he ran away through the entire land of Israel and Judah to escape. He was exhausted, physically and spiritually. He also felt a deep sense of failure – “I am no better than my fathers.” Mount Carmel had felt like such a big moment, a chance to turn Israel back to God, but in the end, it hadn’t worked. Jezebel was still on the throne and still bent on Baal worship.

Feelings of failure can happen often to prophets because their messages are often rejected by the people they have come to help, people who don’t want to listen to their hard truths. Even Moses had a moment of despair like this and asked God if he could just die (Numbers 11:15). But a prophet’s mission isn’t about “failure” or “success,” it’s about God’s plan. Good pastors and other spiritual leaders feel a responsibility for the people under their care. It can be easy to feel like a failure when they don’t seem to respond to the message. But God tells us our job is only to plant the seed and water the seed; it is His job to make it grow (1 Corinthians 3:5–7). Leaders have a responsibility to teach the truth, share the Gospel, and lead with love, care and compassion. We all have a responsibility to share the Gospel and to speak the truth in love to those in our circles of influence. But we can’t control the way people respond. We can’t take on the burden of other people’s decisions. That’s just too much.

**Q: Describe a time when you have felt frustrated or in despair at your own personal ministry. Why did you feel that way? Looking back now, how would you encourage your former self?**

**Q: What does it look like to balance the responsibility of doing our best in our personal ministries without taking on burdens we aren’t meant to bear?**

**Q: What happens to our perspective when we isolate ourselves during discouragement?**

**Q: What hope does it give you to know that God continues to work with Elijah even after this moment?**

**1 Kings 19:5–8 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** When we take refuge in the Lord, we find rest and rejuvenation.

**Q: How did the angel respond to Elijah’s despair? What does this tell us about God?**

**Q: What is significant about the angel's simple command: "Arise and eat"?**

Elijah collapsed under the broom tree and fell asleep. These juniper trees are more akin to large shrubs, growing six to 10 feet tall, and are called broom trees because their slender, green branches look like a broom. Common in the desert, they were often the only source of shade in the hot sun. Theologically, they represent God's provision in times of wilderness and suffering. In Elijah's case, the broom tree was a place of refuge, rest and rejuvenation.

After Elijah slept, an angel awakened him and gave him food and water. Then he slept again. Then the angel gave him food and water a second time. Elijah was in despair emotionally, but the angel focused on his physical needs – rest, food and water. This reminds us that our bodies and our mental health are connected. When we're tired, we tend to lose our patience and snap more easily. We might feel foggy and not be able to focus as well. When we're hungry, we can find ourselves irritable or angry. Modern slang calls it "hangry," which may sound like a joke, but it's a real thing. When we don't eat, our blood sugar drops, which releases adrenaline and cortisol, the "fight or flight" hormones, which leads to dysregulation of our nervous systems. To recover from the "fight or flight" stress and regulate our systems again, doctors tell us to "rest and digest."<sup>2</sup> God knew this about the human body long before any modern science, and He sent His angel to bring Elijah rest and food.

God knows we need rest and rejuvenation. He built Sabbath into our weekly rhythm and sleep and food into our daily routine. Of course, there are times when we fast as a spiritual discipline, but on a regular basis, getting good sleep, eating a healthy diet, and doing regular exercise are the best preventative care for our bodies and our minds. So when Elijah took refuge in the Lord under the broom tree, that's just what God gave him – rest and food.

There was no lecture from the angel about Elijah's failure or his lack of faith. In fact, just the opposite. The angel gave him reassurance about his feelings of despair – "The journey is too great for you." This wasn't just about the physical journey he was about to take to Horeb but his whole mission. Elijah was right to feel inadequate, because this journey was too great for any human being to do on his own. When Elijah said, "I am no better than my fathers," he put the focus on himself, but his journey was not about his being righteous enough or faithful enough or good enough or strong enough. It was about God's power through him. It was natural for Elijah to feel despair, but God wasn't going to leave him there in that feeling. He gave him rest and food and supernatural strength to take on the next part of his journey.

