



November 24, 2013



## Whispers in the Wilderness

### A Grow-Pray-Study guide for small groups

This guide uses the Scripture readings from the daily "GPS" study guide. Group members may read the daily readings before the group meeting, or read the verses aloud when the group meets.

The group may subdivide into two or three smaller groups, each discussing a set of the daily

readings and the matching questions on page 2, or the entire group may discuss those questions together. We pray that, whatever pattern of study you choose, the Holy Spirit will weave God's Word into the life and heart of each group member.

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### MONDAY

**1 Kings 17:1-16, 18:1-2, 7-8, 16-19**

When Ahab became king of Israel, he married Jezebel, a Baal-worshipping queen from Sidon (cf. 1 Kings 16:29-34). Their reign brought Israel economic riches, but spiritual poverty as they actively suppressed the worship of Israel's God (cf. 1 Kings 18:4). The prophet Elijah boldly challenged the idolatrous king, saying God would send an extended drought. In the difficult drought conditions, God miraculously provided for his faithful prophet.

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### TUESDAY

**1 Kings 18:20-46**

Elijah confronted King Ahab, and called Israel to account for worshipping the false god Baal. He set up a showdown with the prophets of Baal where the true God could prove himself. Elijah made sure that, if anything, his God faced handicaps (like a water-soaked altar and sacrifice). Both sets of prophets called, but only one god answered. The God of Israel was the true, living God, and Baal was not. The drought broke—Elijah's victory seemed complete.

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### WEDNESDAY

**1 Kings 19:1-14**

God gave Elijah a great public victory. But Queen Jezebel was still in power. Angry about Baal's defeat, she threatened to kill Elijah. Her defiance of him and God was too much for the "successful" prophet, the bold man of action. Tired, depressed and afraid, he ran. God cared gently for Elijah's physical and mental fatigue. Then God spoke again to Elijah in his wilderness—perhaps in the way Elijah least expected.

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### THURSDAY

**1 Kings 19:15-21**

Happy Thanksgiving Day! Elijah's depressed feelings (like most of ours) did not give him an accurate picture. God said Elijah's complaint that "I'm the only one left" (1 Kings 19:10) was not true—there were thousands of other faithful Israelites (verse 18). And God had much for Elijah to be thankful for—a renewed mission, and Elisha, a faithful helper and designated successor.

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### FRIDAY

**2 Kings 2:1-15**

The Bible only told of God taking one other person directly from earth without having to go through death. (That's how most Bible students see the enigmatic story of Enoch in Genesis 5:24.) God honored Elijah's long, faithful service by making his passage from this life unique and amazing. Elisha watched, cried "Oh, my father, my father!", tore his clothes (a sign of mourning), and then picked up Elijah's coat and his prophetic mission to Israel.

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### SATURDAY

**Malachi 4:4-6, Matthew 17:1-13**

Elijah's name lived on, a symbol of devotion to God before and after his wilderness experience. The final verses of Malachi's prophecy pointed to another prophet who would come with a spirit like Elijah's. Jesus said John the Baptist, his forerunner, fulfilled that prophecy. And Elijah himself joined Moses to support Jesus at a pivotal point in his saving mission.

To access the Family Activity suggested in this week's GPS, download the printable GPS from [www.cor.org/guide](http://www.cor.org/guide).



## SUGGESTED PRAYER

Gracious God, guide us through the wildernesses of our lives and give us confidence that we have done what you sent us here to do. Thank you for giving us a sense of purpose in our lives and thank you for your compassion we feel when we are wandering and feeling alone. Keep us on the path you intend for us and mold us into the people you would have us be. Amen.

## CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

Do you struggle to think of all the things you should be thankful for, or does the list seem endless? Are you concerned about taking for granted some blessings that you should be more keenly aware of?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read **1 Kings 17:1-16, 18:1-2, 7-8, 16-19**. Which of the people of these stories exhibited trust? What people in your life have been trustworthy about important things to you? Has your trust in them made it easier to trust in God? What might we learn from this? Elijah dared to speak up to a hateful, tyrannical king. Have you ever had to speak up to a person in power? What were the overt results and how did you feel afterward?
- Read **1 Kings 18:20-46**. The Israelites were wavering in their beliefs. Is this still common today? Do some people “sit on the fence” when it comes to matters of faith? Do you ever waver? How do your choices about faith affect the way you live your life? Most of the Israelites were worshipping the idol Baal. What are some of the false gods of today? Is the act of our following these false gods a conscious or unconscious act? How can we become aware of and avoid these kinds of spiritual mistakes?
- Read **1 Kings 19:1-14**. How would you characterize this period in Elijah’s life? Have you ever experienced a similar downturn in your spiritual life? What did you do about it? Did God help you through it? Have you ever shared stories of your struggles of faith with others? Did your stories seem to have any effect on them? Did God come to Elijah in a way that Elijah might have expected? Has God ever come to you in unexpected ways? Can you relate to God coming in a gentle whisper or as a “still small voice”? Elijah travelled to a sacred place. Do you find yourself drawn to such places in times of trouble? Do these places offer comfort to you?
- Read **1 Kings 19:15-21**. Elijah felt alone so God showed him that he was far from alone. God sent him a helper in Elisha and named kings to help overcome Jezebel. Have you ever felt weakened and alone with all the responsibility on your shoulders? Did you discover others who were available to help? How did this discovery make you feel?
- Read **2 Kings 2:1-15**. Does Elijah’s “chariot ride” to heaven seem to be just a long ago story, or does it seem to have a hopeful bearing on your life? Why did Elisha keep telling the other prophets to be quiet when they told him that Elijah was going to be taken away? Do you ever try to avoid painful truths that come up in your life? Can you think of an example of when this has happened to you? When these things happened, how well were you able to cope with them? In what ways does God help us cope?
- Read **Malachi 4:4-6, Matthew 17:1-13**. Peter, James and John were present at an amazing, awe-inspiring event. Would you like to witness such an event? If you were a witness, would you feel any kind of responsibility as a result? Would you have the courage to tell others, or, knowing that most people would think you were crazy or lying, would you be more likely to keep it to yourself? Do you think God is as present in your life as he was for Peter, James and John?



**From last week:** Did you focus on taking more responsibility for your own actions? Did you pray daily that you might be given the vision to recognize when your actions might create negative consequences for you or others? Did you seek to repair any damaged relationships that might have resulted, and consider better choices from now on? Tell the group how you felt about this process.

## FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

### From Pastor Adam Hamilton's sermon, November 24, 2013:

Elijah's story fills nine chapters of first and second kings, we'll focus on just bits and pieces of his story today....

There was a famous conflict on Mt. Carmel in which Elijah defeated the prophets of Ba'al, after which Elijah called for rain and it rained. When Jezebel heard that Elijah had defeated and killed the prophets of Ba'al, she issued a death sentence upon Elijah. She had already killed hundreds of God's prophets. She easily had the power to kill Elijah.

Elijah, feeling alone, afraid, attacked, hopeless, as the most powerful woman in the land has commanded his death, flees the country. This is what we read in the scriptures: "Elijah 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."

I wonder if you've ever felt attacked, you've felt in trouble, the lawyers are sending you letters, the IRS is after you, there is conflict, others are speaking ill of you and you feel all alone? This is precisely how Elijah felt—he wanted to die. The stress seems too great, you just want to go to sleep and never wake up....

That day when Elijah wanted to die an angel of the Lord came to him. He offered him Elijah a meal of bread and water that would sustain him for the next 40 days....Where does Elijah go after feeling like he wanted to die? He continues to make his way south, walking for days on end through the wilderness. Jezebel can't touch him here. But where is he going? He's going here, to Mt. Horeb. You may remember Mt. Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai. This is where Israel's faith really begins. It is where God had made a covenant with Israel. This was where the Ten Commandments and the Law were given. It was here that God said, "I will be your God and you will be my people." Elijah goes to "the cave"—that's what the Hebrew says—perhaps the same cleft in the rock where God passed by so Moses could see his glory. When he feels like dying, like giving up, like all hope is gone, he returns to Mt. Sinai.

I wonder where your Mt. Sinai, your Mt. Horeb is? Where do you go to return to God? Part of the reason I love going to the Holy Land is I feel this is a literal Mt. Horeb to me—going to where our faith began. But your Mt. Horeb doesn't need to be halfway across the world....

I don't know what Elijah was expecting, or how he was expecting God to speak to him. When God speaks to me it is usually a thought that comes to me, and I can never really be sure it was God, or just me. It happens while I'm listening to music, or reading scripture, or sitting in small group, or listening to a sermon. "The Word of the Lord came to Elijah saying: 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.'" Listen to what happens next: "Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper..."

But while the wind, earthquake and fire were clearly meant to demonstrate God's power and glory, God was not "in" these manifestations—that is, Elijah did not hear God's voice through them. It was what happened next that changed Elijah's life. Elijah heard what the NIV calls "a gentle whisper." The NRSV says he heard "the sound of sheer silence." The King James Version called it the "still small voice." But after all the noise it was when Elijah became still and quiet that he heard God in the silence.

