

# Questions in Discouragement

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When we read about Bible characters, it is easy to explain away their accomplishments by saying, "That was Moses or David or Elijah." We are not expected to follow their examples because they possess qualities that we could never have. Yet James wrote that "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours" (Jam. 5:17).

The NIV translates that phrase, "Elijah was a man just like us." He had a special calling from God, for sure. But he was a man. He had his ups and down, times of joy and times of sorrow, days of prosperity followed by days of adversity. Just like us. And that means he had occasions of discouragement.

The fact that there was a man in the First Century who was nicknamed "the Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36) ought to prove that God's people have battled discouragement throughout the ages. We get overwhelmed by the cares of life and disheartened when things aren't going our way. What will be our response to such feelings? How will we deal with them?

One of the typical reactions is to ask more questions. We can't answer the ones we already have, but we think introducing more will help solve the problem. Just like Elijah and his plight in 1 Kings 19.

"Why me?" We ask that question as if God is picking a fight with us. Or maybe He has forgotten how righteous we are in comparison to the wicked people around us. Twice, Elijah pleaded his case before the Lord. "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword" (19:10,14). In response, God twice asked His prophet His own question: "What are you doing here Elijah" (19:9, 13). As if to say, "Quit focusing on yourself and get to the work I have called you to do."

"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Does that leave anyone out? Instead of asking, "Why me," perhaps we should ask, "Am I better than Elijah? Moses? David? Jeremiah? Paul?" Peter said not to be surprised at your suffering (1 Pet. 4:12-13). This is not something strange that is happening only to you. What are you doing here? And what are you going to do about it?

"Why bother?" If the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, why even try? Elijah went from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. "He requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers'" (19:4). Since he had been no more successful than those who had gone before, he wondered why he should even go any further. In response, God provided him food and drink for his life to sustain him in his future journey.

How could we ever think that God would abandon us? We equate “unanswered prayers” with the assumption that He does not care for us. Elijah prayed, “Take my life.” God said, “No.” I often wonder if Elijah thought about that when he was being taken up to heaven in the fiery chariot and whirlwind. That future victory is why you keep going. And along the way, you even learn to thank God for times He said, “No.”

“Who cares?” Who else is there besides me? “I alone am left. And they seek my life to take it away” (19:10, 14). Elijah could only see what was missing. God showed him what was still there. The word of the Lord came to Him in a great and strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire (17:2,8; 18:1; 19:9). They were all at God’s command. And His presence was with him even in the “sound of a gentle blowing” (19:12). Not only that, God said, “I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed the knee to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him” (19:18). Who cares besides me? God and His mighty army!

Adversity can cause us to lose our perspective. We exaggerate and say, “No one understands” or “I’m the only one going through this.” But when we come together with the local church, we can look around and see people who are just like us. Instead of isolating ourselves and trying to get through these times on our own, we ought to be surrounding ourselves with those who have not bowed the knee to discouragement.

Two people appeared and spoke with Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration: Moses and Elijah. He who ran for his life and then requested that he might die actually never saw death. He was just like us. And when can overcome just like him. No question about it.