The text tells us that on the strength of that little bit of food, Elijah was able to journey 40 days and nights to Horeb. This was supernatural sustenance, just as God had provided for Israel in the wilderness. Because Elijah took refuge in the Lord, he found rest and rejuvenation that carried him through to the next part of his mission. Taking refuge in the Lord in times of trouble and finding strength and peace – those are a

recurring theme of the Psalms (Psalm 46; 91; 141). Elijah didn't just run *away* from Jezebel; he ran *to* the Lord for refuge. This is what saved him. At his moment of deepest despair, even when he wanted to die, he cried out to the Lord. He didn't take his own life; he put his life in God's hands. Elijah's story shows us it's human to experience fear, exhaustion, self-doubt, worry, inadequacy and even despair at times. But the right response is to turn to God for refuge and strength.

**Q: Describe a time when you have felt you were at the end of your rope. What did you do to recover? How did you find the strength to carry on?**

**Q: In what ways might ignoring physical limits affect emotional and spiritual health?**

**Q: How can we imitate God's attentiveness when someone is exhausted or discouraged?**

**Q: How intentional are you about planning rest – and what usually threatens it?**

**1 Kings 19:9–18 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Discernment is the key to hearing God's voice.

**Q: How can we know from the story how Elijah was feeling?**

**Q: Why do you think God chose to reveal Himself in a gentle whisper rather than dramatic power?**

**Q: Knowing all Elijah had just experienced, what would it have meant to him that God wasn't in the big, loud dramatic sounds but in the quiet whisper?**

**Q: In what ways can exhaustion or fear lead us to exaggerate loss, failure, or loneliness?**

**Q: How does continuing in God's mission contribute to healing and renewed purpose?**

Elijah had rested and recharged in the wilderness outside Beersheba, but he was still feeling very alone and overwhelmed when he got to Horeb. Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments, met with God, and saw His glory pass by (Exodus 19–34). By going from the wilderness to Horeb, Elijah retraced the steps of Moses and Israel, coming from Egypt to Sinai, where they committed to their covenant relationship with Yahweh. Just as it took Israel 40 years, it took Elijah 40 days. When he arrived at Horeb, God asked him, "What are you doing here?" Again, God didn't chastise him for his lack of faith or his feelings of despair, self-doubt, inadequacy or loneliness. And God obviously knew why Elijah was there; He didn't have to ask. But God was inviting him to tell Him. He was inviting Elijah into a relational moment with Him. God was giving Elijah permission to share his true feelings. God invites us to pour

out our heart to Him in prayer. He doesn't expect us to have it all together or to always only have positive feelings. He is our loving Father who invites us to be our authentic self with Him ... and promises to be our refuge, our safe space.

God didn't just ask Elijah what he is doing, but what he is doing "here," specifically there at Horeb, the place of meeting with God, the place of the covenant. The prophet's role was to remind the people of the covenant they had made, the consequences of breaking it, and call them to repent. Elijah used covenant language when he answered God – "The people have forsaken your covenant." Yes, they had repented on Mount Carmel, but nothing had really changed; Jezebel was still in charge. Elijah still felt as if he were the only one who cared about following God.

God didn't answer Elijah with a lecture, commands or instructions; He answered him with His presence. Because our God is a God of relationship, comfort and love. Just as a struggling child goes to a parent for a hug or just to sit in the parent's lap, the parent's presence is the comfort. This moment stands in deliberate contrast to when Moses saw God's presence on Sinai; we can tell by the use of the phrase "passed by" (Exodus 33–34). God's glory was so bright that Moses could not look upon it. When God first appeared before the people on Sinai, He appeared in thunder and lightning (Exodus 19). The experience of God's presence in Exodus was loud and dramatic and powerful. That is likely what Elijah expected. But when God passed by Elijah, He wasn't in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. God's presence caused those things because of His great power, but now He was in the "still, small voice."

In the context of what Elijah had just gone through, God was telling him something important about His presence and His power. On Mount Carmel, Elijah experienced a miraculous "mountaintop" type of event with God. On Carmel, God came down in fire, but on Horeb, He was not in the fire. God was telling Elijah that He not only works in the big shows of power, He also works in small and quiet ways. It's not only the mountaintop experiences with God that matter. It's the day-to-day walking with Him, listening for His voice, that will grow our faith and spiritual maturity.