It was in the silence, in the quiet that Elijah finally heard the voice of the Lord. In my own life I often have too much noise to hear God, starting with the thoughts that sometimes won't stop—I feel like my brain is going non-stop. Then there is the constant noise of life, the phone ringing, the e-mail pinging, the text messages buzzing, the Facebook messages flowing, the tweets twittering....

Father Richard Rohr noted, "We are a toxically overstimulated people." Rohr is a best-selling author and spiritual director. He wrote an excellent article on the necessity of silence in *Sojourners* recently. In it he wrote, "I do know that my best writings and teachings have not come from thinking but, as Malcolm Gladwell writes in *Blink*, much more from not thinking. Only then does an idea clarify and deepen for me. Yes, I need to think and study beforehand, and afterward try to formulate my thoughts. But my best teachings by far have come in and through moments of interior silence."



He noted, "The ego uses words to get what it wants." That's what I feel like my prayer life is sometimes. Sometimes when I pray I get the impression God wants to say to me, "Would you mind shutting up for a bit, I can't get a word in edgewise."

I was struck by something Mother Teresa once said: "In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence."

## Elijah

Elijah, meaning, "my God is Yah" or "My God is Yahweh". The prophet from the ninth century B.C. from Tishbe of Gilead in the Northern Kingdom has been called the grandest and the most romantic character that Israel ever produced.

He was a complex man of the desert who counseled kings. His life is best understood when considered from four historical perspectives which at times are interrelated: his miracles, his struggle against Baalism, his prophetic role, and his eschatological relationship to Messiah.

His prophetic role constantly placed Elijah in opposition to the majority of the people of his nation. His prophetic confrontations involved King Ahab and later his son Ahaziah. Their toleration of polytheism was the ongoing reason for Elijah's prophetic denunciations.

Malachi promised God would send Elijah the prophet before the coming "day of the Lord".

Paul used as an illustration of faithfulness the 7,000 faithful worshipers in the time of Elijah (Romans 11:2-5).

The two witnesses referred to in Revelation 11:6 are not identified by name, but their capacity "to shut heaven, that it rain not" leads many to conclude they are Moses and Elijah.

Source: Holman Bible Dictionary at <http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?w=Elijah>

## Elisha

Personal name meaning, "my God is salvation." Elisha was a ninth century B.C. Israelite prophet....

The beginning of Elisha's ministry should be dated to the last years of King Ahab's rule or approximately 850 B.C. The prophet then served faithfully during the reigns of Ahaziah (about 853 B.C.), Jehoram or Joram (852 B.C.), Jehu (c. 841 B.C.), Jehoahaz (c. 814 B.C.), and Jehoash or Joash (798 B.C.). Elisha's ministry ranged from about 850-800 B.C.

The prophet used his power to provide a widow with an abundance of valuable oil to save her children from slavery (2 Kings 4:1-7). He made a poisonous pottage edible (2 Kings 4:38-41), fed a hundred men by multiplying limited resources (2 Kings 4:42-44), and miraculously provided water for thirsting armies (2 Kings 3:13-22). Once he made an iron ax head float (2 Kings 6:5-7).

Some of the miracles of Elisha are quite well known and loved. Who has not been moved by the story of the Shunammite woman and her son? This barren woman and her husband who had graciously opened their home to the prophet had in turn been given a son by the Lord. One day while the boy worked in the field with his father, he suffered an apparent heatstroke and died. The compassion and tenacious hope of the mother met its reward when she sought and found the man of God and pleaded for help. God's power through Elisha raised the boy from the dead (2 Kings 4:8-37).

Yet another well-known story is the healing of Naaman the leper and the subsequent affliction of Gehazi, Elisha's servant (2 Kings 5:1-27). The prophet's miraculous powers were prominently displayed still further in the war between Syria and Israel. The Syrian soldiers were blinded, then made to see. Divine intervention totally foiled the Syrian siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:8-7:20).

Chosen by God and hand-picked by Elijah in the latter half of the ninth century B.C., Elisha directed the historical drama of Israel.

Source: Holman Bible Dictionary at <http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?w=Elisha>

## Final application:

This week, pause to give thanks every day. Take the time to make a written list of your blessings then add to the list each day. Pray daily, giving sincere thanks to God for each item and ask for his continued blessings upon you, your family and all those who are in need. Next week, let the group know what this process meant to you.