God was also releasing Elijah from the high expectations he had of himself as a prophet, from the pressure of feeling like the success of God's mission depended on him. Elijah had said "I am not ..." and "I have been ..." and "Only I am left." He had put all kinds of pressure on himself to be the hero of the story. But we are not the hero; God is. The very next thing God told Elijah to do was to anoint a new king and to anoint Elisha in his place to show him it wasn't about him and what he could do. God would carry on his mission with others long after Elijah was gone. Through these three men, God would avenge the deaths of His prophets and deal with the Baal worshippers. God also told him there were 7,000 others who had not bowed to Baal; he was not alone. God didn't shame Elijah for his feelings, but He corrected his misconceptions with the truth.

A lot has been made of the "still, small voice" of God from this passage. Some people have used this to say if we want to hear God's "true voice," we have to be quiet enough

to hear the whisper. It is true that we need to quiet the noise and distractions of our lives to hear God's voice. But this isn't teaching us that God *only* speaks in whispers. He spoke in loud, booming voices and big miracles other times. Sometimes He spoke in dreams and visions. The takeaway isn't that we need to get really quiet to hear God's voice. Satan can speak in a quiet whisper, too, or a loud, booming voice. The key to hearing God's voice isn't volume; it's discernment. It's knowing who God is and what He is like in order to recognize Him in both the big, loud, dramatic moments and the "quiet whisper" moments (John 10:1–4). This is one of the reasons why consistent, daily time in the Bible is so vital.

**Q: What misconceptions do people have today about how God speaks and how we can hear His voice? How can you speak truth to those misconceptions?**

**Q: How does consistent reading of Scripture help you grow in discerning God's voice, and what are some practical ways you can prioritize that habit in your daily life?**

**Q: How can our expectations about how we believe God should act keep us from seeing what He may already be doing in quieter, less visible ways?**

**Q: How can you do a better job of seeing God in every experience of your life, both the mountaintops and the day-to-day?**

## **Week 5: *The Still, Small Voice* – 1 Kings 19:1–18**

### **Took**

**Main Point: God doesn't only speak in the big mountaintop experiences but also in the quiet whispers of our day-to-day lives.**

The ministry of encouragement is powerful. Throughout Scripture, we are reminded of how essential it is to stay connected to one another and to speak life into each other's hearts, especially in moments of stress, struggle or uncertainty.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”
- Hebrews 10:24–25 – “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”
- Proverbs 12:25 – “Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.”
- Proverbs 16:24 – “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

God often works through His people to bring encouragement and strength to one another. By staying connected with your LifeGroup – both through regular attendance and engagement outside the classroom – you position yourself not only to receive encouragement but also to offer it to others. In the body of Christ, we truly need one another.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Think about how you can be more aware of God's speaking to you throughout your life in all kinds of ways. How can you recognize His voice amid all the noise of the world? How can you hear Him in visions, dreams or other experiences? How can reading Scripture help you know His voice better? How can you see God's working in all your experiences, both the mountaintop and the day-to-day?

**PRAY:** Tell the Lord in an honest, authentic prayer how you are feeling in your life right now, including any worries, doubts, struggles or other “negative” feelings. Pour out your heart to Him and ask Him to comfort you with His presence.

**ACT:** Set aside an intentional time of prayer this week to spend listening for God’s voice. You may choose to get quiet and still to hear His whisper, or you may choose to listen to worship music or go to a particular place in nature or maybe even in the church. Instead of focusing on hearing a physical voice, reflect on what you know about God’s character, and ask Him to speak into your life.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://yougov.com/articles/48872-sms-texts-mobile-calls-the-most-preferred-modes-people-use-to-keep-in-touch-with-their-loved-ones?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://yougov.com/articles/48872-sms-texts-mobile-calls-the-most-preferred-modes-people-use-to-keep-in-touch-with-their-loved-ones?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>2</sup> [Parasympathetic Nervous System \(PSNS\): What It Is & Function](#)

[7 Small Ways to Reset and Regulate Your Nervous System | Psychology Today](#)